WORKING TOWARDS SCHOOL GOALS AT LION ELEMENTARY:

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Benjamin Dale Butcher

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University

April, 2014

WORKING TOWARDS SCHOOL GOALS AT LION ELEMENTARY:

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by Benjamin Dale Butcher

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

April, 2014

APPROVED BY:

Larry Crites, Ed. D., Committee Chair

Vance Pickard, Ed. D., Committee Member

Cynthia Crites, Ed. D., Committee Member

Scott Watson, Ph.D., Associate Dean, Advanced Programs

WORKING TOWARDS SCHOOL GOALS AT LION ELEMENTARY:

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological study was to understand the perspectives of educators regarding school goals at Lion Elementary. Perspectives concerning school goals were generally defined as the importance of competing priorities as described by participants. This research can inform educators about whether perspectives regarding school goals were aligned, and provide insight regarding the reasons behind similarities and differences by having considered several questions: (a) What were the perceptions of the principal and teachers regarding school goal priorities? (b) What were the main challenges they perceived for meeting school goals? (c) What factors contributed toward schools successfully meeting goals? (d) How did the perceptions of the principal and teachers at Lion Elementary compare in regards to school goals? (e) What factors contributed to the alignment of goals between the principal and teachers? Using a hermeneutical phenomenological approach, this study focused on a purposeful sample of 19 educators at Lion Elementary and how they interpreted the phenomenon of working towards school goals. Data collection consisted of transcribed semi-structured interviews, audiovisual materials, and written documents. Several methods of data analysis procedures used were: hand-coding, constant-comparative analysis, and phenomenological reductionism.

Keywords: phenomenological, perspectives, perceptions, school goals, shared vision, collaboration, change, leadership

Acknowledgments

I gratefully thank God, the giver of all good things (James 1:17), who provided me the opportunity and abilities needed to complete this study. More importantly, he saved me from my sins (Romans 6:23) and loves me as a son (1 John 3:1). To God be the glory!

I thank my wife, Heather, for being strong during this part of our journey. I couldn't have done it without her. As I worked on this study, she supported me and made sure our children, Benny, Billy, and Filly, were well cared for. In other words, she did the harder part, while I was completing this work.

I also thank my mom, Betty, for all the prayers she prayed on my behalf. As I was growing up, she made sure I always had someone who believed in me.

Of course, an important part of completing this process was my dissertation committee. Dr. Larry Crites, my chair, encouraged me throughout the process. He also brought in a practical perspective of an experienced leader. Drs. Vance Pickard, Cynthia Crites, and Gregg Mowen also helped guide me through the process and provided valuable insights. Dr. Russell Yocum, our research consultant, was also instrumental in providing direction. I am grateful to my committee for investing in me and helping me to succeed.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Abbreviations

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS)

American Educational Research Association (AERA)

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Teaching Assistants (TAs)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background

The nature of relationships in a group affects the effectiveness of that community towards achieving its goals (Follett, 1918). In addition, education and learning are inherently social, since they rely on relationships and social interactions (Vygotsky, 1978). Add to this the fact that people often interact with each other based on perceptions (Mead, 1934). Accordingly, there have been several recent studies focusing on the perceptions of those involved in education (Cheng & Yau, 2011; Leech & Fulton, 2008; Pringle, Lyons, & Booker, 2010). The perceptions of those experiencing a situation or phenomenon may lead to interactions that result in either positive or negative outcomes (Choi, 2011; Watt & Piotrowski, 2008). This study added to this growing body of knowledge by considering the perspectives of a principal and teachers at Lion Elementary. There have been few qualitative studies at the elementary level comparing the perspectives of principals to those of teachers regarding school goals at a particular school (Leech & Fulton, 2008; Torff & Sessions, 2009).

Situation to Self

As a teacher at Lion Elementary, my motivation for conducting this study was both personal and professional. One of the philosophical assumptions for this research was that education does not occur in a neutral context; the perceptions and accompanying interactions that take place impact stakeholders to create either a productive or detrimental environment. Leaders influence the direction of a school. As a future principal, I believe it is important for leaders understand existing perceptions and be intentional in guiding those towards a desirable future.

In a broad sense, this study was based on a constructivist paradigm insofar as it acknowledged the importance of people's perceptions in helping create a perceived reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). However, based on a Christian worldview, that does not exclude the existence of an objective reality (John 1:1-3) and godly principles of leadership.

Problem Statement

The problem of this study was the impact of shared vision among educators on the achievement of school goals at Lion Elementary. Given the potential benefits of having an environment with a shared vision and a mutual understanding of the perspectives of stakeholders (Burns, 1978; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Prytula & Weiman, 2012; Williamson, Archibald, & McGregor, 2010; Wrobleski et al., 2011), more research needed to be conducted comparing the perspectives of educators. This phenomenological study examined those perspectives at the elementary school level.

Purpose Statement and Significance of the Study

Specifically, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the perspectives of a principal and teachers regarding school goals at Lion Elementary. Perspectives concerning school goals were generally defined as the importance of competing priorities as described by participants. This research can help inform leaders and teachers about whether perspectives regarding school goals were aligned or whether a mismatch existed. It also provided insights regarding the reasons behind the similarities and differences of perspective between teachers and the principal. Other studies have looked at the perspectives of teachers towards the principal or vice versa (Leech &

Fulton, 2008; Torff & Sessions, 2009); however, this study qualitatively compared the two perspectives at a particular site of interest.

Research Questions

According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research questions are typically open-ended and evolving. This study set out to explore and understand the perceptions of the principal and teacher regarding school goal priorities and challenges. Consequently, the first research questions asked: What were the perceptions of the principal regarding school goal priorities? What were the main challenges the principal perceived for meeting school goals? What factors contributed towards the school successfully meeting goals? These focused on the principal's ideas and understandings.

Next, the focus shifted towards teachers: What were the perceptions of the teachers regarding school goal priorities? What were the main challenges the teachers perceived for meeting school goals? What factors contributed towards the school successfully meeting goals? These questions explored the insights of teachers towards the research foci.

Once the principal and teachers had been interviewed, responses were analyzed for similarities and differences to answer the final research questions: How did the perceptions of the principal and teachers at Lion Elementary compare? What factors contributed to the alignment of goals between the principal and teachers? These questions were of particular interest, since they dealt with exploring perceptions in order to consider factors related to shared vision at the school.

Limitations and Delimitations

Since the study focused on a particular group of educators at one elementary school, situated in the Northwest, there is no claim of generalizability. As a matter of practicality, the sampling was purposeful and convenient, since educators were chosen based on the site of interest. It is acknowledged that results may differ at another location. Similarly, since the researcher was employed as an elementary school teacher in the school under study, it is important to note the possibility of response bias; volunteer participants may have given the answers they thought the researcher "wanted to hear" or the "right" answers. Similarly, some participants may have avoided answers that they perceived could lead to conflict or possible retribution. In addition, since some participants knew the researcher, certain teachers may have been more likely to volunteer based on previous interactions or relationships. In terms of researcher bias, it is also acknowledged that the researcher disclosed his employee role, existing relationship with educators at the site, and Christian worldview.

Research Plan

A qualitative approach is effective for considering the experiences and perspectives of a particular group of people (Creswell, 2013). More specifically, a phenomenological research design is appropriate for understanding the experiences of a group in regards to a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the experiences of the teachers were being explored regarding the phenomenon of working towards school goals. Moreover, a phenomenological approach may also focus on the interpretations and perspectives of individuals (Creswell, 2013); in this study, it was the interpretation of perspectives of educators at Lion Elementary regarding school goals.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

It was important to provide a context for this hermeneutic phenomenology. For this reason, the theoretical framework for this study was considered. In addition, the research problem and the gap in literature were addressed through a discussion of pertinent literature.

Theoretical Framework

Follett

It is appreciable to recognize that many of the concepts being considered in this study could be found in the work of Follett (1919), a pioneer in organizational behavior and management. She posited that "community" is an evolving process that interweaves the wills of those belonging to a particular group (p. 576). She described the community process as "the unifying of differings" (p. 588). Consequently, she conceived both the individual and group as constantly transforming and being transformed by the nature of the community to which they belong.

In her view, these were not separable:

. . . the relation of the individual to society is not action and reaction, but infinite interactions by which both individual and society are forever a-making: we cannot say if we would be exact that the individual acts upon and is acted upon, because that way of expressing it implies that he is a definite, given, finished entity, and would keep him apart merely as an agent of the acting and being acted on. We cannot put the individual on one side and society on the other; we must understand the complete interrelation of the two. Each has no value, no existence

without the other. The individual is created by the social process and is daily

nourished by that process. There is no such thing as a self-made man (Follett,

1918, pp. 61-62).

Accordingly, Follett (1919) believed in the potential of enriching the individual

and group through participation in community (p. 588). To illustrate, she provided the

example of the man who went to war, during World War I, not to abandon his family but

to prove his allegiance to his family (Follett, 1919, pp. 582-583). She wrote, "We are

capable of creating a collective will, and at the same time developing an individual

spontaneity and freedom" (Follett, 1919, p. 588). She described this as individuals

dealing with concerns and differences in a way that enriched both the community and the

individuals that comprised it (Follet, 1919, p. 587). As a result, she called for people to

consider decisions in terms of the whole, rather than dividing up the parts (Follett, 1918,

p. 74). In like fashion, the current study considered how the experiences and concerns of

teachers interacted with efforts to improve Lion Elementary through achievement of

school goals.

Vygotsky

Similarly, Vygotsky (1978) believed that learning took place as the result of

social interaction within particular social environments. For example, his concept of the

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) posited that teachers guided students towards

success in their learning progression (Vygotsky, 1978). The learning task being asked of

a student was very intentional and aimed at taking him or her to the next step.

Another way of framing this is that one of the goals of education is to create

optimal environments for learning to occur. Vygotsky (1978) noted "that the basic

characteristic of human behavior in general is that humans personally influence their relations with the environment and through that environment personally change their behavior" (p. 51). Thus, the social environment plays a big role in elementary schools. Since learning is a social process, one of the primary assumptions of this study was that the social environment at Lion Elementary determined educators' effectiveness in achieving school goals.

Mead

While Vygotsky (1978) considered the importance of social environments and culture, Mead (1934) theorized about how people grew through the use of words and gestures, and how they learned to think. For instance, he explained that "Mind arises through communication by a conversation of gestures in a social process or context of experience" (Mead, 1934, p. 55). He also asserted that people's interactions through symbols, gestures, and words were the bases for society as people participated in cooperative activities (Mead, 1934). As people interacted, they began to understand the perspectives of other individuals and social groups, leading to the development of their own attitudes and perspectives (Mead, 1934). In the current study, an important assumption is that people interact based on perceptions.

For instance, in Snow and Anderson's (1987) study of homeless people, they found that the some homeless people distanced themselves from other homeless people, street roles, and social services (pp. 1348-1353). However, other homeless people embraced their "street-role identities" and were proud of their ability to "survive on the road" (O'Brien & Kollock, 1997, p. 337). A third form of perspective development among some of the homeless studied, referred to as "fictive storytelling," occurred as

20

some exaggerated or lied about their past or current situations (O'Brien & Kollock, 1997, p. 339). This study illustrated the importance of social interaction and developing perceptions among individuals and social groups. In like fashion, the importance of understanding the perspectives of a group of elementary educators working towards school goals was a focus of the current study.

Social Construction of Reality

Guba and Lincoln (1994) argued for the use of a constructivist paradigm when the purpose of inquiry was to understand and interpret (p. 113). For example, Pollner & McDonald-Wikler (1985) told the story of a family who denied the status of a child as "severely retarded," instead attributing normality and competence to her behaviors (pp. 241-242). The family claimed she acted "normal" at home and was putting on an "act" in public (Pollner & McDonald-Wikler, 1985). Consequently, they framed the child's exhibited behavior as intentional, rather than as indicative of being retarded (Pollner & McDonald-Wikler, 1985). The family interacted based on their shared construction of the reality of the child's situation. This research was based on a constructivist paradigm (see Guba & Lincoln, 1994), because it acknowledged the importance of people's perceptions in helping to create a perceived reality.

Similarly, one of the aims of the current study was to consider the perceived realities of the principal and teachers attributed to working towards school goals. What were the realities agreed upon by educators at Lion Elementary concerning the phenomenon of forming and working towards school goals? Accordingly, this study relied heavily on an interpretive or hermeneutical framework that was very much in line with a constructivist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Nevertheless, the existence of a

socially perceived reality does not negate the importance or existence of an objective reality.

<div align="center">**Review of the Literature**</div>

Importance of Perceptions

People influence the community and, in turn, are also influenced by it (Follett, 1919). Moreover, learning takes place in a social context (Vygotsky, 1978), and people interact based on perceptions (Mead, 1934). Therefore, several studies have explored the importance of perceptions and their effects on organizations. Based on their analyses of educators' experiences through qualitative interviews, Mallen and Crowther (2008) found that four things often impeded implementation of important educational change: (a) insufficient training, (b) overwhelming work, (c) time constraints, and (d) lack of support for risk-taking (pp. 13-26). These factors are examples of important elements of educational reform grounded in the perceptions of educators. Similarly, one of the research questions for this study asked, "What are the main challenges the teachers perceive for meeting school goals?" (see Appendix A Research Questions). This was also a question predicated on the importance of perceptions.

In another study, Choi (2011) conducted a literature review synthesizing the findings of over 56 articles about organizational change and concluded that reactions towards change fell into four categories: (a) readiness for change, (b) commitment to change, (c) openness to change, and (d) cynicism about change (pp. 479-500). Again, this was illustrative of the importance of perceptions regarding change. In the current study, working towards school goals also dealt with organizational change, including the reactions and perceptions of educators.

Choi's (2011) study also highlighted the importance of attitudes and behaviors and their connection more to perceptions than objective reality. In the same way, school goals, by their very nature, attempt to bring about positive academic change based on existing perceptions. The current study sought to identify the perceptions of educators regarding school goals, since this helped reveal where educators were positioned in regards to being ready for organizational change. Likewise, it also helped determine whether current efforts at educational reform were productive or led to cynicism or stagnation.

The Change Process

Top-down approaches. Faced with an environment of societal change and educational reform, it was also important to consider the nature of change. On the one hand, much has been written regarding "top-down" approaches (Fullan, 2001, p. 32). For example, Kotter (1995) offered these eight steps for successful change:

1. Establish a sense of urgency.

2. Form a coalition.

3. Create a vision.

4. Communicate the vision.

5. Empower others to act on the vision.

6. Create short-term wins.

7. Consolidate improvements and continue change efforts.

8. Institutionalize new approaches (pp. 60-67).

Such frameworks acknowledge the importance of strong, visionary leaders in bringing about change in organizations. Thus, hierarchical relationships were paramount in this

view. Underlying the current study was the nature of the relationship between the principal and teachers at Lion Elementary.

   Bottom-up approaches. In contrast to top-down approaches were so-called "bottom-up" approaches that emphasized the importance of shared power. For instance, Beer, Eisenstat, and Spector (1990) determined that successful change was often the result of organizations reducing dependence on hierarchical authority and formal divisions of work and, instead, "creating teams, sharing information, and delegating responsibility and accountability far down the hierarchy" (p. 158). Bottom-up approaches recognize the need to involve those who are most directly accountable for carrying out educational change efforts. Among other concepts, the current study considered the feelings of teachers regarding the leadership approach being used by the principal in working towards school goals.

   Distinct organizational needs and resources. While some have favored one approach over another, each organization has a particular set of needs and available resources. Likewise, each organization may be characterized by a multiplicity of formal and informal relationships. As a result, it is not possible to have a single approach with defined steps that addresses the needs of all situations. Fullan (2001) concluded, after a review of literature regarding change, that it provided "complex, unclear, and often contradictory advice" (p. 31). Moreover, the particular situation in an organization may require a combination of approaches. The current study sought to determine the organizational needs and resources of educators at Lion Elementary in working towards school goals.

Leadership Provides Direction

Based on field theory, Lewin (1943) hypothesized that organizations existed in a situational context characterized by both direction and velocity. A related implication is that those involved in education enter organizations that are not neutral; to be for the status quo is as directional as seeking educational reform. For example, in the current study, the very act of putting into place school goals was indicative of directional leadership. In addition, Fullan (2001) found that change often aroused emotions, making leadership even more crucial.

This leadership may take the form of negotiating. Curry, Lowery, and Loftus (2010) found that successful change efforts required negotiated understandings between those in the educational community:

> Change is necessarily negotiated among members of the school and community members. Within the school the negotiations take place among faculty, students, and administrators. Within the community the process takes place among parents, teachers, legislators, and district leadership. Each of these groups provides a measure of their ability to bear the costs of the changes or innovations to be put in place. Those costs are more than financial, measures; they include personnel, skill, time, and tolerance needed for pedagogical and policy changes (p. 416).

Effective leaders help to negotiate with stakeholders as schools strive to achieve defined goals, but there must also be sufficient support within the community. The current study sought to determine the extent to which negotiated understandings existed between educators at Lion Elementary in working towards school goals.

Leadership Styles

Moreover, the guidance provided by leaders is provided in the context of leadership styles. Goleman (2000) theorized six leadership styles that were commonly used approaches to providing direction and guidance:

- Coercive—demanding compliance;

- Authoritative—mobilizing people towards a vision;

- Affiliative—building positive, productive relationships;

- Democratic—seeking participation and consensus;

- Pacesetting—setting immediate, high standards of performance; and

- Coaching—developing people for the future (pp. 82-83).

The leadership style attributed to a principal has a lot to do with the perceptions of the teachers, and can result in positive or negative effects. Goleman (2000) concluded that effective leaders used a variety of leadership styles according to the needs in a given situation.

When the appropriate leadership style was used to meet the situational context, the results were often positive (Goleman, 2000). This supported Lewin's (1943) assertion that organizations exist in a context of direction and velocity. Effective leaders recognize this and use an appropriate leadership style. Two research questions in this study addressed the need to determine whether leadership was perceived by teachers as effective: (a) What factors contribute toward schools successfully meeting goals? and (b) What factors contribute to the alignment of goals between the principal and teachers?

Situational Leadership

While leadership styles exemplify a continuum of leadership behaviors and inclinations, situational leadership focuses on making decisions based on the particular leader, follower(s), and situation (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). The goal is to utilize the most appropriate leadership style, given the situation, that will lead to progress towards a desired effect or goal (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). In this framework, leaders adjust their styles according to the competence and commitment levels of followers (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). For instance, a leader might choose to use a directive style, such as the aforementioned coercive style, with a subordinate who may have low competence and low commitment (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). In contrast, a delegative style, such as the Goleman's (2000) democratic or affiliative styles, would be more appropriate for a follower that is both competent and committed (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). The leader who uses situational leadership considers the leadership style best suited for moving followers towards organizational goal achievement.

Nevertheless, it should also be noted that organizational goals and the individual goals of those belonging to a community need not be viewed as mutually exclusive. As De Gues (1997) pointed out,

> A healthy living company will have members, both humans and other institutions, who subscribe to a set of common values and who believe that the goals of the company allow them and help them to achieve their own individual goals. . . .The self interest of the company stems from its understanding that the members' potential helps create the corporate potential (p. 200).

Ideally, people would be able to meet personal and organizational needs as they worked towards change. The current study considered the personal and organizational needs of educators working towards school goals at Lion Elementary.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

An important aspect of situational leadership is the realization that a multiplicity of needs may exist within a particular organization, and these should be addressed accordingly. Maslow (1943) theorized that a hierarchy of needs ranging from basic physiological needs to higher order needs for self-actualization were the basis for the thoughts and behaviors of people (pp. 372-383; see Figure 1). According to him, once lower order needs were met, people pursued the fulfillment of their full potential (Maslow, 1943).

Figure 1. Simplified Interpretation of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. While the framework has typically been applied to individuals, organizations are also characterized by needs and corresponding group behaviors. Adapted from *Motivation and Personality* (p. 91), by A. Maslow, 1954, New York, NY: Harper and Row.

Effective leaders aim to go beyond organizational survival towards achievement of worthy goals and innovation (Maxwell, 1993). Maxwell (1993) wrote:

People want to join in a group or pursue a cause that will have lasting impact. They need to see that what they are doing is not wasted effort, but is making a contribution. People must see value in what they are doing (p. 123).

One area of consideration for the current study was whether educators felt they were working towards fulfilling higher order goals at Lion Elementary.

Resisting Change

Along with the large number of studies about the importance of change, many of them have considered reasons why change is difficult. For example, Maxwell (1993) found numerous reasons for people resisting change:

- lack of ownership;

- disruption of existing routine(s);

- fear of the unknown;

- unclear purpose for change(s);

- fear of failure;

- perceived benefits do not justify the effort;

- satisfaction with the status quo;

- a pessimistic attitude;

- lack of respect for the leader;

- taking change efforts as a personal attack on previous accomplishment(s);

- feelings of personal loss or inconvenience;

- unwillingness or inability to make the necessary commitment(s);

- rejection of new ideas; and/or

- attachment to existing traditions (pp. 56-62).

Moreover, Maxwell (1993) found that both leaders and followers were susceptible to resisting needed change. Likewise, the current study dealt with impediments that existed in working towards school goals at Lion Elementary.

Problematic Change

In spite of the need for positive change and improvement, Maxwell (1993) concluded that a proposed change would lead to negative results when it was:

- a bad idea;

- not accepted by influencers;

- not communicated effectively;

- self-serving to leaders;

- overly based on the past without an adequate consideration of the future; or

- inadequate time and resources were available (p. 73).

Consequently, leaders must consider whether opportunities for change will lead to growth and progress.

In addition, Beer, Eisenstat, and Spector (1990) determined that change would not be successful without sufficient teamwork, commitment, and competence. As a result, they criticized superficial attempts at change as creating cynicism and impeding the real changes needed (Beer, Eisenstat, and Spector, 1990). For example, improving teamwork by changing the formal organization chart may require the organization to learn new skills and attitudes (Beer, Eisenstat, and Spector, 1990). This goes beyond simply coming up with a new philosophy statement (Beer, Eisenstat, and Spector, 1990). Similarly, putting in place more accountability measures to differentiate performance is

of little use without providing clear standards, training, and steps for remediation (Beer, Eisenstat, and Spector, 1990).

In addition, when new training programs are not well-integrated with an organization's existing day-to-day operations, this often leads to frustration as employees determine that training was a "waste of time" (Beer, Eisenstat, and Spector, 1990, p. 161). Leaders should be weary of "one-size-fits-all" programs and "magic bullet" reforms (Beer, Eisenstat, and Spector, 1990). When attempted reforms are not sufficiently thoughtful, credibility and commitment for the real changes needed may be undermined (Beer, Eisenstat, and Spector, 1990). The current study considered the thoughts of educators regarding their experiences in working towards school goals at Lion Elementary, including their perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the school and district reform efforts and elements that were beneficial or challenging.

Implementation Dips

As schools attempted to implement positive goals and reforms, Fullan (2001) concluded that "implementation dips" were common (p. 40). These periods were characterized by people feeling anxious, confused, and overwhelmed, as new skills and understandings were being developed to meet the demands for innovation (Fullan, 2001, p. 40). The leadership styles that were considered least effective during implementation dips were the coercive and pacesetting styles, which lack empathy and sensitivity (Fullan, 2001). In contrast, affiliative and coaching styles were considered helpful (Fullan, 2001). The affiliative leadership style focused on building relationships, often considered a source of strength during times of change (Fullan, 2001). Similarly, the coaching leadership style attempts to guide people and build capacity (Fullan, 2001). In the current

study, one of the areas of study was whether teachers felt supported by leadership in helping them to work towards school goals at Lion Elementary.

The Prerequisite of Integrity

Aside from wisely using leadership styles, many have researched the essential traits of good leaders. For example, the United States Air Force has recognized the importance of integrity. "It is the willingness to do what is right even when no one is looking," states an Air Force publication (Air Force, 1997, p. 5). People and organizations look for those who have integrity. Maxwell, a well-known business leader, called integrity "the most important ingredient of leadership" (Maxwell, 1993, p. 35). "When I have integrity, my words and my deeds match up," wrote Maxwell (1993, p. 35).

According to Maxwell, integrity is most important because it: (1) builds trust, (2) has high influence value, (3) facilitates high standards, (4) results in a solid reputation, (5) means living it before leading others, (6) helps a leader be credible, and (7) is a hard-won achievement (1993, pp. 35-45). One thing that most of these have in common is their connection to relationships. Leadership requires positive relationships. Integrity increases an educational leader's influence over staff and colleagues because it builds trust (Maxwell, 1993, p. 38).

In turn, the element of trust improves the bond between educational leaders and staff and allows them to relate to each other in an honest and productive way. The antithesis of this is for a an educational leader to be unreliable or inconsistent, resulting in followers who do not feel confident that such a leader should be followed. According to Maxwell and Elmore (2007), "We gain credibility when our life matches our talk and

when both add value to others" (p. 783). Before educational leaders can truly lead, others

must see what they stand for and that they abide by their stated values.

Clear School Goals and Participation

In addition, Borman, Hewes, Overman, and Brown, (2003) conducted a meta-

analysis of historical education reforms and concluded that successful reforms were

clearly defined. Similarly, Barge (2012) noted that educators need an understanding of

the process and expectations to successfully implement change. As a result, several

studies have espoused the importance of teacher-leaders as change agents (Fischer &

Hamer, 2010; Gigante & Firestone, 2008).

Moreover, Short and Greer (2002) found the potential dangers of coercive

implementation of school changes leading to suspicion or misunderstanding. As a result,

they advocated for the involvement of stakeholders in the formation of school goals

(Short & Greer, 2002). This would allow for exploration, consensus building, and

establishing the needed base of support (Short & Greer, 2002). To illustrate, they

provided the example of Gilbert Elementary, a school where teachers were empowered to

come up with a successful plan to improve the school (Short & Greer, 2002).

By the same token, Shedd and Bacharach's (1991) review of the literature found

several important benefits of teacher participation:

- reduced role conflict with administrators;

- increased morale and trust for school leaders;

- reduced stress and burnout; and

- decreased teacher turnover (p. 131).

However, the authors also warned that teachers saw some "opportunities for involvement" as illusionary, meant to provide only the appearance of teacher involvement (Shedd and Bacharach, 1991, p. 132). They described this as including teachers "to secure their assent to decisions that administrators had already made" (Shedd and Bacharach, 1991, p. 132). One area of concern for the current study was whether teachers perceived the principal and others in the school community as valuing their involvement in the process of deciding on and working towards school goals at Lion Elementary.

Importance of Shared Vision

Kouzes and Posner (2002) defined leadership as "the art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for shared aspirations" (p. 30). Likewise, they described shared vision as "An ideal, unique vision for the future that gives direction and inspires others" (p. 30). According to Short and Greer (2002):

> Embedded in a school's vision is a collection of values and beliefs. Often these remain unspoken and unexamined unless a skillful group facilitator helps the group to explore the subtleties of a particular set of values. The process of revealing the beliefs undergirding a proposed course of action helps participants to build a high level of commitment to the new program or effort (p. 48).

Other studies have also found that shared vision was the basis for collaboration and community (Prytula & Weiman, 2012; Williamson, Archibald, McGregor, 2010). These point to the crucial importance of establishing a shared vision. Additionally, Wrobleski et al. (2011) determined that teacher collaboration had the potential to result in increased academic achievement among students.

Similarly, the current research explored the perceptions of an elementary principal and teachers in regards to holding a shared vision. It asked the important question, "What factors contribute to the alignment of goals between the principal and teachers?" (see Appendix A Research Questions).

Productive Relationships

Closely related to the creation of shared vision is the understanding that all organizations are characterized by the nature of the relationships that exist among community members. Fullan (2001) found that effective organizations were characterized by productive relationships and focused on a moral purpose. For example, he distinguished schools with strong communities that simply reinforced the status quo from those with professional learning communities that implemented collaboration focused on learning (Fullan, 2001). Moreover, Burns (1978) theorized that people in an organization had the power to transform each other for better or worse. Thus, he advocated for leaders to have the highest levels of conduct and ethics to serve as models for others (Burns, 1978).

Transactional leadership. In addition, Burns (1978) characterized "transactional" leadership by situations when leaders used their positions to get subordinates to do things they would not usually do. For example, coercive and pacesetting leadership styles, discussed earlier, were often found to have negative results, because they failed to create a shared vision based on collaboration (Goleman, 2000). Goleman (2000) describes this downward effect:

[P]eople's sense of responsibility evaporates: unable to act on their own initiative, they lose their sense of ownership and feel little accountability for their

performance. Some become so resentful they adopt the attitude, 'I'm not going to help this bastard.'

Coercive leadership also has a damaging effect on the rewards system. Most high-performing workers are motivated by more than money—they seek the satisfaction of work well done. The coercive style erodes such pride. And finally, the style undermines one of the leader's prime tools—motivating people by showing them how their job fits into a grand, shared mission. Such a loss, measured in terms of diminished clarity and commitment, leaves people alienated from their own jobs, wondering, "How does any of this matter?" (Goleman, 2000, p. 82).

Morale decreases and motivation suffers with overuse of coercive leadership. For this reason, other styles of leadership are to be preferred for most situations.

Hunter (2002) portrayed transactional leaders as those who prioritized tasks over relationships. He found that the negative results could often be seen in increased employee turnover, cynicism and rebellion, decreased quality of work, lowered commitment, and lack of trust (Hunter, 2002). Accordingly, Hunter (2002) characterized the challenge of leadership as successfully completing goals while building effective working relationships.

Transformational leadership. In stark contrast to transactional or coercive leaders, "transformational" leaders relied on positive, productive relationships to accomplish what is good (Burns, 1978). In addition, this transformational aspect of effective leadership is multidirectional. "Transforming leadership ultimately becomes moral in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leaders

and led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both," writes Burns (1978, p. 20).

Likewise, Fullan (2001) provided a description of such leaders:

> A quick picture of these principals . . . right down in the trenches working along
> with everyone else, who were never afraid of getting their hands dirty. They
> would do everything anyone else did and then go further. These were the
> principals who, through personal behavior and example, inspired trust from all.
> They trusted others and earned reciprocal trust (p. 64).

Thus, transformational leadership was characterized by productive, respectful
relationships. Hunter (2002) related this to leaders who followed the "golden rule" and
treated others the way they wanted to be treated (p. 148).

Servant Leadership

Hunter (2002) presented a model of leadership that resembled transformational
leadership. He defined "servant leadership" as identifying and meeting the needs of
others (Hunter, 2002). However, he clearly differentiated between "needs" and "wants"
(Hunter, 2002, pp. 60-61). For example, he wrote, "Children and adults need an
environment with boundaries, a place where standards are set and people are held
accountable. They may not *want* boundaries and accountability but they *need* boundaries
and accountability" (Hunter, 2002, p. 60). Therefore, servant leadership is marked by an
authentic concern for what is in the best interest of others in the organization. As leaders
work on behalf of what others need, they gain influence with those they serve (Hunter,
2002). In addition, Hunter (2002) concluded that influencing others was crucial to
effective leadership. Moreover, developing influence over others helped leaders avoid
the resentment associated with the unnecessary use of coercive power (Hunter, 2002).

Furthermore, Hunter (2002) equated leadership development with character development. He wrote: "Developing new character habits and breaking the old habits takes time and a great deal of effort. It means we have to behave in new ways. It means we have to change" (Hunter, 2002, p. 10). For this reason, Hunter (2002) provided three important steps in order to assist organizations in developing leaders of character:

1. Leaders must understand what servant leadership is, and decide on principles they are committed to.

2. They must identify areas that need to be improved upon in order to become the effective leaders they have committed to becoming.

3. They should develop measurable goals to help them progress, and share them with someone else, increasing their teamwork and commitment (p. 10).

Hunter (2002) believed that character was something that could be changed through conscious choices and discipline.

In essence, leaders developed character by choosing and doing the right thing(s) for others. Acting in the best interest of others is the essence of servant leadership. This is quite different than the manipulation often found in coercive or top-down leadership approaches (Hunter, 2002, pp. 103-104) and could be illustrated by an inverted triangle (see Figure 2). The current research, about perspectives and change, considered whether the principal's vision aligned with the vision held by teachers and whether educators at Lion Elementary felt supported in working towards school goals.

```
                    Other Stakeholders

                            ↑
                            ↓

                        Leaders
```

Figure 2. Inverted Hierarchy for Servant Leadership. Typical models depict leaders as having power over others, resulting in antagonistic relationships. Servant leaders sacrifice and serve to meet the needs of others, resulting in empowered and involved stakeholders (at the top rather than the bottom). A side benefit is the development of leadership among other stakeholders. From *The Servant: A Simple Story About the True Essence of Leadership* (p. 100), J. C. Hunter, Copyright 2002 New York: Random House Digital.

Assumptions About People

The type of leadership used in an organization may be a reflection of assumptions about the people in general, or specifically those in that organization. McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y are commonly used to describe leaders' assumptions about human nature (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). While they may be an oversimplification, the two theories may serve to distinguish inclinations. For example, leaders who hold to Theory X see people as trying to avoid work, evade responsibility, and meet physical and safety needs by using the path of least resistance. As a result, those who hold Theory X assumptions believe they must control and coerce others to meet the organization's goals.

In contrast, leaders who hold to Theory Y assumptions view others as appreciating work, having self-control, enjoying creativity and problem-solving, seeking higher order goals to achieve self-actualization, and being self-directed (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). Consequently, the leader may be seen as a supportive facilitator

(Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). Of course, as discussed in the aforementioned context of situational leadership, it is more likely that leaders will act according to the needs of the specific people and situations involved. For instance, a leader may be inclined towards Theory Y, but find the need to be directive with someone who is being insubordinate (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988).

Nevertheless, Maxwell (1993) found that his underlying assumptions about people determined his success in helping to develop their talents and leadership. Specifically, he found it valuable to hold to the following assumptions about people:

- They want to feel valued.

- They need encouragement.

- They follow leaders based on relationship more than position.

- They will be loyal to leaders who help them learn and succeed.

- Given a positive environment, people will be naturally motivated (Maxwell, 1993, pp. 117-122).

Maxwell (1993) also found that these assumptions affected the way he treated others and helped him to have positive leadership experiences in developing others. While the current study was not explicitly directed at leadership assumptions, it should be noted that these were influential and underlay the experiences of the principal and teachers at Lion Elementary.

School Culture

An important implication of the relationships that exist between stakeholders in a school is that they will determine the culture of that school. Patterson, Purkey, and Parker (1986) operationally defined culture as the guiding beliefs and daily behaviors of

an organization. Moreover, based on their review of literature, they determined that school culture:

- affected student behavior and achievement;

- could be purposefully influenced by people's decision(s);

- was relatively unique, although schools may share some commonalities;

- was made up of individual elements that had a greater effect when combined;

- could be experienced differently by different groups;

- could have both positive and negative elements; and

- typically changed slowly over time (Patterson, Purkey, & Parker, 1986, pp. 97-98).

These cultural factors underlay the feelings and thoughts of educators at Lion Elementary and were considered in analyzing and evaluating the qualitative data in the current study.

Additionally, given that each school is characterized by a culture, it is also important to consider what constitutes a healthy school culture. Accordingly, Purkey and Smith (1985) identified these common characteristics of healthy schools:

- democratic decision making;

- strong leadership;

- staff stability;

- an organized curriculum;

- staff development;

- parental support;

- recognition for academic achievement;

- dedicated learning time with minimal disruptions;

- district support;

- collaborative planning;

- a sense of community;

- clear goals and expectations; and

- order and discipline (pp. 358-359).

These elements of a healthy school culture were relevant in considering responses of educators at Lion Elementary regarding strengths and challenges concerning school goal efforts.

A Learning Organization

Additionally, Senge et al. (2000) envisioned a positive school culture that embodied a learning orientation. He determined:

> [S]chools can be re-created, made vital, and sustainably renewed not by fiat or command, and not by regulation, but by taking a *learning orientation*. This means involving everyone in the system in expressing their aspirations, building their awareness, and developing their capabilities together. In a school that learns, people who traditionally may have been suspicious of one another—parents and teachers, educators and local businesspeople, administrators and union members, people inside and outside the school walls, students and adults—recognize their common stake in the future of the school system and the things they can learn from one another (p. 5).

There is a sense of optimism and idealism in this perspective. The current study sought to provide insight and enable learning within Lion Elementary.

Mismatched Perspectives

While the potential for positive results towards achieving school goals and a shared vision exists, several studies noted the existence of a disparity between the perceptions of stakeholders in education. Fee (2008) found notable discrepancies between principal and teacher understandings of leadership. Another study found that teacher and principal perceptions of implementation of educational reforms were considerably different (Cheng & Yau, 2011).

Other studies focused on the perceptions of one group only. For example, Torff and Sessions (2009) studied a principal's perceptions of teachers, while Leech and Fulton (2008) considered the perceptions of teachers towards their principal. Still another study compared the perceptions of children regarding academic competencies with the perceptions of parents and teachers (Kärkkäinen, Räty, & Kasanen, 2010). Moreover, Pringle, Lyons, and Booker (2010) concluded that African American students perceived that teacher expectations were lower for their group. Strom, Strom, and Beckert (2011) advocated for a more inclusive role for students in working towards educational change.

In a study of 31 elementary schools, Kelley, Thornton, and Daugherty (2005) compared the perceptions of teachers and principals concerning leadership styles and practices (Kelly et al., 2005). They concluded that teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership were significantly related to school climate (Kelly et al., 2005). They hypothesized that effective leadership resulted in shared vision and led to a positive school climate and increased academic achievement (Kelly et al., 2005). Nevertheless, they also found that principal self-ratings were not significantly related to teachers'

perceptions, pointing to the real possibility of a mismatch between the perceptions of principals and teachers (Kelly et al., 2005).

Tension Between Educator Roles and Perspectives

In addition, Shedd and Bacharach (1991) found that a tension often existed between teachers' need for professional autonomy and principals' efforts to bring about positive reform. They concluded that most school systems contained a complex combination of elements:

> Individual teachers are isolated or insulated (depending on one's point of view) from direct contact with administrators and each other, with what (at first glance) seems to be extraordinary freedom to decide what they and their students will do. Yet these teachers are also tightly constrained by curriculum policies, student assignments, and resource limitations that are all beyond their control (Shedd and Bacharach, 1991, p. 59).

The authors also asked, "Must teachers and school officials resign themselves to constant tugs-of-war and periodic compromises between teachers' needs for discretion and administrators' needs for coordination?" (Shedd & Bacharach, 1991, p. 65). Consequently, they concluded that teacher and administrators must often remind each other of their differing perspectives (Shedd & Bacharach, 1991). Accordingly, the authors believed that paradigm differences between teachers and administrators were often dealt with by "day-to-day" bargaining and mutual respect for each other's "zones of influence" (Shedd & Bacharach, 1991, p. 59-66).

Rationale for Current Study

While some studies found incongruity between principal and teacher perceptions, other studies have found agreement between the perceptions of principals and teachers. For example, Pashiardis (2005) investigated how teachers' perceptions regarding their principal and his leadership style compared with those of the principal. He concluded that there was a high degree of agreement between the perceptions of the teachers and the principal (Pashiardis, 2005).

This study sought to add to the limited body of research comparing the perspectives of principals and teachers. Specifically, it explored their perceptions in regards to achieving school goals at the elementary school level. To look at it another way, Glatthorn and Joyner (2005) theorized that both the replication of previous research and the highlighting of new research questions contributed to the field. Whether existing theories were verified and gained additional support or new theories were developed to explain unexpected results (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005), the current study sought to make a positive contribution to the field of education.

Summary

Learning takes place in a social context, and people interact based on perceptions. Therefore, several studies have explored the importance of perceptions and their effects on organizations. The current research was based on a constructivist paradigm, because it acknowledged the importance of people's perceptions in helping to create a perceived reality. An important aim of this study was to consider how the perceived realities of the principal and teachers attributed to working towards school goals. Moreover, the success of school reforms and achieving goals is often grounded in the perceptions of educators.

However, the importance of effective leadership and the use of appropriate leadership styles should not be overlooked. Effective leaders model integrity and help others through the challenges of adjusting to innovation efforts. In addition, authentically involving teachers in change efforts is helpful in creating a shared vision for a school, and can help to establish productive relationships between administrators and teachers. At the same time, this may also help to avoid the pitfalls of transactional leadership and instead strive to gain from the benefits of transformational leadership.

Several studies have addressed the perspectives of educators. Some have found alignment and shared perspective, while others have noted important differences. Similarly, some have found tensions between the perspectives of administrators and teachers based on their respective roles. This study added to the limited body of research comparing the perspectives of principals and teachers by exploring their perceptions regarding school goals at the elementary school level. This research potentially enhanced understanding and communication between these two important contributors to the educational process. Whether existing theories were verified and gained additional support or theories were developed to explain unexpected results, the current study sought to make a positive contribution to the field of education.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study used a phenomenological research design to understand the perceptions, experiences, and ideas of Lion Elementary teachers regarding the phenomenon of working towards school goals. In choosing a methodology, it was important to consider the most appropriate research design, the effectiveness of research questions, the participants to be studied, the setting for the study, the researcher's role, the data collection methods to be used, how data was analyzed, the trustworthiness of the design and results, and related ethical issues that arose.

Design

Traditionally, academic research has been thought of by many in terms of positivistic, empirical, and objective models. As Charon (1995) pointed out, "This has usually involved defining . . . variables and testing a causal relationship between them" (p. 206). However, such models do not take into account the subjective, novel, and free nature of human beings (Charon, 1995). Things which are not easily numerically quantifiable are often ignored or not taken into account. Hence, important aspects such as thoughts and feelings may not be adequately reflected.

A more complete picture of a human being may involve more than just quantitative research using variables and statistics. Gilbert Ryle (as cited in Geertz, 1973), discussed the importance of having a "thick description":

> . . . two boys rapidly contracting the eyelids of their right eyes. In one, this is an
> involuntary twitch; in the other a conspiratorial signal to a friend. The two
> movements are, as movements, identical. . . . Yet the difference, however

unphotographable, between a twitch and a wink is vast; as anyone unfortunate

enough to have had the first taken for the second knows (Geertz, 1973, p. 39).

A "thin description" of what is happening would be that the boy was contracting his

eyelids (Geertz, 1973, pp. 39-40). In contrast, a "thick description" would be much

richer in meaning; for example, he was "faking a wink to deceive an innocent into

thinking a conspiracy is in motion" (Geertz, 1973, p. 40).

The main goal of qualitative research is to see through the perspectives of the

people one is studying, and convey to others a rich description of their meaning (Charon,

1995; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). As a result, qualitative research is characterized by

studying people in their natural settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This study

investigated teachers working towards school goals at an elementary school.

Specifically, this qualitative study used a hermeneutical phenomenological approach.

Creswell (2013) defined a phenomenological study as one that "describes the common

meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon"

(p. 76). Moreover, a hermeneutical phenomenological approach is concerned with both

the phenomenon and the interpretation of it (Creswell, 2013).

For example, using taped interviews, Williamson (2005) conducted a

hermeneutical phenomenological study of women who had been through the phenomena

of postnatal depression and health professional intervention. This involved transcribing,

interpreting, and analyzing interview and observational data (Williamson, 2005).

Ultimately, in examining and interpreting the experiences of participants, Williamson

(2005) found two major themes that would help to share the essence of participants'

experiences. This was illustrative of a hermeneutical phenomenological study that

attempted to describe the common meaning of a particular phenomenon, postnatal depression with health professional intervention, experienced by several people. In the current study, the phenomenon being studied and interpreted was educators working towards school goals at Lion Elementary.

In another phenomenological study, researchers explored AIDS patients' experiences and visual representations of their illness (Anderson & Spencer, 2002). Transcripts were analyzed to come up with 11 common themes that would describe the phenomenon of interest, experiences and perceptions of AIDS patients (Anderson & Spencer, 2002). Another common practice, sometimes referred to as member checking or informant feedback, was used to allow participants to respond to research findings (Anderson & Spencer, 2002). This served as another example of a hermeneutical phenomenological study focused on exploring the essence of individuals' experiences in regards to a phenomenon.

In like manner, the current study sought to explore and interpret the phenomenon of elementary educators working towards school goals. Through the use of interviews and transcription, data was analyzed to come up with common themes that revealed the essence of their experiences.

Research Questions

For this reason, this study set out to explore and understand the perceptions of the principal and teachers regarding school goals by focusing on several research questions:

- What were the perceptions of the principal regarding school goal priorities?
- What were the perceptions of the teachers regarding school goal priorities?

- What were the main challenges the principal perceived for meeting school goals?

- What were the main challenges the teachers perceived for meeting school goals?

- What factors contributed toward schools' successfully meeting goals?

- How did the perceptions of the principal and teachers at Lion Elementary compare in regards to school goals?

- What factors contributed to the alignment of goals between the principal and teachers?

These research questions were informed by the review of relevant literature and aligned with understanding the essence of educators' experiences in working towards school goals at Lion Elementary.

Participants

Rather than choosing people at random, a purposeful sample includes only people who share the characteristics or experiences being researched (Creswell, 2013). For example, in a qualitative study of AIDS patients, it would serve of little value to include participants that had no experience with the illness. In the current study, a purposeful sample was used, since it focused on educators working towards school goals at Lion Elementary School, the chosen site of interest. This addressed the need for participants who have experienced the phenomenon of interest.

In this study, voluntary participants included the principal and 18 teachers from the 21 teachers at the site. At Lion Elementary School, 80% of the teachers were females, while the principal was also a female. All educators held bachelor's degrees, 25% had also earned a master's degree, and one had achieved a doctorate degree. In

regards to age, the principal was in her 50s, while most teachers were in their 40s. In addition, Lion Elementary's workforce was generally racially homogeneous, with 88% of the staff identifying themselves as Caucasian. In terms of roles, teachers were directly accountable to the principal.

Setting

The research setting was an urban elementary school in the Northwest, serving approximately 450 students in grades Pre-Kindergarten to sixth. The site was selected based on having participants with the shared phenomenon of working towards school goals at Lion Elementary, my vested interest in and knowledge of the school, and as a matter of convenience and practicality. In addition, since other schools that had been researched in other studies were predominantly high schools (Leech & Fulton, 2008; Torff & Sessions, 2009), Lion Elementary served as an interesting contrast.

Procedures

Preparation for this study required written planning and approval of both the school district administration and Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix E Institutional Review Board Approval). Once approval had been granted for this study, volunteers were sought through an announcement during Lion Elementary's weekly staff meeting (see Appendix C Recruitment Script). After volunteers had been identified, they signed an informed consent form that explained the study and reminded them that they could choose to withdraw at any time (see Appendix D Consent Form). Interview times were arranged to conduct semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B Research Questions). Interviews were taped for further analyses and notes jotted down in a journal during the study.

The Researcher's Role

One characteristic of many qualitative studies, including the current study, is that the researcher can be seen as a "human instrument" in the sense that the researcher gathers, evaluates, and interprets data through interacting with participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 236). However, since I was employed as an elementary school teacher in the school under study, the possibility of response bias was increased. Participants may have given the answers they thought I wanted, or that I would view in a positive light. In addition, as an insider, I acknowledge existing professional relationships with other teachers and leaders. As a result, certain teachers may have been more likely to volunteer. It was possible that volunteers with dissenting opinions, that might have been viewed as leading to conflict, may have been more likely to opt out of participating. Moreover, I acknowledge my Christian worldview and the potential of interpreting results accordingly.

Data Collection

Typical data collection for a phenomenological study includes: interviews, observations, audiovisual materials, and written documents (Creswell, 2013).

Interviews

According to Kvale (1996), qualitative interviews are effective for understanding the perspectives, experiences, and meanings of participants. For this study, taped semi-structured interviews were used. This involved the use of structured questions accompanied by probing or open-ended follow-up questions (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). For example, in Williamson's (2005) study of women with postnatal depression and professional intervention, one of her structured questions was "What happened in your

interactions with health professionals?" (p. 75). However, she also had open-ended

follow-up questions prepared, such as "Can you tell me a little more about that?" and

"What happened next?" should they have been needed (Williamson, 2005, p. 76).

The following structured questions were used in this study as a starting point for

interviews with the principal and teachers:

- What do you see as the most important goal for your class this year? (question

  for teachers only)

- What do you see as the most important goal for our school this year?

- How did you decide on the school goals for this year?

- Do you feel you had a voice in deciding on the school goals for this year?

- What kinds of things would be of help to you in working towards class or

  school goals?

- Please discuss some school goals that you would like to see given more priority.

- Is there anything else about working towards class or school goals at Lion

  Elementary that you would like to add?

In addition, possible follow-up questions included:

- Would you please tell me more about that?

- What do you mean by…?

- What led to this?

- What would you change?

- What happened next?

- How do you feel about…? (Williamson, 2005, p. 76)

These questions were peer-reviewed prior to their use with participants of the study.

Follow-up questioning allowed me to seek further clarification on any information gained

during interviews and pursue any new or unexpected leads (see Appendix B Interview

Questions). In addition, interviews were transcribed for further analysis.

Audiovisual Materials

Another category commonly used in qualitative research is analysis of audiovisual

materials (Creswell, 2013). For example, videotaped meetings, website content, and e-

mails may be useful in helping to understand the ideas surrounding a particular

phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). In this study, staff meetings involving school goals were

recorded for further examination. In addition, the district and school websites were

helpful in revealing information regarding school goals, since these were used to convey

information to the public. Likewise, e-mails were often used to communicate

information to principals, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders; therefore, these were

another valuable and informative source of information.

Written Documents

Written documents in a school setting include: textbooks, newsletters, and other

written publications. These often reflected and impacted the sentiments of stakeholders

at the school and were useful sources pertaining to Lion Elementary school goals.

Newsletters to parents, for instance, publicized the educational decisions of district and

school leadership. In addition, journaling or notetaking during the study was valuable in

recording pertinent ideas and themes for later analyses (see Creswell, 2013). For

example, Creswell (2013) found it useful to record both descriptive and reflective notes

in his research. Notetaking also allowed this researcher to record pertinent observations and reminders that might otherwise have been forgotten.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis typically includes preparing and organizing data, finding essential themes, and "representing data in figures, tables, or a discussion" (Creswell, 2013, p. 180). This study used this framework for data analysis.

Preparing and Organizing Data

Creswell (2013) noted that data management begins early in the analysis process (p. 182). For example, he found that researchers organize data into computer files and appropriate units of text (Creswell, 2013, p. 182). This study involved organizing transcribed interviews, audiovisual materials, and written documents. In this research, computer files were used primarily, while some printed paper files were also stored securely for journaling, taking notes, and ease of analyses.

Finding Essential Themes

The process of coding includes creating and refining categories as needed to reflect the main ideas gathered from collected data (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) defines themes as "broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea" (p. 186). In the current study, statements from transcribed interviews, written notes, and other documents were categorized according to relevant themes.

Specifically, this study used Creswell's variation of the steps put forth by Moustakas for phenomenological research (as cited in Creswell, 2013):

- The researcher attempts to describe and set aside his or her personal experiences with the phenomenon being studied; the focus becomes the experiences of participants.

- From data collected, the researcher identifies and lists relevant statements about the experiences of participants regarding the studied phenomenon.

- The list of relevant statements is used to identify meaningful themes (Creswell, 2013, pp. 193-194).

These steps are related to finding essential themes. Themes may be found by looking at data holistically or highlighting meaningful parts (Van Manen, 1990). In addition, the constant comparison method in qualitative research entails the researcher continually comparing collected data and adjusting themes as necessary (Creswell, 2013). Data was collected and analyzed until the research questions were addressed.

Conveying Data

After preparing and organizing data and finding essential themes, data may be communicated using a variety of graphic organizers, flowcharts, figures, or a discussion (Creswell, 2013, p. 180). Consequently, the latter part of Creswell's (2013) variation of Moustakas' steps describe how phenomenological research is usual conveyed:

- Citing examples from participant data, the identified meaningful themes are used to create a "textural description" that describes what participants experienced.

- Next, the researcher provides a "structural description" that describes how the experience happened, including the setting and context.

- The culminating description integrates both the textural and structural descriptions to convey the "essence" of the experience of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013, pp. 193-194).

With a phenomenological study, the desired end result is communicating a thick understanding of the essence of the particular phenomenon being researched.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness can be defined simply as the degree to which information is "worthy of being trusted" (Collins English dictionary, n.d.). Typically, quantitative research has attempted to increase the trustworthiness of research by emphasizing internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Guba & Lincoln, 2007). In contrast, qualitative research focuses on credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 2007).

Credibility

Credibility is concerned with the accuracy of the researcher's interpretation of participants' meanings (Creswell, 2013). In this study, one factor that helped to increase the credibility of my research was triangulation, or relying on multiple sources of data and data collection methods (Creswell, 2013). Several educators from Lion Elementary participated and data was collected from interviews, audiovisual materials, and written documents.

In addition, *bracketing* increases credibility by a researcher disclosing his or her biases and roles and distinguishing them from those of other participants (Creswell, 2013). This also helps to avoid the perception of an ulterior motive, or hidden agenda. In this study, I disclosed my relationships to other participants and my previous experience

as an educator at the site of interest. I also acknowledged that the findings, to some extent, inextricably reflected my interpretation and worldview. However, I assured participants that I was interested in their thoughts and ideas and wanted to compare them to those of other staff members at the school.

Moreover, to avoid making judgments before examining the data collected, I had to be conscious of my own prejudices as a teacher with my own ideas and beliefs. Moustaka (1994) refers to this as looking at a phenomenon "freshly, as for the first time" (p. 34). Admittedly, this was difficult and could not be achieved completely, because one's values and beliefs frame any discussion or thinking. For instance, my research topic, from conception, was based on some existing interest or perceived need.

Nevertheless, reflecting on my beliefs and preconceptions helped me to be aware of them, and I was intentionally careful to avoid projecting my biases. In my journal notes, I noted when participants' ideas were similar to my own, but was cautious to not base my findings on my agreement or disagreement. Instead, I took on the persona of the authentically curious researcher to see where the data would take me. For example, while I thought *public perception* would be one of the main challenges of working towards school goals, none of the educators interviewed brought that up. Consequently, it is not part of my findings. Similarly, while I may have emphasized the *role of politics*, participants did not. Therefore, my findings do not reflect a direct emphasis on politics.

Another important tool to increase credibility was member checking. This meant participants were given the opportunity to provide feedback to make sure the researcher was providing an authentic reflection of the participants' thoughts and feelings (Creswell, 2013). In this study, participant feedback was used during data analysis and before

finalizing the publication of findings to help confirm that the findings accurately reflected participants' ideas rather than the biases of the researcher.

Transferability

Transferability considers whether the results of study can be transferred to other settings and contexts (Creswell, 2013). According to Guba and Lincoln (2007), transferability should be dealt with by providing "thick descriptive" data about the context of the study, so that other researchers may make informed evaluations regarding the transferability of the findings of the current study to other contexts (p. 19). The current research provided a thick description of the context of the current study.

Dependability

Guba and Lincoln (2007) explained that judging dependability involves examining the research process (p. 19). To increase dependability in qualitative research, the research processes used in a study should be reported in such detail that the research could be repeated (Shenton, 2004). This research included detailed descriptions of the processes employed and provided copies of instruments used.

Confirmability

Confirmability is also concerned with the replicability of both the process and findings of a study (Guba & Lincoln, 2007). Trochim (2006) defined this as "the degree to which the results could be confirmed or corroborated by others" (para. 6). Shenton (2004) described this as making sure, as much as possible, that findings are based on participants' experiences, not researcher biases or preferences. Triangulation, bracketing, and member checking, discussed above, were helpful in reducing biases and increasing the confirmability of the current study.

Addressing the need for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability helped to increase the trustworthiness of the current study. Both the process and results of the study were well thought-out and defensible.

Ethical Considerations

Christians may adhere to higher standards based on the Bible (Matthew 7:12), while others rely on published ethical codes, such as that of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). An important rationale for having ethical standards in educational research is linked to the potential for positive or negative impacts on those being studied (Strike et al., 2002, p. 1). These people may be vulnerable (Strike et al., 2002). For example, children are often a focus of educational research (Strike et al., 2002). However, in the current study, participants were adults who were hired as teachers or the principal at Lion Elementary.

Moreover, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with minimizing risks and protecting participants involved in university research (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). Criteria for approval of research also included using procedures considered part of sound research design and ensuring risks were reasonable compared to the potential benefit (see Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003, p. 68). The current study gained approval from Liberty University's IRB (see Appendix E).

Benefits

According to Strike et al. (2002), the main reason for research is to benefit others. There is a considerable potential benefit of having a school environment with a shared vision and a mutual understanding of the perspectives of stakeholders (Burns, 1978; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Prytula & Weiman, 2012; Williamson, Archibald, & McGregor,

2010; Wrobleski et al., 2011). This research informed educators about whether

perspectives regarding school goals were aligned, and provide insight regarding the

reasons behind similarities and differences.

Risks

In this study, potential harm included a negative portrayal of the school district,

school, or educators involved. According to Taylor (1991):

> [W]e have a responsibility to make sure that people are no worse off for having
>
> let us study them, even if we cannot guarantee that their lives will be improved.
>
> When we report our findings, we should take great pains to conceal their names
>
> and other identifying information if there is any chance that harm, including
>
> potential embarrassment, would come to the people in our studies (p. 246).

Consequently, it was important for measures to be in place to help protect participants.

For example, pseudonyms were used for individuals and the school involved in this

study. In addition, computer files were protected by a password and paper files were

locked in a secure filing cabinet to ensure confidentiality. Moreover, participants were

provided adequate information about this study and were informed about being allowed

to leave the study at any time (see Appendix C Informed Consent). These were important

ethical issues that were addressed in conducting this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results and findings and data analysis. Data was presented in the form of themes generated, in order to answer the following research questions:

- What were the perceptions of the principal regarding school goal priorities?

- What were the perceptions of the teachers regarding school goal priorities?

- What were the main challenges the principal perceived for meeting school goals?

- What were the main challenges the teachers perceived for meeting school goals?

- What factors contributed toward schools' successfully meeting goals?

- How did the perceptions of the principal and teachers at Lion Elementary compare in regards to school goals?

- What factors contributed to the alignment of goals between the principal and teachers?

Examples were used to exemplify the essence of participants' perceptions of working towards school goals at Lion Elementary. It should also be noted that interview excerpts are presented grammatically correct without superfluous interruptions, filler words, or interjections for ease of reading. The citation information for the confidential interviews fell under the category of personal communications that took place between February 26, 2013 and January 31, 2014.

Review of Data Analysis

This study used Creswell's variation of Moustakas' steps for analyzing phenomenological research (as cited in Creswell, 2013): (1) setting aside personal experiences to focus on participants' experiences, (2) relevant statements about the phenomenon were collected and identified, and (3) relevant statements were grouped to identify essential themes (pp. 193-194). Nevertheless, the task of having to sort through and make sense of copious amounts of data seemed overwhelming at times (see Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

In practical terms, I set aside my own opinions as a teacher at the site of interest in order to try to listen and understand the thoughts and feelings of other educators at Lion Elementary. As it turned out, my status of being a teacher turned out to give me access to almost all of our staff, with the exception of three teachers: one was apprehensive about being interviewed and taped, one on medical leave, and another had scheduling conflicts.

Since one of the aims of qualitative research is to understand the perspectives of the people one is studying (Charon, 1995; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), I found that transcribing digitally recorded interviews was a useful way to immerse myself in their words and ideas. First, all interviews were catalogued to identify different sources or participants. I randomly assigned pseudonyms for each participant from a list of the names of tropical storms in order to maintain confidentiality. In addition, using different colored fonts helped later, when statements were being grouped, to maintain visual clarity about which statements corresponded to each participant or source. Typically, each interview was heard multiple times during transcription, and each transcript was compared to the recorded interview to ensure accuracy.

Triangulation, bracketing, and member checking, helped to increase the credibility of this study (see Trustworthiness, chapter 3). After transcribing and organizing 164 pages of interviews and recorded meetings, various website content, e-mails, and numerous journal notes, the process of phenomenological reduction began in order to narrow the large amount of data into essential themes (see Moustakas, 1994). This may be thought of as "bringing order, structure, and meaning to the masses of data collected" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 135). Grouping similar statements was an inductive process; patterns became apparent and meaningful themes were identified. Although there were no predefined variables, as with quantitative research, selected data was connected to answering the research questions pertinent to the phenomenon being studied.

This involved the process of coding to create and refine categories to reflect the essential ideas gathered (see Creswell, 2013). Based on the research questions in this study, statements and words from collected data were initially coded using the following codes:

- PSG - Principal's perceptions of school goals

- TSG - Teachers' perceptions of school goals

- PCh - Principal's perceptions of challenges

- TCh - Teachers' perceptions of challenges

- PCF - Principal's perceptions of factors contributing toward meeting goals

- TCF - Teachers' perceptions of factors contributing toward meeting goals

- AF - Factors contributing towards goal alignment

I created 7 identical copies of collected data in order to highlight pertinent statements and words (see Van Manen, 1990) related to each of the research questions.

For example, in the first set of data, I identified and highlighted statements and words related to the principals' perceptions regarding school goals, coded PSG. Next, these statements and words were grouped into subcategories, or emerging themes, based on being similar. As a result, the over twenty pages of data collected based on prinicipal perceptions, were reduced to 4 essential themes: data-driven goals, a paradigm shift, individualized student learning, and the purpose of school goals. This process was repeated for the other research questions as well. In the findings that follow, I presented various interview excerpts, as well as terms used by participants related to the research questions and phenomenon being studied.

<div align="center">

Principal's Essential Themes Regarding School Goals

</div>

Theme: Data-driven Goals

Much of the principal's interview centered around the use of data to drive academic goals. For instance, early in our interview she stated:

> I think our goal is really looking at our data, the history of our data, and what we need to do in the school to address the changes we need to make. It also focuses us on what we need to address and what our information tells us about who we are as a school (Personal communication with interviewee, February, 2013).

Later in the interview she reiterated this view:

> Another goal could be improved attendance, but again that is all going to be connected to data. You know; we say we want more kids coming to school. That is cool, but it is going to be based on data. If we say I want more parent

involvement, it all still gets connected back to academic strength. You know what is parent involvement? What does attendance show? It is not attendance matters because attendance matters. Attendance matters because attendance matters here [pointing to academic data sheet]. Parent involvement matters because it matters here [pointing to academic data sheet]. Parents support their kids. They are getting their homework and reading done. They are coming to conferences, but it still all comes back to this sheet [pointing to academic data sheet] (Personal communication with interviewee, February, 2013).

Other terms used during the interview that related to data-driven goals were: "research-based," "performance-driven," "specific figures," "school data," "valid predictor," "flat line"—referring to a particular trend in one academic area, "strong in" reading or writing based on data, "achievement," and "academic proficiency." In addition, particular norm-referenced, state, and national achievement measures were often brought up. Thus, part of the answer to the first research question was that the theme of data-driven goals was an important priority in the principal's perception.

Theme: Paradigm Shift

While the principal never actually used the word *paradigm*, it seemed like an adequate descriptor for her emphasis on the way things were changing for the school and district. A paradigm can be thought of, broadly, as a philosophical or theoretical framework (Kuhn, 1970). In essence, this was what the principal described was changing in regards to school goals. For example, she stated, "The word school goal has changed; it doesn't mean the same thing anymore" (Personal communication with interviewee, February, 2013). In another part of the interview she explained:

66

I could have said 10 years ago that my goal is to implement a new reading

curriculum. It is now data driven; it is now performance driven. The expectation

of improved performance of the school isn't, anymore, I want to implement this.

I might want to implement some professional development in writing, but only

because we need to strengthen our writing proficiency. What used to be goals 10,

12, 15 years ago are not now goals in themselves; they are means of achieving the

academic goals (Personal communication with interviewee, February, 2013).

Other terms used in describing the paradigm shift were: "change how we do business,"

"new use of data," "new format," "new chapter for the district," "different way of

thinking," "doing things differently," "there has been a change," "refocus," "reorganize,"

"rethink," "better," and "not okay"—referring to the old ways. As a result, in regards to

school goals, the principal's perception that important changes were occurring was

another essential theme.

Theme: Individualized Learning

Closely related to her other themes of data-driven goals and a shift of thinking

about goals, another theme for the principal was the importance of individualized

learning. Part of bringing up the overall proficiency scores for the school was a focus on

helping students considered "nonproficient." For instance, the principal stated,

It used to be, 'Well, we are good enough because 70% of our kids are proficient.'

It has now flipped to 'Really, 30% are not proficient?' That is not okay; you

wouldn't want your kids in that data. It is not okay for any kids to be in the

nonproficient group. So there has really been a change of focus of schools that

need to be unified and getting kids proficient . . . (Personal communication with interviewee, February, 2013).

It was also the principal's perception in regards to helping students achieve proficiency that teachers were thinking, "I need to think of what I'm going to do differently or individually to get more help" (Personal communication with interviewee, February, 2013). Similarly, she explained that she was thinking about how to best use support staff, time, and structure to help intervention efforts. For the principal, this essential theme of individualized learning was perceived as an important aspect for her two other themes; individualized learning would be based on data-driven goals and was a result of a paradigm shift.

Theme: Purpose of Goals

For the principal, one purpose of goals seemed to be to help fulfill the school district's new strategic plan. For example, she described this as "looking at our data" to decide "what changes we need to make or what focus we need to have" (Personal communication with interviewee, February, 2013). She also expressed this as a "new format," and "we get this [referring to school goals provided by the district] and then we address it" (Personal communication with interviewee, February, 2013). From her perspective, the district formulated school goals and then held schools accountable. She asserted,

> I think the district should give us school goals. . . .When we had only 70% of the kids proficient in something at a certain grade, somebody should be saying, 'Hello—take a look here. What are you going to do about this?' (Personal communication with interviewee, February, 2013).

68

She reasoned that the school needed to do its part to fulfill the district's strategic plan, because without the lower grades being proficient they were "not going to have the skill sets to graduate" leading to the district having "graduation issues" (Personal communication with interviewee, February, 2013). Moreover, she reasoned that the "work world" required students to have "college or postsecondary" education, whether it was "college or career tech." Consequently, one of the principal's identified essential themes regarding the first research question was the purpose of school goals.

Teachers' Essential Themes Regarding School Goals

Theme: Data-driven Goals

The second research question was: What are perceptions of the teachers regarding school goal priorities? Like the principal, one of the predominant themes from the teachers was data-driven academic goals. For example, Pablo stated, "Each grade level has a goal for their [standardized test] scores, a percentage, so I think it is important for us to try as a grade level in every grade to try to meet that percentage on the [standardized test]" (name of state test withheld) (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). In addition, Olga explained, "The district dictates that we have certain goals. . . . We are pretty much driven down to the data to see where we need to focus" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). Most teachers believed that academic goals and measuring progress rely on data from testing.

Other terms used relating to data-driven goals were: "achievement," "trajectory of our scores," "bringing up scores," "flat line"—referring to a particular a trend in one or more academic areas, "improving the scores," "a little behind"—on standardized "test scores," "prepare them for upcoming testing," "meeting standards," "progress

monitoring"—using norm-referenced measures, and "interventions" based on data. Moreover, the names of various national and state assessments, withheld to maintain confidentiality, were also used liberally.

Theme: Academic Subject Goals

In regards to the teachers' perceptions regarding goals, the second research question, many teachers also focused on particular academic subjects when discussing classroom or school goals. For example, Ingrid stated, "I want all my kids to be reading proficiently by the time they leave, and then math is secondary" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). "We need to focus on our mathematics, checking for mastery in certain areas before moving on," commented Andrea (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). Lorenzo concluded,

> I would have to say that it would be writing, that for right now you know, it seems that math and reading have held the spotlight especially with the integration of online tutorial programs. . . . We just don't have as many tools for writing . . . along with the needed time for children to be able to sit down and write once they have been shown certain strategies (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013).

Teachers focused on the three main academic areas of reading, math, and writing.

Other terms used in regards to academic goals were: "subjects," "proficiency," "literacy," "an area"—referring to an academic area, "mastery," specific skills—such as, "fractions," "subtraction," "writing organization," "sequential order," and "strengthening"—referring to improving in a particular subject area. Some teachers

paused to consider the needs of their group of students this year, while others referenced the focus of school and district efforts.

Theme: Positive School Climate

Another theme that many teachers discussed during interviews was the goal of establishing a positive school climate. For example, Pablo asserted, "As a school, actually, I think that community building should have a higher priority. The social emotional learning thing is much easier to achieve as a group. . . . I think building that sense of community is important" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). Likewise, Andrea reasoned,

> Teachers should be bonding with their kids, because they perform harder for somebody who shows that they care. . . . If they feel safe among peers, and have made a bond with their teacher, they will try harder. Then teachers are able to explain things when children are frustrated with a particular concept (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013).

Some teachers referenced social and emotional learning (SEL) standards and goals that focus on teaching students how to communicate, understand, and interact with others (see Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2011).

Later in our interview, Andrea noted that SEL influenced not only the classroom but schoolwide dynamics (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). In addition, other terms related to school climate used by teachers were: "getting everybody connected," "opportunities for students to feel like they are part of a team," "feeling comfortable and safe," "digging deeper into the social emotional realm," "being well-rounded," "being compassionate," and "being thoughtful and responsible." Therefore,

positive school climate was identified as an essential theme for teachers in regards to the perceptions of teachers regarding school goal priorities, the second research question.

Theme: Safety

Another common theme described by teachers was safety-related goals. Gabrielle concluded, "No matter what child comes in here, no matter what they learn or what they don't learn, the bottom line is safety" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). Similarly, Humberto determined,

> To me the focus has been so much on security this year and not so much on academics. I feel that is where we have spent a lot of time and energy, on the security portion of goals in this building. . . .The goal seems to be really lock-down security (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013).

Several mentioned recent events when talking about this. For example, Erin explained,

> I feel very connected to what happened in [name of tragic incident withheld for confidentiality], because that is where I am from. The town was right next door to where I lived. In fact, I have family and friends that live there. So when it is really that close to home; it hits hard. . . .When it is that close to home, it is like 'What is happening?' or 'What isn't happening really?' I think that often times when we see a kid that might be troubled, not enough is done to take the steps to address that (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013).

Fernand spoke of this in a more general way, "Well I guess it [the goal] is active safety right now because of all the media and everything that has happened. . . . Our main goal is to make sure our school is a safe haven as much as we can" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013).

Other phrases used by teachers about safety included: "safe environment,"
"feeling safe," "walking the walk"—in reference to creating a friendly and safe school,
"shootings and stuff," "security," "doing it [safety procedures] correctly," "a major
focus"—referring to safety at our school, and "the pervasive thought is always safety."
Thus, the theme of safety was also identified as an essential theme regarding teachers'
perceptions about school goals.

Theme: Individualized Learning

Similar to the principal's focus on individualized learning, teachers also
emphasized the importance of meetings the needs of individual students. Fernand wanted
to "make sure that everyone kind of understands what they need for their level . . . to
support their learning" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013).
Gabrielle explained, "I create a sort of safe, harmonious environment; then everything
else is broken up as far as the individual. My goal is to get the child to the next place in
all domains" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). "I just want each
child to be able to learn to the best of their ability, so I do a lot of individual stuff,"
responded Nestor (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). Other
phrases used were: "helping students who are struggling," "filling in gaps," "figuring out
the best interventions," "progress monitoring"—to determine which students may need
interventions, and "figuring out what steps they are missing." Regarding teachers'
perceptions about school goals, these examples reflected the essential theme of their
desire to meet individual student needs.

Theme: Purpose of Goals

While some teachers focused on the purpose of goals as preparing students for the next grade, many viewed them in the larger context of preparing them for life. Admittedly, these are not mutually exclusive. However, they provide a context for their views about school goals, the second research question.

Preparation for the next grade. Throughout teacher interviews, teachers noted their focus on preparing students for the next grade level. For example, Sebastien declared, "The most important goal is to bring the kids up so that when they are exiting [omitted] grade they are meeting all the academic expectations that they need to meet; so that is probably my primary role. . . . I want them all to become really good writers. I want to make sure they have everything that a paragraph needs, so they are ready to move on to the next grade level" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). "I will say that my most important goal is to prepare them, actually overprepare them, for going on into the [omitted] grade," stated Lorenzo (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). A common phrase used by teachers to describe this was, "getting the kids ready for [the next] grade."

Preparation for life. Many teachers viewed the overarching purpose of school goals as preparing students for life. "We should expect them to be ready to take on life," replied Pablo (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). Olga described it a different way:

We work on social skills. . . . I think that's really important when you become an adult. If you don't have social skills, you can read as much as you want to read, but if you don't have social skills, it's going to be difficult to get a job or hold a

job. . . . I think that academic areas are important, but I also think there is way more than academics, like social skills (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013).

Lorenzo spoke of this in more general terms:

Responsibility, probably, would be at the top of my list; communication skills would be second. I think I would have to kind of simplify that down to about those two important pieces. We really put a lot into having these kids be self-reliant versus having to look for help (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013).

Other terms used in discussing preparation for life were: "college and career ready," "life skills," "cooperation," "confidence," "looking at the whole child," and "growing both academically and socially."

Theme: Teachers as Professionals

In regards to the perceptions of teachers about school goals, another essential theme that emerged was that of teachers maintaining professional knowledge and skills. At the time of the study, our district had recently adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for math and language arts. During interviews, many teachers mentioned a desire to understand and implement them. Humberto decided,

I think the most important goal for our school this year is to really understand the Common Core Standards that we have adopted. . . . I think we had need to understand exactly what is in each strand and each string in reading and math and what it entails for each of our grades (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013).

Karen also noticed,

> There have been a lot of changes coming down and more professional
> development and training are needed in the areas we have been having all the
> changes. . . . We have adopted new writing programs as far as that's concerned;
> training towards being able to use the curriculum more efficiently and effectively
> is probably my biggest concern (Personal communication with interviewee,
> March, 2013).

Others described professional goals more generally: "to have strategies in place and continue as professional leaders," "to find a way for all the different curriculums to work more harmoniously and be more effective," and "professional development time with each other to learn and grow and collaborate on activities, academic goals, and curriculum plans" (Personal communications with interviewees, March, 2013). In this theme, teachers emphasized their need to be knowledgeable and skilled.

Principal's Themes Regarding Challenges for Meeting School Goals

A third area of interest for this study was the perceptions of the principal about challenges for meeting school goals. What were the main challenges the principal perceived for meeting school goals? Three essential themes for the principal concerning challenges were: changing the focus, changing attitudes, and limited resources.

Theme: Changing the Focus

The principal described how the school district's emphasis on data-driven goals led to uneasy conversations:

> So the school district has forced conversations in every school that aren't
> comfortable; that aren't fun. It means we have to change how we do business.

We may not get to do the projects that we like to do, because they are not fitting anymore in a changing way of thinking. Yes, it is a different way of thinking about what we do. I think that's okay, if we are serious. I don't believe this staff here think that it is okay to have some serious percentages of kids that are not proficient (Personal communication with interviewee, February, 2013).

An example, provided later in our conversation, was a teacher who may have done a unit on frogs in the past (Personal communication with interviewee, February, 2013). However, with the shift of focus, this would only be acceptable if the teacher could prove it was connected to the district goals (Personal communication with interviewee, February, 2013). Likewise, she emphasized that in the past, "There wasn't much of a focus on the absolute, critical importance of kids being proficient" (Personal communication with interviewee, February, 2013).

Theme: Changing Attitudes

Closely related to changing the focus of the school and staff, was the challenge of changing attitudes. For example, during our interview, the principal attributed low test scores in a particular area and grade level to some teachers having the attitude "some kids are not ready to learn" or "some kids are not mature enough" (Personal communication with interviewee, February, 2013). She also noted that teachers were often surprised when they focused on the nonproficient percentages:

I think people told me that they were very surprised when they saw our school's data, and that we have become a real flat line school and in some areas have been decreasing as a school. I think a lot of people thought that the school was doing really just fine, that a lot of kids were proficient, and lot of kids were just fine.

After we looked at data this fall, a lot of people said, 'We have never done this.
Oh my word, I had no idea that this many kids were not strong in reading or math
or writing or whatever' (Personal communication with interviewee, February,
2013).

Notwithstanding, she also remarked that once teachers were aware, she believed they
would not just "blow it off" (Personal communication with interviewee, February, 2013).
In her view, teachers were becoming "better" by "thinking about instruction" (Personal
communication with interviewee, February, 2013).

Theme: Lack of Resources

Another challenge identified by the principal was a lack of resources. For
example, she elaborated,

Some schools have a lot more staff through before school programs, and they run
an after school tutoring programs. This school doesn't have those programs, so it
is really hard to provide all the services for academicals goals. Of course, I wish I
had more staff (Personal communication with interviewee, February, 2013).

However, given the current fiscal environment she also concluded, "This not going to
happen, so it is the reorganization and the rethinking the use of staff [that will be
helpful]" (Personal communication with interviewee, February, 2013). She also
described this as rethinking "the use of time and structure to help do the intervention
stuff" (Personal communication with interviewee, February, 2013).

Teachers' Themes Regarding Challenges for Meeting School Goals

The fourth research question asked: What were the main challenges the teachers
perceived for meeting school goals? In analyzing the interviews of the teachers, several

essential themes regarding challenges became apparent. The overarching theme was lack of time. This impacted other challenges of having time for focusing on individual students, needing more time for collaboration, and time for teaching competing academic subjects. Another challenge for some teachers was having a limited voice and ownership of school goals, which may have lead to a lack of clarity regarding goal expectations. Moreover, several teachers were skeptical about the effectiveness of the processes used for identifying and implementing school goals.

Theme: Insufficient Time

The challenge of lacking time came up repeatedly and was part of many of the other themes for teachers. Chantal lamented, "I have more prepping than I do time; I'm always behind" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). Dorian regretted, "Students are going to end up being behind, because we don't have the extra time to give them" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). "There are just not enough hours in the day," remarked Andrea (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). Lorenzo observed, "There really needs to be a reinvention of the entire instructional day as far as how much time is necessary to teach reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). Other comments included, "I would say [I need] more time; time is a valuable thing" and one of my goals "is to be more effective in terms of maximizing time; since, obviously, a big issue is always time" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013).

Theme: Needing Additional Collaboration

Another area that teachers believed was impacted by a lack of time was staff collaboration. Chantal acknowledged,

I would have felt more successful this year if I had more grade-level planning time built into the schedule, where I wasn't asking my grade level to work with me on their own time. I don't want to ask them to work for me on their own time, because I don't want them to resent it. I don't want them to feel like they have to help me on their own time or anything like that. I've been at schools before that have an assigned grade-level planning time, where the grade level gets together and talks about where they are and how to best teach certain things, get advice from one another, get lesson plan ideas from one another, and everybody is expected to be a contributor. I think that the best lesson plans are designed that way. So I miss the teamwork; I don't quite feel like the school has enough teamwork (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013).

Sebastien also felt that more collaboration would be helpful: "We don't really have a team planning time with each other to learn, grow, and collaborate on activities, academic goals, and curriculum plans together. That would help me the most I think" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). Pablo came to a similar conclusion: "I think what would be the biggest help is having time to collaborate with staff members and not just expected to find time" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). Moreover, both Barry and Nestor concluded that more collaboration would help reduce the level of stress and feelings of isolation (Personal communication with interviewees, March, 2013).

Theme: Competing Priorities

Also closely related to lack of time, was the challenge of dealing with numerous educational priorities. Many teachers said they would like to increase the focus on a particular area (Personal communication with interviewees, March, 2013). The CCSS, technology standards, literacy, math, science, writing, social studies, and SEL goals, were all put forth as needing a greater priority by various teachers (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). Moreover, some wanted an increased focus on professional development. In addition, given the recent tragic shootings, teachers also noted that safety had been a crucial focus this year. Humberto stated, "To me the focus has been so much on security this year and not so much on academics. . . .With everything put in to place this year, I think we can start focusing more on academic or climate type goals" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013).

Theme: Focusing on Struggling Students

Teachers also described the challenge of meeting individual student needs. Fernand stated, "I have seen more students with ADHD, more students with IEPs, and more students needing extra support. It is hard to find time to have individual one-on-one or small group time with students" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). He also noted, when students do not understand "I have to revisit and reteach each area" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013).

Inadequate student skills. This challenge was exacerbated by students not coming into their grade levels with adequate academic and social skills. Ingrid indicated, "I would like them to be proficient in [grade level] when they come to me, knowing at least [several specific academic skills]" (Personal communication with interviewee,

March, 2013). Later in the interview, she also noticed a problem with some of the students in her class in the area of social skills: "Kids are not coming to school, sometimes, with those type of things, so teachers still need to teach the social. 'How do you get along with everybody?' Stuff like that is kind of important to me" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013).

Growing class sizes. Growing class sizes were another reason noted for making teaching individual students a challenge. Humberto asserted, "One of the school goals should be to keep the class sizes down. . . Better learning takes place in the classroom" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). Furthermore, the teachers believed that larger class sizes were more difficult to manage and had more behavior issues (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). Humberto also noticed, "The more kids in the classroom setting, the more behavior issues you have" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). Likewise, Olga found, "At some point the scales start to tip. At some point it just becomes too much; everything is louder. There are more kids and more opportunities for conflict, or even bumping into somebody" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). Dorian complained that having so many students in his classroom this year could be seen as "educational malpractice" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013).

Inadequate instructional support. Because individualized instruction requires extra time and effort, teachers found that adequate instructional support was lacking. A lack of teaching assistants (TAs) and tutoring programs were both singled out. Olga stated, "More TA time, with a consistent TA, would allow me to work in smaller groups. That's my struggle, and we have larger classes than we normally do. It's harder to get

around" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). Dorian reached the same conclusion, "I need more TAs that are well-trained and ready to be teachers, so I can have more one-on-one time" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). Similarly, teachers found that tutoring programs to help struggling students at the school were not funded this year. Dorian warned that tutoring was important, because it "focused on the students that were struggling" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013).

Theme: Limited Voice

Also in regards to challenges perceived by teachers, given the district's emphasis on its new strategic plan, another essential theme was teachers having little or no voice in deciding on the school goals. While some considered this a needed move in the right direction, others felt that it did not sufficiently involve teachers. For example, Sebastien observed,

> If I were to offer any suggestions, it would be that I think the teachers working in the schools will probably have some really good ideas about what has happened. I think using those resources, more peer collaboration, bringing that problem solving down to our level; I think we would come up with pretty good solutions together. That would be my big thing, bringing those problems down to our level, and letting us help in that problem-solving process (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013).

Other words used to describe the district's determining of school goals were: "mandated," "handed-down," "coming down the pike," "already in-place," "the district dictates," "I wasn't part of it," "I don't feel like I had a say," "there was no vote," and

"administration decided for us" (Personal communication with interviewees, March, 2013). However, it should also be noted that some teachers found the district's strategic plan to be useful and needed. This is discussed in the subsequent part of this report dealing with factors that contribute towards schools meeting goals.

Theme: Lack of Clear Expectations

Melissa and Lorenzo reluctantly admitted that they were not sure what the school goals were (Personal communication with interviewees, March, 2013). Ingrid couldn't remember if we "set school goals this year" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). Several looked in filing cabinets to find a copy of them. Dorian remarked, "As I'm looking at my little file, I don't see anything that was handed out. I was just given something that talked about how we were so low in proficiency" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). She elaborated that so many things were being emphasized this year that she felt, "You become so fragmented in all the things we were supposed to do. Its sort if a jack of all traits, master of none, kind of concept in my mind with the school goals" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). Humberto concluded, "I am not sure if there is really a school goal; I think it is going to be her [the principal's] agenda" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013).

Some were not aware of the change from goals being decided on by the district rather than a school committee. Humberto held,

> We usually have sat down and done the school goals, and that has been the norm
> every year. We have a math or a writing goal or something like that. That is just
> the norm for the school. We look at the [state standardized test name withheld],

84

and where are we are weak? What can we focus on? To me it is a norm, and

then, of course, we go back to see if we have achieved it (Personal

communication with interviewee, March, 2013).

Nestor was not sure and stated, "I don't know that we have formal committees like we

did before" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013).

Many found ways to deal with the uncertainty regarding school goals by choosing

general educational goals, such as writing or math. While almost all agreed that we

needed to improve in reading, writing, or math, few connected specific class or school

goals to standardized testing results (Personal communication with interviewee, March,

2013). Instead, they tended to turn towards the broader educational goals noted in the

preceding sections (see Preparation for life and Preparation for the next grade).

Teachers perceived that data-driven goals were the emphasis, but did not connect

their identified goals with testing data. Others remembered the emphases on writing

during several staff meetings, and determined that writing must be the school goal for this

year. Still others decided that other changes put forth by the administration should be the

focus. For example, several teachers noted their goal as becoming more familiar with the

new CCSS. Another teacher had the goal of getting more training on a new writing

program.

Lorenzo explained about his grade level, "We kind of have our own ideas. We

have communication regarding the ideas we would like to more fully develop or spend

additional time on. We've seen the ups and downs with abilities from one group to the

next" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). Lorenzo's grade level

seemed to have dealt with the lack of clarity regarding the mandated school goals by

coming up with its own agreed-upon priorities (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013).

Theme: Skepticism

Some teachers viewed the school goal efforts skeptically. For example, Dorian complained:

I think part of the problem with the school goals is, we are given this: 'We are going to improve this much,' and I don't know even what it is for this year honestly, and so there is just sort of this one time sort of *show it*. There is no accountability, and there is no really way to judge it. I don't know; honestly, I feel like sometimes our school goals are just whitewash. . . .You should be able to have the opportunity to teach the reading and the writing and the math and not have to spend all our time, this year especially, it seems, 'Oh now think about Common Core,' 'Oh put this stuff up [referring to posters],' that have no relevance to what really happens. It's just busywork for teachers that doesn't affect the students in legitimate, valid, relevant ways to improve the school goals (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013).

Barry also revealed her frustration,

I feel like there have been a lot of things presented and put on the table and things that we need to work on. It gets overwhelming. I feel like we need to find a way to prioritize or focus clearly on something that is a goal, instead of just trying to do a little bit of everything. We need more of a focus on what is it we are going to work on and find ways to achieve that goal (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013).

In addition, Humberto did not see the determined school goals as class goals, for all practical purposes. He replied, "To me, I kind of don't look at those as goals, because they are at the beginning of the year, and then at the end of year, and life goes on in between" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013).

Theme: Lack of Other Resources

Like the principal, teachers also found one of the challenges to be a lack of resources. Aside from increased instructional support, teachers discussed several other needs. Sebastien indicated, "I would like to see some kind of commitment to get teachers more materials to support our curriculum" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). In like fashion, Gabrielle confided, "I haven't gotten supplies in probably at least a year, if not two years. . . . I haven't been able to keep up with our needs sometimes, because they are changing and our supplies are getting low" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). Dorian viewed this in a more general way, "We weren't given any means financially . . . other than you just need to work harder" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). In contrast, Chantal was more specific, "If my number one intervention is [names of reading and math software withheld], if the intervention is technology-based, then I need more computers" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013). Likewise, Jerry decided "it would be really incredible if teachers had a way of replenishing their class libraries" (Personal communication with interviewee, March, 2013).

Principal's Themes Regarding Factors Contributing Towards Meeting School Goals

After having considered perceptions about challenges for meeting school goals, the next research question considered perceptions regarding things that contribute

towards successfully meeting school goals. Some essential themes for the principal were: valuing data, believing all students can be proficient, and optimal staffing and funding (Personal communication with interviewee, February, 2013).

Theme: Valuing Data

From the principal's perspective, data was a main factor for determining the identity and direction of the school (see Principal's Essential Themes Regarding Goals). It was also the impetus for needed changes within the district and its new strategic plan (Personal communication with interviewee, February, 2013). Each school and grade level was provided numerical goals and would be expected to strive towards those targets (Personal communication with interviewee, February, 2013). Recently, the state education department determined that part of teacher evaluation would also be based on student achievement data. Consequently, the principal believed the things that were happening in Lion Elementary should be connected with data-driven results (Personal communication with interviewee, February, 2013). From her perspective, one of the main things that would help the school achieve its goals was teachers' reliance on data as a basis for targeted instruction (Personal communication with interviewee, February, 2013).

Theme: Believing All Students Can Be Proficient

The second and third essential themes identified for the principal were a paradigm shift and individualized learning (see Principal's Essential Themes Regarding Goals). Accordingly, she held that one of the most important factors in helping students succeed towards school goals was the attitude of the teachers. Several times she emphasized that teachers were changing the way they looked at data to focus on the percentages of

nonproficient students. For example, towards the end of our interview, she explained that at a school successfully dealing with a high level of low-income students, the thing that made a difference was teachers believing they could help students become proficient (Personal communication with interviewee, February, 2013). She also connected proficiency in the early grades to helping students go on to college or vocational training and increased graduation rates, part of the school district's new strategic plan (Personal communication with interviewee, February, 2013).

Theme: Optimal Staffing and Funding

When asked about the challenges for meeting school goals, the principal described the challenge of not having more staff (see Principal's Themes Regarding Challenges for Meeting School Goals). Thus, she believed that having more staff would help the school to successfully achieving school goals. However, given the current unlikelihood that more funding would be available, she believed another helpful alternative would be to reorganize the use of staff to strengthen intervention efforts aimed at nonproficient students (Personal communication with interviewee, February, 2013).

Teachers' Themes Regarding Factors Contributing Towards Meeting School Goals

In comparison, another important part of the fifth research question was to consider the perceptions of teachers regarding things that contributed towards meeting school goals. Some essential themes for the teachers regarding factors that would help in achieving school goals were: more time, more supports, a greater voice, and more clarity and follow-through. These themes were closely related to the challenges perceived by teachers (see Teachers' Themes Regarding Challenges for Meeting School Goals).

Theme: More Time

An overarching theme for teachers was insufficient time. As identified in the challenges, many of them believed they needed more time for staff collaboration, to develop a positive school climate, to teach the expected content, to work with struggling students, and for training and professional development (Personal communication with interviewees, March, 2013). Some noted the need for reconsidering the length of the school day or school year (Personal communication with interviewees, March, 2013).

Theme: More Support and Funding

Another theme for teachers was the need for more instructional support both in terms of staff and other resources (Personal communication with interviewees, March, 2013). This went along with a focus on helping nonproficient students become proficient. For example, teacher assistants, tutoring, and more computers were brought up (Personal communication with interviewees, March, 2013). In addition, some teachers complained of the growing class sizes (Personal communication with interviewees, March, 2013). This year the school district has reduced its budget, and will be expected to do so even more next year.

Theme: A Greater Voice

While some teachers were unaware of the shift from school goal committees to the district strategic plan, many concluded that they had limited or no voice in deciding on the school goals (Personal communication with interviewees, March, 2013). Others wanted to be more involved in problem solving and coming up with solutions (Personal communication with interviewees, March, 2013). Nevertheless, it should also be noted that some teachers concluded that the district strategic plan was helpful in getting schools

to take a more unified approach across the district (Personal communication with interviewees, March, 2013).

Theme: More Clarity and Follow-through

In order to address the challenges of lack of clear expectations and skepticism, teachers pointed to the need for more clarity and follow-through (Personal communication with interviewees, March, 2013). Some expressed this need for clarity in terms of the need for more training and more collaboration (Personal communication with interviewees, March, 2013). Those who saw the current school goals process as something that was not useful may also benefit from more clarity (Personal communication with interviewees, March, 2013). Time spent on collaboration and professional development may help some teachers find the process or the targets more meaningful (Personal communication with interviewees, March, 2013). Nevertheless, some who were skeptical noted a lack of follow-through throughout the year connecting the school goals with what happens in the classroom (Personal communication with interviewees, March, 2013).

<div align="center">A Comparison of the Perceptions of the Principal and Teachers</div>

One of the research questions for this study was: How did the perceptions of the principal and teachers at Lion Elementary compare in regards to school goals? Table 1 shows a comparison of the essential themes found in this study. Likewise, Table 2 compares the essential themes regarding perceived challenges. The last table, Table 3, compares the essential themes regarding factors perceived to help achieve school goals. Themes that seemed considerably aligned are marked with asterisks (*).

Table 1

Comparison of Essential Themes Regarding School Goals

Principal's Themes	Teachers' Themes
▪ Data-driven goals*	▪ Data-driven goals*
▪ Paradigm shift	▪ Academic subject goals
▪ Individualized learning*	▪ Positive school climate
▪ Purpose of school goals	▪ Safety
+ Fulfilling district strategic plan	▪ Individualized learning*
+ Graduation	▪ Purpose of goals
+ College/postsecondary education	+ Preparation for next grade
	+ Preparation for life
	▪ Teachers as Professionals

Note. Identified themes were chosen based on hand-coding interviews of the principal and 18 teachers at an elementary school in the northwest.

Table 2

Comparison of Essential Themes Regarding Challenges for Meeting School Goals

Principal's Themes	Teachers' Themes
▪ Changing the focus	▪ Insufficient time
▪ Changing attitudes	▪ Needing additional collaboration
▪ Lack of resources*	▪ Competing priorities
	▪ Focusing on struggling students
	+ Inadequate student skills
	+ Growing class sizes
	+ Inadequate instructional support*
	▪ Limited voice
	▪ Lack of clear expectations
	▪ Skepticism
	▪ Lack of other resources*

Note. Themes were often interrelated and should not be viewed as mutually exclusive.

Table 3

Comparison of Themes Regarding Factors Contributing Towards Meeting Goals

Principal's Themes	Teachers' Themes
▪ Valuing data	▪ More time
▪ Believing all students can be proficient	▪ More support and funding*
	▪ A greater voice
▪ Optimal staffing and funding*	▪ More clarity and follow-through

Note. There were numerous other factors related to the teachers' theme of having more time.

A comparison revealed that perceptions were the same in some areas and considerably

different in others.

Factors Contributing to Alignment of Goals

The final research question asked: What factors contributed to the alignment of

goals between the principal and teachers? While both the principal and teachers had

positive goals for the school and students, the areas they agreed on during interviews

were the emphasis on data-driven goals, individualized learning, and a need for more

instructional support and funding (Personal communication with interviewees, March,

2013).

In addition, given recent tragic events at schools, the principal emphasized safety

as a priority during several staff meetings. Yet, at the time of the interviews, the

principal was more focused on academic goals. However, teachers often took a broader

view of goals and often brought up safety (Personal communication with interviewees,

February, 2013). When the principal had a chance to review the findings in regards to

teacher goals, she noted that the district leadership would be pleased that the safety

emphasis had gotten across to teachers (Personal communication with interviewee,

March, 2013). Thus, safety could be seen as another goal that both the principal and teachers were in agreement about.

A review of audiovisual and written materials revealed that these themes that both the principal and teachers seemed to agree on were emphasized at school board and staff meetings, in e-mails, district publications, and school newsletters. Some were even brought up in the city's local newspaper. Therefore, one important factor in informing educators about current issues was the amount of emphasis it received in the various forms of communication and media.

Another important factor was the amount of time the staff spent as a group on a topic. For example, in thinking about school goals, teachers commonly referred to things that were main topics of staff meetings or trainings (Personal communication with interviewees, March, 2013). Several concluded the school goal was safety or writing, based on training sessions they had gone through (Personal communication with interviewees, March, 2013). They made the connection between time being spent on a topic to that being a goal of the school (Personal communication with interviewees, March, 2013). In contrast, very few teachers seemed to reference the actual numerical goal sheets that were passed out early in the school year (Personal communication with interviewees, March, 2013). Likewise, given the district's strategic plan, the principals' meetings at the administration building emphasized the importance of data, and this is what the principal referred to when she discussed school goals (Personal communication with interviewee, February, 2013).

A third important factor in creating alignment was the impact of current events on educators. For instance, our district is going through huge budget cuts and reducing the

number of teacher assistants or hours of service. As a result, both the principal and teachers thought more instructional support would be a benefit (Personal communication with interviewees, March, 2013). Similarly, the state education department recently adopted a student progress component as part of teacher evaluations. Thus, teachers understood the importance of understanding and using data, and helping students who might skew the data in an unfavorable way (Personal communication with interviewees, March, 2013). Similarly, the principal had been given targets by her superiors that she was trying to achieve (Personal communication with interviewees, February, 2013). People took note of issues that impacted them in a serious way.

Summary

While a variety of important themes were uncovered in this phenomenological study, the perspectives of the principal and teachers regarding school goals seemed to be aligned regarding: safety, data-driven goals, individualized learning, and a need for more instructional support and funding. In addition, factors that were found to contribute to the alignment of school goals were: a large amount of coverage in school district communications and the media, the focus of staff meetings and trainings, and the extent of the impact of particular issues on educators.

In contrast, the principal's theme of a paradigm shift did not clearly align with teachers' themes of wanting a greater emphasis on a positive school climate, safety, and teachers as professionals. In addition, the principal viewed key challenges and contributing factors as a change of focus and a change of attitude, while teachers sought more time, collaboration, clarity, and voice.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

In chapter 4, research questions were answered based on participants' own words. This helped maintain an accurate representation of the phenomenon of educators working towards school goals at Lion Elementary. This chapter discusses some of the implications of those findings, providing what Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) call "interpretive insights" (p. 173).

Implications in Light of the Theoretical Framework

This study supported the idea that learning is a social process taking place in a particular social environment (see Vygotsky, 1978). It also confirmed the importance of the interweaving of perceptions and how they have both positive and negative effects on a community (see Follett, 1919). In this case, teachers at Lion Elementary were both transforming and being transformed by their interactions with others at the school, often based on perceptions (see Mead, 1934). In addition, these continuously developing perceptions and interactions of educators resulted in a perceived reality (see Guba & Lincoln, 1994). For example, while some viewed the school district's strategic plan put forth by the principal as a positive effort, others viewed it with skepticism.

The most prominent implication of socially constructed realities is that members of a community help to shape that community and, in turn, are also shaped by it. This study potentially increased understanding between the principal and teachers, allowing them to be aware of and influence each other's perspectives. For example, they could choose to act to address the perceived needs of educators.

Implications in Light of the Review of Literature

Prior to conducting this study, a review of literature included the findings of Mallen and Crowther (2008) that insufficient training, overwhelming work, time constraints, and lack of support for risk-taking often impeded educational change. The current study found that teachers brought up the first three of these issues. In contrast, the principal tended to attribute poor achievement more to teacher attitude and a needed change of focus.

Choi's (2011) study concluded that reactions towards change fell into four categories: (a) readiness for change, (b) commitment to change, (c) openness to change, and (d) cynicism about change (pp. 479-500). The current study found that teachers had different reactions based on a particular change. For example, one teacher was ready to implement some new testing software, yet was apprehensive about not knowing very much about the CCSS. Likewise, there were a variety of reactions to each of the multiple changes that were being implemented at the school. While many expressed frustration, only a few teachers described feelings of cynicism or skepticism. However, many seemed very aware about being recorded during interviews, and some may have been concerned about saying something that might be deemed as going against the principal or district.

Another area considered was the perceptions of teachers regarding needs at the school, including those related to leadership. Lewin (1943) believed that organizations were marked by direction and velocity. While it seemed that the leadership's message was getting across to teachers in several areas (see Findings), two of the needs highlighted by teachers were for more collaboration and a greater voice. These pointed

to the perception of teachers that affiliative, democratic, and coaching styles of leadership styles were needed (see Goleman, 2000). In contrast, the principal seemed to perceive that the more authoritative, pacesetting, and coercive styles (see Goleman, 2000) were what was needed, as evidenced by her strong support of the top-down, district strategic plan. Interestingly, some of the teachers agreed with her and described the changes and the principal's style as useful and positive. Others may have perceived this as a risky area to discuss, and did not mention the principal or strategic plan. These findings may be seen as affirming the need for situational leadership (see Hersey & Blanchard, 1988), which looks at the leadership style needed for each teacher's situation.

De Gues (1997) concluded that healthy organizations are those in which both the needs of the organization and the individuals were being met. To the extent that the majority of teachers did not plan on leaving the school or district for the upcoming year, it seemed, at least at the time of the study, people were getting their needs met. Nevertheless, it should also be noted that while teachers pointed to several needs that they perceived in regards to teaching, this study did not focus on whether educators perceived needs in other areas were being met.

As seen in the themes regarding the challenges, the potential exists for things to improve or worsen. In my analyses of these findings, Lippitt's (1987) model seemed pertinent (see Figure 3). I found some teachers were confused due to a lack of clear vision. Others felt anxious and thought they lacked skills and needed additional training. Several complained about being expected to do more without any additional incentives or resources, leading to resistance and frustration. Finally, since there was no clear action plan, some viewed the desired changes as just "another mandate from the district,"

similar to running a pattern on the treadmill. Of course, each of these areas has potential for improving or getting worse.
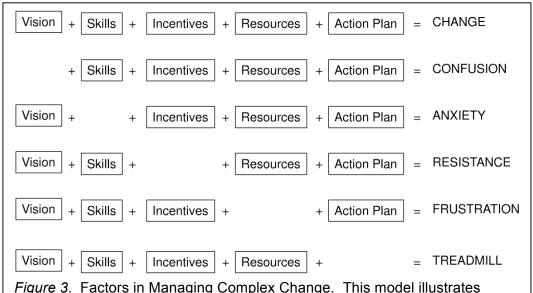
Vision	+	Skills	+	Incentives	+	Resources	+	Action Plan	=	CHANGE
		Skills	+	Incentives	+	Resources	+	Action Plan	=	CONFUSION
Vision	+			Incentives	+	Resources	+	Action Plan	=	ANXIETY
Vision	+	Skills	+			Resources	+	Action Plan	=	RESISTANCE
Vision	+	Skills	+	Incentives	+			Action Plan	=	FRUSTRATION
Vision	+	Skills	+	Incentives	+	Resources	+		=	TREADMILL

Figure 3. Factors in Managing Complex Change. This model illustrates how attempts at change, without the necessary supports, often lead to undesired results. From *Managing Complex Change*, Copyright 1987 Mary Lippitt. Reprinted with permission.

In terms of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Maslow (1943) theorized that once lower order needs were met, people pursued the fulfillment of their full potential (Maslow, 1943). In terms of the district's current fiscal problems and budget cuts, both the principal and teachers' agreed that a lack of resources was a problem. This was also evidenced by articles and coverage in the local media discussing staff reductions. At the school level, there was even concern that copy paper would need to be rationed or whether there was sufficient paper on hand to meet teachers' needs to finish the school year. This study also revealed that teachers were concerned about growing class sizes and lack of instructional support. At the least, these issues may be a distraction to striving towards other school goals. Consequently, I concluded that these issues pulled the focus away from the higher order goals of educators at the school.

Maxwell (1993) found people could resist change for numerous reasons, including: lack of ownership and commitment, disruption of routines, fear, unclear purpose, a pessimistic attitude, feeling inconvenienced, rejecting new ideas, or attachment to the status quo (pp. 56-62). These themes were found to some degree in the teachers essential theme. For example, the lack of voice and need for more collaboration could factor into ownership and commitment. Likewise, a few of teachers viewed some of the things required as "white wash," "busy work," and not "relevant" (see Teachers' Themes Regarding Challenges for Meeting School Goals). Yet, whether these feelings become more prevalent remained to be seen.

Similarly, Maxwell (1993) also concluded that proposed changes could be problematic when: not accepted by influencers, not communicated effectively, self-serving to leaders, or lacking adequate consideration of the future. These themes also came up during this study as many teachers were not clear about the school goals or felt inadequately trained on some of the changes occurring.

Beer, Eisenstat, and Spector (1990) warned that real change required teamwork, commitment, and competence. However, teachers brought up the themes of needing more time for collaboration and a greater voice. Beer, Eisenstat, and Spector (1990) also believed that "superficial" attempts at change were counterproductive and impeded the real changes needed. At the time of this study, it remained to be seen if the district's strategic plan or the principal's authoritative approach would be seen in that context or not.

During implementation of change, Fullan (2001) found that organizations go through "implementation dips" characterized by people feeling anxious, confused, and

overwhelmed. He also found that during these periods the leadership styles that were

most needed were *affiliative* and *coaching,* focused on building positive relationships (p.

41). As the school attempts to implement many mandated changes, it remained to be

seen whether the district and principal would take that direction. In the current study,

teachers felt overwhelmed by the changes taking place at the school. Transactional

leaders are those who prioritize tasks over relationships (Hunter, 2002). A word of

caution could be found in the work of Short and Greer (2002) who found that coercive

implementation lead to suspicion or misunderstanding.

Many teachers felt they needed a greater voice in the changes happening. There

is no shortcut to participation and teachers feeling empowered. Short and Greer (2002)

noted the importance of leaders going through exploration, consensus building, and

establishing the needed supports for true change. They asserted that people build

commitment during the process of participating and revealing the values of the group and

understanding how they relate to proposed changes (Short and Greer, 2002). This type of

transformational, servant leadership prioritizes relationships over tasks and does what is

in the best interest of others (Hunter, 2002). Moreover, people follow leaders based on

relationship more than position (Maxwell, 1993).

In the current study, teachers wanted a greater voice and more collaboration.

Shedd and Bacharach (1991) found that a tension often existed between teachers' need

for professional autonomy and principals' efforts to bring about positive reform.

However, Senge et al. (2000) envisioned school cultures that embodied learning. Yet, he

also found that this could not be accomplished through mandates (Senge et al., 2000). He

101

surmised that educators needed to be able to express aspirations, build awareness, and develop capabilities together (Senge et al., 2000).

Limitations

This study focused on educators at one elementary school in the Northwest. Consequently, there is no claim of generalizability to other schools. It may very well be that other schools can identify with the elements found in this study, but there may be a wide range of findings regarding different school climates, geographic locations, school levels, age of educators, or whether it is a private or public school. Notwithstanding, I believe there is still much value for leaders in considering many of the issues raised in the study.

One of the concerns regarding this study was that the purposeful sample of convenience was from the researcher's school of employment. This could result in biased responses based on previous relationships with those being studied. I acknowledge the likelihood of response bias. Nevertheless, it should also be considered that being a member of the school community being studied served to increase access to other teachers. For example, it could be that the large number of teachers that participated would have chosen not to, aside from helping a colleague.

Still, it did seem that many of the responses from educators were tailored to what *should* be said. For instance, the majority of responses would have probably been almost the same had a superior of the participant been present at the interviews. Only a few openly dissented from agreeing with the direction of district and school leadership. However, there is no assurance that responses would have been different had the researcher been an "outsider."

Implications for Practitioners

An important implication of this study for leaders is that understanding the perceptions of other stakeholders in a school is important if informed collaboration is to take place. This helps to identify whether goals are aligned or not. For example, in the current study, the principal attributed poor achievement to teacher attitude or the need for a change of focus. In contrast, teachers wanted a greater voice, clearer expectations, and more collaboration. Without a mutual understanding each of these important stakeholders will likely believe they are not being supported. Likewise, since the principal and teachers' agreed that a lack of resources was a problem, this may take away the focus from higher order goals.

Moreover, principals should consider that there may be a variety of reactions to each of the multiple changes that are being implemented at the school. Consequently, it may be desirable to identify, prioritize, and limit the amount of changes being implemented to avoid some of the skepticism found in the current study. Additionally, if some educators are more comfortable or knowledgeable concerning a given change, they can be teamed up with those who require more support. The current study found that teachers wanted more collaboration.

Furthermore, at the surface it seemed teachers seemed to identify with the principal and district goals, but a closer consideration revealed that many wanted more clarity and did not feel they were involved in creating school goals. If there is to be authentic support for school goals, it is important for teachers to have a greater voice and involvement. Senge et al. (2000) conceived of school cultures that embodied collaboration and learning. However, this is more likely to happen if affiliative,

democratic, and coaching styles of leadership styles are used, rather than authoritative or coercive styles which may lead to skepticism (Goleman, 2000; Short & Greer, 2002).

Recommendations for Future Research

Since this was a study of one elementary school in the Northwest, there may be a wide range of findings regarding different school climates, socioeconomic student populations, geographic locations, school levels, ages of educators, or whether it is a private or public school. Future research could focus on whether the essential themes found in the current study would be pertinent across other contexts. In addition, since the interviewer in the current study was part of the teaching staff, other studies could help determine if essential themes would be different if the researcher is not previously known to participants.

Conclusion

The purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological study involving transcribed semi-structured interviews, audiovisual materials, and written documents, was to understand the perspectives of educators regarding school goals at Lion Elementary. This research informed educators about whether perspectives regarding the school goals were aligned, and provided insight into possible reasons behind similarities and differences.

The perspectives of the principal and teachers regarding school goals seemed to be aligned regarding: safety, data-driven goals, individualized learning, and a need for more instructional support and funding. Some factors that were found to contribute to the alignment of these school goals were: a large amount of coverage in school district

communications and the media, the focus of staff meetings and trainings, and the perceived impact of particular issues on educators.

Nevertheless, the essential themes of the teachers included a more specific emphasis on various academic areas, positive climate, and professional development. In contrast, the principal focused more on data-driven academic results. Similarly, the principal pointed to the need for teachers to change their focus and attitude, while teachers wanted more time, collaboration, training, and a greater voice.

In light of a review of literature, insufficient training, overwhelming work, time constraints, have led to failed educational reforms in the past (Mallen and Crowther, 2008). In this study, many teachers expressed frustration, and a few teachers described feelings of cynicism or skepticism. Yet, the potential exists for things to improve or worsen. Nevertheless, the top-down leadership and mandates being used may actually serve to decrease the success of attempted reforms (see Shedd and Bacharach, 1991). While understanding the perspectives of educators is necessary, leaders must also consider actions that could increase opportunities for successful educational reforms and goals to be implemented.

References

Anderson, E. H. & Spencer, M. H. (2002). Cognitive representations of AIDS: A

phenomenological study. *Qualitative Health Research, 12*, 1338-1352.

Barge, E. T. (2012). *Teacher empowerment in the implementation of Response to

Intervention: A case study* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from

http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral

Beer, M., Eisenstat, R. A., & Spector, B. (1990). Why change programs don't produce

change. *Harvard Business Review, 68*(6), 158-166. Retrieved from

http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/login.aspx?direct=true&db

=bth&AN=9012241298&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Bloomberg, L., & Volpe, M. (2008). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A

roadmap from beginning to end*. Los Angeles: Sage.

Borman, G. D., Hewes, G. M., Overman, L. T., & Brown, S. (2003). Comprehensive

school reform and achievement: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational

Research, 73*(2), 125. Retrieved from

http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=393186301&sid=2&Fmt=4&clientId=2065

5&RQT=309&VName=PQD

Burns, J. M. (1978). *Leadership*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial.

Caspi, A. & Blau, I. (2011). Collaboration and psychological ownership: how does the

tension between the two influence perceived learning? *Social Psychology of

Education : An International Journal, 14*(2), 283-298. Retrieved

http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=2327324641&sid=1&Fmt=6&clientId=206

55&RQT=309&VName=PQD

Charon, J. M. (1995). *Symbolic interactionism: An introduction, an interpretation, an integration*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Cheng, A. L. & Yau, H. K. (2011). Principals' and teachers' perceptions of quality management in Hong Kong primary schools. *Quality Assurance in Education, 19*(2), 170-186. Retrieved from http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=2333773151&sid=3&Fmt=6&clientId=206 55&RQT=309&VName=PQD

Choi, M. (2011). Employees' attitudes toward organizational change: A literature review. *Human Resource Management, 50*(4), 479-500. Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/login.aspx?direct=true&db =bth&AN=63394760&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). (2011). *Benefits of SEL: Meta-analysis*. Retrieved from http://casel.org/why-it-matters/benefits-of-sel/meta-analysis/

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Curry, B., Lowery, L. M., & Loftus, D. (2010). What a community will bear: Leadership and the change process. *The International Journal of Educational Management, 24*(5), 404-417. Retrieved from http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=2072177861&sid=8&Fmt=3&clientId=206 55&RQT=309&VName=PQD

De Gues, A. (1997). *The living company*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School.

Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). Introduction: The discipline and practice of

    qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook*

    of qualitative research (4th ed.) (pp. 1– 19). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fee, C. (2008). *Teachers' and principals' perceptions of leader behavior: A discrepancy*

    study (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Proquest Dissertations database.

Fischer, J. & Hamer, L. (2010). Professional development and school restructuring:

    Mutual processes of reform. *Middle School Journal, 41*(5), 12-17. Retrieved

    from

    http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=2042177061&sid=11&Fmt=3&clientId=20

    655&RQT=309&VName=PQD

Follett, M. P. (1918). *The new state: Group organization, the solution of popular*

    government. New York: Longmans, Green. Retrieved from

    http://archive.org/download/cu31924016856209/cu31924016856209.pdf

Follett, M. P. (1919). Community is a process. *Philosophical Review, 28*(6), 576-588.

    Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/2178307

Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a culture of change.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Gall, M. D., Gall, J. P., & Borg, W. R. (2007). *Educational research: An introduction*

    (8th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. New York: Basic

    Books.

Gigante, N. A. & Firestone, W. A. (2008). Administrative support and teacher leadership

    in schools implementing reform. *Journal of Educational Administration, 46*(3),

    302-331. Retrieved from

http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=1550198131&sid=10&Fmt=3&clientId=20

655&RQT=309&VName=PQD

Goleman, D. (2000). Leadership that gets results. *Harvard Business Review, 78*(2), 78-

90. Retrieved from

http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/login.aspx?direct=true&db

=bth&AN=2839618&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2007, Summer). But is it rigorous? Trustworthiness and

authenticity in naturalistic evaluation. In D. Williams (Ed.), *New Directions for*

Evaluation, 117, 15-25. doi: 10.1002/ev.223 (Original work published 1986)

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N.

K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-

117). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hersey, P., & Blanchard, K. H. (1988). *Management of organizational behavior:*

Utilizing human resources (5th ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Hunter, J. C. (2002). *The servant: A simple story about the true essence of leadership*

[Adobe Digital Editions version]. New York, NY: Random House Digital.

Kärkkäinen, R., Räty, H., & Kasanen, K. (2010). How are children's perceptions of the

malleability of their academic competencies related to their teachers' and parents'

views? *Social Psychology of Education: An International Journal, 13*(4), 557-

573. Retrieved from

http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=2192442261&sid=2&Fmt=6&clientId=206

55&RQT=309&VName=PQD

Kotter, J. P. (1995). Leading change: Why transformation efforts fail. *Harvard Business Review, 73*(2), 59-67. Retrieved from

http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/login.aspx?direct=true&db

=bth&AN=9503281992&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2002). *The leadership challenge* (3rd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Kuhn, T. S. (1970). *The structure of scientific revolutions* (2nd ed., enlarged). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Kvale, S. (1996). *Inter views: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Leech, D. & Fulton, C. (2008). Faculty perceptions of shared decision making and the principal's leadership behaviors in secondary schools in a large urban district. *Education, 128*(4), 630-644. Retrieved from

http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=1501399851&sid=1&Fmt=6&clientId=206

55&RQT=309&VName=PQD

Lewin, K. (1943). Defining the "field at a given time." *Psychological Review. 50*(3), 292-310. Retrieved from

http://psycnet.apa.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/journals/rev/50/3/292.pdf

Liberty University. (2012). *Informed consent template form*. Retrieved from

http://www.liberty.edu/media/9997/consenttemplateJune7.doc

Lincoln, Y. & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Lippitt M. (1987). *Managing Complex Organizational Change*. Retrieved from

http://www.scoop.it/t/change-management-resources/p/1583300377/managing-

complex-change-dr-mary-lippit

Mallen, C. & Crowther, F. (2008). Implementing change-oriented pedagogy in higher

education: An exploration of instructors' experiences and perceptions.

International Journal of Pedagogies & Learning, 4(3), 13-26. Retrieved from

http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=2468643391&sid=1&Fmt=3&clientId=206

55&RQT=309&VName=PQD

Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review, 50*(4), 370-

396. Retrieved from http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Maslow/motivation.htm

Maslow, A. H. *Motivation and personality*. New York, NY: Harper and Row.

Maxwell, J. C. (1993). *Developing the leader within you*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

Maxwell, J. C. & Elmore, T. (2007). *The Maxwell leadership bible: Lessons in

leadership from the Word of God*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, self, and society: From the standpoint of a social behaviorist*.

Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

O'Brien, J. & Kollock, P. (1997). *The production of reality: Essays and reading on

social interaction*. California: Pine Forge.

Patterson, J. L., Purkey, S. C., & Parker, J. V. (1986). *Productive school systems for a

nonrational world*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum

Development.

Pollner, M. & McDonald-Wikler, L. (1985). The social construction of unreality: A case

    study of a family's attribution of competence to a severely retarded child. *Family*

    Process, 24(2), 241-254. doi: 10.1111/j.1545-5300.1985.00241.x

Pringle, B., Lyons, J., & Booker, K. (2010). Perceptions of teacher expectations by

    African American high school students. *The Journal of Negro Education, 79*(1),

    33-40. Retrieved from

    http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=2055146741&sid=2&Fmt=6&clientId=206

    55&RQT=309&VName=PQD

Prytula, M. & Weiman, K. (2012). Collaborative professional development: An

    examination of changes in teacher identity through the professional learning

    community model. *Journal of Case Studies in Education, 3*, 1-19. Retrieved from

    http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=2680577371&sid=3&Fmt=6&clientId=206

    55&RQT=309&VName=PQD

Purkey, S. C., & Smith, M. S. (1985, January). School reform: The district policy

    implications of the effective schools literature. *The Elementary School Journal,*

    85(3), 353-389. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/1001528

Qualters, D. (2009). Creating a pathway for teacher change. *The Journal of Faculty*

    Development, 23(1), 5-13. Retrieved from

    http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=1870802901&sid=1&Fmt=3&clientId=206

    55&RQT=309&VName=PQD

Senge, P., Cambron-McCabe, N. Lucas, T., Smith, B., Dutton, J. and Kleiner, A. (2000).

    Schools that learn: A fifth discipline fieldbook for educators, parents, and

    everyone who cares about education. New York, NY: Doubleday-Currency.

Shedd, J. B., & Bacharach, S. B. (1991). *Tangled hierarchies*. Jossey-Bass.

Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research

projects. *Education for Information, 22*(2), 63-75. Retrieved from

http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/login.aspx?direct=true&db

=ehh&AN=13857302&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Short, P. M. & Greer, J. T. (2002). *Leadership in empowered schools: Themes from*

innovative efforts (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Snow, D. A. & Anderson, L. (1987, May). Identity work among the homeless: The

verbal construction and avowal of personal identities. *The American Journal of*

Sociology, 92(6), 1336-1371. Retrieved from http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0002-

9602%28198705%2992%3A6%3C1336%3AIWATHT%3E2.0.CO%3B2-J

Strike, K. A., Anderson, M. S., Curren R., van Geel, T., Pritchard, I., Robertson, E.

(2002). *Ethical standards of the American educational research association:*

Cases and commentary. Washington, DC: AERA.

Strom, P., Strom, R., & Beckert, T. (2011). Examining stakeholder expectations for

guiding school reform: Including students. *American Secondary Education,*

39(3), 5-16. Retrieved from

http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=2445103411&sid=11&Fmt=3&clientId=20

655&RQT=309&VName=PQD

Taylor, S. J. (1991). Leaving the field: Research, relationships, and responsibilities. In W.

B. Shaffir & R. A. Stebbins (Eds.), *Experiencing fieldwork: An inside view of*

qualitative research (pp. 238-247). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Torff, B. & Sessions, D. (2009). Principals' perceptions of the causes of teacher

    ineffectiveness in different secondary subjects. *Teacher Education Quarterly,*

    36(3), 127-148. Retrieved from

    http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=1877671181&sid=3&Fmt=6&clientId=206

    55&RQT=309&VName=PQD

Trochim, W. (2006). Research methods knowledge base: Qualitative validity. Retrieved

    from http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/qualval.php

trustworthiness. (n.d.). *Collins English dictionary - complete & unabridged* (10th ed.).

    Retrieved from http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/trustworthiness

United States Air Force. (1997). *United States Air Force core values*. Washington D. C.:

    Air Force Publication AFD-070906-003.

Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action*

    sensitive pedagogy. London, Ontario: State University of New York.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Watt, J. & Piotrowski, C. (2008). Organizational change cynicism: A review of the

    literature and intervention strategies. *Organization Development Journal, 26*(3),

    23-31. Retrieved from

    http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=1546365041&sid=2&Fmt=4&clientId=206

    55&RQT=309&VName=PQD

Williamson, K., Archibald, A., & McGregor, J. (2010). Shared vision: A key to

    successful collaboration? *School Libraries Worldwide, 16(*2), 16-30. Retrieved

    from

http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=2200934091&sid=1&Fmt=6&clientId=206

55&RQT=309&VName=PQD

Williamson, V. (2005). *A hermeneutic phenomenological study of women's experiences of postnatal depression and health professional intervention* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Proquest Dissertations database.

Wrobleski, L., Cushing, D., Hemphill, K., Johnson, J., Jorgensen, J., Marcotte, M., …McMullen, K. (2011). From the ground up: Improving student writing through teacher collaboration. *New England Reading Association Journal, 47*(1), 28-35,102-103. Retrieved from

http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=2478461931&sid=1&Fmt=3&clientId=206

55&RQT=309&VName=PQD

APPENDIX A: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study set out to explore and understand the perceptions of a principal and teachers regarding school goals by focusing on several research questions:

- What are the perceptions of the principal regarding school goal priorities?

- What are the perceptions of the teachers regarding school goal priorities?

- What are the main challenges the principal perceives for meeting school goals?

- What are the main challenges the teachers perceive for meeting school goals?

- What factors contribute toward schools' successfully meeting goals?

- How do the perceptions of the principal and teachers at Lion Elementary compare in regards to school goals?

- What factors contribute to the alignment of goals between the principal and teachers?

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following structured questions were used in this study as a starting point for interviews with the principal and teachers:

- What do you see as the most important goal for your class this year? (question for teachers only)

- What do you see as the most important goal for our school this year?

- How did you decide on the school goals for this year?

- Do you feel you had a voice in deciding on the school goals for this year?

- What kinds of things would be of help to you in working towards class or school goals?

- Please discuss some school goals that you would like to see given more priority.

- Is there anything else about working towards class or school goals at Lion Elementary that you would like to add?

In addition, possible follow-up questions may include:

- Would you please tell me more about that?

- What do you mean by…?

- What led to this?

- What would you change?

- What happened next?

- How do you feel about…? (Williamson, 2005, p. 76)

Williamson, V. (2005). *A hermeneutic phenomenological study of women's experiences of postnatal depression and health professional intervention* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Proquest Dissertations database.

APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Hello staff,

As part of my goal of learning about educational leadership and earning my degree at Liberty University, I am conducting a study of the perspectives of educators working towards school goals at Lion. This research can help inform leaders and teachers about whether perspectives regarding school goals are aligned. It may also provide insight regarding the reasons behind the similarities and differences of perspectives that may exist at Lion.

Please consider participating in this worthwhile study. However, participation in this study is voluntary and there is no payment for participating. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the school or district. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time. All identifiable information will be omitted and pseudonyms used to ensure confidentiality. You will also be given the opportunity to review my findings and provide feedback prior to my final report. For those willing to participate, I have some additional details and a form for you to read and sign.

Thank you for your consideration.

Working Towards School Goals at Lion Elementary: A Phenomenological Study
Benjamin D. Butcher
Liberty University
Education Department

You are invited to be in a research study of the perspectives of educators regarding school goals. You were selected as a possible participant because you were part of the school being studied, Lion Elementary. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Benjamin Butcher, Graduate Education Department, Liberty University

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to understand, compare, and contrast the perspectives of educators working towards school goals at Lion Elementary. This research can help inform leaders and teachers about whether perspectives regarding school goals are aligned or whether a mismatch exists. It may also provide insight regarding the reasons behind the similarities and differences of perspective amongst educators at this site. Participation is voluntary.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to: Be interviewed and tape-recorded for approximately 15-30 minutes. Once the study is written, you will be given a copy and asked for your input about the results prior to final publication.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The study has a risk: If an individual, group, or organization is portrayed in a negative light, this could be harmful. However, for this study personal information will be left out and pseudonyms used for all participants. This minimizes the risk.

This study has a benefit: No direct benefits will be awarded. However, the benefit to society is that researchers and others in the field of education will gain a better understanding of the perspectives of a principal and teachers regarding the phenomenon of working towards school goals at a particular site of interest, Lion Elementary.

How to Withdraw from the Study:

Should you feel uncomfortable about sharing any of your thoughts or opinions, please let the researcher know and the interview will end. If you choose to exit the study, any taped recordings will be erased and corresponding transcripts will be shredded.

Compensation: You will not receive payment for participating.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. To avoid unauthorized access to participants' personal information, computer files will be password protected.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Northwest School District or Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Benjamin Butcher. In addition, Drs. Larry Crites and Gregg Mowen serves as the faculty advisor for this study. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact bdbutcher@liberty.edu or ltcrites@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ I further agree to have my interview tape-recorded.

Signature: ___*Originals signed & dated*_____Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: __*Originals signed & dated*__ Date: _____

IRB Code Numbers: 1556.022513   **IRB Expiration Date:** Feb. 25, 2014

*This form created using Liberty University's (2012) consent form template: http://www.liberty.edu/media/9997/consenttemplateJune7.doc

APPENDIX E: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

LIBERTY
U N I V E R S I T Y™

February 25, 2013

Benjamin Butcher
IRB Approval 1556.022513: Working Towards School Goals at Lion Elementary: A
Phenomenological Study

Dear Ben,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the
Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection
proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to
human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms
for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well with your
research project.

Sincerely,

//original signed//

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling

(434) 592-4054

LIBERTY
U N I V E R S I T Y.

Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971