LEADERSHIP QUALITIES NECESSARY FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS TO BECOME EFFECTIVE TURNAROUND PRINCIPALS:

A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative grounded theory study was two-fold: to understand how educational leaders help failing schools and to generate a theoretical model to explain the leadership qualities necessary to elicit a successful turnaround. Four research questions related to turnaround principals’ experiences and leadership qualities guided this study. Participants included four middle and high school principals within the state of Michigan. Participants were selected based on their involvement in successfully turning around a failing school. Data was collected through surveys, interviews, and observations. Data was analyzed using the grounded theory process of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding procedures. The findings of this study led to the formation of a theoretical model of leadership qualities of effective turnaround principals. The central theme of the theoretical model was being a visionary leader. Leadership traits utilized by visionary leaders included instructional leadership, situational leadership, being collaborative, a good communicator, and persistent.

Keywords: turnaround principals, leadership, visionary, instructional, situational, collaborative, communicator, persistent, persistently low achieving, priority school
Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my family. My husband, Denny, has been my biggest encourager and supporter throughout this process. He graciously stepped up with running the household when I moved out of our house for several weeks to be able to focus all my time and energy on completing this study. My children, Nate, Ruth, Sara, and Sam, were exceedingly patient with me, offering encouragement and diversions when needed. They always seemed to know when to leave me alone and when it was time for me to take a break!

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Patricia and Walter Cain, who raised me with the belief that I could do and be anything I wanted if I was willing to work hard for it. The foundation of my life has been built on the unfailing love and encouragement of my parents. I made a commitment to my mom over 30 years ago that I would one day be on stage participating in a hooding ceremony! Her passing in 2012 only made me more determined to see this process through to completion.

Finally, without the grace of God, I would not have been able to make it through this process. He was always there providing strength and blessings during the easy times and more importantly, the difficult times. I continue to hold on to His unwavering promises and steadfast love.
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# Table of Contents

ABSTRACT .......................................................................................................................... 2  
Dedication .......................................................................................................................... 3  
Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................... 4  
List of Tables ...................................................................................................................... 10  
List of Figures .................................................................................................................... 11  
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION ...................................................................................... 12  
Background ......................................................................................................................... 12  
Situation to Self .................................................................................................................... 17  
Problem Statement ............................................................................................................ 18  
Purpose Statement .............................................................................................................. 19  
Significance of the Study ................................................................................................... 20  
Research Questions .......................................................................................................... 20  
Research Plan ..................................................................................................................... 21  
Delimitations ...................................................................................................................... 22  
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW ........................................................................... 24  
Historical Perspective ....................................................................................................... 24  
Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) .............................................................. 26  
A Nation at Risk (1983) ..................................................................................................... 27  
No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 ..................................................................................... 28  
Race to the Top (2009) ...................................................................................................... 30  
School Leadership ............................................................................................................ 32  
Transactional Leadership ................................................................................................. 32
Transformational Leadership ................................................................. 33
Distributed Leadership .......................................................................... 34
Effective Principals ............................................................................... 35
Age of Accountability ........................................................................... 36
Adequate Yearly Progress ..................................................................... 38
Achievement Gaps ................................................................................ 40
Turning Around Failing Schools ............................................................ 41
Non-Educational Turnaround Models .................................................. 42
Educational Turnaround Models ............................................................ 44
Turnaround Principals .......................................................................... 46
Summary ............................................................................................... 46

CHAPER THREE: METHODOLOGY ..................................................... 48

Design ................................................................................................... 49
Research Questions ............................................................................... 50
Participants .......................................................................................... 50
Setting .................................................................................................. 53
Procedures ............................................................................................ 54
The Researcher’s Role .......................................................................... 56
Data Collection ...................................................................................... 56

Interviews ............................................................................................. 57
Observations ........................................................................................ 59
Surveys ................................................................................................ 60
Data Analysis ......................................................................................... 61
Discussion of the Research Questions ................................................................. 100

Research Question 1 .......................................................................................... 101

Research Question 2 .......................................................................................... 103

Research Question 3 .......................................................................................... 105

Research Question 4 .......................................................................................... 106

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION .............................................................................. 108

Introduction ........................................................................................................ 108

Summary of Study .............................................................................................. 108

Significant Findings ............................................................................................ 111

Study Limitations ............................................................................................... 117

Practical Implications ......................................................................................... 120

Principals ............................................................................................................. 120

Districts ............................................................................................................... 120

Recommendations for Future Research ............................................................... 121

Conclusion .......................................................................................................... 122

References .......................................................................................................... 125

Appendices ......................................................................................................... 135

Appendix A ......................................................................................................... 135

Appendix B ......................................................................................................... 136

Appendix C ......................................................................................................... 137

Appendix D ......................................................................................................... 138

Appendix E ......................................................................................................... 140

Appendix F ......................................................................................................... 152
List of Tables

Table 1: Percentile Ranking within the State of Michigan Schools……………………52
Table 2: Demographics of Participants…………………………………………………53
Table 3: Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions…………………………58
Table 4: Observation Protocol…………………………………………………………60
Table 5: Variances Between LPI-Self and LPI-Observer Responses by Category……67
List of Figures

Figure 1: LPI-Observer Results by Category .......................................................... 66
Figure 2: LPI-Self Results by Category ................................................................. 67
Figure 3: Core Category: Visionary ......................................................................... 79
Figure 4: Visionary Sub-Category 1: Instructional Leadership .......................... 82
Figure 5: Visionary Sub-Category 2: Situational Leadership ............................ 85
Figure 6: Visionary Sub-Category 3: Communicator .......................................... 88
Figure 7: Visionary Sub-Category 4: Collaborative ............................................ 92
Figure 8: Visionary Sub-Category 5: Persistence .................................................. 96
Figure 9: Theoretical Model .................................................................................. 99
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Chapter One begins with a historical look at school reform in the United States. Next is a discussion of the researcher’s experiences that may impact the study. It then presents the problem and purpose statements and the research questions that guided the study are discussed, along with the research plan. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the possible delimitations and limitations of this study.

Background

School accountability has dominated reform efforts in the United States’ educational system since the late 1950s. The Soviet Union’s 1957 launch of Sputnik 1 sent widespread fear into the hearts of many Americans. Such fear was rooted in the possibility that the United States might have lost its position as both a political and economic world power. As a result of the Soviet Union’s efforts to lead the Space Race, United States’ political leaders demanded that the national government intervene and establish higher academic standards and educational accountability across the country (Steeves, Bernhardt, Burns, & Lombard, 2009).

Over the past several decades, school reform efforts have evolved and adapted to meet the needs of an ever-changing global society. In 1981, A Nation at Risk, a report on the state of education in the United States, focused on investigating the quality of teachers and their impact on learning (Strickland, 1985). The report suggested teacher preparation programs were not adequately preparing new teachers, which resulted in severe inconsistencies across the United States regarding what and how content was being taught. Just as the thought of the Soviet Union gaining an edge over the United States sent fear into the hearts of many Americans, the thought of increased
accountability caused educators to be afraid. A Nation at Risk was the precursor to more recent federal teacher accountability mandates. The enactment of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 not only mandated rigorous curriculum but also rigorous accountability measures for teachers, building administrators, and district administrators. The entire school community became accountable and responsible for the success of its students.

Shortly after taking office, President Obama passed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009. Educational reform was a major objective of the ARRA of 2009, which included four reform goals: equal distribution of highly qualified teachers among low and high poverty schools, using data systems to track student progress, increased rigor in state curriculum, and reorganization of low performing schools and improved instructional strategies (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Unfortunately, the United States was experiencing the worst economic recession in U.S. history at the time the ARRA was enacted. The $48.6 billion set aside in the ARRA funds to be used for educational reform were instead used to stabilize school districts across the country that were greatly impacted by the recession (McDonnell & Weatherford, 2011).

Another aspect of the ARRA of 2009 was the $4.3 billion set aside for the Race to the Top (RTTT) initiative. Applicants for this competitive grant were judged on 19 criteria, including the ability to maintain school funding at pre-recession levels, removing any caps placed on the number of charter schools allowed, and the ability to use student achievement data as an evaluation tool for teachers and principals.
McDonnell and Weatherford (2011) stated the following:

Seventeen states changed their laws to allow student test scores to be taken into account in evaluating teachers, 13 removed caps on the number of charter schools that can be established in their state, 48 agreed to consider adopting common academic standards, and 34 of those states formally approved the new standards within a few months of their publication. (p. 312)

States reacted to RTTT conditions with the full understanding that they might not receive any of the funds available to implement their initiatives. This quick reaction from so many states indicated their frustration with the mandates of the NCLB Act of 2001 and their zeal for additional reforms coupled with a hope for increased funding.

Michigan was one of the states that wrote and adopted new legislation to meet the requirements of RTTT. Public comment and memos of understanding from all K-12 public educational entities were sought in December 2009 with the final legislative vote in January 2010. The turnaround time between introducing the legislation and passing the legislation into law was shorter than it seemed because the timing of this legislation coincided with Christmas break for both schools and legislators. In actuality, the turnaround time between the introduction and passing of Michigan’s RTTT of 2009 legislation was closer to one month. All the gallant efforts of Michigan’s legislators fell short when Michigan did not secure any funding (Michigan Department of Education, 2010).

Michigan schools were struggling because of the devastating impact of the economic recession. They were left with new legislation mandating implementation of common core curriculum standards, an overhaul of the evaluation system of teachers and
principals, and turning around the 5% lowest achieving schools within the state with no additional funding. Teachers and administrators were facing performance evaluations based on student achievement, principals were being asked to evaluate the effectiveness of every teacher yearly, and schools were expected to make these changes on meager budgets.

Michigan Governor Snyder signed into law the teacher tenure reform in July 2011. This law negated the use of teacher seniority as the first requirement for job placement during yearly staffing efforts by schools districts. While not well received by teacher unions, this reform allowed principals the freedom to place highly effective teachers in positions regardless of tenure or seniority status. The law also made it easier for school districts to remove ineffective teachers in a shorter time frame than the previous tenure law. Subsequently, in December 2011 Michigan lawmakers passed right-to-work legislation, which further weakened the union stronghold and influence on Michigan’s schools.

The role of building principals in the state of Michigan has drastically changed since the inception of the NCLB Act of 2001. Principals are required to transition from managerial leaders to instructional leaders. Principals of schools not making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) face the possibility of being replaced. If their school is deemed to be in the 5% lowest performing schools within Michigan, it is mandated to implement one of four turnaround models. In each of the models, the district is required to replace the principal unless he or she has been in the position for one year or less. According to Murphy (2009), “the recovery plan should begin with the assumption of leadership change. The replacement of the head may not be inevitable, but the case for evidence
should fall on those who argue against leader change” (p. 817). The adoption of RTTT objectives by many states, including Michigan, has led to a new type of educational leader—the turnaround principal. Duke (2004) succinctly described a turnaround principal as an individual who is “acutely aware that students are more than test scores, that teachers are more than instruments for raising scores, and that the hopes and dreams of parents entail more than higher scores” (p. 18).

Increased government educational accountability since the Space Race has resulted in the evolution of the school principal. Pre-Sputnik principals were entrusted with ensuring their schools ran smoothly from day to day. Their role was more of a managerial or supervisory role than a visionary leadership role (McCurdy, 1983). Post-Sputnik, educational reforms mandated in A Nation at Risk demanded principals become more actively involved in curriculum decisions. This was the beginning of the evolution of principals from managerial leaders to instructional leaders (Findley & Findley, 1992). The enactment of the NCLB Act of 2001 provided the accountability necessary for principals and teachers to work together as instructional leaders—the principal providing building-wide instructional leadership and the teacher providing classroom instructional leadership.

The latest reform effort, RTTT, has provided stringent accountability for principals who have not been successful instructional leaders. RTTT provided the first punitive measures for principals who lead persistently low achieving schools. Persistently low achieving schools are those schools that have not met AYP for at least two years and are in the bottom 5% of schools in their state based on performance levels in mathematics and reading (Stuit, 2012; U. S. Department of Education, 2009). School
districts are required to replace principals of persistently low achieving schools with principals who have the skills necessary to lead a mandated turnaround effort. These turnaround principals are charged to take a persistently low-achieving school and turn it around to one that consistently meets or exceeds state and federal achievement levels.

**Situation to Self**

At the beginning of the 2011-2012 school year, one of the middle schools in the Michigan school district where I am employed was identified as a persistently low achieving school. The current building principal had served in that capacity for only one year and was allowed to retain the position during the turnaround process. District and building leadership were charged with developing a turnaround plan for this school for implementation in the 2012-2013 school year. Another middle school within the district was identified in August, 2012, as a priority school, formerly known as persistently low achieving. This school would need to develop a turnaround plan during the 2012 – 2013 school year and implement that plan in the 2013 – 2014 school year. A third middle school and two elementary schools in the district were identified in 2012 – 2013 as focus schools. Schools receive a focus school designation when there is too large of an achievement gap between average scale score for the top 30% of students and the average scale score for the bottom 30% of students (MDE, 2013, p. 1). I was reassigned to the focus middle school for the 2013 – 2014 school year as the Mathematics Intervention Specialist. I was charged with providing intensive mathematics interventions to the students in the bottom 30% as identified on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) mathematics assessment.
Because I have not served as a building level administrator nor served under a turnaround principal, I do not have any presumptions of what it takes to be a turnaround leader other than what I discovered in an analysis of the literature on this topic. I attempted to describe how educational leaders become successful turnaround principals by developing a theory that explains the process and leadership traits these principals used to successfully turn their schools around.

I approached this study through a social constructivism paradigm, attempting to draw meaning from how the participants were able to develop the necessary leadership skills to successfully turn around their failing schools. Creswell (2007) defined social constructivism as a way “individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work” (p. 20).

**Problem Statement**

The phenomenon of turnaround principals has gained much attention with the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Principals are being asked to take persistently failing schools, as determined by AYP, and turn them into successful schools in a short amount of time.

In an effort to close the achievement gap of underserved populations, President Obama’s administration introduced a plan to turn around 5,000 of the lowest-achieving schools in five years (U. S. Department of Education, 2009). This plan provided the framework for interventions that previously identified low-performing schools were required to implement. Schools identified as consistently low achieving were required to choose from one of four interventions: the Turnaround Model, the Restart Model, School Closure, and the Transformational Model. These models are discussed further in Chapter
Two. All four models required replacing the principal, which has caused the need for schools to seek out principals that have leadership qualities necessary for turning around failing schools. Since the notion of turnaround principals has emerged only within the past decade, little is known about leadership qualities necessary for principals to successfully turn failing schools around (Murphy, 2009; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008).

Many theories have been developed over the past century to describe effective leadership practices, including Transactional Leadership, Transformational Leadership, and Distributed Leadership. These leadership theories are discussed further in Chapter Two. While these theories have been adequate in describing trends in educational leadership, none can sufficiently explain the recent phenomenon of the turnaround principal (Harris & Chapman, 2004; Kowal & Hassal, 2005; Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010). Current research in the United States is focusing on elementary school turnaround principals (Candelarie, 2009; Hickey, 2011, Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010) with minimal discussion of middle school and high school turnaround principals.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative grounded theory study was to understand leadership traits used by educational leaders to turn around failing schools and to generate a theoretical model to explain how they employed such leadership qualities to elicit a successful result. For the purpose of this study, leadership qualities were defined as both inherent and learned leadership traits and skills. These qualities included interpersonal skills, decision making abilities, and goal setting capacities.
Significance of the Study

This study attempted to describe the leadership qualities educational leaders utilized to effectively turn around failing schools. This study is significant in that it provides an understanding of how these leaders were able to successfully evoke change in their underperforming schools. Principals will be able to use the results of this study to help guide their own turnaround efforts. School districts will be able to utilize this study to guide their hiring processes and placement procedures of building administrators. Lastly, this study can guide researchers in developing a quantitative study to develop and test generalizable hypotheses.

Research Questions

The foundational research question that guided this study on leadership qualities necessary for educational leaders to become successful turnaround principals was, “How do middle school and high school turnaround principals achieve change?” The desired change results in all students, regardless of ability, race, gender, or socioeconomics performing at or above district, state, and federal expectations. The foundational question led to the formation of a theory that described the process of how principals employed leadership qualities to become successful turnaround leaders.

Within this primary question are four sub-questions. Firstly, what structural changes do turnaround principals attribute to their success? Murphy (2009) suggested “successful turnaround initiatives should address the source of the problem and that the nature of the problem suggests which recovery strategies are more likely to be effective” (p. 821). Turnaround principals must be able to quickly assess problems and make structural changes when needed.
The second question asked what leadership traits turnaround principals identify as being important to their roles? Successful turnaround principals’ practices are “more complex than a set of exemplary practices and behaviors” (Scribner, Crow, Lopez, & Murthadha, 2011, p 396). Exemplary leadership practices are a result of both inherent and learned leadership traits. Developing a theoretical model of these exemplary practices will examine both these inherent and learned traits.

Thirdly, what previous leadership experiences prepared these individuals to become successful turnaround leaders? The paradigm with which principals view change is largely a result of their past experiences. Decision-making includes assessing the situation, brainstorming possible solutions, implementing the best solution, and continuously monitoring progress. Past experiences assist principals in making educated decisions about possible solutions to a problem.

The final question asked what turnaround leaders believe their role should be in the turnaround process. Leadership qualities and experiences influence how a principal views his or her role. When selecting principals to lead turnaround efforts, it is imperative to assess how they perceive their roles in the process (Devos & Bouckenooghe, 2009).

Research Plan

The concept of turnaround principals is new, having only emerged since the adoption of the NCLB Act of 2001 and the RTTT initiative of 2009. While leadership qualities of effective principals have been the focus of many studies, little is known about what leadership qualities are necessary to effectively lead a school turnaround. Many programs and ideas have emerged in the past few years, however there is little empirical
evidence to support their effectiveness (Murphy, 2009). Current educational and leadership theories cannot adequately explain this new phenomenon. A grounded theory study was necessary to build a representative theory from a qualitative analysis of the data. A grounded theory study does not begin with a set of hypotheses, but rather hypotheses emerge from a systematic analysis of the data obtained through social research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Participants for this study included middle school and high school principals who have successfully turned around failing schools within the state of Michigan. This qualitative grounded theory study focused on systemically developing a theory adhering to the procedures proposed by Corbin and Strauss (1990, 1998, 2008). Further detailed discussions of the research methodology used in this study can be found in Chapter Three.

**Delimitations**

The sample for this study was delimited to middle school and high school turnaround principals within the state of Michigan. Studies focusing on elementary turnaround principals have previously been conducted in the U.S. Consequently, delimiting the participants to middle school and high school principals will be a useful addition to the current body of literature. Delimiting the participants to the state of Michigan served a two-fold purpose. First, Michigan did not have a systemic structure to guide priority schools through the turnaround process until the passing of the Michigan House Bill 4787 of 2009. The sense of urgency for school turnarounds reached a pinnacle with the enactment of this bill in 2010. Secondly, delimiting the participants to the state of Michigan was also a matter of convenience for the researcher.
Another delimitation to this study is that of self-reporting. The participants and their staff may not have completed the surveys with objectivity. Personal opinions may have hindered the answering of the questions honestly.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The goal of this chapter was to determine if current leadership theories and leadership practices could be used to explain the phenomenon of turnaround principals. It begins with a look at the historical perspective of public education reform efforts in the United States. It then moves into a review of the evolution of the role of school leaders as a result of these reform efforts. Finally, it investigates the role of principals in turnaround efforts of failing schools. The focus of this study was rooted in the continuing evolution of the role of principals, and specifically examined the role of turnaround principals in the reform efforts since the implementation of the Race to the Top initiative in 2009.

Historical Perspective

Jefferson, statesman and primary author of the Declaration of Independence, understood the importance of ensuring all children were educated regardless of their social status. Jefferson was instrumental in creating the foundation upon which public education in the United States rests. Jefferson believed that “education was to be general for all people to provide them with the basic skills needed to participate as citizens of a nation with representative institutions” (Gutek, 2005, p.191). Jefferson envisioned an educational system that was state-supported and locally controlled, an agent for identifying and preparing the most talented individuals for leadership, and provided advanced liberty and freedom while maintaining individuals’ rights (Gutek, 2005).

Public education has been state-supported and locally controlled since the founding of the United States of America, however federal aid for education has been available to states to help establish and fund public schools. As the U. S. expanded
westward, land grants and grant funds were provided to local governments to establish public schools. Even though the federal government provided these grants, it never sought to control public education until the mid-1900s (Flemming, 1960; Standerfer, 2006; Steeves et al., 2009).

The 1957 launch of Sputnik incited U. S. lawmakers to demand wide-sweeping educational reforms. For the first time in the history of the U. S., lawmakers demanded educational accountability by states in exchange for financial resources. The objectives of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958 was two-fold: the establishment of specific programs to assist states with solving educational disparities, and the assertion that states would maintain their sovereign rights to administer educational policies (Flemming, 1960; Steeves et al., 2009).

NDEA established 10 Titles to help fund specific educational programs for the following purposes:

The Congress hereby finds and declares that the security of the Nation requires the fullest development of the mental resources and technical skills of its young men and women. The present emergency demands that additional and more adequate educational opportunities be made available. The defense of this Nation depends upon the mastery of modern techniques developed from complex scientific principles. It depends as well upon the discovery and development of new principals, new techniques, and new knowledge.

We must increase our efforts to identify and educate more of the talent of our Nation. This requires programs that will give assurance that no student of ability will be denied an opportunity for higher education because of financial need; will
correct as rapidly as possible the existing imbalances in our educational programs which have led to an insufficient proportion of our population educated in science, mathematics, and modern foreign languages and trained in technology.

(Section 201, paragraphs 1-2)

Title I upholds state-control of all educational policies and decisions while Titles II through X support the implementation of Title I and provide specific details for effective implementation.

The space race created a sense of urgency in the U.S. Politicians believed they were facing a national crisis and the only way to overcome it was through the educational system. The NDEA required public schools to create more rigorous math, science, and foreign language requirements for students in exchange for increased federal funding. This bold action marked the beginning of the federal government’s involvement in public education.

**Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965)**

Just seven years after NDEA was passed, President Johnson called for even further educational reforms through his War on Poverty. Johnson’s plan became law in 1965 through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The premise of the law was to provide federal funds to schools to “level the educational playing field for poor and minority children” (Hoff, 2005, p. 42). President Johnson served as a teacher in a predominately Mexican-American school in Texas prior to becoming President, and recognized the disparities that existed between the poor and minority children and their wealthier, non-minority peers. ESEA further entrenched the federal government into

ESEA has survived for the past half-century, but not without modifications. Students with disabilities, bilingual students, and students facing other educational challenges now receive services and protections under ESEA (Whilden, 2010). ESEA was the basis for the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, and more recently, the Race to the Top Initiative.

**A Nation at Risk (1983)**

In 1981, Secretary of Education, Bell, formed the National Commission on Excellence. This committee was charged with assessing the quality of education across the U. S. According to a Nation at Risk report written in 1965, the committee was asked to probe several specific areas including:

(a) assessing the quality of teaching and learning in our Nation’s public and private schools, colleges, and universities; (b) comparing American schools and colleges with those of other advanced nations; (c) studying the relationship between college admissions requirements and student achievement in high school; (d) identifying educational programs which result in notable student success in college; (e) assessing the degree to which major social and educational changes in the last quarter century have affected student achievement; and (f) defining problems which must be faced and overcome if we are successfully to pursue the course of excellence in education. (p. 1)

A Nation at Risk was the first initiative that took a serious look at the effectiveness of teachers. Other reform measures were student driven, whereas a Nation
at Risk started investigating the quality of teachers and their impact on learning (Strickland, 1985). The findings of the report identified a severe shortage of mathematics, science, and foreign language teachers. According to the report, half of the newly employed teachers were not qualified to teach the subject that they were hired to teach (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The commission also concluded that teacher preparation programs spent too much time on teaching methods and too little time on academic content. Further, the report found severe inconsistencies across the U. S. in what and how content was being taught. A Nation at Risk was the precursor to the increased accountability of teachers and students found in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

Standerfer (2006) best summarized the sentiments of A Nation at Risk “which painted the picture that U. S. schools were failing and that if corrective measures were not implemented into the educational system, the nation would not remain economically competitive in the global market” (p. 27). Subsequent reform measures by President Bush in 1989 called for a commitment from states to develop core curriculum content standards. Further, President Clinton’s Goals 2000 legislation mandated the creation of state core curriculum content standards. While all of these initiatives identified a crisis in education, none of them provided the necessary federal funding to implement the measures required to turn around the educational system.

**No Child Left Behind Act of 2001**

Both NDEA and ESEA promoted equity in the educational system, making more resources available to the most disadvantaged students; however, the achievement gap between the disadvantaged students and their non-disadvantaged peers continued to
grow. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 sought to close that gap by mandating higher standards for both students and educators. States were charged with establishing rigorous core content standards and standardized tests to assess student proficiency in both reading and mathematics. Schools were being held accountable for closing the achievement gaps between various sub-groups of students, while teachers were being held accountable for maintaining a highly qualified status for the content they were teaching.

While the ideals of the NCLB Act of 2001 were reasonable, individual states still had the autonomy to establish their own measures of success and this resulted in large inconsistencies in what determined proficiency from state to state. Many schools were forced for the first time to evaluate the academic success of all students and student sub-groups. The NCLB Act of 2001 mandates for AYP forced schools to look at the achievement gaps of their students (Armario, 2011; Duncan, 2012; Gardner, Canfield-Davis, & Anderson, 2008; Granger, 2008; Price, 2010). According to Secretary of Education, Duncan (2012), “schools can no longer point to average scores while hiding an achievement gap that is morally unacceptable and economically unsustainable” (p. 2).

While the NCLB Act of 2001 forced educators to acknowledge achievement gaps, it also allowed states to create a one-size fits all curricula that inadvertently created barriers for many students (Armario, 2011; Duncan, 2012; Gardner et al., 2008; Granger, 2008; Price, 2010). A single snap-shot of student achievement on a state standardized test left many schools labeled as failing with little to no resources available to make changes. Principals were forced to choose teachers based solely on a highly qualified status rather than their ability to improve student learning (Duncan, 2012). The reforms
of the NCLB Act of 2001 provided a platform for schools to analyze their programs, but left educators frustrated and greater numbers of students left behind.

**Race to the Top (2009)**

The election of President Obama brought promises of more educational reform. Educators were hopeful that the NCLB Act of 2001 would be rescinded and the stringent accountability measures would be lifted (Whilden, 2010), but had to settle for an overhaul of the current system. Ladson-Billings (2009) captured the essence of the frustrations of educators at this decision:

> This is not to suggest that teachers should not be accountable for ensuring that students learn. Rather, it emphasizes that teaching, learning, and assessments are iterative and interrelated processes. Professional teachers want to determine the effectiveness of their work. They want to use assessments to improve their teaching. They are less sanguine about using external standardized assessments that may or may not link to the curriculum because these tests provide limited useful information to improve their teaching. (p. 351)

President Obama’s Race to the Top (RTTT) initiative, rather than retracting the NCLB Act of 2001 mandates, actually included more accountability measures for teachers and more changes to the curriculum expectations.

The Race to the Top initiative began as a competitive grant through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. In 2010, eleven states and the District of Columbia split $4 billion for educational reforms. Requirements of RTTT included using state-wide data systems to track students from early-childhood programs and beyond,
developing college and career-readiness curricula, and an increased use of quality assessments to monitor student achievement (Calzini & Showalter, 2009; Kellerer, 2011).

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiative emerged from the implementation of RTTT in 2009. The mission of CCSS was as follows:

[to provide a] consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers. (CCSS, 2012)

To date, forty-five states and the District of Columbia have adopted the common core state standards (CCSS, 2012).

Many teachers feel that there is an underlying belief in the RTTT initiative of 2009 that teachers are to blame for the many problems facing public schools. Teachers and unions are working together to shed light on other issues such as class size and inequalities in school funding that adversely affect student achievement (Behrent, 2009).

Educational reforms over the century have focused on educating all children at high levels. Unfortunately, these reforms have also increased the federal government’s role in public education by interfering with states’ rights to control educational decisions. States are struggling to adhere to the increasing federal educational mandates and expectations because the federal government is not providing any additional funding for the implementation of these mandates.
School Leadership

“Leadership acts as a catalyst without which other good things are quite unlikely to happen” (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008, p. 28). A study conducted by Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) on the impact of leadership in student outcomes found that higher performing schools had principals who focused on teaching and learning, served as an instructional resource, and participated in professional staff development alongside their teachers. Leithwood et al. (2008) also found no evidence of a successful school turnaround without the presence of a talented leader. “As school accountability pressures mount, understanding effective school leadership—both as cognitive and behavioral phenomenon—becomes increasingly important” (Houchens & Keedy, 2009, p. 58).

Transactional Leadership

Prior to the educational reforms demanding more teacher accountability, the primary role of the principal was to manage the day-to-day operations of the school. They were transactional leaders concerned with ensuring compliance to a pre-established set of rules and standards. These principals intervened in the classroom only when the teacher deviated from the expected standards (Bass, 1990). A transactional principal has little connection to student learning and relies on the teacher to be the instructional leader. These leaders motivate followers through rewards for effort and good performance (Bass, 1990). They respond to external demands placed on the school by district leaders to deal with underperformance using a prescribed method (Smith & Bell, 2011).
Educational reform efforts since the mid-twentieth century have outgrown transactional leadership. Increased accountability for students, teachers, and administrators has forced principals to step outside the confines of transactional leadership. Principals are finding it necessary to become instructional leaders focused on increasing student academic achievement. This is being accomplished by principals evolving from transactional leaders to transformational or even distributed leaders.

**Transformational Leadership**

Burns (1990, 2003) proposed that leaders arise in response to followers’ needs. Leaders are able to articulate the needs of people through the language of values. According to Saban and Wolfe (2007), “leaders must know what they believe and why” (p. 3) they believe it. They must clearly articulate their beliefs and inspire others to work towards a common purpose and group mission (Bass, 1990).

Leithwood et al. (2008) found that all school leaders generally drew from the same set of basic leadership skills, but only successful leaders were able to effectively utilize these skills. They also found that successful leaders had a strong influence on student learning through motivating teachers and providing a school climate that was conducive to learning.

Transformational leaders, according to Bass (2006), emphasized intrinsic motivation and the positive development of followers. Transformational leadership is most effective in leading schools through the ever-changing federal mandates being placed on schools in the 21st century. Educational leaders must be able to provide strong leadership while still maintaining high-levels of teacher and student accountability (Bass, 2006; Leithwood et al., 2008; Saban & Wolfe, 2007).
The school reform movements since the findings of A Nation at Risk confirmed that the role of the principal is vital to successfully leading schools through the federal educational mandates; however, principals are often too busy with the day-to-day management of their schools and are unable to devote the time necessary to address instructional issues. The increased accountability for student achievement has necessitated the need for principals to share some of the leadership for their schools (Camburn, Rowan, & Taylor, 2003).

**Distributed Leadership**

Educational reforms since the mid-1980s have educed a hybrid of transformational leadership and instructional leadership known as distributed leadership (Camburn et al., 2003). The demands of the NCLB Act of 2001 have shifted the emphasis from teaching to learning. Principals can no longer be concerned only with managing the day-to-day operations of the school; they now have to be strong instructional leaders guiding teachers, students, and parents through the learning process (Angelle, 2010; Camburn et al., 2003; Printy, 2010; Robinson, 2008; Spillane & Healey, 2010).

The demands of school reforms have made it necessary for principals to create systems in which they are able to share leadership responsibilities with teachers and, in some instances, students and parents. According to Spillane (2005), distributed leadership is more about leadership practice than it is about leadership roles and functions. Leadership practice is the interaction between leaders and followers, while leadership roles and functions are the day-to-day management skills necessary in any organization (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004).
Distributing leadership within the school can be risky. Principals must conduct themselves as leaders who are guiding others in the decision making process. According to Park and Datnow (2009), principals act as models in the process and serve as knowledge brokers in conversations. In distributed leadership, it is vital to provide teachers with the necessary time and resources to make informed decisions. Teachers should be encouraged to work collaboratively to share ideas and build collegial relationships (Angelle, 2010; Park & Datnow, 2009; Robinson, 2008; Spillane, 2005).

The increased accountability for improving student achievement has been a catalyst for many principals to operate under the pretext of distributed leadership. Principals who are strong instructional leaders understand the importance of building collaboration and collegiality among staff. Clearly communicating and working towards a common goal is more crucial to improving student achievement than sharing leadership. Camburn et al. (2003) offered the following insight: “Though they are members of a team, principals clearly stand out. On average, they are generalists, performing a broader range of leadership functions than other leaders, and usually at higher levels” (p. 366).

**Effective Principals**

Principals of effective schools act as instructional leaders. They communicate a clear educational mission for their schools and make decisions based on accomplishing that mission (Lezotte & Snyder, 2011). Effective principals exhibit leadership characteristics consistent with the leadership research of Kouzes and Posner (2007) who identified four leadership qualities of effective leaders: trustworthiness, competence, forward thinking, and enthusiasm.
Whitaker (2003) identified several leadership traits that great principals’ exhibit. One recurring theme in Whitaker’s study was the importance effective principals placed on the people within the school. Hiring good teachers and staff was a priority for effective principals. Effective principals understood that the school staff made more of an impact on learning than the implementation of programs.

A second theme Whitaker (2003) postulated was the importance of school climate. Providing a school environment where staff, students, and parents felt respected, safe, and honored resulted in increased learning. Input should be sought from all stakeholders about appropriate behaviors, school safety, and a sense of belonging to the school community.

Whitaker (2003) also discussed the importance of establishing a clear mission and set of beliefs for the school community. Effective principals were able to clearly communicate the mission of the school and rally the school community around the shared beliefs of the school. Since the mission is the driving force behind all educational decisions within the school, it is vitally important that the entire school community is committed to the mission and beliefs of the school.

Age of Accountability

The enactment of the NCLB Act of 2001 ushered in a new era of educational accountability for both educators and students. The mandates of the NCLB Act of 2001 were laudable in what they were trying to accomplish, which was “to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and State academic assessments” (NCLB, 2001, §1001). Unfortunately, under
such legislation, individual schools’ success depends primarily upon a yearly pass/fail state created assessment. The changes proposed by the NCLB Act of 2001 have created an environment that over-emphasizes test preparation at the expense of teacher excitement and creativity (Brown & Clift, 2010; Johnstone, Dikkers, & Luedeke, 2009; Lustick, 2011; NCLB, 2001).

The increased teacher accountability mandates in RTTT sparked controversy in education. Many states, in an effort to garner RTTT monies, implemented performance based teacher evaluations. While teacher performance has always been the focus of evaluations, the new trend is to evaluate teacher effectiveness in part on student performance. Teachers and teacher unions are challenging this effort, claiming that it is unfair to judge teacher effectiveness on standardized testing results (Resnick, 2006).

Johnstone et al. (2009) concluded in their qualitative phenomenological study of school superintendents’ responses to increased federal and state accountability that “superintendents felt caught between the unintended policy outcome of delimited curriculum because of a focus on ‘teaching to the test’ and a desire to maintain high expectations in schools” (p. 15). Three themes regarding accountability emerged from Johnstone et al.’s study: politics, emotion, and impact on instruction. While superintendents agreed that the intent of increased accountability through the NCLB Act of 2001 is a laudable goal, achieving this goal has proven to be elusive.

The implementation of increased accountability is often hindered by the lack of time and inadequate funding required for making necessary changes to school programs. In Johnstone et al.’s (2009) study, the superintendents were also emotionally vested in the required changes. Their focus was on the impact the NCLB Act of 2001 would have on
their specific school communities. “The most commonly expressed emotions were stress, resentment, frustration, and disbelief” (Johnstone et al., 2009, p. 16). Finally, these superintendents believed that instruction was adversely impacted by increased accountability. Districts struggled to find highly qualified teachers in high demand areas such as math and science. Additional instruction time was diverted to testable subjects (reading and mathematics) at the expense of non-testable subjects. Low morale and high stress among school communities resulted from the need to reach federal mandated performance levels in short periods of time. In spite of the negative responses by school communities to the increased accountability measures, superintendents still had faith in the spirit of what the NCLB Act of 2001 was trying to accomplish and quickly sought solutions for overcoming obstacles to increasing student achievement for all students.

**Adequate Yearly Progress**

Under the NCLB Act of 2001, individual states selected which standardized tests would be used to assess student proficiency and determine AYP status. States also established their own levels for determining what constituted a demographic sub-group. The disparities among states became apparent from the onset of the NCLB Act of 2001 and AYP determinations. Because of the financial obligations of implementing NCLB, Maryland was forced to replace a performance-based system of testing with a less expensive multiple-choice format. Ohio and Louisiana were forced to lower their pre-NCLB high standards so they were not punished by the AYP requirements. New York and Michigan maintained standards that exceeded the NCLB Act of 2001 requirements, which made it more difficult to reach AYP targets. In the first year of AYP, Michigan had 1,513 schools that did not reach AYP targets, while Arkansas, with lower standards,
had zero. Michigan responded by lowering the percentage of students demonstrating proficiency in order to reduce AYP targets from 75% to 42%, which resulted in reducing the number of schools not reaching AYP to 216. Arizona and Texas also lowered their passing standards to avoid the NCLB Act of 2001 sanctions (Dillon, 2003; Fusarrelli, 2004; Lewis, 2002).

Under the NCLB Act of 2001, schools were graded, in part, by demonstrating student improvement in mathematics and reading. Schools failing to meet specific proficiency targets did not make AYP and were deemed failing schools. To ensure equity for all students, schools not only had to meet the proficiency levels for all students, but also in any demographic sub-group of students meeting the state minimum requirements. Schools not meeting AYP were subject to a tier of sanctions including publically identifying failing schools, providing mandatory tutoring, and either state school takeovers or school closures (Hemelt, 2011).

In an attempt to even the playing field for disadvantaged or at-risk students, the implementation of the NCLB Act of 2001 in actuality resulted in unintended consequences in and across schools. NCLB did not take into account the disparities in the starting points of schools. Every school, regardless of current academic capacity and ability of students, was required to meet the same proficiency levels the very first year and every subsequent year (Brown & Clift, 2010). Many of the lowest achieving schools have struggled to rise above the mandates of the NCLB Act of 2001 and AYP.

Administrators and teachers in the persistently lowest achieving schools were frustrated with the mandates of NCLB. Hemelt’s (2011) study on performance effects on schools failing to make AYP found that schools experiencing school-wide failures in
mathematics and reading were unlikely to improve in either area. In a study conducted by Brown and Clift (2010), they concluded: “Some of the children who the authors of the law were most intent on serving—those from disadvantaged backgrounds attending the nation’s worst schools—are still getting left behind since they and their schools are treated by the teachers and their administrators charged with their education as lost causes” (pp. 795-796).

**Achievement Gaps**

One positive outcome of the NCLB Act of 2001 is the cognizance of achievement gaps. Prior to NCLB, schools were only interested in the average achievement of students collectively. The recognition of demographic sub-groups by the NCLB Act of 2001 forced schools to look at the achievement of all students. Students with disabilities were expected to meet the same proficiency levels as the general student population. Economically disadvantaged students were expected to meet the same proficiency levels as their non-disadvantaged peers. Female students and male students were expected to meet the same proficiency levels. Minority students were expected to perform on an equal level with their Caucasian peers. However, critics of NCLB believe that a better measure of student achievement would be a year-to-year comparison of individual student progress rather than a comparison to one’s peers or to a state average (Schwartz, Yen, Schafer, 2001, Tucker, Salmonowicz, & Levy, 2008).

Brown and Clift (2010) found that schools that were far from reaching AYP operated in survival mode. They accepted the failure and found ways to accommodate the sanctions. Attaining AYP status seemed too far out of reach. In many instances, the staff at these schools inadvertently conveyed a sense of hopelessness of ever being
anything but a failing school. This pervasive attitude in low achieving schools lead to unengaging classrooms and teachers with low-morale. A system that was designed to help low-achieving students may have unintentionally perpetuated the problem (Brown & Clift, 2010; Gunzelmann, 2008; Lustick, 2011).

A quantitative longitudinal study by Schwarz et al. (2001) analyzed standardized tests scores of Wisconsin students over five years beginning, when the students were in fourth grade. They found that the larger the growth expectation, the greater the change in educational programming necessary to attain that expectation. Principals in low-achieving schools discovered the necessity of redefining school culture and climate in order to evoke positive change in academic growth.

**Turning Around Failing Schools**

The educational turnaround phenomenon is a relatively new concept with the inception of the RTTT initiative of 2009. RTTT requires persistently low achieving schools to turn around their school using one of four models contained in the initiative. Given the recency of turnaround schools, research on the effectiveness of the turnaround models is still emerging. In his review of educational literature on turning around failing schools, Murphy (2008) concluded that there is a great amount of conceptual misunderstanding and confusion about organizational turnarounds and that many new ideas and programs are circulating that have suggested how to turn around failing schools. Perhaps this confusion is a result of not clearly understanding why a school is underperforming in the first place.

“Underperforming or failing schools are not hard to identify” (Papa & English, 2011, p. 1). Students, parents, school leaders, and community members understand when
A school is not producing desired results. Increased testing is not the key to identifying underperforming schools, but rather a way to garner data to help pinpoint achievement gaps in specific areas. Moving underperforming schools to high-performing schools requires more than providing a more rigorous curriculum and increased testing. School leaders need to examine school climate, community perceptions, instructional practices, values and beliefs of the school community, and a desire of the school community to want to change. Turnaround leaders are brought into schools to elicit change—this change may have more to do with overcoming an attitude of continuous failure rather than with raising the academic performance of students.

**Non-Educational Turnaround Models**

In light of the lack of empirical evidence regarding turning around failing schools, researchers have looked at non-educational organizations that have experienced successful turnarounds. The research on these organizations found five intertwined approaches to successful turnarounds: capturing the stories of the recovery process, extracting key elements and characteristics of the transformation, discussing actions and approaches/strategies of the process, outlining phases or stages of the turnaround, and developing models to describe the process from beginning to end (Murphy, 2009).

“CEOs come in all flavors, and a board of directors will grant a company leader plenty of leeway if the results are good” (Miller, 2008, p. 145). Successful organizational turnarounds almost always require replacing the senior management team, especially if they have been with the organization for more than two years. Senior leaders often think they can hit a reset button and start over, when in fact reform requires organizational changes. There is a strong correlation between replacing senior management and
successful turnarounds. The recovery plan must begin with the assumption of a change in leadership (Gadiesh, Pace, and Rogers, 2003; Murphy, 2008).

Before understanding how failing corporations are able to effectively elicit a turnaround, it is important to understand how they became a failing corporation in the first place. Collins (2009) identified and described five stages of decline that lead to failing corporations. Stage one in the decline of a corporation occurs when company leaders adopt an attitude of arrogance. They feel a sense of entitlement and lose sight of how the company became successful in the first place. “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18, New International Version). Prideful attitudes lead into stage two of corporate decline. In this stage, corporate leaders lead the company into areas where they cannot possibly be successful. Undisciplined decisions in stage two lead to an inability of the corporation to maintain levels of quality and excellence. The corporation starts to grow quicker than it can possibly support. Corporate leaders moving into stage three of decline tend to ignore early warning signs of problems. The immediate success diminishes the underlying data indicating foundational problems within the corporation. They ignore negative data and continue to make risky corporate decisions. Stage four of corporate decline is a critical determinant of whether the corporation will recover or capitulate into decline. In this stage of decline, the leader is faced with the impending peril of the corporation. The leader’s response can either be to revert back to what made the corporation great in the first place, or to look for external help to save the corporation. Returning to the foundational beliefs on which the corporation was originally built may be enough to stop the decline. However, looking for an external quick fix will most certainly result in a continued downward spiral. The final
stage of corporate decline is the realization that the company cannot be turned around. The corporation becomes insignificant and either sells out or dies out completely.

According to Collins (2009), while it is possible to skip a stage of decline, research has suggested that companies generally move through all five stages sequentially. Some companies move through the stages quickly while others spend many years progressing through them. It is possible for corporations to recover during the decline, but not very likely. “Most companies eventually fall, and we cannot deny this fact. Yet our research indicates that organizational decline is largely self-inflicted, and recovery largely within our own control” (Collins, 2009, p. 26).

Educational Turnaround Models

Turnaround leadership has been the subject of numerous studies over the years. However, these studies have focused on non-educational organizations. Turnaround efforts in non-educational organizations recognize the importance of efficiency moves rather than strategic moves at the beginning of the turnaround process. However, educational turnaround efforts have primarily focused on strategic moves as the catalyst to change. Murphy (2009) warned that this might not be prudent. “If there is anything the literature tells us, it is that this is not a wise approach to turnaround” (p. 818).

The RTT initiative of 2009 turnaround models was rooted in the research on successful non-educational organization turnarounds. Schools that have been identified as persistently low-achieving were required to adopt one of four RTTT models: the turnaround model, the restart model, school closure, or the transformational model. The turnaround model requires replacing the principal, replacing at least 50% of the staff, and restructuring the instructional program. The restart model allows the district to close the
school and reopen it as a charter school. The restart school is required to admit any student who formerly attended the school. A school closure allows the district to close the school and enroll students in other high-achieving schools within the district. The transformational model requires replacing the principal, restructuring the instructional program, extending the instructional time, and providing operating flexibility. Districts are allowed to choose the turnaround plan that best meets the needs of the effected school, however each model does require replacing the principal unless the principal has been in the position for less than two years (USDOE, 2009).

Regardless of which model is selected, school districts have to be committed to the turnaround process. They must create an environment in which the turnaround principal and his or her staff can be successful. This requires engaging in direct and honest conversations of what changes need to be made to impact student achievement. Robinson and Buntrock (2010), in a study of 43 districts and 123 schools through the University of Virginia’s School Turnaround Specialist Program, suggested that districts should provide the following in their turnaround efforts: a comprehensive plan and strategies for effective implementation, “clear and visible support for dramatic change” (p. 6), a recognition of the importance of the principal in the turnaround process, and systemic support for effective instruction by providing frequent formative assessments, review of the data, and professional development on using data effectively.

Smarick (2010) suggested that historically, efforts to turn around failing schools have consistently failed. “Despite years of experience and great expenditures of time, money, and energy, we still lack basic information about which tactics will make a struggling school excellent” (Smarick, 2010, p. 22). Several years prior to the NCLB Act

**Turnaround Principals**

The research on turnaround principals, in respect to the NCLB Act of 2001 and the RTTT initiative of 2009, is still emerging given the newness of the concept. However, what research is available points to the importance of the principal to the turnaround efforts. Much of the research focuses on leadership traits of principals in high-achieving schools and how they can serve as models for principals in low-achieving schools. The problem with this thought is that high-achieving schools and low-achieving schools rarely have much in common. Their school climates are much different, student populations often differ immensely, and principals in high-achieving schools have generally not led the school through the process of moving from low-achieving to high-achieving (Murphy, 2009; Robinson et al., 2008).

**Summary**

The current empirical evidence for defining what traits make leaders effective turnaround principals, or how they effectively turn schools around, is still emerging. This study attempted to fill in that gap in the literature by describing the process principals use to implement a successful school turnaround. Since the emerging research has primarily
focused on school turnaround efforts in elementary schools, this study focused on middle school and high school turnaround leaders. This qualitative grounded theory study focused on developing a theoretical model to describe how middle school and high school principals evoked effective school turnarounds.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this study, a turnaround principal was defined as a person who could successfully take a failing school and transform it into a school where students were academically successful. Academic success was achieved when students experienced at least a one-year growth in mathematics and reading. The mandates of the NCLB Act of 2001 dictated that 100% of students achieve required proficiency levels in reading and math by 2014. The RTTT initiative of 2009, along with the NCLB Act of 2001, have placed the focus of failing schools not on the students but rather on the leadership. New evaluation requirements from RTTT legislation in Michigan require school districts to evaluate the effectiveness of all teachers and administrators yearly. According to Michigan’s RTTT legislation, school districts must replace the principal of any school that is deemed persistently low achieving. The determination of “persistently low achieving” required a complex set of tiers. “Persistently low achieving” designations were replaced in 2012 with the implementation of “priority schools” designation. To determine priority schools, the Michigan Department of Education “preferred rules use a straight classification of the lowest performing five percent of schools as determined by Michigan standard assessments, growth data, achievement gap data in all five tested content areas, and graduation rate data” (Michigan Department of Education, 2011). Principals that were placed into priority schools were challenged with turning the school around from one where the majority of students were below benchmark to one where students were at or above benchmark. Since the notion of turnaround principals has emerged within the past decade, little is known about leadership qualities necessary for
principals to successfully turn around failing schools (Murphy, 2009; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008).

**Design**

Important features of a qualitative study are the ability of the researcher to understand and describe a phenomenon, collect data in close proximity to the phenomenon, gain rich descriptions of the complexity of the phenomenon, analyze longitudinal data, and make meaning of the phenomenon (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Since the notion of turnaround principals is a relatively new idea, many current leadership theories and models are insufficient in describing this phenomenon. The grounded theory approach to qualitative research as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967, 1999, 2008) suggested that researchers’ “main goal in developing new theories is their purposeful systematic generation from the data of social research” (p. 28). This qualitative grounded theory study focused on systemically developing a theory adhering to the procedures proposed by Corbin and Strauss (1990, 1998, 2008). A grounded theory approach was appropriate for this study because of the limited research available and the lack of a specific theory to describe the phenomenon of how principals turn around failing schools. This study focused on describing the leadership qualities turnaround principals utilized to effectively elicit change. A theory describing how principals effectively elicit change in turnaround schools will emerge through systematic data collection and analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 1999, 2008). In this study, variables were identified rather than tested.

Understanding and describing how middle school and high school principals become effective turnaround principals is essential in the placement of principals into
low-achieving schools. The Race to the Top initiative has made it necessary for school districts to carefully consider principal placement and hiring practices. An understanding of how principals become effective turnaround principals can help guide school districts in choosing the right leader for low-achieving schools.

**Research Questions**

The foundational research question that guided this study on leadership qualities necessary for educational leaders to become successful turnaround principals was: How do middle school and high school turnaround principals achieve change? The sub-questions were as follows:

1. What structural changes do turnaround principals attribute to their success? For the purpose of this study, structural changes included organizational or recovery strategies necessary for a successful school turnaround.

2. What leadership traits do turnaround principals identify as important to their roles?

3. How have previous leadership experiences prepared these individuals to become successful turnaround leaders?

4. How do turnaround leaders believe their roles support the turnaround process?

**Participants**

Participants were selected using convenience and criterion sampling. I started with convenience sampling by limiting participants by location. Participants were chosen within the State of Michigan. Secondly, I used criterion sampling based on the participants’ shared experiences of being turnaround principals (Creswell, 2007). I contacted the Michigan Department of Education Office of Accountability, Intermediate
School Districts, and Regional Education Service Agencies to seek the names of middle school and high school head principals who have lead schools through successful school turnarounds (See Appendix A). I did not receive any suggestions from these organizations. I then obtained the August 2010 and August 2011 persistently low achieving schools list and the August 2012 and August 2013 priority schools list from the Michigan Department of Education School Reform Office website. I identified 12 schools initially appearing on the 2010 or 2011 list but not appearing on the 2012 or 2013 list. Table 1 shows the top-to-bottom ranking of each of these Michigan schools. A successful school turnaround was determined when a school moved from persistently performing below district, state, and federal expectations to consistently making progress at or above these same performance levels.
Table 1

*Percentile Ranking within the State of Michigan Schools*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>25*</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>11*</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School C</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8*</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School D</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4*</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School E</td>
<td>11*</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School F</td>
<td>12*</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School G</td>
<td>9*</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School H</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>44*</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School I</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14*</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School J</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>34*</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School K</td>
<td>9*</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School L</td>
<td>3*</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Bolded * denotes persistently low achieving designation*

District superintendents of the 12 schools listed in Table 1 were contacted seeking permission to invite the principals to be participants in this study. Six districts granted permission, three districts declined permission, and three districts did not respond.

Creswell (2007) suggested an appropriate sample size for grounded theory studies is 20-30 participants. However, Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggested the sample size should be determined when theoretical saturation is reached. This occurs when “further data gathering and analysis add little new to the conceptualization, though variations can
always be discovered” (p. 263). The sample size for this study was initially intended to be a combined total of 10-15 middle school and high school turnaround principals; however, after multiple attempts over a five month period of time, only four participants agreed to be part of this study. All participants and their schools were identified using pseudonyms. Once Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained (See Appendix B), I contacted via email the six principals to secure a commitment to be participants in this study (See Appendix C and Appendix D). Of the six contacted, four agreed to participate and two did not respond. Table 2 shows the demographic information of the principal participants.

Table 2

*Demographic Information of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Number of Years as Principal</th>
<th>Grade Level of School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9 - 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8 - 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brady</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6 - 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9 - 12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Setting**

This study was conducted within the state of Michigan. This setting was chosen because the concept of turnaround principals is relatively new in Michigan. Required school turnarounds began with the enactment of new legislation aligned to RTTT.
mandates in 2010. A review of the literature revealed a lack of research on both middle school and high school turnaround principals.

Michigan was selected for two reasons—proximity to the researcher and the urgency of turning around failing schools in Michigan. The economic down turn in the late 2000s impacted Michigan’s economy dramatically. School districts felt the impact of this down turn almost immediately. Michigan schools are primarily funded through state aid. When the state budget is reduced, allocations to the schools are also cut. At the same time the economy was struggling, Michigan legislators passed sweeping educational mandates to meet Race to the Top initiative requirements.

As a result of these new mandates, schools were asked to increase the academic expectations for all students but were given less money to accomplish this goal. A combination of increased academic requirements and a decrease in funding to adequately fund state mandates resulted in many schools failing to make AYP (Behrent, 2009). This has created the need for school districts to carefully evaluate the placement of principals who will be required to lead failing schools through the turnaround process.

**Procedures**

I contacted the Michigan Department of Education Office of Accountability, Intermediate School Districts, and Regional Education Service Agencies via email (see Appendix A) to seek the names of middle school and high school principals who have led their schools through successful school turnarounds. However, none of these agencies responded to my request. I then used the persistently low achieving schools list to identify potential turnaround schools. Once schools were identified, I contacted district superintendents through email seeking permission to invite the turnaround principal to be
a participant in this study. Follow-up emails and telephone calls ensued when superintendents did not respond within two weeks.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained (See Appendix B) before the commencement of any data collection. All required forms were completed and submitted to the IRB, along with copies of all research instruments. Once IRB approval was granted, potential research participants were contacted.

An initial telephone interview was conducted with three of the participants and a face-to-face interview was conducted with one of the participants. All interviews were conducted using an interview protocol containing open-ended questions. Follow-up interviews were conducted as necessary to gain clarification. These follow-up interviews were conducted either through email or face-to-face. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim and member checked. Observations of the participants’ interactions with their staff were conducted at each site. Additional data was collected through an inventory to assess the leaders’ perceptions and their employees’ perceptions of their leadership qualities and effectiveness. A field-tested, criterion-normed survey was used to collect this data.

Coding of data began immediately after the first piece of data was collected. Multiple colored highlighters and post-it notes were used to categorize and to identify common ideas and themes. Emerging themes were categorized using an electronic spreadsheet. Open coding and axial coding were used during a constant comparison of the data. Selective coding was used to synthesize the categories and themes that emerged during open and axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1967, 1999, 2008). The use of memoing
after each interview or observation assisted in the coding process and in maintaining an audit trail. Data continued to be collected until saturation was reached.

**The Researcher's Role**

My role in this study was that of an interpreter. I attempted to develop a theoretical model to describe how principals became successful middle and high school turnaround leaders in the State of Michigan.

I have been an educator for the past 25 years in both the private and public sector. My time as a teacher was equally divided between middle and high school mathematics. In 2008, I left the classroom to become a Central Office Administrator. In my tenure as an administrator, I served as both a Curriculum Supervisor and an Academic Supervisor. I worked with K-12 principals in both curriculum development/implementation and infusing disguised academics into various out-of-school learning opportunities. Because I never served as a building level administrator, I do not have any presumptions of what it takes to be a turnaround leader other than what I gleaned from an analysis of the literature on this topic.

I approached this study through a social constructivism paradigm (Creswell, 2007), attempting to explain the journey of how participants were able to successfully turn around failing schools. The interpretation of data was based on my perceptions and understandings of how leadership qualities exhibited by principals elicited change within their schools.

**Data Collection**

Approaching research from a social constructivist worldview allows the researcher to seek meaning from the world in which they live. In qualitative research, I
had the ability to collect data through varied methods (Creswell, 2007). This study used three primary sources of data collection: interviews, observations, and surveys.

Interviews

Table 3 lists the standardized open-ended questions asked during the initial interviews which were conducted either by telephone or face-to-face. These questions were field tested with school and district administrators within my county, ensuring clarity once IRB approval was obtained but prior to data collection. The open-ended format allowed for follow-up questions for clarification or elaboration. Questions were developed after a careful inspection of current literature revealed a gap in the literature regarding how principals become successful turnaround principals. To preserve the integrity of this study, all interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. (See Appendix E for sample interview transcript). Transcribed interviews were sent to the participant to verify accuracy.
Table 3

*Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Qualities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Describe your experiences leading up to becoming a principal.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. In what ways do you consider yourself to be an effective principal?

2. How have your previous experiences prepared you to effectively turnaround your school?
   - a. What mentors impacted you along the way?
   - b. What successes and failures did you experience?
   - c. What educational research or theories do you ascribe to?

3. What leadership qualities do you consider to be important for turnaround principals?

4. How would you describe your leadership style?
   - a. Personal qualities?
   - b. Leadership qualities?

5. How would others describe your leadership style?
   - a. Personal qualities?
   - b. Leadership qualities?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turnaround Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Describe how you turned around your school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 7. What does a typical day look like in your school? |
| a. What are your priorities? |
| b. What are your challenges? |
| c. How do you organize your day? |

*adapted from interview questions used in a dissertation by Candelarie (2009)*
Interview questions were divided into two broad categories. Questions one through five focused on leadership qualities. Questions six and seven focused on the turnaround process. Four of the eight questions were sub-divided into clarifying questions.

The purpose of questions one through five (the questions pertaining to leadership qualities) was to ascertain skills and traits turnaround principals credited to their success. “Leadership acts as a catalyst without which other good things are quite unlikely to happen” (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008, p. 28). In their research, Leithwood et al. (2008) concluded that leadership has a significant impact on both school climate and student learning. Their research did not find a single failing school turnaround without talented leadership.

The purpose of questions six and seven (the questions pertaining to the turnaround process) was to document the journey the principals took to turn their schools around. The newness of the concept of turnaround principals has schools scrambling to find talented principals to lead the turnaround. Recent literature has suggested a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding of the educational turnaround process. Educational leaders are resistant to adopt successful non-educational organizational turnaround models and instead are struggling to develop their own set of models (Murphy, 2009).

**Observations**

A non-participatory observation was scheduled with each principal. Observations included formal and informal interactions between the principal and staff. (See Appendix I for sample observation notes). Table 4 is an example of the observation protocol that was used for all observations.
Table 4

*Observation Protocol*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Activity:</th>
<th>Length of Activity:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive Notes</th>
<th>Reflective Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Personal Qualities:

Leadership Qualities:

Leadership Role (Interactions):

*adapted from Creswell (2007)*

**Surveys**

Permission was sought and obtained by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. to use Kouzes’ and Posner’s (2002) Leadership Practices Inventory (See Appendix F). The Leadership Practices Inventory-Self (LPI) was given to the principals and the LPI-Observer was given to their staff at the beginning of the data collection process (See Appendix G and Appendix H). The LPI “was developed through a triangulation of qualitative and quantitative research methods and studies” (Leadership Challenge, 2002, p. 1). It measures five practices of exemplary leadership defined as modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart.
“The LPI contains thirty statements—six statements for measuring each of the five key practices of exemplary leaders” (Leadership Challenge, 2002, p. 3). The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficients for the LPI-Self ranged from .75 to .87, while the LPI-Observer ranged from .88 to .92 (Leadership Challenge, 2002). Internal reliabilities for both the LPI-Self and LPI-Observer were acceptable and have remained consistent over time.

The LPI was used to evaluate the principals’ self-perceptions of leadership, as well as how their teachers perceived them as leaders. The purpose of this survey was to verify the accuracy of principals’ perceptions of their own leadership abilities. The results of the survey were used to increase the trustworthiness of the data through a triangulation of the data collected through interviews and observations.

**Data Analysis**

All interview and observational data were analyzed using the systematic procedures of Corbin and Strauss (1967 1999, 2008). They proposed a coding system to categorize data into emerging themes using open, axial, and selective coding. As the data is scrutinized and coded, categories should emerge. A constant comparison of data helped delineate categories and focused future interview questions. Data collection continued until conceptual saturation was reached.

**Open Coding**

Once data had been collected, open coding began. Open coding began with the first piece of data and continued as more data was collected. In open coding, data is coded based on categories that emerge. Often exact words or phrases known as *in vivo codes* were used for categorization. Multiple colored highlighters were used to identify emerging themes. An electronic spreadsheet was used to store and sort the themes. (See
Appendix J for sample coding). Several different categories were initially identified but were refined to five or six key categories as additional data was collected and coding continued (Creswell, 2007).

**Axial Coding**

Axial coding is a refinement of open coding. Multiple colored post-it notes were used as categories emerged. The previously coded data was chunked into these categories. I then looked for common themes to emerge for the various categories identified in open coding. It served much like a sieve, in that data was being sifted and refined through the coding process. Again, axial coding was ongoing throughout the entire data collection process. It began with the first piece of data collected and continued until conceptual saturation had been reached and no further data was necessary (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 1999, 2008).

**Selective Coding**

The final process of coding was selective coding. Selective coding is the process of relating how the themes and categories that have previously emerged described and explained the phenomenon being studied. During the selective coding process, I ensured that conceptual saturation had indeed occurred when no new themes emerged and no gaps existed in the data. Through the selective coding process, hypotheses emerged, allowing me to develop a visual model to represent the phenomenon being studied. The visual model depicted the causality representing the emerging theory.

The data collected from the leadership inventory was analyzed using the established quantitative measure provided. The results of both the self and observer Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) were analyzed and cross-referenced to each other.
for mutual and disjointed perceptions. A comparison of survey data was then cross-referenced to emerging themes from the interview data and observation data. This triangulation of data provided a more complete picture of leadership traits of the principals.

**Memoing**

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967, 1999, 2008), memoing is a critical step in the coding process. “This rule is designed to tap the initial freshness of the analyst’s theoretical notions and to relieve the conflict in his thoughts. Memo writing on the field note provides an immediate illustration for an idea” (Glaser & Strauss, 2008, p. 108). As categories and themes emerged from the data, I used memoing to record my thoughts and ideas. The process of memoing allowed me to critically analyze and reflect on the emerging themes, thus reducing preconceptions or misconceptions. The LPI data was organized and analyzed using the software provided with the survey tools. I used memoing while interpreting the results of the LPI data collected for each participant. I recorded notes on the LPI reports looking for commonalities to emerging themes from the interview and observation data.

**Data Sources**

Data was collected through three sources: interviews, surveys, and observations. As interviews were transcribed, they were analyzed using the systematic procedures of Corbin and Strauss (1967 1999, 2008) for grounded theory of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. During open coding, many categories were initially identified. After analyzing these categories using the process of axial coding, the following significant categories emerged:
After identifying these categories, I then used selective coding looking for commonalities to determine if any categories could be consolidated. After this process, the following categories emerged as the significant categories for a possible theoretical model to explain the phenomenon being studied.

- Collaborative
- Communicator
- Instructional leadership
- Persistence
- Situational leadership
- **Visionary**

Data collected from the surveys and observations were analyzed through the lens of these six categories.

I observed a regular staff meeting at each site as a non-participant. I used an observation protocol to record descriptive notes and reflective notes. During the observations, I focused on the principal’s interactions with the teaching staff. I utilized the Kouzes and Posner (2013) Leadership Practices Inventory: LPI. The LPI contained 30 statements about leadership practices. Principals were asked to rate each statement on a scale of one to ten, with one representing “almost never” to ten representing “almost always.” Teachers were asked to rate the same statements according to how often they observed their principal engaging in each practice. The survey classified each practice into one of the following five categories: model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. See Figure 1 and Figure 2 for the results of the LPI.

The analysis of the data created from the LPI software provided a comparison of the LPI-Self and LPI-Observer responses. Table 5 presents the variances between the principal and teacher responses. A variance of ±1.5 is acceptable. The variances for Adam, Brady, and Sandra are within the acceptable range for all five categories. Joe had a variance outside of the acceptable range for two of the categories; however, for both categories his teachers rated him higher than he rated himself.

The leadership practices surveyed in the LPI were compared to emerging themes from the interview and observation data. The data collected from the LPI helped to
solidify the potential significant categories to develop the Theoretical Model to explain the phenomenon being studied.

**LPI-Observer Results by Category**

*Figure 1. Number of teacher participants: Joe (27), Adam (23), Brady (21), Sandra (25)*
LPI-Self Results by Category

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variances Between LPI-Self and LPI-Observer Responses by Category</th>
<th>Joe</th>
<th>Adam</th>
<th>Brady</th>
<th>Sandra</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model the Way</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspire a Shared Vision</td>
<td>2.20*</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge the Process</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enable Others to Act</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage the Heart</td>
<td>2.23*</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Bolded * numbers denote variances outside of acceptable range

Figure 2. Number of principal participants: four
Trustworthiness

Validating data is critical to the trustworthiness of any qualitative study. Creswell and Miller (2000) “define validity as how accurately the account represents participants’ realities of the social phenomena and is credible to them” (pp. 124-125) and have proposed several strategies for validating data.

Triangulation of data was necessary to ensure that all the data sources converged to the same common categories and themes. The three data sources for this study came from interviews with the principals, observations of the principal’s interactions with staff members, and a leadership practices inventory. It was important to objectively identify and apply the identified categories and themes to all data sources. Another important process in validating data was to disconfirm evidence that does not support the common categories and themes of the other data sources.

Researcher reflexivity allowed me to disclose any preconceived biases or assumptions about the topic being studied. The use of memoing helped alleviate these biases and assumptions. It was important to the validity of the study to identify these, as well as to identify the lens with which I approached the study. Researcher reflexivity included incorporating a narrative account into the study identifying any biases that may impact the study.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim. The transcriptions were given to the participants to verify accuracy of the interaction. This was crucial to establishing credibility with the participants. Another way to establish credibility with the participants was prolonged engagement in the field. In grounded theory studies, prolonged engagement cannot be defined with an exact time limit but rather as the time it
takes to gain trust and respect from the participants. This occurs when the researcher “has been sufficiently immersed in this world to know it, and at the same time has retained enough detachment to think theoretically about what he has seen and lived through” (Glaser & Strauss, p. 226). Through prolonged engagement in the field as noted in journaling and data logs, the researcher is better able to capture a picture of the phenomenon and develops a trust relationship with the participants. This also leads to a more collaborative relationship between researcher and participant, offering even more validity to the study.

An audit trail was developed at the start of data collection. (See Appendix K). The purpose of the audit trail was to provide an accurate timeline of data collection. The timeline included such measures as “journaling and memoing, keeping a researcher’s log of all activities, developing a data collections chronology, and recording data analysis procedures clearly” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 128). Hopper, EdD, acted as an external auditor to examine the audit trail to ensure validity. Hopper is the acting Director for Educational Services for the St. Clair County Regional Educational Service Agency. Hopper received a Doctorate of Education in Educational Leadership from Central Michigan University.

Setting the stage for the study was accomplished through a thick, rich description of the participants, setting, and phenomenon being studied. This provides the reader with a sense of being part of the study and a clear understanding of the importance of the study. While the focus of this study was limited to middle and high school principals and geographically limited to Michigan, the results may be transferable to elementary principals and other geographic areas.
The final method of ensuring validity was through peer debriefing. Peer debriefing is an important component of any study. A peer reviewer provided the researcher with an objective view of the data analysis. The role of the peer reviewer was to inspect and challenge the conclusions drawn from the data analysis process. This process further added validity to this study. Hopper also acted as peer reviewer for this study.

**Ethical Considerations**

Creswell (2007) defined ethical validation as a system in which “all research agendas must question their underlying moral assumptions, their political and ethical implications, and the equitable treatment of diverse voices” (p. 205). To ensure all voices were heard equitably, all interviews were conducted with integrity and professionalism.

Moral judgment and bias were minimized through maintaining the integrity of the data by means of verbatim transcription and member checking. Pseudonyms were used for all participants and their schools to ensure anonymity. Pseudonyms were also used for individuals not participating in the study who may have been identified through interviews. Ineffective teachers and teaching techniques were discussed in respectful and generalized terms to protect the identity of individuals. Finally, transcripts of interviews, observation notes, and survey results were kept in a password protected electronic file with all paper copies stored in a lockbox.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative grounded theory study was to understand leadership traits used by educational leaders to turn failing schools around. The purpose of this chapter was to describe the leadership traits exhibited by the participants. The chapter begins with a description of each participant and his or her school. Next, the leadership traits of the principals will be discussed. The chapter concludes with a theoretical model to explain the results of this study and how it relates to the research questions.

Participants

There were four participants in this study. All participants were principals of schools identified as priority schools by the state of Michigan’s Department of Education. All participants were leading their schools from the onset of the turnaround process. Two participants were principals of high schools. One participant was principal of a junior/senior high school. One participant was principal of a middle school. The participants included three males and one female. Three of the participants were Caucasian and one was African American. The participants’ ages ranged from 37 to 56 years old. Experience as a principal ranged from three to five years; however, all participants had served in numerous leadership and administrative roles prior to becoming a principal.

Joe

Joe is a 56-year-old Caucasian male and is principal of a high school serving grades nine through 12. He has served as principal of this school for three years. Prior to
becoming a principal, Joe spent 16 years as a classroom teacher, 18 years as a football coach, three years as an assistant principal, and was a curriculum director for grades six through 12. He holds a Master’s degree in educational leadership. His educational experiences also included serving in numerous leadership capacities such as school improvement building chair, curriculum advisory, district technology committee member, and district safety committee member. Joe also was involved in teacher contract negotiations.

Joe’s school is located in a rural town in southwestern Michigan. The school has 31 teachers and 519 students. The students identified their ethnicities as 49% Caucasian, 29% African American, 11% Hispanic, 6% Asian, and 5% other. Fifty-one percent of the students were identified as economically disadvantaged and 9% were identified as students with disabilities.

Joe’s school was identified as a persistently low achieving school in August 2011, shortly after he began his principalship. Because he had been the principal for less than two years, the district was not required to replace him as part of the turnaround plan. The district chose to use the transformational model, which requires replacing the principal, restructuring the instructional program, extending instructional time, and providing operating flexibility. At the beginning of the process, the school was in the twenty-fifth percentile of schools within the state. Three years into the turnaround process, the school was in the ninety-fifth percentile and was recognized as a reward school by the state of Michigan because of the significant gains in student achievement.
**Adam**

Adam is a 42-year-old Caucasian male serving as principal of a junior/senior high school serving grades eight through 12. He has served as principal of this school for three years. Adam served as principal of a Kindergarten through second grade elementary school for two years prior to accepting his current principalship. Prior to becoming a principal he also spent three years as a teacher and coach and four years as an assistant principal. Adam holds a Master’s degree in educational leadership.

Adam’s school is located in a rural community in the western part of Michigan. The school has 27 teachers and 568 students. The students identified their ethnicities as 97% Caucasian, 2% Asian, and 1% other. Fifty-one percent of the students were identified as economically disadvantaged and 11% were identified as students with disabilities.

Adam’s school was identified as a persistently low achieving school in August 2010. He was hired shortly after the school was identified as a priority school. Hiring Adam to replace the principal was part of the school’s transformational turnaround plan. At the beginning of the turnaround process, the school was in the 11th percentile of schools within the state. After four years, the school was in the 62nd percentile and was recognized as a reward school by the state of Michigan because of the significant gains in student achievement.

**Brady**

Brady is a 38 year-old Caucasian male serving as principal of a middle school serving grades six through eight. He has served as principal of this school for four years. Prior to becoming a principal, Brady spent seven years as a teacher and coach and three
years as an assistant principal. He served as school improvement building chair and also served on several school and district level committees. Brady holds a Master’s degree in the art of teaching.

Brady’s school is located in an urban community in the eastern part of Michigan. The school has 50 teachers and 896 students. The students identified their ethnicities as 73% Caucasian, 13% African American, 7% Hispanic, and 7% other. Fifty-seven percent of the students were identified as economically disadvantaged and 12% were identified as students with disabilities.

Brady’s school was identified as a persistently low achieving school in August 2011. Because he had been principal for less than two years, the district was not required to replace him as part of the transformational turnaround plan. At the beginning of the turnaround process, the school was in the eighth percentile of schools within the state. After three years, the school was in the sixteenth percentile. The school has been removed from the priority schools list and continues to show significant gains in student achievement.

**Sandra**

Sandra is a 37-year-old African American female serving as principal of a high school serving grades nine through twelve. She has served as principal of this school for three years. Prior to becoming a principal, Sandra spent seven years as a teacher and six years as an athletic director and assistant principal. She holds a Master’s degree in sports administration and a Master’s degree in school counseling.

Sandra’s school is located in an urban community in southeastern Michigan. The school has 40 teachers and 609 students. The students identified their ethnicities as 47%
Caucasian, 46% African American, and 7% other. Fifty-eight percent of the students were identified as economically disadvantaged and 11% were identified as students with disabilities.

Sandra’s school was identified as a persistently low achieving school in August 2011, just one month after she began her principalship. Because she had been principal less than two years, the district was not required to replace her as part of the transformational turnaround plan. At the beginning of the turnaround process, the school was in the fourth percentile of schools within the state. After three years, the school reached the eighteenth percentile. The school has been removed from the priority schools list because of the significant gains in student achievement.

**Discussion of Theoretical Model**

“Turnaround leaders believe that their teaching colleagues and students are capable of much more than they have been accomplishing and seize every available opportunity to increase their expectations significantly” (Leithwood et al., 2010, p. 75). The core category that emerged from the data around which the theoretical model (see Figure 3) was developed was that of being a visionary leader. Five other sub-categories were identified through the coding process. These sub-categories included: instructional leader, situational leader, communicator, collaborative, and persistence. These sub-categories were employed by each of the participants to fulfill their visionary plans for turning their schools around.

**Visionary**

Each participant began their principalship by establishing a new vision and mission to lead his or her school into the future and elicit substantial academic
achievement growth. They each recognized the need to make significant changes to the culture and climate of their schools. The results of the survey indicated that the staff ranked “speaks with a genuine conviction about the higher meaning and purpose of our work” and “paints the ‘big picture’ of what we aspire to accomplish” among the top practices exhibited by their principals.

Brady stated, “We really try to start off the year with having a vision and setting some goals for ourselves and try to keep our focus on those.” At his school, all stakeholders were involved in developing the vision and goals. “We built our mission. We made sure we involved students. We made sure the mission of the school involved not just some people but the entire community. It was genuinely important to us that it needed to involve everyone.” Brady’s staff ranked 67% of the visionary traits in the top 10 of all traits surveyed.

Part of Brady’s vision was ensuring the adults in the building shared his vision and had an underlying belief that the school could be turned around. He was fortunate that he was able to replace teachers who were not committed to the turnaround process with teachers who wanted to be part of the change. He stated:

A lot of that changed through changing some of the adults. That had to happen.

And, a lot of times it’s not a large amount of people either. It’s just a few. What happens is that it makes a huge difference in the culture of the building.

Brady also worked diligently at changing the community perception of his school. The culture of his school was one of failure and the community shared that belief. He believed “the culture needs to believe in success.” Brady’s expectation was “that you’re going to try hard and you’re going to work hard. We always want to improve.” He
started the cultural change by building not only “that sense that teachers believe that kids can do it but that kids believe that they can do it.”

Joe was principal of his school two years prior to its being identified as persistently low achieving. He had already started making small cultural changes but expedited these changes once the school was identified as a priority school. He described organizational life as “you’re either moving forward or you’re moving backwards. There’s no such thing as status quo in an organization.” Disequilibrium should be expected in the growth of an organization. According to Joe:

If you start to feel too comfortable about things, I would say as leaders, you better ask yourselves what’s going on in our organization. Are we doing the right things? It always seems like there’s chaos, it always seems overwhelming, it always seems like nothing is comfortable because you’re always changing because you’re always trying to do things better. And, you’re always asking the question: Is this the best we can do? Is this the most effective? And, when the answer is no, then you’re changing it. That’s part of a great organization—striving for excellence.

The number one ranked leadership trait on the survey of Joe’s staff was “speaks with genuine conviction about the higher meaning and purpose of our work.” Joe’s influences and vision have propelled his school from the 25th percentile to the 92nd percentile on Michigan’s top to bottom list of schools.

When asked about how his school was able to turnaround, Adam responded, “Being very goal-oriented and having those short-term goals, as well as, the long-term goals.” In the observed staff meeting, Adam reiterated the things that had occurred
throughout the school year which were aligned to the mission and vision of the school. After celebrating these successes, he went on to challenge the teachers to develop group and individual goals to further fulfill their mission of increasing student achievement. Under Adam’s leadership, the school moved from the 26th percentile to the 62nd percentile in just three years.

The survey results for Sandra showed that her staff believed that she “paints the ‘big picture’ of what we aspire to accomplish” by ranking this trait as number one. Sandra said the following:

You go into an organization or you go into a situation, you look around and say okay, what’s working? What’s not working? What can I do to help with whatever’s working and maintain it? What can I do, how can I be a change agent? And, that’s kind of my mentality and that’s how I’ve always been. And, maybe that’s what has helped me the most. How can I bring about change?

During the observed staff meeting, Sandra challenged her staff to use the data to develop individual and departmental goals to continue to close the achievement gaps of the subgroups of students. Under her leadership, the school has gone from the 4th percentile to the 18th percentile on Michigan’s top to bottom list. While these results are not as drastic as the previous schools discussed, they are still a significant positive increase in just three years.
Core Category: Visionary

**Attributes**
- Mission
- Vision
- Goals
- Culture
- Environment

*Figure 3.* This figure illustrates key attributes of visionary leaders.

**Instructional Leaders**

The first sub-category is instructional leadership. The participants of this study were strong instructional leaders that placed considerable emphasis on the importance of providing effective classroom instructional strategies. Some of the first conversations they had with their staff revolved around ensuring that teachers were equipped with strategies to provide effective instruction.

Every participant had a fundamental belief that effective teaching was the most important thing in increasing student achievement. Joe believed “the number one factor that impacts learning the most is effective teaching.” For Adam, the focus was identifying weaknesses and then having a laser-like focus “on those things in all of our core areas. That’s why we’ve made a huge turnaround.”
Joe began his principalship with an extensive background in instructional practice and curriculum from his time spent as a curriculum director. He stated:

Teachers need to have leadership that shows them what’s more effective and provides them with resources and tools to be more effective teachers. Any time anybody asks me, “What’d you do?” We did a lot of things, but the one thing that we did that I think was the most critical thing is we changed the way we teach. And our practices today are much different than they were five years ago. And our teachers would tell that to anybody. They wouldn’t even bat an eye. They’d say, yeah we teach differently. And, they teach more effectively.

Prior to being identified as a persistently low achieving school, the staff was reluctant to talk about the decline in student achievement. Joe stated:

In my building there was a huge elephant in the room that people talked around for years. And, finally the elephant sat down and squashed us all in the form of accountability because we weren’t taking it seriously, we weren’t admitting or even looking at what the real problem was.

At the beginning of the turnaround process, Joe forced the staff to start taking a hard look at the achievement data. He began the long process of evaluating current classroom instructional practices and making the necessary changes to increase students’ academic achievement. An important practice Joe implemented was attending workshops with teachers. He stated, “If I send more than three teachers to something, I go with them. I want to know what they are learning so I know how to support them best.” He believes that attending workshops with the teachers provides an opportunity to speak with them about curriculum and instruction that he may not otherwise be able to.
Brady recognized the need to provide more structure and time for instruction. His students needed more time for reading and mathematics. According to Brady:

We needed to change how we teach so that within our classrooms everyone is a teacher of literacy. Everyone is expected to have bell-to-bell instruction. And, everyone is expected to use data. You set up the day so people and kids can be successful. And then you change how you teach so that during the time you have the kids you’re trying to optimize learning that occurs during the hour through the use of formative assessments.

Brady’s school has struggled to find the ideal schedule to provide the extra time for reading and mathematics. Brady and his staff continue to evaluate and adjust the schedule to optimize learning.

Under Sandra’s leadership, her teachers have implemented more student-centered classrooms. She was a proponent of cooperative learning and believes “those who talk more learn more.” She has provided teachers with professional develop opportunities to focus on questioning strategies to increase student engagement in the classroom. An area of weakness in Sandra’s school was literacy. Sandra implemented common literacy strategies with the expectation that every teacher utilize these strategies in every classroom.

Providing instructional leadership was vital in the turnaround process of all the sites included in this study. The principals understood the need to equip their teachers with the tools necessary to provide effective instruction. Brady realized that as a principal he would “make assumptions that staff understood how to use teaching strategies. And a lot of times you find that you go in and you watch a class and they’re
not using any of those strategies.” He realized that while the teachers knew about various strategies they were hesitant to try new things and would fall back on the strategies they were comfortable using even if those strategies were ineffective.

All of the principals devoted a large portion of their day to conducting classroom walk-throughs, informal observations, and formal observations of their teaching staff. The vital component of these observations for each of the principals was providing the teachers with immediate and relevant feedback. Joe understood this when he said, “You’ve got to give them honest feedback and you have to give them a plan and or support and ideas on how to make those changes and improvements.” Holding the teachers accountable for effective classroom instruction and providing them with the necessary tools, constructive and timely feedback, and instructional leadership has been an essential factor in the school turnaround process.

**Visionary Sub-Category 1: Instructional Leadership**

![Diagram of Instructional Leadership](image)

*Figure 4.* This figure illustrates key attributes of instructional leaders.
Situational Leader

When discussing situational leaders, Blanchard (2008) stated, “effective leaders adapt their style according to the development level of the people they are managing” (p. 19). Every school’s staff is diverse in many ways: ethnicity, age, gender, experience, educational level, cooperation capacity, or any combination of these. Principals must have the patience and tools to identify the varying personalities and quirks of their staff members and know how to extract the best from them. Sandra stated:

I knew the staff who were self-initiators. I knew the staff who were just being great at following directions and doing what they’re told. And, I knew the staff members who were dragging their feet and who were kind of resistant. It took time for me to kind of put people into those categories and then from those categories I relate and treat people accordingly. I know who are the self-initiators. I know how to connect with them. I know how to connect with the people who will follow directions, not necessarily will they go above and beyond but they won’t also destroy it. And, now I know how to connect with the people who are resistant. I spent frustrating energy on people who were resistant. I believe if I continue to work with people and meet people where they are that they will move a certain way.

Sandra’s teaching background was in physical education. She came into the principalship with limited knowledge of the core content. She was upfront with her staff “admitting what I don’t know and then trying to figure out and learn about the things I don’t know and building capacity and building relationships with teachers.” She believed
that she has “become very good at navigating in terms of meeting people at whatever level they may be at.”

Joe was also able to find a way to work with people of varying degrees of cooperation. He stated:

We have really improved the culture among our staff in this building. There were people who I call blockers that were always, you know, the last to change. They were always those that could find flaw with something. They always wanted to know why. When you explained why, the still wanted to know why. And, some just flat out wouldn’t verbalize it but by their actions would say ‘I’m not doing this. I’ve seen this before. This isn’t going to work. I’m not doing it’. The culture change in this building—we don’t have any blockers anymore. There’s no such thing in this building.

While Joe may not have “blockers” anymore, he also understands “I’m not a leader that’s so naïve and so egotistical that I tell people that I have a great building because I don’t. I’ll tell you right now, the morale in my building’s not very good.” He attributes the low morale to the constant changes that have to be made in response to either district or state mandated educational requirements.

Brady recognized the value of staying calm when he said, “I try to be the one that’s not going to escalate a situation and make it worse.” He tries to look at a situation and work out the best solution. He says adults are “some of the hardest to work with, kids are pretty easy.” He commented about the times teachers stop in to ask a question, “I just need 10 seconds. I just need to ask you a question.” He gave up being frustrated by these interruptions and decided, “You know what, they need me for those 10 seconds.
That’s part of my job. Shut up and listen to them and help them out.” When working with adults, Brady understands the need to be flexible, listen, and work with people to find an agreeable solution.

Adam approaches his staff with compassion. He stated, “I have some things I would never do to people that I’ve seen done whether to myself or to my other colleagues.” He recognizes that to get the best out of people, you have to approach them with respect and dignity.

Understanding the personalities, attitudes, and quirks of staff members is an integral part of moving forward in the turnaround process. The participants, as situational leaders, are able to effectively meet the needs of their staff. Sometimes this requires encouraging them to try new things and other times it requires confronting them when they are resistant to necessary changes.

**Visionary Sub-Category 2: Situational Leadership**

![Situational Leadership Diagram]

*Figure 5.* This figure illustrates key attributes of situational leaders.
Communicator

“Turnaround leaders never quit communicating the school’s purposes, plans, and expectations to staff, students, parents, and other stakeholders” (Leithwood et al., 2010, p. 78). The participants were strong communicators with their staff, students, parents, and community. They understood the importance of communicating the mission, vision, and goals of the school to all stakeholders. They were also cognizant of what and how they communicated with their school community.

Sandra’s obstacle to communication was “trying to figure out each person’s mode of communication that works best for them.” She learned that some teachers “do best and listen best if I talk with them face-to-face,” while others “do best and listen best through email and, some teachers I literally have to text on their phone.” Her bottom line was communication and she was willing to be flexible and adapt to whatever communication style worked best for individual staff members. She also believed she was “very good at communicating with people and helping people understand whatever it is that we are trying to accomplish” and “can articulate and get along well with probably the most well accomplished intelligent folks.” She also discussed the importance of teaching students how to be good communicators. When discussing communication with her students, she stressed the importance of using appropriate forms of communication. An example of a conversation between her and a student is the following: “So the email you send me as the principal, you don’t say ‘hey what up Ms. S.’ You know, you address me in a different way through email but maybe in the hallway we do have that informal casual conversation.” As a communicator, Sandra is able to communicate on various
levels to meet the needs of her audience as evidenced by her adaptability of using others’ preferred methods of communication.

Adam believed he was a communicator. He used communication to build healthy relationships with his staff and students. Talking about his morning routine, he stated:

I’ll walk the whole building and as I do that, I’ll stop in each classroom pop in and say good morning to the kids and or teacher whoever will acknowledge me at that time. So I pop in every morning and say hi and go around and do those pieces.

After completing his morning routine he makes “sure I’m available in between each class to be out in the hallway to talk to kids.”

Adam described himself as a go-getter, which he confessed sometimes gets in the way. He does not “like to sit and talk about a situation for six months. I want to get options and get moving. A lot of people in education want to talk about things for a year before we ever make a change.” He optimizes communication with teachers to produce quick decisions that will positively impact student learning and achievement.

Brady believed one of his strengths was communication. He stated, “The other thing is communication, we just lay it out there.” When asked what his staff would say are his strengths, Brady responded, “As much as possible we communicate. That I’m approachable to talk to.” He went on to say that sometimes you have to have difficult conversations with people and tell them things they do not want to hear. However, if you have invested time building relationships with your staff members, the other person better receives these difficult conversations. He stated, “I think that’s one thing people would say to me is they know that I care. That this isn’t just a job.”
Joe believes it is important to communicate with people. He stated, “I have to have face-to-face communication frequently. I am big on praise and encouragement.” As a principal, Joe has also learned that effective communication must include more than just praise and encouragement. He went on to discuss:

I’m also learning that I have to be bigger on constructive feedback because praise and encouragement makes a person feel good and it helps them understand their worth and value to the organization and to the leader, but it in no way tells them what they have to get better at so they can continue to get more effective in their role. And so, you have to be able to balance that with constructive feedback.

Communication with his staff is now more balanced, providing the teachers with the praise and encouragement they need and the constructive feedback necessary to make them better teachers.

**Visionary Sub-Category 3: Communicator**

*Figure 6. This figure illustrates key attributes of communicators.*

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88
Collaborative

“The degree of collaboration is a powerful indicator of a school's capacity to improve” (Harris & Chapman, 2004, p. 424). The participants provided opportunities for staff to collaborate with leadership and with other staff members. All participants provided time for staff members to collaborate with each other. They also included staff in the decision-making process whenever possible.

Joe recognized when he first took over that teachers were not collaborating. He implemented structures and expectations of collaboration. According to Joe, “people were very skeptical about that and very unwilling. People were forced to collaborate.” One of the structures Joe created was time in the day for teachers to collaborate. After just one year, Joe found that he “had veteran teachers saying it was the best thing they’d ever done because they learned more from other teachers than all their years combined of teaching in isolation.”

Adam also had teachers who were reluctant to collaborate. “In our high school, you better not assume how much cooperation you’re going to get with your staff. People have to get onboard with the fact that we have to make some changes. That can be an awful tough hill to climb.” He approached this reluctance by developing a team concept. No one liked the idea of being called a failing school, and worked together as a team to decide how to turn the school around. Adam described his team as “My staff whether it’s my custodial group or my lunch ladies, or whoever it is. If you come in contact with my kids, I consider you a part of my team.” The top three leadership practices Adam’s staff felt he almost always engaged in were treating others with dignity and respect,
developing cooperative relationships, and giving people freedom and choice in deciding how to do their work.

During his first year, Brady realized he had to establish a mission for the school. He knew he had to involve more than just the teachers and have an encompassing team of all stakeholders. “We made sure that we involved students. And, we made sure that the mission of the school involved the entire community. It was genuinely important to us that it needed to involve everyone.” This collaborative effort led to the formation of a World Café that meets two to three times a year to work together to find solutions to problems that arise. When talking about the World Café, Brady stated, “We’ve used that approach to set up our peer observation programs, to really look at our mission statement and break down the mission statement and what does it mean.”

Brady created professional learning communities (PLC) within his school. This provided time for teachers to collaborate and share ideas. He believes these learning communities have helped get the staff to buy in to all the necessary changes for a successful turnaround. Staff meetings are conducted much differently with the implementation of the PLC. Meetings are now focused on accomplishing specific tasks within the various PLCs in the school. Brady’s role has also changed from that of facilitator to more of a participatory role. Staff meetings begin with a brief corporate meeting and then quickly transition into small group PLC meetings where teachers can focus on specific tasks.

All of the principals shared the decision-making process as much as possible. However, they also realized that there are times when they have to make decisions without the input of others. Joe stated, “There are decisions that you will make every
day; there’s decisions we will make frequently; and, sometimes there are decisions I will make. And to me that’s what decision making and leadership is all about.” Joe went on to say, “They know that I am a strong decision maker. And, they know I will make decisions that I think are best for the school.” According to Adam, “I do make decisions that need to be made, at the same time I try to make sure that I’m talking to them about decisions that we need to be making.” Brady also understood the importance of being a strong decision maker. When asked about his decision-making process, he responded:

Sometimes you’ve got to be president and sometimes you’ve got to be dictator.

And there’s times I’ve had to be dictator. But, I try to be the president as much as possible. The presidents try to reach consensus and try to work with people.

They try to get everything to work together.

Sandra ascribed to a more collective decision-making process. She tapped into the expertise and knowledge of her staff when making curriculum decisions. She also sought the input of her staff when making decisions about the direction of the turnaround process. However, she still understood that “sometimes the decision is made collectively and sometimes the decision is not made collectively.” She was not afraid to make executive decisions when necessary.

All of the principals employed collaborative practices in their staff meetings. During the observed staff meeting, Sandra interspersed small group discussions about data trends and achievement gaps throughout the meeting. Adam had his staff break into five content groups and charged each group with specific tasks necessary for the turnaround process. Joe modeled effective small group discussions by providing opportunities to reflect upon the successes from the past year. The majority of Brady’s
staff meeting was devoted to breaking into PLC groups and discussing specific intervention strategies to be implemented into the next school year. These principals have realized the value of collaboration and have changed the way they do business to provide as much time as possible for their staff to meet together to share ideas, resources, and solutions.

**Visionary Sub-Category 4: Collaborative**

*Figure 7. This figure illustrates key attributes of collaborative leaders.*

**Persistence**

“Successful school turnaround is not just about improving test scores; it is fundamentally about improving life chances for and opening new opportunities to the young people who learn there” (Leithwood et al., 2010, p. 175). Commitment and persistence to the process were key concepts for each of the participants. The persistence they exhibited was not only limited to the turnaround process and increasing student
achievement, but also to ensuring they were providing proper support for their staff and for themselves. This was most poignantly evident in Sandra’s story.

Two days prior to accepting the principalship at her school, Sandra was diagnosed with an aggressive form of breast cancer. The day the school received the news that it was a priority school is the day she started losing her hair due to chemotherapy. The most important thing to Sandra during this process was that she be allowed to continue to work. She spent the first six months of her principalship having chemotherapy once a week and returned to school the next day without her staff ever knowing what she was going through. She did not want her cancer to be a distraction to anyone or to the turnaround process. The only reason they found out was because she had to take two weeks off in December to have surgery related to the cancer. She likened the turnaround process to her battle with cancer when she stated, “You either chose to live or you chose to die. That was my mentality. We had a choice, either we’re going to continue to move or we’re going to fall apart.” The strength she found in her personal battle was the driving force behind the turnaround of her school.

According to Adam, “You have to be persistent.” He went on to say:

You have to love people who you didn’t start out feeling like should be loved. Because there’s going to be things that people get knocked off their pedestal for what they’ve done for 20 years and all of a sudden you’re telling them, alright, we’ve got to change. They can feel busted for some people.

Adam understood the importance of sticking with people and through building relationships with them, got them to accept his vision for the school. Such compliance does not happen overnight but requires persistence and longevity in building these
relationships. It is often a trust factor and once trust is established, you can move forward with a healthy relationship.

For Brady, he had to be persistent in changing the culture of his building. His school had a long history of being perceived as a failing school. His school is one of three middle schools in his district and has traditionally been the lowest performing of the three. Implementing a Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) program was the first step in changing the culture. Brady and his staff modeled the expected behaviors and had the students practice these behaviors regularly. Brady, along with his entire staff, held students to the expectations of PBIS in all common areas within the school. One example of this occurred when the school was going to have an assembly to hear a motivational speaker. A couple of days prior to the assembly, Brady had all the students come to the gymnasium and model and discuss expected behaviors for the assembly. After the assembly was over, the speaker called Brady to congratulate him on the behavior of his students. The speaker had visited many middle schools around the state and told Brady that the students at Brady’s school were by far the best he had encountered. Brady’s persistence to PBIS has had a significant impact on the culture of the school. According to Brady, one of the positive side effects of implementing PBIS was the change in the adults in the building. They went from having a defeatist attitude to one where they believed their students were capable of achieving high standards of behavior and academics.

Joe was also faced with changing the culture of his building. The demographic makeup of his students has changed drastically in the past few years with the decision by his district to allow school of choice. His community is a rural community; however, not
far away is a large urban area with a school system that is one of the lowest performing
districts in the state. Many families from this urban community have chosen to send their
children to Joe’s school through school of choice. While Joe’s community is
predominately Caucasian, over 50% of his student population are from minority ethnic
groups. According to Joe, the students coming from the other communities are “poor and
come with a lot of challenges.” Joe stated,

Depending on the year, I can have anywhere from 30 and 40 different nations
represented in my school. And some of those students, English is their second
language. So, those are some of the challenges that we deal with and we have
some environmental issues, student cultural issues. We had to fix those. Those
have been fixed.

Joe had to provide opportunities for his staff to gain the necessary tools to create a
learning environment that met the needs of this new diverse population of students. His
persistence in fixing the cultural and environmental issues resulted in tremendous
academic growth results.

Another important change Joe had to make involved the daily school schedule.
At the beginning of the turnaround process, his school had a four by four schedule block.
The schedule was not providing the continuity necessary for optimum learning.
According to Joe, “There could be as much of a gap as 12 to 14 months before your next
course in the sequence.” Teachers were spending too much time reteaching concepts
from the previous course instead of moving on to new topics. As Joe stated, “It is a
fabulous schedule for teachers,” but not great for the students. He brought the schedule
challenges to the staff for discussion but could not reach a consensus about what changes
should be made to the schedule. He wanted teachers to collaborate and come up with solutions; however, after the deadline came and went, the staff presented no solutions to the scheduling problem. Joe was forced to make an executive decision about the schedule. Teachers were not happy with his changes, at which point he reminded them of their reluctance to even talk about the situation. Persistence does not always bring about the desired results but it does require a decision.

**Visionary Sub-Category 5: Persistence**

![Persistence Diagram](image)

*Figure 8:* This figure illustrates key attributes of a persistent leader.

**Turnaround Process**

The participants in this study had four common previous experiences before becoming principals: (a) classroom teacher; (b) teacher leader; (c) district committee member; and, (d) assistant principal. These previous experiences were important in shaping the participants’ ideals and belief systems once they were selected to lead their schools as a principal. They entered their principalships with a strong instructional
background recognizing the importance of utilizing effective instructional strategies and classroom procedures. Their experiences serving on district committees provided them with an in-depth understanding of the district organizational structure and district expectations.

The structure of the turnaround process was grounded in the foundational leadership trait of visionary and was supported by the leadership traits of communication and persistence. Throughout the entire turnaround process, the participants communicated their vision and expectations diligently to all stakeholders ascribing to the belief that over communication is far better than not enough communication. They remained committed to the turnaround process making adjustments as needed persistently focusing on increasing student achievement.

Once the participants communicated their vision with their stakeholders, they were ready to address the necessary structural and cultural changes. These changes were implemented within the first year of the turnaround process. Restructuring the school environment was crucial to a successful turnaround. Developing a safe learning environment was a priority at the beginning of the turnaround process. The participants became visible leaders by regularly supervising the hallways and other common areas. They made it a point to have positive interactions with staff and students on a daily basis. Structural changes to the daily schedule were necessary to provide increased time for intervention and enrichment for students and to provide time for teachers to collaborate within the school day.

Re-culturing the ideals and belief systems of the school community was of equal importance as the environmental changes. The participants found it necessary to
communicate and model expected behaviors to both the students and the adults in the building. Students were held to high standards of learning while teachers were held to high standards of instruction. With structural changes in place to allow time for collaboration, participants fostered an expectation of collaboration. Teachers were encouraged to share resources, instructional strategies, and data with their colleagues. Instructional decisions started being made based on the available data. Participants closely monitored classroom instruction by conducting frequent walk-throughs and informal observations. They provided teachers with frequent and relevant feedback from these observations.

Once the structural and cultural changes were implemented, the participants continuously monitored and evaluated the changes. Their main focus was on ensuring teachers were utilizing effective teaching strategies and that students were learning at high levels. Providing teachers with the necessary resources and equipping them with the appropriate tools was vital to the turnaround process. The process utilized by participants to turnaround their schools included communicating the mission and vision of the school, monitoring and evaluating structural and cultural changes, monitoring and evaluating teacher effectiveness, and persistence to the turnaround process. While the ultimate goal for each participant was to be removed from the priority schools list, they remained committed to building a culture of excellence that would continue long after the turnaround journey was completed.
Figure 9. A visionary foundation with pillars of communication and persistence provides a framework for the process utilized by effective principals to turnaround their failing schools.
Hypotheses

According to Creswell (2007), the purpose of a grounded theory study is to generate or discover a theory to explain the shared practices of the participants when a current theory cannot adequately explain the phenomenon. The study does not begin with a set of hypotheses but rather generates hypotheses through a comparison of the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967 1999, 2008). The hypotheses are suggestions of a possible explanation for the phenomenon. However, further research is necessary to test the hypotheses. Six hypotheses were generated as a result of this study:

- Hypothesis one: Turnaround principals are visionary.
- Hypothesis two: Turnaround principals are instructional leaders.
- Hypothesis three: Turnaround principals are situational leaders.
- Hypothesis four: Turnaround principals are communicators.
- Hypothesis five: Turnaround principals are collaborative.
- Hypothesis six: Turnaround principals are persistent.

Discussion of the Research Questions

In this section, I discuss the findings as related to the four research questions that guided this study. Findings were related to the foundational research question that guided this study on leadership qualities necessary for educational leaders to become successful turnaround principals. The foundational question this study attempted to answer was “How do middle school and high school turnaround principals achieve change?” Four sub-questions attempted to answer this question. The discussion of how the findings attempted to answer these sub-questions follows.
Research Question 1

The first research question of this study was “What structural changes do turnaround principals attribute to their success?” In an analysis of the data, two ideas surfaced: (a) cultural changes and (b) structural changes. Cultural changes refer to the belief system of the school. At the beginning of the turnaround process, the principals recognized the need to provide a belief system centered on the idea that all students could be successful. Structural changes refer to the daily schedule and the school environment.

In an analysis of the data for cultural changes, four causal conditions emerged: developing and communicating the mission and vision to all stakeholders, building an expectation of collaboration, creating behavior expectations for both the staff and students, providing accountability for effective instruction through frequent and relevant feedback, and utilizing data to drive instruction.

In an analysis of the data for structural changes, three causal conditions emerged: providing built-in time for collaboration by providing common prep times or creating professional learning communities within the school, changing the daily schedule to provide time for interventions, and providing a safe learning environment with the implementation of behavior expectations and higher visibility of the principal and teachers. The cultural and structural changes provided the platform for the principals to make significant changes required for a successful turnaround.

Creating a collaborative environment was crucial in the turnaround process. Teachers traditionally work in isolation and rarely have conversations with other teachers about curriculum and instruction. The participants provided designated time for collaboration where teachers were forced to start dialoging with their colleagues. These
conversations were uncomfortable and intimidating at first, but the teachers quickly appreciated these opportunities to share ideas with each other. The creation of a culture of collaboration also eased the apprehensions of principal walk-throughs and informal and formal observations. The teachers started valuing the feedback they were receiving as a result of these observations. A high level of accountability was created in a nonthreatening way that led to significant academic growth for the students.

Building a system of interventions into the school day was crucial in increasing academic performance. Ideally, the participants advocated for the classroom teacher to provide these interventions; however, realistically, each school had students who were several grade levels behind their peers. These students required more intensive interventions. Providing them with an additional intervention class was the best solution to catch them up with their peers.

Providing the staff and students with a safe learning environment was a top priority of the participants. They implemented behavior expectations for the common areas and classrooms. Participants and teachers became more visible around the school while creating a friendly and safe environment.

Another structure that had to be developed was establishing behavior expectations for the adults. At the beginning of the turnaround process, the teachers had developed a defeatist attitude because of the low performance of their students. They were working hard, the results did not change, and in some cases, they continued to get worse. The participants worked diligently to eradicate these attitudes and replace them with attitudes of hope and cooperation and a belief that all students should have access to quality instruction and the opportunity to learn at high levels.
Research Question 2

The second research question of this study was “What leadership traits do turnaround principals identify as important to their roles?” The participants exhibited several leadership traits. In an analysis of the data, five causal conditions emerged: communicator as one who uses frequent and varied methods (i.e., email, face-to-face, text, telephone), collaboration by providing built-in time for small group dialog, decision-maker being both inclusive and exclusive as the situation warrants, compassionate in their interactions with others and referring to the school community as ‘their family,’ and persistent in their commitment to change, developing relationships, and improving instruction. Each participant had a very unique personality; however, the leadership traits they exhibited were very similar.

Communication was important to the participants. They valued face-to-face interactions with their staff. They tried to stop by every classroom each day to say hello to their teachers and students. They also recognized that teachers had different preferred methods of communication and were flexible in how they communicated with the teachers. They utilized email, text messages, and the telephone to meet the communication needs of each individual. They ascribed to the idea that over-communication was better than a lack of communication.

The participants valued collaboration and fostered a culture conducive to collaborating. They called upon others to help brainstorm solutions to problems that might hinder the turnaround process. They fostered and developed collaborative relationships with all stakeholders.
When making decisions, the participants tried to be inclusive whenever possible. They sought input from staff, students, parents, and community members. They understood that the success of the school impacted the entire community and valued the importance of all stakeholders in the decision-making process. They also understood that there were times when they were required to make decisions without input from others and were not afraid to make those decisions.

The participants developed a sense of community within their schools. They referred to the students as ‘their kids’ and became extremely protective of them. They considered the school community to be a family, while at the same time recognizing that families are not perfect. By investing in relationships, the participants were able to encourage others but could also have difficult conversations when necessary.

The participants spent a great deal of time nurturing and developing relationships with their teachers. They identified those teachers who could lead the way, those who willingly followed, and those who remained resistant to any change. They capitalized on the teachers who were on board and spent time mentoring and talking with those who continued to be resistant. When the resistant teachers and their resistant attitudes became toxic to the turnaround process, the principal had no choice but to replace them.

Rapid and effective change was essential in the turnaround process. The participants realized that it was not a smooth process and that corrections needed to be made along the way. They remained committed to the process and were persistent in staying focused on the mission and vision guiding the process. Such persistence was evident in the participants’ commitments to making their schools successful. They did
not like the label of failing school and challenged themselves, their staff, and their students to perform at high levels to dispel that label.

**Research Question 3**

The third research question was “What previous leadership experiences prepared these individuals to become successful turnaround leaders?” The participants all came to their principalships with extensive experiences in education. In an analysis of the data, four causal conditions of their experiences emerged: (a) classroom teacher, teacher leader serving as mentors, department leaders, and school improvement committee members, (b) district committee members serving on curriculum committees, and (c) assistant principal serving under effective principals. For all the participants, this was their first principalship. They believed their previous experiences, collectively, impacted them in their roles as turnaround principals.

The participants drew upon their previous experiences to become effective principals. They had a comprehensive understanding of effective instructional strategies and could provide their teachers with guidance. Through their experiences of serving on district level committees, the participants gained a broadened view of the entire organizational structure. This larger view served as a guide to his or her own school organizational structure. It was also important to understand how each school and its ideals meshed with the district’s organizational structure.

Serving as an assistant principal provided an opportunity to glean ideas from an acting principal. Often, these principals became mentors to the participants offering guidance in the beginning days of the turnaround process. In order to become effective principals, the participants had to be able use these mentoring relationships as guides.
rather than a crutch. They had to be able to assimilate their experiences into their role as a turnaround principal and use what was good and weed out what was not good for their schools.

**Research Question 4**

The final research question for this study was “What do turnaround leaders believe their role should be in the turnaround process?” The participants identified themselves as visionary leaders. It was important that they communicated with all stakeholders, the mission, and the vision of the school.

The participants made quick and necessary changes at the onset of the turnaround process. They made structural and cultural changes to the school environment including increased instructional time, built-in collaboration time for teachers, an expectation of collaboration, increased emphasis on utilizing effective instructional strategies. Once these changes were implemented, the participants remained committed to monitoring and evaluating the changes making adjustments as needed.

Providing structures and supports was fundamental in creating an environment where students felt safe, valued, and respected. Data-driven decisions were made with the best interest of the students in mind. Building relationships was important, making it easier to have difficult discussions when necessary. Equipping teachers with the tools necessary to be more effective educators was crucial. Continuously monitoring classroom practices and providing timely, constructive feedback to the teachers was essential. Participants felt pressures to increase student achievement; however, they did not become reactionary but rather approached the turnaround process methodically,
always referring to the data and making decisions based on what was best for the students.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative grounded theory study was to understand leadership traits used by educational leaders to turn failing schools around. In this chapter, I begin with a summary of the study. I then discuss the significant findings as related to the six hypotheses. Next, the practical implications and limitations of this study are addressed. Finally, I discuss recommendations for future research.

Summary of Study

The phenomenon of turnaround principals has gained much attention in the past decade. The Race to the Top initiative of 2009 provided a framework of accountability for teachers, principals, and district leaders. As a result of this initiative, the academic performance of the students directly impacts not only teachers, but principals as well. Once a school is identified as a persistently low achieving school, the principal must be replaced with an effective turnaround principal. These turnaround principals are charged with taking a persistently low achieving school and turn it into a successful school in a short amount of time. Districts are struggling to find proven turnaround principals because of the recency of this concept. Also, little is known about the leadership qualities necessary for principals to successfully turn failing schools around (Murphy, 2009; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008).

Many theories have been developed over the past century to describe effective leadership practices including Transactional Leadership, Transformational Leadership, and Distributed Leadership. These leadership theories are discussed further in Chapter Two. While these theories have been adequate in describing trends in educational
leadership, none can sufficiently explain the recent phenomenon of the turnaround principal (Harris & Chapman, 2004; Kowal & Hassal, 2005; Leithwood et al., 2010). Current research in the United States is focusing on elementary school turnaround principals (Candelarie, 2009; Hickey, 2011, Leithwood et al., 2010) with minimal discussion of middle school and high school turnaround principals.

The purpose of this study was to describe leadership traits used by educational leaders to turn failing schools around. This study attempted to discover how turnaround principals employed the leadership qualities identified, through the experiences of the participants, to elicit a successful turnaround. For the purpose of this study, leadership qualities were defined as both inherent and learned leadership traits and skills. Secondly, the study provided insight to principals about the leadership qualities necessary to be an effective turnaround principal should they encounter that possibility in the future. Finally, it provided guidance to school districts regarding desired leadership qualities to look for when faced with hiring a turnaround principal.

The foundational research question that guided this study on leadership qualities necessary for educational leaders to become successful turnaround principals was: How do middle school and high school turnaround principals achieve change?

Sub-Questions:

1. What structural changes do turnaround principals attribute to their success?

2. What leadership traits do turnaround principals identify as important to their roles?

3. What previous leadership experiences prepared these individuals to become successful turnaround leaders?
4. What do turnaround leaders believe their role should be in the turnaround process?

While leadership qualities of effective principals have been the focus of many studies, little is known about what leadership qualities are necessary to effectively lead a school turnaround. Many programs and ideas have emerged in the past few years, however there is little empirical evidence to support their effectiveness (Murphy, 2009). Current educational and leadership theories cannot adequately explain the phenomenon of turnaround principals. A grounded theory study was necessary to build a representative theory from a qualitative analysis of the data. This qualitative grounded theory study focused on systemically developing a theory adhering to the procedures proposed by Corbin and Strauss (1990, 1998, 2008). The study did not begin with a set of hypotheses, but rather hypotheses emerged from a systematic analysis of the data obtained through social research (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 1998, 2008).

The participants of this study included four middle school and high school principals who had successfully turned around a failing school within the state of Michigan. Data was collected using three forms. First, one-on-one interviews were conducted with each principal using standardized open-ended questions allowing for follow-up questions. Three interviews were conducted by telephone and one interview was conducted face-to-face. Each interview was audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and member checked for accuracy. Second, principals and volunteers from their teaching staff participated in a survey of leadership practices. The principals completed a self-assessment while the teachers completed an assessment of their perceptions of the principals’ leadership practices. Finally, I observed the interactions between the
principals and their teaching staff during a regularly scheduled staff meeting. I recorded both descriptive and reflective notes during the observations using an observation protocol.

As interviews were transcribed, they were analyzed using the systematic procedures of Corbin and Strauss (1967, 1999, 2008) for grounded theory of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The leadership traits that emerged included the core category of visionary, and five subcategories of instructional leadership, situational leadership, communicator, collaborative, and persistence. The core category of visionary relates to all of the research questions of this study.

Data was analyzed using the systematic procedures of Glaser and Strauss (1967 1999, 2008), categorizing data into emerging themes using open, axial, and selective coding. A constant comparison of data helped delineate categories and focused future interview questions. Data collection continued until conceptual saturation was reached. As data was scrutinized and coded, one core category and five sub-categories emerged. Within each sub-category, attributes were identified. A theoretical model was developed around the core category and sub-categories.

**Significant Findings**

The purpose of a grounded theory study is to derive a theoretical model to describe the phenomenon being observed. The theoretical model and resulting hypotheses of the leadership traits used by educational leaders to turn around failing schools were formulated as a result of grounded theory methodologies. As the data was analyzed and categories emerged, I formulated hypotheses for the foundation of the theoretical model. The six hypotheses formulated as a result of this study explain the
leadership qualities necessary for educational leaders to become effective turnaround principals.

The first hypothesis was that turnaround principals are visionary. “All other things being equal, the visionary leader will produce greater step change and higher growth” than non-visionary leaders (McKeown, 2012, p. 8). In a discussion about corporate turnarounds, Riggio (2006) stated, they “are successful partly because of the work of their founders and subsequent leaders but mainly due to their visionary and transformational culture” (p. 131). “Too many turnaround plans fail to recognize that strong, competent leaders are needed to inspire cultural changes, establish strategic focus, and drive decisions” (Robinson & Buntrock, 2011, p. 6). Successful turnaround principals communicate a clear educational mission for their schools and make decisions based on accomplishing that mission (Lezotte & Snyder, 2011). Successful school turnarounds begin with the turnaround principals re-culturing the school by establishing and communicating their vision for the school (Duke, 2004; Leithwood & Strauss, 2009; Pappano 2010; Tucker, Salmonowicz, & Levy, 2008; Whitaker, 2003).

Stein (2012) discussed the importance of creating a sense of urgency at the onset of the turnaround process by stating:

Teachers and staff at failing schools fully understand their predicament. Unfortunately, many of them have become comfortable with failure or mediocrity. Instilling in them a sense of urgency is imperative. The leader is responsible for ensuring that everyone understands the school’s purpose, goals, and objectives. They need to know why they come to work each day and the positive difference they make in the lives of their students. (p. 53)
Visionary leaders bring hope and inspiration through innovative and creative solutions. The vision of turnaround principals is central to all decisions made within their schools. They develop a mission and vision centered on what is best for students. While increasing academic achievement is the primary focus of the school, turnaround principals also recognize the need to provide a culture where everyone feels safe, valued, and respected. Most importantly, they are adept at effectively communicating their mission and vision to all stakeholders.

The second hypothesis was that turnaround principals are instructional leaders. “It takes leadership for a principal to question a teacher whose methods of teaching don’t result in the students’ understanding and knowing the subject” (Finkel, 2012, p.54). Increasing student achievement is vital to the turnaround process and principals are acutely aware of the pressures from the state, district, and community to accomplish this in a rapid timeframe. Quality instruction is key to a successful turnaround. Turnaround principals need to hire quality teachers. To make significant academic gains, the most effective teachers should be reassigned to work with the most at risk students (Pappano, 2010; Whitaker, 2003). Huberman et al. (2011) demonstrated in their study of strategies utilized by turnaround principals, “the importance of the principal being in the classrooms, doing walk-throughs, and providing ongoing feedback to teachers” (p. 13).

Turnaround principals require teachers to implement effective, best practice instructional strategies in the classroom. They develop a system of supports for teachers who are not proficient at using effective instructional strategies. Finally, they monitor the teachers and provide timely and relevant feedback by conducting classroom walk-throughs, informal observations, and formal observations.
Hypothesis three was that turnaround principals are situational leaders. Turnaround principals recognize the diversity of their staff, whether ethnicity, gender, age, or experience. “The staff and teachers of failing schools are often paranoid; they hear or see things that aren’t happening. Rumors abound, and gossip is the main form of communication in the building” (Stein, 2012, p. 54). Successful turnaround principals learn to work with their staff and teachers to assuage fears and doubts. They recognize the individual needs of the teachers and are adept at prodding them in the right direction (Pappano, 2010; Stein, 2012; Whitaker, 2003). Leithwood and Strauss (2009) said that “[t]he schools in [their] study experienced a dramatic change in the nature and quality of their capacity development efforts” (Leithwood & Strauss, 2009, p.28).

Effective turnaround principals have the patience and tools to identify the varying personalities and quirks of their staff members and know how to extract the best from them. They are capable of assessing a situation and making a quick decision if necessary. Turnaround principals provide encouragement to their staff, but are also not afraid to confront staff when it becomes necessary.

The fourth hypothesis was that turnaround principals are communicators. “The effective principal is a communicator—a genuine and open human being with the capacity to listen, empathize, and connect with individuals” (McEwan, 2003, p. xxx). Stein (2012) discussed the importance of turnaround principals communicating clearly and frequently to their staff and teachers. Communicating the turnaround plan and expectations to all stakeholders was vital to the success of the turnaround initiative (Robinson & Buntrock, 2011; Tucker et al., 2008)
Turnaround principals utilize every opportunity to communicate their vision with all stakeholders. They make every effort to touch base with their staff members each day. They use varied methods of communication (i.e., email, face-to-face, telephone, notes). They are visible leaders interacting with staff and students throughout the day. They hold fast to the idea that over-communication is better than not enough communication.

Hypothesis five was that turnaround principals are collaborative. “The principal needs explicitly to encourage and support collaborative educational goals and ensure that adequate resources are allocated for their accomplishment” (Farmer, 2007, p. 59). Effective turnaround principals placed an emphasis on collaboration. They recognized the value in allowing teachers the opportunities to share instructional ideas and strategies with each other. They built a culture in which it was safe to collaborate and provide the time necessary to accomplish this task. (Huberman et al., 2011; Leithwood & Strauss, 2009; Tucker et al., 2009; Villavicencio & Grayman, 2012). Villavicencio and Grayman (2012) found “formal structures for mentorship and collaboration were strengthened by frequent opportunities for informal sharing” (p. 27). They went on to say, “Overall, there was a shared sense among these teachers that they could easily find support from another teacher and that their skills were enhanced by the formal and informal opportunities to learn from their colleagues” (p. 28). “To foster greater collaboration, principals employed a number of specific practices, such as the creation of a common planning time to be used for grade-level learning and vertical training” (Tucker et al., 2008, p. 25).

Turnaround principals create a culture of collaboration. They provide a designated time within the school day for teachers to collaborate with their colleagues.
Turnaround principals share the decision-making process as much as possible; however, they also realize that there are times when they have to make decisions without the input of others.

The sixth hypothesis was that turnaround principals are persistent. School turnaround “is marked not by orderly implementation, but by altering a lot at once and being willing to step in and change—and change again” (Pappano, 2010, p. 3). Tucker et al. (2008) found that “[p]rincipals described an exhausting combination of efforts to identify and address student academic needs” (p. 25). They further concluded, “It was clear that principals were trying a broad range of strategies that have been found, or are alleged, to be successful for low-achieving students” (p. 25). Successful turnaround leaders are committed to the change necessary for their school to overcome the failing status. They continue to build rapport with staff, teacher, students, parents, and community members, recognizing that it takes the collective community to make sustained changes (Leithwood & Strauss, 2009; Tucker et al., 2008; Villavicencio & Grayman, 2012). Robinson and Buntrock (2011) discussed the importance of creating a long-term implementation plan to guide the turnaround process. Leithwood and Strauss (2009) reiterated the need to remain committed to the turnaround process and make necessary adjustments along the way.

Rapid and effective change is essential in the turnaround process. Turnaround principals realize that it is not a smooth process and that corrections will need to be made along the way. They remain committed to the process and are persistent in staying focused on the mission and vision guiding the process. Their persistence is evident in their commitment to making their schools successful. They do not like the label of
failing school and challenge themselves, their staff, and their students to perform at high levels.

**Study Limitations**

The sample for this study was delimited to middle school and high school turnaround principals within the state of Michigan. Studies focusing on elementary turnaround principals have previously been conducted in the U. S. (Candalerie, 2009; Fawcett, 2008). A case study of the leadership practices of a high school principal was conducted in the state of Texas (McLain, 2009). The focus of these studies was more on the practices and processes employed by turnaround principals rather than the leadership traits of these men and women. Delimiting the participants to middle school and high school principals was a useful addition to the current body of literature. Delimiting the participants to the state of Michigan served a two-fold purpose. First, Michigan did not have a systemic structure to guide priority schools through the turnaround process until the passing of Michigan House Bill 4787 of 2009. The sense of urgency for school turnarounds reached a pinnacle with the enactment of this bill in 2010. Secondly, delimiting the participants to the State of Michigan was also a matter of convenience for the researcher.

Delimiting the participants to middle and high school principals provided a more manageable study in regards to interviews, transcriptions, observations, and data analysis. As a result, the study was limited in its scope. A larger number of participants with a greater cross-section would have broadened the knowledge gained from this study. The newness of the concept of turnaround principals in Michigan significantly impacted the number of available participants for this study. Similar studies conducted in other
geographic areas or at other levels may further the knowledge base about this phenomenon.

Limitations to this study included a limited number of available participants, a lack of generalizability of the findings, and the use of self-reported data. This study focused on middle school and high school principals in the state of Michigan. The first priority schools in Michigan required to implement a turnaround plan were identified in August 2010. Not enough time has elapsed for many of these schools to exhibit significant gains in academic growth.

The number of available participants was limited by the recency of required school turnaround efforts in Michigan and the fact that turnaround efforts in Michigan have focused on Title I schools, which excluded many high schools because districts chose to use their Title I funding for early childhood interventions. The invited principals who declined to participate cited the demands of their principalship as the number one reason. Replication of the study will need to occur at the elementary level before the results can be generalized. A quantitative study will also need to be conducted to verify the generalizability of the results across all grade levels and geographic regions.

The limitation of self-reporting presents issues of objectivity. The participants and their staff may complete the survey with subjectivity. Personal opinions may hinder answering the questions honestly. Also, principals may be hesitant to be truthful about some of the struggles and failures they experienced throughout the turnaround process for fear of presenting themselves in a negative light.

Another limitation of this study was the voluntary nature of the participants. This resulted in some groups being under-represented. Only one participant was a middle
school principal. Only one of the participants was female. And, the only ethnicities represented were African American and Caucasian.

Initially, the Michigan Department of Education Office of School Reform and Intermediate School Districts were contacted seeking the names of principals who had successfully led their schools through the turnaround process. This resulted in zero responses. An analysis of the persistently low achieving school reports from 2010 to 2013 was conducted. Schools showing significant gains were identified. Letters were then sent to the identified school districts seeking permission to invite the principal to participate in this study. These requests resulted in a low response. After repeated attempts to obtain these permissions, only six districts responded with a permission letter. From these permissions, the six principals were invited to participate in the study, with only four agreeing. Again, several failed attempts were made to contact the nonresponsive principals. One reason for the low district response may have been the hesitation by district superintendents to put any more burdens upon the already overwhelmed turnaround principals.

Another limitation of this study is the newness of the concept of turnaround principals in Michigan. The participants have only been turnaround principals for three to four years. While early results of their leadership show them as effective leaders, the longevity of their leadership is still unproven. I had originally intended to include ten to 15 participants representing a cross-section of middle and high school turnaround principals. A closer look at the persistently low achieving school reports from 2009 to 2013 as reported by the Michigan Department of Education School Reform Office
indicated that there were only 12 schools within the state meeting the requirements to be a participant in this study.

**Practical Implications**

Two categories of practical implications emerged from this grounded theory study investigating the leadership qualities necessary for educational leaders to become effective turnaround principals. The first implications are for principals faced with turning around a failing school. The second implication is for districts faced with hiring or mentoring a principal charged with leading a school turnaround.

**Principals**

This grounded theory study has implications for middle and high school turnaround principals. Principals hired to be turnaround principals are inundated with the urgency to make a rapid turnaround. These pressures come from the state, district, school, and local community.

Principals want practical solutions for many of the situations that arise throughout the turnaround process. The theoretical model presented in this study can serve as a guide of important leadership traits necessary for turnaround principals to exhibit. Being visionary is the core trait of successful turnaround principals. They can focus on nurturing the traits they already utilize and further develop the traits in which they are weak or lack altogether. If a principal is not visionary, becoming a successful turnaround principal may be difficult.

**Districts**

This grounded theory study has practical implications for school districts faced with turning one of their schools around. This study has provided a theoretical model of
leadership traits exhibited by successful turnaround principals. At the beginning of every school turnaround, districts are faced with the decision of replacing the principal. If the principal has been in the position for more than two years, he or she must be replaced. If the principal has been with the school for less than two years, the district must decide if the principal is capable of leading the school through the turnaround process or if he or she should be replaced.

When it becomes necessary to hire a principal to lead a school through the turnaround process, districts are often faced with a quick timeframe in which to accomplish this task. Recruiting and screening candidates is often a difficult task. The theoretical model developed in this study can assist districts in the hiring process by providing guidance in the leadership traits necessary for a principal to be an effective turnaround principal. The core quality districts should seek in potential candidates is whether or not they are visionary leaders. This can be ascertained in a pre-screening process, saving all parties involved time and effort in the hiring process. Other questions that should be asked in the screening process include a) Are they instructional leaders? b) Are they situational leaders? c) Are they communicators? d) Are they collaborative? e) Do they have a history of persistence when faced with adverse conditions?

**Recommendations for Future Research**

While this study described the leadership qualities necessary for four middle and high school educational leaders in Michigan to be effective turnaround principals, replication of this study will need to occur at the elementary level before the results can be generalized. A quantitative study will also need to be conducted to verify the generalizability of the results across all grade levels and geographic regions.
This grounded theory study focused on developing a model to represent the leadership qualities utilized by the participants to turn their schools around. The participants were at varying stages of the turnaround process; however, all of their schools had made significant gains in student achievement. A broader study including turnaround principals with long-term results of success would need to be conducted to further add to the knowledge base of effective leadership qualities.

Because of the newness of turnaround principals in Michigan, a longitudinal study should be conducted. This type of study would be able to examine the long-term results of turnaround principals. Early results of successful school turnarounds are promising, but maintaining high levels of achievement for a sustained period of time has yet to be proven.

**Conclusion**

“School turnaround—this adrenaline-charged moment that we are presently in—is about rapid and dramatic improvement not just in test scores but also in culture, attitude, and student aspirations” (Pappano, 2010, p. 3). School accountability has dominated reform efforts in the United States educational system since the late 1950s. Over the past several decades, school reform efforts have evolved and adapted to meet the needs of an ever-changing global society. The implementation of Race to the Top required persistently low achieving schools to implement one of four turnaround plans. Principals in persistently low achieving schools, if in the job more than two years, had to be replaced with turnaround principals. Because of the newness of this concept of turnaround principals in Michigan, there is not a pool of potential leaders to draw from to
lead failing schools. A review of the literature illustrated this problem across the United States.

Little is known about the leadership qualities necessary in a principal to successfully turn a school around. The purpose of this qualitative grounded theory study was to understand leadership traits used by educational leaders to turn around failing schools and develop a theoretical model to describe these qualities.

Research Question One asked what structural changes turnaround principals attributed to their success. Four middle and high school turnaround principals participated in this study. They identified both cultural and structural changes that were necessary in their turnaround efforts. The cultural changes included developing and effectively communicating the mission and vision, implementing an expectation of collaboration among staff, creating behavior expectations for staff and students, and providing accountability for effective instruction. Structural changes included providing built-in time for collaboration, changing the daily schedule, and providing a safe learning environment. Research Question Two asked what leadership traits turnaround principals identified as important to their roles? The leadership traits the participants identified as important to their roles as turnaround principals included communicator, collaborative, decision-maker, compassionate, and persistent. Research Question Three asked what previous leadership experiences prepared these individuals to become successful turnaround leaders. The experiences they attributed to their success included classroom teacher, teacher leader, district committee members, and assistant principal. Finally, Research Question Four asked what turnaround leaders believed their role should be in the turnaround process. They believed their role was to be a visionary leader, guiding the
school through the turnaround process and keeping the best interest of the students at the center of all decisions.

I used the systemic grounded theory open, axial, and selective coding methods to analyze all data. From this data analysis, I generated a theoretical model to describe the phenomenon that emerged from the data. The core category of the theoretical model was visionary. The sub-category leadership qualities that emerged included instructional leadership, situational leadership, communicator, collaborative, and persistent. Effective turnaround principals are, first and foremost, visionary. They develop and communicate a shared mission and vision to guide the school through the turnaround process. The sub-category leadership qualities are utilized to support them as visionary leaders. Turnaround principals do not become reactionary but rather approach the turnaround process methodically, always referring to the data and making decisions that will support their shared vision for the school.
References


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Appendices

Appendix A

Sherri Irish
6931 George St.
Brown City, MI  48416
810-346-2555 ~ sirish@liberty.edu

Dear Educational Leaders:

I am currently a doctoral candidate at Liberty University working toward an Ed.D in educational leadership. As an educational leader, I am interested in ensuring the academic success of all students. I am particularly interested in the role of educational leaders in ensuring the academic success of students. The purpose of this study is to discover how middle and high school principals have effectively turned around failing schools. This study will focus on capturing and describing their experiences in order to assist other educational leaders faced with turning around failing schools.

I am asking your assistance in identifying principals who meet the following criteria for this study:

1. Have successfully led a middle or high school through the turnaround process.
2. Are currently serving as a principal within the state of Michigan.

If you know of any principals who meet this criterion can you please share their names and contact information below. I will contact them once I am in a position to begin collecting data.

**Suggested Participants:**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
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Thank you for your support in this research study. Please contact me at 810-300-3962 or via email at sirish@liberty.edu if you have any questions about this study.

Sincerely,

Sherri Irish
Appendix B

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

March 17, 2014

Sherri Irish
IRB Approval 1740.031714: Leadership Qualities Necessary for Educational Leaders to Become Effective Turnaround Principals: A Grounded Theory Study

Dear Sherri,

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.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

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

Sincerely,

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

(434) 592-4054

Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971
Appendix C

Invitation to Participate – Building Principal

Dear Principal,

I am currently a doctoral candidate at Liberty University working toward an Ed.D in educational leadership. As an educational leader, I am interested in ensuring the academic success of all students. I am particularly interested in the role of educational leaders in ensuring the academic success of students. The purpose of this study is to discover how middle and high school principals have effectively turned around failing schools. This study will focus on capturing and describing your experiences in order to assist other educational leaders faced with turning around failing schools.

With your experiences turning around a failing school, I am hoping you will consider volunteering to be a participant in this study. You will be able to withdraw from this study at any time.

Data collection for this study will include the following:

- I will ask you to participate in a leadership inventory survey.
- I will ask your staff members to participate in a leadership inventory survey.
- I will interview you about your experiences as a turnaround principal.
- I will make informal observations of your interactions with staff members.

All interviews will be transcribed verbatim and you will be asked to check them for accuracy. All data will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of all participants and their schools. Once data has been collected, it will be analyzed, organized and categorized. You will have an opportunity to read the final report before it is submitted.

There are no known risks associated with participation in this study. By participating in the study, you are contributing to the understanding of how principals become effective turnaround leaders.

I hope you will consider participating in this study. If you are interested, please complete the attached consent form and email it to sirish@liberty.edu or send it via mail to S. Irish, 6931 George St, Brown City, MI 48416. Thank you for your consideration. Participants will be selected from among applicants who have submitted a completed consent form. You will be notified upon your acceptance.

Sincerely,

Sherri Irish

(Creswell, 2007)
Appendix D

Informed Consent Form - Principals
Leadership Qualities Necessary for Educational Leaders to Become Effective Turnaround Principals: A Grounded Theory Study
Sherri Irish
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study to understand how educational leaders turn around failing schools. You were selected as a possible participant because you have been a principal in charge of a school that has experienced a successful turnaround. 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 Sherri Irish, Liberty University School of Education Doctoral Candidate.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to understand leadership traits used by principals to turn around failing schools.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in one-on-one interviews with the researcher. All interviews will be audio taped. Interviews will be approximately 1 hour in length. Follow-up interviews may be necessary to provide clarification. Follow-up interviews will be approximately 15-20 minutes in length.
2. Participate in faculty meetings observed by the researcher. The observation will last the duration of the faculty meeting. Initially, one observation will be conducted at each site. Additional observation will be conducted if necessary.
3. Complete a Leadership Practices Inventory. The inventory should take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

Risks to you are no more than you would encounter in everyday life.

There are no direct benefits for participating in this study. Indirect benefits of participation in this study are the opportunity to add to the limited knowledge of leadership traits of successful turnaround principals. The benefits of this knowledge may include better hiring practices of districts.

Compensation:

You will not receive any compensation for participating in this study.
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.

Pseudonyms will be used whenever referring to individuals. All data will be stored in a locked cabinet and/or a password protected computer file. Audio recordings will be erased once a verbatim transcript has been completed and verified for accuracy by the researcher and participant. All other data will be destroyed after the mandatory retention period expires.

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 Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships. Any audio recordings of principal participants will be erased should the principal choose to withdraw from the study.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Sherri Irish. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at 810-300-3962 or via email at sirish@liberty.edu. You may also contact my Liberty University faculty adviser, Dr. Mark Lamport, at malamport@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@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 agree to participate in audio-taped interviews. (Principals only) All audio-tapes will be erased once a transcript has been created and verified for accuracy.

Signature: ______________________________ Date: ________________

Signature of Investigator: _______________ Date: ________________

IRB Code Numbers: 1740.031714

IRB Expiration Date: 03/17/15
Appendix E

Sample Interview Transcript

Describe your experiences leading up to becoming a principal.

I spent 16 years in the classroom as a teacher, 18 years coaching high school athletics—a number of those as a head football coach. During my teaching experiences, I served in a number of leadership capacities, such as I was the building chair for school improvement in two different high schools in two different communities. I chaired a couple of different school improvement teams which would report to that building chair. The chair typically reported directly to a principal. I was involved at the district level on numbers of committees, such as curriculum, advisory. I’m just going through my mind, I’m doing kind of a visual of my resume which I haven’t updated in five years. I was on a technology committee. I was on a safety committee. I’ve been on crisis committees that were district wide, though essentially served in a number of teacher leadership capacities. Was involved in some contract negotiations. Teacher leadership, 16 years of classroom instruction, 18 years of coaching. And then of course, educationally, I earned a master’s degree in educational leadership.

How have your previous experiences prepared you to effectively turnaround your school?

To be honest, I don’t know that they did. I don’t think anyone gets into school administration with the thought or the belief that they are going to have to turn around a school. So, how did it prepare me? That’s a tough question. I don’t know.

Well, here are some follow-up questions that may help. What mentors impacted you along the way?

Okay. Certainly, as an assistant principal I had the opportunity to work under a highly effective principal in a very high achieving school. And, in that role as an assistant principal I served a dual role in the district, I was also grades 6-12 curriculum director. And that prepared me a great deal because I came into the principalship with a significant understand of instructional practice, curriculum and had already spent considerable time reading and understanding what educational research is telling us about effective teaching and how students learn. That probably prepared me well for a turnaround because I think ultimately when you look at turnaround there are many, many facets of school that impact learning. But, the number one factor that impacts learning the most, and anyone you read in research, you know, people like Robert Marzano and some of those folks, will tell you that of all the research they have studied, still the number one impact is effective teaching. That has more impact on learning and achievement than anything else; and so, as a principal I had a reasonably extensive background in best practices. And a decent understanding of what effective instruction looks like. That helped me because I could have conversations with teachers about, you know, the conversations would often go like this: You’re a great person, and you work really hard. You are very
committed to this profession, and you love kids; however, the practices you are engaging in are not the most effective. And here’s what I always likened it to with my staff. I’m a do it yourself person, a DIYer, I like to, it’s a stress reliever to cut wood and build things and remodel. And over the years I’ve gotten decent at it. But I know this; I’m only as good as the tools I have. And I told teachers, teaching is much like a carpenter’s tool belt. You have a variety of strategies in that tool belt you use. And some of you are still trying to tighten screws and loosen screws with screw drivers. And you don’t realize there is tool out there that is a little more expensive, but it’s 10 times as effective. And, it should be in every one of your tool belts and it’s not in some of yours and that’s called a cordless drill. And, that’s what I liken it to. You know, you’re still using strategies that are effective, but they’re not the most effective—they’re not the most efficient. And, teachers need to have leadership that shows them what’s more effective and provides them with resources and tools to be more effective teachers. So having that background, I believe helped me in that aspect of the turnaround because that’s really the bottom line. Any time anybody asks me, “What’d you do?” We did a lot of things, but the one thing that we did that I think was the most critical thing is, you know, we changed the way we teach. And our practices today are much different than they were five years ago. And our teachers would tell that to anybody. They wouldn’t even bat an eye. They’d say, yeah we teach differently. And, they teach more effectively.

What successes and failures did you experience along the way?

We’ll do successes first. Success. I think the number one success that we had in the process was we have really improved the culture among our staff in this building. There were people who I call blockers that were always, you know, the last to change. They were always those that could find flaw with something. They always wanted to know why. When you explained why, they still wanted to know why. And, some just flat out wouldn’t verbalize it but by their actions would say I’m not doing this. You know, I’ve seen this before this isn’t going to work, I’m not doing it. The culture change in this building—we don’t have any blockers anymore. There’s no such thing in this building. I had departments that frankly, had not ever sat down and talked to each other about instructional practices. I had math teachers who had never sat down with their science teachers and talked about instructional practices. In other words, poor collaboration. People were forced to collaborate. I created structures and expectations. And there were people who were very skeptical about that and very unwilling. But, after our first year of building into our day, time to collaborate, I had veteran teachers saying it was the best thing they’d ever done because they learned more from other teachers than all their years combined of teaching in isolation. So the culture among the staff had to change. The second thing that had to change was the environment in our building. We are a rural school with a urban population. We used to be high white composition demographically--we’re 51% white and 49% minorities. We also have a
university, a liberal arts university, in our small community that has a world-wide student population. And, depending on the year, I can have anywhere between 30 and 40 different nations represented in my school. And some of those students, English is their second language. So, those are some of the challenges that we deal with and we have some environment issues, student culture issues. We had to fix those. Those have been fixed. And, then the third success we really had was that over a three year period, we seen tremendous improvement in our achievement, to the point where, you know, we went from being a school that was persistently low achieving to one that was recognized as a reward school.

Failures. Boy, I know there’s things that haven’t worked well. You know, we’ve not had the greatest success with schedules. You know, we had a schedule in our high school; we were doing a four by four schedule block. And, we don’t think that schedule was a good schedule for the kinds of learners we have. And my contention was that there’s too many gaps in instructional sequencing—math, science, world languages. And that type of a schedule you may not be in a math class, well you won’t be in math all year or science all year. And there could be as much of a gap as 12 to 14 months before your next course in the sequence. So that was a failure. We had to change schedules. That was probably the biggest one—making the schedule change.

**What educational research or theories do you ascribe to?**

Do I personally ascribe to?

*Yes.*

Wow. I don’t know how to answer that question because I don’t have a specific philosophy. I guess if my philosophy as a leader, as an educational leader, my belief is that my primary role is three things: to provide an environment that is safe; that’s orderly; and, that’s free of disruptions and distractions to learning as possible. And everything that I do as an educational leader should ultimately be in support of creating that kind of environment. I think if you do that well, then I think a lot of things take care of themselves. And, I think any school that does those 3 things highly effectively, there’s good teaching and good learning that’s going on and the achievement will follow. I don’t know what philosophy of education that is; I just know that that’s my primary role as an educational leader. I know that there’s different philosophies out there. I’ll be honest, I don’t ascribe to any of them. I believe what I just told you. I mean I read a lot of research. I don’t know if you’re familiar with ASCD, it’s a national organization; I’ve been a long time member. I’m looking at a bookshelf right now that’s got three shelves of ASCD books. I’ve got over 100. I haven’t read them all. I read parts of many of them and many of them I have read. I try to stay well versed on best practice. I try to stay well versed on educational research. And, you know, there’s people I have read and I’ve listened to that have been very helpful informing what I believe are important factors that I have to consider to be an effective leader. But, I don’t really ascribe to a philosophy to be honest with you.
Okay, fair enough. In what ways do you consider yourself to be an effective principal?

Well, I have a really good teaching staff but that makes me look effective. But I think that there’s a couple of things that mark what I believe are my leadership style. One, I know colleagues and college professors have laughed at me, but, I believe in servant leadership. And, I’m telling you in my case it works. It doesn’t mean you do everything, you can’t. Leaders don’t. You have to lead and if you’re trying to do everything it’s kind of like blah to live. Your organization and your people are only going to grow to the level of your capacity to do. So, it’s not the type of servant leadership where you’re doing everything for people. It’s the type of servant leadership that can have a tough conversation with a staff member that typically might create a barrier or wall in your relationship and you can go up to that staff member two days or three days or a week later and put an arm around them, physically put an arm around them, and tell them how much you value them and how much you appreciate what they do. I think that’s important because if they think, I mean it’s about relationships. It’s the foundation for everything we do in teaching and learning. If you’re building walls all the time between you and parents and you and students and you and staff, you’re going to spend a lot of time tearing those walls down. And so my belief is you don’t allow the walls to be constructed in the first place. You tell people, that hey this is a tough conversation for me to have with you but I have to have it. Because if I don’t have it, you’re not going to get better and our organization is not going to get better. And so we’re going to have the conversation. And you may disagree with me and you may become frustrated with me. You may become angry with me. I’m okay with that, I understand. But, what I do as a leader is I’m going to go out of my way to make sure that kid, that parent, that teacher knows that for me it’s all about my role in this organization and it’s not about my personality, my character. My heart still loves them. I still care deeply about them. And, I’ll show that with my behavior and actions. And so that’s part of my leadership style. That’s part of that servant leadership I think is important. I also think to be an effective leader you have to be willing to make every tough decision that comes across your desk. If you avoid confrontation and conflict, you will never be an effective leader. I think the most effective leaders learn how to deal with it and I think I’ve been blessed with some skills where as much as I dislike handling, I don’t like handling confrontation 27 years into education any more than I did my first year. It just, it’s never fun, it’s just not. It’s not part of our human nature. I don’t know anybody who loves dealing with conflict and confrontation. But your effectiveness as a leader is completely dependent on how well you manage conflict and how well you manage confrontation. And what the end result is. I think I’ve been blessed with some gifts to manage that part of my leadership. You have to be willing to make every tough decision that you know, they don’t even have to come across your desk, you have to figure out what they need to be and you have to make them because if you don’t make them, the organization is not going to continue to grow and be effective. Your school’s not going to be the best school it can be. Those are a couple of things as I think about my leadership that would probably characterize who I am.
Would these leadership qualities be as important or different if we were talking about you as a turnaround principal?

No. I don’t believe that my leadership style has changed. I believe my focus has changed but as far as the way I lead, I really don’t lead any differently through a turnaround process than I did before that. And, I was only principal here for two years when we were identified as a PLA school. And, a lot of things, a lot of the change we were required to make as part of our redesign plan we had already implemented my second year here. Because when I was hired, I was hired with the understanding that there were things that needed to be fixed in this school. And, I was hired on the understanding that I had the skill set, the drive, and the willingness, to go about fixing those things. So we were already trying to fix some things prior to being a PLA school.

Okay, well you’ve already answered my next question but I’m going to try to break it down a little bit further. And the question is, how would you describe your leadership style and I would be interested to know what you think your personal qualities are and your leadership qualities.

Okay. Personal qualities and sometimes I think a person’s strength can sometimes become their weakness if you don’t maintain balance. But, I care a great deal about people. It’s important to me to communicate with people. I have to have face-to-face communication frequently. I am big on praise and encouragement. But I’m also learning that I have to be bigger on constructive feedback because praise and encouragement doesn’t always, what it does is it makes a person feel good and it helps them understand their worth and value to the organization and to the leader, but it in no way tells them what they have to get better at so they can continue to get more effective in their role. And so, you have to be able to balance that with constructive feedback. And, I’ve understood probably through this turnaround process how critical the feedback piece is especially with teachers. You’ve got to give them honest feedback and you have to give them a plan and or support and ideas on how to make those changes and improvements. You have to be willing to say, “Here’s what I believe you need to do to get better. You need to come up with a plan on how to do that. And then tell me how I can support that and what kind of resources you need whether it’s my time, whether it’s materials, whether it’s training, whether it’s whatever it is.” That’s part of my role. I think sometimes leaders tell people what they need to do to get better at something but they forget that the person needs the support and follow-up to get better. And then, you have to be willing to give them feedback as they’re going through the process of changing and improving. I generally consider myself a very compassionate person. Again, it goes back to I care deeply about people. You know, I refer to the students in my building as my kids all the time. They’re like my own children. And, you know, it’s just the way I feel about it—I’m a heart guy. But sometimes your heart gets in the way of your brain and then that’s where the balance has to come. You can’t let your heart trump your brain ever. Because your brain will tell you, hey you have an issue to deal with and your heart will say but you love that teacher, it’s your favorite teacher. You can’t confront that teacher about that situation they’ll take care of it themselves. And the reality is they won’t. Its human nature they won’t take care of it themselves. And so, your brain has to
take over and say to your heart, hey look you got to have a conversation, you’ve got to
deal with the situation but you can still deal with it in a way that is constructive and it
doesn’t tear people down, you frame it in a way that helps them understand—it’s
coaching. You know, it’s how I coached my kids. You know, my best football players
sometimes would, they would have to endure my greatest wrath because I expected a lot
from that kid. And when he didn’t get there, sometimes that message was a tough
message. But I always followed that up with hey you can do this. I know you can
because I’ve seen you do it. You have the capacity and the ability to do it and with my
help you’re going to get there and when you do you’re going to be a highly effective
player. And, you’re going to be pleased with the results that you see. And that’s part
of the message you have to package to the teachers, too. It’s just human behavior.

Leadership characteristics. I don’t know. I’m reflecting for a minute. I’ve always been a
highly organized person. But, if you’re running a high school, it’s just impossible to ever
be organized. You’re just kind of dealing, I mean within a half hour you are dealing with
six different issues that are nowhere near related to one another. And, it’s kind of like
this, when I first started my first administrative job at a high school as assistant principal,
I was a great big Franklin Planner person because I had always used them. And it’s
funny because I kept my Franklin Planner for my first year kind of because it was a diary.
And, the first three weeks of school I would have the big long to do lists and those lists
by the fourth and the fifth, and the sixth and the eighth week of school were getting
smaller and smaller. And finally, by the second or third month there was no to do list
because I had never gotten to any of those things. It’s just that well, not at school; you do
those on non-school time. I mean while you’re in school as an administrator you’re just,
there’s so many things coming at you so fast that you’re just managing all of those
situations. There’s no time to close the door and say, okay I’m going to work on these
three things on my to do list. It’s just not realistic. So, you know, I still try to be
organized at least to a degree but not the way I used to be, you know. And obviously you
have to have a system of keeping track and managing programs and initiatives and tasks,
but you find different ways to do that. So, I think I’m pretty organized at that. Other
leadership qualities, I’m pretty collaborative. But, I also believe this about leadership,
I’ve learned this and I think Marzano talks about it in some of his research, that the most
effective leaders are really situational leaders. You can say that, you know, I’m a
collaborative leader or I’m task oriented but he would contend that the best, most
effective leaders are really situational because your leadership style has to have some
flexibility in it. There’s times when you can’t be totally people oriented. And I’ll give
you an example, because it was part of our turnaround process. Our schedule was killing
us. And, I could prove that it was because of our achievement. But part of that process
was I couldn’t really prove it. To me it was logic and the logic was if a kid’s not in a
math class all year round and there’s gaps between math instruction are they going to
retain those skills? I think some kids do but I think the majority of human beings don’t.
And the proof in the pudding was our geometry teachers kept complaining to me about
how their colleagues who taught algebra in this building weren’t doing a very good job.
And I said, “Why are you talking to me about this? Why don’t you talk to them?” They
were spending six and seven weeks reteaching algebra. And I said “Duh! My whole
point guys and you’ve been fighting me tooth and nail about this. It’s just human nature,
if you don’t use a skill you lose it.” And, that’s what was happening. I could not get any
support, not even a single teacher in this building would look at a different schedule. And part of the reason was, in a four by four block, you teach three classes a day for 90 minutes a day, you get a 90 minute prep period and you teach three courses. And, for some teachers that was the same course three times a day. It is a fabulous schedule for teachers. And, I was proposing we go to a seven period day. So, they would be teaching six classes out of seven and go from 90 minutes, you know, conference periods to 50 minutes. And, that was a tough pill for them to swallow. That was not time to be collaborative. I couldn’t get any consensus; I couldn’t get any movement whatsoever. I’m convinced we’d still be trying to figure out what kind of schedule to be on four years later. I finally had to say look, we’ve got until this date and you guys tell me what you want to do and if I don’t have a clear consensus on what you want to do as a staff, I’m making the decision. I made the decision because they couldn’t reach any consensus. A lot of them didn’t even want to talk about it. That’s situational leadership. There’s times where you can’t always be collaborative. There are other times that you can. And, I believe this about decisions, that’s part of my leadership style. I say this all the time to teachers, there are decisions that you will make every day; there’s decisions we will make frequently; and, sometimes there are decisions I will make. And to me that’s what decision making and leadership is all about. That’s situational leadership. You can’t always apply one style of leadership to every decision and every situation that you have to deal with.

_Great. This is the last question on leadership style and I’m kind of turning it around on you a little bit. How would others describe your leadership style? And, that would be with personal qualities and leadership qualities, as well._

And, I have a pretty clear understanding because I have a good relationship with most all teachers here that I know what they’d say because they tell me. In their words, I have their backsides. I’m very supportive of them. They know that. They know that I am a strong decision maker. And, they know I will make decisions that I think are best for the school. And, even when it might not be the popular decision to make, but they also know that I look to them for input on most all decisions. They know that I am a person who deeply cares about people, including them, and parents, and students. They would say that I’m a reasonably visible leader. That I’m in hallways, I’m in classrooms quite a bit. Now, as of recent I haven’t been but in my five year tenure, I’ve spent considerable time in classrooms. When I send teachers to any type of workshop or training, if it’s local or if it’s done on site, I’m with them. I go to every training session I send teachers to. If I send more than three teachers to something, I go with them. And they know why, it’s not, you know, I’m not holding them accountable it’s because I want to know what they are learning so I know how to support them best. And, not only that, it gives me opportunities to speak to them and talk with them about instruction and curriculum. And, I would otherwise not have those opportunities. So, those are things I think probably, in my mind that they would say about me. They probably have some things to say that aren’t that nice either but I’m okay with that.
And you wouldn’t want to say those!

No of course not, unless you want me to!

The next set of questions are actually about the turnaround process and you’ve talked a great deal about it already. I’m going to give you an opportunity though, if you want to elaborate any more. The first question is describe how you turned around your school.

We started with the classroom and we just took a hard look at what we were doing and we tried to do it in a way that didn’t disenfranchise people but, hey, are there things we can do better. And, again sometimes we were collaborative about that, sometimes we weren’t. So, a lot of it had to do with instructional practice. We really didn’t change a lot structurally in our school other than schedule. We worked on a lot of, you know, the cultural, environmental pieces. We’ve really worked hard on things like student behavior expectation. And, I’ve worked on professional behavior expectations with teachers because I think all of those are factors in getting a school turned around. I think, probably one of the biggest things we did was we learned what data to look at and how to use that data effectively. That wasn’t something this school had any interest in doing.

And, here’s one of the things I can tell you they wouldn’t like about me, there are certain, you’ve got certain decisions you just have to make. I can remember having a conversation with two of my teacher leaders two weeks before we were notified being a PLA school and we were talking about, they were helping me plan the agenda for the first staff meeting a week before school started. And, I was adamant that we needed, that I needed to talk about drop in achievement because it was a problem. And, they were adamant that if I was going to start the school year that way that I was going to lose people, lose credibility as a leader. I told them they were dead in the water wrong. And, we’re in the same county as [a large corporation] and I said, “Do you think [that corporation] never talks about their bottom line profit? You believe they talk about it. Do you think there are departments in that corporation that enjoy talking about profit? Probably not, because it impacts their jobs and what they do. But, they talk about it. They have to, it’s their bottom line.” I said, “Our bottom line right now in schools, we’re being held accountable for learning and the way it’s being measured is achievement. And it’s not up to you or me to decide if it’s being done fairly or not, we have to do it.” And I got very upset with those two people. And two weeks later that we were notified we were a PLA school. Best thing that happened because I didn’t have to talk about it anymore. Now they were willing to talk about it. So that’s been highly effective in our turnaround. It’s what data to use, creating opportunities for people to talk, to have conversation about data and how to use it effectively. And, that’s an ongoing learning process for us we’re still learning the most effective ways to use data. You know, I’ll be honest there’s data that we get I still don’t know really what to do with it but, we’re working through that.
Can you elaborate on what data you do look at?

We, when it comes to, we are looking at really three things. We look at achievement and learning data, that’s one pot; we look at behavior data, that’s another pot; and, we look at attendance data. And, attendance includes all kinds of things, you know, it’s daily attendance, it’s the tardies getting to class on time, it’s skipping, you know, anything attendance related. It’s school related absences, it’s, you know, how many things do we disrupt the day with, it’s all those kinds of data that we look at. The student behavior is pretty much we just look at expectations and we look at, you know, what kinds of behaviors are we experiencing. Are there significant differences by genders, by age, by ethnicities? We look at data that tells us, you know, what locations in our building do many of our, you know, behavior issues occur so that if we have supervision issues we’re fixing those. And, then learning and achievement data, we look at of course, the state assessment which everybody has to look at which includes the ACT. We have benchmark data that we use. Right now we’re using the Explore, PLAN, ACT as our benchmark in grade 9, 10 and 11. We also use MAP which is a NWEA product. We use the math and reading in 9th grade because it’s also used, it’s used grades 3 through 9 in our district. And then we also look hopefully at our own assessments. And so our teachers for the majority of their assessments, their interim assessments, we do a lot of pre and post testing. We have a data warehousing tool that they enter all those assessment into that gives them all kinds of neat reports to look at that helps them, you know, break down learning by the standards and by skill set. So, we’re at the point that if a kid fails algebra, we don’t put him in summer school for algebra. We put him in summer school to relearn specific skills within algebra. And, without the use of data, we wouldn’t be able to do those kind of things. And, we have a number of diagnostic tools that we use, too. We’ve got, you know, we’ve got better screeners. That’s really what the Explore, PLAN and ACT really just are screeners. Once we get a kid that’s red flagged, we’ve got other diagnostic tools that help us drill down to, for example, the kid’s got a reading problem, specifically what’s their problem, and how do we address that specific problem.

This is the last question, but it’s multi-part. What does a typical day look like in your school? And, here are the parts if you what to hear them first. What are your priorities? What are your challenges? And, how do you organize your day?

I don’t organize my day. I’m going to be honest. I’ll start and go backwards, I don’t. I can’t. There’s no way to organize my day. There’s too many things that come through my office that filter through my office. The one thing I do that I protect and absolutely won’t change unless it’s for the Superintendent, and that is classroom observations and walk-throughs. I put those on my calendar. Those are my priorities. I will not change those for anything other than the Superintendent. I will not change them for an angry parent. Fortunately I have two other building administrators that can deal with pretty much any crisis that comes up with students. But unless it’s a, you know, a reasonable emergency I don’t, that time is sacred. If I put it on my calendar, I don’t change it. So I guess that is probably how I prioritize my day. I’m not in classrooms every single day on a formal basis. I do, if I have, if I’m not in meetings most of the day, I do stop into every classroom. But I only have 31 teachers so it’s easy for me to do that. I poke my head
into every door just about every day. And, sometimes it’s just hey, you know, good morning, how’s your day been, that’s it. At least they know I’m there. They know I care about them, they’ve seen my face. I think it’s important that they know that you care about them. There’s days when I don’t do that because I’m out of district or I’m in meetings most of the day so I can’t do it every single day. But, most days I have, I’ve already done it today. I’ve been in every classroom, stuck my head in the door. Again, I can do that because I have 31 teachers. So that’s a doable task for me. You know, I was in a high school prior to this, we had 78 teachers, you can’t do that with 78 teachers. There’s no way. I don’t know, but other than that, there’s no organization to my day because I don’t know what’s coming through my door. I don’t know what’s coming on the phone. I don’t know what’s coming through my email. I’m not in my office much. I think that’s a characteristic of turnaround schools. I’m just not in my office much. I’m with teachers a lot. I might be meeting with parents. I do a lot of training and workshops with my staff. I either conduct them or I’m with them. So, that’s part of my day probably and it’s part of the organization of my day.

And, how about your challenges?

Challenges. It, everybody, it’s time. There just isn’t enough time in the day to do all the things that need to do and you want to do. The demands of the job. I don’t know how young people are effective principals because I’m 56, my kids are grown, they’re teachers, my wife’s an educator, you know, I’ve pretty much got all the time I need to commit to my job and I have to. I really don’t know how young principals manage family and marriages. I couldn’t do it; I really could not do it.

Okay. I would like to do just one follow-up question if that’s okay.

Sure.

I’m curious to know how your teachers have bought into the decision you made for your new schedule.

How they bought into it?

Do they like it now or has it, you know…

I think it’s mixed. I think, I believe, and I know this because some have said, some actually do like it. My most effective teachers hate it because it’s a 48 minute class period. And, if I were teacher, frankly, I would hate it. It’s too short of a period. But here’s what happened, we were on a seven period day and we were running 53 or 54 minute class periods and when we became a PLA school we had to lengthen our school day. So, we ended up having to add another period. So we are eight class periods that meet for 48 minutes per class period. It’s just not ideal. I know that but it was just what we had to do. It was the only thing we could make work. Some teachers have told me they like it others don’t like it. And, I’ve got two or three teachers that three times a year they complain about how much they hate this schedule. And, I tell them, hey, next year
we’ll be talking about a different schedule because it will be our last year being in redesign. And, because of some of the added costs that are involved with the schedule we will not stay in this schedule we’ll be in some different schedule. So, to answer your question, it’s mixed. Teachers who do labs hate it because it’s not, it’s not, you know, my chemistry teacher just pulls her hair out. She’s constantly, “Joe*, how do I do labs in 48 minutes?” I said, “If I knew Jill*, I’d tell you how, but, I feel your pain. I don’t know how.” You know, I said one thing you may have to do, and I know she does it because we’ve go some iPads, you may have to go to, you know, simulated labs that you get online so that there’s no prep work involved that the kids just watch, you know, watch the test or they watch the lab and they respond to it. And, you know, she’s had to do some of that.

Do you have an intervention time built into your schedule?

We don’t. We have intervention, specific intervention classes that are part of our course offerings. We currently have three different intervention classes for math. And what we do with our math kids who need intervention, targeted, we, what I call, double block them. So, we have kids who are in a regular Algebra 1 class but they’re also in an intervention class that’s giving them extended learning time over the same concepts. So, they get a double block of math. So we do that in math with algebra and geometry. We have one, two, three, four, five reading intervention classes and those are in grades 9, 10, and 11. And, we’ve targeted based on diagnostic testing specific skill sets that kids need to work on. And, then we have three classes that we call Academic Studies and the criteria to get into those, to be placed in those, is pretty simple: if you have two or more failures in the semester you’re automatically in Academic Studies. And the focus of that class is time management, organization, test taking, study skills, and there’s one more because it’s 5-pronged. And I have a really, really good teacher who teaches that class. She is really dynamite.

You would have to.

The first semester, that we taught that class, she had, we had 30 about 35 kids that were in Academic Studies. And these were all kids with two or more failures that previous semester. Some had four or five failures. That first semester, with her intervention for one semester, we had nine kids had zero failures. And I’m absolutely convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt, that wouldn’t have been the case without that class and her intervention. And those are really small classes; they’re less than 10 kids. That’s very individualized. So we don’t, we used to have intervention class time but you know what, it was too hard to monitor, too hard to keep people accountable, and I just don’t think it’s effective. When you’ve got 31 teachers and you’re creating intervention time, you’re assuming they’re all doing something effectively. And, the problem is you’re asking the science teacher to do reading, which they’re getting better at but that’s not what they’re trained in. If I had a kid who really needs reading intervention, I need a reading teacher teaching them. I need somebody that knows what the skills are, understands the most effective strategies to help that kid and then helps them. And, the other thing that we’re doing more of is we’re building more interventions right into, right into our classes. I
mean honestly we shouldn’t have to have separate classes and we’re going to begin weaning those out because our teachers are getting better at being able to, you know, provide those interventions right in the classroom.

*Do you use RtI?*

No. We used to use RtI. We use MTSS which is a, it’s probably RtI on steroids. It’s Multi-tiered System of Supports. We’ve gone through training on that and it’s ongoing. We’re on our third year of MTSS training. It’s very intense. We have consultants working with us. So, it’s pretty intentional stuff.

*Great. Okay, well, that is all that I have for questions for the interview.*

*Note:* *pseudonyms were used for all identifiers*
April 16, 2014

Sheri Irish
6931 George Street
Brown City, MI 48416

Dear Ms. Irish:

Thank you for your request to use the LPIs: Leadership Practices Inventory® in your dissertation. This letter grants you permission to use either the print or electronic LPI (Self/Observer or Self and Observer) instrument[s] in your research. You may reproduce the instrument in printed form at no charge beyond the discounted one-time cost of purchasing a single copy, however, you may not distribute any photocopies except for specific research purposes. If you prefer to use the electronic distribution of the LPI you will need to separately contact Marisa Kelley (mkelley@wiley.com) directly for further details regarding product access and payment. Please be sure to review the product information resources before reaching out with pricing questions.

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Best wishes for every success with your research project.

Cordially,

Ellen Peterson
Permissions Editor
Epetersen4@gmail.com

Appendix F
Appendix G

Invitation to Participate – Staff Member

Dear Staff Member,

I am currently a doctoral candidate at Liberty University working toward an Ed.D in educational leadership. As an educational leader, I am interested in ensuring the academic success of all students. I am particularly interested in the role of educational leaders in ensuring the academic success of students. The purpose of this study is to discover how middle and high school principals have effectively turned around failing schools. This study will focus on capturing and describing the experiences of your building principal in order to assist other educational leaders faced with turning around failing schools.

With your experiences working with a turnaround principal, I am hoping you will consider volunteering to be a participant in this study. You will be able to withdraw from this study at any time.

Data collection for this study will include the following:

- I will ask you to participate in a leadership inventory survey.
- I will make informal observations of your interactions with your building principal.

All data will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of all participants and their schools. Once data has been collected, it will be analyzed, organized and categorized.

There are no known risks associated with participation in this study. By participating in the study, you are contributing to the understanding of how principals become effective turnaround leaders.

I hope you will consider participating in this study. Should you choose to participate, please read the attached consent form and retain it for your own records.

Sincerely,

Sherri Irish

(Creswell, 2007)
Appendix H

Consent Form – Staff Members
Leadership Qualities Necessary for Educational Leaders to Become Effective Turnaround Principals: A Grounded Theory Study
Sherri Irish
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study to understand how educational leaders turn around failing schools. You were selected as a possible participant because you have been a staff member of a school that has experienced a successful turnaround. 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 Sherri Irish, Liberty University School of Education Doctoral Candidate.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to understand leadership traits used by principals to turn around failing schools.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in faculty meetings observed by the researcher. The observation will last the duration of the faculty meeting. Initially, one observation will be conducted at each site. Additional observation will be conducted if necessary.
2. Complete a Leadership Practices Inventory-Observer. The inventory should take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

Risks to you are no more than you would encounter in everyday life.

There are no direct benefits for participating in this study. Indirect benefits of participation in this study are the opportunity to add to the limited knowledge of leadership traits of successful turnaround principals. The benefits of this knowledge may include better hiring practices of districts.

Compensation:

You will not receive any compensation for participating in this study.

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.
Pseudonyms will be used whenever referring to individuals. All data will be stored in a locked cabinet and/or a password protected computer file. All data will be destroyed after the mandatory retention period expires.

**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 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 Sherri Irish. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at 810-300-3962 or via email at sirish@liberty.edu. You may also contact my Liberty University faculty adviser, Dr. Mark Lamport, at malamport@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@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.

**PLEASE RETAIN THIS FORM FOR YOUR OWN RECORDS.**

**IRB Code Numbers:** 1740.031714

**IRB Expiration Date:** 03/17/15
Appendix I

Sample Observation Notes

Sandra’s* secretary met me at the door and took me to Sandra’s office. Sandra extended her hand for a handshake as she introduced herself. She was very welcoming and even asked me to help her carry stuff upstairs to the staff meeting. It was staff appreciation week and she had brought donuts and yogurt to share with the staff. She was in the media center prior to the arrival of the staff and spent a few minutes talking with the students who were working in the media center. Once staff started arriving she welcomed each one and directed them first to the donuts and yogurt and then to the sign-in sheet and agenda. The following are a summary of the descriptive and reflective notes I made during the observation.

Personal Qualities

Descriptive

- As teachers trickle in she directs them to the donuts and yogurt
- Teachers are cordial with her
- She sits on the table top while teachers are entering the media center
- As teachers sit, she moves to a table that is closer in proximity to the teachers
- When she is ready to start the meeting, she stands with her hands in her pocket and smiles
- She comments that they will be having “honest and transparent” conversation about the data she presents to the staff (gap analysis by ethnicity and social-economic status)

Reflective

- The atmosphere is very relaxed
- She is welcoming and inviting

Leadership Qualities

Descriptive

- Speaks confidently in front of staff
- Uses humor while explaining professional development changes for the next school year
- Remained in the room and attentive while assistant principal presented behavior data to the staff
- Handed out the assistant principals presentation notes to the staff
- Deliberate in guiding discussions
- Allowed teachers to discuss noticings about the data
- Allows teachers to vote on school improvement meeting days and times for the next school year

Reflective
• Appeared engaged in the parts of the meeting she was not leading
• Engaged in friendly banter with the staff throughout the meeting

Leadership Role
Descriptive
• At 3:10 she is taking account of those present by department
• When giving an overview of the meeting she makes the following statements
  o “one sheet of paper at a time”
  o “one issue at a time”
  o “We’re in for a challenging year next year”
• 3:13 “ok, we’re going to start” talked about having a heavy meeting with a lot to share
  o “remember how you got through this year”
  o “my valley was March—my peak is right now”
  o She challenged the staff to reflect on the following:
    ▪ “What was your valley?”
    ▪ “What was your peak?”
    ▪ “What kept you at your peak?”
    ▪ “What pulled you out of your valley?”
• 3:20 assistant principal presents behavior data
• 3:30 she shares gap analysis data and asks staff to focus on the achievement gap
  o Allows staff to discuss the data at their tables. She walks around to check on discussions
  o She give a 30 second warning to end discussions
  o “What did you notice?”
  o “we know it’s a national problem but what are we going to do to address race and socioeconomic gaps?”
  o “How much more can we do?”
  o Discusses the financial situation of the district
    ▪ School of choice will be open to grades 9, 11, and 12 to bring in more money
• 4:00 her portion of the meeting concludes so teachers could work on small group work
• She stays in the media center and answers questions from individual or small groups of teachers
• 4 teachers remain after the 4:10 required time to discuss scheduling changes for the next school year
  o she is adamant that she will not make the decision—the teachers will have to make the decision about continuing with the current schedule are make adjustments to eliminate the daily advisory period
  o if teachers decide to keep the advisory period they will need a plan of how they will use that time effectively
  o she assures them that advisory is a non-evaluation period and is hands-off for her unless problems arise

Reflective Notes
The staff members were Caucasian with a balance of males and females. Sandra is African-American, the only African-American administrator within the school district. Race does not seem to be a factor in the principal/staff interactions. The conversations are focused on what’s best for the students and the school as a whole. The data indicated that there is a large achievement gap between the Caucasian and African-American students. Sandra challenged the staff to start considering how to rectify this gap. She did not make excuses and did not accept excuses from the staff. She stated it as fact and expected all would be involved in closing this gap.

She had a confident air about her in the staff meeting yet seemed approachable.

*Note:* pseudonyms used for all identifiers
### Appendix J

#### Sample Coding Process

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<th>Consolidated Themes</th>
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159
communication style
community
constructive feedback
cooperation
cooperative learning
craziness that occurs
creating opportunities
creative

crisis committee
cultural
culture
goal-driven
goal-oriented
inclusionary
leader of the pack
make decisions
motivate
navigator
organized
problem solving
resourceful

servant leader

situational leader
visible
curriculum advisory
data
data
decision maker
demands
department leaders
go-getter

heart guy
honest
laugh
listen
nonjudgmental
open
personable
relationship
sincere
supportive
transparent

Decision Making
Decision Making
Decision Making
Decision Making
Focused
Focused
Focused
Focused
Focused
Focused
Key People
Key People
Key People
Key People
Leadership Qualities
Leadership Qualities
Leadership Qualities
Leadership Qualities
Leadership Qualities
Leadership Qualities
Leadership Qualities
Leadership Qualities
Leadership Qualities
Persistent
Persistent
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Persistent
Persistent
Personal Qualities
Personal Qualities
Personal Qualities
Personal Qualities
Personal Qualities
Personal Qualities
Personal Qualities
Personal Qualities
Personal Qualities
Personal Qualities
didn't help

School Improvement
district administrator

School Improvement
drive

School Improvement
job embedded PD

School Improvement
educational research

School Improvement
encouragement
energetic
enrichment
environment

School Improvement
ethical
expulsion hearings
fair
feel safe
flexible
flexible
focus
focused
focusing
free of disruptions
mission
frustrating energy
good learning
good teaching
great superintendent
hard to focus
highly effective principal
honest
honest feedback
individualized action plan
instructional leader
instructional practice
intervention
investigation
it's just non-stop
key people
kids
Leadership Qualities
literacy instruction
master's degree
math coach
modeling
motivational speaker
my team
number sense
ongoing learning process
optimize learning
orderly
PBIS
people into those categories
persistent
personable
Personal Qualities
plan
principal
principal
professional behavior expectations
professional learning communities
purpose
questioning
Read 180
reading
recognizing
resources
respected
safe
safety
safety committee
schedule
schedule
school improvement plan
school improvement teams
self-initiators
skill set
strong culture
structures and expectations
student behavior expectations
student-centered classrooms
student-centered learning
support
support
teacher
teacher asks me to be in the classroom
teacher leadership
teacher leadership
teacher-centered buildings
team decision
team decision
technology committee
there's always something
tight and loose
time
tough decisions
trust
unimportant
video club
visionary
visionary team
visual learning
walk-throughs
wife and boss
willingness
World Café
writing program

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<th><strong>Significant Themes</strong></th>
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**Significant Themes**

Collaborative
Communicator
Instructional Leader
Persistence
Situational Leader
Visionary

163
## Appendix K

### Audit Trail of Contacts

#### Permission to Invite Principal - District Contact Log

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
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<th>Follow-up communication</th>
<th>Permission Letter Received</th>
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#### Invitation to Participate - Principal Contact Log

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#### Data Collection Points

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