

LEADERSHIP PRACTICES AND CAPABILITIES THAT WORK BEST FOR
MIDDLE SCHOOL ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS: A MULTIPLE CASE
STUDY

by

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A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty
of
George Mason University
in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree
of
Doctor of Philosophy
Education

Committee:

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Date: _____ Spring Semester 2013
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

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Doctor of Philosophy at George Mason University

by

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Master's in Education Leadership
George Mason University, 2007

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Spring Semester 2013
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Fairfax, VA



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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Darryl Gaines, and to my son, Andrew Michael Gaines. Thank you for always believing in me and understanding my need to strive for the best. Without your support, patience, encouragement, and confidence in my abilities, I would not have achieved my dream. Thank you, I adore you both!

Thank you also to my family back home in Scotland: my mum, dad and sister, who have always believed in my crazy ideas and supported my drive and ambition. Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to my late grandmother, Janet Dunn Macpherson. I hope I have made you eternally proud!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with great appreciation and admiration that I thank the following people for their tireless assistance to me during this dissertation process. This dissertation could not have been accomplished without the support from a number of people. I would like to express my appreciation to them.

First, I would like to thank Dr. Susan Bon, my dissertation chair. I will truly miss our coffee conversations. You helped me to set and stick to deadlines, gave excellent feedback, and constantly encouraged me along the way. Thank you, also, Dr. Joseph Maxwell and Dr. Ana Taboada for your support and guidance. Within Prince William County Public Schools, I would like to thank the following people for their amazing assistance and encouragement: Rae Darlington, Deputy Superintendent; Dr. Pat Puttre, Associate Superintendent for Middle Schools; John Miller, Stonewall Middle School Principal; Dr. Karen Giacometti, former Beville Middle School Principal; Rita Goss, former Parkside Middle School Principal. I would also like to thank the many teachers from the three schools who participated in the focus groups for their participation in my case studies. I appreciate their time and willingness to be so honest and forthcoming. Without their input this study would not have been possible.

It goes without saying that I also owe a debt of gratitude to my family and friends who have weathered these five years with me through courses and research. They have

been abundantly patient and supportive. To my husband and son: I am very excited to venture through life and finally spend the quality family time that was interrupted throughout the past few years.

To my friend and colleague, Dr. Athene Bell, who began the journey with me and was a constant source of support, intellectual stimulation, and patience. Without your continual encouragement and personal sacrifice to spend time working with me, I don't believe I would have been able to work through the dark days. To Dr. Amanda Wilder and Dr. Melissa Saunders, for both keeping me grounded in reality and providing much needed study breaks over the phone and in person. Your friendship and support over the years has been greatly appreciated. To "Robin" Amber Montgomery, and to Betsy Yanello, both of you have given me daily encouragement over the last two years and this has been inspirational. I sometimes feel that you both believe in me more than I believe in myself. Thank you for your unwavering support and encouragement.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone who I have worked with over the last few years and who have supported me while I have juggled work, school, and research. Everyone's patience and support has been greatly appreciated and I am humbled to know I have so many people in my life who love and believe in me. Thank you all!

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ABSTRACT

LEADERSHIP PRACTICES AND CAPABILITIES THAT WORK BEST FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

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George Mason University, 2013

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The role of schools, and more specifically school principals, is central to the goal of addressing the literacy needs of adolescent English language learners (ELLs). School principals must have the instructional knowledge base and leadership practices as well as the instinctual leadership capabilities to lead their staff in effectively educating all students, but especially ELLs. Effective principals instill a sense of urgency with staff and place literacy at the forefront of school initiatives and programs. The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate and understand the leadership practices and capabilities of three middle school principals who successfully addressed the literacy needs and achievement of ELLs over a three year period. A multiple case study design was used to explore “how” effective principals achieved results. The study examined and described the leadership profiles, practices and capabilities, as well as investigated the perceptions, views, and knowledge of the three middle school principals. Interviews

were conducted with each principal as well as focus group interviews with teachers who worked in each school building. For purposes of sorting and categorizing data, a framework was developed anchored in theoretical and research-based leadership literature. This framework was used as a theoretical and organizational guide to aide in the identification of emerging themes. A cross-case analysis was conducted that revealed five dominant themes based on similarities across all three case studies. Though the three principals were very different, both in their personalities, professional experiences, and backgrounds, all three of them focused on developing a culture of shared leadership, emphasized teamwork, and believed in developing teacher leaders.

The data strongly suggest that principals should consider a more integrated model of leadership such as distributed leadership while developing strong and purposeful relationships with all faculty, staff, students and parents in order to encourage collaboration and develop teacher leaders. All decisions should be student-focused and driven by data, with a goal of enhancing instructional knowledge and practices. School districts need to support principals in making student-focused decisions. Providing appropriate training and support of principal's is essential. Responsive educational leadership will prepare future principals to face the realities of public education with courses such as scheduling, data analysis and data-driven practices, developing the school mission, vision, and climate focused on meeting the needs of all students and striving for continuous improvement.

1. INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

In today's society, more than any other time in history, adolescents are being required to read and write at a highly proficient level both in and out of school (Cook & Babigan, 2001; Goldenberg & Coleman, 2010; Ogle & Correa-Kortun, 2010; Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), 2009). Advanced levels of literacy are not only essential for job performance, but also for completing daily tasks (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999).

The inability to successfully read and comprehend print and non-print material at a basic level is directly related to adolescents' lack of success in schools (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; August & Shanahan, 2006; Batalova, Fix, & Murray, 2007; Goldenberg & Coleman, 2010; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; SREB, 2009). The overall educational impact of poor literacy skills on adolescents' academic achievement is substantial, as they are faced with challenges in all content areas, specifically the challenge of comprehending academic text and vocabulary, which sometimes results in teachers being reluctant to or simply unable to provide literacy support (Harmon & Kenney, 2004; Kieffer & Lesaux, 2010). As a result of these challenges, many struggling adolescent readers appear to their teachers to be unmotivated, lethargic, or inattentive in class (Zhou, 2003). Consequently, it is possible that some students and teachers are likely to accept failure as an inevitability. In addition, adolescents may rely on coping mechanisms, such as disruptive or

defiant behavior, to help them handle the daily rigor and demands of school (Brozo, 1990; Bushman & Haas, 2001). This lack of success with reading can lead to disinterest in academics and eventually places adolescents at risk of not completing high school (Strong, Silver, & Robinson, 1995; cited in McCombs & Barton, 1998).

The numerous challenges faced by many struggling adolescent readers also impact the academic success and literacy development of adolescent English language learners (ELLs). Adolescent ELLs are also described as language minority (LM) students. Kieffer, Lesaux, and Snow (2006) defined LM students in their paper prepared for the Civil Rights Project Conference:

We define LM students as those who come from a home where a language other than English is the primary language spoken. Many of these students are fully bilingual in the home language and English; some are more proficient in English than in the home language; and some speak no English at all upon school entry (p. 2).

Adolescent ELLs are not a monolithic entity. They come from many different countries and cultures, speaking a wide range of different languages and dialect. In the United States, these students speak more than 350 languages (Hopstock & Stephenson, 2003). Given the challenges of learning more than one language, ELLs especially need solid literacy instruction in middle school. Although middle school is a challenging time for all adolescents, many challenges are unique to ELLs in light of the increased cognitive and linguistic demands, the need to participate in advanced course content, as well as the focus on developing and improving their work knowledge (Calderon & Minaya-Rowe, 2011).

This study is based on the principle that leadership practices and capabilities of middle school principals must evolve to specifically meet the unique challenges of the changing demographics of students in the 21st century. Schools today are required to provide a high quality of education that is accessible to all students regardless of their race, gender, ethnicity, native language, or religious beliefs. Therefore, school principals are expected to acquire a vast array of leadership practices and capabilities (Gantner, Daresh, Dunlap, & Nesom, 1999). School principals are believed to be vital to leading highly effective schools (Daresh, 1991; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). In order to provide schools and students with highly qualified principals, leadership programs and district recruitment departments need to consider that all school principals should have the instructional knowledge base as well as the instinctive capabilities to lead their staff in effectively educating all students (Olsen, 2010; Williams et al., 2010).

In schools where there are large numbers of English language learners, the school principals need to develop a clear understanding of these students' unique needs and strengths, both academically and culturally. Principals must be familiar with appropriate strategies to enable them to provide ELLs with effective, measurable instruction that will improve all literacy achievement (Goldenberg & Coleman, 2010). Likewise, principals need to understand how ELLs' learn and consider all external and internal factors that may negatively impact learning, given that not all ELLs are the same and individual educational profiles must be considered when selecting appropriate modes of instruction (Goldenberg & Coleman, 2010; Williams, Hakuta, & Haertel, et al., 2007). Additionally, school principals

should be equipped to support teachers and students in their academic endeavors and literacy achievement (Goldenberg & Coleman, 2010; Williams, et al., 2007).

Researchers, as well as educators and policy makers, when discussing the current state of literacy in the United States, seem to agree that literacy for all needs to be education's main priority. Blokker, Simpson, Whittier (2002) affirmed that "... principals need to increase their level of commitment, work with their staffs, and reinforce literacy in their schools" (p. 7). Therefore, when researching how to best meet the needs of ELLs, it is important to examine schools and the principals who have shown sustained ability to successfully maintain high student literacy achievement, particularly with the ELL population. In order to understand how these schools are 'beating the odds,' it is important to examine the educational leadership profiles and organizational structures implemented by each school principal and identify any distinct personal leadership practices and capabilities (McDougall, Saunders, & Goldenberg, et al, 2007).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand how the leadership practices and capabilities of middle school principals address the literacy needs of English language learners (ELLs). This qualitative study investigated the perceptions, views and knowledge of three middle school principals who have positively impacted the literacy achievement of ELLs. Specifically, principals were asked to identify the leadership practices and capabilities that they attribute to the successful literacy achievements of ELLs in their respective schools. The theoretical framework supporting this study is based on the effective leadership research conducted by Kouzes and Posner (2002). The research design is a multiple case study that

includes interviews with each principal, focus group with teachers from each school, field notes, and memos. Underlying this study is the belief that an in-depth examination of leadership may contribute to the understanding of practices and capabilities that are likely or perceived to positively impact literacy skills of ELLs. The research has possible implications for school administrative leadership preparation programs, school districts, as well as policy makers who may be provided with meaningful and relevant information regarding the required skills of future school leaders as well as future research studies.

Research Questions

The goal of this study was to investigate and understand how these principals have addressed the literacy needs of ELLs. It is important that school principals are aware of ELLs' diverse needs and that they provide teachers with resources and supports that can be implemented to successfully meet all ELLs' needs. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine and describe leadership practices and capabilities of effective middle school principals that may potentially relate to literacy achievement, particularly literacy achievement of ELLs.

The primary research questions follow:

- (1) What leadership practices and capabilities do middle school principals believe positively impact the literacy achievement of ELLs?
- (2) What leadership practices and capabilities have middle school principals implemented that may have positively impacted the literacy achievement of ELLs?

Additional sub-questions include the following:

- (a) What challenges did each principal face when addressing the literacy needs of English language learners?
- (b) How did these principals acquire the knowledge and skills to understand the literacy challenges and needs of English language learners?
- (c) Why did the principals believe that the leadership practices and capabilities they adopted aided them in meeting the specific literacy challenges and needs of ELLs?

Summary

The role of schools, and more specifically school principals, seems to be central to addressing the literacy needs of adolescent ELLs. The need for all adolescents and specifically ELLs, as the research study is designed to address, to graduate high school fully literate is huge. Failure to accomplish this could have long-lasting and devastating economic and social effects, not just on the students themselves, but also on our society. Jobs in the 21st century require high-level literacy skills; therefore, if students are failing to graduate high school due to low literacy skills, they will not be able to compete in this ever-evolving job market. In turn, more and more young men and women, particularly ELLs, will be prevented from going to college, and will continue to work for minimum wages or even worse, not work at all. Therefore, school principals must have the leadership practices and capabilities to meet the needs of all students, but especially ELLs. Without the correct training, and on-going support, many school principals will continue to neglect and fail adolescent ELLs. School principals need to instill a sense of urgency in their teachers and place literacy at the forefront of all school initiatives and programs. Literacy and the literacy

needs of ELLs must be priorities in middle schools in order for all ELLs to receive the instruction and exposure needed to become confident, proficient, and motivated learners. This, coupled with principals having the leadership practices and capabilities necessary for addressing the specific needs of their students, may in turn result in all ELLs successfully graduating high school and possibly continuing on to higher education (Blokker, Simpson, & Whittier, 2002) and in turn successfully graduate high school and possibly continue on to higher education.

Operational Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms have been defined as follows.

Academic vocabulary: The vocabulary critical to understanding the concepts of the content taught in schools.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): A federally mandated requirement for all public schools in the United States of America that addresses the required academic progress in reading and mathematics that every sub-group (i.e., gender, race, disability, language minority) must obtain on a yearly basis as mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO): Virginia, under No Child Left Behind Act flexibility waivers granted by the US Department of Education, has established annual measurable objectives (AMOs) for reducing proficiency gaps between low-performing and high-performing schools. These objectives in reading and mathematics replace the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) targets schools were previously required to meet under the federal education law. The AMOs represent the percentage of students within each subgroup that

must pass Standards of Learning (SOL) tests in reading and mathematics in order to make acceptable progress over six years (Virginia Department of Education). Retrieved from http://www.doe.virginia.gov/federal_programs/esea/flexibility/faq_amo.pdf.

English language learner (ELL): A term used to identify heterogeneous populations of students who share specific characteristics. As used here, English language learner refers to a person who has a first (home, primary, or native) language other than English and is in the process of acquiring English. Specifically, an ELL is an active learner of the English language who may benefit from various types of language support systems.

Ethnic and racial minority: A group of people within a given national state whose style of life, language, culture and origin can differ from the majority population of the state or part of the state.

L1: The first or native language learned by a person.

L2: The second or new language learned by a person.

Leadership practices: A learned set of professional skills, routines, and habits that a school principal models throughout all of their interactions, decisions, and behaviors as a leader.

Leadership capabilities: The intrinsic knowledge, skills, and dispositions required for school leaders to be effective, which may include professional and personal values and beliefs.

Limited English proficient (LEP): Persons who are unable to communicate effectively in English because their primary language is not English and they have no developed fluency

in the English language (U.S. Department of Health and Human Resources. Retrieved from <http://hhs.gov/ocr/civilrights/resources/specialtopics/lep/>).

Standards of Learning (SOL): SOL assessments measure student achievement in English, writing, mathematics, science, and history/social science. Middle school students are assessed in English and mathematics in grades 3-8 and at the conclusion of certain high school-level courses. SOL tests in science are administered in grades 3, 5, and 8 and at the end of high school-level courses, and SOL tests in history/social studies are administered in grades 4 - 8 and at the end of high school-level courses. SOL tests in writing are administered in grades 5, 8 and 11. Some students may take tests at other grade levels based on the school's curriculum (Virginia Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/>).

These terms will be used and explained more thoroughly throughout the study.

Organization of the Report

This report is structured in seven chapters. Chapter 1 presents the introduction to the context of the study, the problem statement, and the purpose of the study, the research questions, and operational terms. Chapter 2 presents an overview of related literature and research to establish and support effective leadership practices and capabilities. The methodology and procedures used to collect and analyze data for the study are presented in Chapter 3. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 describe the three case studies. Chapter 7 provides a cross-case analysis of the three cases, as well as a comparison of the literature and possible revision of the theoretical framework. The final chapter presents a summary of the key findings of

the study, a discussion of the findings, implications derived from the findings, the limitations of the study, and recommendations for further research.

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Throughout the years, there has been much debate about the potential positive impact, explicit or implicit, that school leaders have on student achievement, although not specifically literacy achievement (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982; Heck, 1992; Hughes, 1999; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). In today's accountability-driven environment, school principals are mandated by their school districts, communities, as well as state and federal governments to ensure the success of all students who are educated in their schools. Given these demands on principals, it is important to understand what successful principals, who have sustained as well as improved student literacy achievement, have done and continue to do on a daily basis to promote student success. Are they effective because of their leadership style? Is this literacy achievement related to their chosen leadership practices? Is this literacy achievement due to their charismatic personality or their intrinsic leadership capabilities or aptitude? What sustains a principal's ability to continue to be successful in an extremely challenging and demanding arena, where the measure of academic success through standardized assessment keeps getting higher and higher, but the needs and demands of many students, especially students who are identified as special education, English language learners (ELLs), or as having a lower social economic status becomes greater and more challenging?

This study explores the leadership practices and capabilities of middle school principals who may potentially impact the literacy achievement, particularly the literacy achievement of ELLs. Within this review of literature, leadership will be defined and relevant studies that have identified different leadership theories that have been the foundation for building effective schools will be included. I will examine effective leadership, including types of effective leadership practices and capabilities, as well as characteristics of a successful school principal. Research on literacy in middle schools, particularly findings on adolescent struggling readers, will be presented. This research reveals the various academic difficulties of ELLs as well as the specific challenges and problems ELLs face with literacy. Additionally, characteristics of ELLs will be described. Finally, the focus will be on defining how effective principals address the unique challenges facing ELLs and identifying these principals' leadership practices and capabilities.

Leadership

What is Leadership? Who are leaders? What makes a person a leader? These are questions that have been discussed, researched, and analyzed for centuries regardless of whether the leadership role is in reference to a specific country, government, school, business, or organization. Based on the literature, there are many different definitions, theories and philosophies documented on the topic of leadership from as far back as Plato and Caesar to present day (Bass, 1981; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Leaders are individuals who “displayed high levels of persistence, overcome significant obstacles, attracted dedicated people, influenced groups of people toward the achievement goals, and played key roles in guiding their companies through crucial episodes in their history”

(Collins & Porras, 1997). Roland Barth (2001) defines leadership as “making happen what you believe in” (p. 446), while Burns (1978) defines leadership as “leaders inducting followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and motivations ... of both leaders and followers” (p. 19). Likewise, scholars portray leadership as the ability to interpret, provide choice, accomplish objectives, motivate followers, provide opportunities for collaboration and cooperation, and provide appropriate support from outside sources (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Yukl, 1994).

Similarly, there are potentially hundreds of definitions for school and educational leadership. As Bush (2003) states, there is “no correct definition.” Over the last fifty years, this definition has changed from stressing managerial and organizational skills to requiring that charisma, and inspirational and motivational aspects be added to the term. In the early 90s, Mitchell and Tucker (1992) described educational leadership “as a way of thinking, a sense of spirit founded in overlapping environments – our own, that of the profession, and that of the educational process itself.” However, by the early 21st Century, there was a move away from the leader as a solo entity to a more collaborative model. According to Williams-Boyd (2002), it is the “... collaborative process of engaging the community in creating equitable possibilities for children and their families that result in academic achievement” (p. 5). Regardless of whether the definition focuses on the individual or the process itself, the shared thread between all definitions of educational leadership is that the ultimate goal is to facilitate a common goal towards academic achievement for all students.

Leadership Theories

There are a multitude of leadership theories, or models, both in and outside of the educational world. Therefore, it is difficult to clearly define what leadership theory works best, and if there is in actuality a perfect leadership model. Many researchers and educators believe that leadership theories or styles are very contextual and situational, and that every school is different (Sergiovanni, 2001). On one hand, a school may have a strong, united and committed faculty, who works diligently to meet the needs of their students, but, on the other hand, a school may have a fragmented, unhappy and inexperienced faculty, who is barely able to report to work on time, let alone effectively educate or meet the needs of their students. When school districts are searching for a school principal, the needs of the specific school are an important factor to consider (Sergiovanni, 2001). One leadership style may not work for every school, as each school has its own issues, challenges and needs. For the purpose of this study, a few of the most influential theories in school improvement research will be examined. These theories are transactional leadership (Burns, 1978), transformational leadership (Bass, 1997; Yukl, 1998), instructional leadership (Hoerr, 2007; Smith & Andrews, 1989), and distributed leadership (Spillane, 2005).

The theory of *transactional leadership* focuses primarily on the managerial requirement for efficiently running a school (Huber, 2004; Webb, Neumann, & Jones, 2004; Zembylas & Iasonos, 2010). In the field of education, in addition to assuring the school runs smoothly, goals are clearly defined and fulfilled (Day, Harris, Hadfield, Tolley, & Beresford, 2003). The theory is a top-down model in that the principal takes full responsibility and control for the success of the school (Sergiovanni, 1990; Zembylas & Iasonos, 2010).

Sergiovanni (2001) describes transactional leadership as a form of bartering. “Positive reinforcement is given for good work, merit pay for increased performance, promotion for increased persistence... and so forth” (p. 136). It is important to remember that when a leader is transactional, they are clearly in charge and have a tight control over all their subordinates (Bass, 1997; Burns, 1978). *Transformational leadership* focuses more on the school leader as a visionary and goal-oriented leader (Webb, et al., 2004; Zembylas & Iasonos, 2010). Although it is similar to the top-down approach of transactional leadership theory, transformational leadership rests, not only on the school leader taking full responsibility for managing the organization, but also on his or her ability to encourage followers by inspiring and motivating staff to work together to achieve common goals. Transformational leaders believe that if their followers are fulfilled and committed to the work place goals, they will be motivated to achieve their full potential. Such leaders connect themselves and their followers to the same mission and challenge them to reach their potential (Bass, 1981; Yukl, 1994). Researchers have focused many studies on transformational leadership and its potential for positively impacting student achievement (Leithwood, 1994; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood, Jantzi, Coffin, & Wilson, 1996; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). For example, Leithwood (1992; 1994) and his fellow researchers have conducted extensive research on identifying successful leadership practices for principals working in failing schools. Throughout their findings, the theory of transformational leadership is a constant and prominent leadership theme.

Instructional leadership has become extremely popular in the educational field and literature (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). The role of the instructional leader is to

provide resources and instructional support to the teachers, communicate clear goals to the faculty, and be visible throughout the school and specifically in classrooms (Smith & Andrews, 1989). Traditionally, this model has been very leader-driven, with the responsibility for assuring that teachers are providing effective instruction falling on the shoulders of the school leader. It has been suggested that there is a link between instructional leadership and transformational leadership (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005).

Transformational leadership and instructional leadership are related in that both styles inspire and lead to increased efforts by members to benefit the organization as well as enhance their individual skills (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999). However, instructional leadership is distinct from transformational leadership in that it does not focus primarily on motivation or inspiration; rather instructional leaders seek to provide the necessary training, support and assistance to members in order to be able to foster the development of highly effective educators.

Finally, one of the most recent leadership theories to be introduced and developed in educational leadership research and literature is *distributed leadership* (Spillane, 2005), or what some researchers call *shared leadership* (Pearce & Conger, 2003), *team leadership* (Belbin, 1993; Northouse, 2012), or *democratic leadership* (Bass & Bass, 2008). The definition for distributed leadership is that “various functions are distributed to multiple individuals acting as leaders. These leaders can have formal or informal leadership positions (Spillane, 2006). It is essentially about sharing out leadership responsibilities (Hartley, 2009). It is important to note that distributed or shared leadership is not simply the task of dividing up a list of jobs or responsibilities to a group of individuals who then in turn work

independently (Timperley, 2005). In actuality, distributed leadership is driven by the understanding that all members of the team will work together on tasks, and that tasks will be distributed based on the need or problem, not on who is traditionally in charge or any internal hierarchy (Copland, 2003; Spillane et al., 2004). It should be noted that distributed leadership is not a theory or model that works in schools where there is no clear mission or vision. In addition, it does not work in schools where teachers and staff have no real buy-in to or ownership of the success of the school, but rather simply come to work because it is their job. As stated by Harris (2005), "...distributed leadership is about collectively and collaboratively constructing meaning and knowledge. It should provide opportunities to reveal and mediate perceptions, values, beliefs, information and assumptions" (p. 9). Distributed leadership fosters a mentality of teamwork and encourages teachers, parents, and support staff and school administrators to work together (Harris, 2005).

Unfortunately, there is no one leadership theory, model or style that will work for all schools. Each school's needs are too different (Sergiovanni, 2001). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, it is impossible to determine a particular leadership theory or model on which to base one or all of the case studies. It is important to examine the leadership practices and capabilities of each effective principal in order to and possibly determine if one or more leadership theories, or styles are visible as well as potentially identify if they, contribute to the overall success of the schools.

Leadership Practices and Capabilities

As stated by Kouzes and Posner (2002), "Leadership is not all about personality; it's about practice" (p. 13). Leadership practices, for the purpose of this study, are defined as a

set of professional skills, routines, and habits that a school principal displays throughout all of his or her interactions, decisions, and behaviors (Robinson, 2010; Smylie & Bennett, 2005).

In addition to leadership practices, a number of recent research studies have proposed the need for school leaders to not only exhibit effective leadership practices but to also display a number of key capabilities. It is important to be aware of the differences, even though they may appear to be subtle, between leadership practices and capabilities. As Robinson (2010) reminds us, “Evidence about effective leadership practices is not the same as evidence about the capabilities that leaders need to confidently engage in these practices” (p.2). In other words, practices are easier to define and observe in action, whereas capabilities are likely to be intrinsic characteristics that naturally motivate practices.

While it may be helpful to know and understand effective leadership practices for school principals, many researchers and educational experts believe that school principals must also have the natural ability, intrinsic knowledge and attributes to be able to appropriately facilitate effective leadership practices (Robinson, 2010; Smylie & Bennett, 2005). For the purpose of this study, leadership capabilities are defined as the intrinsic knowledge, disposition and attributes that school leaders need to possess to be effective (Robinson, 2010; Smylie & Bennett, 2005). Moss and Johansen (1991) outlined very clearly their beliefs in the distinct differences between leadership practices and capabilities when describing what they believed were important leadership qualities. Moss and Johansen stated, “Leadership is both a process (practices) and a property (capabilities). The process of

leadership involves directing the work of the teachers. The property of leadership refers to the common traits or characteristics shared by effective leaders.”

Kouzes and Posner (2002) conducted “The Leadership Challenge” research project in the 1980s. In this project, their goal was to determine the leadership competencies that are essential to getting extraordinary things done in organizations. While conducting their research, they interviewed thousands of leaders, all from various professions, and asked them to retell their “Personal Best” stories. Even though there were vast differences between all of these stories, Kouzes and Posner (2002) were able to determine that there were similar behaviors exhibited by effective leaders.

Although Kouzes and Posner did not separate their findings under the two separate titles of practices and capabilities, the distinction between these two terms emerges through their results, as well as in the Leadership Practices Inventory that they developed. In other words, their comprehensive study reveals a broad profile of an effective leader as being an individual who exhibits, learned as well as intrinsic leadership traits. For example, they identify five practices of exemplary leadership: a) model the way, b) inspire a shared vision, c) challenge the process, d) enable others to act, and e) encourage the heart. These are all competencies that on paper can be learned. However, when you read into each of their descriptors, Kouzes and Posner detail how these five practices can be accomplished. In their descriptors, they include the need for leaders to be able to navigate bureaucracy and model how to treat people. The ability to do this could be something that is learned, however, there is also a degree of intrinsic knowledge to treating people with dignity. Another example is their description of passionate and creative leaders who foster the organization’s vision.

Passion and creativity are not generally accepted as learned skills, but rather as inherent and internally driven traits. Therefore, even though Kouzes and Posner focus primarily on practices, the underlying assumptions are that individual leaders are also capable of employing the identified practices. Thus, in this present study, leadership practices and capabilities are examined separately.

Recent research on effective leadership practices has also suggested that leaders must not only exhibit similar leadership practices, but also have similar capabilities in order to be successful, particularly in schools with challenging student populations (Robinson, 2010). However, there is insufficient research to clearly support the distinction between practices and capabilities. In fact, as the following discussion reveals, research on effective school leaders has generally merged capabilities and practices, sometimes referring to these concepts as practices only or as characteristics (Robinson, 2010).

Leadership practices and capabilities of effective school principals. Research on effective leadership has outlined practices, not both practices and capabilities. The research has primarily focused on the impact of student achievement and literacy and reveals a number of leadership practices that are critical to school improvement efforts (Crawford, 1998). These leadership practices have similarities to the practices outlined by Kouzes and Posner and are identified as providing and understanding the need for timely and appropriate professional development (Model the Way, and Enable Others to Act) (Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Morgan & Clonts, 2008; Murphy, 2004), supporting quality instruction (Challenge the Process and Enable Others to Act) (Allington, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2002), and

communicating school mission and vision (Inspire a Shared Vision) (Alvy & Robbins, 1998; Houston, Blankstein, & Cole, 2007; Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

A key practice that has been identified as vital in all areas of education is the ability of the school leader to create or schedule time to have on-going, collaborative professional conversations between teachers, teachers and administrators, teachers and experts, etc. (Morgan & Clonts, 2008). This ties into the Kouzes & Posner's practice of 'Model the Way' in that the leader provides the structure and guidance to support and achieve goals as well as 'Challenge the Process' by possibly designing a school schedule that is not the 'norm,' but provides the teachers and staff with the time necessary to meet their goals (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). This on-going conversation provides the opportunity for principals to model the belief that talk clarifies and refines the purpose in our work with children (Morgan & Clonts, 2008). School leaders must strive to include as much authentic instruction and learning as possible in the time provided and not waste a moment with useless or incidental duties. In short, an effective leadership practice is to ensure that instructional time is maximized and not wasted (Murphy, 2004). Included in this practice is the belief that a teacher who is effective at promoting high levels of literacy is naturally going to also effectively exhibit a productive use of time. This productive use of time could therefore be argued as a potential key component to the teacher's ultimate success with literacy (Murphy, 2004). However, it should be noted that research also shows that devoting extra time to literacy instruction is necessary, but is not a sufficient practice on its own to improve the literacy achievement of at-risk students (Pikulski, 1994).

A powerful feature of effective schools that successfully improve students' literacy achievement, is the quality of classroom instruction (Allington, 2006). In order for this to happen, it is critical for principals to embed meaningful *professional development* into the school culture, as well as recognize and encourage teachers who do purposefully re-think and re-vamp their own personal teaching styles in order to be successful. This practice clearly aligns itself with Kouzes & Posner's practice 'Encourage the Heart.' A good first step in developing effective instructional programs that will improve the quality of classroom instruction is developing a plan for continually upgrading all teachers' expertise (Duffy & Hoffman, 1999). Teachers require and deserve professional development that respects their prior knowledge and skills, as well as extends their expertise in their specialized instructional area (Ivey & Fisher, 2006).

As can be seen, all of the previous examples have been identified as practices. There are skills or habits that can be learned. However, a leadership capability that is just as important is for school principals to have a strong, well-rounded knowledge base, not only about adolescent students, but also their development and their learning styles and needs (Eichhorn, 1966; George, 1990; Schmidt, 1988). Furthermore, principals can adopt the leadership practice of conducting multiple informal classroom observations; however, this practice depends on the leadership capability of understanding effective instruction in all content areas (Blokke, Simpson, & Whittier, 2002; Stein & Nelson, 2003). Instructional leaders have the ability to motivate and inspire others. They must be able to demonstrate a clear understanding of the subject, which in turn will foster the respect from teachers and the

school community that all leaders must have in order to successfully lead (Printy, 2008; Reeves, 2008; Stein & Nelson, 2003).

While the studies reviewed above have all primarily focused on leadership practices, there is also a need to understand the underlying capabilities, such as emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1998) that also inform effective practices. The components of emotional intelligence are self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill (Goleman, 1998). Effective leadership practices and capabilities are vital to all school leaders. These qualities enable school leaders to recognize, sustain, and develop high-quality instruction from all members of the school community (Murphy, 2004; Stein & Nelson, 2003). Regardless of how well all other components of effective and successful school programs have been implemented, if the school principal does not have the leadership practices and capabilities to identify and assure quality instruction from their teachers, then all other efforts will have been a complete waste of time. Therefore, it is vital that as a practice, ongoing observations and evaluations are conducted, as well as the capability of mentoring is provided to guarantee the quality of teacher instruction that is being administered to all students (Murphy, 2004).

Leadership practices and capabilities to support literacy achievement. When addressing the role of the principal in establishing literacy teams, Cobb (2005) introduced the idea of shared leadership, where in order to be successful, the school has to have the ethical desire to make a difference as well as the means to encourage, mold, and establish the same beliefs into their entire school building (Fullan, 2002). According to Cobb (2005), “It begins with a commitment from every staff member – from the principal to the custodian – that

learning is what is valued, and that every effort will be made to keep learning at the center of school activities,” (p. 473). The leadership practices and capabilities needed to promote the belief that all students not only have the right to learn, but also have the ability to learn that ultimately produces and sustains literacy achievement, is paramount. A school principal is an inspirational leader, human developer and change agent, (Williamson, 1991) which are all primarily leadership capabilities. As an administrator, leader, and life-long learner, school principals have a duty to provide teachers, parents, community members and students with the heartfelt belief that they can do it (Cobb, 2005; Williamson, 1991). This can be a learned and purposeful leadership practice, but also requires intrinsic leadership capability qualities as well. Through developing key leadership practices and having the necessary leadership capabilities, school principals and their schools can strive towards developing a framework of shared leadership and become collegial communities of instructional practice where learning is the shared responsibility of all members (Cobb, 2005). In other words, schools where the principal’s leadership practices and intrinsic capabilities develop and convey the school vision, and consistently reinforce to students, parents, and members of the community, that the emphasis for the whole school community is the ability to engage, motivate, inspire, and invigorate the students to learn, will be effective in establishing schools that are consistently teaching all students (Williamson, 1991).

Summary

As indicated throughout the literature there are many different leadership definitions, theories, opinions, as well as beliefs regarding the vast topic of leadership and the effectiveness of individual leaders. However, as the term leadership relates to education and

schools in particular, research has shown that leadership practices are critical to school improvement efforts (Crawford, 1998) and that the leadership capabilities of our school leaders cannot be overlooked or ignored (Robinson, 2010). Although no school leader is going to incorporate identical leadership practices or display identical leadership capabilities, research does suggest that leaders who do exhibit similar effective practices (Kouzes & Posner, 2002) or effective capabilities (Murphy, 2004; Stein & Nelson, 2003) are effective school principals.

Adolescents' Difficulties with Literacy

Adolescents who struggle with reading and writing are at risk of under-achieving in school (Harmon & Kenney, 2004). Once adolescents reach high school, struggling readers have very few positive experiences with reading. Negative attitudes can become apparent toward reading as well as toward themselves as readers and as students in general. Therefore, many adolescents who are struggling readers lack motivation to read, have a limited repertoire of strategies, struggle with comprehension, and ultimately acquire a passive, reluctant stance towards reading (Bintz, 1993).

In response to the growing need to address the issues and concerns relating to struggling adolescent readers, the International Reading Association (IRA) in the late 1990s formed a Commission on Adolescent Literacy that put forward a position statement to inform the public about the literacy needs of adolescents (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999). The position statement outlined seven principals to support adolescents' literacy growth (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999). Additionally, Kirk (2000) stated the need to communicate the importance of literacy programs for adolescents and the need to convince

school districts that middle schools need the presence of more expert teachers in reading and more reading intervention programs for students who are struggling to read. Hock and Deshler (2003) stated that struggling reader needs “intensive, focused, and sustained instruction” by competent teachers to meet the demands of academic literacy, as well as programs that teach literacy strategies, metacognitive awareness, and content knowledge. Finally, in 2008, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), chaired by the Governor of Virginia, Timothy M. Kaine, stated that the improvement of students’ reading skills needs to be the top priority in all middle and high schools in the SREB states due to the fact that “By raising students’ reading skills to more advanced levels in the middle grades and high school, SREB states can raise the overall level of education students receive higher than ever before” (Spence, President of SREB, 2008, p.v.).

Although the needs of all adolescent learners is important, for the purpose of this study, the adolescent learner being reviewed is specifically the adolescent English language learner (ELL) and how school principals meet this diverse sub-group’s specific learning needs in the area of literacy.

English Language Learners’ Difficulties with Literacy

An English language learner is defined in this study as a student whose first language is something other than English and is in the process of acquiring English. In the last two decades, the growth of ELLs was 169 percent compared to only 12 percent of the general school population (Francis, Rivera, Lesaux, Kieffer, & Rivera, 2006). The population of children in immigrant families is growing faster than any other group of children in the nation (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2008). Recent estimates by the U.S. Department

of Education indicate that more than 5 million school-age children in the United States (more than 10 percent of all K-12 students) are ELLs (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2011). This represents a 64 percent increase in the enrollment of ELLs since 1994-95 (NCELA, 2011).

The increasing population of ELLs in our public schools constitutes a large percentage of the adolescents who are reported to be reading below the basic level on National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (Batalova, Fix, & Murray, 2007; Snow & Biancarosa, 2003). In 2011, 71 percent of eighth-grade ELLs scored below basic in reading compared to 23 percent of non-ELLs. Also in 2011, 29 percent of ELLs scored at or above basic in reading, compared to 77 percent of non-ELLs (NCES, 2011). Adolescent ELL difficulties with reading and writing start much earlier than in middle school, and for some students these difficulties are never resolved or improved and can therefore potentially lead to an inability to graduate from high school (Snow & Biancarosa, 2003). The number of students who do not graduate from high school within the ELL population is far higher than that of native English speakers (Kohler & Lazarin, 2007). Struggling to read and write is a key element that reportedly impacts the achievement gap within our public school system (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; Batalova, Fix, & Murray, 2007; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). In many cases, an ELL's poor literacy skills are related to later challenges in the job market or potential success in higher education (Batalova, Fix, & Murray, 2007; Snow & Biancarosa, 2003).

As a result of this dramatic increase in the number of ELLs in many U.S. public schools and the identified challenges many ELLs face when trying to successfully acquire the

necessary literacy skills to be academically successful, researchers have attempted to identify potential explanations as to why so many adolescent ELLs struggle in schools. One reason identified is that many ELLs speak one language at home and are expected to speak English at school (Batalova, Fix, & Murray, 2007; Capps et al., 2005). About one-fourth of immigrant children live in households where no one over the age of 13 speaks English exclusively or well (Hernandez et al., 2008). Add to that the fact that not only is there no English being spoken in the household, there is potentially no-one in the home who can assist, support, and reinforce reading and learning in English. Furthermore, in many situations, the ELLs' parents and extended family lack formal education themselves in their native language and are therefore unable to provide any support in the ELLs' L1 language (Capps et al., 2005; Tabors & Snow, 2004). Consequently, this dilemma contributes to reading deficiencies in ELL adolescent learners (Garcia, Jenson, & Scribner, 2009).

Similarly, another reason that should be considered when discussing the educational needs of ELLs, is their social and economic characteristics (Jensen, 2007). In general, ELLs are more likely than English Only (EO) students to come from low-economic families (Garcia & Cuellar, 2006). Sixty percent in grades 6-12 live in low-economic families, compared with 32 percent of EO students (Capps et al., 2005). Each of these factors, as well as ethnic/racial minority status, is associated with decreased literacy achievement, contributing to the relatively low performance of English language learners (Garcia, Jenson, & Scribner, 2009). Additionally, ELLs, on average, are generally at greater risk for academic underachievement (Hernandez et al., 2008). The final and possibly most linguistically fundamental, reason is directly related to students being educated in the L2

language is that ELLs often have to learn academic concepts prior to having developed the related academic vocabulary in English (Cummins, 1989).

Literacy proficiency is vital for students to master because it underlies learning in all content areas and consequently, school success. Students who are proficient readers and writers do better academically (Brown-Chidsey, 2005; Lonigan, 2006). As outlined by Joseph & Schisler (2006), limited reading proficiency hinders access to the curriculum; contributes to low self-esteem and poor motivation; can lead to inappropriate placement in special education; increases the risk of academic failure and dropping out of school; and is linked to behavior problems, delinquency and such lifelong, negative consequences as criminal activity and welfare dependency. A student's background, culture, literacy experience, native language, and educational experiences play a key role in anticipating the success of many students, especially ELLs (Lonigan, 2006; McLane & McMamee, 1990). In order to successfully meet the individual and educational needs of ELLs, it is important that the characteristics that outline and drive their needs are understood, not only by teachers, but also by the educational leader of schools, the principal.

Characteristics of English Language Learners

Three dominant ELL types emerge when reviewing the theoretical and empirical literature regarding adolescent ELLs (Freeman & Freeman, 2002; Meltzer & Hamann, 2006). The first type includes ELLs whose English language proficiency is limited or absent upon entering the country (August & Shanahan, 2006; Olsen, 1987) but who are literate in their first language (L1). These ELLs typically fit into the traditional definition of an ESL (English as a Second Language) student (Freeman & Freeman, 2002; Olsen & Jaramillo,

1999). Their home-language proficiency and on grade L1 literacy enable them to learn English by receiving traditional ESL services. For the purpose of this study, I will refer to the first type of ELL as English as a Second Language learners (ESLL). The second type includes ELLs whose English language proficiency is also limited (August & Shanahan, 2006; Olsen, 1987), but who, due to a multitude of factors (e.g., transient or rural lifestyles, lack of education in L1), are either illiterate or have basic L1 literacy (Freeman & Freeman, 2002). They struggle, especially to learn content knowledge. For the purpose of this study, I will refer to the second type of ELL as Limited Literacy English learners (LLEL). The third ELL type is typically U.S. born or lives in the U.S. prior to entering school. They often speak English at the time of elementary school entry (Abedi, 2008) due to exposure through informal means (i.e., television, movies, neighborhood friends, etc.), making their conversational English quite developed. ELLs in this third group have attended U.S. public schools since kindergarten and are typically not literate in their L1. For the purpose of this study, I will refer to the third type of ELL as Long-Term English learners (L-TEL).

In regards to the third ELL type, it is important to understand that many L-TELS are identified as ELL based solely on the fact that their parents speak a language other than English. Also, many public schools are now assessing their students prior to kindergarten, and if the L-TELS do not perform within certain parameters, which are designed with English-only (EO) students in mind, they will be identified as ELL. Regrettably, due to a host of possible reasons such as socioeconomic status (SES), possible lack of support at home due to parents' limited literacy, lack of appropriate instruction or support from schools as they are bilingual upon school entry or lack of cultural assimilation, these students are not

able to read or meet the academic expectations for their grade level (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). L-TELEs conversational English may be adequate, but they significantly lack academic English (Bailey, Huang, Farnsworth, & Butler, 2007; Scarcella, 2003) in that they are not proficient in the vocabulary that they are potentially going to encounter in textbooks and on tests (Snow, Lawrence, & White, 2009). All of these factors are vital for educators to understand in order to effectively address their educational needs. Additionally, it is important to note that in 2007 approximately 57 percent of students identified as ELL were born in the U.S. (Batalova, Fix, & Murray, 2007; Rance-Roney, 2009) and many of them, based on documented literacy achievement as well as a number of the above factors, could be considered L-TELEs.

As part of this study, the purpose is to explore the knowledge, or specific knowledge of three principals who have been identified as effective and whose schools are made up of a significant percent of English language learners. Additionally, the goal is to inquire as to whether these principals are aware of the different ELL categories, specifically the L-TELEs. If they are, how has this knowledge potentially impacted how they have led their schools?

In summary, ELLs have different academic and language needs given the different ELL categories identified in the discussion above. Practitioners note these differences among ELLs on a daily basis (Rance-Roney, 2009). In addition, due to their differences, ELLs may vary in their motivation to read and learn, creating very different trajectories across elementary and middle school. Therefore, school principals need to be aware that ELLs cannot be treated as a monolithic entity. The different characteristics of students who fall within the ELL population are recognized and discussed within the ELL field of study,

but evidence suggests those policy makers, researchers, and practitioners lack sufficient information about the identified differences (Goldenberg & Coleman, 2010).

Effective Middle School Principals for English Language Learners

Studies have outlined a number of key themes or findings that effective school principals (and school districts) should practice in order to successfully meet the needs and challenges of their English language learners (American Institute for Research and WestEd, 2006; Coleman, 2006; Echevarria, Short, & Powers, 2006; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006; McDougall et al., 2007; Williams, Hakuta, Haertel, et al., 2007; Williams, Kirst, Haertel, et al., 2010). Some of these key findings are identified below:

- (1) Administrators must have more of a role in the day-to-day running of the academic school day;
- (2) Clear goals towards meeting the needs of all students;
- (3) Administrators who have a sincere desire to help ELLs have greater success;
- (4) District-wide support is required;
- (5) Administrators and district need to make sure that all staff members are aware of the ELLs' needs and provide the training and support to address these needs;
- (6) Appropriate specialists are required in these schools;
- (7) Teacher leadership roles are important;
- (8) Appropriate and meaningful professional development.

In addition to these key findings, in a large-scale study of middle grade practices and student outcomes conducted by Stanford University School of Education outlined "... the importance of strong principal leadership in driving and orchestrating a school-wide focus

on improving student achievement” (Williams, Kirst, Haertel, et al., 2010, p. 44). In addition, the study reported that the principal’s training and level of expertise when working with ELLs was extremely important, as was communicating high expectations for all students (Williams, Kirst, Haertel, et al., 2010). That is, principals should consider themselves as the instructional leaders of their schools. The principal should model the goals of learning and instruction for the school, coordinate the activities of students and teachers, and integrate all other components of effective schools (Jesse, Davis & Pokorny, 2004; McDougall et al., 2007).

Blachowicz (2009) conducted a literature review of research-based studies that looked at identifying strategies and practices to meet the needs of all students, but inclusive of schools that serve diverse populations. These studies indicated that schools where principals are knowledgeable about the instructional needs of their students and provide appropriate support to their teachers have schools that are excelling academically. In addition, one of the leadership practices that was stressed was the ability to identify the areas of need within a school and providing students and staff with reading specialists, reading coaches, and other specialists who are available to collaborate with them: the school leader, teachers, and parents to work with students. Principals, who are able to build collaborative environments by working side by side with their teachers, were able to create and maintain successful schools (Blachowicz, 2009; McDougall et al., 2007; Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 1999).

Additionally and in some way parallel to the previous findings, in an exploratory study that examined how school principals managed “ethno-cultural diversity” in schools, Billot,

Goddard, & Cranston (2007) identified two key challenges for school districts and more specifically individual schools and their principals. Firstly, the researchers discussed the need for purposeful recruitment and selection of principals. Their study found that successful principals of ethno-cultural diverse schools had special capabilities and strongly articulated notions of social justice. Secondly, adequate and relevant professional development opportunities were deemed as a necessity for future, as well as current, school principals. Furthermore, the study highlighted and reinforced the need for school principals to understand the characteristics and expectations of the different cultural groups within the school community and develop a proactive strategy to address potential cultural conflicts and misunderstandings that might arise (Billot, Goddard, & Cranston, 2007; Escobar-Ortloff & Ortloff, 2003). However, although the study mentioned language as a factor of ethno-cultural diverse schools, no specific findings were presented and no direct mention of ELLs was evident.

Despite the apparent lack of emphasis on ELLs, the study did present what they titled as ‘the four principals,’ principles for success of ethno-culturally diverse schools.

- (1) A strong commitment to social justice principles, with these embedded in school practice and culture;
- (2) An acceptance of difference and the capacity to work across various cultures, accommodating differences and using these as strengths;
- (3) The setting of high learning expectations for all students and avoiding an ‘excuse’ culture;

- (4) The celebration of the diverse ethno-cultural nature of schools, with cultural and sporting activities that respect and highlight individual and group differences.

(Billot, Goddard, & Cranston, 2007, p. 16-17)

Based on the dearth in the literature and research, this study seeks to address this gap through examination of three effective middle school principals and study their leadership practices and identify their specific capabilities.

Limitations of the Literature and Future Research

Research on effective leadership practices and capabilities that specifically look at schools with English language learners is limited (Goldenberg & Coleman, 2010). Most studies that identify school or district factors that demonstrate school improvement include very little information pertaining to effective leadership practices that meet the specific needs and challenges of English language learners (Goldenberg & Coleman, 2010). That is, most of these studies report on ethnic minority students (e.g., African American) or low socioeconomic status students (SES) but not on language minority students, such as English language learners (ELLs) (Goldenberg & Coleman, 2010). However, there have been a number of studies that deal specifically with how to improve literacy achievement of adolescent ELLs from an instructional approach (e.g., Coleman, 2006; Goldenberg, 2004; Livingston & Flaherty, 1997; McDougall, Saunders, & Goldenberg, 2007; Slavin & Madden, 1998). Additionally, there are empirical studies and government reports that provide insights and suggestions on how school leaders could improve student achievement based on empirical results as well as expert knowledge and opinion; including Research for Action

(Christman, Brown, Burgess, Maluk, & Mitchell, 2009); *Gaining Ground in the Middle Grades* (Williams, Kirst, Haertel, et al., 2010) and *Beating the Odds in Teaching All Children to Read* (Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 1999). However, despite making suggestions on possible improvements, very few empirical studies or government reports have specifically looked at the practices and capabilities successful principals implement to foster the literacy achievement of ELLs. This study, in particular, is concerned with investigating and understanding the effective practices and capabilities demonstrated by effective middle school principals who are successfully working with ELLs.

Summary

School principals, and district leaders who are committed and actively seeking to help English language learners are positively impacting student achievement (Goldenberg & Coleman, 2010). Due to the increased pressure placed on districts and principals under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, many districts are not working diligently to address the needs of all sub-groups, including ELLs. Many school leaders may lack expertise and knowledge of ELLs' needs, and therefore are unable to provide appropriate resources to support teachers and improve ELLs' academic skills and potential for success. According to research, school leaders must be transparent, communicate, and make ELLs a priority focus in order to positively impact achievement for ELLs (American Institutes of Research and WestEd, 2006; Williams et al., 2007).

As indicated in the literature review, although there may not be a significantly large number of research studies to date on effective leadership practices as they relate to the academic needs of ELLs, when school leaders are focused, committed and driven to provide

a quality education for all students, inclusive of ELLs, overall student literacy achievement can be and is positively impacted. The goal of this study is to investigate and understand how three purposefully selected middle school principals have addressed the literacy needs of their English language learners (ELLs). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine and describe leadership practices and capabilities of effective middle school principals that may potentially relate to literacy achievement, particularly literacy achievement of English language learners.

The primary research questions are:

- (1) What leadership practices and capabilities do middle school principals believe positively impact the literacy achievement of ELLs?
- (2) What leadership practices and capabilities have middle school principals implemented that positively impact the literacy achievement of ELLs?

Additional sub-questions will include:

- (a) What challenges do each principal face when addressing the literacy needs of English language learners?
- (b) How do these principals acquire the knowledge and skills to understand the literacy challenges and needs of English language learners?
- (c) Why does each principal believe that the leadership practices and capabilities they have adopted aided them in meeting the specific literacy challenges and needs of ELLs?

3. METHOD

Qualitative research is a “systematic, empirical strategy for answering questions about people in a particular social context” (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2007).

Qualitative research, for the purpose of this study, provides the opportunity, through specifically designed questions, to describe, analyze, and possibly explain leadership practices and capabilities of effective school principals in effective middle schools (Creswell, 2008). The ability to gather meaning through the exploration of specific individuals’ experiences and their perceptions of their experiences is extremely important when attempting to understand an important accomplishment that is not necessarily deemed to be the norm (Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 1998). In regards to this study, the accomplishment under exploration is the documented impact three principals have had specifically on the literacy achievement of English language learners (ELLs).

This chapter begins with a rationale for the use of qualitative methods and a brief definition of case study research. The following sections of this chapter include a description of my research design, participants, procedures, instrumentation, and analysis of research data, trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Qualitative Research

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the leadership practices and capabilities of middle school principals who have been effective in impacting the literacy achievement of ELLs, a qualitative approach was used. This is an appropriate method considering the exploratory nature of this study. Qualitative researchers describe how people get a sense of their world and assign meaning to the documented experiences (Merriam, 2009), providing rich data about real-life people and situations. Creswell (2008) suggested the use of qualitative research because of the need to present a detailed view of the topic while studying individuals in their natural setting. It is my intent to describe the leadership practices and capabilities of middle school principals in an effort to uncover commonalities among the successful middle school leaders in Virginia.

Case Study

A “case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied” (Stake, 2000, p. 435). Therefore, a case study is an appropriate method for obtaining information regarding the motivations and habits of individuals in the workplace (Berg, 2004), which is the reason this exploratory study is based on case study research. According to Yin (2003), a case study presents conditions relevant to the phenomenon under study. The case study is most appropriate when the researcher seeks to provide a detailed description of an individual using a variety of sources, such as interviews, focus groups, field notes, and documents (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Yin, 2003).

Research Design

This study used a multiple case study design to explore “how” effective middle school principals positively impacted the literacy achievement of students, particularly the literacy achievement of ELLs. The best way to do this was to personally meet with principals who had documented success with ELLs as well as talk with their staffs. Yin (1994) explains “[i]n general, case studies are the preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (p.1). In a multiple case study, several cases are examined to understand the similarities and differences between the cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008). As described by Yin (2009), a multiple case study: “... is case study that covers multiple cases and then draws a single set of ‘cross-case’ conclusions” (p. 20). Therefore, this design allowed me the opportunity to analyze within each setting, as well as across settings, in order to formulate my findings (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

This study investigated the leadership practices and capabilities of three principals in one northern Virginia county, who had shown significant success with positively impacting literacy achievement in their schools, particularly with the ELLs. According to Seidman (1998), the primary way a researcher investigates an educational organization is through scrutiny of the experiences of people who make up that organization. Thus, this study focused on the experiences of the school leaders, principals, and educational professionals, teachers.

One way to explore the experiences of people is through interviewing. When describing interviews, Hatch (2002) explained that interviews could be “structured, semi-

structured or in-depth.” Hatch went on to explain that this level of flexibility regarding the format or style of interview is due to the fact that the researcher is in charge of the interview and therefore can choose how involved he or she should be in the questioning, or if the participant is simply encouraged to respond at will. For example, should the researcher ask probing questions in addition to the specific interview questions if the researcher feels that the participant possibly has not provided detailed or on-topic responses, or should the researcher simply allow the participant to take the lead in the conversation and not probe for clarification? In addition an established time is set, and the interview is recorded. For this study, I chose to use a semi-structured interview format, which had a flexible structure and flowed more like a conversation. Specifically, I used open-ended questions to elicit rich responses from the participants rather than simple yes or no responses (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). By adopting a semi-structured approach to gathering information from multiple principals, I was able to obtain an in-depth look at the leadership practices and capabilities of the participants (Berg, 2004) from each principal’s personal perspective. As recommended by Billot, Goddard, & Cranston (2007), the research was expanded beyond each principal by interviewing a focus group from each school in order to add valuable insights into each principal’s leadership practices and capabilities, specifically in regards to literacy achievement of ELLs.

This study focused on middle school principals in one county in northern Virginia whose schools had shown significant improvement in literacy achievement for ELLs. Interviewing is an appropriate technique when past events are being studied and: “when conducting case studies of a few selected individuals” (Merriam, 1998, p. 72). Only a

limited number of Virginia middle schools met the criteria for this study, so interviewing the principals is a particularly suitable method.

Site and Participant Selection

Consistent with the purposes and goals of this study, I focused on effective principals of middle schools with large ELL populations and in which the ELLs have demonstrated successful literacy achievement. Through individual interviews, the participants provided insight into what leadership practices and capabilities may have impacted or supported each of their schools successes. The three principals were purposefully selected from one Northern Virginia County because their schools met the following specific criteria:

- (1) Over a three year period, fall 2008 to summer 2011, the school had sustained above the overall mean for the county reading achievement scores known as the Standards of Learning (SOL) for all three grade levels, as reported by the Virginia Department of Education under the leadership of the current principal;
- (2) Over the same three year period, the ELL sub-group had sustained above the mean specifically for this sub-group for the county reading achievement scores, as reported by the Virginia Department of Education under the leadership of the current principal;
- (3) The school reports at least 20% of the student population are Limited English Proficient (LEP) and that there are more than 50 students identified as LEP Levels 1-5 in each grade level.

Once schools were identified as meeting the above criteria, the district's Associate Superintendent for middle school was contacted and asked for her recommendation as to whom the district believed was an effective principal out of the pool of eligible middle

school principals. Once the above criteria were considered, the pool was narrowed down to three principals. I contacted all three of them personally and invited them to participate in my study. All three were more than willing and welcomed the opportunity to participate in this study.

In regards to the focus groups at each school, the purpose was to: “achieve representativeness or typicality of the setting, individuals, or activities selected” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 89). The teachers and staff from each middle school were invited to participate via email to volunteer to participate in a focus group. In the invitation the purpose of the study was clearly explained and the need for their perspectives of their principal was specifically cited as valuable for each individual case study. The purpose of the focus group and the criteria and guidelines that were followed for each session were clearly outlined. Contact information was provided, and the faculty was asked to indicate their interest to participate by contacting the designated contact person. Once the teachers had submitted their names for consideration, I looked for a cross-section of teachers with various years of experience and different areas of expertise to participate in each focus group.

In sum, for each middle school I interviewed the principal, who was the focus of each case study, and conducted focus groups with a range of 5-8 teachers. I also consulted with the district’s Associate Superintendent for Middle Schools prior to conducting the interviews. In total, across the three middle schools I interviewed 20 individuals.

Data Collection

The goal of the data collection was to gather information about participants and their schools, discuss how each participant perceived their leadership practices and capabilities,

and explore the impact these leadership practices and capabilities may have had on the literacy achievement of each schools' ELL population. The data collection phase was conducted over several months, from February to June 2012. Data were collected for this study using interviews, focus groups, field notes, and memos.

In an attempt to improve data credibility (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2003) multiple data sources were used. A case study protocol (Yin, 1994) as well as an interview protocol (see Appendix D) was developed to provide focus and direction for my study (Tellis, 1997; Yin, 1994). The protocols also ensured consistency when collecting my data collection and analysis (Stake, 1995). Prior to beginning data collection I requested and was granted permission by my school district as well as by the George Mason Human Research Review Board (HRSB), to conduct the research (see Appendix A).

Interviews

A semi-structured, face-to-face interview was conducted with each principal. The interviews (see Appendix D) included open-ended questions and lasted approximately one hour. I chose semi-structured interview to provide consistency across the sties that I visited and to allow for flexibility to probe and explore interesting pieces of information as they occurred in the interview. According to Bogden and Biklen (2007), qualitative researchers employ interviews: “to gather descriptive data in the subjects’ own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world” (p. 96). The semi-structured interview process allowed each principal to share their own experiences and tell their story in their own voice (McCracken, 1988). The principal interviews were recorded using a Livescribe pen and notepad, as well as the audio-recorder on my iPhone. I

felt it was necessary to have the secondary recording device as back-up to the Livescribe recording. I conducted the first two principal interviews at their respective schools, however, for the third principal, the interview was held in her new office at her new location. I also jotted informal notes as the interviews occurred which in turn were included in my field notes journal.

As the interviews were such an important part of my study it was vital that I conducted them as expertly as possible. I set up each interview to initially include small talk, icebreakers, and a brief explanation of my study. I also explained the consent form and asked participants to sign to indicate their acceptance. My position as a fellow principal within the same school district helped to build rapport with principals as well as helped ease their potential apprehension regarding any possibly negative emphasis or focus in my study. I took time to make sure they fully understood that I perceived them to be highly effective principals, and that I was hoping to be able to share their successes to a larger community of educational leaders in an attempt to further our profession in a positive manner. To obtain genuine rich and descriptive information, it was important for the interview participants to feel comfortable (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The interview protocol for this study was semi-structured. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility when talking with the participants, while maintaining a certain amount of structure and consistency throughout all interviews (Glesne, 1999). I paid close attention to the interviewees as they answered and asked probing or follow-up questions to pull information for a rich, thick description of each principal's leadership style, practices, and capabilities that may have impacted the literacy achievement of their ELLs. I designed

interview questions to answer my research questions and to gain an overall understanding of how these effective principals functioned in highly diverse and successful middle schools. I designed the questions to gain insight into each principal's beliefs regarding their own leadership style, practices, and capabilities, as well as to understand their perceptions and what they perceived to be the reason for their sustained success.

A list of the interview questions for the principal interviews is located in the appendix of this dissertation (see Appendix D). Because recording devices can affect participants, like many other aspects of qualitative research, I was conscious of that impact, and I worked to minimize the recorder in the interview setting. As Bogden and Biklen (2007) note: "good interviews are those in which the subjects are at ease and talk freely about their points of view" (p. 97). After I completed interviews, I conducted follow up conversations over the phone as needed and made notes in my field note journal. Additionally, I transcribed each of the conversations myself. The transcriptions were made available to each of the principals to review in order to provide them with the opportunity to verify the accuracy of the documentation from the interviews.

To increase the success of the interviews, I worked to develop rapport with each principal and keep the interview session relaxed and informal. All three principals were extremely professional and willingly engaged with me. I acknowledged each of them for their participation, as this study would not be possible without their readiness to volunteer time during busy workdays.

Focus Groups

The focus group interview was chosen in order to gather an additional source of information about the school principal from the teachers, or insiders whose views are critical to understanding a fuller picture of the leadership practices and capabilities (Patton, 1990). In addition, the focus group interview provides an opportunity for participants' voices to be included. Likewise, the focus groups enabled me to gather thoughts and observations from teachers, who are directly involved in working with the principal as well as ELLs.

Focus group interviews promote normal conversations about a specific issue and preference participants' voices rather than researchers' agendas (Vaughn, Schumm & Sinagub, 1996). Furthermore, it was extremely important to hear the teachers' opinions and thoughts on how they perceived their principals' leadership practices and capabilities and what impact they perceived the principals had on the literacy achievement of the ELLs in their schools. A list of the interview questions for the focus group interviews is located in the appendix of this dissertation (see Appendix E).

Field Note Journal

After each interview and focus group session I took a moment to write in my field note journal. These notes comprised of additional thoughts, my perceptions of reactions to questions, descriptions of body language, as well as notes on any interruptions or disruptions that may have occurred. I coded the contents of my reflective field note journal along with the transcribed interviews and focus group interviews.

Memos

During the entire research process, from designing the research questions, to completing the data analysis I used the strategy of writing memos to think through my ideas, thoughts, and questions. I found that writing memos provided me with a way to critically reflect on my work and make timely and appropriate adjustments as needed. Additionally, I found that writing memos assisted me in working through some challenging moments during the data analysis process and allowed me to keep working on my dissertation in a consistent and open-minded way.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this case study involved the use of a variety of methods, as it was necessary to examine and interpret all the data that were collected. According to Merriam (2009): “data analysis is a complex process that involved moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation,” and “the practical goal of data analysis is to find answers to your questions” (p. 176). Data analysis for this study was an ongoing process as categories and themes were discovered along the way that altered the overall picture that attempts to explain the existence of effective leadership practices and capabilities that impact literacy achievement of ELLs.

Coding

Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) described coding as: “a procedure for organizing the text of transcripts and discovering patterns within that organizational structure” (p. 31).

Coding is the core of qualitative analysis because coding is when and where themes begin to emerge and situate themselves in the data. Merriam (2009) explained that codes could be: “single words, letters, numbers, phrases, colors, or combinations of these” (p. 173). Specifically, open coding was used for this case study. Merriam (2009) explained that open coding is called such because as the researcher begins to examine the data, the possibility of what information might be useful is expansive. According to Auerbach and Silverstein (2003): “You can use an open coding framework without all of the assumptions of grounded theory, coding as you go, rather than preparing a list, refining the concepts, and then marking them in the text” (p. 223). Open coding allowed me to sort through the data looking for data segments that seemed to appear regularly and which eventually would emerge during the interpretive process as categories.

Single Case Study Analysis

Data analysis was ongoing and the coding process was guided by Maxwell (2005). Thus, immediately after an interview was completed and transcribed, I analyzed the data for that specific interview. No cross-comparison was attempted at this point in the analysis. Analyses of the transcribed focus group interviews were completed following the analysis of each principal was completed in order to keep the analysis of each principal as non-biased as possible. Before beginning coding each transcript, I read and re-read each transcript a number of times, with and without the audio file. This afforded me the opportunity to not only determine that my transcribed text was accurate, but also gave me a deeper understanding of each principal and their unique leadership style, experience, and background.

Following this initial step, text that seemed relevant to my research questions was first identified and highlighted. Merriam (2009) described this process as “identifying segments” and explained that each “segment is a unit of data which is a potential answer or part of an answer to the question(s) you have asked in this study” (p. 176). Once data segments were identified; I began to sort and organize the data segments into possible categories. I then created a matrix titled *Matrix 3: Data segments (Key Concepts) and their potential groups* to document each of the segments in a clear and organized format that would allow me to review each of them individually as well as their possible emerging groups.

Once I had completed Matrix 3 and had developed possible groups to describe the data segments, I organized the groups into possible categories. I then created a matrix titled, *Matrix 4: Emerging categories and possible themes* that organized the categories in one column, then organized the categories into groups in the next column, and finally labeled each group with a possible theme. At this point in the process I took time away from the data so that I could analyze the emerging themes with fresh eyes and perspective.

Once the data segments, labels, categories, possible groups and emerging themes were developed, I then analyzed the data using predetermined definitions of practices and capabilities, which could be described as using a “start list” that has been generated from previous studies and professional literature (Miles & Huberman, 1984). I then began developing my own conceptual framework to establish distinct definitions for each of my emerging themes. Once this was complete, I revisited Matrix 3 and Matrix 4, and re-organized the categories and groups using my newly developed framework. Due to the fact

that this framework was grounded in current research and professional documents, it provided reliability to the emerging themes in my data.

The focus groups were analyzed replicating the exact process used for analyzing each principal's interview. At this point, I was careful as I went through the process to avoid any temptation to include the categories, groups, or themes from the principal's data if such concepts were not relevant or discernible based on analysis of the focus group interviews. This was purposefully done in order to allow for potential new themes to emerge or develop without presuming that the focus groups would automatically generate the same themes as the principals.

As stated previously during the data analysis process and in an attempt to solidify my theoretical context, I designed a *Framework of Themes for Leadership Practices and Capabilities* (Table 1) that was influenced and developed by the combination of major documents that focused on leadership practices and capabilities (Coates, et al., 2010; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Lewis, 2009; Public Impact, 2008) and included the following: (1) definitions of the leadership practices and capabilities outlined for the purpose of this study; (2) a review of relevant literature; and (3) the data from this multiple case study to represent the themes of leadership practices and capabilities. This framework represents the themes of leadership practices and capabilities that I used as my guide to ground my data analysis process. I also used this framework as an organizational tool or guiding framework by continuously assessing each principal's practices and capabilities to assure they were consistently aligned with the literature and definitions as outlined for the purpose of this study.

Table 1

Framework of Themes for Leadership Practices and Capabilities

Self-Confidence to Lead	Visionary Leadership	Research and Data-Driven Instructional Practices	Student-Centered	Accountability	Building Relationships & Developing People	Leading the Organization
<i>Capabilities (Personal Values & Beliefs)</i>	<i>Capabilities (Personal Values & Beliefs)</i>	<i>Practices (Learned/Developed)</i>	<i>Capabilities (Personal Values & Beliefs)</i>	<i>Practices (Learned/Developed)</i>	<i>Capabilities (Personal Values & Beliefs)</i>	<i>Practices (Learned/Developed)</i>
<p>Stands alone</p> <p>Visibly focused</p> <p>Committed</p> <p>Self-assured</p> <p>Model the behaviors they expect of others</p> <p>Relentless effort</p> <p>Competence</p> <p>Attention to detail</p> <p>Highly visible</p> <p>Working side by side</p> <p>Earning the right to lead</p> <p>Respect</p> <p>Actions align with values & beliefs</p> <p>Prior experience</p> <p>Leads by example</p> <p>Hands-on/involved</p> <p>Follow-through</p> <p>Conviction</p> <p>TRUST (of the leader and their ability to lead)</p> <p>Open-minded</p> <p>Persistence</p> <p>Self-Confidence to show emotion</p> <p>“People first follow the person, then the plan” (Kouzes & Posner, 2002)</p>	<p>Results driven</p> <p>Think “Outside of the Box”</p> <p>Know their staff & students</p> <p>Enthusiastic</p> <p>Belief & enthusiasm for vision is the spark that ignites the flame of inspiration</p> <p>Inspire</p> <p>Future focused</p> <p>Dream</p> <p>“Anything is possible”</p> <p>Think big!</p> <p>“Can-do” attitude</p> <p>High performance expectations</p> <p>Communicates the vision well</p> <p>Motivates</p> <p>Challenges</p> <p>Empowers others</p> <p>Creative & Innovative</p> <p>Clear & objective goals are set</p> <p>A belief that all students can learn</p> <p>High Expectations for ALL</p> <p>Commitment to an inclusive, respectful, equitable school culture</p> <p>Develop a love for learning</p>	<p>High expectation for learning outcomes</p> <p>Assessment</p> <p>Data to monitor progress</p> <p>Resources</p> <p>Central Office Support</p> <p>Inclusive Practices</p> <p>Programs</p> <p>Initiatives</p> <p>Enrichment & Remediation</p> <p>School-wide focus on achievement</p> <p>Professional Learning Communities</p> <p>Focus is on LEARNING</p> <p>Master Schedule</p> <p>Raising the standards for all students</p> <p>Manage time effectively (instructional time)</p> <p>Support by Experts</p> <p>Equal & Appropriate Access for ALL</p> <p>Students</p> <p>Inclusive Environment</p> <p>Instructional Strategies</p> <p>Knowledge of Literacy</p>	<p>Continuous focus on student achievement</p> <p>Differentiate</p> <p>Knowledge of Student</p> <p>Teach for Mastery</p> <p>Individual student’s needs</p> <p>Student Behavior</p> <p>Attendance</p> <p>Focus Is on STUDENTS</p> <p>Master Schedule/Student’s Needs</p> <p>Meeting the needs of all students</p> <p>Commitment to ALL students</p> <p>Student’s Needs</p> <p>Literacy Focus</p>	<p>Recruitment, hiring, and retention of staff with common interests & goals (staffing)</p> <p>Management systems, structures, and processes</p> <p>Measures and monitors teacher and leader effectiveness (Teacher supervision)</p> <p>Competency of staff</p> <p>Monitor</p> <p>Evaluate</p> <p>Improve</p> <p>Reflective on student achievement</p> <p>Data to assess student achievement</p> <p>Data-driven decisions</p> <p>Expectation & Accountability from & for students</p> <p>“Accountability for All!”</p>	<p>Collaborate</p> <p>Responsive</p> <p>Teacher Leaders</p> <p>Support</p> <p>Home & School Connections</p> <p>Communication</p> <p>Teamwork</p> <p>Professional Learning Communities</p> <p>Professional Development</p> <p>Celebrate achievements</p> <p>Encourages others</p> <p>Lead by example</p> <p>Transparent decision-making</p> <p>High visibility</p> <p>Manage conflict effectively</p> <p>Listens</p> <p>Shared Leadership for improvement</p> <p>Confidence</p> <p>Optimism</p> <p>Hope</p> <p>Resiliency</p> <p>Integrity</p> <p>Considerate of Teachers’ Needs</p> <p>Transparency/Trust</p> <p>Reflective</p> <p>Sense of community</p> <p>Personal Connection</p> <p>Challenge students & Staff</p> <p>TRUST (this is more within group, trust for each other)</p> <p>Positive Environment</p> <p>Positive Reinforcement</p> <p>Inclusive Decision-Making</p> <p>Personable</p> <p>Approachable</p> <p>Sensitive to the needs of Teachers</p> <p>Genuine individual/Love for people</p>	<p>Safe & Secure Environment</p> <p>Structures the organization for success</p> <p>Efficient administrative routines</p> <p>Policies & Procedures</p> <p>Ethical behavior</p> <p>Implementation of Structure & Processes</p> <p>Firm w/discipline</p> <p>Requires respect from ALL</p>

As part of the process each principal's leadership practices and capabilities developed from the emerging categories both from the interviews with each principal and the focus group interviews. Subsequently, from these leadership practices, capabilities, and emerging categories, possible themes evolved. It should be noted that as this process was taking place the *Framework for Themes for Leadership Practices and Capabilities* was also ongoing in its development. This entire process was: "...a reflective process operating through every stage of a project" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Although an overall plan was originally designed to guide data analysis, this plan had to be modified, revised, reviewed, and reworked multiple times as the data was consistently revisited. Consistent with Maxwell's (2005) description of a multiple-case study design, data-analysis is an on-going process or 'journey' during which the researcher alternates between the data, literature reviewed, newly discovered literature, and the research questions. This process truly evolved into an "interactive" model (Maxwell, 2005).

In the final phase of the data analysis, the emerging categories and themes displayed in *'Matrix 4: Emerging categories and possible themes'* were separated dependent on whether the data represented a leadership practice or capability. Upon completion, the interview transcripts and data segments were re-read, in an effort to identify descriptions of the leadership practices and capabilities as perceived by each individual principal. The identical process was completed for the focus group data. Finally, to identify the possible leadership style of each principal all of the analyzed data were reviewed. This included a review of each principal's personal opinion of their leadership style as well as the relevance of the data to the literature review.

Triangulation (Denzin, 1970) of data was accomplished by comparing principal perspectives, focus group perspectives, field notes and memos. This provided both validations of data as well as assisted me to better understand each principal and the importance of the identified leadership practices and capabilities. According to Yin (2003), there were several methods that could be used to strengthen the construct, internal and external validity of research of this type. For this particular study, data triangulation was used to strengthen internal and construct validity, as there were multiple sources of evidence and pattern matching in this research. External validity was strengthened by the replication logic used within this embedded multiple-case study. External validity was also strengthening by using the interview and focus group protocol.

The goal of data triangulation was to create a more accurate picture of each principal (Bechhofer & Paterson, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Yin, 2003) and created stronger research when compiling and comparing the data set. Pattern matching was used to determine whether what the participants said matched what they actually did, as well as whether it matched the results of the focus group interview analysis. According to Berg (2004), "... conclusions drawn from the patterns apparent in the data must be confirmed (verified) to assure that they are real and not merely wishful thinking on the part of the research" (p. 40). The verification process of retracing data paths helped control for researcher bias.

Cross-case Analysis

I began cross-case analysis after the third case study by looking for any similarities or differences identified by each principal or focus group. I followed the same processes to

maintain consistency when comparing data from three different principals and schools (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; McMillian & Schumacher, 1989).

I initially compared each of the matrices I had developed to visibly represent the emerging themes of each principal as well as the themes of their respective focus groups. From there I identified five leadership practices and capabilities themes that were dominant across all three case studies. I conducted comparative analysis of the three principals and included the construction of cross-case displays and matrices. I created Figure 4 to highlight the five dominant leadership practices and capabilities themes.

I then delved a little deeper by creating a comparison matrix for both the principals and the focus groups to compare in more detail each of the principals' and focus groups' identified leadership practices and capabilities (Appendix F and G). The three principal's leadership practices and capabilities were analyzed looking for what was similar and dissimilar in how they perceived they impacted the literacy achievement of the ELLs in their school. This process of identifying differences and similarities in leadership practices and capabilities, followed by looking for the possible impact they had on the literacy achievement of ELLs, led to developing Table 2, Key Findings from Research Questions. When a difference was identified I indicated the difference by italicizing the difference in Table 2.

Throughout the process of data analysis, I checked my emerging themes by discussing my data and themes with my committee chair as well as other members of my committee. I also discussed my data and themes with a few professional colleagues. This provided me with a sounding board to share my interpretation of the data and themes, and

have the opportunity to discuss and question their validity and possible implications on the subject as a whole.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was a critical part of my research because those who review the data collected may question the validity of the study. As a researcher, I worked to ensure that my assertions could hold up against criticism while still maintaining fidelity to the research questions. This is especially important for qualitative research because the method inherently lacks concrete data. According to Glesne (1999), this “is an issue that should be thought about during research design as well as in the midst of data collection” (p. 32). The initial means of addressing trustworthiness occurs in the development of the research instrumentation. For me it was important to remember that I was a privileged guest in the school. The two interview participant groups – principals and focus groups – provided triangulation of data and unique perspectives based on their roles and relationships to the school.

Ethical Considerations

In qualitative research, it is important to protect the participants as well as the research process. When conducting this study I took precautionary measure to address the ethical issues that commonly arise in qualitative research. This study was designed to eliminate potentials risks to participants by disclosing the purpose of the study, seeking voluntary participants, and assuring their confidentiality. Written permission to conduct the study was obtained from the George Mason University Human Research and Subject Board

(HRSB), the school district in which all three principals were working at the time, and the individual participants. Strategies “such as triangulation, member checks, use of rich, thick description” (Merriam, 2002, p. 30) provide evidence that an ethical study was conducted. The identification of participants and their schools was not made public. Instead, a numerical system was used to refer to individual participants and their schools. Field notes and audio files of the sessions were also labeled using the numerical coding system rather than the actual names of the participants. At no time did anyone other than my committee chair and myself have access to this data. In accordance with federal regulations, all data will be maintained in a locked file in the principal investigator’s home office for three years.

Although I am a principal myself in the same county as the principals interviewed, I maintained an open mind of the view of others regarding their leadership styles, practices, and capabilities. I have no supervisory responsibilities over any of the participants in the study. These factors helped to protect the participants and the research process in this study.

Summary

Chapter 3 focused on the methodology and rationale for the research design of this case study on leadership practices and capabilities. This chapter provided a rationale for the use of qualitative methods and an argument for why this was an appropriate method for this study. This chapter described the qualitative research conducted in order to explore leadership profiles, practices and capabilities. It described participants, setting, and interview and focus group procedures used throughout this qualitative study. In addition, the ethical considerations were described. The study investigated the leadership profiles, practices and

capabilities that are present in effective middle school principals who sustained literacy achievement with ELLs.

In Chapters 4, 5, and 6, I present data emerging from the three case studies I conducted for this study. I then organize and describe the data in an effort to reveal the leadership styles, practices, and capabilities of each of the three principals participating in the present study. For all three case study locations, I conducted interviews with each principal as well as focus group interviews with teachers who work in the respective school buildings. Each principal described specific beliefs and practices that contributed to the literacy achievement of English language learner (ELL) students at their respective schools. Likewise, the teachers shared their perspectives regarding the leadership of each of the principals.

For purposes of sorting and categorizing data, I developed a framework consistent with key principles and concepts emerging from the theoretical and research-based leadership literature (see e.g., *The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership* (Kouzes & Posner, 2002); *ACEL Leadership Capability Framework* (Lewis, 2009); *VET Leadership for the Future: Contexts, Characteristics, and Capabilities* (Coates et al., 2010); and *School Turnaround Leaders: Competencies for Success* (Public Impact, 2008)). This framework, represented in Table 1, is organized according to the leadership constructs of interest in this multiple case study approach, specifically practices and capabilities. Using this framework as a theoretical and organizational guide, I identified themes emerging from the data for each of the three case studies. The specific themes that emerged from principal interviews as well as focus group interviews with teachers who work in the respective school buildings are

summarized and presented at the ends of Chapters 4, 5, and 6. In Chapter 4, I report the data, discuss themes, and describe case study one at Perth Middle School. Likewise, in Chapter 5, I present the data and themes for case study two at Glasgow Middle School and in Chapter 6, I share the data and identify themes unique to case study three at Tarbet Middle School. Finally, cross-comparison analyses of themes emerging from the three case studies are presented and discussed in Chapters 7 and 8. As explained in Chapter 1, this study is focused on developing a professional leadership framework based on identification of the practices and capabilities of effective middle school principals who work in school contexts that include ELLs.

4. CASE STUDY: PRINCIPAL ONE

This chapter is organized into seven sections: (a) the context of Perth Middle School, (b) brief overview of the principal, (c) description of the principal's perceptions of the leadership practices and capabilities that work best for middle school English Language Learners (ELLs), (d) description of the teachers' perceptions of the principal's leadership practices and capabilities that work best for middle school ELLs, (e) description of additional information shared by the focus group, (f) description of the principal's perceptions of leadership style, (g) description of emerging themes for this individual case, and (h) a case and chapter summary.

Perth Middle School

In this section, I discuss Perth Middle School's demographics and provide a brief description of the school building. I retrieved the demographic data from the department of education website, from the state in which Perth Middle School is located.

I collected data for the case study of the Perth Middle School principal during the 2011-2012 school year. I interviewed the principal as well as conducted a focus group that was comprised of English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), language arts, and special education teachers. To protect the anonymity of the participants, I changed the names of the people I interviewed. I also created a pseudonym for the school, Perth Middle School.

School Demographics

Perth Middle School is located in the eastern part of the U.S. and is located in one of the largest school districts in this geographical region. It is a traditional middle school that includes grades 6, 7, and 8. Approximately 70 full-time teachers and slightly over 1,100 students comprised the staff and student body during the 2011-2012 school year. Student demographics include 19% African American, 44% Hispanic, 5% Asian /Pacific Islander and 27% White with 32% of the students identified as ELLs. Approximately 45% of the student population was considered to be low income and therefore qualified for free and reduced lunch.

School Building

The physical structure of Perth Middle School is well maintained, though the building originally served as a high school and is one of the older schools within the district. Upon entering the building, visitors are greeted by a receptionist and required to sign-in and wear a name badge. The receptionist's desk and welcoming area is located in the hallway of the building and clearly displays welcome messages and instructions written in English and Spanish. On the left of the reception desk is a large auditorium, an uncommon resource when compared to other middle schools in this district. At the time of my visit there were many students in the auditorium actively engaged with a number of adults. According to the principal, these students were receiving structured remediation or re-teaching during the school's structured Response to Intervention (RtI) time.

The office is located down the first corridor past the reception desk. On entering the office I was warmly greeted by the office staff. There were a number of students in the

office either waiting for an administrator or to see the nurse. The atmosphere was warm and inviting. The office staff conducted themselves in a positive and engaging manner. A delightful repartee was going on between the office staff that added to the overall ambiance. As I waited for the principal, I found myself smiling and absorbed in the light-hearted and entertaining conversation.

Brief Overview of Principal One

Mr. McCorkindale is the principal of Perth Middle School. On the day I interviewed Mr. McCorkindale we met in the school's main office where I observed Mr. McCorkindale personally addressing every student sitting in the office in a warm and jovial manner. He called them all by name, and it was clear that this was a common practice and that the students were extremely comfortable in his presence. Mr. McCorkindale grew up in a large metropolitan city on the east coast of the U.S. in a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood. He revealed that his childhood neighborhood was integrated with Blacks and Whites, and that this was a powerful influence in shaping his beliefs about life and equity when dealing with people. He started his career as a high school basketball and baseball coach and social studies teacher in the same metropolitan city. Mr. McCorkindale indicated that he "incorporated a lot of my coaching techniques into my teaching, and that's when I really got into teaching and understanding what I could do for kids." Mr. McCorkindale married and soon after moved with his family to the current district. His first job was as a Teacher on Administrative Assignment at one of the district's high schools. Mr. McCorkindale reported that he initially hated the job and requested to be returned to the classroom. His principal refused stating that he was really good at the job, but encouraged him to pursue higher

education and his Master's degree. After completing his Master's degree, Mr. McCorkindale was immediately hired as an Assistant Principal at one of the district's middle schools and became the fifth principal in five years at his current school. At the time of this interview he was finishing his ninth year as principal of Perth Middle School. Throughout the interview, I observed Mr. McCorkindale to be a calm and approachable leader with a visible passion for his students.

Principal's Perception of the Leadership Practices and Capabilities that Work Best for Middle School English Language Learners

After reviewing the two primary research questions and purpose of this study, I began to ask specific questions (Appendix D interview protocol) in an effort to understand the leadership practices and capabilities that positively impact the literacy achievement of ELLs. I asked Mr. McCorkindale to describe the school's vision and mission and explain how the vision and mission guided him as the school leader. Mr. McCorkindale spoke with what appeared to be an intense internal belief in his school's vision and mission. It is easy to understand why teachers, students, parents, and community members may believe in the school's vision as Mr. McCorkindale was so visibly focused on communicating the vision and mission with passion, enthusiasm, and commitment.

Mr. McCorkindale explained that Perth Middle is an International Baccalaureate (IB) school and he explained the IB philosophy:

To foster tolerance and inter-cultural understanding among young people through a specific method of teaching. This method of teaching, also known as 'curricular

framework', incorporates critical thinking, problem solving, and exposure to a variety of viewpoints

The IB philosophy is integrated into the school's vision. Specifically, he explained that the Perth Middle School vision is: "...to educate all our kids to be globally minded." He fully embraced the IB philosophy even though, at the time of my research study, Perth Middle School had not yet been recognized as a full IB school and only offered an IB program rather than immersing the total school population into the IB program.

Regardless of the academic division between the student populations of the general education program and the students accepted and participating in the IB program, it was clear that Mr. McCorkindale truly believed in the vision of developing globally minded students, and the vision at Perth Middle was for the entire student body. He did not feel that there was one vision for the IB program and another for the rest of the students. Mr. McCorkindale added that for all kids at Perth Middle the vision also states that the students "...are citizens of the world that have a responsibility not only to Perth, not only the U. S., but that they are part of a global community." He also explained that embedded within the whole school vision is the goal that all students will "love learning." Therefore, the overarching vision and mission for all students at Perth Middle is to develop and encourage the students to be life-long learners and to have a love and passion for understanding what is happening throughout the entire world. Mr. McCorkindale's passion for the vision and mission of his school is revealed not only through his espoused beliefs and values but also through his habits and behaviors as a school leader.

Habits and Behaviors: Mr. McCorkindale's Leadership Practices

In this section I describe the leadership practices that support the literacy achievement of all students, but especially the practices that may have positively impacted the literacy achievement of ELLs at Perth Middle School. I identified seven leadership practices that supported Perth Middle School's literacy achievement (a) ensuring the successful implementation of the IB learning process, (b) requiring staff to routinely reflect on student achievement, (c) implementing programs and initiatives, (d) hiring, supporting, and supervising competent teaching staff, (e) guaranteeing an inclusive master schedule that is accessible to all students, (f) providing resources, and (g) executing the Perth Middle School process.

Ensuring the Successful Implementation of the IB Learning Process. Mr. McCorkindale described how he deliberately incorporated the school's vision and mission into students' daily experiences through multiple strategies, including evaluation and innovative instructional strategies. For example, he explained the importance of using portfolios rather than relying solely on multiple choice responses to assess students. According to Mr. McCorkindale, "Evaluating students through the portfolio system is not only important to their success but is also consistent with the schools efforts to become an IB school." As he explained:

IB is more into the students understanding the process rather than the product...if the kid, the child, understands the process that has got him to the end product, even if the end product is not perfect, then the student receives complete credit.

Mr. McCorkindale stated that he felt that this learning process was the principal component that had helped students to increase their literacy scores.

As defined in this study, leadership practices are professional skills, routines, and habits that a school principal displays throughout all of interactions, decisions, and behaviors as a leader (Robinson, 2010). Mr. McCorkindale exhibits effective leadership practices through his purposeful implementation of the IB learning process. For example, Mr. McCorkindale explained that he consistently communicates high expectations for learning while also promoting a school-wide focus on academic rigor and achievement. His consistent focus on high expectations and increased achievement has encouraged conversations about student success, and from these discussions routine instructional practices have pervasively evolved throughout the school. He went on to say: “The fact is that they [the students at Perth Middle School] have to be able to communicate their thoughts.” Although he shared that it has been a struggle between balancing prepping for the state’s yearly standardized assessments and fulfilling the IB philosophy, the end results showed that the student’s and staff’s hard work was paying off, and that all students at Perth Middle School were improving in literacy as well as all other academic areas.

Requiring Staff to Routinely Reflect on Student Achievement. Mr. McCorkindale believes in scheduling weekly professional learning community (PLC) meetings to provide teachers with the opportunity to reflect collaboratively about the progress of students. For example, he shared that in these required meetings he and his administrative team expect to hear teachers’ plans related to weekly lessons as well as discussions related to teachers’ observations and conclusions about what has been working to positively improve student

achievement. Additionally, during PLC's, teachers are able to share specific areas of their lessons with which they may be struggling as well as areas in that they feel they have not been able to successfully instruct their students. According to Mr. McCorkindale, the teachers are encouraged in these meetings to not only openly share their own successes and frustrations but to also support and advise each other. Furthermore, they are encouraged to cooperatively plan future lessons as well as assessments. Also, Mr. McCorkindale stated that these PLC meetings provide a structured time for all teachers to analyze, evaluate, and reflect on their student data in order to make sound instructional decisions. For example, Mr. McCorkindale utilizes the student data: "...to show them that this is something they didn't do real well. What haven't you taught them?" Therefore, the teachers are encouraged to reflect on what may have caused their lessons to fail and strategize about what they could potentially do differently in the future. In addition, Mr. McCorkindale shares examples of fellow staff members who may have successfully taught the same objectives in order that the teachers can collaborate, share, support, and learn from each other.

Implementing Programs and Initiatives. At the time of this study, Perth Middle School was in the process of becoming an IB school. In previous years, the IB courses were offered exclusively to the students who had applied to participate in the IB program. Due to the increased rigor in these classes, many students either failed to apply or were not strong enough in their academics to be accepted upon application. The change from an IB program to an IB school represents a dramatic program shift and provides school-wide opportunities for all students to experience and benefit from the IB globally minded vision.

It is however, important to note that Perth's school-wide IB program does not address many of the fundamental concerns for student academic achievement shared by Mr. McCorkindale. Many of the school's ELLs are struggling with basic literacy skills and although the IB vision includes all students, it does not specifically provide a program or specific guidance for working with struggling readers. Mr. McCorkindale shared that he had difficulty identifying a research-based program that was designed to meet the literacy and reading needs of students identified as ELLs, students with disabilities, as well as students in the general school population who are struggling readers. In essence, Mr. McCorkindale clearly recognized that his vision for the equitable education of all students could not be realized with the exclusive implementation of the school-wide IB program.

Mr. McCorkindale stated that it has been a struggle trying to meet the needs of his ELLs. He shared how he had asked for support from outside sources, including his supervisor, district ELL staff and superiors, and although all were extremely willing to listen to his frustrations, and even eager to help, the underlying issue was that there was no "working program" that could be recommended to support the ELLs. He continued to explain his request: "So, there is nowhere in this state that I can go and get a program that works?" The response that he received was "no" from all parties. Therefore, Mr. McCorkindale focused his vision to include all students to be educated in the mainstream classes and searched for programs, initiatives, and instructional strategies that could be located to support his vision.

Subsequently, one program that Mr. McCorkindale has found that supports his vision while also addressing the individual needs of all students is the Response to Intervention

(RtI) program. For example, Mr. McCorkindale explained that RtI requires teachers: “To find out what the kids know, what they don’t know, and then break them up.” In this way, students can be provided with purposeful and direct instruction to address the students’ areas of need. Although not all teachers at Perth Middle School are consistently or successfully implementing the RtI program, the level of daily conversations regarding authentic student data had definitely increased according to Mr. McCorkindale. Thus he noted that the teachers were moving in the right direction.

In addition to the RtI program, Mr. McCorkindale has also implemented the Parents as Educational Partners (PEP) program. The PEP program is designed to encourage parents, especially parents whose native language is not English, to learn about the U.S. education system, strategies to help their children, while also providing parents with English lessons. The program is focused on providing parents new to the U.S. with relevant and vital information regarding their child’s education and to do so in an inviting as well as safe setting. Furthermore, the Perth Middle school students whose parents are attending the PEP program are encouraged to participate with their parents. In many cases the students assist their parents. Mr. McCorkindale believes that this in turn provides positive interaction between parent and student. Finally, the PEP program is one of the initiatives that Mr. McCorkindale believes reduces the fear factor that many of his parents have about becoming involved in their child’s school.

Hiring, Supporting, and Supervising Competent Teaching Staff. Finding staff who are competent in the art of teaching diverse students while simultaneously building positive relationships with all students can be a challenge (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser,

2000). Mr. McCorkindale is passionate about the need to hire teachers for Perth Middle School who are not only supportive of the schools vision, but who are also capable of embedding the vision in every lesson they teach while interacting with students. Mr. McCorkindale is committed to providing the students of Perth Middle School with skilled teachers who demonstrate a passion and drive for meeting the needs of all students. For example, over the past nine years Mr. McCorkindale has struggled to recruit ESOL teachers who he felt were competent in ESOL, a content area, or both. He expressed his ongoing frustration at the lack of capable applicants in the discipline. He also shared that over the years: "...I've had teachers who were de-staffed from other schools that were not, you know, my own choice." Mr. McCorkindale also shared that over the last few years staffing changes have been made and a portion of the department was: "...very enthusiastic and want what I want, you know for my kids."

Consequently, the responsibility of educating the ELLs has transferred to the general education teachers. The ESOL teachers may be responsible for the modifications of assignments, assessments, quizzes, as well as assuring that all students receive the appropriate accommodations, but the general education teachers are primarily conducting the content instruction. It could be argued that that this move by Mr. McCorkindale has possibly been one of the leadership practices that have positively impacted the ELLs literacy achievement. For example, Mr. McCorkindale explained that in an effort to raise the level of expectation and to provide the ELLs the best possible instruction, it was determined that his best general education teachers would be asked to teach the ELLs. He stated: "...we asked them will they take these ESOL...now I have a language arts teacher, bottom of the class

language arts, the stuff she does with those kids is amazing.” Even though there is an ESOL co-teacher, the language arts teacher takes the lead and as Mr. McCorkindale explained raised the standards and more importantly the expectations for all of their students.

Guaranteeing an inclusive master schedule that is accessible to all students. Mr. McCorkindale believes in designing and implementing a master schedule that provides equitable access to education regardless of a student’s race, disability, gender, or language proficiency. At Perth Middle School the master schedule is driven by Mr. McCorkindale’s belief that all students should be educated by the content expert teachers and should be afforded the opportunity to be included in every possible content course. For example, Mr. McCorkindale expressed his struggle with creating an inclusive learning environment for all students: “I want all the kids out; I don’t want the kids in small groups.” For Mr. McCorkindale this meant that he did not believe in isolating ELLs in self-contained classes, and believed in providing them support in general education settings. Mr. McCorkindale went on to explain that: “The level ones are out for social studies, science and math: they get small group instruction for language arts.” He declared that: “They are out as soon as they can be out into general education.” Mr. McCorkindale believes that by providing ELLs the opportunity to interact and learn side by side with their English-only peers that the ELLs will have a much better chance to be academically successful.

Providing resources. At a time when school budgets are at their leanest, Mr. McCorkindale still values the importance of providing ELLs appropriate and relevant resources. One such resource that Mr. McCorkindale believes is extremely important is providing ELLs access to picture books. For example, Mr. McCorkindale explained that

when addressing some of the teachers' initial concerns regarding having ELLs scheduled into their core content classes such as mathematics or science, he responded, "Give them pictures, picture books. I don't care, as long as they are hearing you speak I feel they are getting what they need."

In addition to material resources, Mr. McCorkindale has also strongly valued the human resources made available to him through the county. In particular, Mr. McCorkindale has relied on the ESOL director as what he described as his "ESOL resource." Not only was the ESOL director available in assisting Mr. McCorkindale in locating and successfully hiring qualified ESOL teachers, she also provided Mr. McCorkindale a sounding board for many of his ideas and thoughts specifically when planning for ESOL instruction, and the master schedule. For example, when Mr. McCorkindale was considering having the Language Arts content area teachers take the lead and co-teach the Level 1 through 3 ELLs with the ESOL teachers. When Mr. McCorkindale initiated this practice it was not a common practice throughout the county. It was evident that Mr. McCorkindale was open to assistance and guidance from what he perceived to be the experts. He never indicated that he was the expert to the extent that no one else could provide information, guidance, or support.

Executing the PMS process. The Perth Middle School (PMS) process can simply be described as a whole school initiative that promotes the importance of students being re-taught material they have not successfully learned. Additionally, once the students have been re-taught, they are then provided the opportunity to be retested on the same material. This process is continued until the teachers are satisfied that each individual student has mastered the content being taught. The PMS process had originally stemmed from the eight-step

instructional process that had been first introduced in Perth Middle School during Mr. McCorkindale's first year as principal. The Eight-Step Process is a data-driven, cyclical continuous improvement approach and includes test score disaggregation, instructional focus, assessment, tutorials and enrichment as well as monitoring (Davenport & Anderson, 2002).

At the time of its introduction Mr. McCorkindale hired a retired teacher to provide support and training to the teachers as they collected and learned how to analyze their students' data. The position was titled director of data, and this staff member took the time to sit with teachers and have conversations related to data, the meaning of data, and how data could be adjusted to teaching practices. The data is gathered to support and inform the 8-step process. This process relies on data such as student test scores, quick checks, unit tests, interim grades, and attendance. Teachers engaged in focused discussions of the data and then learned how to use these various forms of data to guide their instructional practices. Mr. McCorkindale stated that he believed that these data conversations were extremely powerful and in many ways contributed to the increased successes of ELLs as well as other students at Perth Middle School.

Mr. McCorkindale, while in his ninth year as principal, had just begun to introduce the RtI model that integrated many components of the Perth Middle School's PMS process. After nine years Mr. McCorkindale continued to stress the importance of the PMS process. For example, Mr. McCorkindale declared: "I think the PMS process, the fact that if the child does not get it, we go back and teach it. I give the credit to that process." Mr. McCorkindale continued to share that the teachers began to rely on each other more and more, and they

began to understand the end results of their hard work: “The students passing the success prize.”

Beliefs and Values: Mr. McCorkindale’s Leadership Capabilities

In this section I describe the leadership capabilities that support the literacy achievement of all students, and specifically describe how these capabilities positively impact the literacy achievement of ELLs. I identified five leadership capabilities that supported Perth Middle School’s ELLs’ literacy achievement: (a) a strong sense of commitment to students and staff, (b) high expectations for all; (c) beliefs focused on students; (d) values collaboration from all members of the school community; and (e) empathy for the needs of others.

A strong sense of commitment to students and staff. Throughout the interview with Mr. McCorkindale it was evident both by his well-thought responses, and his body language and tone of voice that Mr. McCorkindale was extremely committed to the students and staff of Perth Middle School. He consistently represented himself as an individual and leader who was dedicated to the success of his school and was prepared to do whatever was needed to assure all students’ success. For example, Mr. McCorkindale voiced his concerns regarding the overall competency of staff, especially ESOL teachers, who were available for hiring. He explained that: “Teachers are the key for student success,” and that he was looking for the best teachers for his students. He stated numerous times that students are the “number one priority” and that his students’ needs would always come first. Mr. McCorkindale demonstrated this commitment when he fought to include a community liaison position to his staff. After he: “...fought for three to four years...” he was eventually

afforded the opportunity to create this position and subsequently hire a bilingual staff member to meet the needs not only of his students, but also the faculty and community as a whole.

Another example of Mr. McCorkindale's commitment to his students is with regard to his attitude toward teachers who do not necessarily agree with the decisions being made by the school administration. Mr. McCorkindale shared that on many occasions he experienced: "Teachers resisting change." Mr. McCorkindale went on to say that he believed: "Teachers have to be able to adjust." Yet, in order to facilitate his teachers' ability to adjust, Mr. McCorkindale stated that he "provides teachers with direction" and believes in leading by example. However, in spite of the strategies he utilizes, he still believes that there are a core group of teachers who, in his own words: "Teachers hate me." Mr. McCorkindale is committed to meeting the needs of his students regardless of the teachers, and as he stated, they may hate him, but he is not going to change the vision and mission of the school or diminish the effort to appropriately and successfully reach each and every student who is enrolled in Perth Middle School. Finally, Mr. McCorkindale finished by stating: "The best is yet to come!"

High expectations for all. As Mr. McCorkindale models his commitment to Perth Middle School, he encourages high expectations for all; not just for students, but also for the faculty, staff, community, and himself. The vision and mission both for the IB program as well as the entire Perth Middle School is designed to develop: "life-long learners." Mr. McCorkindale expects everyone to do well at all times, including students and staff. Consequently, one of Mr. McCorkindale's frustrations is the continuous struggle to hire

competent and qualified teachers, especially ESOL teachers. Although Mr. McCorkindale encourages high expectations for all, he realizes that he has to be consistently monitoring both students and teachers to assure that high expectations are realized. For example, Mr. McCorkindale requires all assessments to include a variety of formats that exclude multiple choice questions. He believes that: “Students need to be able to communicate their thoughts through written responses” in order to achieve high standards. Accordingly, Mr. McCorkindale communicates that: “high expectations are the foundation of our success.”

Beliefs focused on students. As a strategy in striving for high expectations for all, Mr. McCorkindale believes in ensuring that the student focus is maintained. By requiring teachers to analyze and reflect on their students’ data as well as the lessons taught, Mr. McCorkindale reports that Perth Middle School teachers are now: “Talking more now about kids.” For example, in both department and grade level meetings teachers are openly: “...discussing the needs [of students] and what has to be done,” in order to meet their individual students’ needs.

In addition to having teachers talk about their students with each other Mr. McCorkindale requires teachers to: “...break down the curriculum for kids into a language that they can be successful with.” This requires teachers to have detailed knowledge of their students in order to be able to understand all that students need to be able to learn. Another strategy that the Perth Middle School teachers use to better understand their students is that: “Teachers conference with students.” They build in time to discuss with their students problems that may have arisen and solutions to those problems. In this way, teachers are equipped to help each of their students independently.

Mr. McCorkindale indicated the importance that all teachers understand they do not need to teach all students as a whole group in order to successfully disseminate information. In this situation, he explains: “Teachers don’t understand...you don’t have to do a whole class instruction.” Students can be taught much more effectively by: “...putting them into groups of kids that need to be remediated.” He explained that the instruction that is being provided meets the specific needs of the students in a smaller group setting. Mr. McCorkindale believes whole-heartedly that if the focus of instruction is placed on the individual needs of each student, then the possibility of successfully raising students’ level of individual achievement is strengthened.

Values collaboration from all members of the school community. As defined in this study, leadership capabilities are intrinsic knowledge, disposition, and attributes that a school principal displays throughout all of their interactions, decisions and behaviors as leaders (Robinson, 2010). One such capability that Mr. McCorkindale regularly displays is his ability to motivate others to complete tasks that they may not have been capable of or willing to do in an alternative setting. In this situation, one way that Mr. McCorkindale motives collaboration is the requirement for teachers to meet with other teachers on a regular basis and with the purpose of focusing on students and their individual needs, as well as their own teaching needs. Mr. McCorkindale himself sits with teachers and talks to them about their own teaching and offering suggestions related to how they can make necessary adjustments that can be made. During our conversation Mr. McCorkindale shared that he believed it was his coaching experiences that provided him with the necessary intrinsic

knowledge to be able to motivate teachers to collaborate with one another as well as all members of the school community.

Empathy for the needs of others. Finally the most personal leadership capability demonstrated by Mr. McCorkindale was the desire to genuinely support the needs of all members of his school community. Mr. McCorkindale displayed a sincere need to support his students and teachers, as well as his school community in every way possible. In the case of teachers, Mr. McCorkindale believes that by supporting teachers through the purchase of resources and materials they request, teachers are enabled to be successful. For example, Mr. McCorkindale shared his sincere unhappiness about not being able to favorably respond to every teacher's request this school year due to a huge unexpected deficit in funding. In his own words, Mr. McCorkindale expressed: "I try to give them anything they need to be successful!"

At the same time, Mr. McCorkindale is also mindful of meeting the needs not just of his teachers but also his students, parents, and community at large. One example that demonstrates this leadership capability was the creation of a community liaison position. Mr. McCorkindale shared how it had taken him three to four years of relentless pursuit regarding the need for this position and was finally able to create a job description that was approved by the school district. The community liaison (CL) position included an array of responsibilities that included contacting students' homes in Spanish, facilitating the Parents as Educational Partners (PEP) program, encouraging and supporting the involvement of parents within the walls of the school, and in general, promoting the overall image of the school. Mr. McCorkindale declared that the CL became: "...a lifeline to the teachers." For

example, not only was the CL available for the parents, he or she is also available to support the teachers. The CL provided translating services and support to teachers both in writing as well as assisting in teacher-parent conferences, calling home with important information regarding students, and supporting the need of parents through communicating with parents and the PMS community. In other words, the CL: "...changed the face of Perth Middle School."

Teachers' Perceptions of Mr. McCorkindale's Leadership Practices

In this section I describe the teachers' perspectives that emerged during the focus group interview. The teachers were asked to share and discuss the principal's leadership practices that related to and specifically supported the literacy achievement of all students. I identified the following four leadership practices demonstrated by Mr. McCorkindale that emerged from the responses of the teachers in Perth Middle School: (a) ensuring that the learning environment at Perth Middle School is safe and secure; (b) requiring accountability for all; (c) guaranteeing an inclusive environment for all students; and (d) promoting high expectations for all students and faculty.

Ensuring that the learning environment at Perth Middle School is safe and secure. At Perth Middle School the environment within the school building is warm and friendly. There is a definite calm atmosphere, and the initial impression is extremely positive in nature. The members of the focus groups talked extensively about how they felt that the principal not only expected respect from all parties including himself, but more specifically required respect. For example, one teacher shared that: "...he doesn't tolerate disrespect toward teachers and he stands behind that." They felt that even though he was extremely

friendly and easy-going, he was consistently firm with discipline in dealing with students. Due to this fact, the focus group agreed that they felt safe at work, and that Mr. McCorkindale had developed an environment that was both secure and safe. For example, the teachers talked about the demographics of the school and the geometrical location of the school site: “Considering the area that we are situated in and the diversity of our students...the climate of the school is safe.” The teachers continued to share that he has tried to work on the overall climate of the school and: “...to make the students feel like when they walked through the door that they were safe.” The teachers were adamant that Mr. McCorkindale was the driving force behind the continual reduction of discipline issues over the last few years, and the fact that there was a significant decrease in acts of violence among students. The overall impression was that students and most parents were fully aware that Mr. McCorkindale would not support violence or inappropriate behavior and was committed to providing the Perth Middle School students and staff with a safe and secure environment for learning.

Requiring accountability for all. At Perth Middle School not only is respect required from all stakeholders but there is also a high expectation to hold everyone, including students and teachers, accountable for their actions, their learning, and their focus on education for all. Mr. McCorkindale believes in empowering teachers and students to raise their own expectations and to strive to do their best in everything they undertake. Mr. McCorkindale is open to new ideas and suggestions and empowers teachers as well as students to think outside the box. For every idea that is implemented Mr. McCorkindale expects to be kept regularly informed of the progress and holds both teachers and students

accountable for seeing the idea play out from beginning to end. To demonstrate, one teacher shared that: "...if you have an idea he will let you run with it, but you know just to follow up with him [Mr. McCorkindale] and see it through."

Another way in which Mr. McCorkindale requires accountability is through the tracking of data. To illustrate the point, the teachers discussed the RtI initiative that required detailed data tracking in order to provide the students with the individualized remediation necessary to meet each of their specific needs. The teachers shared that following the individual progress of each student was challenging because it required significant work. However, they did admit that they felt that it was helping the students that were struggling as it allowed them to pull students out in small groups and provide them with a little extra help. Once students received this additional instruction, they were reassessed to determine if they had successfully mastered the objective. All data was documented and tracked in order to assure that no student was falling through the cracks or that individual needs are being met.

Finally, due to the fact that Mr. McCorkindale expects that all students are provided equitable access to the appropriate curriculum and qualified teachers, the expectation is that all ELLs are treated equally. This means that ELLs are held accountable for their participation in their learning, and all ESOL teachers are held accountable for their students' individual growth and overall achievement. The teachers in the focus group believed that this level of accountability intended for all, was a main reason for the overall success of all students, but for the purpose of this study, the overall success of the ELLs.

Guaranteeing an inclusive environment for all students. Throughout my entire time at Perth Middle School, it was very clear through my conversation with Mr.

McCorkindale and the focus group that providing an inclusive environment for all students was a priority. The focus group shared a variety of situations in which it was evident that this priority was a whole school initiative. According to the teachers it is important to clearly note that by promoting an inclusive environment this did not mean simply providing an inclusive classroom setting for students. For Mr. McCorkindale an inclusive environment was much more. It included access to educational materials and equal instructional practices, access to the same variety of course selections, and the expectation that all classes, regardless of the student population, are being taught at the appropriate grade level and are requiring the same level of commitment and effort by both students and teachers.

An example of this inclusive environment was the specific courses selected to be included in the schools' master schedule. Mr. McCorkindale believes in providing all students with equitable access to education, and therefore, the creation of sheltered classes have not just provided a more streamlined focus for the teachers, but have also required them to be as close to, or on par with the general education pacing for all subjects. One member of the focus group shared: "... ELLs receive sheltered instruction rather than inclusion; however, students are expected to be learning at the same pace." In addition to the sheltered classes, there are also a variety of co-teaching opportunities that provide students with the teacher content expert as well as the teacher ESOL expert. Members of the focus group commented on how successful many of these partnerships have been over the last few years, and that students have continued improving and maintaining individual student growth.

Promoting high expectations for all students and faculty. Embedded in many of the responses from the members of the Perth Middle School focus group was the positive

impact Mr. McCorkindale's master schedule design has on the overall success of the students. One 8th grade language arts teacher explained that by clustering the ELL students into certain core teachers, although not a popular decision in the beginning, was one of the reasons she believed the overall ELL achievement scores in reading had improved. She shared that allowing content area experts, who were willing and open to this to work with the less proficient ELLs assured that the appropriate content and curriculum could be taught, while also raising the standards for all students. The same teacher shared that before Mr. McCorkindale adjusted the master schedule to allow for this creative clustering of students, many ELLs would be scheduled for self-contained classes taught by certified ELL teachers who were not content experts. As a result, these ELLs' language acquisition was being addressed, but they were not appropriately prepared for the state's standardized content assessments, and therefore the achievement scores of these students remained extremely low. An example shared by one of the veteran ESOL teachers was that: "Having the level 3 students grouped together is such a big difference; it helps a lot – for me and for the students and the outcome – because they are all on the same page." Another ESOL teacher shared that: "In my pull out class I got some really low kids in there who are ESOL and a couple of low kids who are not ESOL." She continued to share that, due to the fact that the teachers collaborate in the planning process and the high expectations presented to them by Mr. McCorkindale, no one would even think to exclude all students who needed assistance regardless of whether they are identified as ESOL or not. According to focus group members this behavior simply strengthens the overall achievement and morale of the ESOL students as

it prevents alienating any student and assists in assuring that all students believe they are welcome and supported at Perth Middle School.

Teachers' Perceptions of Mr. McCorkindale's Leadership Capabilities

In this section I describe the teachers' perceived leadership capabilities that support the literacy achievement of all students, and potentially positively impact the literacy achievement of ELLs. I identified five leadership capabilities exhibited by the principal, Mr. McCorkindale, that the teachers of Perth Middle School believe support their students' literacy achievement: (a) believes in a collaborative approach to education, (b) values a motivational and empowering learning environment driven by high expectations for all, (c) committed to a culture of trust between students, staff, parents, and community, (d) believes in a student-centered environment that exhibits positivity and support to all stakeholders, and (e) demonstrates a responsive approach to school leadership.

Believes in a collaborative approach to education. Throughout my interview with Mr. McCorkindale reference was made to his love of coaching and the valuable experiences he gained while coaching that he contributes to his leadership style. On a similar note, members of the focus group discussed Mr. McCorkindale's ability to bring the staff, students, and community together in an encouraging and coach-like manner. The focus group was all in agreement that Mr. McCorkindale encouraged inclusive decision making throughout the school. One way this was articulated by a 6th grade teacher in the focus group was Mr. McCorkindale's expectations regarding collaboration between teams, including students and teachers. The teacher explained that Mr. McCorkindale expects: "...each grade level to come up with a motto and theme... getting the students involved." She continued to explain

that this whole-school expectation for collaboration was evident throughout the school however; she stated that it was because of Mr. McCorkindale's encouraging manner and his expectations that enabled them to be completed so successfully.

An equally significant aspect of Mr. McCorkindale's capability to encourage a collaborative approach is the evidence of his personal involvement in modeling this expectation. The 7th grade language arts teacher shared that there are times during content or grade level meetings when it is hard to come to a consensus on issues and explained that sometimes there is just outright disagreement on a problem. She continued by stating: "...if your group is having a hard time communicating about or there is a break down in your PLC, he'll come and try to help repair it." The members of the focus group all agreed that Mr. McCorkindale regularly gets involved when situations become contentious and has made it a priority to take the lead rather than expect his assistant principals to handle delicate situations.

Another aspect of Mr. McCorkindale's collaborative approach to education is his emphasis on teamwork. Although Perth Middle School is not organized with what could be categorized as traditional teams such as language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science whose teachers share the same students, due to the implementation of the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, Mr. McCorkindale has made every effort to provide common planning for all teachers on a grade level. This includes ESOL and special education teachers that have allowed for some common planning taking place. An example of how this has assisted within Perth Middle School was shared by one 8th grade language arts teacher. She stated: "ESOL teachers may make connections to something we're working

on in LA to other classes that I may not know is going on, and since we aren't on teaching teams that's been my one link to other teams or disciplines." The special education teacher expressed her gratitude for being able to plan with the general education teachers. She explained that she could share with her colleagues what is working in other classes in an effort to replicate success throughout the building.

Finally, one of the most powerful statements was expressed by the 7th grade language arts teacher regarding Mr. McCorkindale's efforts to encourage and support collaboration throughout the building. This teacher described a definite feeling of a "sense of unity" among teachers even though there was not a traditional middle school team framework in place. It was clear when listening to the teachers talk about Mr. McCorkindale that they all felt very supported and there was no doubt from anyone that this feeling came directly from and was modeled by the principal, Mr. McCorkindale.

Values a motivational and empowering learning environment driven by high expectations for all. A direct result of Mr. McCorkindale's encouraging manner and desire for true collaboration is his ability to motivate and empower his faculty, staff, and students to strive for his high expectations for all. During our focus group the 8th grade language arts teacher explained how the teachers have a number of incentive programs to reward the students for their individual academic growth. Mr. McCorkindale recognizes that it is not always about the end result, but about how the students are making progress, and how they are demonstrating their learning experiences. Mr. McCorkindale motivates and empowers students. An example, according to the teachers, is that he holds PEP rallies for each grade level to clearly express to the students what his expectations are for all of them and how

much he believes in them and their individual abilities. As a follow up to the PEP rallies the teachers in the focus group shared that he frequently visits classrooms and voices how proud he is of the students and celebrates in their achievements regardless of how small. As the special education teacher stated: “He makes every student feel wanted and worthwhile.”

With regard to motivating and empowering his teachers, the 8th grade language arts teachers shared that “he has high expectations” and makes it clear to all that he expects follow through. Mr. McCorkindale is extremely supportive and will allow the majority of teachers to take the lead and work through their ideas and visions provided they meet the needs of all of their students. The only stipulation that he expresses to his teachers is that they must follow through with whatever initiative or idea the teachers take the lead on. The special education teacher shared how Mr. McCorkindale unifies the faculty by making statements such as “Let’s do our job!” and then continues to model for all of his staff members how they can get the job done. She shared that Mr. McCorkindale never asked a teacher to do anything that he was not willing to do himself, and that sense of commitment to his teachers was the main reason that so many of them believe and trust in everything that Mr. McCorkindale does at Perth Middle School.

Committed to a culture of trust between students, staff, parents, and community.

The staff, students, parents, and community members of Perth Middle School realize very quickly that there is a strong level of trust that runs through the building, and that this level of trust begins at the top and emanates from Mr. McCorkindale. The 8th grade language arts teacher in the focus group explained that trust at Perth Middle School is due to the fact that Mr. McCorkindale: “believes in what we do” and “trusts and supports us.” This seemed to

be a common theme throughout the focus group session. It was evident from teachers' responses that the members of the focus group all felt that they could personally trust Mr. McCorkindale, and that he supported them in their efforts to meet the needs of their students.

The strong level of trust and support that is experienced by the Perth Middle School community begins with the high level of visibility throughout the building modeled by Mr. McCorkindale. The 7th grade language arts teachers shared: "He will pop into your classroom...he'll just be part of your lesson like answer questions; he'll... you know, he makes the kids feel comfortable." Another member of the focus group went on to state that: "I really like that, I mean I really appreciate that," referring to the level of visibility and the fact that Mr. McCorkindale is not a stranger to their classes. The focus group agreed that because the students were so comfortable with his presence his "popping" into classes never phased any of the students; in fact it did the complete opposite which is to raise their own personal level of expectation and effort. When Mr. McCorkindale visited classrooms, students tried their best and openly wanted to receive praise from him personally.

The focus group continued to discuss Mr. McCorkindale's visibility throughout the building and went on to share that he models the behaviors and expectations that he has for students and faculty. It is clear to all, that he is passionate about the students at Perth Middle School and that the teachers' and students' best interests are a main priority. An example of this level of commitment to the students is that: "He personally meets with students who are in the RtI program." This same teacher went on to share that Mr. McCorkindale believes in talking with students to discuss their personal wishes and dreams and explains how their time at Perth Middle School can assist them in meeting these personal goals. He will brainstorm

with students to problem solve issues, whether they are behavioral or academic and will work with them to find resolve and continue making progress in whatever area they have been struggling in previously. Mr. McCorkindale makes time for his students and staff. He will make time to work with any of them when needed, and this is well known throughout the school community.

Believes in a student-centered environment that exhibits positivity and support to all stakeholders. Teachers who work at Perth Middle School can be confident in their knowledge that all decisions are made with the students in mind. Mr. McCorkindale prides himself and his team on striving to create a positive work environment for staff, faculty, students, and the community. When talking with the focus group, the unanimous feeling was that Mr. McCorkindale creates an encouraging environment through positive interactions both with students and faculty. He models the behaviors toward students he expects from others on a continuous basis. One member of the focus group explained that he is: “all about the students.” She went on to share that: “He will talk to them and try to encourage them.” Another member of the focus group continued by stating that: “he supports students’ efforts” and is “supportive and encourages the students’ ideas.” The overwhelming feeling of support was evident during the focus group session. A third member of the focus group explained “he does not say no to students” and he encourages “all of the things that they did do well [it is] not just about testing.” As we continued to discuss Mr. McCorkindale’s implementation of a student-centered environment it was apparent that his personal behavior is the key factor to the overall positivity and support evidence throughout the school building.

Repeatedly, members of the focus group referred to Mr. McCorkindale's high level of support for both the staff and students of Perth Middle School. Also discussed was Mr. McCorkindale's method of encouraging all stakeholders, although especially students, in everything that they do. An example expressed by a member of the focus group was that he: "...encourages all of us to take ownership." The same teacher went on to say that not only is Mr. McCorkindale encouraging of students and faculty, but he also encourages them, to take the lead on their own ideas and follow them through to make them a reality. In summary, Mr. McCorkindale creates an atmosphere of positivity that moves past just the hallways of the school but is also reflected in the classrooms. The 8th grade language arts teacher in the focus group stated: "The atmosphere in my class, the atmosphere is kinda like the school – positive."

Demonstrates a responsive approach to school leadership. Mr. McCorkindale is evidently an involved principal who is visible throughout the building and is one who makes himself available to both faculty and students. During the focus group session the teachers repeatedly remarked how approachable Mr. McCorkindale was and how he was available to them whenever they needed him. Although it might seem like a simple act, the teachers were all very appreciative of the fact that: "He responds if you need him." and that "He responds to emails." This high level of responsive behavior towards the faculty and the students was evidently greatly appreciated by the members of the focus group and was one of the main reasons why they believed Mr. McCorkindale was so successful at Perth Middle School.

According to the focus group another attribute identified as key to the success of students at Perth Middle School was the fact that Mr. McCorkindale is perceived to be

extremely approachable. Although there was a level of respect between the faculty and Mr. McCorkindale it was not developed as a result of fear or intimidation. The members of the focus group explained how approachable Mr. McCorkindale was to everyone, both students and faculty. One member of the focus groups stated: “His door is always open to us and any of the students.” Another member of the focus group shared: “I’m comfortable going to him and asking a question...I’m not nervous in there.” A third member of the group described Mr. McCorkindale as: “...he is laid back... I like that style of him.” The focus group agreed that Mr. McCorkindale’s relaxed and friendly manner was a huge factor in his approachability, and due to this, many teachers and students were willing to take any concerns or problems directly to him for guidance and assistance. This willingness to support all stakeholders of Perth Middle School combined with Mr. McCorkindale – responsiveness to the needs of his staff created an overall feeling of support among all members of the school.

Additional Information Shared by the Focus Group

Although not specifically related to the data discussing leadership practices and capabilities, a number of other items were discussed during the focus group interview at Perth Middle School that I believe are worth mentioning. In particular, the teachers indicated that funding was an area of challenge facing the principal. Specifically, the teachers believed that Mr. McCorkindale’s biggest challenge for addressing the needs of ELLs was the lack of funding. This lack of funding caused scheduling issues as well as presented problems with providing appropriate technology resources to the ELLs. One of the ESOL teachers candidly reported: “...we don’t have anything.” The focus group discussed the concern that they did

not have enough computers in their classrooms or enough research-based resources to use with the ELLs. They discussed further that they have access to a computer program called “Achieve 3000,” however; they don’t have enough computers for their students to effectively use the program. This seems to be a common concern from all members of the focus group. Interestingly, Mr. McCorkindale did not share, or at least he failed to identify concerns regarding funding.

Another interesting issue arose during the focus group interview related to the master schedule and changes that had been made for the school year. During this discussion it was evident from the raised voices and alternate exchange between focus group members that there was definitely some misunderstanding or possible miscommunication regarding these changes. Additionally, it was clear that not everyone in the focus group seemed to be aware of all of the scheduling terms randomly presented by some of the focus group participants. For example, there was confusion regarding the difference between an inclusion and a sheltered setting or class. Also, it seemed that the teachers were not clear as to why some of their self-contained classes for ELLs had become inclusion classes and as a result, the level 1 and 2 ELLs were now being taught with regular education students. Although the focus group members continued to stay professional at all times, it was clear that the newest member of the group, an ESOL teacher who was in her first year of teaching was disgruntled by the arrangement. While perhaps not necessarily appropriate, due to my own background as a certified ESOL teacher and principal, I took a few minutes out of the focus group interview to explain to the group why Mr. McCorkindale as well as every other principal in the area would have made some of these scheduling changes based on licensing requirements

from the state. What was amazing was the nearly automatic reaction of relief from the group when they realized that a less than popular scheduling decision had not been Mr. McCorkindale's idea. It was obvious that they had not felt the need to question Mr. McCorkindale as they clearly trusted him however, the decision to place level 1 and 2 ELLs into inclusive classes had definitely been bothering a few of them. Some of the statements made by the group were: "Oh that is why" and "Oh well that explains it." After the focus group interview, I shared with Mr. McCorkindale this portion of the interview. Mr. McCorkindale explained how surprised he was that they had not just come and asked him for clarification however, he also understood that the teachers who he primarily selects to work with the ELLs are some of the most dedicated and hard-working teachers on his staff and would not have thought to question a decision he made. He shared that he needed to take a little more time to meet with them when changes beyond his control are mandated so that he could respond to their questions and concerns personally. He thanked me for clarifying the situation with the teachers and with sharing the information with him. It was evident when talking with Mr. McCorkindale that it pained him to think that his teachers were not happy with a decision that he had made regarding the schedule of ELLs, and it appeared that he would be extremely reflective about making sure that this type of miscommunication did not occur again. His obvious commitment to his students and staff was evident in all of his responses and his demeanor throughout the interview and this separate conversation.

Principal's Perception of his Leadership Style

As part of the interview process one of the specific questions directed to all principals was related to the principals' perceptions of their own leadership style. Mr. McCorkindale

without hesitation stated that he believed it was his coaching background that has been the most influential in his leadership. He went on to say:

In coaching, everyday you are looking at what the teams weaknesses are, what the strengths are, what drills you do to improve, and that is really what has helped me in looking at the school and, you know analyzing what needs, what our areas of strength and our areas of weakness are.

Mr. McCorkindale went on to share that when it comes to decisions surrounding helping his teachers, he tries to give them anything they need to be successful. This was probably the only time during the entire interview when Mr. McCorkindale's demeanor became slightly depressed. He shared that the budget had not come out the way he had expected this year, and therefore for the first time when someone has come to his door and asked for something, he has had to tell them that they may need to wait because the school does not have the money. It was clear when Mr. McCorkindale shared this information that it was very painful for him to have to turn a teacher away without providing them with the resources or supplies they would normally receive on request.

Additionally, Mr. McCorkindale shared that he believed that his leadership style could also be described as collaborative. He continued by explaining that when he took over as principal at Perth Middle School, he was the fifth principal in five years. Therefore, without the support and collaboration of the teachers and staff at Perth Middle School no improvements or positive changes would have been possible. It was clear when talking with Mr. McCorkindale and watching his body language that he genuinely cares about the students and staff at Perth Middle School and firmly believes that by working together and

building positive relationships between all school stakeholders, positive results can be achieved by all.

Emerging Themes

The following themes emerged from the interview data and subsequent analysis, and also aligned with the theory driving the analysis. Namely, the people in formal educational leadership positions should not only be proficient in leadership practices that support effective middle schools, but also have intrinsic leadership capabilities. Through the combination of practices and capabilities, the leadership style of principals emerges and guides their decisions and actions to support effective middle schools.

After identifying the emerging themes, both from the principal and the focus group interview, I developed a matrix to assist in the identification and description of Mr. McCorkindale's leadership style. I used my previously created *Framework of Themes for Leadership Practices and Capabilities*, which is based on the terminology used in predominant leadership literature, as a foundation and a guide to complete this matrix (Figure 1).

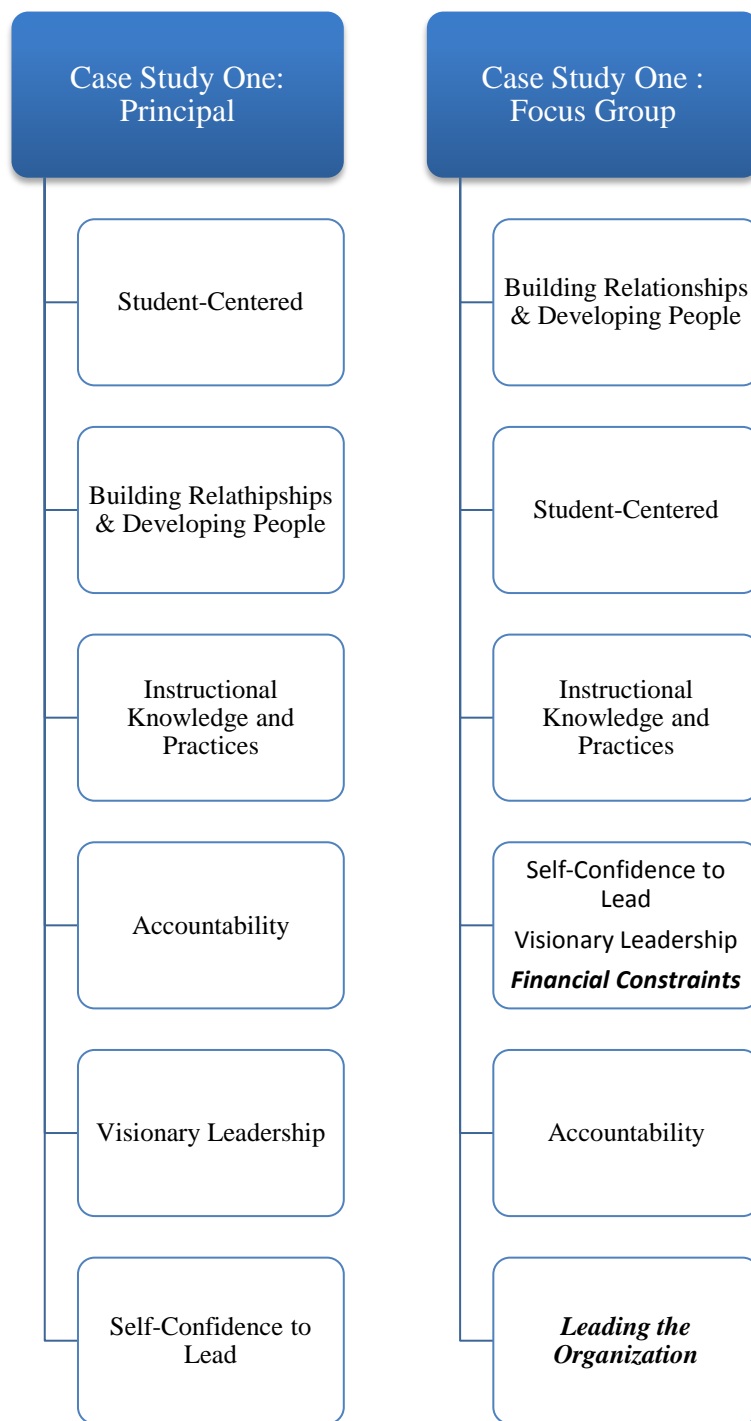


Figure 1. Emerging Themes for Case Study One

Figure 1 demonstrates the three dominant themes that emerged from the interviews with Mr. McCorkindale and the Perth Middle School Teacher focus group. These three themes were (a) student-centered, (b) building relationships and developing people, and (c) instructional knowledge and practices. All three of these themes could independently contribute to the literacy achievement of ELL students at Perth Middle School. It is striking that the focus group teachers perceived the principal in a clearly similar manner to the principal's perceived view of his leadership practices and capabilities. This convergence of belief regarding Mr. McCorkindale's ability to build relationships and develop people within and outside of Perth Middle School has a huge impact on the success of all of the students, not just the ELLs.

Based on the emerging themes described above, Mr. McCorkindale's leadership style is consistent with transformational leaders. Specifically, Mr. McCorkindale is able to motivate faculty and students, as well as inspire those around him to work hard for the good of the school overall as well as for their personal attainment of happiness in their work (Bass, 1981; Yukl, 1994). The transformational style is consistent with Mr. McCorkindale's supportive and encouraging behaviors, and his belief that in order for faculty, staff, students, and parents to meet their potential they have to feel encouraged and valued. In addition, Mr. McCorkindale exhibits a shared leadership style due to his desire and practice of involving the entire school community into the decision making process while also sharing the many roles and responsibilities of the daily school day. His clear vision and mission is evident throughout the school and because of this clearly defined focus, all stakeholders in and out of the school have clear goals and objectives to follow and work towards. All of these factors

influence Mr. McCorkindale's leadership style, practices, and capabilities and therefore potentially contribute to the literacy achievement of ELL students.

Case and Chapter Summary

In this chapter I described the leadership practices and capabilities, as well as the leadership style demonstrated by the principal, Mr. McCorkindale. The leadership practices, capabilities, and style emerged from the data, which consisted primarily of interviews with the current principal and with teachers who participated in the focus group discussions during the 2011-2012 school year. Given the high population of ELLs as well as the economic disadvantages facing the Perth Middle School community, Mr. McCorkindale faced significant leadership challenges as principal. Based upon his the interview with Mr. McCorkindale, in which he acknowledged these challenges, he primarily focused on sharing examples and describing his leadership practices and capabilities that work best, not only for ELLs, but for all middle school students.

Given the focus of this study on distinguishing practices from capabilities, I used the definitions established in Chapter One to separate the emerging themes into the two separate categories. Accordingly, I identified seven leadership practices that supported Perth Middle School's literacy achievement (a) ensuring the successful implementation of the IB learning process, (b) requiring staff to routinely reflect on student achievement, (c) implementing programs and initiatives, (d) hiring, supporting, and supervising competent teaching staff, (e) guaranteeing an inclusive master schedule that is accessible to all students, (f) providing resources, and (g) executing the PMS process. In addition, I identified five leadership capabilities that supported Perth Middle School's literacy achievement: (a) a strong sense of

commitment to students and staff, (b) high expectations for all, (c) beliefs focused on students, (d) values collaboration from all members of the school community, and (e) empathy for the needs of others. In the following paragraphs, I briefly review the teacher focus group interviews and describe how they perceived the leadership practices and capabilities that support the literacy achievement of students at Perth Middle School.

The teachers at Perth Middle School described how Mr. McCorkindale supported students' literacy achievement. Based on the data from the teachers who participated in the focus group interview, four leadership practices emerged (a) ensuring the learning environment at Perth Middle School is safe and secure, (b) requiring accountability for all, (c) guaranteeing an inclusive environment for all students, and (d) promoting high expectations for all students and faculty. These focus group interviews with the teachers also revealed five leadership capabilities that the principal exhibited (a) believes in a collaborative approach to education, (b) values a motivational and empowering learning environment driven by high expectations for all, (c) commits to a culture of trust between students, staff, parents, and community, (d) believes in a student-centered environment that exhibits positivity and support to all stakeholders, and (e) demonstrates a responsive approach to school leadership.

Overall three primary themes emerged: (a) student-centered, (b) building relationships and developing people, and (c) research and data-driven instructional practices. The combination of these themes potentially impacts the literacy achievement of the ELLs at Perth Middle School. This is the first of three cases. In the next chapter I review the second case in my multi-case study, Glasgow Middle School.

5. CASE STUDY: PRINCIPAL TWO

This chapter is organized into seven sections (a) the context of Glasgow Middle School, (b) brief overview of the principal, (c) description of the principals perception of their own leadership practices and capabilities that have worked best for middle school ELLs', (d) description of the teachers perception of their principals leadership practices and capabilities that work best for middle school ELLs', (e) description of additional information shared by the focus group, (f) description of the principal's perception of her leadership style, (g) a description of emerging themes as they pertain to this individual case, and (h) a case and chapter summary.

Glasgow Middle School

In this section, I discuss Glasgow Middle School's demographics and provide a brief description of the school building. I retrieved the demographic data from the department of education website, from the state in which Glasgow Middle School is located.

I collected data for the case study of the Glasgow Middle School principal during the 2011-2012 school year. I interviewed the principal as well as conducted a focus group that was comprised of ELL, language arts, assistant principal, and special education teachers. To protect the anonymity of the participants, I changed the names of the people I interviewed. I also created a pseudonym for the school, Glasgow Middle School.

School Demographics

Glasgow Middle School is located in the eastern part of the U.S. and is located in one of the largest school districts in this geographical region. It is a traditional middle school that includes grades 6 through 8. There are approximately 75 full-time teachers and slightly over 1,150 students during the 2011-2012 school year. The student demographics include 28% African American, 37% Hispanic, 8% Asian /Pacific Islander and 18% White with 26% of the students identified as ELLs. Thirty-five percent of the student population was considered to be low income and therefore qualified for free and reduced lunch.

School Building

The physical structure of Glasgow Middle School is beautifully maintained with an impressively landscaped entrance into the school building. Upon entering the building, visitors are greeted by a receptionist and required to sign-in and wear a name badge. The receptionist's desk and surrounding area is welcoming and is located immediately on entering the building and clearly displays motivational and inspirational messages displayed in English and Spanish. Immediately to the right of the reception desk is the main office, which is where I was directed to wait for Dr. Dunn. At the time of my arrival there were not many students or parents in the front area of the building and the overall impression that I gleamed was of a calm and focused learning environment.

On entering the office, Dr. Dunn was dealing with a discipline incident and there were police, school personnel and parents in Dr. Dunn's office. One thing that impressed me while I waited was that although the parents were obviously upset, and the incident was evidently serious, the entire incident was handled in a calm and respectful manner. The

office staff carried on their duties without hesitation and remained professional and pleasant throughout the entire unfortunate situation.

Brief Overview of Principal Two

Dr. Dunn was the principal of Glasgow Middle. On the day I interviewed Dr. Dunn we met in the school's main office. Due to the discipline incident previously mentioned I had to wait for a short time period before being escorted back to the administrative conference room. I learned later that this was because Dr. Dunn was personally handling the discipline issue. I was impressed by the personal commitment Dr. Dunn displayed regarding her students and their well-being. She could have easily handed discipline issues over to her assistant principals, but it was evident by her actions that she believed in being personally involved and committed to her students, families, and staff.

Dr. Dunn grew up in a small town in western PA. She shared that originally she was not supposed to go to college as she was the only daughter with two older brothers and two younger brothers, and when family funds were tight it was more important for her brothers to go to college than for her. Dr. Dunn stated that this did not really bother her as she had been working for her father's company all through high school and could have made a career working in finance. Additionally she was taking business classes in high school like typing, short hand, and record keeping and bookkeeping with the idea in mind that she would probably work in in an office. However, her aunt had other ideas. She shared that her aunt was a career person, who had never married, and refused to accept that Dr. Dunn was not going to college, so at the last minute all of her plans had to be changed, as now she could go to college. However, the next dilemma was what to study. Dr. Dunn's mother suggested

teaching and since Dr. Dunn had been taking so many different business classes she decided to become a business teacher. So, Dr. Dunn went to an excellent state teacher college. Dr. Dunn shared her belief that to this day many of the PA teacher colleges produce some of the best young teachers available to the teaching field.

Following her graduation, Dr. Dunn started a career as a high school business teacher in a southeastern coast U.S. state. Dr. Dunn taught business for 10 years at this school before moving to a program for at-risk students called “Education for Employment” that was designed to help disadvantaged youth. Dr. Dunn revealed that this: “was the beginning of my love for working with disadvantaged youth.” From this position Dr. Dunn moved into a vocational coordinator position which she described as half way between teacher and administrator and that very early on in her first or second year her teaching supervisor encouraged her to consider pursuing her Masters in Administration. On completing her master’s Dr. Dunn explained that she got her first assistant principal job back in her home state, however she shared that this job was a disaster as it required her to separate herself and her young children from their father, so after a short period of time their returned to the southern eastern U.S. state and she worked for four years as an high school A.P in one school district, and then was invited to become an A.P. at an extremely troubled high school in a neighboring school district, where she stayed for five years before taking her first principal job in the same district. After four years, and taking the school to full accreditation, Dr. Dunn felt that it was time for a change and made the move to Glasgow Middle School, where she has been for the last four years at the time of this interview. Throughout the interview I

observed Dr. Dunn to be a self-motivated and dynamic leader with a visible drive for education.

Principal's Perception of the Leadership Practices and Capabilities that Work Best for Middle School English Language Learners

After reviewing the two primary research questions and purpose of this study, I began to ask specific questions (Appendix D: Principal Interview Protocol and Questions) in an effort to understand the leadership practices and capabilities that positively impact the literacy achievement of ELLs. I asked Dr. Dunn to describe Glasgow Middle School's vision and mission and explain how the vision and mission guided her as the school leader. Dr. Dunn stated in a natural and confident manner that the mission at Glasgow Middle School is:

To provide an environment in which my teachers can teach with the proper resources and tools and my students come to this building each and every day with the expectation that they are going to learn something. The building is calm, the expectation is that the lessons are engaging and that we provide again tools and resources for all students so that means if I have low readers then accommodations are made for me so that I can learn, I can increase my academic achievement as well as the top notch student who can read for higher standards.

It was clear when listening to Dr. Dunn that she whole-heartedly believed in her school's vision and mission. It was also very clear that she expected her staff to model the vision and mission to the students of Glasgow Middle School on a daily basis. I was very moved when I listened to her speak and could understand how teachers and staff could be motivated by her

words, drive and commitment to the students, staff and community of Glasgow Middle School.

Dr. Dunn went on to share that in regards to guiding her as a leader, the vision and mission requires her to be: “On top of everything. Every single thing.” She went on to explain that: “To the point that it is a 24/7 job. And you never rest, because if we are not in the halls with the kids, we are in the classroom. We are very seldom sitting down. In fact we are hardly ever sitting behind closed doors.” Dr. Dunn went on to share that she believes that her leadership team, which consists of herself and her two assistant principals, are all highly visible throughout the school building. She explained, “I think we have the same mentality...we really gel.” She continued to explain that they all believe in the need to monitor instruction, student behavior, staff interaction with students etc. Dr. Dunn explained the need for being so visibly focused. She stated: “I want my teachers to be the very best that they can be and in order for me to help them do that I need to know what they are doing on a regular basis.”

Dr. Dunn explicitly explained her belief in leading by example and her commitment to being visible throughout her building both in the hallways and classrooms. It is also very clear that Dr. Dunn believes in her leadership team and their united commitment to the school vision and mission. She believes in hard work and effort in order to reaching all common goals, which in this case is the academic achievement of all of her students at Glasgow Middle School.

Habits and Behaviors: Dr. Dunn's Leadership Practices

In this section I describe the leadership practices that support the literacy achievement of all students, but especially the practices that may have positively impacted the literacy achievement of English language learners. I identified five leadership practices that may have supported Glasgow Middle School's literacy achievement, especially with the ELLs (a) ensuring the master schedule meets the individual needs of all students, (b) supervising competent teaching staff and guaranteeing all staff, regardless of content, are held accountable for ensuring high expectations for learning outcomes, (c) providing appropriate resources and implementing appropriate programs including enrichment and remediation, (d) committing to strengthening and redefining the co-teaching model of instruction at GMS, and (e) ensuring a safe, secure, and welcoming environment for all GMS students.

Ensuring the master schedule meets the individual needs of all students. Dr. Dunn conveyed the importance of a good master schedule. She stated that the master schedule should be driven by the need to provide necessary and required services to ESOL and Special Education students. Dr. Dunn went on to explain that a good master schedule in her opinion at the middle school level was a block schedule because: "you couldn't do for ESOL and special education students without it being block." Additionally, Dr. Dunn explained that block schedules provided her the opportunity to create schedules to individually meet the needs of all of her ESOL students. For example, Dr. Dunn described:

The ESOL and Sp. Ed. teachers are more focused on one content area versus all over the place so the teacher; those Sp. Ed. and ESOL only have to worry about the

curriculum for one subject so they can become an expert in the subject area. So that's one thing in the schedule.

Another example is the ability to give the ESOL students a double dose of their weakest area.

Dr. Dunn went on to share:

So if I have, well given them double doses and at the same time given them access to through co-teaching the expert in LA, Math, Science, and Social Studies. So we don't have for ESOL I have no self-contained LA classes or Math classes or Science classes. They have a resource during elective time where they are getting that double dose, but they are out in the mainstream for the content areas.

It was very evident when listening to Dr. Dunn that she was extremely passionate and committed about the need for all ESOL, and special education students to be provided equal access to, as she called them the experts, the content area teachers. She in no way felt that the ESOL students benefited from being in self-contained classes, and in her opinion, they learned more by being exposed to the appropriate grade level curriculum, being taught by the content specific expert teachers, and being supported and guided by the ESOL teacher in a co-teaching model. Although Dr. Dunn did not have any previous experience working with ESOL students prior to taking over Glasgow Middle School, her evident beliefs and enthusiasm for student and their ability to achievement was evident with every word spoken. It was hard to not be impressed by her confidence and overall strong personality, which is evident in every observed interaction.

Supervising competent teaching staff and guaranteeing all staff, regardless of content, are held accountable for ensuring high expectations for learning outcomes. As defined in this study, leadership practices are professional skills, routines, and habits that a school principal displays throughout all their interactions, decisions, and behaviors as a leader. Dr. Dunn exhibits effective leadership practices by her purposeful hiring of competent staff, the steps she takes to support their needs, as well as the actions taken to support them with their instructional practices. For example, Dr. Dunn described one way she supervises and oversees instruction throughout her school building is by developing a comprehensive plan to monitor instruction. Dr. Dunn continued to explain that it is not only important to design a solid plan for monitoring instruction, but it is also important to follow through with the plan. Dr. Dunn explained:

And when we tell the staff what that plan is we have to do it. So we don't say what we are going to collect lesson plans and then do nothing with them. We don't say like... in my first three years we did collect lesson plans, we are now collecting assessment rather than lesson plans. But the point the whole point is that we follow up when teachers do not adhere to our plan and that was the big shock to them. And I think would be a big shock to a lot of people. Oh my goodness they are actually doing what they said they were going to do.

In regards to monitoring assessments rather than lesson plans Dr. Dunn expressed how interesting the entire exercise has been from an administrative perspective has been. She shared:

There's always been argument about rather whether it is valuable to collect lesson plans or not, but when I started my third year in the same building and I started to see the same lesson plans over and over again, I said okay it is time for me to do something different. Umm...plus collecting lesson plans doesn't really tell me what the kids are learning and how they are learning. So powerful it is to collect the assessments, very powerful. And it tells me really where we are in terms of standard-based instruction.

Additionally, Dr. Dunn went on to share that by monitoring instruction throughout the building it automatically filters down to the ESOL students because:

Traditionally, and I hate to say this, you know, but special education teachers and ESOL teachers particularly those in the co-teaching classrooms, were sometimes viewed or thought they were teacher aids and so now they are being held, actually being held accountable for what they are teaching and the learning process.

Dr. Dunn shared that this level of accountability and monitoring has definitely placed pressure on her staff and she felt as a direct result a number of her teachers have left over the last few years, particularly from the ESOL department.

In summary, Dr. Dunn believes in all of her teachers being content experts regardless of whether they are content teachers. For example, if an ESOL teacher is a co-teacher in an English or Language Arts class she wants the ESOL teacher to be as knowledgeable and experienced in this content area as possible. Dr. Dunn explained throughout the interview, that for too long at Glasgow Middle School the ESOL teachers were not regarded as content experts and in some situations were treated as teacher assistants and therefore were not

expected to strive and maintain the same standards of accountability as all other teachers in the school. Dr. Dunn continued to explain that at Glasgow Middle School it is their ongoing mission to guarantee that the: “expectation is that the lessons are engaging” and in order to do this, all of our teachers must be content experts and be held accountable for ensuring high expectations for all learning outcomes by all students, including ELLs.

Providing appropriate resources and implementing appropriate programs including enrichment and remediation. Dr. Dunn stated in her description of the school mission that she believed in the need to provide teachers with an environment where they can teach with the proper resources and tools. She explained that resources should be provided to specifically meet the individual needs of the students, as well as support the teaching styles and requirements of her staff. For example, if a teacher is working with students who read significantly below grade level, reading materials are provided to the teacher and students that are engaging while also supporting the instructional needs of the students. Dr. Dunn went on to share that during this school year their focus was literacy and they were introducing a tiered program throughout the school. The program was a tiered literacy intervention program designed to focus on literacy throughout the school. Dr. Dunn believed that this program was one of the reasons why they were now able to provide the ELL 1 students with a true double dose of reading and effectively address their academic needs in the area of reading.

Dr. Dunn talked passionately when describing the needs of her ESOL level 1 and 2 students. She shared how for staff at Glasgow Middle School the focus is really all about “raising their level [and] working with the language.” She went on to share:

It's remarkable to watch them grow. Oh my goodness, I used to go to this one class and ask every day, well not every day, well as often as I could. I would follow kids out of the lunchroom, so I would follow them ... I would get to my favorite ESOL level one class. And I am telling you those children could not speak a word of English, there's one student from that class who is already in Algebra. The growth was just remarkable. It's unbelievable.

Furthermore, Dr. Dunn has purchased a number of recommended programs to remediate and enrichment the literacy and overall academics of the ELLs at Glasgow Middle School. One program in particular that the school is using is called "Achieve 300." This program is being used primarily to develop reading comprehension skills and was selected because the students can go at their own individual pace and they work independently on the computer. In addition, a reading strategies class is offered to their ESOL level 3 and 4 students as part of their regular schedule.

One final program that Dr. Dunn discussed was designed specifically for parents was the Parents as Educational Partners (P.E.P.). Dr. Dunn explained that: "We don't have a big turnout so we really need to try to increase the popularity of that support group." Dr. Dunn did not go in too much more detail regarding this program; except to reiterate their need to place more of an emphasis into promoting the program and encouraging parents and families to participate.

Committing to strengthening and redefining the co-teaching model of instruction

at GMS. At the time of this study, Dr. Dunn was reflecting on their current data and analyzing student results from recent benchmark assessments. When discussing leadership practices that impact the literacy achievement of ELLs, Dr. Dunn shared the need to take time to redefine the co-teaching model of instruction with her building. She stated:

I need to find a really good model of a co-teaching classroom cause I have never; and I'm in my 34th year. The philosophy of co-teaching is awesome, all of the resources that we provide for them, all of the advice, all of the suggestions, ... so just getting better or just keep pounding away at making sure they understand what that model, that I have described really looks like or really, I mean can they see it and feel like, you know what I mean, so just keep pounding away at what we have already talked about and it has gotten better, but like I said I still don't think, I mean I am still not a 100% satisfied.

Dr. Dunn went on to say that as administrators, or school leaders, they have to do a better job of partnering teachers up as co-teachers. Very often it is the co-teaching partnerships that are the main reason for the failure or disconnect, however, this is not the only reason.

In addition Dr. Dunn talked about the need to provide support and encouragement for both the ESOL and the general education teacher, but in alignment with the monitoring of instruction practice, both co-teachers have to take equal responsibilities for educating all of the students in their charge. Dr. Dunn shared that often it is the general education teacher who is not willing to give up the "power" within the classroom. As with many situations,

there is no easy solution to this dilemma that is why Dr. Dunn is so committed to working on strengthening and re-defining co-teaching within Glasgow Middle School.

Ensuring a safe, secure, and welcoming environment for all GMS students. It was evident when talking with Dr. Dunn as well as witnessing in her action that she was very much a strong presence in her school building. Dr. Dunn carried herself in a professional manner at all times and demonstrated, as she described herself, a “no nonsense” atmosphere in her building. Dr. Dunn shared that she believed it was extremely important the building was calm in order for students and staff to be provided the appropriate environment for teaching and learning to take place. Although Dr. Dunn strives to ensure that the building has a warm and welcoming environment, she does admit that sometimes the perception is that she runs the school like a business, but she does not apologize for the fact. Dr. Dunn explained that her number one focus is the students and that one of her most important roles is to keep the students and staff safe and secure at all times.

Beliefs and Values: Dr. Dunn’s Leadership Capabilities

In this section I describe the leadership capabilities that support the literacy achievement of all students, while also highlighting those capabilities that especially impact the literacy achievement of English language learners. I identified five leadership capabilities that supported Glasgow Middle School’s literacy achievement: (a) high expectations for all through clear and objective goals, (b) values all actions aligning with values and beliefs, (c) relentless sense of commitment and attention to detail, (d) a strong advocate for supporting the needs of all students, and (e) believes in providing opportunities to support and challenge faculty and staff.

High expectations for all through clear and objective goals. It was evident throughout the interview that Dr. Dunn believes in guaranteeing high expectations for all, faculty, staff and students. As defined in this study, leadership capabilities are intrinsic knowledge, disposition, and attributes that a school principal needs to possess to be an effective leader. One such capability that Dr. Dunn exhibited during the interview was the intrinsic passion and commitment to address the needs of all students at all times. For example, When asked questions relating specifically to ELLs, Dr. Dunn constantly referred to all students, and would respond by making statements such as: “I don’t specifically say let me look at ESOL, I look at my whole school.” However, in regards to establishing clear and objective goals to ensure high expectations for all students, Dr. Dunn stated “All my ESOL and special education teachers know what we expect.” She went on to explain that in general all regular education students are successfully passing all standardized benchmark assessments, and therefore the overall goal across the school is to focus on increasing what is known as ‘pass advanced’ scores, however, the pressure is definitely on the ESOL and special education teachers as they are now being held accountable for the success of their students, and the expectation both by Dr. Dunn, the state and the federal government, is that the ESOL and special education students will show academic growth and will ultimately pass all standardized assessments. Dr. Dunn believes that by being consistently clear about the goals and objectives to all members of the Glasgow Middle school faculty and staff that the teachers are all aware of her expectations, and are all diligently working hard to meet the needs of all of their students.

Values all actions aligning with values and beliefs. One of the most impressive attributes displayed by Dr. Dunn during my interview was her out-pouring of commitment to and for her students and staff. It was evident by her working space, which was the administrative conference room that she was actively involved in ensuring that everything that came out of the administrative offices was supported by data and aligned with the school vision and mission. The walls of the conference room were surrounded by student and teacher data. Dr. Dunn explained: “The vision guides us so that the whole scope of what we are about helps us to determine what we monitor and how we monitor.” Additionally, Dr. Dunn believes in truly leading by example. She believes in being visible throughout the building both in the hallways and in the classrooms. She also believes in transparency. For example, Dr. Dunn believes in informing teachers and staff of her expectations. She also believes it is extremely important that both herself and her administrative teams follows through with monitoring her expectations. For example, in regards to monitoring instruction: “When we tell the staff what that plan is we have to do it. So we don’t say what we are going to collect lesson plans and then do nothing with them.” Dr. Dunn explained that one of the most effective attribute that she possess are the ability to know when someone is avoiding her, and the need to be persistent. She shared that on a number of occasions a few teachers have believed that by avoiding her and continuously forgetting to provide her with the item she had requested would mean that she would stop requesting the item. By showing her level of commitment and persistence, the teachers have learned that she means business and will not back down or expect less from them just because they resist her requests for productivity. All of this takes relentless effort and time, but Dr. Dunn believes that it all pays off in the end

as the students' academic achievement is positively impacted by everyone's improved efforts.

Finally, the level of reflective practice exhibited by Dr. Dunn during my short time with her was inspirational. Dr. Dunn reflected on her practices as well as her administrative team practice to ensure they were aligned with the vision and mission of the school. Efforts were continuously being made by teachers, staff, and students to strive for improvement; all of this inspired by the leadership of Dr. Dunn. Not only did I leave the interview with an enthused mind, it also felt exhilarating to witness the intense level of commitment and energy exhibited by a veteran principal. Over thirty years in the profession and this principal clearly came to work with passion, drive and purpose to ensure the success of all of her students on a daily basis.

Relentless sense of commitment and attention to detail. Throughout the interview with Dr. Dunn her commitment to the students of Glasgow Middle School was impressive. Dr. Dunn explained, "It is a 24/7 job." When listening to Dr. Dunn it was very hard to image much going on within the building that Dr. Dunn would not be aware of. She took pride in being extremely involved in all aspects of running the school, and stated "I have to be on top of everything." Dr. Dunn went on to explain that a number of people, both parents and staff members, have been heard commenting that she "runs the school like a business." She was not sure if this was because of her business teacher background or because of her no nonsense attitude; however, as far as she was concerned, she took her responsibilities extremely seriously and was committed to the success of all of her students and staff. Dr. Dunn continued to explain how important it is to provide follow up and lead by example.

For example, just as we share with teachers to not tell students you are going to do something and then follow through, the same goes with teachers. It is very important that if we promise to do something, or we ask them for something [for example, lesson plans] that we follow through and provide them with feedback on whatever it is that we have asked them to submit. Dr. Dunn believes that it is the time spent on attention to details that assures that all teachers and students needs are met.

Dr. Dunn continued to explain that in order to meet the high expectations that she has for all of her students, she believes in being very hands-on and involved with her students, and faculty. She explained that she rarely sits down during the school day, and is highly visible in the hallways, cafeteria, and classrooms. Dr. Dunn stated that she believes it is extremely important for her presence to be seen throughout the building both by the students and faculty on a regular basis. The relentless sense of commitment and attention to detail Dr. Dunn exhibits is a true example of how she aligns her actions with her values and beliefs.

A strong advocate for supporting the needs of all students. Additionally important to Dr. Dunn is the need to advocate and support the needs of all students. On a number of occasions throughout our interview, Dr. Dunn made a point to stress that in her opinion her leadership practices and capabilities are designed to impact all students, not specifically one sub-group over another. In many of her responses, she answered by including special education and ESOL students into her responses, as it was clear that she believed both groups of students to be of high priority.

In alignment with the GMS mission, Dr. Dunn advocates that all students should be able to come to school on a daily basis with the expectation that they are going to learn

something. Dr. Dunn continues to advocate that all learning experiences for all students at GMS should be engaging and should meet the specific needs of all students. In addition, Dr. Dunn stated “My expectations are that accommodations are provided to all students through differentiation.” In order to accomplish this goal, Dr. Dunn promotes an environment where all students believe that they can learn, and students, as well as teachers, are provided with the appropriate resources and tools. As Dr. Dunn described “I care about what the kids are getting... [so] “whatever category they fall into, that is the intervention they receive.” Dr. Dunn was very clear that every intervention should be designed to specifically meet the needs of each individual student regardless of whether they are ESOL, special education or a general education student. Thus, she reiterated, “I don’t specifically look at ESOL, I look at the whole school.”

Finally, Dr. Dunn discussed the need to create student-centered classrooms versus teacher-centered classrooms. She shared how this had been a large focus of what she and her leadership team had been working on with the staff over the last three years. Dr. Dunn noted: “...we’ve tried to give them more ideas on using instructional strategies that are more engaging.” All of these different components of Dr. Dunn’s leadership reveal how she has maintained focus on the whole-school literacy achievement in an effort to address the needs of all students.

Believes in providing opportunities to support and challenge faculty and staff.

Finally, one of the most powerful attributes demonstrated by Dr. Dunn was her true ability to develop supportive and challenging opportunities for her faculty and staff. Moreover, her ability to trust her staff and rely on their level of expertise to assist her in providing the

support to the faculty and staff. For example, Dr. Dunn shared that a team of teachers formed a leadership literacy team the past summer. Approximately 10 teachers from the school spent an entire week reviewing literacy best practices as well as GMS literacy data. At the end of the week the cumulating result was their own teacher created tiered literacy interventions that were incorporated into this year's master schedule. Dr. Dunn shared that they spent as much time as possible as they could be working on this project before school started developing strategies that could be included into their tiered interventions. Dr. Dunn continued to explain that what made this entire process so powerful and in her opinion worthwhile was that the literacy leadership team was primarily comprised of teachers, the tiered interventions and strategies were rolled out whole-school, and the professional and staff development was presented and was continuing to be presented by teacher leaders within the school building. Dr. Dunn reiterated:

So we have school-wide initiatives, and that's why I say I don't specifically say my ESOL kids, and say I want you [the students] to know that everything we are doing, you know, is to help you [the students]. I just think that it's a school-wide thing.

Another form of support that Dr. Dunn has provided the faculty and staff at Glasgow Middle School is specific professional development designed to meet the specific needs of the teaching staff. Dr. Dunn shared that over the last three years, teachers have shared their need for more support and guidance in the area of differentiation. Therefore, during her second year at GMS, the focus for the entire year for professional and staff development with differentiation. Additionally, Dr. Dunn has worked hard to increase the amount of technology resources that are available at GMS and has strived to provide relevant and useful

technology professional development for all faculty and staff in order to support them as well as encourage them to embrace and take full advantage of all of the new resource within the building.

Finally, Dr. Dunn believes that utilizing the expertise of her leadership team and teacher leaders whenever possible is a great way to not only support her faculty and staff but also challenge them. She shared that her assistant principal was an ESOL teacher prior to becoming an assistant principal and therefore was an extremely useful resource both for herself as principal, but also for her teachers, and staff. Also, Dr. Dunn relied on her assistant principal, her ESOL department chairperson and her special education chairperson when working on master scheduling, planning for professional development as well as any other major issues. As a team she believed they were a strong support to each other and challenged each other on a daily basis.

Teachers' Perceptions of Dr. Dunn's Leadership Practices

In this section I describe the teachers' perspectives that emerged during the focus group interview. The teachers were asked to share and discuss the principal's leadership practices that related to and specifically supported the literacy achievement of all students. I identified the following five leadership practices executed by principal Dr. Dunn that emerged from the responses of the teachers at Glasgow Middle School (a) leading by requiring accountability for and by all, (b) implementing inclusive practices throughout the school, (c) committing to high quality of instruction, resources, and programs, (d) demanding high expectations from all members of the Glasgow Middle School community, and (e) providing a safe and secure learning environment for all.

Leading by requiring accountability for and by all. At Glasgow Middle School the general emphasis throughout the building is that all teachers are held equally accountable for the success of all students regardless of the content. One member of the focus group talked about the implementation of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) and that due to purposeful scheduling all ESOL and special education teachers can attend these meetings and fully participate in all planning meetings. This same teacher went on to share:

I love how she has made it not just the regular education teachers responsibility but its every teachers responsibility to pick up the load [talking about ESOL and special education teachers] and make sure that whatever the student needs they are getting it from both of us or whatever... they have that made us all accountable for that child. The focus group continued to share how the PLC's had brought an increased awareness of the unique needs of all students, not just ESOL and special education, and involves all teachers in a healthy ongoing dialogue regarding data-driven decisions to support and meet the needs of all students. Additionally, by holding all teachers accountable for their students data has required general education teachers to be in daily contact with the ESOL and special education teachers and to discuss when a student is having problems and therefore address these problems immediately rather than later.

During their discussion about accountability, the topic of authentic assessments was introduced. One member of the focus group stated:

What the school has done really is to refine our planning and we emphasized backward planning so we looked at the outcome and do and start with that and where our kids need to be and this is how we create assessments and I think especially our

school over I can say got really good at doing authentic assessment not just you know multiple choice assessments.

This same teacher continued to say, “the authentic assessments are helping not only ESOL but special education students, but also regular classes as well and those assessments are regularly supervised by Dr. Dunn to make sure that they match the standards.” It was clear when listening to the members of the focus group talk as well as watch their body language that they were very appreciative of the decision by Dr. Dunn to hold all members of the teaching staff accountable for the academic success of all students, and this decision, as well as follow through by Dr. Dunn and her leadership team had instilled a level of trust within many of the teachers, especially the teachers who were sharing their opinions and thoughts in the focus group session.

Implementing inclusive practices throughout the school. During both my interview with Dr. Dunn as well as my focus group interview, it was evident that Dr. Dunn believed in inclusive practices for all students. The focus group supported Dr. Dunn’s efforts at revitalizing the master schedule in order to provide equal learning opportunities to all students. As shared when discussing accountability for and by all, one of the ways that Dr. Dunn has accomplished implementing inclusive practices throughout the school is by removing self-contained classes for the majority of ELL and special education students, unless mandated by a student’s Individual Education Plan (IEP) and by creating inclusion classes for both ELL and special education. For example, one member of the focus group stated, “ESOL students are in with everybody else and I think that’s helped them a lot.”

Another member of the focus group went on to state “It’s not a pull out program. It’s not an isolation program, there are very few self-contained classes, especially ESOL.”

In order to support the ELL students who have been placed into the regular education schedule, Dr. Dunn created co-teaching opportunities. The focus group felt that Dr. Dunn had done an amazing job when designing the master schedule to weave the inclusion, co-teaching classes into the schedule, and allow the co-teacher the opportunity to only have to focus on one subject area as well as one grade level, and therefore truly be able to become a key member of a co-teaching environment. The focus group discussed how Dr. Dunn made it abundantly clear, as many times as needed, that her expectations were that both teachers in a co-teaching class were equally responsible for educating all of the students in the classes, both through planning, co-teaching, collaborating, and grading. They continued to explain that she did not expect any one member of a co-teaching team to feel or act like a teacher’s assistant. This mindset again ties into the previous practice of holding everyone accountable. It was very clear when listening to the focus group talk that they were all very appreciative of this change in approach and they believed that this change had positively impacted the literacy achievement of all of their students.

A special education teacher in the focus group expressed a further example of how implementation of inclusive practices throughout the school has positively impacted students at Glasgow Middle School. She shared:

Co-teaching, one of the things, especially since we’re more curriculum or what do I want to say, lesson specific, we are no longer seen as just helping the ESOL kids in other words, the kids aren’t saying oh don’t come over to me cause I don’t want to be

identified we're just teachers in the class, we know as much about the curriculum and what is being taught as the regular teachers so they don't see a differentiation either you will help me or the other teacher will help me and it's not your help me because I'm special education or you're helping me because I'm ESOL, you're the teacher that's going to help me because you know it.

It was clear by this statement that not only are the teachers benefiting from believing that they are all being respected as equals, but also the students are benefiting from no longer feeling that they are being singled out. If the environment is truly inclusive, then no student should be able to identify who is ELL, special education, gifted or regular education, and all students should feel comfortable asking for and receiving help. It was clear that the focus group believed that Dr. Dunn had created an inclusive environment for all students and teachers.

Finally, another member of the focus group shared her experiences with co-teaching by stating:

We approached it like as all of these kids are our kids and however you know a large majority of them are ESOL and so they need extra special services, but they're our kids, we both teach this class, so I think what people are saying to that responsibility is that we're all in it together.

It was extremely refreshing to listen to such positive and uplifting experiences with co-teaching and inclusion classes. It was clear by listening to the focus group that the last few years had not been easy while Dr. Dunn had been laying the ground rules for co-teaching, and providing clear expectations for implementing inclusive practices, however, by listening

to the teachers talking, it was evident that all of their hard work had paid off, and they strongly believed that this practice had positively impacted all of their students.

Committing to high quality of instruction, resources, and programs. Throughout my entire time at Glasgow Middle School, both interviewing Dr. Dunn as well as conducting the focus group interview session, it was clear not only by the intense conversations, but also by the rich instructional data surrounding all four walls of the administrative conference room, how dedicated Dr. Dunn and her staff were, and how determined they were to meet the needs of all of their students. One way to meet the needs of all students is by providing a high quality of instruction, resources and programs. According to the focus group, Dr. Dunn had high expectations, professionally, for everyone at Glasgow Middle School. It was clear when listening to the focus group talk that they held Dr. Dunn with the utmost respect and clearly did not feel that she was someone who could be taken advantage of. An example of this was when the focus group was talking about teachers requesting items to be purchased. A member of the focus group shared "... she does not just buy things for the sake of buying things – she needs a rationale, will hold you accountable." This teacher went onto explain that in order for Dr. Dunn to approve installing a smart board into her classroom she required this teacher to devise a lesson plan, which she had to go to county training to learn how to do, and then she had to come and observe the lesson in action. The focus group was visibly nodding in agreement when this teacher was sharing her experiences.

As the focus group continued to share their personal experiences regarding requesting resources or programs, time and time again the same level of commitment and conviction from Dr. Dunn was described. It was evident that Dr. Dunn believed in purchasing quality

programs and resources that teachers were going to successfully implement with all students. However, Dr. Dunn obviously did not believe in purchasing or spending time on staff development if the staff was not going to fully utilize the programs or resources, and therefore there was a clear level of accountability laid out on the table right from the beginning. An example of this was shared by a member of the focus group who said “I can tell you that if she was to purchase a program and nobody is using it and you come back to her next year and say I want it again – oh but you didn’t use this the whole year why do you want it again... holds people accountable.”

Related to Dr. Dunn’s expectations of high quality instruction with purchased resources and programs is the belief that the resources and programs themselves are of high quality. One member of the focus group shared that she believed “...the resources are super and it’s wonderful.” Another member of the focus group added, “... programs really have helped them [talking about the ELL students].” Additionally, the focus group members discussed the work the staff had conducted searching for appropriate programs to meet the needs of all students, particularly programs that focused on literacy. An ESOL teacher shared: “... within our literacy initiative we were seeking research-based programs that helped our special education and ESOL students.” Although it was clear throughout the focus group interview that Dr. Dunn was very much the leader of Glasgow Middle School, it was also evident that the teachers were included in many of the decisions, specifically when recommending high quality programs and resources to support quality instruction.

Demanding high expectations from all members of the Glasgow Middle School community. The level of admiration towards Dr. Dunn displayed by the members of the

focus group was truly humbling. There was not one member of the group who did not appear to have genuine respect for Dr. Dunn on a professional level. They may not necessarily understand her at a personal level, but from a professional level, the members of the Glasgow Middle School focus group were fully committed to Dr. Dunn. When talking about some of the challenges Dr. Dunn had faced when becoming principal at Glasgow Middle School the focus group discussed the challenging student population, that is not only made up of a high ESOL population, but also has a large number of students who fall into the low socio-economic bracket. With that being said, the focus group was unanimously clear that Dr. Dunn always raised the standards for both students and staff and had high expectations for everyone. One member of the focus group stated: “she never lowered the bar!” Another member went on to say: “that’s a challenge, she did not lower the bar and ok say that’s a high need school and the standards are in some cases too high so let’s just lower the bar a little bit.” Continuing on this conversation another member of the focus group added: “She always kept those challenges up there.” The focus group went on to discuss that prior to Dr. Dunn the attitude had been more complacent or sympathetic towards the students and their personal plights. Teachers and staff had not overly pushed students academically and it could be argued that many teachers had enabled students to fall further and further behind. When Dr. Dunn took over as principal she made it very clear that she did not care about how sorry people felt for these students. She expected great things from everyone, regardless of their personal life or background, and it was our job at Glasgow Middle School to raise our standards and challenge ourselves and our students to succeed.

Another example of Dr. Dunn's demanding high expectations from all members of the GMS community is reflected in her scheduling decisions for all ELLs. The focus group shared that Dr. Dunn implemented inclusive practices throughout the school because she believes in including all ELLs into as many general education classes as possible. Ultimately, Dr. Dunn is committed to ensuring that the general education and ESOL teachers collaborate to provide high level of content-rich as well as language instruction for all students.

Providing a safe and secure learning environment for all. A final leadership practice that the focus group discussed in the interview session was in regards to Dr. Dunn's ability to provide a safe and secure learning environment for all. It was clear from the discussion that prior to Dr. Dunn's arrival at Glasgow Middle School the safety of teachers and students was not always guaranteed. One member of the focus group shared:

I have been here long enough to see discipline change and really get better – there was a time when I was breaking up a fight every day, and since she has been here it's been just a happy place to be. I enjoy coming in every day because I know if there is a problem she is going to take care of it; she is going to handle it.

Another example of how Dr. Dunn has provided a safe and secure learning environment is her visible presence throughout the building. Nearly every member of the focus group at one point in time during the focus group interview mentioned how visible Dr. Dunn was in the hallways, classrooms, after school events, evening events. The students, parents, members of the community as well as staff were all very well aware of who was in charge and who was holding them all accountable. According to the focus group this level of visibility and

involvement in the day to day running of the school had definitely had a positive impact on the overall feeling of securing within the building. Students know that Dr. Dunn means business. One member of the focus group summed it up clearly “She is just very involved, very involved.”

Teachers’ Perceptions of Dr. Dunn’s Leadership Capabilities

In this section I describe the teachers’ perceptions about the leadership capabilities that support the literacy achievement of all students, and address in particular how the leadership capabilities impacted the literacy achievement of English language learners. I identified five leadership capabilities exhibited by the principal Dr. Dunn that the teachers of Glasgow Middle School believe support their students’ literacy achievement: (a) believes in inspiring teacher leaders by establishing a culture of trust throughout the school community, (b) committed to all students by visibly aligning all leadership actions with values and beliefs, (c) values a future-focused vision and mission for the Glasgow Middle School students, staff, parents, and community, (d) high expectations for achievement for all students through motivation and challenge, and (e) advocates for a positive and welcoming home and school connection.

Believes in inspiring teacher leaders by establishing a culture of trust throughout the school community. Throughout both the interview with Dr. Dunn as well as the focus group interview session it was very clear to me that Dr. Dunn was a very capable and independent professional, who believed in holding herself and others to extremely strong standards. However, it was not until the focus group interview discussion that I fully realized how inspirational Dr. Dunn was to her staff members. When they talked about Dr. Dunn

they all talked with such pride and admiration, and it was clear that they were proud to work for Dr. Dunn. It also became clear during the focus group interview session that one of Dr. Dunn's instinctive leadership capabilities was the ability to inspire teachers to take leadership roles within her school and to work alongside her to accomplish the school vision and mission. An excellent example that represents this statement is when talking about the master schedule for ELLs and special education students. One member of the focus group stated "When making the schedule, she relied on the ESOL and special education department chairperson to assist her in student placement." This indicated that Dr. Dunn does not believe that she is the only one who holds all the knowledge and is willing to show trust within her teachers to allow them to work side by side with her and schedule students for the upcoming school year. Another member of the focus group added, "She really fosters that leadership onto the ESOL and special education department chair because truly and sincerely they know the students best." And finally a third member of the focus group added, "She trusts that the department chairperson are doing what is good for children."

Another forum that the focus group believed Dr. Dunn had established a culture of trust was through the true collaboration of the professional learning communities (PLC's). One member of the focus group shared that Dr. Dunn "...put the regular education teachers in content with the special education teachers on a daily basis." Another member of the focus group went on to explain how this practice "...eliminates isolation amongst teachers." The discussion within the focus group surrounding this topic was extremely passionate. The special education and ESOL teachers in the focus group shared how appreciative they were of only having to concentrate on one subject area and actually being able to attend and

participate in a regular PLC meeting. One ESOL teacher shared “Being able to focus on one thing makes a huge difference in delivery of service.” The special education teacher in the focus group added “I can hear about all students in the grade level even if I’m not teaching them....” The members of the focus group seemed to really believe that the purposeful time designed in the schedule for grade level subject PLC’s had created collaboration and trust within the staff, and ultimately a strong sense of awareness for each other and the students throughout the entire faculty.

Committed to all students by visibly aligning all leadership actions with values and beliefs. A common subject that kept being discussed was the master schedule and how Dr. Dunn had required the school community to work with her to review and revise the master schedule to specifically align with the leadership values and beliefs that all students should be global thinkers and that regardless of each individual students challenges the expectation for each student is that they are going to succeed. A member of the focus group explained “We have really worked in the last few years in restructuring the schedule to make sure that our students are integrated in with the general population.” They continued by stating: “...also the way the school classes are organized helps...because I’m a special education teacher and it brings the students [special education] into the general population more than it has before, they were more isolated.” Following on from this another member of the focus group developed this by explaining that not only has the schedule provided the students with true integration, but also has allowed for common planning.

Another leadership capability that Dr. Dunn has intrinsically shown through her actions are in direct relationship to her personal drive to meet the individual needs of all

students. The focus group expressed how clear this level of personal passion is evident in many of the instructional initiatives she has brought to her teachers for their review over the last few years. For example, when searching for appropriate programs to meet the needs of all students the focus has been on literacy Dr. Dunn invited a team of teachers, including ESOL and special education to attend a literacy workshop over the summer. The members of the focus group shared how all subject areas were represented and the literacy team basically discussed and decided on the certain program that they wanted to use. There was total teacher input in the decisions made regarding the implementation of this literacy initiative. An ESOL teacher explained that they were able to decide on purchasing more than one program in order to meet the need of all of their students, both general education, ESOL and special education. A member of the focus group continued by stating:

...she had math and language arts, and social studies and everybody had an input not only the reading specialist and ESOL and special education but she had input from everybody and she listened to everybody's point of view you know before we discussed and decided this is the way we wanted to go.

It was clear throughout this discussion that the members of the focus group were highly engaged and involved both in the immediate discussion but also in the ongoing discussions throughout the school year. They felt invested in decisions being made by the school leadership and believed their opinions and thoughts were being heard. They also clearly stated over and over again how decisions were always grounded in Dr. Dunn's belief in meeting the individual needs of all students and that Dr. Dunn was committed to high

expectations for all students. The level of commitment towards Dr. Dunn was impressive as well as admirable.

Values a future-focused vision and mission for the Glasgow Middle School students, staff, parents, and community. According to the focus group Dr. Dunn has made great strides to move the Glasgow Middle School community into the 21st Century by adding more computers, computer labs, iPads, and laptops. All of these items are part of her future-focused vision to support the students of Glasgow Middle School and as one member of the focus group stated "...provide them with different things to use to help kids move forward." Another member of the focus group added "Dr. Dunn is really big on technology because that's what the kids use a lot and making sure the teachers are up to speed is important."

The focus group shared that Dr. Dunn believes in providing equal opportunities to all students and never expecting less from anyone regardless of their background or individual challenges. One member of the focus group explained:

The expectation that children are supposed to succeed regardless of your know what challenges they may face – so it's not you know there is a never an attitude of oh well you know we don't expect them to do well, because they happen to have a special label or they're ESOL – we just simply have to change what we do sort of.

It was clear that Dr. Dunn's future-focused values aligned with the move Glasgow Middle School was making of changing from offering an IB program to becoming a fully IB school, as now all students would be experiencing all of the same rigor and enrichment of their peers regardless of their past academic ability, or identification of special education or ESOL. The

members of the focus group were visibly excited about the future at Glasgow Middle School and believed in the path they were taking with leadership of Dr. Dunn.

High expectations for achievement for all students through motivation and challenge. The focus group was unanimous in their understanding and belief in Dr. Dunn's high expectations for achievement for all students. It was evident across every topic discussed during our focus group interview session. As one member of the focus group stated "...the expectations are the same [for all students]." Another member of the focus group went on to share that "students know what is expected of them because it is told to them by their co-teacher and their teachers in every classroom every single day." The message that was clearly being told was that throughout Glasgow Middle School Dr. Dunn's high expectations of achievement for all students was being relayed by her faculty at every opportunity and according to the focus group, the students and staff were finally beginning to believe in her message.

The focus group discussed how Dr. Dunn and the staff have built in ways to motivate and challenge the students into believing in themselves when many of them have never been successful at school prior to entering Glasgow Middle School. In respect to beginning ELLs, one focus group members shared how Dr. Dunn personally takes that time to come and visit their language arts classes and talks to them about how proud she is of them and their accomplishments. The focus group member explained how obvious this pride is when "Dr. Dunn tells them you're smart because you can speak two languages, and some kids come along and say I'm dumb I can't do this – Dr. Dunn works with them and encourages them, and motivate them to keep going." Another member of the focus group continued "...we do

I think a really good job the whole staff does a really good job of letting these kids know how proud we are for being bilingual.”

Finally the faculty and staff motivate and challenge the students at Glasgow Middle School through the true integration of all students into all programs and activities. A member of the focus group shared two specific examples:

(1) We had our IB reauthorization this year and so when they came and part of it is interviewing students and a group of students who were ELLs had to be part of that so they weren't of don't interview the ESOL students so they were part of that and (2) a couple of students who went to the Battle of the Brains last week. We were supposed to have a general group of kids representing Glasgow Middle School not just the high achievers and I don't have the details of all the kids but I know at least two of these kids were ELLs.

After this member of the focus group had finished sharing a number of other members quickly followed with additionally pieces of information regarding both the IB reauthorization interview process and the Battle of the Brains team. It appeared that a 1st year ELL student had participated in the Battle of the Brain team as well as a special education student. One member of the focus group stated: “So we made sure each group was represented.” Another member of the focus group continued by stating: “These are specific things that I recall clearly that say to ESOL students and special education students, hey, you're part of Glasgow Middle School, and you need to go and represent us.”

Advocates for a positive and welcoming home and school connection. The final leadership capability discussed by the focus group was how Dr. Dunn advocates for a

positive and welcoming home and school connection for all of her students. A member of the focus group stated:

The principal has really done is to try to be sure to bring in the community as much as possible by trying to have more contact with the parents and families just by using the internet, the school sign that we have out front that announces what's going on...

One program that the focus group discussed that brings the community into Glasgow Middle School and has also linked the school initiative of literacy to the parents is the implementation of the Parents as Educational Partners (PEP) program. One member of the focus group stated:

My experience is that the parents that do participate in the PEP program – and that obviously is something that the school has to want to have here and that goes out to the principal whether or not she say ok yes we'll do PEP or not, but it does have an impact on these parents who participate and their involvement in their student's education and the life of the school.

An alternative to any specific programs that has been initiated in a way of involving and welcoming the parents and community into the school are back to school nights, open houses, multi-culture nights and other such events. The focus group shared how Dr. Dunn was very sensitive to the needs of the parents by providing translators and material in their native language. Every effort is made to welcome all parents to Glasgow Middle School, and the focus group members stressed over and over again how visible and physically present Dr. Dunn was at all of these events. The parents and community were very much aware of who the principal was at Glasgow Middle School and knew they could talk to her in a variety of

forums, not just in a formal setting. The focus group members felt that this level of availability was extremely welcoming as well as comforting for their parents, especially parents who may be anxious or nervous about entering their students into a school in the United States for the first time.

Additional Information Shared by the Focus Group

One area of concern discussed by the focus group in depth, even though it was not really related to the leadership practices and capabilities of Dr. Dunn was the lack of competent ESOL staff. This concern was initiated by one of the ESOL teachers and she made sure that she started by stating “I am an ESOL teacher – and I’m going to preface this by saying that Glasgow Middle School has the best ESOL teachers that are out there.” She went on to state:

...but my experience is that ESOL teachers that are really good and who understand what ESOL is and how to support the student and so forth are very hard to come by – I sit in on interviews, and the quality of the candidates that come through the interviews is unbelievable and I don’t know if that is because of the ESOL preparation programs at the college level, I don’t know if people go into ESOL because they think they’re just going to be teaching about travel or such.... But the quality of personnel that is available for staffing is for me a challenge.

Another member of the focus group added her agreement, expressing her frustration, “they aren’t good teachers.” The focus group continued to discuss how important it was to find quality teachers for all students, however, in the area of ESOL when the teachers are required to have the ability to teach all content areas, they believe that the standards for ESOL

teachers should be higher. However, they agreed, that the lack of strong candidates was a challenge and a hindrance to successfully meeting the needs of all of their ELLs.

Another area of concern that the focus group members discussed was the backgrounds of the students and the many conflicting responsibilities that the ELLs had from their families. They shared that attendance was an issue within the Hispanic ELLs due primarily to babysitting issues. Many times students would be required to stay at home to look after younger siblings so that their parents could go to work. The members of the focus group were visibly moved and upset by these incidents as they were sharing a number of stories regarding individual students. One member actually started to cry as she began to explain:

I have been working very closely with this one student and we've done everything to help this girl with her school social worker, and so the last few days she has been out.... so we called and the poor girl comes to the phone and says I know you thought I was skipping but I was sick, I said you weren't sick and she said well my dad had to work and I had to watch my little sister, and it makes me so mad but I get it her Dad's a single father and she does what she has to do.

The passion and frustration in this teacher's voice was heartbreaking. It was evident that this educator deeply cares about her students, as well as the vision and mission of Glasgow Middle School and is overwhelmed when individual cases like the one just described occurs. The focus group continued to talk about how Glasgow Middle School was a high need school and that with the support of Dr. Dunn, the teachers do their very best to be the parent, teacher, mentor and role-model for all students.

Principal's Perception of her Leadership Style

As part of the interview process one of the specific questions asked directly to each principal was related to the principal's perceptions of their own leadership style. Dr. Dunn was very quick to describe herself as being a hands-on, with high expectations and a no nonsense sense of purpose when running her school. She explained that one of her assistant principals' who was new to Glasgow Middle School this school year had shared that he had never known a principal to be out in the building as much as she was, or as involved in the day to day running of the school. Dr. Dunn stated that many of the students feel that she is the disciplinarian of the school. She went on to say that students just do not mess around when she is visible in the hallways, lunchroom and classrooms.

Dr. Dunn expressed a bit of frustration because she said, "I try to be very caring but there are people that don't feel that I am, so I don't know how to change that perception." I asked Dr. Dunn why she felt some people had this perception and she went on to share that:

To me caring is making sure that the vision and mission is implemented. Caring for some people means that they can do whatever they want. So I think that breakdown I really do care about you, but beyond that I care about what the kids are getting, so if that means that it appears that I don't care about you as a teacher that I can't help that you feel that way, but when you come to the building and we are nowhere near perfect, but certainly between year one and year four it is like night and day.

It was clear both in Dr. Dunn's tone and body language that she was extremely passionate about meeting the needs of her students, and the need to hold all of her staff accountable for meeting the students' needs. Dr. Dunn went onto share "I still have some teachers that are

mediocre and are sliding by but you have to start at the top and work your way down.” Dr. Dunn truly believed that being an effective principal required staying student-focused at all times, with the vision and mission of the school at the forefront of all decisions.

Emerging Themes

The following themes presented in chapter five not only emerged naturally from the interview data and subsequent analysis, and also aligned with the theory driving the analysis – namely, that the people in formal educational leadership positions should not only be proficient in leadership practices that support effective middle schools, but also have intrinsic leadership capabilities that define their leadership style and direct their leadership decisions and actions to support effective middle schools.

Relying on the emerging themes, both from the principal and the focus group interview, I developed a matrix, as I had done with case study one, to assist in the identification and description of Dr. Dunn’s leadership style. Additionally, I used my previously created *Framework on Themes for Leadership Practices and Capabilities* that is based on the terminology used in predominant leadership literature, as a foundation and guide to complete this matrix (Figure 2).

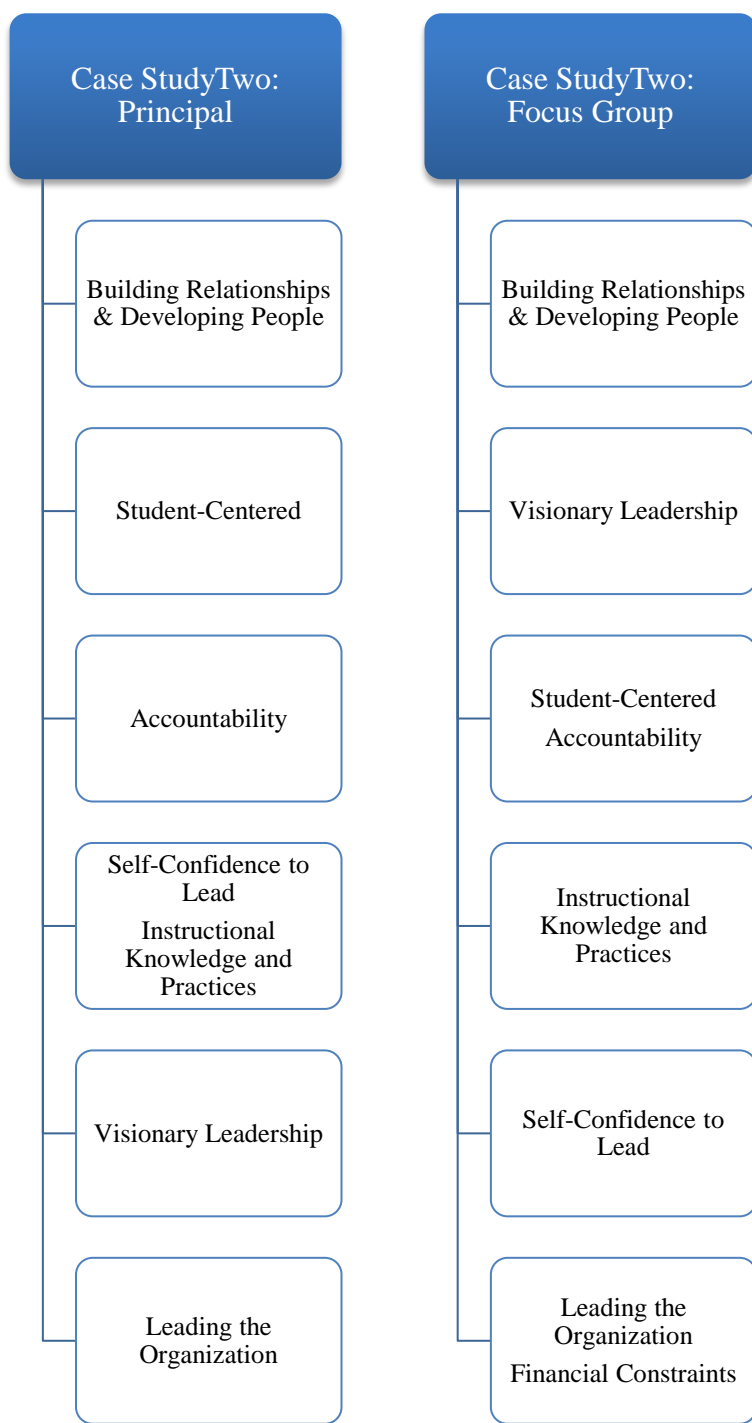


Figure 2. Emerging Themes for Case Study Two

As revealed by figure 2 there are potentially three dominant themes that evolved out of the principal and focus group data. The three themes were (a) building relationships and developing people, (b) student-centered, and (c) accountability. Additionally, it should be noted that within the focus group data, the theme of visionary leader also emerged, and although it was not as important within the principal's data, it should not be disregarded when reflecting on the possible impacts Dr. Dunn's leadership practices and capabilities may have had on the literacy achievement of ELLs' at Glasgow Middle School. All of these themes could independently contribute to the literacy achievement of the ELL students at Glasgow Middle School.

Furthermore, it is somewhat remarkable that the focus group teachers' perceptions were so clearly aligned to the principal's perceptions of her leadership practices and capabilities. For this to happen, I believe that Dr. Dunn's ability to build relationships and develop people within and outside of Glasgow Middle School has a huge impact on the success of the students, not just the ELLs. Therefore, based on these emerging themes, Dr. Dunn's leadership style is that due to Dr. Dunn's strong vision and goal-oriented leadership style, she could be described as a transformational leader. This style would also support Dr. Dunn's hands-on and highly visible behaviors, as she truly believes that in order for her faculty, staff, students, and parents to meet their potential she has to be completely involved as well as aware of what is going on at all times. In addition, I could also suggest that Dr. Dunn exhibits a shared leadership style due to her inclusion of her ESOL and special education department chairs, as well as her administrative and leadership team in the decision making process, while also sharing the many roles and responsibilities of the daily school

day. The faculty, staff, students, and parents are very clear on her vision for Glasgow Middle School and are committed to working with her to accomplish the overarching goal of academic success for all students.

Case and Chapter Summary

In this chapter I described the leadership practices and capabilities as well as the leadership style demonstrated by the principal, Dr. Dunn. The leadership practices, capabilities, and style emerged from the data, which consisted primarily of interviews with the principal at the time of my study and with teachers who participated in the focus group discussions during the 2011-2012 school year. Given the high population of ELLs as well as the economic disadvantages facing the Glasgow Middle School community, Dr. Dunn faced significant leadership challenges as principal. Based upon the interview with Dr. Dunn, in which she acknowledged these challenges, she primarily focused on sharing examples and describing her leadership practices and capabilities that work best, not only for ELLs, but for all middle school students.

Given the focus of this study on distinguishing practices from capabilities, I used the definitions established in Chapter One to separate the emerging themes into the two separate categories. Accordingly, I identified seven leadership practices that supported Glasgow Middle School's literacy achievement (a) ensuring the master schedule meets the individual needs of all students, (b) hiring, supporting, and supervising competent teaching staff, (c) guaranteeing all staff, regardless of content, are held accountable for ensuring high expectations for learning outcomes, (d) providing appropriate resources, (e) implementing appropriate programs including enrichment and remediation, (f) committing to strengthening

and redefining the co-teaching model of instruction at GMS, and (g) ensuring a safe, secure, and welcoming environment for all GMS students. In addition I identified five leadership capabilities that supported Glasgow Middle School's literacy achievement: (a) high expectations for all through clear and objective goals, (b) values all actions aligning with values and beliefs, (c) relentless sense of commitment and attention to detail, (d) a strong advocate for and supporting the needs of all students, and (e) believes in providing opportunities to support the individual needs of students and teachers. In the following paragraphs, I briefly review the teacher focus group interviews and describe how they perceived the leadership practices and capabilities that support the literacy achievement of students at Glasgow Middle School.

The teachers at Glasgow Middle School described how Dr. Dunn supported students' literacy achievement. Based on the data from the teachers who participated in the focus group interview, five leadership practices emerged: (a) leading by requiring accountability for and by all, (b) implementing inclusive practices throughout the school, (c) committing to high quality of instruction, resources, and programs, (d) demanding high expectations from all members of the Glasgow Middle School community, and (e) providing a safe and secure learning environment for all. These focus group interviews with the teachers also revealed five leadership capabilities that the principal exhibited: (a) believes in inspiring teacher leaders by establishing a culture of trust throughout the school community, (b) commits to all students by visibly aligning all leadership actions with values and beliefs, (c) values a future-focused vision and mission for the Glasgow Middle School students, staff, parents, and

community, (d) high expectations for achievement for all students through motivation and challenge, and (e) advocates for a positive and welcoming home and school connection.

Overall three primary themes emerged: (a) building relationship and developing people, (b) student-centered, and (c) accountability. The combination of these themes potentially impacts the literacy achievement of the ELLs at Glasgow Middle Schools. This is the second of three cases. In the next chapter I review the second case in my multi-case study, Tarbet Middle School.

6. CASE STUDY: PRINCIPAL THREE

This chapter is organized into seven sections (a) the context of Tarbet Middle School, (b) brief overview of the principal, (c) description of the principals perception of the leadership practices and capabilities that work best for middle school English language learners', (d) description of the teachers perception of principals leadership practices and capabilities that work best for middle school English language learners', (e) description of additional information shared by the focus group, (f) description of the principal's perception of her leadership style, (g) a description of emerging themes as they pertain to this individual case, and (h) a case and chapter summary.

Tarbet Middle School

In this section, I discuss Tarbet Middle School's demographics and provide a brief description of the school building. I retrieved the demographic data from the department of education website, from the state in which Tarbet Middle School is located.

I collected data for the case study of the Tarbet Middle School principal during the 2011-2012 school year. I interviewed the principal as well as conducted a focus group that comprised of ELL, language arts, and 6th grade, science and special education teachers. To protect the anonymity of the participants, I changed the names of the people I interviewed. I also created a pseudonym for the school, Tarbet Middle School.

School Demographics

Tarbet Middle School is located in the eastern part of the U.S. and is located in one of the largest school districts in the geographical region. It is a traditional middle school that includes grade 6 through 8. Approximately 75 full-time teachers and slightly over 1,080 students comprised the staff and student body during the 2011-2012 school year. Student demographics include 12% African American, 35% Hispanic, 6% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 42% White with 22% of the students identified as ELLs. Forty-two percent of the student population was considered to be low income and therefore qualified for free and reduced lunch.

School Building

The physical structure of Tarbet Middle School is less aesthetically pleasing than the previous two case study schools. Although the exterior is well kept, the building at the time of this study was coming up to its 50th year, and therefore, was lacking in some of the same curb appeal as a younger building. Upon entering the building, visitors are greeted by a receptionist and as with all other county schools are required to sign-in and wear a name badge. The receptionist's desk is located immediately on entering the building. The receptionist herself is very warm and welcoming to all guests as they enter the building although the location of the desk itself has a temporary feel to it due to the floor plan of the building and the fact that the building will be receiving a new entrance and front office location by the school year 2013-2014. Immediately to the right of the reception desk is the main office.

Brief Overview of Principal Three

At the time of this study Mrs. MacPherson was no longer the principal of Tarbet Middle. She was promoted at the end of the 2010-2011 school year within the same school district. On the day I interviewed Mrs. MacPherson we met in her new office at a completely separate location from Tarbet Middle School.

Mrs. Macpherson was a child of generational poverty. Education was always very important to her parents and she became the first person in her family to graduate from college. Mrs. MacPherson shared that she started as an engineering student at Virginia Tech, changed to chemistry and then finally realized that she wanted to pursue something with children and went into elementary education. Mrs. MacPherson went on to share that she got her bachelors in elementary education and then went back to school to get her masters in curriculum and instruction that she loved and then when she started to teach, she went for administration and supervision.

Mrs. MacPherson started her career as a 4th grade teacher and moved after one year when her principal asked her to move down to 3rd grade because she had worked with a difficult family in her first class and the mother liked her so much that her principal moved her to take care of the families younger sibling. Mrs. MacPherson continued to share that she subsequently moved grade level quite often. After moving around multiple grade levels Mrs. MacPherson finally ended in 1st grade where she stayed for the rest of her teaching career that was for approximately five years. Mrs. MacPherson shared that she taught at three elementary schools. From 1st grade Mrs. MacPherson became the assistant principal of the same school where she was teaching at that time.

During Mrs. MacPherson's teaching career she shared how she fell in love with working with children who other teachers may have perceived to be bad behaved or have problems. Mrs. MacPherson stated that she believed in working at a school where the "kids needed you." Mrs. MacPherson went on to state:

I loved those kids in my class and connected to them and really tried to connect to their families and help their families not just by educating their kids by finding them resources for their families and help them and I ended up staying at Dundee Elementary for the end of my elementary career. I was a first grade teacher and went to be the assistant principal at the same school and then eventually came the principal of the school.

After being principal for three years Mrs. MacPherson's supervisor asked her to consider applying for middle school and she shared that she was always a principal who given the opportunity took advantage of every initiative that was made available, therefore, at the end of her fourth year, she moved into the position of principal at Tarbet Middle School.

Throughout the interview I observed Mrs. MacPherson to be a passionate and inspirational leader with a visible desire to promote and provide education to disadvantaged students.

Principal's Perception of the Leadership Practices and Capabilities that Work Best for Middle School English Language Learners'

After reviewing the two primary research questions and purpose of this study, I began to ask specific questions (Appendix D: Principal Interview Protocol and Questions) in an effort to understand the leadership practices and capabilities that positively impact the literacy achievement of ELLs. I asked Mrs. MacPherson to describe Tarbet Middle School's

vision and mission and explain how the vision and mission guided her as the school leader.

Mrs. MacPherson stated in a thoughtful yet confident manner that the vision at Tarbet Middle School when she was the principal was “The prowl for excellence.” She went on to state:

We said that we did whatever we could to insure that success of all students... and we said that over and over again. Whatever it takes; Success is the only option.

Whatever it takes and so you know that’s really what I tried to live by and lead by.

Mrs. MacPherson shared that they could have used the common phrase ‘Failure is the only option’ but she felt that at Tarbet Middle School they tried to take the more positive approach and saying ‘Success was the only option’ kept a level of positivity in the message. She went on to say that at one time they had this message posted all over the school building.

Mrs. MacPherson went on to explain that at Tarbet Middle School the vision and mission of being on the ‘Prowl for excellence’ and ‘Success is the only option’ meant that they had to be creative about helping students and helping each other. She continued by stating “It really wasn’t an option for a teacher not to teach or a child not to learn and if those things were happening then we needed to use the team effort to change that.”

Habits and Behaviors: Mrs. MacPherson’s Leadership Practices

In this section I describe the leadership practices that support the literacy achievement of all students, but especially the practices that may have positively impacted the literacy achievement of ELLs. I identified five leadership practices that supported Tarbet Middle School’s literacy achievement; (a) designing and implementing a master schedule to provide equal and appropriate access to all students, (b) ensuring the use of data to assess student achievement, (c) hiring, supporting, and supervising competent teaching staff, (d) promoting

high expectations for learning outcomes, and (e) implementing structures and processes to ensure a safe and secure environment for all.

Designing and implementing a master schedule to provide equal and appropriate access to all students. Mrs. MacPherson described how she deliberately looked at the placement of students and how they were placed as well as the data they had on students. The data was to provide information regarding the students' skills. Mrs. MacPherson continued by explaining:

Prior to me coming to Tarbet Middle School a lot of the ELLs had never been placed in classes with other students in the building and they spent all day in an ELL class.

They were never with their peers other than at lunch, P.E. or music.

Mrs. MacPherson described, "So we changed that." She went on to state: "We looked at our ESOL teachers not just doing pull out but also push in; into the classroom." Additionally, Mrs. MacPherson explained they attempted to cluster students into classes. They made every effort not to spread the ELLs everywhere. This provided the ESOL teachers time to actually push into classes and provide appropriate support and instruction. Mrs. MacPherson worked to make sure that the ELLs at Tarbet Middle School at a full continuum of services for the ELLs and she stopped the practice of where ELL and special education students had been taken out of their general education classes, or worse, received no instruction in science or social studies.

Mrs. MacPherson spoke very passionately regarding her desire to assure all students had appropriate access and equal access to instruction. She stated:

That's the great thing about middle school teachers is that they are content experts and I learned in middle school that not all ESOL teachers know content. And so you have to be careful who is going to teach... it was much better to push into our content classes and make sure we clustered the kids so that the content information was accurate and could be taught best by the general education content expert.

By purposefully scheduling all of the ELLs, Mrs. MacPherson was able to "make sure that every one of these students had access to each one of the content areas and a content expert."

Finally, Mrs. MacPherson discussed the need to make all students at Tarbet Middle School feel welcome and a part of the school community. She explained how important it was to assure the ELLs that they were included in everything that was available at Tarbet Middle School. She went on to share:

When the ESOL students had the same access to classes and were included their peers was important it was an important message to them that they mattered, that you know they weren't going to be given the classroom at the back of the school... ESOL students knew they were going to be moving class to class and have the same opportunities and the same teachers that their peers had and you knew the teachers helped deliver the message.

Ensuring the use of data to assess student achievement. Mrs. MacPherson discussed extensively how imperative it was in the beginning to establish a screening process to determine what the skills the students at Tarbet Middle School had already mastered. She shared that prior to her taking over, as principal four years previously there had been no structures in place. Mrs. MacPherson continued to explain that there was not a way to really

look at the students diagnostically or see what reading level they were, so Mrs. MacPherson stated, “I put in place a way to screen at the beginning of the school year using the Gates.”

Mrs. MacPherson went on to explain that although there are many different assessments that she could have selected, she choose the Gates McGinity assessment due to the fact that it could be given as a class, rather than by individual students or small groups. She went on to explain how she would “...try to look at where teachers were in time and trend to get some sense of where students were, so we looked at how we were placing students.” Mrs.

MacPherson described how important she believed it was for the teachers, staff, students and parents of Tarbet Middle School to use student data to determine how the students were achieving academically, particularly in the area of literacy. She explained that without this information it was nearly impossible for teachers to consistently plan appropriate lessons to meet the needs of all of their students. As Mrs. MacPherson went on to say the only way to meet the needs of all students, is to meet their own individual specific needs.

Mrs. MacPherson continued to talk about the professional development on teaching literacy that was brought into the building. This was conducted by outside consultants as well as Mrs. MacPherson herself. As part of this professional development the emphasis on literacy was specifically on how to differentiate instruction to students. Mrs. MacPherson stated “they looked at assessments in different ways to teach.” The data from the assessments guided the teachers in planning for their differentiation of instruction for all of their students. Mrs. MacPherson explained how important it was for all teachers to use data to measure student achievement and assist teachers in determining what and how they should teach, and from an administrative position, assist with scheduling students.

Hiring, supporting, and supervising competent teaching staff. Mrs. MacPherson described how she deliberately examined the strengths and weaknesses of all of her teachers prior to creating teams of teachers, and prior to scheduling students onto specific teams. Mrs. MacPherson explained that she believed it was important to team students with the teachers' strengths in mind. For example, Mrs. MacPherson went on to explain:

We had to place, you know, looking at what worked for teachers, you know there are certain teams that worked best with the level 1 and 2's clustered together. There were other teams in which it was necessary cause of who the teachers were, to take them and put level 1 and 3's, and level 2's and 4's together, and then level 5 and 6's could be spread out in a different way.

Furthermore, Mrs. MacPherson shared how prior to her arrival at Tarbet Middle School the ESOL teachers had been responsible for teaching the majority of ELLs. Yet, based on her experience, it is "clearly evident in middle school not all ESOL teachers know content." Thus, Mrs. MacPherson contended that "you have to be careful who is going to teach [and] if someone is going to teach a content class who that person is..." really impacts student learning. With this in mind, Mrs. MacPherson made sure that no ESOL teacher ever taught a content class unless they were certified to teach that course. For the most part, ESOL teachers at Tarbet Middle School provided instruction through a push-in model, or through direct language acquisition instruction. Mrs. MacPherson never relied on unqualified ESOL teachers to provide content instruction to ELLs.

On the subject of supervision, Mrs. MacPherson discussed how prior to her arrival at Tarbet Middle School it was unclear whether the teachers and staff were ever held to a clear

and concise level of standards or level of accountability. Mrs. MacPherson explained “Teachers not used to that level of accountability or being asked to turn in those items for someone to see those items like lesson plans or unit plans.” Mrs. MacPherson went on to share that not only did there seem to be a lack of accountability for the teachers, there was also a lack of expectations for the students, both academically and socially. Mrs. MacPherson explained, “There was a lack of expectation for kids, and a lack of consistency and follow-through on discipline and because of that, you know, kids as kids do, and they’d been allowed too.” In summary, due to the lack of accountability prior to Mrs. MacPherson the feeling in the school community was that the students were running the school. Therefore, Mrs. MacPherson worked very hard to hold teachers accountable not just for instruction, but also for the day to day running of the school. Teacher supervision while also supporting the needs of the teachers and students became a priority.

Promoting high expectations for learning outcomes. Mrs. MacPherson believes in high expectations for all students both from the teachers and staff, but also from the students themselves. For example, Mrs. MacPherson shared her expectation that language art teachers moved away from the practice of all students being taught the same novel at the same time. Mrs. MacPherson explained how “We took the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade books, who had a variety of levels of classroom novels and we split them up and so language art teachers had them in their classroom but they didn’t necessarily have a whole classroom set.” Mrs. MacPherson continued to explain: “It allowed kids to be taught skills in the application of skills and not necessarily a specific book, by how I am applying what I am interested in.” A strategy that Mrs. MacPherson shared they introduced and implemented at Tarbet Middle

School as a way to promote high expectations for learning outcomes was desk side conferences. The desk side conferences were a way for the teachers to take the time to talk to the students individually and discuss areas of concern as well as areas of strength with the students while promoting each individual students achievement. Based on these practices, Mrs. MacPherson claimed, “We were beginning to see real progress.”

In addition to the desk side conferences, Mrs. MacPherson described some further strategies implemented in order to promote high expectations for learning outcomes. For example Mrs. MacPherson shared how “We started training teachers on different tools they could use like running records.” Although Mrs. MacPherson acknowledged that the teachers had different comfort levels for the new strategies being introduced to the teachers to support the students. Another strategy that was encouraged by Mrs. MacPherson and her administrative team was for the teachers to start implementing small group instruction in addition to whole group. Mrs. MacPherson explained:

We put a lot into differentiation of instruction and bringing outside consultant to help us with that and we looked at assessments in different ways to teach and I saw progress, I saw progress that whole time I was there. I was excited about the level of professionalism of the folks in that building. They wanted to do what was best for kids and if you showed them this would be good I rarely had a teacher say I’m not going to try.... the majority of folks wanted to do what was best.

It was clear when listening to Mrs. MacPherson talk about her time at Tarbet Middle School that the four years as principal at been difficult at times, but overall she was extremely proud of the gains they had made at Tarbet Middle School.

Implementing structures and processes to ensure a safe and secure environment for all. At the time of the study, Mrs. MacPherson was no longer the principal at Tabet Middle School. Her four year tenure ended the 2010-2011 school year after achieving remarkable gains in student achievement particularly in ELL literacy. However, when Mrs. MacPherson took over as principal four year previously student academic achievement was not only area of concern, student behavior and attendance was also a major concern. Mrs. MacPherson explained “in the beginning it was necessary to micro manage some things to put some systems in place that the school needed.” In particular, she explained that “ there was not a school-wide system there, there was a lack of expectations for kids and a lack of consistency and follow-through on discipline.” Mrs. MacPherson strongly believed that clear structures and processes needed to be in place before instructional practices could be supervised. In other words, Mrs. MacPherson felt she needed to promote a safe and secure environment for all students and for that matter, for all staff.

Mrs. MacPherson shared how important it was to be consistent both when dealing with the students and the staff. It was vital that her actions were constant and unwavering, and that all of her actions were transparent to everyone involved. Mrs. MacPherson explained:

The first year I would say I spent an inordinate amount of time continuously talking that message and making sure that I meant what I said, and said what I meant, and that there was that follow through consistently on consequences for students, and even rewards for students who were doing well, and making good choices, positive rewards.

Mrs. MacPherson continued by sharing a situation with students in the beginning when the feeling in the building was that the students were following their own rules. For example, it had been reported to Mrs. MacPherson by teachers, by students, and by parents that students had segregated themselves to where there were different ethnicities of students. They ate separately from each other and Mrs. MacPherson stated:

It was important because of the discipline issues that had been in the building to have a clear knowledge of where every student was at all times of the day, and so I assigned tables as classes came in their assigned, there were assigned tables based on the teachers class they just left and I can't tell you the amount of push back I got about that.

Mrs. MacPherson shared how she received push back from parents and students who did not want their students sitting with students of different ethnicity, but she stated that she held her ground, and in time the students learned from each other, made new friends, and overall the feel in the cafeteria and throughout the entire building began to improve. Mrs. MacPherson passionately explained "I stuck with it no matter what the complaints, we weren't going to change and I really started as a thing to address two issues, the safety issue, and the issue of kids not kind of clustering together and not being together as one school community."

Beliefs and Values: Mrs. MacPherson's Leadership Capabilities

In this section I describe leadership capabilities that support the literacy achievement of all students, but especially positively impact the literacy achievement of English Language Learners. I identified five leadership capabilities that supported Tarbet Middle School's literacy achievement: (a) visibly focused and involved leadership style that encourages trust

and commitment, (b) inspiring and communicating a love for learning, (c) focus and commitment is on students and their individual needs, (d) values personal connections to the faculty, staff, students, and parents, and (e) believes in advocating and encouraging shared leadership and collaboration for improvement.

Visibly focused and involved leadership style that encourages trust and commitment. Throughout the interview with Mrs. MacPherson it was visibly evident that Mrs. MacPherson believed in building strong relationships with the faculty and staff she worked with, as well as gaining the trust and respect of the students. There was never any doubt when listening to Mrs. MacPherson talk that she was committed to the students at Tarbet Middle School and was actively involved in working with all members of the school community. An example of this commitment was when Mrs. MacPherson shared the frustration many of the teachers shared with her when she began at Tarbet Middle School. They were working with 6th grade students who were reading on a 1st grade level. The majority of the teachers felt completely out of their depth and was unconfident about what to do to help students who were struggling so dramatically with their basic reading skills. Mrs. MacPherson shared: "... how she met with the teachers in their teams and in their departments and personally provided them with lower level resources for phonemic awareness, phonological awareness, fluency and comprehension."

Another example of Mrs. MacPherson's commitment and personal involvement in building trust and commitment throughout the school community was through the time spent talking about what are some strategies that could be used to remediate in small groups, providing them with leveled texts so that their students could feel more comfortable in their

reading and then encouraging them to motivate their students to read. She shared that in fourth at Tarbet Middle School the students were able to record reading a million or more pages by May. The students surpassed the goal by millions of pages prior to the end of the school year. Mrs. MacPherson shared: "... we found ways, teachers found ways to overcome those challenges and I tried to support them in every way I could, with resources, staff development, changing schedules when they asked me." She went on to say that by working side by side with the teachers and the students they were able to make some significant progress and positively impact literacy achievement for all students.

Inspiring and communicating a love for learning. Without doubt when talking with Mrs. MacPherson it is clear that she herself has a true passion for education and believes in the possibility that a good education can provide students from poverty and other challenging backgrounds positive options for their own personal future. As she shared in the beginning of our interview, she herself was a child of poverty and due to the fact that her family believed so strongly in education she was afforded a strong foundation and therefore a way to a bright future. Mrs. MacPherson believed she was a walking example to all of her students of what could be accomplished with a little hard work, support from others, and a strong belief in oneself. It was inspirational just to sit and listen to her talk. It was clear that she was driven by a deep passion to help others less fortunate than herself. Mrs. MacPherson did not appear to be scared to show her emotions and to be honest, I think she felt that her emotions helped to show her faculty, staff and students that she was human and therefore, made decisions based on her beliefs rather than just because she was the principal.

Mrs. MacPherson stated, “I showed them the vision and they made it work. I tried to support them in every way that I could but they supported students and each other and they’re the heroes.” She continued to explain that when she arrived at Tarbet Middle School some of the teachers were still not familiar or even comfortable with the changing demographics of the student population. She realized quickly that “The vision of who we teach and how we teach them has to change.” Mrs. MacPherson described how in the first year, the biggest challenge she faced with the faculty was their lack of empathy for the student. She questioned whether some of the teachers were on the job for the right reason. She shared how she had to remind them over and over again, that their job was all about the students, and nothing more. She continued to explain: “This is about the kids and you know that work piece about ‘Success for all’ and ‘Whatever it takes’, well that includes everyone.” Mrs. MacPherson discussed how in her first year the ELLs were not always included in everyone’s conversations when discussing the needs of students. She went on to share: “The whole learning piece as the core so that all kids... the ESOL kids have the same access to classes and were included.... the message was important.”

Therefore, Mrs. MacPherson did not just require the leadership capability to inspire and communicate a love for learning to the students, but also to the faculty and staff. Mrs. MacPherson continued to share the need to be creative about inspiring teachers to help students as well as helping each other and although it was tough at times, she confidently stated: “I attribute so much of the success to what the teachers and the students did.” She passionately declared, “Success is the only option – what I tried to live by and lead by.”

Focus and commitment is on students and their individual needs. It was clear when talking with Mrs. MacPherson that decisions at Tarbet Middle School were all made with the needs of students as the number one priority. Mrs. MacPherson shared an example of this focus and commitment when she described an early faculty meeting when she shared how she got visibly upset with the faculty over some scheduling change requests. She shared how disappointed she was with the staff when she heard that a number of teachers had gone to the guidance department asking for a number of students to be removed from their classes because, as she worded it, “I don’t teach those students.” The students that the teachers were talking about were the ELLs. She explained how she stood up in front of the staff, and with tears in her eyes declared: “If you’re going to teach here, we’re going to do it together. We’re going to teach them... they belong to all of us... we’re all going to teach them.” She shared that she believed that showing her emotions to the staff in this format, although not something she would strongly recommend, seemed to be a turning point for the staff, and from that point on she believed the majority of the faculty and staff became more focused and committed to all students.

In an attempt to focus all decisions on the individual needs of all students, the teams worked together to collectively address the needs of each student. Due to the fact that the students were placed onto teams the teachers were able to discuss what the students’ strengths and weaknesses were and therefore work together to try and meet their needs. Another example of how they stayed focused and committed to students and their individual needs was to look at the individual placement of students and how they are placed. Mrs. MacPherson shared that she believed that ultimately “they want to do what’s best for kids.”

Another way that Mrs. MacPherson clearly indicated the focus and commitment to the needs of students was to provide specific professional development based on the needs and requests of teachers. For example, Mrs. MacPherson shared the professional development and professional conversations that were had with the staff regarding providing appropriate instruction to the ELLs. Mrs. MacPherson stated “We used to have customers coming to the middle level who knew how to read we now have kids, especially ELLs, who come who have no framework or how the English language works.” Mrs. MacPherson went on to share: “And although they are acquiring the language there are some, I believe where direct instruction is required.” Therefore, Mrs. MacPherson discussed the many different levels of professional development opportunities that were provided to the faculty and staff at Tarbet Middle School in order to provide them with the ability to focus and commit to their students and have the skills and knowledge to meet their students individual needs.

Values personal connections to the faculty, staff, students, and parents.

Throughout the interview with Mrs. MacPherson it was very clear that she valued developing strong personal connections with all members of the school community. Mrs. MacPherson voiced a genuine drive to assist others professionally and personally, explaining “I really care about the people that work for me... they came like my family.” Mrs. MacPherson described her efforts; “I tried to take good care of them... not just professionally... if someone is sick making sure that we take care of them as you would your own family.” It was clear when listening to Mrs. MacPherson talk that she valued strong personal relationships and believed in the importance of working and supporting each other as much as possible. She continued on by stating: “I was always trying to help my teachers, my families, and my students...”

Mrs. MacPherson related much of her compassion and drive to assist others to her own personal experiences as a child of generational poverty. She believed that she was able to connect a lot to children of poverty. Additionally, Mrs. MacPherson stated that she strived to always be considerate of the needs of her teachers. Mrs. MacPherson shared an example, "... there was never anything set in stone, the teachers came back to me and said this isn't working and we worked to adjust, or to change in order to make it more successful for teachers or students." Mrs. MacPherson went on to share that she "looked at what worked for teachers," and adjusted plans to best meet their needs whenever possible. Mrs. MacPherson went as far as to describe herself as 'a servant leader.'

Believes in advocating and encouraging shared leadership and collaboration for improvement. One of the most impressive attributes displayed by Mrs. MacPherson during my interview was her belief in developing shared leadership and collaboration with the faculty, staff, students and community. It was evident by the fact that Mrs. MacPherson and Tarbet Middle School was the first middle school in this school district to introduce the Baldrige-Based Quality School criteria. The underpinnings of the framework are a set of core values. As defined by Margaret Brynes the creator of Baldrige for education, "Leadership sets the tone and vision, brings passion, care, and concern for all stakeholders, is a key participant in strategic planning, and creates a measurement system with a balanced scorecard and in-process targets" (Byrnes & Baxter, 2006, p. 23).

In addition to introducing Baldrige to Tarbet Middle School, Mrs. MacPherson shared her personal belief in working hard with her faculty and staff to get their input and using the input from everyone. However, Mrs. MacPherson went on to share "Not everyone was

happy with the decisions... but they had a strong voice.” She continued to explain that she attributed so much of the success to what the teachers and the students did, not to her leadership. Mrs. MacPherson at all times during the interview displayed a level of humility that was inspirational. It was clear when listening to her talk that she believed that her role as the principal was simply to show the school community the way, guide and support them, and then celebrate their successes. An example that solidified this belief was when Mrs. MacPherson stated: “I just kept telling the faculty and staff over and over again that I knew they could do this, I believed in them, I believed in the kids, and I just tried to love and support them and they really did the hard work.” Mrs. MacPherson truly believed in modeling a ‘collaborative’ style of leadership.

Teachers’ Perception of Mrs. MacPherson’s Leadership Practices

In this section I describe the teachers’ perspectives that emerged during the focus group interview. A professor from George Mason University conducted the focus group interview regarding the teachers’ perception of Mrs. MacPherson’s leadership practices because I am currently the principal of Tarbet Middle School. Every effort was made to assure that the members of the Tarbet Middle School focus group felt comfortable to respond in an open and frank manner. The teachers were asked to share and discuss their former principal’s leadership practices that related to and specifically supported the literacy achievement of all students. I identified the following five leadership practices executed by the principal Mrs. MacPherson that emerged from the responses of the teachers of Tarbet Middle School: (a) committing to raising academic standards for all, specifically in literacy, (b) executing clear and precise expectations and accountability from and for students, (c)

ensuring all decisions are supported and driven by relevant and appropriate data, (d) providing resources to meet the needs of all students, and (e) requiring equal and appropriate access to education for all.

Committing to raising academic standards for all, specifically in literacy. At Tarbet Middle School the emphasis throughout the building clearly focused on literacy and striving for success for all. Not only did Mrs. MacPherson talk extensively about the importance of literacy but also the first response from the focus group regarding the school's vision and mission centered about educating all students to high levels and striving for 100% literacy with all of their students. There was no hesitation before responding from members of the focus group. It was clear that they were all well versed in Mrs. MacPherson's expectations, and even though she was no longer the principal at Tarbet Middle School, her presence was still very much a part of their own personal belief systems.

A member of the focus group shared another example of Mrs. MacPherson's commitment to raising the academic standards for all. The 8th grade science teacher explained that Mrs. MacPherson emphasized literacy throughout the whole school, by "pulling it into all subject areas making literacy not just reading." Another member of the focus group added, "I was just thinking too of the emphasis on reading, the importance of using reading in different ways, and getting as many books in here as we could, regardless of the subject area we taught." Overall, the understanding from the focus group was that in order to raise the academic standards of the students at Tarbet Middle School, it was important to increase and improve the literacy of all students.

Additionally, another member of the focus group discussed how Mrs. MacPherson was well versed in best practices for instruction and took the time to share her wealth of information with the faculty during PLC, grade level, department and faculty meetings. This member explained how “She brought in people from outside and we would have meetings and they would pass on to us and we would have to share and collaborate with other teachers.” The focus group discussed how by providing support herself, while also bringing in outside experts Mrs. MacPherson was able to support the teachers in their efforts to raise the academic standards for all students.

Executing clear and precise expectations and accountability from and for students. During the first year at Tarbet Middle School Mrs. MacPherson introduced Baldrige to the faculty, staff, students, and community. Mrs. MacPherson had brought Baldrige to the elementary school where she had been principal prior to Tarbet Middle School and believed that the core values outlined by Baldrige would be a great program for Tarbet Middle School to implement. An example of how Mrs. MacPherson executed clear and precise expectations and accountability from and for students concentrated around the introduction and implementation of Baldrige throughout the school. One member of the focus group shared:

I think the teachers were expected to take the mission – we were a Baldrige school – and the mission we were asked in our rooms to each make a mission the students were asked to do it based on the grand mission of the school with that in mind we wrote our own classroom missions so that the students owned the mission not just directed by the principal.

Another member of the focus group went on to share how the students would recite their classroom mission every day in the morning. They would also post them up in their classrooms so that it was something that they could take seriously and be reminded of as they looked at it every day. Every classroom mission was based on the overall school mission: “Success is the only option.”

Ensuring all decisions are supported and driven by relevant and appropriate data. One of the key core values embedded in the Baldrige-Based Quality School criteria is the creation of a measurement system and the usage of in-process targets to drive and support decisions. The focus group members discussed how Mrs. MacPherson required them to use data to support their instruction as well as appropriate student placement. For example, a 6th grade language arts teacher shared how Mrs. MacPherson introduced the Gates McGinity assessment to Tarbet Middle School and required all students to be assessed at the beginning of her first year. She continued to share how resistant many of the teachers were in the beginning as they did not understand why they should be giving up their instruction time to facilitate the assessment, however, once the teachers received the each of their students reading comprehension and vocabulary grade level, they were able to use this information to assist them differentiate their lessons. Additionally, in situations where some of the teachers were questioning the ability of certain students, they now had relevant and informative information they could use to assist them when working with their students.

Another example of how Mrs. MacPherson encouraged the faculty and staff to utilize data was in regards to the appropriate placement of all ELLs. An 8th grade teacher in the focus group shared:

A majority of our ELL students were mislabeled, mis-numbered if you will, some of that was an issue from the schools that were feeding them into us, some of it was an issue of ways that things were done here previously but she had to do a whole lot of work to dig down and figure out who supposed to be where and with whom and so that was a huge undertaking the 1st few years that had to be done just to get some wires untangled.”

The focus group continued to discuss that by using the data appropriately they were able to place the ELL students in the classes that could support their academic and language needs and therefore impact the ELLs literacy achievement.

Providing resources to meet the needs of all students. Embedded throughout the entire focus group interview responses was the knowledge by all members that Mrs. MacPherson’s leadership style was very collaborative and supportive. One way she supported her students was by providing them with appropriate resources to assure their academic needs would be met. For example, the 6th grade language arts teacher shared: “... she was committed to getting as many books in here as we could.” Another member of the focus group shared “She met with us a lot as she would find new things to provide us with a lot of different ideas and handouts and things at various times throughout the year.” The focus group continued to discuss how personally involved Mrs. MacPherson was in providing resources, especially literacy resources. The feeling or understanding within the focus group was that this personal involvement was due to the fact that Mrs. MacPherson was good with ELLs because of her personal experience in elementary school.

Additionally, another type of resource that the focus group felt Mrs. MacPherson provided Tarbet Middle School that assisted in meeting the needs of the students was in regards to providing the teachers, staff and parents with translators. One member of the focus group stated: “She hired a translator to be here on the staff at all times.” Another member of the focus group shared the rationale for hiring the translator was because: “The translator was to work with the parents during student conferences; that was important.” The overall feeling by the members of the focus group was that Mrs. MacPherson believed that providing the resource of a translator would act as a support for the students and their families as well as assist the teachers. It was evident by the focus groups responses and nods of agreement that they all appreciated this particular resource and believed that it had been well worth it.

Requiring equal and appropriate access to education for all. At Tarbet Middle School not only was the school vision “Success is the only Option” but also it was success for all students. The focus group discussed how prior to Mrs. MacPherson arriving at Tarbet Middle School there were racial divides both between the students as well as between the communities. Although over the past four years these divides may not have been totally removed, the members of the focus group strongly agreed that it was Mrs. MacPherson’s continual mantra that she repeated over and over again to faculty, staff, students and community that “we are all the same.” One member of the focus group shared “It was never presented as success is the only option unless you are a Spanish speaker – that was never it was just the environment was we will all succeed.”

Another example of how the focus group believed Mrs. MacPherson required equal and appropriate access to education for all was by the introduction and implementation of the whole school mentoring program. The focus group shared that Mrs. MacPherson required every member of Tarbet Middle School including custodians, cafeteria staff, teacher assistants and administrators to become mentors to students at Tarbet. Every effort was made to assign students to adults who they believed would be able to relate to the students they were mentoring. The staff members were encouraged to have lunch with them whenever possible.

Teachers' Perception of Mrs. MacPherson's Leadership Capabilities

In this section I describe the teacher's perceived leadership capabilities that support the literacy achievement of all students, and possibly positively impact the literacy achievement of English language learners. I identified five leadership capabilities exhibited by the principal Mrs. MacPherson that the teachers of Tarbet Middle School believe support their students' literacy achievement: (a) high expectations for all, (b) committed to meeting the needs of each individual student, (c) believes in exhibiting the self-confidence and persistence to lead by example, (d) values a collaborative work environment and developing a shared leadership for improvement, and (e) enthuses a sense of community by exhibiting a genuine love for people.

High expectations for all. Throughout both the interview with Mrs. MacPherson as well as the focus group interview session it was very evident that Mrs. MacPherson held everyone, including herself to extremely high expectations. This was supported by a member of the focus group who in the interview session stated: "She had high expectations for

everyone including herself.” The same teacher went on to say “She had high expectations for the school for you as a professional and would have done anything to help you meet those high expectations. It’s just a sense that there is a level that people perform...” “Another member of the focus group described her as having “extraordinary high expectations.”

However, the focus group all agreed that with this level of high expectation also came with a level of support and motivation that inspired and empowered the staff to strive to reach these high levels of expectations. When listening to the focus group interviews the admiration and respect for Mrs. MacPherson could clearly be heard in everyone’s voice when they spoke regarding her expectations for them as well as the students at Tarbet Middle School. One member of the focus group shared “She was extremely supportive of the teachers.” Another member added to this by stating: “She generally let us make many decisions on our own,” as well as “... almost always had the confidence that we were making the right decisions.” It was evident that the members of the focus group believed that Mrs. MacPherson’s ability to empower them to do the right thing for students and her supportive actions allowed them to strive to reach her high expectations for all.

Committed to meeting the needs of each individual student. As mentioned earlier under leadership practices, the mentorship program that Mrs. MacPherson introduced to Tarbet Middle School was definitely seen as a positive program for the students, and the members of the focus group believed that it has a direct impact to many of the students’ literacy achievement. In respect to a leadership capability, the mentorship program, and how committed and in some ways dedicated to its success, could be described as an intrinsic attribute of her leadership style. The members of the focus group described how she took a

personal interest in the program, and worked diligently to assure that all students received an appropriate mentor. Mrs. MacPherson herself mentored students who she believed would benefit from her personal background and experiences. She was dedicated to meeting the needs of all students, and via all avenues possible. The focus group was all in agreement that Mrs. MacPherson's personal commitment to the mentor program was one of the reasons for its overall success. A member of the focus group stated:

We had this mentor program when Mrs. MacPherson was here about the students having a mentor in the building so they could check in with somebody and find out how the kids were doing, if they needed a pencil you would be the person they would ask if they didn't want to ask someone else – I thought that mentorship program was very helpful for some of our ELL students.

Another member of the focus group stated “We all agreed about how beneficial it was.”

Another example that the focus group members discussed as representative of Mrs. MacPherson's commitment to meeting the individual needs of students was what they described as *desk side chats*. The 6th grade language arts teacher in the focus group shared: “She introduced the desk side chats.” The same teacher went on to explain that their purpose was:

To get engaged with the students about what they were reading so if they know those academic words if you wanted them to review for instance protagonist and antagonist when you're sitting with that child you could talk to that student and find out do they know these things and use those antidotal notes when you go to figure out well do I

need to re-teach these things because 5 out of 10 kids that I'm teaching don't get that.

It was really effective.

Another member of the focus group went on to state that she believed it was due to Mrs. MacPherson's elementary background that she brought with her to Tarbet Middle School, as well as a belief in knowing where your kids were, and the importance of using this information to drive all instruction and more importantly decisions.

Believes in exhibiting the self-confidence and persistence to lead by example.

The focus group was unanimous in their belief in Mrs. MacPherson's personal conviction in what they were doing and therefore frequently led by example. The focus group discussed how she was aware of the resistance within the school building during her first year at Tarbet Middle School but through her persistence that resistance finally shifted to many of the staff members buying in to her vision. They shared how hands-on she was with all new initiatives and a member of the focus group stated, "We knew that was expected of all administrators." They continued to discuss how Mrs. MacPherson personally "met with them [the teachers] a lot" during their PLC meetings to assist them to navigate the student data and to use this data to drive their instruction and meet the individual needs of their students.

Another example a member of the focus group shared regarding Mrs. MacPherson's self-confidence and persistence to lead by example was in regards to collecting student reading comprehension data. The member of the focus group shared how Mrs. MacPherson not only trained all of the language art teachers on how to conduct the Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI) assessments in order to provide them with an accurate reading grade level of all their students, she also "literally came and sat in the hall and did QRI's with them." The

same member of the focus group member shared how Mrs. MacPherson not only assisted with testing her students she also “worked with them one at a time, something I could never have done with them, to give me more data about where they were with their reading.” In general the focus group members all agreed that Mrs. MacPherson’s elementary school background was a definite bonus to Tarbet Middle School, especially in the area of literacy.

Values a collaborative work environment and developing a shared leadership for improvement. Throughout my interview with Mrs. MacPherson she made reference to her expectation of involving all members of the Tarbet Middle School community in the decision making process. The discussion amongst the focus group members shared many of Mrs. MacPherson’s expectations regarding developing a shared leadership for improvement. An example of this shared by a member of the focus group was:

She was extremely supportive of the teachers and she generally let us make many decisions on our own but we almost always had the confidence that we were making the right decision because she knew we would. She made us feel like we could and would make the right decisions and then we would turn to her for ones that it was her leadership to decide on be the bottom line on.

Another member of the focus group went on to discuss how this collaborative leadership style filtered through to her assistant principals. The focus group member stated, “The assistant principal’s would check in with us to make sure that we were following the curriculum, it came directly from the top.” The focus group also discussed how Mrs. MacPherson delegated well and made sure that all teachers and staff members were aware of what was expected of them and what they were responsible for. The same focus group

member went on to say “You were part of her plan and the carrying out of her plan.” It was clear by listening to the focus group discuss Mrs. MacPherson’s leadership style that she both believed in collaboration as well as sharing the leadership responsibilities throughout the school. There were many members of the staff who felt personally invested in the decisions being made and therefore were committed to their success.

In regards to developing a collaborative working environment throughout Tarbet Middle School the focus group described Mrs. MacPherson personally as showing both “tenderness and support.” Another example of collaboration was Mrs. MacPherson’s expectation of a “thoughtful collaboration with each other in terms of supporting and respecting the sharing of their colleagues.” The level of collaboration and respect was expected during all team, grade, and department meetings. A member of the focus group stated “We would have to share and collaborate with other teachers.”

Another example of how Mrs. MacPherson encouraged a collaborative working environment was through the Tarbet Middle School faculty meetings. The members of the focus group shared how the faculty meetings were led by the staff and provided the staff with opportunities to share their ideas, lesson, and professional experiences. Another member of the focus group went on to state “One thing that I like was when we met at our staff meeting and the presentation different teams would present to the faculty and so we could see what was working in their classroom and just that collaboration with the other teachers.” As the conversation continued another member of the focus group shared “She really let us, our teams, do so many different things.” The focus group members discussed how the staff shared their work through many different lenses including PowerPoint,

demonstrations and videos. It was evident when listening to the staff that they appreciated being including in the faculty meetings and enjoyed the opportunities to share and learn from one another.

Enthuses a sense of community by exhibiting a genuine love for people. The final leadership capability discussed by the focus group was Mrs. MacPherson's strong sense of community and her genuine love for people. Mrs. MacPherson was evidently an involved principal who genuinely loved people and strived to create a sense of community for Tarbet Middle School. A member of the focus group simply stated: "She was a real people person." Another member agreed, and added, "She just loved people." An example that the focus group shared to support Mrs. MacPherson's sense of community was "She understood their worries [ELLs] and their anxieties about speaking English in front of kinds who spoke English all of the time." Another member of the focus group went on to state "It was good for a huge part of our population that she [Mrs. MacPherson] had that kind of tenderness and sweetness." The focus group went on to share how Mrs. MacPherson took the time to celebrate all of the students' successes and make them feel proud of all of their accomplishments, regardless of how small they may have seemed.

Another example that showed Mrs. MacPherson's leadership capability that motivated and created a sense of community for Tarbet Middle School was her continual commitment to heighten everyone's cultural awareness, students as well as adults. Mrs. MacPherson was able to do this by simple decisions such as celebrating Hispanic month, including culturally interesting facts in the school newsletter, and hosting a festival to celebrate the foods of a variety of different countries. One member of the focus group

explained the rationale for the festival: “It wasn’t just for the kids but it was for us – to understand that Hispanic doesn’t just mean one country, it’s the countries, are so varied, and so wonderful. I learned a lot.” A member of the focus group shared an additional step that Mrs. MacPherson took stating:

In the beginning she always sent out any communications from the school in Spanish until finally she found out that a majority of the parents didn’t read Spanish and that the students most of them didn’t read it either so she made sure that the students knew all the information so that they could tell it to their parents in their own words.

The focus group felt that her ability to adapt and creatively reach the parents of her students was a leadership capability that they were extremely proud of.

A further example that was shared from a member of the focus group regarding her genuine love for people was on a much more personal level. One member of the focus group shared a personal experience. She shared:

When I had a huge medical problem and was in hospital and she was the first one in room in the hospital room and I had my grade book and was grading papers and she took them from me and took them back and graded them.

It was very clear that even though Mrs. MacPherson was no longer the principal at Tarbet Middle School the members present during the focus group interview all held her dear to their hearts and all held strong feelings for her. They all expressed respect and commitment to her vision and mission and believed in the direction she had begun to take Tarbet Middle School.

Additional Information Shared by the Focus Group

One area of concern that was discussed by the focus group was not really related to the leadership practices and capabilities of Mrs. MacPherson or how they related to the literacy achievement of ELLs, but was in relationship to the guidance department. Due to the nature of the focus group interview and the fact that the teachers were not focusing on what was done wrong, but what was done well, the member of the focus group who brought up the situation with the guidance department was very hesitant and thoughtful about how they worded their comments. In actual fact, their tone could be described as apologetic. They discussed how the guidance department was very weak the last school year. They continued to state “The truth is she [Mrs. MacPherson] did a lot of work that guidance should have been doing.” They went on to say, “She [Mrs. MacPherson] had to take that kind of mothering, big sister, kind of gentle, I will be glad to help you work that out, because we didn’t have a guidance counselor who would do that.” The members of the focus group were very concerned not to place Mrs. MacPherson in a negative light as another member stated, “She really had high expectations of everybody including herself.” The same member went on to say: “She had high expectations for the school, for you, as a professional and would have done anything to help you meet those high expectations. It’s just a sense that there is a level that people perform at.” However, there was definitely a negative vibe throughout the focus group whenever they discussed the guidance department and it was clear that whatever had transpired with this department had been painful, frustrating, and problematic for not only the students, but also the teachers, staff, and community.

Principal's Perception of her Leadership Style

As part of the interview process one of the specific questions asked directly to each principal was related to the principal's perception of their own leadership style. Mrs. MacPherson shared "I would look at myself as having a collaborative style: working hard to get the input and using the input from everyone." Mrs. MacPherson believed that everyone had a 'strong voice' in the decision making process under her leadership. She explained "There was never anything set in stone, the teachers came back to me and said this isn't working and we worked to adjust, or to change in order to make it more successful for teachers or students." Mrs. MacPherson went on to describe herself as someone who has a servant leadership style. She explained a servant leader as someone who is always trying to help teachers, families, and students. She went on to share:

The truth is I really care about the people that work for me and I hope that they would say that, I, they come like my family, so I try to take good care of them and not just care about whether they are doing all the things that they should be doing professionally but if someone is sick making sure that we take care of them as you would your own family member whether that is a child or a teacher.

It was clear both in Mrs. MacPherson's tone and body language that she was extremely sincere about helping others, and developing strong personal relationships with the students and people that she works with. Mrs. MacPherson described her leadership style best by stating "Just you know trying to bring that sense of family, we're in this together... that's really who I am as a leader." Mrs. MacPherson clearly believes that in order to be an

effective principal, developing strong relationships with a sense of community are extremely important, with a clear vision and mission driving all decisions.

Emerging Themes

The following themes emerged effortlessly from the interview data and subsequent analysis, and also were aligned with the theory driving the analysis – namely, that the people in formal educational leadership positions should not only be proficient in leadership practices that support effective middle schools, but also intrinsic leadership capabilities that define their leadership style, as well as direct their leadership decisions and actions that support effective middle schools.

After identifying the emerging themes, both from the former principal and the focus group interview, I developed a matrix as I had previously done with case study one and two, to assist in the identification and description of Mrs. MacPherson's leadership style. I used my previously created *Framework on Themes for Leadership Practices and Capabilities* that is based on the terminology used in predominant leadership literature, as a foundation and guide to complete this matrix (Figure 3).

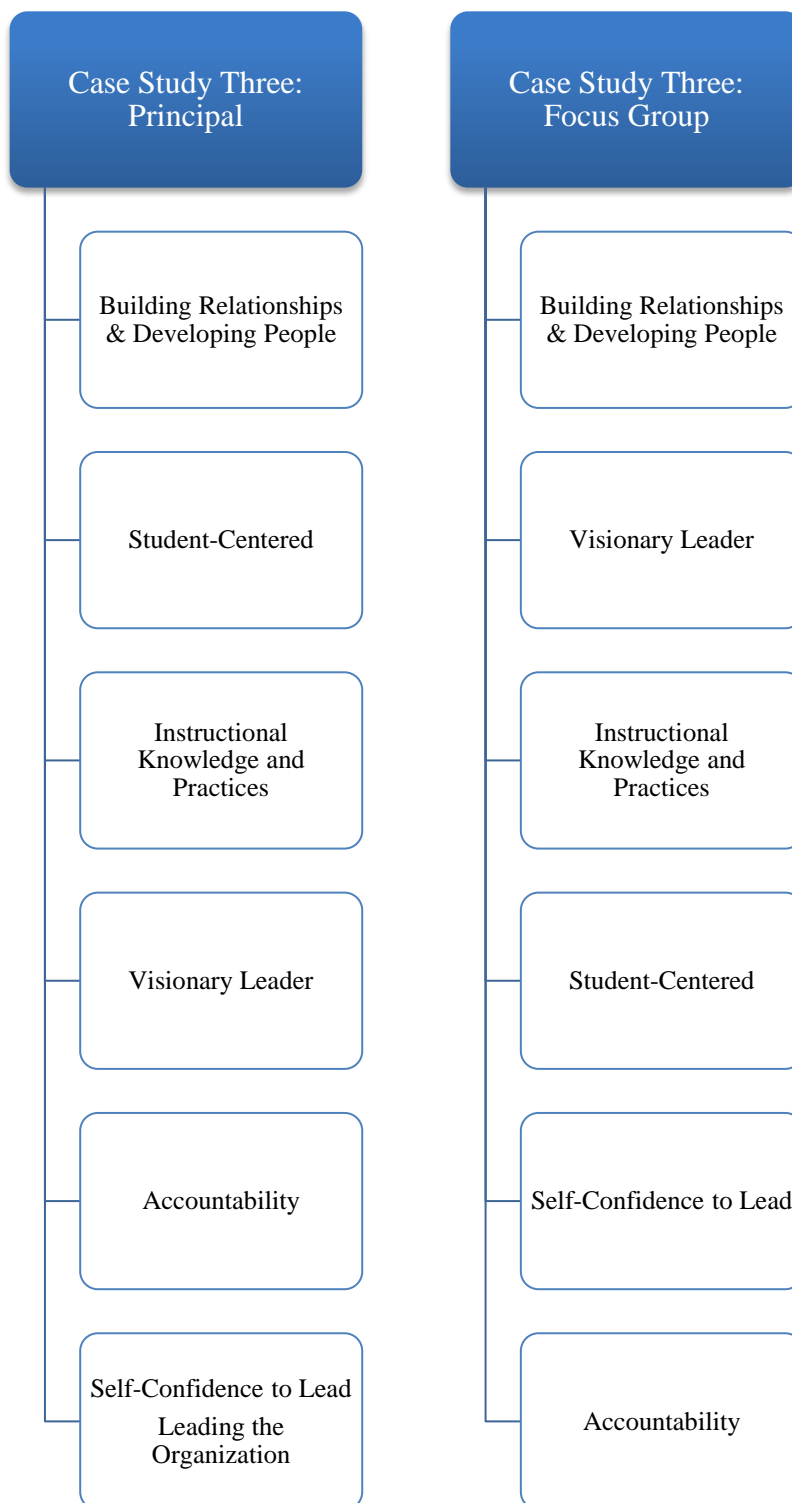


Figure 3. Emerging Themes for Case Study Three

Figure 3 reveals the three prevailing themes that evolved out of the principal and focus group data. The three themes were (a) building relationships and developing people, (b) student-centered, and (c) research and data-driven instructional practices. Additionally, based on the focus group data, the theme of visionary leader was also very influential, and although it was not as prominent based on the principal's interview data, it should not be disregarded when reflecting on the possible impacts Mrs. MacPherson's leadership practices and capabilities may have had on the literacy achievement of ELLs at Tarbet Middle School. Additionally, I believe that it is important to point out that the focus group's perception of the principal is identical to the former principal's perception of her leadership practices and capabilities. For this to happen, I believe that Mrs. MacPherson's ability to build relationships and develop people while at Tarbet Middle School has had a huge impact on the literacy success of all students, not just the ELLs. Based on the emerging themes, and Mrs. MacPherson's own description, if I were to describe Mrs. MacPherson's leadership style I would suggest that due to Mrs. MacPherson's strong sense of community and supportive leadership style she could be described as a transformational-servant leader with a strong emphasis on the specific attributes of a servant leader. As seen in the research literature, a servant leader tends to focus more on the people who are their followers rather than the organization itself (Greenleaf, 1969, 1977; Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2003). Therefore, this style supports Mrs. MacPherson's collaborative and hands-on behaviors, as she truly believes that in order for her faculty, staff, students, and parents to meet their potential everyone needed to be involved in the decision-making process. In addition, I could also suggest that Mrs. MacPherson exhibits a shared leadership style due to her willingness to

provide everyone with a voice in decisions while also being willing to be flexible and make changes whenever possible. Furthermore, her introduction of Baldrige to Tarbet Middle School encouraged and supported the teachers to take the lead in faculty meetings, professional development opportunities, PLC's and other decision-making forums. The faculty, staff, students, and parents were all very clear on her passion for people and love for learning for Tarbet Middle School students and were committed to working by her side to accomplish the vision of 'Success is the only option' for all students.

Case and Chapter Summary

In this chapter I described the leadership practices and capabilities as well as the leadership style demonstrated by the former principal, Mrs. MacPherson. The leadership practices, capabilities, and style emerged from the data that consisted primarily of the interview with the former principal and with teachers who participated in the focus groups discussion during the 2011-2012 school year. Given the high population of ELLs as well as the economic disadvantages facing the Tarbet Middle School community. Based upon the interview with Mrs. MacPherson in which she acknowledged these challenges, she primarily focused on sharing examples and describing her leadership practices and capabilities that work best not only for ELLs but also for all middle school students.

Given the focus of this study on distinguishing practices from capabilities, I used the definitions established in Chapter One to separate the emerging themes into the two separate categories. Accordingly, I identified five leadership practices that supported Tarbet Middle School's literacy achievement: (a) designing and implementing a master schedule to provide equal and appropriate access to all students, (b) ensuring the use of data to assess student

achievement, (c) hiring, supporting, and supervising competent teaching staff, (d) promoting high expectations for learning outcomes, and (e) implementing structures and processes to ensure a safe and secure environment for all. In addition I identified five leadership capabilities that supported Tarbet Middle School's literacy achievement: (a) visibly focused and involved leadership style that encourages trust and commitment, (b) inspiring and communicating a love for learning, (c) focus and commitment is on students and their individual needs, (d) values personal connections to the faculty, staff, students, and parents, and (e) believes in advocating and encouraging shared leadership and collaboration for improvement. In the following paragraphs, I briefly review the teacher focus group interviews and describe how they perceived the leadership practices and capabilities that support the literacy achievement of students at Tarbet Middle School.

The teachers at Tarbet Middle School described how Mrs. MacPherson supported students' literacy achievement. Based on the data from the teachers who participated in the focus group interview, five leadership practices emerged (a) committing to raising academic standards for all, specifically in literacy, (b) executing clear and precise expectations and accountabilities from and for students, (c) ensuring all decisions are supported and driven by relevant and appropriate data, (d) providing resources to meet the needs of all students, and (e) requiring equal and appropriate access to education for all. These focus group interviews with the teachers also revealed five leadership capabilities that the principal exhibited (a) high expectations for all, (b) committed to meeting the needs of each individual student, (c) believes in exhibiting the self-confidence and persistence to lead by example, (d) values a

collaborative work environment and developing a shared leadership for improvement, and (e) enthuses a sense of community by exhibiting a genuine love for people.

Overall, three primary themes emerged: (a) student-centered, (b) building relationships and developing people, and (c) research and data-driven instructional practices. The combination of these themes potentially impacts the literacy achievement of the ELLs at Tarbet Middle School. This is the third of three cases. In the next chapter I provide a cross-case analysis of the three cases, as well as a comparison of the literature and possible revision of the theoretical framework.

7. CROSS-CASE COMPARISON OF THREE CASE STUDIES

The purpose of this chapter is to present the cross-case analysis and answer the research questions. This chapter is organized into three sections. In this first section, I briefly summarize the study by revisiting the research questions and the theoretical framework, which all served as the foundation for this research. In the second section, I present a comparison of themes emerging from the three cases as well as discuss the themes in the context of the existing literature. In the third section, I explain how the themes, data, and research literature answer the research questions.

Summary of the Study

In chapters 4, 5, and 6, I described the perceptions, views and knowledge of three middle school principals who were the focus of this multiple case study because they positively impacted the literacy achievement of ELLs. The three case study settings were selected based on the established criteria, specifically each school had sustained above the overall mean for their county reading achievement scores under the principals' leadership. In addition, over the same three year period the ELL sub-group had also sustained above the mean average for the county reading achievement scores under the principals' leadership. Finally each of the three schools reported at least 20% of their student population were documented as Limited English Proficient (LEP) and that there were more than 50 students

identified as LEP Levels 1-5 in each grade level. As part of the case study design I conducted principal interviews and focus group interviews with teachers in each school.

In each of the three cases, I applied my theoretical framework to study my research questions:

(1) What leadership practices and capabilities do middle school principals believe positively impact the literacy achievement of ELLs?

(2) What leadership practices and capabilities have middle school principals implemented that positively impact the literacy achievement of ELLs?

In addition to the questions identified above, I asked the principals to explain (a) what challenges they faced when addressing the literacy needs of ELLs? (b) how they acquired the knowledge and skills to understand the literacy challenges and needs of ELLs? (c) why did they believe that the leadership practices and capabilities they adopted would aid them in meeting the specific literacy challenges and needs of ELLs? The theoretical framework supporting this study was based initially on the effective leadership research conducted by Kouzes & Posner (2002). However, during the data analysis process and in an attempt to solidify my theoretical context, I had to incorporate additional leadership theories that resulted in my development of a *Framework of Themes for Leadership Practices and Capabilities* (see Table 1). The framework was based on the combination of research and commentary focused on leadership practices and capabilities (Coates et al., 2010; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Lewis, 2009; Public Impact, 2008). In order to develop this comprehensive framework, I focused on the following information and materials (a) definitions of the leadership practices and capabilities outlined for the purposed of this study; (b) the relevant

leadership literature; and (c) the data from this multiple case study, which evolved into the reported themes of leadership practices and capabilities. I then used this framework as my ultimate guide for sorting, categorizing, and analyzing the data to ground my data analysis process. I also used this framework as an organizational tool or guiding framework by continuously assessing each principal's practices and capabilities to assure they were consistently aligned with the literature and definitions as outlined for the purpose of this study.

Comparison of Themes

As revealed in chapters 4, 5, and 6 there are numerous similarities in terms of leadership practices and capabilities of the three principals. These similarities emerged from the individual interviews as well as the focus group interviews. Five dominant themes were revealed based on similarities across all three case studies including:

1. *Building relationships and developing people,*
2. *Student-focused,*
3. *Research and data-driven instructional practices*
4. *Accountability, and*
5. *Visionary leader.*

The following section will focus on each of the five dominant themes, as presented in Figure 4, which also reflects how the five themes align and are interwoven between leadership practices and capabilities.

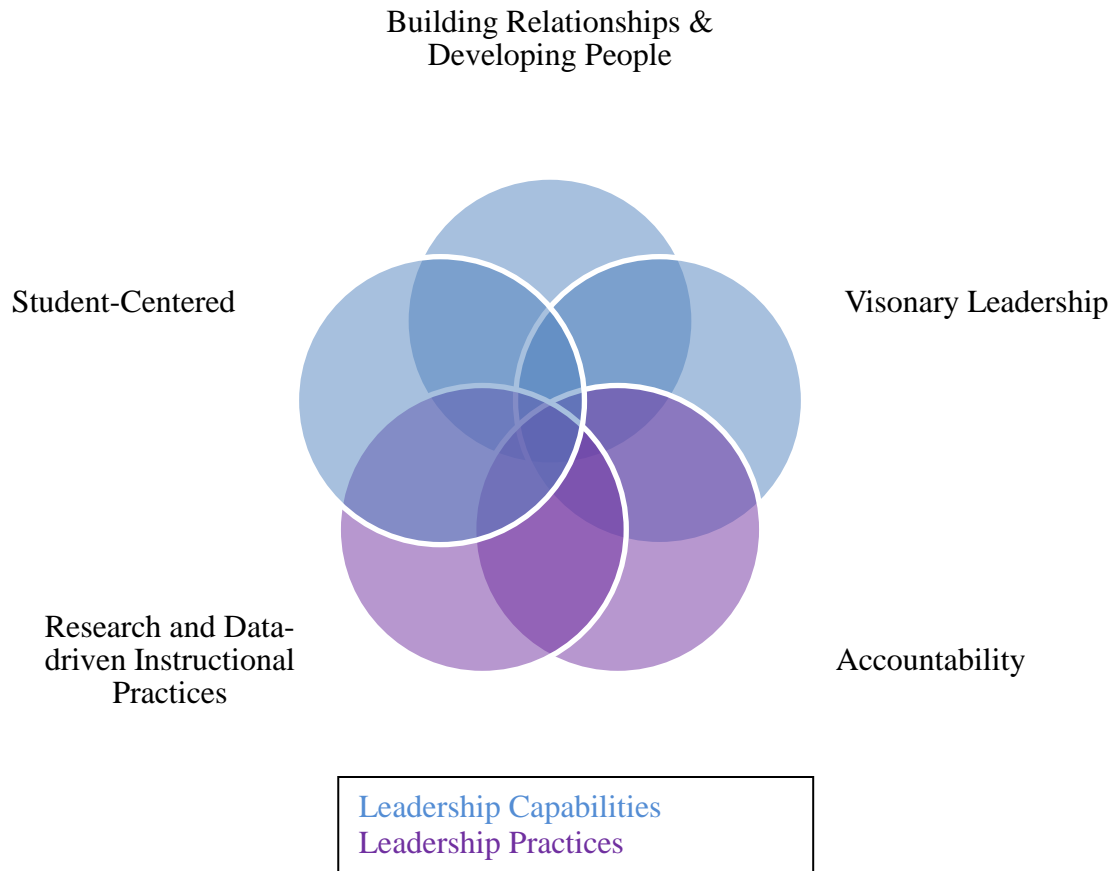


Figure 4. Effective Leadership Practices and Capabilities for ELLs

Developing People and Building Relationships

The first theme that I noticed and identified emerged through the responses of the principals, and the focus group interviews' was *Building Relationships and Developing People*. This theme was the foremost theme across all three case studies. *Building Relationships and Developing People* is a theme present in the existing literature that demonstrates the leadership capability of a leader who intrinsically understands the need to

focus attention on human relationships (Slater, 2008). While this theme demonstrates the leadership capability of the three principals, it also is interwoven to some extent with leadership practices. In all three schools, the principals talked about the need to build strong relationships with their teachers, staff, students, parents, and community. Each principal in their own unique way developed opportunities for strong and meaningful relationships to develop within the school, while also providing a vast array of opportunities for teachers, staff, and students to develop professionally, personally, and academically.

Principals in the three schools demonstrated a strong sense of commitment to their students and staff, both as a whole group and on an individual level. All three principals naturally applied and demonstrated leadership capabilities such as responsiveness to the needs of teachers and students in times of personal tragedy, personally collaborated amongst teachers for curriculum and lesson improvements, as well as assisted in the administering of diagnostic assessments, involvement in the continuous reflection on practices and a willingness to listen to the voice of the faculty, staff, and students, as well as providing ongoing support to all members of their school community. All three principals and members of the three focus groups believed these capabilities to be vital for classroom and school-wide improvements and greater achievement for all students. For example, in case study one, Mr. McCorkindale demonstrated how he valued teamwork among all educators in the building by the emphasis he placed on teachers meeting regularly and working together to collaboratively meet the needs of their students. He clearly demonstrated this leadership capability by intrinsically understanding the unspoken needs of his faculty and staff. He explained:

I think it has been real important that I talk to teachers. We sit down; we have a grade level meeting every week. They give me their concerns, I try to address their concerns, and I give them my concerns, I so I think it is the collaboration and the emphasis on meeting their needs...

In case study two, Dr. Dunn shared the need to be supportive of students and faculty. She stated:

I believe in providing an environment in which my teachers can teach with the proper resources and tools and my students come to this building each and every day with the expectation that they are going to learn something... I want my teachers to be the very best that they can be.

She emphasized the need to be highly visible and collaborative with teachers and students in order for them to feel supported and to trust that their professional and personal needs would be met by the principal and her leadership team. On the one hand being visible is a practice espoused in the leadership literature (Kouzes & Posner, 2002), but it also is strengthened by the individual presence of a leader, which is a capability that cannot be learned but rather is an inherent quality, much like a charismatic leader (Northouse, 2010). Dr. Dunn truly believed that it was a team effort, but that she herself needed to model the way.

Mrs. MacPherson, the principal for case study three was very honest about how she values building strong relationships with her faculty, staff, students, and parents. She also discussed the need to include all stakeholders into the decision-making process whenever possible. She stated:

I would look at myself of having a collaborative style: working hard to get the input and using the input from everyone. That doesn't mean that everyone was happy with the decisions that were made but they had a strong voice and there was never anything set in stone, the teachers came back to me and said this isn't working and we worked to adjust, or to change in order to make it more successful for teachers or students.

Mrs. MacPherson demonstrated how she personally believed in helping her teachers, families and students. She truly cared for their well-being and had a deep-seated desire to create a sense of family within the school.

These findings were consistent primarily with the leadership capabilities that I identified in my *Framework of Themes for Leadership Practices and Capabilities* (Coates et al., 2010; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Lewis, 2009; Public Impact, 2008). Some examples of the leadership capabilities included under this dominant theme were collaboration, responsive, teacher leader, supportive, teamwork, professional development, encourage others, and shared leadership for improvement. Many of these leadership capabilities align themselves with two of the practices that Kouzes and Posner (2002) identified as practices of exemplary leadership. The two practices are *enable others to act* and *encourage the heart*. As stated early in Chapter 2, both of these practices could be learned, however, it could also be argued that they all need a level of intrinsic knowledge and attributes. For example, in the case of *enable others to act* the leader have to be able to “foster collaboration by promoting cooperative goals and building trust” (p. 22). This is not a leadership practice that I believe can be just learned. The ability to encourage teachers, staff, students, and parents to trust in a

leader has a lot to do with the leader's personality and character, not just the leadership practices they have learned. The other exemplary leadership practice identified by Kouzes and Posner (2002) that aligns itself to *building relationships and knowing people* is *encourage the heart*. More specifically, the descriptor stated that the leader must be able to "Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community" (p.22). At first glance, this is clearly a leadership practice that can be learned. All school principals can build in celebrations for many different school events and traditions. However, the leadership capacity that aligns with *building relationship and developing people* is the ability to 'create a spirit of community.' Again, the ability to create a community spirit within a school is not something that can be learned, but something that is intrinsic within your abilities (Robinson, 2010; Smylie & Bennett, 2005).

Because of the strong emphasis on *building relationships and developing people*, principals and teachers in all three middle schools described an increased level of trust developing throughout each of the schools as well as an increased sense of community. These findings were consistent with leadership capabilities described by Robinson (2010) and Smylie & Bennett (2005), who stated that school principals should not only know and understand what leadership practices are effective for school principals, they also must have a natural ability, intrinsic knowledge and attributes to be able to appropriately facilitate effective leadership practices.

Student-Centered

The second theme that was identified through the responses of the three principals, and the focus group interviews was *student-centered*. This theme was prominent across all

three case studies, although in case study one it was actually the dominant theme for this principal. *Student-centered* is one in the existing literature that demonstrates the leadership capacity of a leader who inherently is driven by “a commitment ... that learning is what is valued, and that every effort will be made to keep learning at the center of school activities” (Cobb, 2005, p. 473). The focus is on students and their individual needs. It was interesting to note that in all three cases, even though my questions specifically asked about ELLs, all three principals as well as their respective focus groups, responded by answering in regards to all students. It was evident across all three cases that the focus was on all students and the students’ individual needs rather than dividing or categorizing students into specific sub-groups by their ethnicity, disability, socio-economic or ELL status.

All three principals in this study placed a high value on ensuring access to, and full participation in, an effective general education experience for all students. Even though none of the three principals had any personal training specifically in ELLs, they all instinctively knew and believed that the best opportunities for all students would be for all students to be instructed by core content experts in the general education setting with appropriate supports. For example, in case study one, Mr. McCorkindale demonstrated how he focused on students when he discussed what he described as the PMS process. This process was based on the philosophy that when a student does not understand or master a concept, the teacher, or in some cases an alternative teacher goes back over the material and re-teaches the student. Mr. McCorkindale went on to demonstrate the impact of this leadership capability:

It's had an effect on the teachers, they are talking more now about kids, but they are now putting them into groups of kids that need remediation. Kids that need a talk, maybe a conference or they enrich kids... the enrichment part is really really good. Mr. McCorkindale is passionate about meeting the needs of all of his students. He is willing to try any ideas the teachers have in order to successfully meet the needs of all of his students. When listening to Mr. McCorkindale talk it is personally very hard not to instantly believe in him, as his personal commitment and drive is contagious.

In case study two, Dr. Dunn shared throughout her interview her passion for challenging and meeting the specific needs of all of her students. She explained how all initiatives such as co-taught classes are school-wide and that she never singles out any one sub-group. Dr. Dunn went on to elaborate:

I know you are focusing on the ESOL, but the ESOL and special education teachers are more focused on one content area versus all over the place so the teacher, those special education and ESOL only have to worry about the curriculum for one subject, so they can become an expert in the subject area.

Dr. Dunn went on to explain that in order for all of her students to receive the best possible education she believes content experts must teach them. Similarly to Mr. McCorkindale, Dr. Dunn does not believe in segregating the ELLs, and prefers to provide them with quality co-teaching classes in the general education setting with ELL support.

In the third case study, Mrs. MacPherson shared very similar beliefs in personally striving to meet the specific needs of all students. She shared that the school vision of "Success is the only option" was supported by the desire that: "... we did whatever we could

to insure the success of all students.” She went on to share that even though she is no longer the principal at Tarbet Middle School the vision is still very important to her. She shared:

I still think of that [Success as the only option] as near and dear to my heart and try to instill that whole thing about being on the prowl for excellence and depending on the prowl for excellence and with success being the only option as really what we did at Tarbet Middle School. It just meant we had to be creative about helping students and helping each other: basic steps for all. So it really wasn’t an option for a teacher not to teach or a child not to learn and those things were happening then we needed to use the team effort to change that.

As with both other principals, Mrs. MacPherson’s commitment to all students came through in all of her responses. She truly believed that ‘Whatever it takes’ was the way to address any concerns regarding any student. This level of flexibility and willingness to adapt in order to do what was best for all students in each of the middle schools was apparent across all three case studies.

These findings were consistent with the leadership capabilities that I identified in my *Framework of Themes for Leadership Practices and Capabilities* (Coates et al., 2010; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Lewis, 2009; Public Impact, 2008). Some examples of the leadership capabilities included under this dominant theme were continuous focus on student achievement, differentiation, knowledge of students, teach for mastery, focus is on students, meeting the needs of all students, and commitment to all students’ needs. Many of these leadership capabilities align themselves with one of the practices that Kouzes and Posner (2002) identified as exemplary leadership. The practice that aligns itself is *model the way*.

As stated early in Chapter 2, this practice could be learned, however, it is plausible to assert that school principals need to have some natural ability in order to be able to successfully *model the way*. Therefore, the need to interweave leadership practices with leadership capabilities is extremely important. For example, in regards to each of the case study principals' being student-focused, they had to be able to "set the example by aligning actions with shared values" (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 22). Shared values, especially student-centered beliefs, are not easily learned; rather there must be the fundamental desire and commitment to do 'whatever it takes' to address the needs of all students. When a leader is student-centered, even if a decision is hard and goes against the opinion of the faculty and staff, a principal who is student-centered will *model the way* and make their decisions based on the shared value that students are the number one priority in their school. As clearly stated by Cobb (2005), "It begins with a commitment from every staff member- from the principal to the custodian – that learning is what is valued, and that every effort will be made to keep learning at the center of school activities" (p. 472).

Research and Data-Driven Instructional Practices

The third theme that emerged through the data was *research and data-driven instructional practices*. This theme emerged dominant across all three principals, as well as the focus groups. *Research and data-driven instructional practices* is one in the existing literature that demonstrates the leadership practice and capability of a leader who intrinsically understands as well as practices the need of providing appropriate resources and programs to students, as well as the necessary professional development and continuous dialogue to follow through and ensure the programs are successful and meet the needs of all students

(Jackson & McDermott, 2012). In all three schools, all three principals discussed the need to develop an inclusive master schedule that was accessible to all students. All three principals believed in designing a master schedule that not only met the needs of individual students, but also provided equal and appropriate access to the master schedule to all students. All three schools had very different schedules, but all shared the common goal of implementing a master schedule that would meet the needs of all of their students. For example, in case study three, Mrs. MacPherson shared how prior to her arrival at Tarbet Middle School the ELLs had traditionally been placed in self-contained classes separate from the general education students. One of the first instructional practices she changed was to move from a pull out model to a push in model. With a push in model co-teaching practices were implemented and provided all ELLs with the opportunities to be instructed by both the content area experts as well as receive the language support from an ESOL teacher. Mrs. MacPherson went on to explain:

We worked with the ESOL department to really work with their content teachers to make sure that they were planning with those teachers and helping those teachers adapt lessons to meet the needs of ESOL students. We put in place trying to cluster kids in classrooms. We didn't have kids spread out everywhere. So teachers could actually have the time to go into classrooms... We looked at what worked for teachers.

Similarly in case study two, Dr. Dunn discussed the need to provide a master schedule that provided access to all students, and was not exclusionary to any particular sub-group. Dr. Dunn also talked about the need to provide a good co-teaching model for all of her teachers

and students. She explained that when co-teaching is expected from our faculty we have to also provide them with the instructional knowledge and practices to be successful as well as appropriate resources and time. Some of these items can be addressed through a purposefully designed master schedule, but additionally, time needs to be spent in professional learning communities as well as faculty meetings and other forums to provide support from experts and encourage coloration amongst peers. Dr. Dunn went on to say:

The philosophy of co-teaching is awesome, all of the resources that we provide for them, all of the suggestions, some of it is who they are partnered with, so just getting better or just keep pounding away at making sure they understand what that model, that I have described really looks like or really, I mean can they see it and feel like.

Dr. Dunn was very clear about the importance of designing a master schedule that not only provided appropriate access to all students, but also provided time for all teachers to plan and strive to achieve the high expectations for student achievement.

In case study one, Mr. McCorkindale was also adamant about the importance of designed a master schedule that provides all ELLs with access to content experts in all subjects. Mr. McCorkindale was passionate when he shared his opinions regarding self-contained classes for ELLs, and his belief that they should all receive instruction in the general education setting with support from the ESOL teachers. He believed that it was fundamentally wrong to have ELLs in small, self-contained classes where they do not feel part of the school community.

Principals in the three schools also demonstrated a compulsion to implement programs and initiatives that they and their faculty believed would benefit all students. Each

principal discussed a willingness to adapt and change when needed if it was determined that the students were not making the necessary gains. Along with the successful implementation of programs and initiatives was the commitment to provide resources to support these programs and initiatives. All three principals discussed the need to support their faculty and staff with whatever resources was required to achieve the common goal. This commitment assisted in promoting high expectations for learning outcomes throughout all three case studies. For example in case study one, Mr. McCorkindale demonstrated how he believes that the implementation of the IB program Perth Middle School has made all the difference to raise the standards for all students and provide the faculty, staff, and students at Perth Middle School with a different perspective in regards to instruction and learning. Mr. McCorkindale shared “I have found that the IB program to be an absolutely great program for kids because it is very age appropriate, it makes them think of other things, it makes us evaluate them other than multiple choice.” Mr. McCorkindale went on to describe how the teachers at Perth Middle School work with portfolios. He went on to explain:

IB is more into the students understanding of the process rather than the product.

And that is, they have a personal project that they do at the end of the eighth grade.

And that’s the whole think. If the kid, the child understands the process that has got them to the end... even if the product isn’t fabulous... they could make a quilt that might not be the best quilt, but if the kid understands how they got worked with the theme of the quilt and what their thought process was that created it all, they get complete credit.

This is definitely a different instructional process than simply teaching the curriculum and assessing students by multiple choice tests. Mr. McCorkindale believes that the IB program provides the students at Perth Middle School with the additional skills and knowledge they need to be successful, while it also requires all teachers to instruct at a more individual student level, especially in order to facilitate the overall learning outcomes.

Dr. Dunn, the principal of Glasgow Middle School, case study two, also emphasized the importance of providing programs and resources that specifically met the needs of all students. Likewise, Dr. Dunn shared that the whole school focused on providing training targeted to promote student-centered instructional practices and strategies in all classrooms. She explained:

We did quite a bit of staff development... teaching on the block that is really nothing more than teaching using a wider range of instructional strategies. So, we've tried to really give them ideas on using instructional strategies that are more engaging.

Creating student-centered classrooms versus teacher-centered classrooms has been one of our greatest focuses.

Dr. Dunn explained the master schedule can only create the appropriate classes and provide all students with access to classes, yet the teachers must make the most appropriate use of time in order to meet the high expectations for learning outcomes.

Finally, in case study three, Mrs. MacPherson shared how introducing and facilitating the Baldrige program at Tarbet Middle School has increased the faculty, staff, and students awareness of their own individual needs, and has assisted both the teachers and students in fine tuning their individual learning outcomes. The Baldrige program had encouraged as

well as required professional dialogue by all of the faculty and staff. Mrs. MacPherson shared how this increased dialogue primarily centered on instructional knowledge and practices.

Mrs. MacPherson explained:

Tarbet Middle School was one of the first cohorts of Baldrige within the middle schools. Once you get to use it you really get to know how much it empowers teachers and kids. It's difficult to function without it.... Once you get teachers to see the value in it there's very little you have to do. The teachers' talk about the successes in classes and then every teacher wants to try it.

Mrs. MacPherson continued by explaining that the Baldrige program provides all members of the faculty, staff, as well as students with clear strategies that can foster good instruction and strengthen practices that ultimately sustain increased achievement in all students.

These findings were consistent with the leadership practices that I identified in my Framework of Themes for Leadership Practices and Capabilities (Coates et al., 2010; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Lewis, 2009; Public Impact, 2008). Some examples of the leadership practices included under this leadership practices were high expectation for learning outcomes, assessments, data to monitor progress, inclusive practices, enrichment and remediation, school-wide focus on achievement, raising the standards for all students, as well as equal and appropriate access to all students. Many of these practices align themselves with the practice Kouzes and Posner (2002) identified as practices for exemplary leadership. The practice that aligns itself is *challenge the process*. An example of how this exemplary leadership practice aligns itself to the theme *instructional knowledge and practices* is clearly outlined by Kouzes and Posner (2002). They state that the leader has to be able to "Search

for opportunities by seeking innovative ways to change, grow, and improve” (p. 22) as well as “experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from mistakes” (p. 22). This leadership practice spans a lot of different areas within educational leadership, including the ability to use data to drive decisions, both for individual students, but also for the whole school which may include a change in the master schedule, or moving a teacher from one grade level to another depending on the needs of the current students. Additionally, the knowledge of selecting the appropriate professional development to support faculty and staff, while also being open to the support from experts would fall under this descriptor.

As stated in Chapter 2, the leadership practice of *challenge the process* could well be demonstrated when a school principal designs a school schedule that is not the ‘norm’ but provides the teachers and staff with the necessary time to meet their instructional goals (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). The ability to think past what is traditional, or what has always been the way something has been done, is a leadership practice that all three principals and focus groups demonstrated throughout all three case studies.

Furthermore, the ability to introduce and implement programs and initiatives that were designed specifically to meet the needs of the students was evident in each of the case study middle schools. All three principals believed in searching for new and innovative ways to support and increase rigor for their students within their building, and were all willing to become personally involved in the training and facilitating of the programs and initiatives. Additionally, in order to focus on instructional knowledge and practices all three principals were clear on the need to assure that all of their teachers are utilizing appropriate and

purposeful practices to support the needs of all of their students. More importantly for this study, all three principals did not believe in separating their student population by sub-group, but endeavored to meet each student's individual needs in order to assure their ultimate achievement.

Accountability

The fourth theme that I noticed and emerged through the responses of the principals, and the focus group interviews was *accountability*, although it was not as prevalent in case study three. Accountability is one in the existing literature that demonstrates the leadership practice and capability of a leader who has the knowledge, skills and determination to hold all members of faculty and staff accountable for meeting the needs of all students (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). In all three schools, all three principals talked about the need to hire, supervise and support competent teachers and staff in order to provide quality instruction to all students. In case study two, Dr. Dunn went on further to state that regardless of content, all teaching staff should be held accountable for ensuring high expectations for learning outcomes. Additionally, the principals from case study one and three discussed the need to require staff to routinely reflect on student achievement using student data. All three principals agreed that this level of accountability specifically focused on students was important and more importantly vital to facilitate each of their schools accomplishing their goals of success for all students. An example of this level of accountability was found in case study one. Mr. McCorkindale discussed how he and his administrative team would sit with the teachers during their professional learning community

(PLC) meetings and discuss individual student data, which ultimately led to conversations related to the teachers teaching. He explained:

We were able to sit with teachers and have conversations about their teaching. And what they were doing and what was working and what they felt wasn't working. We were able to use the data to show them hey this is something that you didn't do real well. What haven't you taught them? Was there somebody in the building that did teach it well? We got them to meet with other teachers. It was really very very good. Additionally, in regards to accountability, Mr. McCorkindale also discussed the need to hire competent staff. He shared his frustrations that it was not always easy to find good teaching staff in certain key areas of need, particularly ESOL, and that it had taken a number of years to develop a team of teachers who he believed were of a high quality. He also discussed the need to provide adequate support and supervision, to guarantee that all members of staff were appropriately meeting the needs of all students.

In case study three, Mrs. MacPherson shared that during her first year as principal at Tarbet Middle School she placed some systems in place that the school needed and that they had never had. She explained that it was clear during this first year that many of the teachers had not been used to this level of accountability. She went on to state "There were something's that I put in place that certainly folks were not used to that level of accountability or being asked to turn in those items or for someone to see those items like lesson plans or unit plans." She went on to explain that prior to her arrival as principal:

There was a lack of expectations for kids and a lack of consistency and follow-through on discipline and because of that, you know, kids as kids do, and they'd been

allowed too. They'd taken liberties... you draw a line, we won't tolerate this and to really get peoples focus back, we should be about learning and that should be, you know, the center of everything we do, which should be student learning.

All three principals agreed that every member of the faculty and staff, as well as the students needed to be held accountable and be encouraged at all times to move in the direction of each schools vision and mission.

These results were consistent with the leadership practices that I identified in my *Framework of Themes for Leadership Practices and Capabilities* (Coates et al., 2010; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Lewis, 2009; Public Impact, 2008). Some examples of the leadership practices included under this leadership practice were recruitment, hiring, and retention of staff with common goals and interests, measuring and monitoring teacher and leader effectiveness, competency of staff, reflective on student achievement, and data to assess student achievement. Many of these leadership practices associate themselves with two of the practices Kouzes and Posner (2002) identified as practices of exemplary leadership. The two practices that align themselves are *challenge the process* and *enable others to act*. In the case of *challenge the process* Kouzes and Posner (2002) suggest that the leader must “question the status quo” (p. 204) as well as “conduct pre- and postmortems for every project” (p. 237). In all three cases the principals discussed the need to reflect on student achievement while also ensuring the use of data to assess student achievement. Both of these practices align themselves clearly with the above descriptors. In regards to *enable others to act* Kouzes and Posner (2002) suggest that the leader “ask questions, listen and take advice” while also “focus on gains, not loses” (p. 277). Additionally, Kouzes and Posner

(2002) share that leaders should “educate, educate, educate” while at the same time “create a learning climate” (p. 311). Again, in all three case studies the principals were very cognizant of listening to the needs of their students and staff as well as promoting high expectations for all. Additionally, all three principals were committed to doing whatever it took to meet the needs of all of their students and to focus on creating an environment that was conducive to learning for all.

Visionary Leadership

The fifth and final theme that emerged through the data was *visionary leadership*. This theme emerged most dominant in the focus group interviews, across all three case studies, although was also evident throughout all three principals interviews as well. In the existing literature, the leadership capacity of *visionary leadership* is demonstrated by a leader who inspires and challenges everyone around him or her to believe in their vision and strive for a common cause (Hoerr, 2005; Houston, Blankstein, & Cole, 2007; Kouzes & Posner, 2002). In all three schools, all three principals and their focus groups discussed the need to strive for high expectations for all. By this they meant high expectations for students as well as for faculty and staff. The principals believed in aligning each of their schools vision with their own personal values and beliefs, while also outlining very clear and objective goals. In case study three the principal went as far as stating that she wished to inspire and communicate a love for learning throughout her school and the focus group members shared her obvious love for people and desire to support them in any way possible. This level of vision and inspiration was evident throughout all three case studies. For example, in case study one both Mr. McCorkindale the principal, and the members of the focus group

discussed the vision and mission as inspirational for all members of the school community, including faculty, staff, students and community. The focus group went on to discuss Mr. McCorkindale's ability to motivate and empower the students as well as the staff at Perth Middle School, while always having high expectations from all. They also discussed Mr. McCorkindale's passion to ensure that "... every student is given the same opportunity for success – there is no ESOL level 1 who can't do it – there is still that rigor."

In case study two, the focus group was very clear in how they perceived Dr. Dunn. The focus group members unanimously agreed that Dr. Dunn held everyone at Glasgow Middle School to extremely high standards, and had high expectations for achievement for all students. They also shared that they believed she was extremely future-focused and described her as challenging both the faculty and students to perform to the best of their abilities. A member of the focus group shared "There is the expectation that children are supposed to succeed regardless of you know challenges they may face... I think that... is something clearly presented to our school and we are moving forward after it..."

Lastly, in case study three, the focus group described Mrs. MacPherson as a leader who was willing to do whatever was necessary to support her teachers, staff, and students. They stated:

She had high expectations for everybody including herself. She had high expectations for the school, for you as a professional and would have done anything to help you meet those high expectations. It's just a sense that there is a level that people perform...

Another member of the focus group shared how Mrs. MacPherson was always "... striving for their best at all times." Another member stated: "... she made us feel like we could and would make the right decisions." They discussed how her ability to empower others was inspirational to both the faculty and the students. She made them all believe that anything was possible, and that they could be successful, regardless of how challenging the situation may be. It was evident throughout all three cases that the members of the three focus groups all admired and respected their respective principals and believed that much of the success of the students at each of their schools was due to the leadership of each of their principals.

These results were consistent with the leadership capabilities that I identified in my *Framework of Themes for Leadership Practices and Capabilities* (Coates et al., 2010; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Lewis, 2009; Public Impact, 2008). Some examples of the leadership capabilities included under this leadership capability were belief and enthusiasm for vision is the spark that ignites the flame, inspiration, future focused, high performance expectations, communicates the vision well, motivates, challenges, empowers others, and results driven. Many of these leadership capabilities align themselves with the practice Kouzes and Posner (2002) identified as *inspire a shared vision*. As a leadership practice Kouzes and Posner (2002) describe it as the ability to "envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities" as well as "enlisting others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations" (p. 22). Although I am sure that developing a common vision and working with your faculty and staff is a leadership practice that could be learned, I argue that not everyone has the ability to visualize exhilarating and distinguishing opportunities for the future. Many school leaders rely on others to develop these visions, and

without visionary people around them are unable to think past the status quo they are already leading. I believe that to be a visionary leader is to have the leadership practices and the leadership capability to think of the big picture while also not forgetting the individual needs of all students. As stated by Williamson (1991) a school principal is an inspirational leader, human developer and change agent. All of which for the purpose of this paper are identified as leadership capabilities.

Effective Leadership Practices and Capabilities: The Impact on Literacy Achievement of ELLs

The principals and focus groups members spoke openly when responding to the interview and focus group questions providing meaningful and valuable insight into the possible leadership practices and capabilities potentially required for principals to impact and be effective in middle schools with high number of ELLs. The following two research questions were answered using a combination of the responses from the principals' interviews and as well as the focus group interviews: what leadership practices and capabilities do middle school principals believe positively impact the literacy achievement of ELLs? And what leadership practices and capabilities have middle school principals implemented that positively impact the literacy achievement of ELLs? Generally, the educational beliefs of each principal and their leadership practices and capabilities were very similar. Frequently throughout all three principal interviews, once each principal had shared their beliefs, they would then immediately discuss how these beliefs were implemented and vice versa. Thus, the following discussion will answer simultaneously both questions about the beliefs and the leadership practices and capabilities that each of the principals featured in

the three case studies potentially impacted the literacy achievement of ELLs in each of their respective schools.

Across all three case studies it was evident that all three principals believed that the leadership practice and capability of compelling all stakeholders to require high expectations for all was critical for the success of each of their schools. By this I mean they had high expectations for themselves, their faculty and staff as well as their students. They all believed that all students could learn and that is was the role of the school to guarantee that every effort was made to reach every student, regardless of the challenges or obstacles laid out in front of them. The principals from case study one and three strongly believed in motivating and empowering their faculty, staff, and students to reach these high expectations, while the principal from case study two strived to accomplish and obtain high expectations by challenging her faculty, staff, and students and by being very future-focused when considering possible school initiative, programs, or resources to best meet and support the needs of her students and staff. In regards to my *Framework of Themes for Leadership Practices and Capabilities* (Table 1), high expectations for all falls under a number of categories depending on the specific emphasis of the expectations. However, it should be noted that throughout all three case studies, the main focus of each principals' high expectations for all was centered on their students. Each principal was one hundred percent committed to all of their students and it was evident that they were dedicated to doing everything and anything to meet all of their students' needs. The principals indicated on numerous occasions their continuous focus on student achievement and the need for differentiation within all classes. They discussed the need for their faculty and staff to know

their students and be able to design lessons and activities that specifically met the needs of their students. They also discussed the importance of moving away from simply covering the curriculum, but the need to teach for mastery. By this they meant making sure that all students were fully understanding and able to critically think and problem solve using the information and material they were taught. For many educators this level of rigor was a new concept and each of the principals shared how they had been working personally with their faculty and staff to support this transition.

Tied directly to each principal's belief in high expectations for all, is the purposeful design of the schools master schedule that was evident throughout all three case studies. All three principals indicated how important they believed it was to develop a master schedule that addressed the specific needs of all of their students. They all stated the importance of a schedule that provides equal and appropriate access for all students that allows teachers to raise the standards for all students. The principals indicated numerous times that the schedule had to be accessible to all students and that they did not utilize or subscribe to any set program or resource for their ELLs students. All the principals were in agreement that the emphasis should be providing rigorous instruction to reach the individual needs of all students regardless of whether they are ELL, special education, at-risk, or lower socio-economic in status. Overall, the consensus among all three principals across all three studies was the belief in inclusive practices for all students. They did not believe in educating students in isolation. Furthermore, they also assented in designing a master schedule that supported the strengths of the teachers in their respective schools. For example, if a teacher's previous data has shown that they were successful in a co-teaching setting working with

special education students, however, struggled with more advanced classes, then all principals agreed that they scheduled their teachers to teach in the areas and grade levels that they were most comfortable and successful with. It was evident that they all believed in scheduling for success, both in regards to the students and teachers.

Based on the identified theme of *building relationships and developing people*, the master schedule is important due to the fact that it allows the principal to purposefully scheduled teachers into the subject areas they are most affective in, while also provide them with adequate support and training when needed. Additionally, the need for a purposeful master schedule also falls under the theme of *research and data-driven instructional practice*. It is important to recognize that not only does the teachers need to have the instructional knowledge and skills, but also the principals need to be knowledgeable regarding the specific needs of their student body in order to be able to design an effective master schedule that successfully meets the needs of all of their students.

All three principals on a number of occasions discussed the need for competent staff, particularly ESOL teachers, and discussed the need to hire highly qualified ESOL teachers, as well as, content area teachers who are also qualified to teach ESOL. Additionally, all three principals discussed the need to train and support teachers especially in regards to co-teaching strategies and practices: both the content teacher as well as the ESOL teacher. This provides teachers with the ability to develop professionally by refining and strengthening their teaching skills, while also working on their ability to work in a collaborative setting with a co-teacher. There was a strong emphasis by all three principals on providing quality instruction and providing the appropriate supports to students and teachers to achieve. All

three principals did not separate the needs of the ELL or the special education students from the general education students. The focus at all times was on meeting the individual needs of all students.

Each of the principals discussed the need for teachers to model reflective practices on student achievement in order to evaluate and modify their teaching practices as needed in order to meet the specific needs of each individual student. They also discussed the increased need to use data to drive all of their decisions both from an administrative standpoint by also in regards to instruction and assessment. For example, the principal in case study one shared how at Perth Middle School they utilized the 8-step process to gather, analyze, and reflect upon their student data, in case study two, the principal of Glasgow Middle School shared how they did not use a specific program but as a school they were collecting in the teacher generated assessments to evaluate how the students were mastering the content and standards. In regards to case study three; the principal at Tarbet Middle School shared the introduction of the Baldrige program. This program not only requires the teachers to reflect on the student's data, but also requires the students to analyze and reflect on their own data and to develop individual goals for themselves based on their own strengths and weaknesses. Although each school utilized very different strategies to gather and analyze data, it was evident that all three case studies believed in the importance of data to drive all instructional decisions for each of their schools.

Grounded in the identified theme of *accountability*, the subject of competency of staff is important as in order to allow each of the three principals to focus on student achievement all three principals understood the importance and necessity of measuring and monitoring

teachers in addition to their own effectiveness. The principals indicated numerous times that they all felt a level of frustration with the lack of competent teachers within the ESOL subject area, and felt that this was an area that over the last few years they had all worked on to improve in each of their respective schools. Their biggest area of concern was in regards to the ESOL teachers' lack of expertise in content areas, and the negative instructional impact they believed this lack of expertise had on ESOL students who in all of their opinions required and to be honest, deserved their most experienced and most effective content area teachers. This could not be provided to their ESOL teachers when the teachers applying for the ESOL positions are not content certified or master teachers in any specific area, including ESOL. Therefore it was evident throughout all three data sources that the principals were focused on improvement from a number of angles: student academic improvement in order to obtain this, teacher effectiveness improvement.

A collaborative approach with a sense of encouraging and inspiring others to lead and try new things was evident throughout all three data sources. All three principals created opportunities for them to be actively involved in the educational process in each of their schools, and believed in open the lines of communication with all of their faculty, staff, students, and parents. All of the principals identified the need to communicate and meet regularly with their teachers and shared how they were all implementing professional learning communities within their respective schools. All grade levels and departments in each of the case study schools were required to meet as professional learning communities and were encouraged to collaborate and support each other with the emphasis on improving the quality of instruction and providing the appropriate supports to the teachers to achieve. It

was evident that all three principals believed in creating supportive and encouraging environments, and although all three were at different stages of implementation, the ultimate goal was to create a sense of true collaboration and teamwork throughout each of their schools.

Additionally, it was evident when talking with each of the principals that they believed in developing teacher leaders within their schools. They all valued the expertise of their teachers, and were all willing whenever possible to empower their teachers to take ownership of programs, professional development, and remediation and enrichment initiatives. For example, as the principal of case study three shared when the teachers work together as a team they learn the strengths and weaknesses of the students and can work together to collectively address what each student needs. Additionally, as a team they can lean on each other's strengths and weaknesses and as a team support each other as professionals and develop their own professional skills. There was a unanimous belief by all three principals that by building strong relationships within their school buildings, and providing faculty and staff with the opportunity to take ownership for their own successes as well as failures that the ultimate goal of meet the needs of students will be achieved.

Based on the theme of *building relationships and developing people* the three principals indicated numerous times the importance of collaboration, teamwork, implementation of professional learning communities, and ultimately a shared leadership for improvement. All three principals also discussed the need to be supportive, responsive, encouraging to others, as well as lead by examples. They all agreed that it was vital to build positive relationships with all stakeholders within their school. Additionally, within the

interviews and the focus group discussions, transparent decision-making and the need for clear and concise communication to faculty, staff, students, and parents was discussed. All participants agreed that in order to have true buy-in from all stakeholders all decisions have to be fully understood, even if not fully agreed upon, and the only way to be able to do this is to keep everyone as informed as possible.

This level of openness and willingness for collaboration could be argued as the reason why there seems to be a great sense of trust throughout all three of these schools.

Tschannen-Moran (2004) agreed that leaders create trusting school environments through honesty, openness, and reliability. Empowering teachers and including them in all aspects of the educational process fosters the “we” model that was evident in all three of the case study middle schools.

This level of trust evident in all three schools also connects to the transformational model of leadership discussed in Chapter 2. Transformational leaders work side-by-side with their teachers talking and planning together while providing motivation and instructional leadership. These leaders model open communication and build structures that support collaboration and eliminate teacher isolation. When transformational leaders work cooperatively with teachers, a team approach is taken, which also serves to flatten the hierarchy and includes all educators in the educational process of the school.

Additionally interwoven within the theme of *building relationships and developing people* another leadership practice that all three principals agreed was a key necessity for each of their schools, but one that they all agreed was not as successful as they all hoped was in relationship to building positive relationships between home and school. Each of the

principals indicated numerous times the importance of working with the students' parents and community to successfully support all students; however, they all shared differing levels of frustration and success. However, regardless of how successful they perceived they were, all three of the principals were adamant of their continued commitment to working with the parents and community to continue to strive and build positive relationships between school, home and community. For example the principal of case study one shared how he had created a community liaison position within his school and was committed to keeping this position fully funded. In his opinion, this position and in particular the individual who had taken this position was a huge asset to the school and surrounding community. The ability to communicate parents in their native language and to foster a welcoming and open environment for parents to visit the school was extremely important to this principal. The principals of case study two and three both introduced and supported a program called 'Parents as Education Partners' as a resource to support and educate their parents. They also believed in the need to create an inviting school environment so that all parents felt welcoming when entering each of their respective schools. All three principals discussed the facilitation of international nights, back to school nights, parent conferences, bilingual newsletters, and other community events.

Finally, the ability of each principal to successfully communicate their school's vision was evident throughout the principals' and focus group interviews. All three principals believed in the importance of communicating the school's vision to all stakeholders. They all believed in the need to be highly visible throughout their school building both for the students as well as for the faculty and staff. The principals in case study one and two

believed in being highly visible and involved in as many aspects of the daily school activities as possible. The principal in case study three believed in being very hands-on as well as involved.

Centered on the identified leadership capability theme of *visionary leadership*, the need to communicate the school's vision was extremely important for each of the case study principals. All three principals discussed the need to be inspirational and to be able to communicate the ability to 'think big!' They also shared the need for them to be able to model the belief and enthusiasm for the school vision and to motivate their respective faculty, staff, students and community to strive to meet their common vision. It was evident when reviewing the principals' and focus group interviews that each of the case study principals openly walked the walk, talked the talk, and was more than willing to work side by side with their faculty and staff.

As well as the two primary research questions; a number of additional questions were also answered by each of the principals and focus groups. In regards to the question what challenges did each principal face when addressing the literacy needs of ELLs what was extremely interesting was not one of the principals focused on ELLs in particular as a challenge. They all shared challenges that were inclusive of all students and not specific to any one sub-group, especially ELLs. For example, the principal of case study one shared that his biggest challenge was hiring qualified and competent teachers who had high expectations for their students. The principal for case study two shared two challenges. The first one was the challenge of scheduling dually identified ESOL and special education students to make sure that they fit in both programs and assure that the students receive the best services

possible from both departments. The second challenge was in regards to motivating unmotivated students. The principal clearly stated that this challenge was across the entire student body, not just the ELLs. Finally, the third principal shared that one of the challenges she faced was working with the teaching practices that were already in place prior to her taking over as principal. She shared how many of the teachers taught whole group and there was a need to ask teachers to change their paradigm about teaching, particularly teaching reading. Interestingly as stated earlier, the challenges the principals shared were not specific to the ELLs.

When answering the question how did these principals acquire the knowledge and skills to understand the literacy challenge and needs of ELLs the principals each shared very different professional background prior to becoming a middle school principal. The principal of case study one who began his career as a social studies high school teacher and coach shared he acquired his knowledge and skills by lots of reading, reaching out for district support and relying on his own previous teaching experience. In regards to the principal of case study two, she began her career as a high school business teacher. She shared that she acquired her knowledge and skills by attending and completing professional development while also relying on the support of experts within her building. Finally, the principal of case study three began her career as an elementary teacher. She shared that she acquired her knowledge and skills initially by teaching ELLs within her own classrooms, and then attending professional development training as an assistant principal and elementary principal that was specifically designed on how to teach reading, including ELLs. It can be noted that none of the three principals had received any specific training or similar prior

experience before becoming a middle school principal. None of them were certified in teaching ESOL or were fluent in a second language. Each of them at completely different teaching experiences and all came from completely different backgrounds and locations in the US.

And finally when specifically asked why did each principal believe that the leadership practices and capabilities they adopted aided them in meeting the specific literacy challenges and needs of ELLs all three of them were unanimous in stating that they believed that as long as all decisions were made for the good of all students, and that the focus was always on student achievement, all students, including ELLs would ultimately benefit. It is important to document that not one of the principals or focus groups identified any explicit leadership practices or capabilities being adopted to specifically meet the needs of ELLs in isolation.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I described briefly the study by revisiting the research questions and the theoretical framework. I presented a comparison of themes that emerged from the three cases as well as discussed the themes in context of the existing literature. And finally, I explained how the themes, data, and research literature answered the research questions. In summary, all three principals were very different individuals, both from a personality perspective as well as from the perspective of experience. Additionally their individual leadership styles were also different however, what was evident throughout all three of the case studies was their similar focus on developing the culture of shared leadership throughout all three schools. There was a definite emphasis on teamwork as well as the development of teacher leaders. None of the principals demonstrated a top-down leadership model and all

stressed the need to involve teachers, staff, students, and parents as much as possible in the decision-making process. They all agreed that they ultimately were responsible for making any final decisions, and it would not be possible to have everyone in agreement all of the time, but they all strongly felt that by involving all stakeholders as much as possible, it was easier to communicate the school vision, together with moving forward with each respective school mission.

Although the three principals are personally and professionally very different, as Table 2 demonstrates, they share five distinct commonalities in terms of their leadership practices and capabilities. The findings support existing research in several areas of school leadership. The exploration of leadership practices and capabilities of principals emphasizes the importance of leading by example, defining and inspiring a shared school vision and mission, and designing a master schedule and instructional program in middle schools to meet the needs of all students. Additionally the need to empower all stakeholders to be involved in the decision-making process as well as provide encouragement and support for all (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). This study also supports current research on accountability pressures in schools and the need for principals to be well versed in data-driven practices, while also focusing on the quality of classroom instruction (Allington, 2006). In addition, the importance of collaboration and developing a framework for shared leadership were also supported in this research. To be successful the school as a whole has to have the ethical desire to make a difference, and then have the means to encourage, mold, and establish the same beliefs into their entire school building (Cobb, 2005; Fullan, 2002).

Table 2

Key Findings from Research Questions

Theme Belief (B) Implemented (I)	Leadership Practice (LP) or Capability (LC)	Perth Middle School	Glasgow Middle School	Tarbet Middle School
Building Relationships & Developing People	LC (& LP)	Collaboration (B) Teacher Leaders (B/I) Teamwork (B) Professional Learning Communities (I) Community Liaison (B/I)	Collaboration (B) Teacher Leaders (B/I) Teamwork (B) Professional Learning Communities (I) Parents as Educator Partners (I)	Collaboration (B) Teacher Leaders (B/I) Professional Learning Communities (B) Shared Leadership for improvement (B) Parents as Educator Partners (I)
Student-Centered	LC	Master Schedule Continuous focus on student achievement Individual needs of students	Master Schedule Continuous focus on student achievement Individual needs of students	Placement of Students Continuous focus on student achievement Individual needs of students
Research and Data-Driven Instructional Practices	LP	Inclusive Practices (B/I) Master Schedule (B/I) Equal and appropriate access for all students (B/I) Raising the standards for all students (B/I) No set program or resources for ELLs.	Inclusive Practices (B/I) Master Schedule (B/I) Equal and appropriate access for all students (B/I) Raising the standards for all students (B/I) No set program or resources for ELLs.	Inclusive Practices (B/I) Master Schedule (B/I) Equal and appropriate access for all students (B/I) Raising the standards for all students (B/I) No set program or resources for ELLs.
Accountability	LP	Competency of Staff (B) Reflective practices on student achievement (I) Data-Driven Decisions (I) – <i>8-step process</i>	Competency of Staff (B) Reflective practices on student achievement (I) Data-Driven Decisions (I) – <i>collection of teacher created standard-based assessments</i>	Competency of Staff (B) Reflective practices on student achievement (I) Data-Driven Decisions (I) – <i>Baldrige Program</i>
Visionary Leader	LC	Communicates the vision well Motivates and empowers others High performance expectations (B) Highly visible and involved	Communicates the vision well Challenges and is future-focused High performance expectations (B) Highly visible and involved	Communicates the vision well Motivates and empowers others High performance expectations (B) Hands-on/involved

8. DISCUSSION

The final chapter is organized into four sections. This chapter begins with a summary of the findings. In the second section, I discuss the implications of this study on building principals, school districts, and principal preparation programs. In the third section, I discuss the limitations and the significance of the research. In the final section, I discuss recommendations for future research followed by a brief conclusion.

Summary of Findings

In summary the findings suggest that all three principals were very different individual, both personally and professionally. On the surface each of these principals' leadership styles could have been perceived as very different due to their different personalities and professional experience. However, what was evident throughout all three case studies was their similar focus on developing a culture of shared leadership throughout each of their schools and that they all modeled the leadership style of a transformational leader. There was an emphasis on teamwork as well as the development of teacher leaders. Each of the principals believed in involving their faculty, staff, students, and parents as much as possible in the decision-making process. Additionally, across all three case studies the principals agreed in the need to create a student-focused master schedule that provides equal and equitable access to all students. Instructionally they all believe in inclusive practices and strive to provide all of their teachers and staff with the most appropriate support and

resources in order to meet the needs of all of their students. All three case studies focus groups perceived their principals' to be visionary leaders and felt very strongly that their principals were strongly committed to doing 'whatever it takes' to meet the needs of all students. In the next section I will discuss the possible implications for building principals, school districts, and educational leadership programs.

Implications

Implications for Building Principals

The position of the building principal is a multifaceted one, demanding many responsibilities of school leaders. This study has several implications for the leadership practices and capabilities of building principals at any level. First, principals need to understand the importance of developing the leadership capability of building strong and purposeful relationships with all members of their faculty, staff, as well as students and parents, while also working on developing teacher leaders while fostering and encouraging collaboration throughout their school. Closely related to collaboration, principals need to recognize the importance of developing relationships with all stakeholders. Promoting and developing positive relationships was found repeatedly through the analysis of interview data, as well as within research. This characteristic was evident throughout the ways that principals supported their teachers, interacted with parents and community members, and celebrated their students learning and achievements.

Additionally when leadership is shared among teachers and other members of staff regarding school decisions about the instructional program and other school related

initiatives, more teachers will be able to reflect and make the necessary changes to their own teaching pedagogy and practices, if necessary. When the principals in this study made the effort to collaborate with and work alongside their teachers and staff this led to more ownership from the faculty and staff in regards to the common goal of striving for the increase in student achievement and overall success while also the drive for continued progress. The commitment on the part of the school staff to do whatever is necessary to help students learn is strengthened when teacher leaders and professional learning communities are established. The literature discussed in Chapter 2 indicated that teachers who professed to have more freedom regarding decisions that affected their classrooms had higher levels of commitment to their school and school vision (Firestone & Pennell, 1993).

Building principals should make every effort to understand the importance of facilitating professional learning communities and developing teacher leaders to increase the sense of collaboration and ownership of whole school instructional changes and modifications among the teachers in their buildings. Developing instructional knowledge with teachers and securing time for collaboration are key factors in impacting student achievement. Principals can enhance collaboration within their buildings by including teachers in the decision making process and increasing their involvement in data-driven practices. School leaders can transform their schools when attention is paid to developing teacher leaders and shared leadership throughout their building.

Second, the leadership capacity centered on student-focused decisions is important for all effective principals. The direction and example that is set by the building principal determines the environment in which students and teachers will work. While this can be

approached in different ways, effective principals must possess the leadership capability that will enhance student and teacher productivity by continually emphasizing the need to be student-focused when making all decisions. Setting the tone, providing focus, and building relationships are critical to schools sustaining a student-focused environment. Stakeholders could be surveyed so that building principals have an accurate view of the school climate. Results would help to provide feedback to principals on areas of strength or weakness. All three principals in this study understood the need to base all decisions with their students as their primary focus. As fundamental as the master schedule, which all three principals agreed required all students to be scheduled based on their individual needs and that it was important to provide equal and appropriate access to all students. In all cases the fundamental belief was that when students were the focus of all decisions, then the right decision would be made, and students would be positively impacted. It is important for principals to remember this leadership capability. It is important that students are always the priority and there is continuous focus on achievement.

Third, it is clear that principals need to be skilled in the area of instructional knowledge and practices. The responsibility falls to the school leaders to ensure that teachers are effectively providing the appropriate instructional practices and utilizing the necessary strategies in order to successfully meet the individual needs of all students. Building principals need to have the knowledge and leadership capability to discuss instructional practices with their teachers, understand how to model different pedagogical practices, and provide the direction needed for teachers to have the skills necessary to reflect on their own practices and make the necessary adjustments and changes to their teaching. All three

principals in this study had varying levels of instructional knowledge and practice experience however, they all understood the need to provide their teachers with the support of experts, professional development that targeted the specific needs of their staff and students, and utilized their teacher leaders as well as master teachers within their own building to support and collaborate with each other. They also instinctively understood the importance of integrating inclusive practices throughout their respective schools in order to raise the expectations and standards for all students.

Fourth, in this era of accountability, it is apparent that principals need to be skilled at using data including SOL scores, benchmark assessments, and progress monitoring tools. The leadership practice of accountability continues to be major pressure felt by building principals. The responsibility falls to school leaders to ensure that teachers have access to pertinent data and that time is allocated to analyze data to make instructional decisions. Building principals need to have the knowledge and leadership skills to discuss data with their teachers, understand scores and trends, and provide the direction needed for the team to make data of their daily practice. This may require professional development for school leaders, as well as for their teachers. Completing needs assessments, strategic plans, and other comprehensive documents are appropriate exercises for teams to look closely at data. However, all three principals in this study stressed the competency of staff as more important in regards to accountability. They tied reflective practices on student achievement, with data-driven decisions, to the overall effectiveness of individual teachers.

Fifth, Goodlad (1994) warned principals about allowing management tasks to overshadow their priorities of effective teaching and student learning. All three principals in

this study did not let the general school operations get in the way of their focus on increasing literacy achievement for their students. Many characteristics of instructional leadership were evident with these leaders, but instructional leadership is not the only model that warrants further discussion. Transformational leadership was also apparent in this study. Hallinger (2003) suggested that one difference between the two leadership models is that instructional leadership emphasizes a coordinated, directive strategy while transformational leadership takes more of an empowering approach. All of the focus groups identified and characterized their principals as being visionary, which is certainly not a leadership practice or managerial skill. The supporting approach of transformational leadership also aligns with the collaborative work of principals that work to develop a collaborative and culture of shared leadership throughout their building.

Therefore, a third leadership model should also be considered and that is distributed leadership or shared leadership. According to Printy and Marks (2006), “the concept of shared leadership has moved to the forefront of leadership approaches” (p. 125). This is supported by Hall and Hord (2010) who have stated how school leaders are not capable of sustaining school change alone. Research is now suggesting that distributed or shared leadership could provide and support a student-centered, collaborative learning environment that therefore could potentially be steadily sustained. In the case of this study, these considerations within the current research have a possible bearing to how each of the principals could have impacted the literacy achievement of ELLs (Day, Gronn, & Salas, 2006; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Leithwood, Anderson, Mascall, & Straus (2010); Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Spillane, 2006).

This study confirms a more integrated model of leadership as suggested by Marks and Printy (2003) and supported by Peariso (2011) combining instructional leadership and transformational leadership styles positively impacted the literacy achievement of ELLs at each of these three schools. For example, all three principals in this study demonstrated characteristics of transformational leadership while also willingly and openly sharing the instructional leadership within each of their schools with teacher leaders, especially in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Printy, Marks, and Bowers (2009) stated that the evidence supports that "... schools prosper when principals and teacher leaders, whether formal or informal, integrate transformational and instructional leadership approaches in their interactions with others." (p. 505). Marks and Printy (2003) suggested that although transformational leadership and instructional leadership are systematically different, they fit together in practice. Building principals should investigate each model and take from them the strategies that will help to move their schools forward. The school principal would lead changes within the school building. Additionally, this study confirmed the need to take a look at also including many facets of the model of distributed leadership. For example, all three principals in this study strongly believed and valued the importance of sharing the responsibilities of developing students' schedules, supports, programs and resources by collaboration and communication via each of their grade level professional learning communities as well as teacher leaders. As stated by Marks and Printy (2003), "Best results occur in schools where principals are strong leaders who also facilitate leadership by teachers; that is, principals are active in instructional matters in concert with teachers whom they regard as professional and full partners" (p. 130). Marks and Printy

(2003) continue to state that, “Where schools have the benefit of shared instructional leadership, faculty members offer students their best efforts and students respond in kind; they are organizations that learn and perform at high levels” (p. 130). All three principals in this study demonstrated leadership skills that replicated a variety of characteristics from two or all of these leadership models. This study also provides insight into implications on a larger scale. School districts and central office administrators might also benefit from the findings in this study.

Finally, in regards to the need to understand the differences and the need to be aware of leadership practices and capabilities as separate entities as well as combined, this multiple case study supports this belief (Robinson, 2010). Although all three principals understood and displayed effective leadership practices such as professional skills, routines, and habits throughout all of their interactions, decisions, and behaviors, they also exhibited a number of key leadership capabilities. All three principals displayed the natural ability to understand and adapt to their faculty, staff and students, and have the intrinsic knowledge and attributes to be able to effectively motivate and lead their respective schools (Robinson, 2010; Smylie & Bennett, 2005). Therefore, it is important for building principals to understand that as a school leader it is just as important to develop and acknowledge the need for intrinsic leadership capabilities, as it is employ effective leadership practices.

Implications for School Districts

While much of this section focuses on the implication for individual principals, school districts, superintendents, and school boards need to emulate and replicate the success of these three effective middle school principals. Information to benefit districts can be

gleaned from this study. Leadership practices and capabilities should be observed and serve as a model for others, especially those struggling to meet the increasing AMO benchmarks.

More specific areas should also be addressed by school districts in relation to the topics mentioned in the previous section. School systems need to review how schools are organized and how teachers and administrators utilize time for collaboration and reflection. If these opportunities are not available, efforts should be made to support team collaboration within the structure of the school day. School boards need to review policies to ensure that barriers are removed so that principals are empowered to structure their schools in a way that fosters collaboration and school improvement. One significant advantage that the principals in this study had over many other principals in other school districts is that they have the autonomy of site-based management. This form of management allowed the three principals in this study to make systematic decisions without the restraints of central office protocols.

Recognizing the accountability pressures felt by all school districts, it is critical that schools have data systems that can be securely accessible from within and out of the school building, and allowing for multiple users to be manipulating the data simultaneously to assist with collection and analysis of student information as well as teacher effectiveness. While many student data sources are available to teachers and principals, comprehensive systems are also available to house district-wide data; making it more accessible to teachers. These systems can be used to incorporate multiple data sources and provide reports to initiate the discussion of student progress and academic performance that is critical to the success of public schools as well as measure the effectiveness of each individual teacher. While the

participants did not specifically discuss this, it would be a partial solution to the overwhelming nature of data collection and analysis within school districts.

School districts can also take steps to improve collaboration and the development of teacher leaders. Central office administrators and school boards should work to develop a district culture that focuses on teaching and learning. In addition to developing a positive climate throughout a school district, district officials also need to recognize the importance of developing the people within the district, providing professional development opportunities and supporting their needs. Setting district goals and priorities can help to set this tone. School districts can also emphasize teamwork and communication to support the development of professional learning communities.

Implication for Educational Leadership Programs

While districts must take the responsibility for the ongoing development of building principals, colleges and universities also need to better prepare principals for the realities of public education. Many colleges and universities offering educational leadership certification provide coursework limited to leadership theories, legal implications, and teacher supervision. Programs in most institutions are also offering online courses and performance-based programs with aspiring administrators responsible for directing their own learning through online discussion forums and internships. Unfortunately, this results in varied experiences for participants when they enter the position of assistant principal and ultimately principal while also limiting their ability to successfully navigate the rigorous interview process due to lacking first hand administrative experiences.

Educational leadership programs need to include intensive courses on data analysis and data-driven practices, developing the school mission, vision, and climate, investigating the need of building relationships and developing people, and in-depth studies in multiple models of leadership (instructional, transformational, distributed or shared leadership, etc.). Coursework must include exposing future administrators to various data sources and the opportunity to make sense out of this information, since this is a frequent task of principals as they face increasing accountability pressures. These trends were all apparent within this study, yet none of the participants conveyed a clear sense of preparation to truly lead these efforts in their schools.

Finally, educational leadership programs need to include courses on designing and developing master schedules that meet the specific needs of varying student populations. An aspiring principal who works at a predominantly middle class, English-only speaking middle school where there is a strong parental presence is not necessarily going to require the same master schedule as a middle school with a high ELL population. The needs of the students are very different therefore the master schedule should look different. Educational leadership programs need to address some of the fundamental organizational skills relating to instructional knowledge and practices and provide aspiring principals with the experience and practice to design a selection of different master schedules that specifically address the instructional needs of students with a variety of different prerequisites including but not excluding both remedial and enrichment.

Limitations of the Study

Within any study, limitations exist. As with any qualitative study, the data cannot prove a causal relationship (Berg, 2004). It should be noted again that the number of participants interviewed included three principals and 16 teachers. As the principal and teachers were voluntary, it is logical to assume that had different teachers volunteered to participate in the focus group interviews, the interviews may have resulted in different information. The number of participants as well as the selection of participants could be a limitation to this study. Further research including a larger number of participants could enhance this study and could possibly bring it to stronger conclusions.

The teachers who volunteered to participate in each of the focus group interviews were either language arts, special education, 6th grade or ESOL teachers. Therefore, it is logical to assume that had different content area teachers, or elective teachers volunteered to be interviewed, some of the information may have resulted in different information.

Another limitation could be the number of schools within this multiple case study, as well as the location. Within this study, three middle schools were students all from the same east coast school district, which could affect the generalizability of this study. Including a larger number of schools and a different region could increase the generalizability of this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on this study, there are several directions that future research could take, extending to different school levels, as well as pursuing emerging themes. A follow-up study could be conducted at individual sites to involve other stakeholders, including students,

parents, or other administrative leaders. This qualitative study could be expanded to include all a larger number of schools, including elementary and high schools, parochial schools, and charter schools. In studying various levels and school types, a researcher could compare and contrast the practices of principals in each of the aforementioned settings. Investigating the shared leadership practices of principals and teachers could also serve as a possible research topic.

A quantitative approach could be used to gather data from school stakeholders regarding the development and sustainability of teacher leaders and professional learning communities. Colleges and universities could be surveyed to explore the content of the educational leadership programs and their emphasis on the themes of data-driven practices and accountability, as well as other topics revealed within the current research. It would be interesting to determine the leadership practices that are supported in various programs.

The current research has not followed a specific group of middle school principals as they have gone through the process of working successfully with schools that meet this studies criterion. A longitudinal study that follows the experience of principals through the process could shed light on the sustainability of school success and effective leadership. A follow-up study could be conducted with the participants of this study to determine where their schools are five years from now.

This study opened the possibility for research extending to other aspects of leadership. Both quantitative and qualitative studies could be considered in order to gain a more comprehensive look at school leadership in effective middle schools with high ELL

student populations. This chapter has provided a summary of the research findings, implications for practice, and recommended topics for future research.

Conclusion

The findings in this study suggest several important conclusions. First, significant to this study through the process of collecting and analyzing the data and reporting the findings, I concluded that serving as an effective middle school principal in a school with high ELL population required many leadership practices as well as leadership capabilities. In comparing the data gathered at the three sites, it was interesting to explore the views of the participants as they related to leadership practices and capabilities. The three principals were different in gender, personality, experience, and qualifications, yet all were able to achieve literacy achievement for their ELLs and lead effective middle schools. Reflecting on these factors, it seems that each principal demonstrated a slightly different leadership approach to obtain success – one a combination of transformational and shared, another a combination of transformational, instructional and shared, and the last one a combination of transformational/servant, instructional and shared. Based on the results of this study, it is clear that each of these principals were not identical. Overall, these principals exhibited several positive leadership characteristics including attention to school climate and development of teacher leaders, involvement in data-driven practices, and features of instructional and/or transformational leadership. The pursuit of these leadership practices is encouraged, as discussed in the implications section of this chapter.

Many similarities were also revealed throughout this study. This indicated the possibility of specific leadership behaviors associated with these effective principals. Not

only do most successful principals manage the general operations of the school, they must foster positive and collaborative relationships and keep stakeholders informed. Setting a positive climate for learning and providing direction through a clear vision and mission are also the responsibility of the principal. Beyond their daily work, these leaders must also be skilled in understanding and implementing data-driven practices and serving as an instructional leader. It is this complex role that building principals take on every day.

This study affirmed the accountability pressures in education and increasing demands on school principals. Although the NCLB guidelines have changed, there are still high expectations for all students to show continued progress on a yearly basis. In response to this demand, successful principals have embraced data-driven practices while never losing focus on their students. Instructional and transformational leadership serve as positive models for leading middle schools with a clear vision and mission as critical components of effective leadership and being mindful of not being hyper focused on any one student demographic, while always being aware of addressing the needs of all students. Additionally, the fostering of a positive school environment and the development of shared leadership only serve to strengthen schools. The interwoven nature of effective school leadership and the required leadership capabilities and practices of successful school principals to impact the literacy achievement of ELLs are lessons to learn from as schools and school districts strive to meet the needs of all students and continuous improvement for all.

APPENDIX A

HSRB APPLICATION



Office of Research Subject Protections
Research Hall
4400 University Drive, MS 6D5, Fairfax, Virginia 22030
Phone: 703-993-4121; Fax: 703-993-9590

TO: Susan Bon, College of Education and Human Development
FROM: Keith R. Bushey *gmb*
Chief of Staff, Office of Research

PROTOCOL NO.: 7841 Research Category: Doctoral Dissertation

PROPOSAL NO.: N/A

TITLE: Leadership Practices and Capabilities that Work Best for Middle School ELLs: A Multiple Case Study

DATE: January 11, 2012

Cc: Mary Jane Boynton

On 1/11/2012, the George Mason University Human Subjects Review Board (GMU HSRB) reviewed and approved the above-cited protocol following expedited review procedures.

Please note the following:

1. Copies of the final approved consent documents are attached. You must use these copies with the HSRB stamp of approval for your research. Please keep copies of the signed consent forms used for this research for three years after the completion of the research.
2. **Any modification to your research (including the protocol, consent, advertisements, instruments, funding, etc.) must be submitted to the Office of Research Subject Protections for review and approval prior to implementation.**
3. Any adverse events or unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects including problems involving confidentiality of the data identifying the participants must be reported to Office of Research Subject Protections and reviewed by the HSRB.

The anniversary date of this study is 1/10/2013. **You may not collect data beyond that date without GMU HSRB approval.** A continuing review form must be completed and submitted to the Office of Research Subject Protections 30 days prior to the anniversary date or upon completion of the project. A copy of the continuing review form is attached. In addition, prior to that date, the Office of Research Subject Protections will send you a reminder regarding continuing review procedures.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 703-993-3088.

APPENDIX B

PRINCIPAL INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Leadership Practices and Capabilities that Work Best for Middle School English Language Learners: A Multiple Case Study PRINCIPAL INTERVIEWS INFORMED CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This research is being conducted to assist in understanding how leadership practices and capabilities of middle school principals potentially positively impact the literacy needs of English language learners. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to spend about 1-2 hours in two separate individual interview sessions answering 11- 12 guiding questions.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.

BENEFITS

There are no benefits to you as a participant other than to further research in identifying possible effective leadership practices and capabilities as they pertain to the literacy success of English language learners.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The audiotaped recording of each interview and responses to questions will be confidential. Your name will not be included in the transcriptions of the audiotaped information. As a participant you may choose to not answer a question. A code will be placed on the transcriptions and other collected data. Through the use of an identification key the researchers will be able to link your responses to your identity. Only the researchers will have access to the identification key.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party

CONTACT

This research is being conducted Susan Bon and Mary Jane Boynton at George Mason University. We may be reached at 703-993-3896 (Bon) or 571-330-6288 (Boynton) for questions or to report a research-related problem. You may contact the George Mason University Office of Research Subject Protections at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research.

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

CONSENT

I have read this form and agree to participate in this study on understanding how leadership practices and capabilities of middle school principals potentially impact the literacy needs of English language learners. Please print two copies of this page, sign both copies, and keep the entire Informed Consent Form for your record. Submit one signed copy to the researchers when you participate in your first interview.

Select one of the options provided below:

☐ I do consent to participate in this study.

☐ I do not consent to participate in this study.

Name

Signature

Date of Signature

Version date: 10-29-11

APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Leadership Practices and Capabilities that Work Best for Middle School English Language Learners: A Multiple Case Study

FOCUS GROUP INFORMED CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This research is being conducted to assist in understanding how leadership practices and capabilities of middle school principals potentially positively impact the literacy needs of English language learners. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to spend about 1-2 hours in a focus group answering guiding questions and interacting with a group of approximately 6-7 colleagues.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.

BENEFITS

There are no benefits to you as a participant other than to further research in identifying possible effective leadership practices and capabilities as they pertain to the literacy success of English language learners.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The audiotaped recording of the focus group discussion and responses to questions will be confidential. Your name will not be included in the transcriptions of the audiotaped information. The principals being interviewed will not be informed of the staff members participating in the focus session and will not have access to the focus session transcripts. In the focus group session, confidentiality will be limited because a group of 6-7 individuals will be present at the focus group session and will be responding to the semi-structured questions and engaging in discussion with other participants during the focus group. If you are not comfortable with or do not have a response to a specific question, you may choose not to answer and instead may simply listen to the other participants who are responding to questions and engaging in discussion. As a participant you may choose to not answer a question, but may still engage in discussion with other participants. This will enable you as a

participant the individual freedom to participate to the extent that you are comfortable during the focus group session.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you choose to withdraw after the focus group interview has been conducted, your comments may still be included in the data analysis, although comments will not be attributable to you personally as your identity on the audiotaping is confidential. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party.

CONTACT

This research is being conducted Susan Bon and Mary Jane Boynton at George Mason University. We may be reached at 703-993-3896 (Bon) or 571-330-6288 (Boynton) for questions or to report a research-related problem. You may contact the George Mason University Office of Research Subject Protections at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research.

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

CONSENT

I have read this form and agree to participate in this study on understanding how leadership practices and capabilities of middle school principals potentially impact the literacy needs of English language learners. Please print two copies of this page, sign both copies, and keep the entire Informed Consent Form for your record. Submit one signed copy to the researchers when you participate attend the focus group interview.

Select one of the options provided below:

☐ I do consent to participate in this study.

☐ I do not consent to participate in this study.

Name

Signature

Date of Signature

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APPENDIX D

PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL & QUESTIONS

Interview Protocol and Questions for Leadership Practices and Capabilities that Work Best for Middle School English Language Learners: A Multiple Case Study

The interview protocol is for use with participating principals who have agreed to be interviewed for this study. The interviews will follow the protocol below, realizing that respondent's answers may require additional follow up questions.

School Name: _____ Date: _____
Name of Person Interviewed: _____
Position: _____
Researcher: _____
Time Started: _____ Time Ended: _____ Total Time: _____

Each interview will begin with the researcher clearly outlining the purpose for the study. The explanation will be read verbatim from the script included in this interview protocol.

SCRIPT

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me. I am currently a doctoral student at George Mason University and am studying the leadership practices and capabilities of successful middle school principals, especially principals working with high English language learner populations. Through a purposefully designed criteria process, you were identified as a middle school principal who over a three-year period has successfully led your school to have higher than average literacy scores for ELLs.

As you know, the school principal is a key factor in the success of a school. Therefore, it is important to understand what successful principals, who have sustained as well as improved student literacy achievement, have done and continue to do on a daily basis to achieve this success. So I'd like to ask you some questions about your own experiences as a principal, specifically the last three years while you have been principal at _____ Middle School. I would like to ask you questions relating to effective leadership practices, leadership capabilities and your thoughts' regarding school leadership as they pertain to the literacy achievement of English language learners. This

qualitative study wishes to investigate your perceptions of your leadership practices and capabilities.

The information garnered from this research will be used to spread new knowledge and a clearer understanding about the leadership practices and capabilities required to positively impact the literacy achievement of ELLs and to inspire current and future principals to reflect on their personal practices in an effort to continue improving ELL's literacy achievement.

Please be as honest as possible. Although I am also a principal in Prince William County I don't want that to stop you from saying anything that's on your mind. You will be provided with an opportunity not only to review the transcripts from our interview(s), but also to review my interpretation of our interview(s), prior to the completion of this study.

I will begin with some introductory questions. I will follow them by conducting a qualitative semi-structured interview. I may ask some follow up question(s) if necessary to elicit further responses pertaining to the research questions.

At this time the participant will be reminded that their interview is going to be recorded simply as a research tool to enable the researcher to transcribe and analyze the interview at a later time.

Before we start I would like to remind you that I will be recording our conversation. This is simply to enable me the opportunity to transcribe our conversation and then analyze your responses at a later time. This recording will not be used for any other purpose than this study and no-one other than myself will have access to the recording or transcripts.

The interview should take about 45 minutes. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

At this time, if there are no objections, the digital recorder will be switched on.

At this time if there are no objections the digital recorder will be switched on and we will begin the interview.

Interview 1

Introductions:

- (1) Tell me a little about yourself. Where did you grow up?
- (2) Where did you go to college and what did you study?

- (3) How long have you been in education?
- (4) What are you certified to teach?
- (5) Why did you become an administrator?
- (6) What do you like about your work?
- (7) Is there a particular subject or field that you regard yourself to be an expert?

The following research questions will be read so that there is a clearer understanding of the study's purpose, however, you are not required or expected to answer these questions at this time.

Primary Research Questions:

- (1) What leadership practices and capabilities do Middle School Principals believe positively impact the literacy achievement of ELLs? and;
- (2) What leadership practices and capabilities have Middle School Principals implemented that positively impact the literacy achievement of ELLs?

Interview Questions

- 1. What are your school's vision and mission? And how does the school's vision and mission guide you as a school leader?

Probes:

- 2. How would you define or describe your leadership style?

Probes:

- 3. What leadership practices and capabilities have you implemented in your school that you contribute to positively impacting the literacy achievement of ELLs at your school and why? Please share examples of evidence that supports your findings.

Probes:

4. Do you think there are further practices that you believe would work to positively impact the literacy achievement of ELLs at your school that you have not been able to implement? And if so, why have you not been able to implement them?

Probes:

5. What challenges have and/or do you still currently face when addressing the literacy needs of ELLs and why?

Probes:

6. How have you acquired the knowledge and skills to understand and address the literacy challenges and needs of ELLs?

Probes:

7. What have you done to communicate to your teachers, students, and parents know that literacy achievement is a priority at your school? How do the ELLs know that this priority includes them and not just the English-Only students?

Probes:

8. How have you addressed the specific needs of the Long-Term English learner? (If they are not aware of this term, take a moment to define in order for them to successfully respond to this question).

Probes:

9. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Probes:

APPENDIX E

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE FOCUS GROUP

1. How would you describe your school's vision and mission? And how does the school's vision and mission guide your principal?
 - a. Share an example of how your principal has been guided by the schools vision and mission.
2. How would you define or describe your principal's leadership style?
 - a. Share an example that demonstrates your principal's leadership style in action.
3. What leadership practices and capabilities do you believe your principal has implemented that may have contributed to positively impacting the literacy achievement of ELLs at your school and why?
 - a. Please share examples of evidence that supports your response.
4. What challenges has the principal faced when attempting to address the specific needs of ELLs and why do you think he/she has faced these challenges?
 - a. Please share some examples of these challenges and describe how they relate to ELLs and their needs.

5. How has the principal communicated to teachers, students, and parents regarding the priority of literacy achievement at _____ Middle? How do the ELLs know that this priority includes them and not just the English-only students?

- a. Please share specific examples of the communication.

6. Is there anything else that anyone would like to add?

APPENDIX F

PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW COMPARISON MATRIX

Principal Interviews	Principal #1	Principal #2	Principal #3
Practices	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensuring the successful implementation of the IB learning process, 2. Requiring staff to routinely reflect on student achievement, 3. Implementing programs and initiatives, 4. Hiring, supporting, and supervising competent teaching staff, 5. Guaranteeing an inclusive master schedule that is accessible to all students, 6. Providing resources, and 7. Executing the Perth Middle School (PMS) process! 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensuring the master schedule meets the individual needs of all students, 2. Supervising competent teaching staff and guaranteeing all staff, regardless of content, are held accountable for ensuring high expectations for learning outcomes, 3. Providing appropriate resources, 4. Implementing appropriate programs including enrichment and remediation, 5. Committing to strengthening and redefining the co-teaching model of instruction at GMS, and 6. Ensuring a safe, secure, and welcoming environment for all GMS students. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Designing and implementing a master schedule to provide equal and appropriate access to all students, 2. Ensuring the use of data to assess student achievement, 3. Hiring, supporting, and supervising competent teaching staff, 4. Promoting high expectations for learning outcomes, 5. Implementing structures and processes to ensure a safe and secure environment for all.
Capabilities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A strong sense of commitment to students and staff, 2. High expectations for all, 3. Beliefs focused on students, 4. Values collaboration from all members of the school community, and 5. Empathy for the needs of others. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. High expectations for all through clear and objective goals, 2. Values all actions aligning with values and beliefs, 3. Relentless sense of commitment and attention to detail, 4. A strong advocate for supporting the needs of ALL students, 5. Believes in providing opportunities to support the individual needs of students and teachers. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Visibly focused and involved leadership style that encourages trust and commitment, 2. Inspiring and communicating a love for learning, 3. Focus and commitment is on students and their individual needs. 4. Values personal connections to the faculty, staff, students, and families, 5. Believes in advocating and encouraging shared leadership and collaboration for student improvement.

APPENDIX G

FOCUS GROUP COMPARISON MATRIX

Focus Groups	Principal #1	Principal #2	Principal #3
Practices	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensuring that the learning environment at Perth Middle School is safe and secure, 2. Requiring accountability for all, 3. Guaranteeing an inclusive environment for all students, 4. Promoting high expectations for all students and faculty. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leading by requiring accountability for and by all, 2. Implementing inclusive practices throughout the school, 3. Committing to high quality of instruction, resources, and programs, 4. Demanding high expectations from all members of the Glasgow Middle School community, 5. Providing a safe and secure learning environment for all. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Committing to raising academic standards for all, specifically in literacy, 2. Executing clear and precise expectations and accountability from and for students, 3. Ensuring all decisions are supported and driven by relevant and appropriate data, 4. Providing resources to meet the needs of all students, 5. Requiring equal and appropriate access to education for all.
Capabilities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Believes in a collaborative approach to education, 2. Values a motivational and empowering learning environment driven by high expectation for all, 3. Committed to a culture of trust between students, staff, parents, and community, 4. Believes in a student-centered environment that exhibits positivity and support to all stakeholders, 5. Demonstrates a responsive approach to school leadership. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Believes in inspiring teacher leaders by establishing a culture of trust throughout the school community, 2. Committed to all students by visibly aligning all leadership actions with value and beliefs, 3. Values a future-focused vision and mission for the Glasgow Middle School students, staff, parents, and community, 4. High expectations for achievement for all students through motivation and challenge, 5. Advocates for a positive and welcoming home and school connection. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. High expectations for all, 2. Committed to meeting the needs of each individual student, 3. Believes in exhibiting the self-confidence and persistence to lead by example, 4. Values a collaborative work environment and developing a shared leadership for improvement, 5. Enthuses a sense of community by exhibiting a genuine love for people.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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