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The purpose of the study was to contribute to the limited research on leadership,
change, and school culture in Title I schools. More specially, this study explored one
Title I Elementary school and the principal. This qualitative study used the case study
design. Data was obtained through multiple sources. There was a review of the relevant
scholarly literature, interviews responses, researcher's notes, and a review of other school
documents (School improvement plan, Teacher working condition survey, School report
card) to triangulation the data collected. The data analysis was done in three steps. The
first step involved the analysis of each individual interview. Next, the interview responses
were aligned to the primary and sub research questions. The third step uncovered the
emerging themes among the participants in the study.

Four overall shifts were identified as factors that contributed to the shift of the
school culture. The cultural shifts included (a) from a test focused to a student focused
environment, (b) from a culture of isolation to one of involvement and collaboration, (c)
from a culture of ambiguity and fear to one of clarity and positivity, and (d) from
Principal invisibility to visibility. Each of these shifts were orchestrated and encouraged
by the principal's leadership and guidance. The results of this study are potentially useful
for new administrators leading change in Title I schools.

A STUDY OF LEADERSHIP, CHANGE, AND SCHOOL

CULTURE IN TITLE I SCHOOLS

by

Angela Lenora Moore

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APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

For decades Americans have been trying to improve education so that all students have the opportunity to succeed. Businesses are asking why schools are not producing students that are ready for the workforce that awaits them. Meeting the needs of 21st century jobs requires a change in the educational system. The majority of the students in America have not been properly prepared for the current world in which they will live and work (Wagner, 2008). In President Obama's 2011 State of the Union speech, he contended:

> Over the next 10 years, nearly half of all new jobs will require education that goes beyond a high school education. And yet, as many as a quarter of our students aren't even finishing high school. The quality of our math and science education lags behind many other nations. America has fallen to ninth in the proportion of young people with a college degree. And so the question is whether all of us—as citizens, and as parents—are willing to do what's necessary to give every child a chance to succeed. (p. 4)

It is not only parents' responsibility to make sure students are getting the proper education for success, but schools need to make sure they are providing the proper instruction and environment for students to be ready to take on the challenges of the 21st century.

With the accountability pressures being placed on school leaders today, there is a need to find ways to address the academic challenges that their schools face. One of the

less often addressed areas is school culture. According to Deal and Peterson (1990) culture is "the way we do things around here." Focusing on school culture may also help leaders identify school values and norms that may be hindering the student's potential for success.

Why should school leaders assess and address their school culture? It is evident in most situations that if the culture that we work in is not conducive to producing good work we will not be successful in getting the job done. When I think about students in our schools today, I wonder if we facilitate a culture that is conducive to learning. How can we expect students to produce their best work when the culture does not emphasize productivity or 21st century skills? The culture of the school has an enormous affect on how and what students' learn daily.

A culture that emphasizes high academic achievement must be established by the principal. Staff members also have to embrace the need of holding high expectations for all students. Hoy, Tarter, and Hoy (2006) stressed that academic goals should be set high but achievable for all students. Building a culture that expects the best from all students will determine how successful students and schools are in the days of accountability.

The pressures being placed on principals from the state and federal government makes it imperative for districts to identify what is going on in schools that is preventing all students from being successful. Muhammad (2009) stated that, "schools would be judged based upon student outcomes, not educator intentions" (p. 9). Leaders have to dig deeper to find out what needs to be done. One area they should look at is the school's culture. Is it important that all students receive a quality education that will prepare them

for the 21st century but if leaders do not invest their time and energy in finding out what

needs to change, students will continue to fail the tests that are being mandated by the

state and federal government. Although test scores are not the only important element of

success for students, the federal government uses it as their way of holding schools more

accountable.

Not only do school leaders need to evaluate the culture within in their schools

they must determine whether or not their schools are preparing students with the 21st

century skills needed to be competitive in the workforce. Advanced technology has

changed the skills that are necessary to be able to perform the basic jobs that once

existed. Students are now being asked to think critically, work collaboratively, be

innovative, and communicate effectively (Wagner, 2008). According to Darling-

Hammond (2010), about 70% of the jobs in the United States now require specialized

skills and knowledge. Changing how students learn and how teachers teach should be

something that leaders consider when changes are being made at their schools. Twenty-

first century skills are a must if students are to compete for jobs in the future with

students from different countries.

Deal and Peterson (2009) provide suggestions on how to change the culture of

schools but they did not provide specific suggestions on how to change the culture of

Title I schools. Title I schools are different from traditional schools because they

typically serve a high percentage of economically disadvantage students (United States

Department of Education, n.d.). Reports show that Title I schools receive less than their

fair share of state and local funding which leaves them with fewer resources than non-

Title I schools (United States Department of Education, 2011). How can we expect students in Title I schools to compete with other students in the world if we do not give them the same resources? U.S. Secretary of State Arne Duncan stated, "Educators across the country understand that low-income students need extra support and resources to succeed, but in far too many places policies for assigning teachers and allocating resources are perpetuating the problem rather than solving it" (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Resources need to be provided equitably to all schools so that students are allowed the same educational opportunities.

When principals know what others have done to shape culture and promote success within their schools, they can model their plan of action to change their own culture. In this proposed study I hope to learn about leadership, change, and school culture. I want to be able to provide principals with insight about the cultural turnaround journey of a Title I elementary school in North Carolina. Conducting this study will help me and other principals identify alternative ways to change culture within Title I schools to promote success.

Researcher's Personal and Professional Interest

Leadership, change, and school culture became an interest to me when I became an Assistant Principal in a Primary grades Title I school. In this particular school the expectations for students and the families were extremely low. Being in this role opened my eyes to beliefs that I did not realize existed in schools. Being the Assistant Principal only gave me minimum control over what was happening at this school. I could not make any drastic changes to the culture at that point. After four years of the school

failing, the former principal transferred to another position. This was my opportunity to make a difference in the school and students that I loved dearly.

In fall 2011, I was appointed as the new principal at this school. I was told by the Superintendent that I had three years to turn the school around. This was going to be a huge challenge for me as a new principal. This school was identified that year as one of the 118 schools that were failing in the state of North Carolina, according to the No Child Left Behind Act. My first year as a principal was not going to be an easy one where I could learn the ropes; I had to jump right in, feet first.

After accepting the job, I was told that the State Department was coming to assist me with the changes that needed to occur. I was not completely convinced that they were coming in to help me but I stood up to the challenge. What was I going to do to make these changes? Why would I take on such a challenging school my first year as a principal? As those questions started crossing my mind I began to think of all of the students that I had worked with the past four years and how I wanted to make a difference in their education.

Since I did not have any experience in leading a school that needed change, I started researching the topic. I wanted to know how to approach the issues that I saw as an Assistant Principal—especially low expectations for students and ineffective teaching practices. I consulted with some other principals from other districts as well as my mentor to get some suggestions. All of their suggestions were great, but I felt like I had to get to the root of the problem. Some of the scholarly literature that I read still did not give me what I believed was needed to start on this journey.

I had to examine different aspects of the school. I had to look at the existing programs, the existing belief system, and the ineffective teaching practices that were taking place. My first step in this process was to get all of the staff members on the same page when it came to expectations. I held a meeting with every staff member before the first day of school to discuss what I expected of each of them. Once my expectations for teachers were clear, I then discussed some of the ineffective teaching practices that were taking place in the school. During every staff meeting presentations and discussion took place around effective teaching practices. I also always had teachers tell about one student success they had since the last staff meeting. This was a way to focus our purpose of work for students.

My next big task was developing Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) so that we could discuss student achievement. This process was not received well by the staff at first because the previous training that they received was not accurate. They were trained to believe that PLCs were just a book study. Once the staff received the proper training on PLCs they were more willing to meet and have discussions about student achievement. The meetings started being about formative and summative data and how they were going to change their instruction. It was easier for them to identify the students that needed interventions as well as areas that they needed to re-teach. Having this process in place helped with the collaborative efforts to meet all of the students' needs. It also motivated the students to work harder to meet their personal academic goals. Essentially, everyone had to have a vested interest in every child's success. Buy in was essential.

The change in programs and teaching practices was not an easy task, but a must. There were times when disappointment, excitement, and anxiety arose, but as the leader, I had to maintain my composure. Throughout those emotions I knew that the staff was looking at my actions and reactions to all that was happening. I knew that this school needed a culture change and it was my responsibility to lead it.

Last year we worked diligently to improve our test scores but we only increased by four percentage points. Although that may not seem like much growth, I have seen a change in the attitudes and beliefs of some of the staff members. At the end of year, I lost 13 staff members due to them not being able to get on board with the changes that had been made. Losing that many staff members at one time was pivotal for the school but it allowed for fresh teachers in the building which has tremendously changed the culture within the school. As long as I can see a change in the school's culture I will continue to push the staff to make a difference in the education of the students.

As I reflected on my first year as a new administrator I realized the effect that leadership, change, and school culture plays on students and staff members. A school culture that projects low expectations for students and parents ultimately impacts how much they learn. As principal, it is imperative for me to address the culture of expectations for all students at my school. I am still learning how to reconcile my own pre-conceived ideas and practices about high expectations, as compared to those of my faculty and staff. My ultimate goal is to establish a mutually healthy academic culture for our school, while building and maintaining strong relationships. Though not easy, I want

to explore strategies other principals employed to change the mindset of teachers, the community, and students in order to promote success.

Problem Statement

According to Deal and Peterson (2009) "culture affects all aspects of a school" (p. 12). School culture influences the decisions being made about educating students, as well as how staff members interact with students. It influences the conversations that take place in the teachers' lounge and around the rest of the building. Additionally, it affects what the faculty and staff believes about if students can learn.

In North Carolina, schools have experienced the different phases of accountability, from proficiency to growth to both. If we believe all children can learn, then why aren't they? Our state has spent considerable time, money, and resources addressing the accountability models, but not much on the effects of leadership, change, and school culture play in the learning process.

In December 2006, the North Carolina State Board of Education of developed executive standards that focused on school leaders for 21st century schools. According to the North Carolina State Board of Education the purpose of these standards was to guide principals and assistant principals as they continually reflect upon their own leadership practices. The seven standards that were developed were: strategic leadership, instructional leadership, human resource leadership, managerial leadership, external development leadership, micro-political leadership, and cultural leadership. As I conduct my study I will be interested in looking at one Title I School and its principal so that I can

get an in-depth perspective of their turnaround journey as I focus on leadership, change, and school culture.

North Carolina State Board of Education (2006) explains cultural leadership as: School executives will understand and act on the understanding of the important role a school's culture contributes to the exemplary performance of the school. School executives must support and value the traditions, artifacts, symbols and positive values and norms of the school and community that result in a sense of identity and pride upon which to build a positive future. A school executive must be able to "reculture" the school if needed to align with school's goals of improving student and adult learning and to infuse the work of the adults and students with passion, meaning and purpose. Cultural leadership implies understanding the school as the people in it each day, how they came to their current state, and how to connect with their traditions in order to move them forward to support the school's efforts to achieve individual and collective goals (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2006, p. 2). If leaders in North Carolina have a clear understanding of the state board's expectations when it comes to cultural leadership, there is a chance for them to explore what they need to do in order to help change the current culture in their schools to promote success.

Having a leader who understands their role in being a cultural leader is imperative in making culture changes. Communicating clear expectations for educating students as well as modeling the type of behavior that is expected at the school is one of the essential jobs of the leader. Good leaders are typically proactive and see value in building other leaders within the school (capacity building). Building and sustaining a

culture of high expectations will promote an environment of success. Leadership is one of the major keys to the success of both students and staff.

The state of North Carolina had not really focused on the importance of cultural leadership since the No Child Left Behind law. Although the state has put a standard in place to address school culture there is still limited research on how, or if, school leaders have changed the culture in their schools. This study will look specifically at one Title I school and its principal to study the cultural turnaround journey that took place over a few years, specifically as that journey related to leadership, change, and school culture.

Purpose

While research has been done on school culture and how to change it, there is a need for more in-depth research on leadership, change, and school culture of Title I schools since the passage of the No Child Left Behind law.

My primary research question is:

1. What can we learn about leadership, change, and school culture by studying the turnaround journey of one Title I elementary school?

Sub-questions are:

1. How did the post-turnaround school differ from the pre-turnaround school?

2. What cultural shifts occurred in the school?

3. What were the factors (actions, words, programs, practices, etc.) that contributed to the cultural change?

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter is designed to provide the readers with background information on successful schools, leadership, change, and school culture. In the chapter, I discuss the cultural characteristics that exist in successful schools and how leadership can help promote those cultural characteristics to help develop a culture of success within their schools. It will also examine the process of change that may happen as the leader tries to establish a culture of success. The literature on organizational culture and school culture is reviewed in this chapter as well to give the readers a working knowledge of how they relate to each other and how to change their school culture. Finally, I provide an overview of the North Carolina executive standards.

This chapter is composed of four distinct sections. The first section discusses research on successful schools. It outlines cultural characteristics that most successful schools have identified as contributing factors of their success. While reading, it is important to keep in mind that each school is different; therefore, the characteristics that are discussed may not be seen in every situation. The second section briefly provides background knowledge on the North Carolina School Executive Standards for principals. The information shared in it gives a brief description of each of the standards and how leaders should exhibit these standards in order to provide the cultural changes needed within their schools. The third section in this literature review is about change. It

focuses mainly on Kotter's (1996) model for change. It also focuses on leadership as change happens within a school setting. The fourth section explores school culture and organizational culture. It provides insight into how leaders shape a culture. The information gained throughout will provide the essential components needed to help build and maintain a school culture that should provide all students with a quality education. In the dissertation, each of these sections will be elaborated upon.

Cultural Characteristics of Successful Schools

Literature on successful schools has become invaluable for leaders that want to provide a quality education for all students. Research has been conducted on the characteristics of effective schools. Due to the extensive amount of literature available on effective schools, leaders must remember that they should utilize the information that will best fit their particular schools. The literature reviewed for this study will give a general overview of effective schools.

Ronald Edmonds one of the major pioneers of effective schools research aligned his work with Weber (1971), an early contributor to literature on the school determinants of achievement. Edmonds (1979) identified five characteristics that make schools effective: strong administrative leadership, high academic expectations for students, a safe and orderly school atmosphere, focus on basic skills, and frequent monitoring of student progress. Other researchers later reaffirmed Edmonds's effective school research as well as added a few more elements that were discovered within their own research.

Research conducted by Sammons, Hillman, and Mortimore (1995) communicated cultural characteristics of effective schools based on school effectiveness and

improvement. The following characteristics were evident in effective schools according to their review of literature: professional leadership, shared vision and goals, a learning environment, purposeful teaching, high expectations, positive reinforcement, monitoring process, pupil rights and responsibilities, home-school partnership, and learning organization.

According to Taylor (2002) the extensive body of work that Edmonds and other scholars contributed to is now referred to as the effective schools research. Over the last several years these cultural characteristics have been modified and seven newer characteristics have been identified as:

1. Clearly stated and focused school mission;

2. Safe and orderly climate for learning;

3. High expectations for students, teachers, and administrators;

4. Opportunity to learn and student time-on-task;

5. Instructional leadership by all administrators and staff members;

6. Frequent monitoring of student progress; and

7. Positive home/school relations. (p. 377)

Although all these cultural characteristics do not directly align with Edmonds and other scholars, they all correlate and should be examined by school leaders.

Deal and Peterson (2009) have related their research on school culture with effective schools research to give insight about successful schools. According to Deal and Peterson (2009), successful schools share the following:

- Strong values that support a safe and secure environment, one that is conducive to learning and is free of disciplinary problems or vandalism;
- High expectations of every student and of faculty, believing that everyone can achieve;
- Belief in the importance of basic skills instruction as a key and critical goal for all students;
- The belief that there should be clear performance goals and that everyone should have clear and helpful performance feedback to guide the learning and improvement process; and
- Strong leadership and a belief in its importance. (p. 132)

Deal and Peterson's (2009) insight about successful schools includes what other scholars would consider as cultural characteristics of successful schools as well. There are no set guidelines or formulas that make all schools effective but each component works interdependently to insure that success can happen.

Strong Administrative Leadership

The importance of leadership has been one of the major characteristics discussed in most literature reviews on effective schools. Professional leadership according to Sammons et al. (1995) is an essential part of effective schools. Deal and Peterson (2009) contended, "Cultural leaders reinforce the underlying mores, values, and beliefs in subtle and often important ways" (p. 199). Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2004) examined several studies conducted by the Mid-Continent Research for Education and Leadership (McRel) and found out that effective school leadership correlates to student achievement. Waters et al. (2004) discovered "that the average effect size (expressed as a correlation) between leadership and student achievement is *25%*, which means as leadership improves, so does student achievement" (p. 49). Making sure that effective leaders are working in our schools today is imperative.

Reitzug and Patterson (1998) looked at the importance of leadership differently.
They looked at the aspects and practices of empowerment through caring. They identified
5 components that were shared by the leader in their study:

1. establishing/developing a personal connection,
2. honoring voice,
3. showing concern for the individual well-being of students via her expectations of them,
4. connecting individuals to their communities, and
5. seeing alternative possibilities (p. 165)

This study was a great example of how leaders can lead with care. Leading with care could definitely change the culture within a school community.

Deal and Peterson (2009) gave eight essential leadership roles that leaders should exhibit when trying to shape a school culture:

- Historian: seeks to understand the social and normative past of the school;
- Anthropological sleuth: analyzes and probes for the current array of cultural traditions, values, and beliefs;
- Visionary: works with others, including leaders in the neighboring community, to characterize a portrait of the ideal school;
- Icon: affirms values through dress, behavior, attention, actions, and routines;
- Potter: shapes and is shaped by the school's symbolic webbing of heroes, rituals, traditions, ceremonies, symbols; brings in staff who share core values and help them find the right seat "on the bus" (Collins, 2001);
- Poet: uses expressive language to reinforce values and sustains the school's best image of itself;
- Actor: improvises in the school's predictable dramas, comedies, and tragedies;
- Healer: oversees traditions and changes; heals the wounds of conflict and loss. (p. 200)

The leader must also have a sense of purpose for the school as well as a shared vision among the staff. Deal and Peterson (1990) agree that "it often falls to the

principal, formally and informally, to articulate the philosophy that embodies what the school stands for" (p. 23). The leadership has to set the tone of the school as well as model what they expect from the students and staff members. Edmonds (1979) contended without strong administrative leadership "good schooling can neither be brought together nor kept together" (p. 22). The leadership within the school can and will determine the success of the school.

Shared Vision and Mission

Sammons et al. (1995) suggested having a shared vision and mission is another cultural characteristic of effective schools. Having a clear purpose and direction will help staff members in making sure that their beliefs and values align with the leadership in the building so that the school will be successful. According to Deal and Peterson (2009) the mission and vision helps guide the organization in the right direction.

The school's vision typically gives the school a sense of purpose. Sammons et al. (1995) affirmed, ". . . schools are more effective when staff build consensus on the aims and values of the school" (p. 23). Hoy et al. (2006) confirmed that schools that displayed collective efficacy flourished academically. Collective efficacy is when a group of individuals are working for the greater good of one common goal. When people are working together to get the job done it is much easier to accomplish that goal. The role of the principal is to articulate the shared vision of the school to all stakeholders. Peters (1988) stated it well, "The very issue of leadership is that you have to have a vision. It has to be a vision that you articulate clearly and forcefully on every occasion. You can't be an uncertain trumpet" (p. 483). This gives the staff members, parents, and community

members a sense of the work that is being done in the building. The Wisconsin State

Department of Public Instruction (2000) stated it best, "A clear vision is like a good road

map. Without a good map it is difficult to determine where you are going and impossible

to know when you arrive" (p. 1). If stakeholders have that map of where they are going

they are more likely to obtain their goals.

Learning Environment

The learning environment in which the students are taught is imperative to school

success according to Sammons et al. (1995). The environment of the school has an

enormous affect on how and what students' learn daily. An environment that emphasizes

high academic achievement has to be established by the school leader as well as accepted

by the staff. Hoy et al. (2006) stressed that academic goals should be set high, but

achievable, for all students. The learning environment should be fun as well as engaging.

Schlechty (2002) stressed the importance of students being authentically engaged in the

task that they are performing. These tasks must have a clear purpose and value to

students. Students who are not highly engaged will not reach their fullest potential of

academic success. They also must feel that what they are learning is relevant to their

everyday life. If principals want to ensure that the learning environment is conducive to

learning, they must monitor it daily.

Sammons et al. (1995) also stressed the importance of the learning environment

being orderly and attractive for the students. Sammons et al. (1995) further explained

that, "Successful schools are more likely to be calm rather than chaotic places" (p. 26).

Being in schools that do not have order distracts from the learning that should be taking

place. Maintaining an environment that encourages self-control among the students will help them be in control of what is learned daily in the classroom. Limiting the noise level in the classrooms will help with maintaining the concentration of the students.

Schools should also encourage attractive working environments. According to Sammons et al.'s (1995) review of research, the physical environments of schools affect the attitudes and achievement of the students. Cheng (1994) reaffirmed in his study that the physical environment of the school and classroom affects the safety and comfort of the students which could affect the student's learning and physical development. The leader of the school should set high standards about what the school should look like and how to maintain the physical appearance of the school so that students enjoy the environment in which they spend most of their day. Cheng proclaimed that teachers can shape the physical and social environment in the classroom to make sure that it is conducive to learning.

Effective Teaching and Learning

A concentration on teaching and learning was another area identified as an important characteristic in effective schools. In order for schools to maximize the learning that should be taking place Sammons et al. (1995) suggested that teachers must manage the transitions that happen throughout the day. Making sure that transitions are orderly and smooth decreases the off-task behaviors that may exist during this time.

A challenge to school leaders is ensuring that all teachers have high expectations for all students. According to the Wisconsin State Department of Public Instruction (2000), high academic standards "describe what students are expected to know and be

able to do. High standards in each and every subject are the foundation for academic

success" (p. 4). School leaders must monitor the instruction that is taking place in the

classroom to make sure that the students are getting quality teaching. The North Carolina

Executive standards (2006) stress the importance of leaders being instructional leaders.

Being a good instruction leader helps leaders know what to monitor and how to make the

needed changes in teaching and learning if it is not happening appropriately.

Not only is teaching and learning important in successful schools but purposeful

teaching is equally important. Teaching practices in effective schools according to

Sammons and colleagues (1995) have four major elements that should be considered.

The elements are: efficient organization, clarity of purpose, structured lessons, and

adaptive practice. Hopkins (1999) research revealed the follow practices of good

teaching:

- providing wait time for students to respond to questions during instruction;
- implementing multiple independent activities after guided practice, small and large group instruction;
- using higher level questioning strategies;
- spending extra time with students;
- interacting with students verbally and/or non-verbally during instruction;
- utilizing speakers, presenters, mentors, tutors and community volunteers to enhance classroom instruction;
- keeping students regularly informed on the classroom progress;
- explaining content and learning tasks clearly. (p. 3)

The practices listed above reflect the importance of purpose teaching. Hopkins (1999)

list is not in any specific order, but should be considered by leaders when they are trying

to ensure that the teaching taking place in their schools is purposeful and relevant to the

students.

Monitoring of Instruction

The monitoring of progress in effective schools is essential. Edmond's review of effective schools found that higher-achieving schools monitor student progress and programs regularly. Sammons et al. (1995) contended, "Well-established mechanisms for monitoring the performance and progress of pupils, classes, the school as a whole, and improvement programs, are important features of many effective schools" (p. 43). Research conducted by Hopkins (1999) showed that strong leaders monitored their school's direction by: reviewing staff patterns to improve instruction, reviewing instructional strategies that are learned during professional development, looking for evidence of implementation of the professional development during instruction, reviewing the school improvement plan during staff meetings. In Sammons et al.'s (1995) review of effective schools research stated monitoring pupil performance and progress at the school-level is an important factor in successful schools. Classroom visits were recommended to get a true indication about what is actually going on in the school. Schmoker and Wilson (1995) stated it best, "if you can measure the impact of process or some aspect of it, you can improve it" (p. 62). The information gained from the monitoring of students and the school as a whole is important information to share with the staff so that they can help with the improvements that are needed.

Parent/Community Involvement

Parental involvement and community support is another cultural characteristic associated with effective schools. Since we know that parents are their children's first teacher it is imperative to get them involved in the school community. Muscott et al.

(2008) suggest that effective schools look for opportunities to get parents involved by building on their basic strengths. Effective schools also create a constituent two-way communication system with the families. Finally, they allow the families to share power within the school and their child's education.

It is key that parents, teachers, and students view each other as knowledgeable individuals that want the best education possible. Sammons's et al.'s (1995) review of effective schools pointed out that supportive relationships and co-operation between the home and school have had positive effects on school success. In Lezotte's (1991) review of literature it suggests that in order for schools to meet the needs of their students there is a need for parental support. Schools have to make a conscious effort to get parents involved in their students' education.

Professional Development

Why is professional development important? Providing teachers with the appropriate professional development is essential for their professional growth. Holloway (2003) believes that professional development should focus on analyzing student assessments to find out what teachers need to be trained on in order to meet their students' academic needs. The Wisconsin State Department of Public instruction (2000) provided eight elements that successful schools base their professional development around, as follows:

1. focuses on individual and organizational development related to improving student achievement;
2. develops expertise in both content and process;.
3. focuses on teaching and learning for all students;
4. is relevant and research-based;

5. is sustained and supported by modeling, coaching, and specific problem solving;
6. helps school staff meet the needs of a diverse student population;
7. is based on up-to-date knowledge about how people learn;
8. includes accountability measures for changing practice based on the professional development. (p. 7)

If teachers are not fully equipped with the necessary skills to teach their students the information they need, it will be hard for the school to show significant academic growth of their students. The constant monitoring of students progress and programs will help leaders provide the appropriate school-based professional development needed for success.

It is evident through the review of literature on effective schools that there is not one specific way to achieve success. Edmonds's (1979) five characteristics of what makes a successful school remain consistent throughout most of the recent literature. Whether leaders choose to use the specific characteristics that Edmonds identified as relevant for successful school or use the literature by Taylor, it is imperative for them to figure out what works best for their schools and their school culture.

North Carolina School Executive Standards

The North Carolina State Board of Education adopted the North Carolina Executive Standards in December 2006. According to the State Board of Education the purpose of the standards was to assess Principals and Assistant Principals in a non-threatening manner to improve their effectiveness. These standards were put in place to help leaders examine their leadership abilities. Schools today deserve leaders that are not just good with managing the daily operations of the schools like buses and schedules but

they need leaders that are skilled at building relationships with and across the staff. Leaders have to be able to develop systems for change within their schools. These standards have helped focus leaders on a set of beliefs and goals that help drive their decision-making.

The seven executive standards that have made leaders look at their leadership abilities are strategic leadership, instructional leadership, cultural leadership, human resource leadership, managerial leadership, external development leadership, and micropolitical leadership. Each of these areas has a different focus which is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Seven Executive Standards of Principal Leaders

Standard	Description
Strategic Leadership	• School executives will create conditions that result in strategically re-imaging the school's vision, mission, and goals in the 21st century. Understanding that schools ideally prepare students for an unseen but not altogether unpredictable future, the leader creates a climate of inquiry that challenges the school community to continually re-purpose itself by building on its core values and beliefs about its preferred future and then developing a pathway to reach it.
Instructional Leadership	• School executives will set high standards for the professional practice of 21st century instruction and assessment that result in a no nonsense accountable environment. The school executive must be knowledgeable of best instructional and school practices and must use this knowledge to cause the creation of collaborative structures within the school for the design of highly engaging schoolwork for students, the on-going peer review of this work and the sharing of this work throughout the professional community.

Table 1

(Cont.)

Standard	Description
Human Resource Leadership	• School executives will ensure that the school is a professional learning community. School executives will ensure that processes and systems are in place that results in the recruitment, induction, support, evaluation, development and retention of a high performing staff. The school executive must engage and empower accomplished teachers in a distributive leadership manner, including support of teachers in day-to-day decisions such as discipline, communication with parents, and protecting teachers from duties that interfere with teaching, and must practice fair and consistent evaluation of teachers. The school executive must engage teachers and other professional staff in conversations to plan their career paths and support district succession planning.
Managerial Leadership	• School executives will ensure that the school has processes and systems in place for budgeting, staffing, problem solving, communicating expectations and scheduling that result in organizing the work routines in the building. The school executive must be responsible for the monitoring of the school budget and the inclusion of all teachers in the budget decisions so as to meet the 21st century needs of every classroom. Effectively and efficiently managing the complexity of everyday life is critical for staff to be able to focus its energy on improvement.
External Development Leadership	• A school executive will design structures and processes that result in community engagement, support, and ownership. Acknowledging that schools no longer reflect but in fact build community, the leader proactively creates with staff opportunities for parents, community and business representatives to participate as "stockholders" in the school such that continued investments of resources and good will are not left to chance.
Micropolitical Leadership	• The school executive will build systems and relationships that utilize the staff's diversity, encourage constructive ideological conflict in order to leverage staff expertise, power and influence to realize the school's vision for success. The executive will also creatively employ an awareness of staff's professional needs, issues, and interests to build social cohesion and to facilitate distributed governance and shared decision-making.

Source: North Carolina State Board of Education (2006)

Each standard directly or indirectly affects the culture of the school. In order to be a strategic leader the principal must have a clear vision and mission for the school. If there is not a vision and mission apparent in the school how can the staff have a true sense of purpose and direction for the school? Hiring and retaining good staff members is imperative in any organization therefore displaying the human resource leadership must be present in all school organizations. Having the right people in place in a school is a must if success is going to happen. Without external development leadership it is hard to maintain parental and community support. Successful schools have parental and community support which helps with the decision making process within the schools. Within any organization managerial leadership has to be apparent. Budgeting, staffing, and problem solving is needed in 21st century schools. Lastly, micropolitical leadership is important because it allows the leader to capitalize on the strength of their staff; getting to know them not only personally, but also their gifts and talents that which ultimately helps take the school to the next level.

If schools are to move forward in the 21st century, the leaders have to change the way they view instruction. Understanding what strategies and best practices work best for 21st century learning is imperative in the days of accountability. School leaders have to be prepared to walk into a classroom and determine if 21st century skills are being taught. Leaders should have the ability to collaborate with teachers about instruction and give them affirmations as well as suggestions about what needs to happen in a 21st century classroom.

Leaders who operate in the cultural leadership standard should be able to display these following practices according to the State Board of Education (2006):

- Creates a collaborative work environment predicated on site-based management that supports the "team" as the basic unit of learning and decision-making within the school and promotes cohesion and cooperation among staff;

- Communicates strong ideals and beliefs about schooling, teaching, and professional learning communities with teachers, staff, parents, and students and then operates from those beliefs;

- Influences the evolution of the culture to support the continuous improvement of the school as outlined in the school improvement plan;

- Systematically develops and uses shared values, beliefs and a shared vision to establish a school identity that emphasizes a sense of community and cooperation to guide the disciplined thought and action of all staff and students;

- Systematically and fairly acknowledges failures and celebrates accomplishments of the school and staff;

- Visibly supports the positive, culturally-responsive traditions of the school community;

- Promotes a sense of well-being among staff, students and parents;

- Builds a sense of efficacy and empowerment among staff that result in a "can do" attitude when faced with challenges;

- Empowers staff to recommend creative 21st century concepts for school
improvement.

Change

After reviewing literature about effective schools and the North Carolina School Executive standards it is evident that leadership plays a vital role in the process of change. Hall and Hord (2001) stated, "administrator leadership is essential to long-term change success" (p. 13). In order for change to happen effectively school leaders have to be fully committed to making the needed changes that will benefit the students even if it is uncomfortable for the staff. Making decisions that are in the best interest of the students need to be the main focus of any changes that occur in schools.

Fullan (2001) explains the process of change as, "less about innovation and more about innovativeness. It is less about strategy and more about strategizing" (p. 31). Change is inevitable in most situations. Friedman (2005) suggested that the current rate of change is at an all-time high. Good or bad change is an uncomfortable feeling for most people. It is the job of the leader to assure their followers that the changes are for the betterment of their organization. In order to effectively lead change there is a need to understand the complexities associated with change.

Fullan (2001) stressed that change is a process, not an event. He gave six suggestions on understanding the process of change: the goal is not to innovate the most, it is not enough to have the best ideas, appreciate the implementation dip, redefine resistance, re-culturing is the name of the game, never a checklist, always complexity. Each of these areas has clear messages that should be explored when making changes.

Successfully leading others through this process take a committed and dedicate leader. Fullan (2001) stated that, "Leading in a culture of change means creating a culture (not just a structure) of change" (p. 44).

When changes are implemented Muhammad (2009) believes that there are four types of educators that will be evident within most schools. He conducted a study of 34 different schools and he identified these four groups of educators: believers, tweeners, survivors, and fundamentalists. The believers believed that they had a direct impact on their students learning and overall achievement. The tweeners were new to the schools therefore they were trying to find their way and trying to learn the school's culture. Survivors are making it day by day and they may suffer from depression or anxiety. Finally, the fundamentalists would be known as the resistors in the building. They actively work against the believers and the leadership. If leaders know what category each of their staff members fall in it will help them when dealing with each of them on a daily bases.

According to Kotter (1996), ". . . major change efforts have helped some organization" (p. 4) while other organizations have seen failure to the changes that have been made. In Kotter's (1996) *Leading Change*, he outlined eight errors common to organizational change efforts:

- Allowing too much complacency;
- Failing to create a sufficiency powerful guiding coalition;
- Underestimating the power of vision;
- Under communicating the vision by a factor of 10 (or 100 or even 1,000);
- Permitting obstacles to block the new vision;
- Failing to create short-term wins

- Declaring victory too soon;
- Neglecting to anchor changes firmly in the corporate culture. (p. 16)

Kotter (1996) contended that "to some degree, the downside of change is inevitable. Whenever human communities are forced to adjust to shifting conditions, pain is ever present" (p. 24). If people have had a bad experience with change they tend to always look at the negative. Kotter stated, "People who have been through difficult, painful, and not very successful change efforts often end up drawing both pessimistic and angry conclusion" (p. 17). When there are people within an organization that does not support the changes they have the ability to be toxic to the culture as well as be the downfall to the change efforts being made.

Knowing the errors that happened when making changes Kotter developed the eight-stage change process. Within this change process he has turned the negative error into a more proactive way to explore this journey. These are the eight steps to the process:

- Establishing a sense of urgency;
- Creating the guiding coalition;
- Developing a vision and strategy;
- Communicating the change vision;
- Empowering broad-based action;
- Generating short-term wins;
- Consolidating gains and producing more change;
- Anchoring new approaches in the culture. (p. 21)

If leaders try these eight steps as they lead change in their schools some success may be achieved. Kotter (1996) confirmed that, ". . . the major change will not happen easily"

(p. 20). Sustainable change does not happen easy or overnight but leaders have to be consistent and have a vision and purpose for the changes.

Kotter (1996) further put the eight steps into four different phases. The first four steps has been labeled as the defrosting phase. These four steps help defrost "a hardened status quo" (p. 22). Steps five to seven is where the new practices are being introduced according to Kotter. The last step is the making sure that the culture that has been put in place stays in place within the organization. Kotter has found that organizations that are under a lot of pressure to produce tend to skip phases which can become a major pitfall in making the needed changes. Completing following through with each step will help with sustaining the desired changes.

Avoiding change in the days of accountability is not an option. Schools today do not have a choice of whether or not they want to change. Educators must realize all of the changes that are being made will help better equip students for their future career choices. All change are not bad change as long as it will have a positive impact on our students well being.

Leadership

Leadership has been one of the main characteristics associated with making changes within most organizations therefore understanding the term in my study is essential. Leadership has multiple meanings. This is a complex term with many interpretations from different individuals due to people's own subjective meanings. For example, Max DePree (1989) describes it as an art. He further explains leadership as, "liberating people to do what is required of them in the most effective and humane way

possible" (p. 1). Brubaker (1994) sees leadership as a need to take action so that a goal may be accomplished. For the purpose of this study leadership will be defined as an individual that guides or leads a group of people to common goals or mission.

Although leadership style is not one the main focuses for this study it is still important to address the leadership style that seems to be more in line with leading change in schools today. Transformational leadership has been the style that many leaders have resorted to in order to make the needed changes within their organization. According to Avolio and Bass (2002) research supports the idea of transformational leadership. It helps with the effort and commitment of the followers. Bass and Riggio (2006) believe that transformational leaders motivate and inspire their followers. Smith and Bell (2011) suggested that transformational leadership could change the culture of the organization. Transformational leadership should be look at as a collaborative effort between leaders and followers.

Burns (1978) coined the term transformational leadership back in 1978. He explained that transformational leadership occurs:

> . . . when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality. Their purposes, which might have started out as separate but related, as in the case of transactional leadership, become fused. Power bases are linked not as counterweights but as mutual support for common purpose. (p. 20)

Bass (1985) and other scholars further advanced the term. Bass (1985) broke transformational leadership into four dimensions. The dimensions are charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. A

combination of all four dimensions is needed in order to be an effective transformational leader to truly impact change.

Leithwood (1992) believes that transformational leadership "provides incentive for people to attempt improvement in their practices" (p. 9). Getting people to the point of wanting to improve their practices is half the battle in leading change. Flora (2003) pointed out that the best bosses encourage and mentor their employees to be the best they can be when they are at work. If employees feel that their bosses truly care about them as a person they tend to be more committed in making the needed changes.

Principals should lead the changes within their schools but they must also realize that the teachers play a critical role in this process. Teachers are in the "trenches" of the school every day therefore they can be the cheerleader for the changes that need to be made. Getting their full commitment can determine the outcome of the changes. Hall and Hord (2001) believe, "an entire organization does not change until each member has changed" (p. 7). The purpose behind transformational leadership is to build a partnership between the leader and their followers so that change will happen; which ultimately benefits both parties.

Without effective leadership, little positive educational changes will occur, and less of it will be sustained over time. If good learning depends on good teachers, good teaching ultimately depends on excellent leadership within the schools setting. In the study conducted by Beauchamp and Parsons (2012) they found that successful leaders use the skill of building relationships. Kouzes and Posner (2007) contend that leaders, "model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and

encourage the heart" (p. 64). Transformational leadership is ideal for schools that need change but it is not the only leadership style used when making changes within an organization. Knowing and implementing what's best for students has to be the focus of change in any schools today. Leaders can no longer set back and hope for the best, but they must put in action their beliefs about educating all students.

Beauchamp and Parsons (2012) found eight emerging themes about effective principals in their study:

1. Highly effective principals build and communicate common goals, a common sense of purpose, and a clear vision;
2. Highly effective principals take time to really "know" the people with whom they work and appreciate, value and respect them;
3. Highly effective principals listen, care, and support the people with whom they work on professional and on personal matters. Highly effective principals have "Open Doors";
4. Highly effective principals create "family-based" working and learning environments;
5. Highly effective principals are organized; they engage in detailed, inclusive, and proactive planning;
6. Highly effective principals celebrate success with both formal and fun-filled informal
7. Highly effective principals include others in planning and deciding, and are "equal partners" who empower good decision-making among teachers;
8. Highly effective principals "walk their talk." (p. 45)

In order to make changes in schools today principals should posses some if not all of the skills of a highly effective leader. Beauchamp and Parsons (2012) noted that the leaders in this study were able to create and manage the changes that needed to happen in their schools.

Organizational Culture

The word *culture* has been interpreted several different ways. Culture has been deemed as a complex word with multiple definitions. Hebdige (1979) stated that the word culture "has acquired a number of quite different, often contradictory meanings" (p. 5). According to Berger (1995) "it has been estimated that anthropologists have advanced more than a hundred definitions of culture" (p. 136). Leaders must have a clear understanding of culture so that they can help build an environment that is productive for all stakeholders.

Several scholars that have done research on culture have defined it in various ways. Deal and Peterson (1990) describes culture as "the way we do things around here." Schein (1985) briefly defines culture as, "The deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization that operate unconsciously" (p. 6). Glisson (2002) stated that culture "includes the shared values, beliefs, and behavioral norms in an organization" (p. 197). Morgan (2002) explains culture as a phenomenon through which people jointly create and recreate the environment that they live in. Each scholar's definition of culture is a little different but all of them involve a group of individuals building common behaviors among a group.

When the word organizational culture comes up leaders may reflect on the work that has been done by Edgar Schein. According to Schein (2004) culture has a long checkered history that still remains unclear to some leaders. Schein's (1986) deeper definition of culture is:

. . . any given group or organization that has had a substantial history, culture is the pattern of basic assumptions that the group has invented, discovered or developed in learning to cope with its problem of external adaptation and internal integration, and that has worked well enough to be considered valid, and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and fell in relation to those problems. (p. 31)

Schein (2004) further contends that, ". . . culture is essential to understanding intergroup conflict at the organizational level" (p. xi). Being able to identify and work through the conflicts that may be present in an organization is essential.

Schein (2004) believes that leadership and culture go hand and hand. A leader within the organization sets the culture. Within those cultures are subcultures that must be assessed and addressed. According to Schein (2004) cultures and subcultures influences all aspects of how the organization functions. Schein (2004) further explains, ". . . the task of leadership is to understand the dynamic forces that arise and to manage these forces to ensure that they are congruent with the organization's mission and goals" (p. 6). Employees at every level of the organization must see their value and recognize that they have a role in creating a productive culture.

Deal and Peterson (2009) are two other scholars that have researched culture extensively. They believe leaders that are attuned to their organization's culture tend to have better productivity from the people that work for them. It is essential for employees to align their core values and beliefs with the organization in order to have a productive working culture. According to Williams (2002) the organization's core values defines them. It gives meaning to the organization. Desjardins and Fitzgerald (2004) believe, "Organizational values are collective beliefs about what the entire enterprise stands for,

take pride in, and holds of intrinsic worth" (p. 124). Valuing what the organization

represents produces a culture that works toward a common goal.

In every organization whether big or small there is a culture. Most employees

adapt to the culture of the organization or they move on to find an organization that aligns

with their core beliefs. Deal and Kennedy (2000) contend that:

> Whether weak or strong, culture has a powerful influence throughout an
> organization, it affects practically everything—from who gets promoted and what
> decisions are made, to how employees dress and what sports they play. Because
> of this impact, we think the culture also has a major effect on the success of the
> business. (p. 4)

It is imperative for leaders to shape a culture that is positive and engaging for all

members. Shaping that culture within an organization will help employees take a vested

interest in what happening in the organization and how they can make it better.

School Culture

There has been a constant debate over the need for school improvement in our

public schools. Several reforms have been put in place to try to fix the problems within

education. An area that has not been specifically challenged within the reforms has been

school culture. The concept of school culture was adopted from the field of

anthropology. Anthropologists still do not have a clear definition of the word culture. It

was implied by Gruenert (2005) that there is not a common definition of the term in the

field of education either.

Evans (1996) defines culture as "an organization's traditional practices and modes

of operating or its climate and general ambiance" (p. 4). Evans (1996) goes on further to

state that school culture "offers an effective means of coordination and control and a center of shared purpose and values that provide inspiration, meaning and significance for the members of the school community" (p. 46). Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) explained school culture as the evidence of the guiding assumptions, beliefs, and expectations of how the school operates. Although there is not a clear definition of the term culture and how it is used in education many have understood it to be "the way we do things around here."

School culture plays a vital role in the effectiveness of schools. If leaders want to promote success for all students they must understand how culture will affect the way students perform. Deal and Peterson (2009) shared in their research the functions and impact of culture:

- *Culture fosters school effectiveness and productivity* (Purkey & Smith, 1983; Levine & Lezotte, 1990; Newmann & Associates, 1996; Leithwood & Louis, 1998). Teachers succeed in a culture focused on productivity (rather than on maintance or ease of work), performance (hard work, dedication, and perseverance), and improvement (continuous fine-tuning and refinement of teaching);
- *Culture improves collegiality, collaboration, communication, and problem-solving practices* (Little, 1982; Peterson & Brietzke, 1994; Kruse & Louis, 1997; DuFour, 2007). Schools that value collegiality and collaboration offer a better opportunity for social and professional exchange of ideas, the enhancement and spread of effective practices, and widespread professional problem solving;
- *Culture promotes innovation and school improvement* (Little, 1982; Lousi & Miles, 1990; Deal & Peterson, 1990; Kruse & Louis, 1997; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004). Toxic cultures that harbor mediocrity, inertia, and apathy are unlikely to be innovative.;
- *Culture builds commitment and kindles motivation* (Schein, 1985, 2004). People are motivated and feel committed to an enterprise that has meaning, values, and an ennobling purpose;

- *Culture amplifies the energy and vitality of school staff, students, and community.* It has long been known the social climate and culture influence the emotional and psychological orientation of a school; and
- *Culture focuses attention on what is important and valued* (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Schein, 1985, 2004). Rules, job descriptions, and policies can influence what a person does. Yet unwritten rules, informal expectations, and rites and rituals may be even more meaningful precursors of positive action and sustained progress. (pp. 12–14)

Each of these functions influences the beliefs and conversations that take place within an organization. It is the leader's responsibility to make sure that all of these functions have a positive impact of the culture of the school.

In order for any organization to work the culture has to be positive and productive. Deal and Kennedy (2000) have urged leaders to remember that the people within the organization determine whether or not the organization will be successful (p. 5). Kilman, Saxton, and Serpa (1986) believe that a toxic culture will lead followers in the wrong direction.

A toxic school culture can divide a school but a positive culture can bring a school together to make a difference for students. Kilman et al. (1986) suggested that a positive school culture will influence the actions of the members while putting pressure on the members that do not want to conform to the values and believes of the organization. When there is a common goal and vision within the organization the goals and vision tends to grow and become productive. Daily actions and statements about students and their performance become positive. Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) found that building a strong, optimistic culture is long and daunting, but worthy of the efforts and commitment that the members exert towards it.

Deal and Peterson (2009) believe that a culture can have positive or negative transmitters that can make or break the culture within the school. They have put them into two different networks the supportive cultural network and the noxious network. Within each network there are different roles that people within the organization may fall into. In the supportive cultural network the following roles may be apparent:

- Priests and priestesses—guardians of cultural values and beliefs;
- Storytellers—breathe zest and vigor into everyday life in schools;
- Gossips—quickly disseminate messages, keeps the corpus of the culture informed, enlivened, and well connected;
- Spies—pass intelligent information to open ears, let people know what's coming down the road;
- Heroes and heroines—role models who inspires us to be more than we think we can be (pp. 116–120).

Within every supportive culture there is always a chance for a toxic culture to exist. According to Deal and Peterson (2009) toxic cultures mission is to, "perpetuate a down downbeat, pessimistic status quo" (p. 122). In a toxic or noxious network the following roles may be apparent:

- Destructive spies—blockade any effort to make things better;
- Saboteurs—trash any new ideas, innovative programs, or positive activity;
- Pessimistic taletellers—spin yearns to jog memories of every failure, unresolved problem, or lost opportunity;
- Keep of nightmare—never fail to remind the staff of dreams that went awry, hopes that were dashed, and past programs that did not work out;
- Negaholics—find something negative, nasty, unfavorable, or pessimistic in any new idea;
- Prima donnas—want more than their share of attention, resources, and top students;
- Space cadets—have no idea what is going on but latch mindlessly on to anything new;
- Martyrs—expect people to recognize any contribution they make or time they spend as an enormous personal sacrifice;

- Rogue pirates—steal ideas from everyone and never give credit to them;
- Equipment and resource vulture—first to claim new equipment or materials
- Deadwood, driftwood, and ballast—just along for the ride, the glory, the excitement of teaching in a good school—and the paycheck;
- Rumor mongers—look for any dirt they can spread;
- Anti-heroes and devils—negative role models; they encourage others to act in ways opposite the core values of the positive culture;
- Devils—take delight in undercutting colleagues, leaking negative information to parents and the community, and undermining the confidence and self-worth of students. (pp. 122–126)

When leaders are aware of the different roles that staff members may play within their school culture they have a better understanding of how to deal with them as they try to change the school. Community members outside the building can either help or hinder the culture that may be in the school building. This is why it is important for leaders to be mindful of how they treat others when they enter the school. As soon as visitors enter a school they can typically pick up on the culture of the school. Deal and Peterson (1990) explained:

> Each school has its own character or "feel." You can sense it as you approach the building. You can almost smell and taste it as you walk through the doors. You can see it in the pictures on the walls and the students in the halls. You can hear it in exchanges between students and teachers in the classroom and in students' talk with one another on the playground. (p. 7)

It is essential for leaders to hone in on the culture that is being read from the people outside the building. Principals have to be able to communicate to others the schools' shared goals and beliefs about what teaching and learning should look like. Helping all stakeholders understand the goals of the school could ultimately help the school. The

outsiders such as community members and parents can assist in making sure that learning

is happening even when students are not in the school building.

Deal and Peterson (2009) offered strategies to help principals shape their school

culture. Before making changes to any organization it is wise to find out what is working

and what needs to be reformed. Deal and Peterson (2009) stated that, "When school

leaders feel they understand a school's current way of life, they can evaluate the need to

reshape or reinforce it" (p. 199). Gaining a clear understanding of what needs to be done

will benefit leaders and well as build supporters of the changes. According to Deal and

Peterson (1990), principals should be a shaper of school culture. In order to be that

shaper, the school leaders have to be able to clearly state their values and beliefs about

education in their schools.

Deal and Peterson (2009) suggest several basic questions that leaders should pose

when they are assessing the current realities and future dreams of the school (Deal &

Peterson, 1990):

- What are the social rituals of interaction and support?
- How and when (if at all) are classroom successes shared and recognized?
- What subcultures exist inside and outside the school? What are their values?
- Who are the recognized (and unrecognized) heroes and villains of the school?
- How is the work of teaching defined—as job or calling?
- What do people say (and think) when asked what the school stands for? How is conflict typically defined? How is it handled?
- What events are assigned special importance?
- How are newcomers welcomed?
- What do people wish for? Are there patterns to their individual dreams? What does the school's architecture convey?
- How is space arranged and used?
- Are student work and accomplishments displayed?
- What are the key ceremonies and stories of the school? (pp. 198–199)

All of these questions give leaders a way to reflect on the changes that they want to make at their schools. It also helps put things into perspective with their own beliefs and values. Deal and Peterson (1990) stated that, "Changing something you do not understand is a surefire recipe for stress—and ultimate failure" (p. 17). Leaders never want to cause more stress on themselves or the people working in the schools with them. Therefore, it is important to listen to the people around them as well as observe what goes on daily within the organization before making any major changes.

Leaders are challenged today to lead schools where every student gets a quality education. It is believed they must fix the things they have direct control over which would be the culture of the school. Being aware and addressing the issues that are occurring in schools that are preventing a positive and conducive learning environment is the job of the leader. They must eliminate those factors within their school building. Building a culture where learning is not an option but a necessity is a must in schools. Leaders must step up and fight for students to receive the education that they deserve and desire by building a culture that promotes academic success.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

For this study I used a qualitative approach to gain more insight about leadership, change, and school culture. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) believe that, "Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world" (p. 3). The purpose of this study was to learn about leadership, change, and school culture in one successful Title 1 school.

I used the case study research approach. According to Creswell (2007), a case study is used when the researcher explores a problem over time, through detailed data collection in a bounded setting or situation. I used this particular approach because I wanted to look closely at just one Title 1 school to compare the pre and post school culture. I was interested in seeing the culture shifts that happened over several years. The data collected for this study helped identify factors associated with leadership, change, and school culture within a successful Title 1 school. I identify and describe the programs, values, and common practices that the principal believes impacted the cultural shifts within the school.

Scholars such as Edmonds (1979) and Deal and Peterson (2009) have researched characteristics associated with effective schools. They found strong leadership, high academic expectations, teaching of basic skills, and a safe and orderly environment as

characteristics associated with schools that exhibit success. Although research has been conducted on successful schools and on school culture, there is a need for a more in-depth study of leadership, change, and school culture within successful Title 1 schools.

Setting

This study was conducted on one Dimples County Title I school and its principal. The reason I chose an elementary Title I school is because of the limited research on these schools in North Carolina. I chose this neighboring district because the demographics in this district were somewhat similar to my district. I was also impressed with some the changes that were occurring within this district. Also, being a principal of a Title I school, I wanted to gain as much insight as possible on the journey of change within these schools.

I asked Dimples County district superintendent to identify five principals who met the following criteria:

- principal of an elementary school,
- school is an identified Title 1 school,
- significant positive change in the school culture during the principal's tenure,
- improved test scores during the principal's tenure,
- principal has been at school for one to four years.

Once the superintendent selected five principals I contacted all five principals recommended for the study. Out of the five principals that were recommended two of them never responded to my phone calls or emails. One principal already had a research study being conducted at his school. I provided the other two principals with background

information about the study to see if they were interested in participating in the study. I

scheduled a time to collect some additional information about the principals and their

schools. I asked them the following questions:

- How long have you been principal at the school?

- Do you believe that there has been a significant change in the culture since

  you have been there?

- Have the test scores improved since you have been there? If so, by how

  much?

- Are you open to sharing information about your school's journey?

After having these conversations it allowed me the opportunity to see which principal

was the best fit for the study. It gave me an idea as to how well the principals could

articulate the changes that had occurred at their schools and their willingness to share.

The reason for selecting one principal and site was based on my desire to gain a

rich in-depth understanding of the shifts that occurred over time. Being able to hone in

on what helped the principal with changing the culture of her school to promote success

for all students provides insight for other Title I school leaders.

Research Participants and Data Collection

The participants in this study were the principal and the school's other staff

members. The principal was interviewed two times. The first interview entailed the

principal telling the story of the school with some guidance of specific questions if the

principal gave limited information. The questions were parallel to the questions I asked

in the interviews with the staff members. The second principal interview was an exit

interview with the principal to follow-up on unanswered questions I had from the interviews with the staff. I intended to interview the assistant principal, the lead teacher, and the guidance counselor but all of them came the first year the principal arrived. I was only able to interview nine other staff members because the other staff members that were willing to share their experience and stories did not meet the requirements for the study. It was important to stick to those requirements because if participants were not there one year prior to the principal's tenure they would not have been able to give me a clear depiction of the previous school culture. Each interview was approximately an hour and a half in length.

Interviewing different staff members from different grades and experience levels provided me with a wide perspective of the school and the changes that occurred over time. Having the opportunity to interview the staff members enabled me to identify common themes in the school's journey. I was able to compare and contrast the past school culture to the present school culture.

According to Creswell (2007), data collected in a case study should be extensive and draw upon multiple sources. Creswell (2007) cited observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials as commonly used sources in case studies. I used interviews and other documents (School Improvement Plan, Teacher Working Condition survey, School report card) to triangulate the data collected.

Interview Protocol

The opening interview question for all participants was "Tell me your life story." Table 2 lists the other interview questions.

Table 2

Interview Questions

Principal Questions	Staff Member Questions
1. How long have you been the principal at this school?	1. How long have you been a staff member at this school?
2. How did you get to be the principal of this school?	

3. Tell me what the school was like when you first arrived.
   a. Tell me about the teacher-student interaction at your school.
   b. What evidence can you provide that shows staff members believed or did not believe in success for all students?
   c. What actions did you take when you first began working at the school?
   d. What did you think needed immediate changes? Why?
   e. After your initial weeks and months at the school, what did you do next?
	3. Tell me what the school was like before the current principal arrived.
	   a. Tell me about the teacher-student interaction at your school.
	   b. What evidence can you provide that shows staff members believed or did not believe in success for all students?
	   c. What were some of the first actions your principal took when he/she started? Do you believe they were needed? Why or why not?
	   d. What do you think needed immediate change when your current principal arrived? Why?

4. Tell me what the school is like now.
   a. What things have happened since you have been here that have made a difference?
   b. What things were successful? What things were not? Why?
   c. Do you think the culture of the school is different? If so, why?
	4. Tell me what the school is like now.
	   a. What things have happened since the current principal has been here that have made a difference?
	   b. What things were successful that your principal implemented? What things were not successful? Why?
	   c. Do you think the culture of the school is different? If so, why?

5. What does school success mean to you?	5. What does school success mean to you?
6. How have you built a culture of success for your students and staff?	6. What has happened at this school to build a culture that promotes success for the students and staff?
7. What is your leadership style and how has it impacted the school's culture?	7. What is the principal's leadership style and how has it impacted the school's culture?

Table 2

(Cont.)

Principal Questions	Staff Member Questions
8. What barriers did you face when trying to change the school's culture?	8. What were some of the barriers that the school faced as the culture was changing?
9. How did you handle the resistors as you where changing the culture within your school?	9. Were there resistors during this process? a. Why do you believe they were resisting the changes? b. Were there people who supported the changes being made? How did they support?
10. When did you ever feel like giving up during this process? What kept you going? How did you respond to this adversity?	10. Were there any turning points during the change process?
11. What other changes do you believe still need to occur in order to further promote school success?	11. What other changes do you believe still need to occur in order to further promote school success?
12. How will you sustain the changes that have been made?	12. If your current principal leaves, do you think the changes made will continue? Why or why not?
13. If you had the opportunity to do it all over again what would you do differently? Why?	13. If there was one thing you could tell your principal to do differently when trying to make change, what would you tell him/her?
14. What are your suggestions for new administrators who are trying to change their school's culture?	

These interview questions are aligned with my research questions as listed below.

1. **A follow up interview was conducted with the principal using the questions below. Questions for this interview were developed from responses to the staff members' interviews, as well as the first principal interview.** A few teachers referred to the past culture as "dark," "negative,"

and "fearful." Would you describe the culture in those words? Why or Why

not? How do you believe the past culture impacted instruction?

2. In the second group of interviews with some of your teachers, words like

"tension," "lack of support," and "sucking the life out of them" were used.

How did you address these issues when you first arrived?

3. What will or have you done to increase teacher retention since you have been

here?

4. This study's underpinning framework was based on Peterson and Deal's

literature on school culture and Kotter's model of change. Who inspired you

or what literature did you read before taking on such a huge challenge?

Primary research question: What can we learn about leadership, change, and school

culture by studying the turnaround journey of on Title I elementary school?

Table 3

Crosswalk of Research Questions with Interview Questions

Research questions	Principal questions	Teacher questions
1. Background questions	1. How long have you been the principal at this school? 2. How did you get to be the principal at this school?	1. How long have you been a staff member at this school?
2. How did the post turnaround school differ from the pre turnaround school?	3. Tell me what the school was like when you first arrived. a. Tell me about the teacher-student interaction when you first arrived.	3. Tell me what the school was like before the current principal arrived. a. Tell me about the teacher-student interaction when the principal first arrived.

Table 3

(Cont.)

Research questions	Principal questions	Teacher questions
2. How did the post turnaround school differ from the pre turnaround school? (cont.)	b. Tell me about staff members' beliefs about students learning when you first arrived. c. Tell me about the culture of the school when you first arrived. d. How did the students feel about the school when you first arrived? e. How did the parents and community members feel about the school when you first arrived? f. What were the biggest issues and problems that you faced when you first arrived? g. What were some of the most positive things that the school had going when you first arrived? 4. Tell me what the school is like now. 9. c. How does the current vision of the school differ from the past vision? How did you get the staff to buy into the current vision?	b. Tell me about the staff members' beliefs about student learning when the principal first arrived. c. Tell me about the culture of the school when the principal first arrived. d. How did the students feel about the school when the principal first arrived? e. How did the parents and community members feel about the school when the principal first arrived? f. What would you consider to be the biggest issues and problems that the principal faced when she/he first arrived? g. What were some of the positive things that were happening at the school when the principal first arrived? 4. Tell me what the school is like now since the new principal has arrived. 9. c. How does the current vision of the school differ from the

Table 3

(Cont.)

Research questions	Principal questions	Teacher questions
2. How did the post turnaround school differ from the pre turnaround school? (cont.)		past vision? How did your principal get the staff to buy into the current vision?
3. What cultural shifts (programs, practices, etc.) occurred in the school?	8. What things have happened since you have been here that have made a difference? 9. What has shaped the changes that have occurred in your school (programs, practices, etc)? e. What steps or processes took place to form your current school culture?	8. What things have happened since the current principal has been here that have made a difference? 9. What has shaped the changes that have occurred in the school (programs, practices, etc.)? e. What steps or processes have taken place to form the current school culture?
4. What were the factors that contributed to the cultural change?	5. What actions did you take when you first began working at the school? 6. What did you think needed immediate change? Why? 7. After your initial weeks and months at the school, what did you do next?	5. What actions did the principal take when she/he first began working at the school? 6. What did you think needed immediate change when she/he arrived? Why?
Related question: What role did the principal play?	9. What has shaped the changes that have occurred in your school (programs and practices)?	9. What has shaped the changes that have occurred in the school (programs and practices)?

Table 3

(Cont.)

Research questions	Principal questions	Teacher questions
Related question: What role did the principal play? (cont.)	a. What did you do to construct a clear understanding of the past school history? b. How were you able to find out about the past beliefs, traditions and values of the school? c. How does the current vision of the school differ from the past vision? How did you get the staff to buy into the current vision? d. What behaviors do you model daily that you feel is important for your staff to see? Why do you feel that they are important? e. What steps or processes took place to form your current school culture? f. If you had to tell me in one sentence something about your school or school culture what would it be? g. How do you get all staff members involved in all aspects of the school (classroom, extra-curricular activities, staff outings, etc.)?	c. How does the current vision of the school differ from the past vision? How did your principal get the staff to buy into the current vision? d. What behaviors do your principal model daily and has it influenced how the staff members behave daily? e. What steps or processes have taken place to form the current school culture? f. If you had to tell me in one sentence something about your school or school culture what would it be? Why? g. How does your principal get all staff members involved in all aspects of the school? h. How has your principal helped the staff deal with any changes that have or will occur in your school? 10. What is the principal's leadership style and how has it impacted the school's culture?

Table 3

(Cont.)

Research questions	Principal questions	Teacher questions

Related question: What role did the principal play? (cont.)	h. How have you helped your staff deal with any changes that have or will occur in your school (curriculum changes, staff turnover, staff members or student deaths)?
	10. Tell me a little about your leadership style.
	11. How did you handle the resistors as you where changing the culture within the school?
	12. How did you communicate the need for change in the school? How did you get the momentum going?
	  a. How did you involve the staff members in making the needed changes? How did you develop the level of trust among the group members that helped make the changes possible?
	  b. What steps or strategies did you use to make sure that the needed changes were going in the right direction?
		11. Were there resistors during this process of change?
		  a. Why do you believe they were resisting the changes?
		  b. Were there people who supported the changes being made? How did they support?
		12. Did your principal communicate the need for change? If so, how did she/he get the momentum going among the staff?
		  a. How did your principal involve the staff in making the needed changes? If staff members were involved how did he/she build trust within the group?
		  b. What did your principal do to make sure that the school was moving in the right direction for change? How did you help with this process?
		  c. What did your principal do to ensure that all staff members had a clear understanding of the goals and direction of the school?

Table 3

(Cont.)

Research questions	Principal questions	Teacher questions
Related question: What role did the principal play? (cont.)	c. How did you ensure that every staff member understood the goals and direction of the school? d. What barriers or obstacles did you see that were hindering the change process in your school? What obstacles or barriers did you have to remove from the previous culture in order to make the needed changes within the school? e. How have you celebrated the small accomplishments that have happened during the change process? How has it motivated the staff to continue with making the needed changes within the school? f. What have or will you do to make sure that once you leave this school that the culture that you have built will continue to grow?	d. What obstacles or barriers existed when the principal was trying to implement changes? What did he/she do to remove those barriers? e. How has the small accomplishments with the change process been celebrated? Do you feel that the celebrations have motivated the staff? Why or Why not?

Table 3

(Cont.)

Research questions	Principal questions	Teacher questions
Closing questions	13. If you had the opportunity to do it all over again what would you do differently? Why?	13. If there was one thing you could tell your principal to do differently when trying to make change, what would you tell him/her?
	14. What are your suggestions for new administrators who are trying to change their school's culture?	

Documents such as the school improvement plan, North Carolina school report

card, and the teacher working condition survey helped provide information on class size,

number of suspensions and expulsions, ethnicity, instructional practices in place, and

collaboration efforts. Also, I looked at the former and current school vision and mission.

Using multiple data collection strategies helped me piece together a story of how the

school leader changed the culture over time.

Data Analysis and Conceptual Framework

After reviewing multiple data collection sources, I organized the information in a way

that was informative to the study. I took the responses from each participant and placed

it under the research question with which it corresponded. After I organized the

information collected I looked for emerging themes that were evident in the study. It was

my goal to provide a visual representation of the principal's cultural shift based on the

conceptual framework designed for this study. This framework helped me organize the

information gained from the principal and the staff.
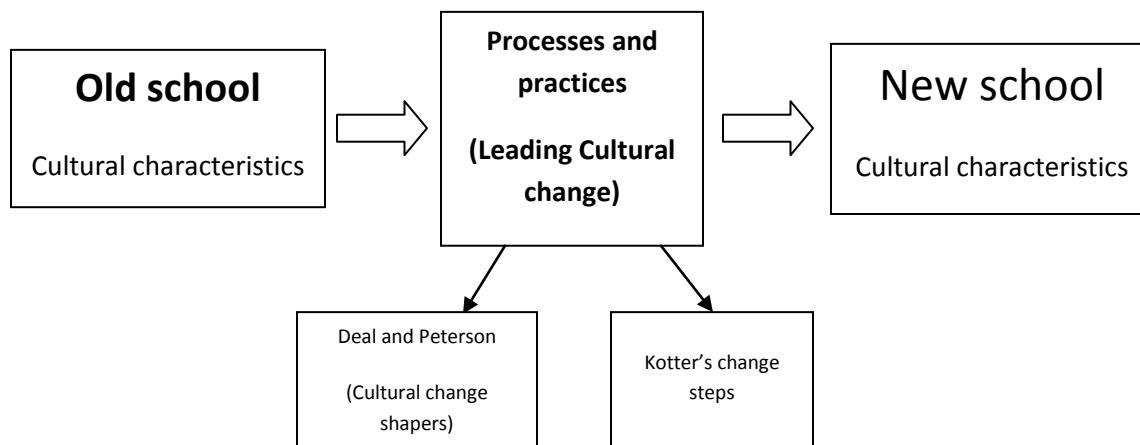
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.

In organizations leaders plays a vital role in whether or not changes will occur.

According to Deal and Peterson (2009) this is true in schools organizations as well. This

framework allowed me the opportunity to look closely at the past and present school

culture. I was able to identify the cultural characteristics that once existed and compare

them to the current cultural characteristics. The processes and practices that the school

used in the past could also give me an idea of the things that may have helped with the

improvement of the school over time.   I was able to identify what shifts occurred over

the years. I was also able to see how the leadership practices had an effect on the shifts

that were made.

I compared the current leader's practices to Deal and Patterson's research on

leaders' roles in changing school culture. They believe that if the right leadership is

present in the organization, changes in practices, traditions, beliefs, and the vision of the

organization is possible.

Leaders who implement Kotter's (1996) eight steps to change correctly should see

changes within their culture. Once these steps are fully implemented the culture within

the organization should begin to operate and function differently. This was evident in

this study. The culture shifted and allowed the leader the opportunity to develop new

norms, rituals, and traditions. As all of these things start to happen as a culture of success

emerges. Using this framework allowed me the opportunity to look at some of the

emerging themes between the principal and the staff members as the school transitioned

from the past school to the present school.

Researcher's Subjectivity

It is important for me to identify my own connection to my topic and the

participants in the study. I needed to examine my own subjectivity as the researcher in

order to give the readers the opportunity to learn from the research that I collected.

Peshkin (1988) stated:

> If researchers are informed about the qualities that have emerged during their
> research, they can at least disclose to their readers where self and subject become
> joined. They can at best be enabled to write unshackled from orientations that
> they did not realize were intervening in their research process. (p. 17)

Whether I wanted to admit it or not, my subjectivity affected the results of my study. My

values, life stories, and belief system emerged into the study in some form or fashion

regardless of how hard I tried to eliminate those factors. However, acknowledging them

from the beginning of the study helped me better analyze the data. Peshkin (1988)

affirmed that, ". . . one's subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed. It is insistently present in both the research and nonresearch aspects of our life" (p. 17). I realized that who I am had some impact on what I unconsciously and subconsciously "choose" to uncover.

The topic of leadership, change, school culture, and student success is something that is very important to me as a Principal. I specifically wanted to look at Title 1 schools because I attended them throughout grade school. Not exactly knowing the difference between a Title 1 school and a transitional school I felt that it was important for me to research the difference between them as I started exploring my job options. It was not until I started exploring my options that I saw a clear distinction between the two schools. One of my professors explained it as the "haves and the have nots". Another one of my professors discouraged me from teaching in a Title 1 school my first year of teaching. She told me that it is one of the toughest schools to work in as a new teacher. Always looking for a challenge, I accepted my first teaching job in one of the toughest Title 1 schools in High Point, North Carolina. Teaching there taught me a lot about the students and families that were served at these schools. It was tough but it did not discourage me from finding a true passion and love for these types of schools.

After leaving the classroom I assumed a role as a Mathematics coach in a Title 1 school. Being in that role I started hearing and seeing the low expectations that educators had for students in Title 1 schools. A few years later I was given the opportunity to serve as an Assistant Principal in the Title 1 School that I now serve as the Principal. Unfortunately, the four years that I was there as the Assistant Principal I continued to see

and hear a lot of negative things about the students that we served. The staff members at my school did not truly believe in the success of all the students. Seeing the disappointment and the faces of defeat from the students and their parents, I felt that it was important for me to change how the staff viewed the students at my school.

Since, as an elementary school, my school is the first school that the parents and students encounter in this district, it is important for my staff to ignite that fire of success for those students. I have a vested interest in making sure that the students understand the importance of being academically successful and going to college. If I start at my level building a positive school experience for the students and their parents, hopefully this will keep students excited about their education and their willingness to be productive citizens in their community.

While serving as the new principal of this Title I School I can work on building a school culture that promotes success for all students. I wanted to learn from other principals some of the strategies that they have put in place to help their students and staff members believe in success for all. Peshkin (1988) stated that, "I saw people doing something that I realized that I do myself, and I valued it" (p. 18). My role as a new principal is to learn how to support students, parents, and staff members in being a school that consistently displays success.

My own experience working within a school needing a culture change impacted my perception on some of the factors that may or may not be apparent in the study. As the researcher, it is important for me to be upfront with what I see in my school and community so that my data is trustworthy. I did several months of data collection from

multiple sources so that I could capture the true picture of the things associated with leadership, change, and culture.

Trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness is important in any qualitative study. Throughout the study, it was my intent to ensure all data collected was trustworthy. I accomplished this task through member checking and triangulation. To ensure that the data and interpretation of the research was valid, I checked for misinterpretations through a member checking process. According to Creswell (2007) member checking allows the participants to "judge the accuracy and credibility of the account" (p. 208). I gave the participants the opportunity to correct errors or misinterpretation of the data collected during the study. I met individually with the participants to review the data that I collected during the interview. At this time they were allowed the opportunity to delete any comments that were not accurately recorded. They were also able to elaborate on any comments that they felt needed more explanation. This allowed participants the opportunity to correct errors or misinterpretation of the data collected during the study.

By using multiple sources to gather data such as interviews, observations, and documents, triangulation was possible. Creswell (2007) stated, ". . . this process involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective" (p. 208). Using these sources to collect data helped me get a true sense of the change process within this school.

I kept all documents and records in a secure location to ensure confidentially. As mentioned previously, it was my goal to gather information from the research and convey it in a way that was authentic and reflective of the participants in the study.

Benefits and Risks

There were no risks to the participants. Using pseudonyms in this study protected all participants' jobs and reputations within their school districts. This study provided benefits to new administrators going into Title 1 schools that need a shift in their school culture. The intentions of this study was to provide insight and specific ideas about what leaders can do to promote a culture of success for all students.

CHAPTER IV

THE SCHOOL AS IT WAS (PRIOR TO 2010 SCHOOL YEAR)

Little Elementary School was a Title I school in the Dimples County school system. It experienced several challenges. These challenges have brought about many changes. At Little Elementary School, several factors impacted the school community significantly. These factors are so significant that they became a constant refrain, for the teachers, as well as for the entire close-knit school community. Little Elementary School was in a perfect storm with a captain who could not maintain the ship.

These factors included:

1. Low staff morale

2. Negative working environment

3. Lack of principal visibility

4. Lack of teacher freedom

5. Unwelcoming environment to stakeholders

Low Staff Morale

One of the challenges that was evident in this school was the issue of low staff morale. The morale at Little Elementary school was a huge concern for the staff, students, and community members. According to the teachers at Little Elementary School, the principal did little to contribute to a productive environment for them, but instead made them feel like coming to work every day was a daunting task. The teachers

at Little Elementary had lost their passion for teaching. One fifth-grade teacher explained:

> It was hard coming to work every day. It was more of a job instead of a commitment. The life was sucked out of you. It was extremely regimented. We were being told what to teach and how to teach it. Having to deal with this each and every day can make even the best teacher dislike coming to work. (Personal communication, July 22, 2013)

Teachers voiced their opinions about the lack of a constructive healthy school culture. Their definition of a constructive healthy school culture was one where all teachers felt valued, even if they did not agree with every decision leadership made. Teachers' felt unsure of their ability to teach what they knew their students needed. One teacher stated, "We knew that every kid could learn something and could grow, but we were just frustrated with our inability to do things we knew worked" (Personal communication, July 22, 2013). No one dared to take instructional risks. If anyone took those risks it was behind closed doors where they knew no one would know.

Not being trusted to teach and the lack of support were apparent in this school. This had a direct effect on the low morale of the staff. According to the teacher, absenteeism during instructional days becomes epidemic. One teacher reported, "Opting out on optional days becomes the thought of choice for most of us. We did not want to be in a place where we not supported or valued by our principal" (Personal communication, July 22, 2013). Taking a day without pay and only working when they were required became the standard according to some of the teachers.

Teachers did not always know exactly what administration expected of them. This brought daily feelings of anxiety and tension. They were never sure if they were going to be called out for doing the wrong thing. One teacher shared:

> A lot of teachers felt unsure of what they were supposed to do, never sure if they were doing things correctly. Tension would be the best word for it. You were never 100% sure if you were going to get called out on something or get told no, don't do that. (Personal communication, July 22, 2013)

According to the teachers having to work in an environment where there were no clear guidelines or expectations made it uncomfortable.

The lack of a consistent administrative team played a huge factor into the teachers not knowing exactly what was expected of them. Since there were not clear expectations of what to do, the teachers did what they thought was in the best interest of the students, which later resulted in them being reprimanded. A veteran teacher shared, "This is my 18th year teaching. I have been here since 2005. I was hired 3 principals ago. I was counting the other day and I think I've had 7 Assistant Principals. It's been quite a turnover in administration here" (Personal communication, June 8, 2013). With the inconsistent leadership at Little Elementary, expectations from year to year changed. A teacher confirmed, "One year you could be in line with the vision of the school and then the following year you could be out of compliance" (Personal communication, June 8, 2013). Therefore, it could have affected how teachers felt about coming to work and the expectations of their daily work.

Teachers also reported that administration at Little Elementary was quick to jump into different initiatives that were not always in the best interest of the school. This

contributed to some of the anxiety within the building. Switching from one thing to another without knowing if the first thing really worked was frustrating for the teachers. For example, one teacher shared:

> Administration was what I'd like to call bandwagon fans. If county office even hinted that something was on the horizon they would jump on it. They wanted to be the first ones to try it, even if it was not in the best interest of the school or the students. I had a hard time understanding why they would do that. It just didn't make sense to me. (Personal communication, July 22, 2013)

Teachers at Little Elementary School felt they were competent professionals that could give insight on programs or initiatives new to their school; however they were never involved in those decisions. Getting the teachers input would have help with giving them ownership in the things that were happening at Little Elementary School. According to the teachers they just wanted be able to give their opinions about the new initiatives that were coming.

Negative Environment

The negative environment that existed at Little Elementary School was a direct result of the extremely low staff morale. One teacher referred to it as having, "a darkness over a shadow" (Personal communication, June 8, 2013). It was also described as a, "sad environment" (Personal communication, June 8, 2013). Another teacher felt like "a dark cloud hung over the school all the time" (Personal communication, June 8, 2013). According to teachers there was much bitterness and complaining among the staff. Little Elementary was traditionally a place where students were being educated and learned

how to be good citizens, but this mission was impacted because they were sadly

confronted with a mentally and physically draining environment.

Not only was this an unhappy environment to work in but several teachers

reported it was also a fearful environment for several of the teachers. They were

constantly worried about being punished for their actions. Teachers frequently

questioned whether or not they were doing the right thing. That "right thing" was

oftentimes a moving target. What was right today according to the teachers would most

certainly be wrong next week. A teacher explained:

> Sadly it was a fearful place. People were truly afraid to hang things in the
> hallway. I've never seen anything like it. They were afraid of what they laid in
> front of the students to do because the students were not allowed to touch glue
> and scissors. I found it appalling. Teachers were guarded. They were very
> careful in their chosen words. It was almost as if they were teaching as though
> there was a hidden camera in their room. The word fearful is the best adjective I
> can use. (Personal communication, June 8, 2013)

Working in an environment like this was stressful for the staff. According to the

teachers, they were even afraid to causally speak to one another in the hall. Another

teacher continues, "At this school it was like walking down a prison hallway. If you

carried on a casual conversation with anyone you risked the chance of being called out by

administration. I'm telling you it was crazy around here" (Personal communication, June

8, 2013). Teachers reported that they felt like there was little hope left at this school.

The teachers at Little Elementary felt like the students did not feel the stress or

tension like they did. One teacher confirmed, "I don't think the student felt the same

tension that we felt. Teachers were really good at trying to make school fun for their

students" (Personal communication, July 22, 2013). The teachers at Little Elementary

did a good job at masking their own personal feelings about the school and the principal.

Although the teachers did not believe that it affected the students, one may question

whether it had an indirect effect on the teaching and learning that was taking place.

Also contributing to the high level of stress and tension that the teachers were

experiencing was a lack of support in this environment. A teacher explained it:

> There was a feeling of fear versus the feeling of support. I felt like we were told
> you can't put this on the wall, you can't do this, you have to have this there, you
> can't hang up this, and you can't get your colors out. You know it was all about
> things you could not do. Instead of you know this is what we need to be doing,
> let's figure out how to get there, what do you need, that kind of thing. Did the
> previous principal sit me down and say you can't do crafts at school, you can't do
> this? No, but it didn't take long to feel it from everybody else. Innovative and
> creative instruction was not accepted and allowed. (Personal communication, June
> 8, 2013)

It was the implied, unspoken reality of working at Little Elementary. The challenge was

knowing the hidden rules and understanding the expectations of the principal.

Another teacher shared:

> I had been to a lot of different schools with guidelines, but coming here was the
> most unique of my experiences. Immediately I was told, not by administration so
> much, but by the rest of the staff. That if it was not in the handbook or any place
> else you better not even think about doing it. I was also told do not get out glue
> and scissors, do not have fun, and do not put things on the wall that are not
> curriculum based. (Personal communication, June 8, 2013)

Walking into an environment where everybody but the administration told you what not

to do brought about confusion and left teachers not knowing the expectations of the

administration. The negative environment that existed was hard for the teachers to

overcome therefore their instruction was comprised on a daily basis.

Visibility of Principal

Having a presence within an organization or community is always vital when you

are trying to engage others in your vision or goals for the organization. At Little

Elementary School that component was missing which became a major issue for the

students, staff and community members. It appeared that the principal just did not care

about the students or the work of the school. The students did not know who the

principal was at Little Elementary. One teacher confirmed, "My kids thought the janitor

was the principal" (Personal communication, June 8, 2013). According to the teachers,

they saw him more than they did the principal. He was the one who was always in the

hallways and classrooms. Other staff members within the school were also seen as the

principal by the students. Another teacher further confirmed, "I remember that my

children in my class saw the assistant principal and asked was that the principal." One

teacher shared her students' experience about the principal and her presence within the

school:

> I still remember the Assistant Principal walked into the classroom—and that
> Assistant Principal was pretty visible within the building and my students thought
> that she was the principal. When the principal would come in I would have to say
> no that's the principal not the Assistant Principal. It was because the principal
> was not that visible in the building or classrooms. Again, when she did show up a
> few times it was like she was in there to be critical. (Personal communication,
> June 8, 2013)

The students had no idea who was in charge in their building. They knew it was an adult running the school, but what she looked like was a mystery to them.

There was no apparent relationship between the principal and the students at Little Elementary. The only place the principal was seen was in her office. Even the students, who required another level of discipline past classroom interventions, did not know the principal. Their relationship was with the Assistant Principal, their principal of choice. The Assistant Principal built a bond with them that the principal lacked.

Teachers also complained about the principal not being visible in the building. Seeing her in the classroom was rare. She also never attended meetings where student achievement was discussed. A teacher confirmed:

> The previous principal didn't attend any of our data meetings; therefore, those meeting were unfocused and pointless. The meeting became a time for teachers to complain about what the principal was not doing and not about what we needed to do to get our students where they needed to be academically. In my opinion it was a waste of time not to mention we never met consistently. It was a big joke. (Personal communication, June 8, 2013)

Having an administrator who was apparently unaware about the standards and best practices being used in the classrooms was counterproductive to student success. One teacher commented, "She was kind of hidden in her office" (Personal communication, July 22, 2013). The only thing the principal could rely on were the scores at the end of the year, which according to the teachers, was the only thing she really cared about. A teacher shared, "I think we were trained to believe it was all about testing. I don't think the kids were allowed to be kids necessarily because it was all about a test score" (Personal communication, July 22, 2013).

According to the teachers there were never any walkthroughs done in the building. The only time that the principal would cross the doors in the classroom was to do an evaluation or to reprimand a teacher for doing something wrong. Teachers were guarded and afraid when she came to visit the classes because they were uncertain about what would happen next. Uncertainty at Little Elementary seemed to be the norm.

According to the teachers the parents felt that the principal was not visible within the building or community. The parents shared with their child's teacher that they never had any interactions with the principal and that typically dealt with the Assistant Principal when their child was in trouble. According to the teachers there were a lot of letters sent to the newspaper and the district office about the principal and her lack of leadership and visibility at Little Elementary School. The teacher shared:

> I can only go by what parents would say on the side to me when they were fishing for more information. There were a lot of negative responses from parents about the principal. They would talk about things that were happening here and the way things were being run. I think a lot of parents would say they didn't even know what the principal looked like. (Personal communication, July 22, 2013)

Several of the teacher shared there were events that the principal did not attend. A teacher confirmed:

> If we had events at the school she wasn't there to show her support. The parents would ask us where she was and all we would say is I heard that she had a family emergency. After awhile that story became old and the parents just stopped asking. (Personal communication, July 22, 2013)

The principal's lack of visibility symbolized to parents that their child's principal was not interested in what was going on in the school and that she did not really care about their

child academically or personally. The principal's lack of visibility ultimately affected the

relationship between the student, staff, and community.

No Teacher Freedom

Teachers were not given the freedom to do what they felt they needed to do for

their students academically. Teachers feeling that they were incapable of making the

right decisions about what needed to be done in their classrooms also played into the

issue of low staff morale. Teachers constantly questioned their work. One teacher stated,

"I think there were some concerns from us about are we doing what's best for our kids"

(Personal communication, June 8, 2013). One teacher shared her experience with the

lack of teacher freedom:

> I believe under the old administration the staff believed that you were to follow
> the script, the proverbial script. We were given templates and you were supposed
> to do everything based on that and turn that in on that template every week. No
> exceptions. Just keep instruction as a cookie cutter. Everything was just sort of
> given to teachers in a way that we weren't intelligent enough to come up with our
> own or to trust our instinct. It made teachers believe that this is how it's going to
> be done and you need to do it this way. Teachers had to form their beliefs into
> this mold because this is right and that's what they wanted to see. (Personal
> communication, July 22, 2013)

The teachers at Little Elementary knew they had standards to teach but they just wanted

the freedom to tweak how things were being taught. A teacher confirmed:

> It's one thing to say we have county expectations so I'm not talking to that
> degree, I'm talking within our school expectations.   I want to be able to tweak or
> move things around how I need to in order to meet my students' individual needs.
> (Personal communication, July 22, 2013)

Letting teachers use their professional judgment about what the students needed was never an option with the past administration. The teachers just wanted to feel supported in the decisions that they made for their students academically.

Not Welcoming

Little Elementary was not a welcoming place to the students, parents, or community members according to the teachers. One teacher confirmed, "A parent shared with me that it just was not a place where the parents felt invited" (Personal communication, July 22, 2013). Teacher 9 further confirmed:

> The parents did not see the principal out about greeting the students or other parents. If she was out greeting it was awkward and out of the norm. The teachers made this school welcoming. I do not think it was an open atmosphere where parents could go talk to someone if they had a problem. (Personal communication, July 22, 2013)

A teacher expressed the community's view about the unwelcoming environment at Little Elementary:

> This town is literally my family's town. We were born and raised here so the community members shared a lot with me. It was a very unhappy parental feelings about this school and administration. They felt unwelcomed and they wanted her gone, sooner than later. They felt she came in and literally took this school that was once welcoming and had been known for its huge carnival events and turned it into a very unfriendly place. She stopped all the fun. It was like a sad PBS show you see where the wicked witch comes in the town and upsets it. The community felt her presence as negative and unproductive. They knew that their kids were missing all the fun stuff and they wanted it back. (Teacher 4, personal communication, June 8, 2013)

According to some of the teachers the parents did not feel like the principal was very personable therefore their involvement in the school was limited.

    The low staff morale had a direct impact on the other contributing factors of the
toxic school culture that existed at Little Elementary School. Each factor has its own
merit but in order to change the other contributing factors that existed in the previous
school culture there was a need of some shifts in attitudes and beliefs from the staff.
With the help of a strong committed leader the school culture that once existed could be
changed and a new culture can be developed and maintained by the students, staff, and
community members.

CHAPTER V

THE SCHOOL AS IT IS (IN 2013)

Transforming a school is not an easy task for any leader but to transform Little Elementary school's culture would take a special type of leader. This person had to be dedicated and willing to take on such a huge challenge. According to the teachers at Little Elementary School, the district searched high and low for their next principal. They wanted someone who could come in and move the school academically as well as build a culture where both the teachers and students could flourish. District leaders appointed one of their well-known and respected principals in the district to take on this enormous task. The district leaders knew if anybody could make the needed changes at Little Elementary School this particular principal would be the one, according to the teachers.

Mrs. Big was named the new principal of Little Elementary School during the 2010-2011 school year. Mrs. Big was a tall, attractive, slim Caucasian woman with blonde curly hair. When I first met her she greeted me with a pleasant smile and a meek voice. It initially appeared to me that she could be a push over. Her physically demeanor and body language was questionable when I first encountered her. She did not seem very assertive or stern. To my surprise her interview and her actions displayed during the interview painted a much different picture. Mrs. Big was a very confident and knowledgeable leader. She spoke with certainty and clarity about her vision and mission

for the school. It was also evident during the staff interviews that she was well respected

and liked by them.

The district leaders knew that coming to Little Elementary School would be a

huge challenge for Mrs. Big due to her only having experience with the affluent

population in the district. Mrs. Big had three years of experience as a principal. Coming

to a school where free and reduced lunch was the norm, would change how she operated

the school. The students, parents, and staff had to learn to trust and respect her. Mrs. Big

shared her insight about coming to Little Elementary School:

> Before coming to Little Elementary School I was the Principal for three years at
> Free Elementary School. Free Elementary was a very affluent school. Whatever
> the teachers wanted they got. Whatever resources we needed, parents and the
> community provided.
>
> There was some movement within the county during the 2010-2011 school year
> and I was the one that was asked to come here to Little Elementary School. It
> wasn't something I interviewed for or even wanted because I was content at Free
> Elementary. They asked me to come here to help clean up; whatever that meant.

Mrs. Big did not know much about Little Elementary School. She confirmed:

> My knowledge about the school was more hearsay. Some of the people that I
> knew that worked here previously said that the school was good but there were
> lots of discipline issues and low morale. Being named the principal at the
> beginning of August made me a little apprehensive because there was not a lot of
> time for me to plan. To be honest with you, I like change and I like to be
> challenged but only having two weeks to get ready was not a good feeling. Not
> being completely prepared I still took on the challenge. I felt like I was up for it.
> (Personal communication, July 17, 2013)

Not having the time to adequately plan could make anyone feel nervous or anxious.

Obviously, the district leaders had enough faith in her to get the job done because they

moved forward with their decision to name her as the new principal of Little Elementary School.

Going into a Title 1 school that had experienced several changes in leadership and staff members was going to be a challenge. The teacher turnover rate was at an all time high of 14% which was higher than the state and district average. Little Elementary school had over 600 students with a large population of English as a Second Language (ESL) students. The ESL population made up over 60% of the school community which was a drastic change for this school because in previous years it was less than 20%. More than 50% of the teaching staff had less than 10 years of experience.

During the interview Mrs. Big shared a few challenges she knew she would have to face going into Little Elementary School. She shared the following things:

1. Improving staff morale

2. Developing a positive working environment

3. Addressing the communication issues

4. Being more visible

5. Open door policy

She addressed each challenge that was placed before her carefully and thoughtfully. She won the staff over by the approach that she took to address each of these areas.

It was evident that Mrs. Big addressed these areas when she first assumed the role as the principal because the challenges that she spoke of were not apparent during my visits to the school. The staff seemed very upbeat and excited about being at work. When I first entered the school the office staff was very attentive and helpful. The building was

well kept and inviting. While I interviewed the principal the door was kept open and staff

members readily stuck their head in the door to ask a quick question. The staff truly took

advantage of her open door policy. It was also evident during my tour of the building that

the students knew the principal. It was important for them to hug and greet her as she

entered the rooms.

Staff Morale

Morale will determine how people feel when they come to work as well as their

daily interaction within an organization. It was evident that the teachers at Little

Elementary School, prior to Mrs. Big, did not enjoy coming to work. Mrs. Big

confirmed,

> When I got here I felt like there were teachers and assistants who had been
> unhappy for awhile and who had felt like they hadn't been listened to or been
> respected, so when I came, that was what I made sure I did. (Personal
> communication, July 17, 2013)

Although the teachers did not initially tell Mrs. Big that's how they felt, she was able to

read the culture that presently existed in the school. Mrs. Big had that intuitive sense to

know what was going on at the school without even being told.

It was important for Mrs. Big to find out why the staff morale was so low. She

met with every staff member in the building right before school started. Mrs. Big shared,

"I wanted to meet with everybody to see what was really going on here at Little

Elementary" (Personal communication, July 17, 2013). She felt that if she had a general

idea about what was happening she could possibly fix the problems. Her goal was not to

go in and change everything at once but she wanted to at least be aware of the things that needed to be done.

After talking to the staff she realized that one of the things that the teachers wanted was ownership. Mrs. Big stated, "I gave them a lot of ownership on the things that we were doing at the school. I gave them some autonomy and ownership on how the money was going to be spent" (Personal communication, July 17, 2013). Giving the teachers the opportunity to give input was a way for Mrs. Big to start building relationships with the staff at Little Elementary School.

There was a sense of relief when Mrs. Big arrived. The teachers were amazed by how she came into their school and actually made them feel good again about teaching and being a part of the Little Elementary school community. A teacher commented, "There is just a breath of fresh air. There is a feeling that you can do what needs to be done to meet the needs of the children" (Personal communication, June 8, 2013). Mrs. Big also valued the teachers' opinions and treated them like professionals, which made a world of difference to some of the teachers. One teacher shared:

> We are treated like professionals and we are asked our opinions on things. Mrs. Big presents ideas and ask for input. We are included in the development of the new initiatives. She asks what she can do to adjust the new initiative to make it work for our students. We aren't just given things anymore and told this is how it's going to be done. We now feel more valued as professionals. (Personal communication, July 22, 2013)

The teachers at Little Elementary School just wanted to be treated like professionals.

Teachers now felt like they can actually be themselves. A teacher confirmed, "I think we're allowed to express how we feel about things. Even if she doesn't agree she

still will listen" (Personal communication, June 8, 2013). Sometimes just listening can determine if people feel appreciated and valued. Although Mrs. Big did not always agree with the teachers, she still allowed them to have an opinion about the things that were occurring at their school. Being a good listener could have been one of the determining factors as to why the teachers respected Mrs. Big. Listening to the teachers at Little Elementary was half the battle for her.

Teachers and students now knew the expectations of the principal, which helped with the morale according to a teacher. She explained, "I think the morale is better. Behaviors I think for the students are better. The kids are even better because they know her expectations" (Personal communication, July 22, 2013). Mrs. Big was transparent with her students and staff about what she needed and wanted from them.

Teachers were encouraged to be risk takers at Little Elementary School. They were more relaxed about their teaching. They were no longer looking over their shoulders to see who may be coming into their classrooms to criticize them. One teacher shared her take on staff morale now:

> Big smiles are all you see in the building. We are much more relaxed and I don't mean that as far as teaching and saying oh I'll do whatever. We feel very comfortable and supported. It's almost like you don't mind trying new things or trying to change something up just a little bit. Now you do feel supported. Mrs. Big is very vocal about us trying new things. If it does not turn out right the first time it's okay. She just wants us to be willing to try new things. Teachers are more willing to try new things now. We are much more open-minded. You don't feel like she's going to walk in your door and slam you for everything. She's very supportive with emails and encouraging notes about the good things that are happening in the school. (Personal communication, July 22, 2013)

The feeling of support from the new principal was evident at Little Elementary School.

Having the needed support definitely changed how teachers felt about the work they were

doing.

Positive Working Environment

The teachers at Little Elementary School stressed the importance of them going to

a place every day that was positive and productive. The teachers felt that Mrs. Big

brought that positive energy to the school daily. A teacher shared how the environment

has changed:

> I think there is more of a family atmosphere now than it was in the past. There is just more of a feeling of a team. Joy about your job. There is not that negativity hanging over your head. It's no longer you can't do this you can't do that. It's more of what can we do to help you, what do you need. It is more of that kind of feeling. (Personal communication, June 8, 2013)

Another teacher described it as a community and a family. The teacher further explained:

> I think we all work together like a community and like a family now. I go to other teachers in other grade levels and ask for help and advice. I can even now go back to previous teachers of some of my students and they are willing to give me ideas on what to do to help my students. In the past it was not okay to have these conversations with each other. You were truly on an island by yourself. (Personal communication, July 22, 2013)

Mrs. Big also agreed that the school has a family atmosphere:

> I feel like we are more of a family that is very caring and not just for our students but for everybody, regardless if it's someone in the cafeteria, teacher, assistant, or bus driver. They are just caring and loving. The staff looks out for each other. It's a very positive place to come to. (Personal communication, July 17, 2013)

This environment is completely different for the past environment. The teachers shared that having an environment that has a family feeling was a breath of fresh air for the Little Elementary school community.

According to a teacher, Mrs. Big rejuvenated the teachers. This has helped with building that positive environment. She explained further, "She got us back excited about teaching. She put the ball back into the teachers' court by allowing us to make some professional choices for our students" (Personal communication, July 22, 2013). Allowing the teachers to make professional choices for their students was one of the things that the teachers would say did not exist previously. Gaining that professionalism back has given the teacher that boost of energy to keep moving forward.

Mrs. Big organized meetings to be more positive and valued the time of the teachers during the meetings. The meetings are more structured with a purpose. One teacher shared about the meetings being more positive:

> We now start out our meetings with positive shout outs. She wants to know what's going on good in our school lives as well as our personal lives. We had lost that sense of caring for others with our previous principal. (Personal communication, July 22, 2013)

A teacher shared about how Mrs. Big changed the meetings to be more organized with a focus:

> I felt like a lot of the staff meetings and staff development trainings where unproductive meetings. They were just a waste of time because you still left with unclear expectations about what to do. Meetings now have an agenda. You know exactly what you are going to be talking about. We don't have staff meetings any more where you walk away still not knowing what happened. We have 20 minute staff meetings and talk about everything that you were supposed to talk about.

You get the business done and walk away with everything being direct and clear. (Personal communication, June 8, 2013)

Knowing what is expected and valuing the teacher's time at Little Elementary made the environment positive and productive for the teachers. Since Mrs. Big valued the teachers time during meeting they are more willing to put forth the extra effort and long hours to get the job done.

Communication

Communication at Little Elementary was a major issue for some of the staff members. They wanted to know about things that were coming up as well as new initiatives that they were going to have to implement. A teacher shared:

The big thing was communication. There was a major shift in the whole outlook. Everything was different. She effectively communicated what we needed to know in a positive manner rather than a negative one. It is always good to know what is about to happen before it actually happens. Mrs. Big is good about keeping us informed. (Personal communication, June 8, 2013)

The teachers really appreciated how she communicated things for the Central Office that may not have been that positive as well as keeping them informed about the new initiatives that were coming. Mrs. Big stated, "It is my responsibility to be the filter for my school. I share with them only the needed information" (Personal communication, July 22, 2013). Being that filter for the teachers was a must for the staff at Little Elementary School because their previous experience with how information was shared was not a positive one.

There was never a time that the staff was unclear about Mrs. Big's expectations. She made sure that she effectively communicated to the staff what she wanted. One teacher shared:

> At our first staff meeting I remember her giving us this big list of expectations. They were clearly stated. There were some requirements. I would even say the requirements were even more vigorous than they were before. Every year we still get the same list with more accountability being placed on us. We have a page of clear expectations about what she expects to see on the walls and on your bulletin boards. (Personal communication, June 8, 2013)

Mrs. Big also clearly communicated her philosophy. A teacher explained:

> She started the first day out with just explaining her philosophy. She informed us that she was here to help move Little Elementary forward. She told us that we were there to work together as a team so that we could get the best results out of our students. Communicating was one of the areas that was lacking here and she made it her business to effectively communicate with the staff her goals and vision for the school. (Personal communication, June 8, 2013)

Mrs. Big used different forms of communication to reach her staff. Another teacher shared:

> She constantly communicated with us verbally and through email. She wants to make sure that everybody was clear as to what she wants and needs from us. I really appreciate that she puts it in writing because sometimes I forget exactly what she wants us to do. Doing it both ways help reach different learning styles. (Personal communication, June 8, 2013)

Due to Mrs. Big clearly communicating her expectations and her philosophy to the staff when she first arrived, she was able to get them to buy into any changes that were

occurring or needed to occur at the school. The teachers shared that once they

understood her direction they could support her in efforts to move the school forward.

Not only did Mrs. Big communicate with her staff about her expectations, she

encouraged the teachers to communicate with their parents about things that are going on

in their classrooms and in the school. One teacher explained:

> She has even given us expectations about our website. She wants our class
> newsletters on the website each week. This has change this year. In the past the
> newsletters was required but wasn't stated how often. This year she wants the
> newsletter on the website weekly. (Personal communication, June 8, 2013)

Mrs. Big's expectations of communicating with parents via the website have helped the

parents become more aware about things that are happening at the school.

Communication is no longer a major issue at Little Elementary School.

Open Door Policy

According to the teachers at Little Elementary School they never felt like they

could just go to their principal's office to ask a quick question until Mrs. Big arrived. A

teacher stated:

> We needed someone that we could talk to if we had a quick question. We wanted
> someone that had an open door policy. Our prior principal would always be in
> meetings. Her door was always closed. She had no time for us to just pop our
> head in to ask a two-minute question. (Personal communication, June 8, 2013)

The teachers just wanted their principal to be accessible to them if they needed

something. Mrs. Big prided herself on being accessible to her staff:

Being accessible to my staff is one thing that I take great pride in as a Principal. My door in three years has only been closed maybe five times. The only reason why it has been closed was because I had an angry parent one time and the other times were when someone was sharing confidential information with me. Sometimes I must admit not closing the door is a pain when I have to get something done or when I am trying to eat something quickly before going to a meeting. I know how it was when I was a teacher and I needed to ask my principal a quick question but was never able to do so because his door was always closed. Also, I always think the one time that I decide to close the door will be that time that someone really needed me and I closed them out. (Personal communication, July 17, 2013)

The teachers at Little Elementary shared their appreciation of Mrs. Big being so accessible to them. One teacher commented:

I think the teachers feel comfortable coming to her. When she is in her office you can always pop your head in to say hello or ask a quick question. It's kind of weird because I am actually not going to be teaching here next year because I want to try working at a middle school but with no hesitation I feel like I can still walk right back through her doors to get her professional opinion about anything. I've changed schools several times now and this is the first one that I truly feel like I could still come back to and feel welcome. (Personal communication, July 22, 2013)

Having an open door policy had a direct effect on how comfortable teachers felt at Little Elementary School and how willing they are to talk to their principal.

Visibility

The visibility of administration at Little Elementary School was a major area of concern for the staff. A teacher commented, "I think visibility in the building and visibility outside the building is very important for our students and their families" (Personal communication, June 8, 2013). Knowing who the principal is at Little Elementary School was important because the students wanted to know who was in

control at their school. One of Mrs. Big's priorities was to be out and about during the

school day. Mrs. Big confirmed, "I want my students to know who I am. It is important

to build relationships with them therefore I am in their classrooms on a regular basis"

(Personal communication, July 17, 2013). The students seeing their principal in their

classrooms was not the norm therefore Mrs. Big wanted to make it a norm while she is

the principal there. Mrs. Big feels, "Students should never have to guess who the

principal is at their school. It is my responsibility to make my presence known in this

school" (Personal communication, July 17, 2013). Mrs. Big made her presence known.

Being in the classrooms was a way to build relationships with the students and the

staff at Little Elementary School according to Mrs. Big. She shared:

> Being visible and building those relationships with the staff and the students was
> one of the first things I did. This was easy for me because I enjoy being around
> people. I have tried to learn all 600 names of my students. I still don't know all
> of their names but I can at least tell you what grade level they are in and who their
> teacher is this year. I think that it is important to talk to them and learn their
> names so that they know that have a vested interest in them. (Personal
> communication, July 17, 2013)

Mrs. Big took on different duties within the school so that she could be more visible. She

confirmed:

> I do car duty in the afternoons and mornings. I want my staff to know that I will
> do the same work that I ask them to do. It also allows me the opportunity to see
> my parents and carry on conversations with the students. While standing out
> there I have a chance to notice new haircuts or new outfits. The students cherish
> the comments that I make about how nice they look. (Personal Communication,
> July 17, 2013)

Not only did Mrs. Big notice her students but they also noticed her. She continued:

> My first year here a little Kindergartener gave me a picture of me holding the stop sign that I hold every day during car duty. She drew a very detailed picture of me and painted it. I just had to get the picture framed. I never realize until that day how much my students actually recognize the things I do around the school. (Personal Communication, July 17, 2013)

It was evident that Mrs. Big's visibility had an impact on her students.

The teachers at Little Elementary School enjoy Mrs. Big's visibility in the building. A teacher stated, "She comes around, she come by every day. Sometimes she just pops her head in the door to say good morning. She is around much more than the previous principal. We just love seeing her" (Personal communication, June 8, 2013). According to one teacher:

> She's in your room every day. In the first 9 weeks of school, my third year here, she was in my room more that year than the former principal was in the two whole years prior. She comes in our room, she knows our kids, and she know how we teach because she's there and she sees it. Due to her being in my room so much, when it comes time to completing my evaluation she can honestly say that she knows that I do certain things because she is in my room. (Personal communication, July 22, 2013)

According to the teachers, it is a good feeling when the principal comes to their rooms now. Teacher 1 shared, "I don't mind the principal coming to my room now. Her coming to visit is greatly appreciated by me and my students" (Personal communication, June 8, 2013). Teachers at Little Elementary began to welcome the principal into their classrooms with open arms.

Although Mrs. Big had several challenges put before her, she cautiously dealt with each of them diligently and professionally. Each of the challenges had a direct effect on the over arching problem at Little Elementary school which was the staff morale. In the past there was no open door policy therefore the staff felt like they could not go talk to their principal about something on which they needed immediate feedback. Now the teachers feel comfortable going into Mrs. Big's office to ask a question. She welcomes them into her office to ask questions. Mrs. Big is such a great communicator so the staff now feels like they always in the know about what's going on in their building and in the district. There are no surprises about what's coming next. The communication among the staff and the principal is now a two way channel. The visibility of the principal is no longer an issue. Mrs. Big is out and about all day long within the building as well as in the community.

CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS

Transforming Little Elementary School from "the way it was" to "the way it is now" took time and patience. The data were analyzed and several themes emerged that illustrated the cultural shifts. The data also revealed the principal's role in orchestrating the shifts at Little Elementary School.

Cultural Shifts

After a close analysis of the interviews with the staff and the principal, the following cultural shifts were identified as being instrumental in the changes that occurred at Little Elementary School. According to the teachers these cultural shifts have resulted in building a positive school culture that has been productive for both the students and staff.

These cultural shifts included:

1. from a test-focused to a student-focused environment

2. from a culture of isolation to one of involvement and   collaboration

3. from a culture of ambiguity and fear to one of clarity and positivity

4. from Principal invisibility to visibility

The data were triangulated using the School Improvement plan, Teacher Working Condition survey, the school's mission statement, and the qualitative interviews. All of

these documents helped support the findings about the cultural shifts that occurred at

Little Elementary School.

From a Test-focused to a Student-focused Environment

The teachers at Little Elementary felt like prior to Mrs. Big arrival the school was

not focused on students rather on test prep. Test prep was pushed constantly. According

to the staff the former principal only cared about scores. A teacher explained how test

prep took precedence over teaching the students:

> I think we were trained to believe it was all about testing. Kids were not allowed
> to be kids necessarily. It was all about a test score. I don't want to say to make
> the school look good but that's exactly what it was about. That was all we ever
> knew, lived, and believed. It had gotten to the point where we felt like the kids
> were being tested for the sake of being tested. The students became very
> disengaged with their learning. When Mrs. Big came testing was no longer our
> main focus. She strongly encouraged us to look pass the test and focus on
> building our students to be lifelong learners. Initially that was hard for many of
> us but now I think all of us see why testing should not be the only thing that we
> should focus on.

In comparing the North Carolina school report card from the previous principal to the

current principal there was a slight increase in test scores. The Math overall score went

from 85.1% to 87.1%. The Reading overall scores went from 71.4% to 73.5%. Being

student focused rather than test prep focused may have been a contributing factor to the

increase of test scores.

One of the interview questions was about student-teacher interaction at the school.

The common theme that emerged among the staff and the principal was "doing what's

best for all students." One teacher commented, "Students are our main priority around

here." Listening to the teachers' passion about the students that they worked with each

day showed that they were willing to do whatever needed to be done to educate their students. A teacher shared:

> I think the staff believed that all kids could learn just at different rates. We have tried to focus on our students' individual needs. At one point we were all frustrated because we felt like we had to put our kids into a mold and categorize them. We knew that every kid could learn something and grow; we were just frustrated with our inability to do things we knew worked. At one time every decision that was made about our school and our students was based on one individual in county office.

> Mrs. Big was really good about coming in and helping us stay focused on the students and their individual needs. She communicated to us that any decisions that would be made at this school would be based on our students.

The teachers and the principal at Little Elementary School knew in order to improve and be productive they had to work hard and be dedicated to the students. Their focus had to be on how to grow the students academically and personally.

During the interviews it was evident that the principal stressed the importance of the work that needed to be done at Little Elementary in order to reach all of their students' needs. They all realized that this would not be an easy task but several made it clear during the interviews to say that they were willing to take on this challenge. For example, one teacher shared, "As long as it helps improve our school I am willing to help out in any way" (Teacher 1, personal communication, June 8, 2013). Having the commitment and dedication to the students and school was needed to move the school in the right direction.

Not only was the staff faced with how to improve the school and be student focused they were also confronted with appropriately delivering the new Common Core

standards. One teacher shared, "There were some ups and downs with this new curriculum but we were not afraid to tackle these new standards." A few teachers discussed the challenges of learning and teaching the new standards. They understood it was their responsibility to give the students the opportunity to fully understand the standards that were being taught. The staff knew that Mrs. Big wanted them to focus on growing all students academically. Mrs. Big shared that she constantly challenged the teachers to think outside the box to teach and learn the standards. She pushed them to do more for their students and to challenge their own thinking on how to teach the standards. Although this process of learning and teaching the new standards seemed daunting to some of the staff it helped with the continuous fine-tuning of the curriculum and their teaching abilities.

Throughout every interview it was evident that the teachers and the principal valued student learning. They understood the importance of teaching them to be lifelong learners and productive citizens. It was clear that being student focused went beyond academics. Deal and Peterson (2009) suggested in their literature that sometimes the unwritten rules, informal expectations, and rituals may be more meaningful precursors to positive changes. This was apparent because there was not a rule or a policy at Little Elementary School that the staff had to value and love the students but it was evident in the interviews that it was an informal expectation as well as an unwritten rule. There was no way anybody that worked at Little Elementary could not value or love the students under Mrs. Big's leadership. Putting student needs first and creating a caring culture was a precursor to the shifts that occurred.

During the interview I asked the staff to describe the culture of the school in one sentence or one word since Mrs. Big arrived. One teacher stated, "This is a caring group of people who care about each other and the students. We put students first." Another teacher described the school culture in more than one word she contended:

It's hard to explain it in one word or sentence. I think that the school's mission statement kind of sums up the culture of the school. We believe in helping every child grow into their fullest potential and be lifelong learners. I think that sums up our purpose and culture of our school in everything we do. We are not just responsible for educating our students we are also responsible for teaching them how to be good citizens. Teaching them life skills they may not get taught at home. (Teacher 2, Personal communication, June 8, 2013)

The cultural shift that was apparent in all interviews was the shift from adult focused to student focused environment. Although other things happened within that school building, decisions were made in consideration of the impact on students. The teachers at Little Elementary gave a lot of credit to Mrs. Big on helping the staff to use their energy to focus on the students as opposed to factors that were not relevant to the student or their learning.

From a Culture of Isolation to One of Involvement and Collaboration

During the interviews with the staff it was evident that collaboration did not exist until Mrs. Big arrived. One teacher stated, "We never got the opportunity to work together. Everybody worked in isolation." Mrs. Big encouraged collaboration. She wanted the staff to collaborate with each other as well as collaborate with her on things that needed to occur at the school. A teacher contended:

We are treated like professionals and we are asked our opinion on things. Mrs. Big presented ideas and ask for input. We are included in the development of the new initiatives. She asks what she can do to adjust the new initiative to make it work for our students. We aren't just given things anymore and told this is how it's going to be done. We now feel more valued as professionals.

Throughout the cultural shifts at Little Elementary School, Mrs. Big constantly asked for input from the stakeholders by doing multiple surveys. She wanted feedback from the staff, students, and parents. Mrs. Big wanted to know what was working and what was not working. She believed having all stakeholders involved with the improvement of the school was the only way to move the school forward. During the interview she stated, "If I don't have all of my stakeholders involved in the improvement of the school I will never get the result that I need." Getting input from all stakeholders helped with the collaboration efforts that needed to happen at Little Elementary School.

According to Deal and Peterson (2009), "Schools that value collegiality and collaboration offer a better opportunity for social and professional exchange of ideas, the enhancement and spread of effective practices, and widespread professional problem-solving" (p. 12). The teachers felt like collaboration was definitely needed when teaching the Common Core standards. Teacher 5 shared, "Having to learn and teach a new curriculum is hard to do by yourself." Teachers had a hard time teaching and understanding the new standards. Mrs. Big tried problem-solving with them. She encouraged the teachers to share their professional ideas with each other about some of the ways they were teaching the standards. These efforts supported the collaboration that happened at Little Elementary School.

Collaboration and problem-solving among the teachers was constantly encouraged. For example, a teacher stated:

> I really like how Mrs. Big forces us to collaborate and problem solve with each other. I feel that sometimes Mrs. Big already knew the answers to some of our problems but she sat back to see what type of solutions we will come up with as we had discussions. Not just giving us the answer to all of our problems helped us become better problem solvers.

The teachers also felt a sense of community and family now since they were collaborating with their colleagues. Another teacher further explained:

> I think we all work together like a community and like a family now. I go to other teachers in other grade levels and ask for help and advice. I can even now go back to previous teachers of some of my students and they are willing to give me ideas on what to do to help my students. In the past it was not okay to have these conversations with each other. You were truly on an island by yourself.

Collaboration within the school was one of the highlight gathered from the data collection. Teachers enjoyed and shared how they felt like they learned some much from their colleagues. One teacher contended,

> I don't know how we went so long without collaborating. I feel like I could have learned some much from others that have been here and have left. It just makes sense to learn and talk to your peers about how to improve your teaching.

Now collaboration happens without having to force teachers to share their ideas or expertise on different things. It is the norm at Little Elementary School. It was clear from the interviews that the lack of collaboration was no longer acceptable under the leadership of Mrs. Big. The teachers no longer felt alone. Everybody at Little

Elementary School took part in the collaborative efforts that were being encouraged by their leader.

All of the teachers interviewed would agree that collaborating with their colleagues was a much needed endeavor at Little Elementary School. According to the teachers they are now having professional conversations and collaborating with their peers which have also helped with building some personal relationships among the staff. A teacher commented, "I feel like can talk to some of my colleagues about personal things that are going on in my life now because we are all like family." Having the family feel at the school has truly impacted the collaborative spirit that had taken place.

From a Culture of Ambiguity and Fear to One of Clarity and Positivity

Being positive was not an easy task for the staff at Little Elementary. The negativity that existed in this school came from an unhealthy and fearful culture. One teacher explained her thoughts about the past school culture:

> Sadly it was a fearful place. People were truly afraid to hang things in the hallway. I've never seen anything like it. They were afraid of what they laid in front of the students to do because the students were not allowed to touch glue and scissors. I found it appalling. Teachers were guarded. They were very careful in their chosen words. It was almost as if they were teaching as though there were a hidden camera in their room. The word fearful is the best adjective I can use.

Inconsistent expectations and a lack of clarity also contributed to the culture of fear. The teachers felt that contrary to the former administration, Mrs. Big was very transparent about what she expected from the teachers. A teacher confirmed:

> At our first staff meeting I remember Mrs. Big giving us this big list of expectations. They were clearly stated. There were some requirements. I would even say the requirements were even more rigorous than they were before. Every year we still get the same list with more accountability being placed on us.

During the interview the teacher did not seem to be uneasy about more accountability being place on her nor did she comment about other teachers not wanting to comply with all of the new expectations each year. The teachers at Little Elementary just wanted to know what was expected of them daily. Having clear expectations at the beginning helped change some of the negativity that had once existed at Little Elementary which further help improved the culture of the school.

Teachers attribute a shift to a positive culture to Mrs. Big's leadership. For example, the teachers shared that every day she had a smile on her face and only spoke positive about the changes that needed to occur. She was also the buffer for any of the things that came from district office.

Mrs. Big always challenged her teachers to be innovative and creative with their teaching. Teachers were uncomfortable about being creative in their classrooms because it was not acceptable in the past. One teacher contended:

> Mrs. Big would always say think outside the box. Let your students explore their own learning. She would tell us remember you are just the facilitator of their learning therefore guide them to the answer. Of course that did not make me happy because I am an old school teacher that wants to tell the students how to think.

Knowing that Mrs. Big wanted the teachers to be innovative and creative it helped build more risk takers. The teachers were more willing to try new things in their classrooms.

Teachers also shared during the interviews that once Mrs. Big was appointed as the new principal of the school the negativity and fear that had taken over the school had suddenly vanished. They were excited about all of the positive energy that Mrs. Big brought with her. Teacher 1 contended, "There is just a breath of fresh air. There is a feeling that you can do what needs to be done to meet the needs of the children." Several teachers also expressed throughout the interviews how they felt like they could now express their professional opinions. A teacher confirmed, "I think we're allowed to express how we feel about things. Even if she doesn't agree she still will listen." This was a huge shift from the way the school was previously run. The teachers just wanted a listening ear. Mrs. Big brought that level of comfort and positivity to the staff at Little Elementary School.

The teachers at Little Elementary want change so that they could do what was right for their students. They did not want to continue to work in an environment of fear and discomfort. The teachers just needed someone to come in and rekindle their commitment and motivation. According to them they needed someone to get the momentum going again. The teachers always wanted to do what was right for the students but they had lost their commitment and motivation due to the fear and negativity that existed. One teacher explained:

> It was hard coming to work every day. It was more of a job instead of a commitment. The life was sucked out of you. It was extremely regimented. We were being told what to teach and how to teach it. Having to deal with this each and every day can make even the best teacher dislike coming to work.

During the interviews the teachers expressed that being fully committed to the school again took time as well as some encouragement from their leader.

Mrs. Big shared during her interview that she had to find out what motivated the staff to push forward. One thing she did was model her commitment to the students and school. She provided positive feedback, gave staff recognitions, and celebrated the small accomplishments that were happening at Little Elementary School.

Mrs. Big also shared that she prioritized the need to put purpose and meaning back into the work that was being done daily at the school. Deal and Peterson (2009) found that people are motivated and committed when they find meaning, value, and purpose in their work. It was evident during interviews that Mrs. Big helped the staff recommit to their purpose at Little Elementary School. Teacher 8 shared:

> I am going to be honest with you I had lost my commitment and passion for being here. I didn't see the purpose of me being here because I felt like I could not do anything right. When Mrs. Big came she told us her philosophy and her vision for this school. After working with her for a few months she helped me put purpose back in my work.

The teachers wanted purpose in the work being done at Little Elementary School. Mrs. Big was able to help build the level of confidence and commitment with the staff. Her presence changed the fearful and sad environment to a pleasant positive working place.

From Principal Invisibility to Visibility

Principal visibility was a major issue for the students, staff and community members at Little Elementary School. A teacher stated, "I think visibility in the building and visibility outside the building is very important for our students and their families."

During the interviews teachers gave several examples of the lack of visibility of the former principal. Another teacher shared, "My kids thought the janitor was the principal." According to the teachers the janitor had more interactions with the students than the principal. One teacher further confirmed the lack of visibility of the former principal:

> I still remember when the Assistant Principal walked into the classroom—and the Assistant Principal was pretty visible within the building and my students thought that she was the principal. When the principal would actually come in I would have to say that's the principal not the Assistant Principal. It was because the principal was not that visible in the building or classroom. Again, when she did show up a few times it was like she was in there to be critical.

The students in the school did not know who their principal was until Mrs. Big came. A teacher recalled, "Mrs. Big comes by every day. Sometimes she will just wave and keep going. The students love to see her. She is around much more than the previous principals." Several teachers confirmed that there was no relationship between the students and the former principal. One teacher shared:

> I believe that Mrs. Big knows every child's name in the school. She has been in our classroom every day. The students love her and it's just better. They want to go to her to talk. There is more of a connection with the principal then there was before.

The teachers reported that Mrs. Big's visibility impacted their impression of support and student relations. Having those relationships with the students and the staff ultimately helped with transforming the culture within the school.

Principal actions that stimulated cultural shifts. It took some time for Mrs. Big to figure out what to do first when coming to Little Elementary School. During the interview she shared how she capitalized on her own leadership abilities to conquer this enormous task. Mrs. Big first started by recreated the vision and mission for the school. She knew that she would have to start the process first but she understood that she would ultimately need input from all stakeholders. The vision and mission needed to focus on student achievement. Mrs. Big shared, "If all the staff members understand the focus for the school they would all understand the need for change." To make the transition smooth she came up with some team-building strategies that would help with getting all stakeholders involved to get the work done. Relying on her abilities to move the school in the right direction she put in place some cultural shifts that needed to exist at Little Elementary.

Developing a Student-focused Environment

The principal used hands on approach with the students. Table 4 summarizes some of the things she did with her students. She wanted to know what was going on with her students' academically as well as personally. The teachers were impressed about how much the principal actually knew about the students. It was evident in her interview that she took a special interest in her students. "I want my students to know I care so every chance I get I like to sit down and talk to them", Mrs. Big shared. By prioritizing time in her schedule to talk to her students showed that her work is truly about the well-being of the students.

During the interview, Mrs. Big shared her vision for the students. Mrs. Big

explained,

> Every morning and afternoon on the announcements we recite "be respectful,
> responsible, and lifelong learners" as a school. I could stand here in my office
> and hear the Kindergarten to fifth graders reciting it with me. I really want the
> students to know what that means. In the classrooms the teachers are responsible
> for discussing how the students could do those things. I just want my students to
> believe in themselves regardless of the barriers that may be placed before them. It
> is equally important for them to know how to be responsible and respectful to
> others. We all know nowadays not all parents instill those values in their
> children.

The principal also shared that she wanted her students to come to school each day and be

academically challenged by their teachers. Mrs. Big's ultimate goal challenged the

students to go home and share with their families all of the good learning that had taken

place during the day. She stated, "If they can share with somebody what they learned in

school that day then they have actually learned what the teacher has taught."

Table 4

Factors Causing Cultural Shifts—Principal's Focus: Student-focused

Cultural Shift	Factors
Student-focused	• Principal knew the students academically and personally • Principal allocated time for students • Principal wanted students to be academically challenged daily • Principal implemented an incentive program to motivate students • Principal expected instruction to be at a high level so that the students received the best instruction in the state

Mrs. Big motivated and pushed her students each day to do better. She implemented an incentive program for her students called "Radar of the week." This award was used to recognize students for their good behavior. A teacher explained this incentive program:

> It's like a positive behavior type of program. The administration will announce it on the morning announcements. The teachers actually get to choose the student in their classroom that has exhibited positive behavior. The principal or the assistant principal will announce their name on the intercom. The student gets to come and take their picture in the front office with administration. The picture is placed on a bulletin board outside the office door. The students really enjoy this recognition. They feel like hey I'm noticed around school. It's just that little bit of positive motivation and acknowledgement that goes a long way for our students.

The care and concern that Mrs. Big and her staff exhibited showed the students that they actually matter at Little Elementary School.

Mrs. Big also expressed that her students deserved the best instruction in the State of North Carolina. She constantly visited the classrooms. She shared that if she was going to be student focused she needed to know what was going on in every classroom. The teachers valued her visibility and presence in the classroom. One teacher stated:

> She's in your room every day. In the first 9 weeks of school, my third year here, she was in my room more that year than the former principal was in the two whole years prior. She comes in our room, she knows our kids, and she knows how we teach because she's there and she sees it. Due to her being in my room so much, when it comes time to completing my evaluation she can honestly say that she knows that I do certain things because she is in my room.

Mrs. Big made it apparent that she expected instruction to be at a high level. It was evident in her interview that students should be the focus of everything done at Little

Elementary School. She felt it was her responsibility to make sure that the focus stayed

strong.

Developing a Culture of Involvement and Collaboration

During the interview Mrs. Big discussed the culture of the school when she first

arrived. She talked about the lack of collaboration and input from teachers. Table 5

shows some of the intentional actions that she took to promote a culture of collaboration.

She met individually with every staff member in the building to talk about some of the

good and bad things that were happening at Little Elementary School. She needed to

know currently where the school was and where she needed to take them.

Table 5

Factors Causing Cultural Shifts—Principal's Focus: Collaboration

Cultural Shift	Factors
Collaboration	• Principal met with each staff member initially to get input on the things working at the school and the things not working at the school • Principal allow teachers ownership within the school • Principal involved teachers in decision making progress • Principal implemented an incentive program to motivate students • Principal engaged the external community in decision making process • Principal established a guiding coalition for the transformation of the collaborative culture

The lack of collaboration was an area that Mrs. Big said kept coming up during

her discussions with the staff. She understood the importance of building a coalition.

During her interview she commented on how she relied on a group of key staff members. She depended on this group to help with the change efforts. Mrs. Big shared:

> I first surveyed everybody to find out the changes they would like to see. I took all of it into account and then I met with the School Improvement Team over the summer. This team of people seemed to have the most power in the school. As a team we started implementing some of those changes.

According to Kotter (1995) most of the successful coalitions are powerful people within the organization—in terms of titles, information and expertise, reputations and relationships. Mrs. Big was fortunate to already have a team of individual in place that could take on this enormous venture.

Teachers complained about not being able to share their input about things that were taking place at their school. Mrs. Big wanted the teachers to have ownership in some of the decisions being made. Teachers confirmed that Mrs. Big wanted them to collaborate with her. A teacher stated, "We felt empowered because Mrs. Big gave us a voice in the things that were going on at our school. We actually have a voice now."

As I analyzed the data further it was apparent that many of the staff members felt that they played a major role in guiding the coalition. I am not sure if Mrs. Big did that on purpose or if they just felt that way because she intentionally sought them about the needed changes. Kotter's (1995) model suggested that the coalition needs to grow to about 20 to 50 people before much further progress can be made in the other steps (p. 62). Since many of the staff members already felt like they were a part of this step it was not hard to move forward with the changes at Little Elementary School.

Mrs. Big also wanted to engage the external community in her collaboration efforts as well. The parents and community members felt like they did not have a voice in what was going on at the school in the past. Mrs. Big explained, "They were ready for a change. They expressed that to me when I first arrived. They may be the reasons why I was moved here." She invited the external community to be a part of the School Improvement Team and the Parent Teacher Organization. It was important for her to get them involved in the decisions concerning the school. Having them involved opened the lines of communication and built trust among them. The community and parents now trust Mrs. Big to make the right decisions for the school. She took time to get to know them and she was able to find out what they needed.

Mrs. Big accepted the responsibility of creating a vision and mission for the school. She worked with the School Improvement Team on what they believed about the students. Mrs. Big wanted to create a culture that embraced the notion "all students can and will learn at Little Elementary school regardless of their economic status." She wanted to make sure that all stakeholders believed that about the students. Having a vision for Little Elementary School was never an issue for Mrs. Big. Kotter (1995) stated:

> Sometimes the first draft comes mostly from a single individual. It is usually a bit blurry, at least initially. But after the coalition works at it for 3 or 5 or even 12 months, something much better emerges through their tough analytical thinking and a little dreaming. (p. 63)

Mrs. Big started out with what she believed as an educator to initially start the vision but soon after got input from other stakeholders. She explained:

It all goes back to having input from all the stakeholders. Listening to the school improvement team and the grade level teams and allowing them the opportunity to work through the process of developing a vision for the school was important to me. I also got input from the Advisory Council and the PTO to see what we needed to put in our vision for the school. Basically, having ownership from everybody and knowing the main focus for the school is what will help the vision come alive.

It was evident during the interviews with the staff members that they really enjoyed being involved in the development of the school vision. The vision seemed to motivate the staff to take action to move in the right direction to educate their students. The staff shared that having a clear vision now was helpful to them because they knew what direction they were going in as a school. According to the staff the collaborative efforts that had taken place at Little Elementary has ultimately impacted the cultural changes that have occurred. The idea of working in isolation was no longer an option. Mrs. Big looked for opportunities to get staff input on things going on at the school. She created a sense of responsibility and shared-work ethic within the staff.

Developing Clarity and a Positive Environment

Mrs. Big had to gently help move the staff into the direction of positivity. Table 6 displays the actions Mrs. Big took to change the negative environment. During her interview she constantly referred to the words, "role model." She knew that she had to lead by example in order to change the atmosphere at the school. Leading by example was one of the factors that contributed to the shifts in the environment. Mrs. Big shared, "It was unbelievable how stiff the air was around here. People were afraid to even smile at each other." Many teachers agreed that things were negative and uncomfortable for everybody.

The process was slow but Mrs. Big started first by modeling. She would smile and greet everyone in the mornings. She shared that she could not believe how long it took the staff to model this same behavior during the day, "It was like pulling teeth to get people to be friendly to each other." Prior to Mrs. Big the negativity at Little Elementary School definitely took a huge toll on the environment.

Table 6

Factors Causing Cultural Shifts—Principal's Focus: Positivity

Cultural Shift	Factors
Positivity	• Principal modeled the behavior she expected from the staff (lead my example) • Principal put positive messages in the announcements and in emails • Principal implemented a staff "shout out" board • Principal removed all known obstacles and barriers that existed at the school

Kotter's model (1995) recommends having short-term wins along the way. Celebrating these short-term wins helped with making the environment more positive according to the teachers. A teacher shared, "I feel like we celebrate all the time. During the staff meetings Mrs. Big always recognize the good things going on here at the school." Kotter's (1995) model suggest celebrating wins keeps the momentum going when implementing change. Mrs. Big was asked how she has celebrated the small accomplishments that have happened during the change process and this is what she shared:

> Well on Fridays I do the Friday focus and try to focus on something positive. I try to highlight if there is someone that helped out doing something or something that stood out in the classroom. At every staff meeting we start with some type of celebration. These celebrations can be personal or school related. I also send out emails that say I liked what I saw in your classroom or in the hallway. I am always looking for opportunities to celebrate the small things that are happening at the school.

The staff members valued the acknowledgments from the principal of the small accomplishments. One teacher commented, "She encourages us to celebrate whether it is professional or personal. We really like that about her. Knowing that she valued the small things that are happening makes us feel valued." Kotter (1996) found that commitment to produce short-term wins will help keep the urgency level high for change. Keeping the urgency level up was Mrs. Big ultimate goal; therefore she should keep celebrating the small accomplishments that are occurring at the school.

Mrs. Big also implemented a "shout out" board for the staff which has contributed to the change in the environment. This board was used to recognize staff members that have done great things during the month. It could be something as simple as helping someone clean-up a spill in the cafeteria to someone doing something positive impacting the whole school. Each month Mrs. Big took the names off the board and placed them in a drawing for $50.00 gift cards. She stated, "You would be surprised how many people found something positive to say about their co-workers. This one gesture has really changed the whole atmosphere around here." Other things that she did during the transition were to send out positive emails, gave positive feedback on walkthroughs, and value the input from the staff.

Leading by example at Little Elementary School was the route that Mrs. Big decided to take when transforming the culture of the school. During her interview she stated:

> You have got to walk the talk. If I want to see student achievement go up I have to talk about the importance of it as well as monitor it. If I want collaboration to happen I have to allow time during the day for it to happen. If I want the atmosphere to be positive I have to model it and make sure that it happens.

Seeing Mrs. Big model the behaviors that she expected helped the staff follow suit with what they were asked to do. The staff was willing to change the way they had done business at Little Elementary therefore they got on the bandwagon to making the needed changes that would ultimately impact student achievement.

Kotter's (1996) model also deals with removing obstacles or barriers that hinder the change process. When I asked the staff about some of the things that hindered the change process at Little Elementary School they stated money, resources, and trust. Although the staff listed those as barriers for change; Mrs. Big did not feel that there were any obstacles or barriers. She stated, "I think everyone was open and ready for change. I will admit that I always see the good in everything therefore I may have just over looked the obstacles or barriers that could have existed." Even though these barriers or obstacles were not apparent to Mrs. Big the staff felt like she dealt with each of them appropriately therefore it contributed to the further shift of the environment. One teacher explained:

> She would send out a little paper to each staff member that said "When you wish upon a star your dreams come true." If you have a wish list of items you wanted

and she had money that needed to be spent she would purchase it for you. You would come back to your class in the fall and there it was.

It was evident in the interviews with the staff that Mrs. Big did not have a problem removing all barriers that might hinder the process for making change. Kotter (1995) stressed that no organization has the momentum, power, or time to get rid of every obstacles but there is a need to confront and remove the big ones (p. 65). Mrs. Big attempt to remove some of the big ones that the staff felt like was hindering them from making changes.

Developing a Visible Principal Presence

One of Mrs. Big's priorities was to be out and about during the school day. Table 7 shows how Mrs. Big made a conscience effort in developing her presence within the school building. Mrs. Big confirmed, "I want my students to know who I am. It is important to build relationships with them therefore I am in their classrooms on a regular basis." Mrs. Big knew what was going on in every classroom. She visited each classroom daily. She knew which students were failing and passing. There was regular dialog with teachers about student performance based on data; therefore this made her well aware of the instructional practices taken place in the classrooms.

Just having the principal's presence within the classroom was a huge change for the students and staff. Mrs. Big felt, "Students should never have to guess who the principal is at their school. It is my responsibility to make my presence known in this school."

Table 7

Factors Causing Cultural Shifts—Principal's Focus: Visibility

Cultural Shift	Factors
Visibility	• Principal took on various duties within the building • Principal visited classrooms daily • Principal helped change the students and staff's perception of her role in the school building (no longer untouchable)

Building relationships with the students and the staff was imperative in the

cultural shifts that needed to happen. Mrs. Big shared:

> Being visible and building those relationships with the staff and the students was one of the first things I did. This was easy for me because I enjoy being around people. I have tried to learn all 600 names of my students. I still don't know all of their names but I can at least tell you what grade level they are in and who their teacher is this year. I think that it is important to talk to them and learn their names so that they know that have a vested interest in them.

Another way Mrs. Big increased her visibility and improved the school culture was to

become a part of the duty rotation. She confirmed:

> I do car duty in the afternoons and mornings. I want my staff to know that I will do the same work that I ask them to do. It also allows me the opportunity to see my parents and carry on conversations with the students. While standing out there I have a chance to notice new haircuts or new outfits. The students cherish the comments that I make about how nice they look.

Not only does Mrs. Big notice her students, but they also notice her. She continued:

> My first year here a little Kindergartener gave me a picture of me holding the stop sign that I hold every day during car duty. She drew a very detailed picture of me

and painted it. I just had to get the picture framed. I never realize until that day how much my students actually recognize the things I do around the school.

Mrs. Big's visibility during dismissal has impacted her students' perception of her role at their school. The principal was no longer this untouchable person that the students cannot have contact with.

During the interview several teachers shared how much they enjoyed seeing their principal in their rooms. A teacher stated, "She comes around, she come by every day. Sometimes she just pops her head in the door to say good morning. She is around much more than the previous principal. We just love seeing her." Another teacher further confirmed, "I don't mind the principal coming to my room now. Her coming to visit is greatly appreciated by me and my students." Teachers at Little Elementary welcomed the principal into their classrooms with open arms. It took time to develop this type of relationship between the principal, students and the staff but it was a relationship that was needed in order to help move the school forward toward its transformation.

Conclusion

All of the cultural shifts that have taken place at Little Elementary School impacted the school in a significant manner. Having a more student focused environment, according to the teachers, has helped create an atmosphere that has been more conducive to teaching and learning. Collaboration among the staff and community members has built a trusting relationship that has evolved into a partnership that has ultimately benefitted the students. Mrs. Big's positivity and visibility has changed how the students and staff interacted with her as well as the others within the school building.

Each of these cultural shifts contributed to the transformation at Little Elementary

School.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Overview

Although the research and literature on school culture is abundant, there has been limited research done on Title I schools concerning school culture. According to Deal and Peterson (2009), "culture affects all aspects of a school" (p. 12).   This study specifically examined leadership, change, and school culture in a Title 1 school. The results of the data collected from this study could benefit future Title 1 school leaders in their efforts of transforming their school culture.

The ten participants in this study shared their stories and experiences through interviews. The staff in this school described in rich detail the previous school culture, the present school culture, and the change process that occurred during the transformation of this school. Kotter's (1996) change model and Deal and Peterson's (2009) research on school culture was the theoretical framework underpinning this study and the analysis of the data.

Summary of Data

The finding presented in this chapter focused on the primary research question and the three sub-research questions. Due to the richness and detail of the ten interviews, the researcher was able to develop a comprehensive view of the school culture prior to the new principal and again after the three years with the new principal. Due to the

openness and honesty of the staff each of the following sub-research questions were addressed which ultimately answered the primary research question.

The primary research question was:

1. What can we learn about leadership, change, and school culture by studying the turnaround journey of one Title 1 elementary school?

   Sub-research questions were:

   a. How did the post-turnaround school differ from the pre-turnaround school?

   b. What cultural shifts occurred in the school?

   c. What were the factors (action, words, programs, practices, etc.) that contributed to the cultural change?

Each of the research questions are addressed in more detail in the following section.

Research Questions

Results from sub-research question 1: *How did the post-turnaround school differ from the pre-turnaround school?* After a close analysis of the interviews with the teachers and the principal there were several differences identified among the pre and post school culture. One of the differences that emerged from the data was the issue of low staff morale in the pre turnaround school compared to the post turnaround school where the energy and morale was high and positive. During the interviews the teachers gave several encounters about how the low morale impacted the school culture. One teacher shared, "It was hard coming to work every day. It was more of a job instead of a

commitment. The life was sucked out of you." This was one example of how the teachers felt about the pre turnaround school and its impact on the staff morale.

The new principal also discussed during her interview about how unhappy the environment seemed when she first arrived. The principal wanted to change the culture that existed therefore she looked for ways to improve it. For example, the principals treated all staff members with respected and got their opinion about things occurring at the school. She gave them the needed support in areas that they struggled with on a daily basis.

Visibility was another major difference between the pre and post turnaround school. In the pre turnaround school the teachers and the students rarely saw the principal in the building. The principal was disengaged with what was going on in the school. The new principal took a special interest in the students personally and academically. She visited classrooms on a regular basis and took on different duties within the school which increased her visibility in the building. She also went out of her way to acknowledge and complement the students daily.

The data also indicated how the unwelcoming environment in the pre turnaround school impacted the school culture. The teachers shared how the students, staff, and community members felt about how unwelcoming the former principal was and how she was never available to have brief conversations about issues within the school. In the post turnaround school the new principal had an open door policy. She seldom closes her door and wanted the community members to be a part of the school community and the decision making process that was occurring at the school. She encouraged people to stop

by her office to have professional dialogue about issues going on in the school and to give suggestions about how she could help solve things that were happening.

The lack of communication was evident in the pre turnaround school. The former principal would not share with the staff the new initiatives coming from the district office. The teachers also reported that she never effectively communicated with the staff her expectations or her vision for the school. In the post turnaround school the new principal shared her philosophy and vision for the school the first staff meeting of the year that she arrived. The teachers expressed how transparent the new principal was when it came to her expectation of the students and staff. The staff appreciated the communication that now existed in their school.

Results from sub-question 2: *What cultural shifts occurred in the school?* The following four cultural shifts emerged as the staff and the principal shared their stories and experiences: Cultural shift 1—from test focused to a student focused environment; Cultural shift 2—from a culture of isolation to one of involvement and collaboration; Cultural shift 3—from a culture of ambiguity and fear to one of clarity and positivity; Cultural shift 4—from Principal invisibility to visibility. These shifts have helped with building a positive school culture for the students and staff.

Data were examined from the School Improvement plan, Teacher Working Condition survey, School report card, the school's mission statement, and interviews to draw conclusions. Data from these sources were triangulated. It appeared that student learning has been enhanced as a result of these shifts being put in place.

Cultural shift 1—The School Improvement plan and the school's mission statement supports the interview data revealed on being student focused. In the School Improvement plan any funds that have been allocated for school improvement was based on specific resources needed for students. The school's mission statement stresses the importance of helping every child grow to their full potential. During the interviews the principal and the teachers shared that every decision that was made at the school was based on all students. One teacher commented, "Students are our main priority around here." It was obvious that the staff in this study embraced the true meaning of being student focused.

Cultural shift 2—Professional Learning Communities were cited several times throughout the School Improvement plan. These communities allowed time for collaboration among staff members. During the interviews the staff did not referred to anything formal like Professional Learning Communities but they did share about times when they worked together to solve problems or discuss data. According to the Teacher Working Conditions survey the teachers felt like they had time to collaborate with their colleagues. The School Improvement plan and interview data supports the finding of a cultural shift toward collaboration.

Cultural shift 3—It was evident in the interviews that the negativity in the school impacted the daily routines in the building. Since the current principal arrived the environment has been positive and supportive. Teachers felt that they were not supported and were not respected by their previous principal. The Teacher Working Conditions survey supported the data revealed from the interviews. The atmosphere of trust and

mutual respect in the school based on school leadership was low with the previous principal but increased with the current principal in place. The level of support received from the school leadership also improved according to the Teacher working conditions survey. It is clear from this data that teachers were not feeling positive about the culture that once existed but it appears that things have gotten much better over time with new leadership in place.

Cultural shift 4—The need for the principal to be visible in the school building was a cultural shift that all staff members consistently shared in their interviews. The former principal was seldom seen around the building. The current principal made it her mission to be visible as much as possible to the students and staff. It was implied in a few interviews that student behavior was at an all time high in the past due to the lack of visibility of authority. This may be due to the visibility of the current principal.

Results from sub-research question 3: *What were the factors (actions, words, programs, practices, etc.) that contributed to the cultural change?* The cultural shifts that occurred in this study were mainly contributed to the leadership of the new principal. She had a vision for the school therefore she made sure that she put fourth every effort to address all of the areas of concerns from the staff. During the interviews the staff did not acknowledge any specific program or practices used to address the cultural shifts. Each shift was address by the principal's actions and words.

Cultural shift 1—To show that she was student focused the principal made time to get to know the students by sitting down and talking to them regularly. She made sure that all of her students knew the importance of being responsible, respectful, and lifelong

learners. She expected her teachers to install those values in the students. In her morning message she would have the students recite those three words with her and asked the teachers to follow up with examples of what each one meant. The principals also rewarded and pushed her students each day to be the best in everything they did at school. According to the staff the principal motivated the students daily without even knowing that she was doing so.

Cultural shift 2—During the interview with the principal she shared that there was a lack of collaboration among the staff. She was told by the teachers that they were never given the opportunity to give input on things that were happening at the school. The principal wanted more collaboration among the staff therefore she gave them more ownership over the decisions being made. She also implemented Professional Learning Communities at the school so teachers could have professional dialogue with their colleagues about student data and school issues.

Cultural shift 3—The principal modeled daily behaviors and practices she wanted her staff to exhibit. She constantly smiled and spoke to each staff member that she encountered in the building. She implemented a board that recognized the good things the staff members were doing positively around the school. She also sent out weekly positive emails to keep the staff informed about upcoming events as well as to brag about the things that she saw going on in the classrooms.

Cultural shift 4—The cultural shift of visibility was not hard to accomplish for the principal. She just positioned herself in the building where she could be seen regularly. During the day she would visit the classrooms. In the morning and afternoon

she was on car duty greeting all of the students and parents. The principal played a vital role in all of the cultural shifts that occurred in this school which helped with the transformation of this Title I School.

Implications of the Study

Being able to transform a toxic culture to a more productive culture takes not only cultural leadership but it also requires the principal to strategically think about her actions. Hallinger and McCary (1990) shared, "strategic behavior involves skillful planning and management; it implies forethought, an understanding of the interdependence of actions within a social system, and a purpose coordination of resources" (p. 91). Based on this study, it was clear that the principal of this Title 1 schools changed the culture by strategically thinking about and acting on what needed to be done. The four cultural shifts identified in this study were shifts that worked in this particular school setting but may not work in every school setting.

One implication for this study may be for a leader to have a clear understanding of Kotter's (1996) model of change. This model would give a new leader direction on how to get the process started. Although the leader in this study did not utilize Kotter's model she did express that she had a mentor to guide her through this transformation process. Also, this leader had prior experience in the principalship which may have contributed to a lot of the decisions that were made during the cultural shifts.

Implications gained from this study are as follows:

Implication 1: Principals should make sure that decisions are student focused and are in the best interest of all students and not based on test prep or test scores.

Test focused environments are not what 21st century students need. Students need to learn how to be risk takers, collaborate with others, and be able to share their conceptual understanding of the skills being taught. Students that just learn how to take a test will have a hard time being successful in this ever changing world.

Test prep is not aspiring for anyone in education. Teachers go into the field of education to impact student learning and to help students understand the importance of being life-long learners. Test prep only teaches students how to be good test takers and does not provide them with the needed skills to function outside of the school environment. The principal in this study helped the teachers stay focused on what was important at the school, which was students and not test prep.

Implication 2: Principals should encourage collaboration among all stakeholders (students, teachers, and community members) to ensure that every stakeholder has sufficient input in the decisions being made about the school and students. The principals should not work in isolation.

Collaboration is not a new concept in schools today but it has fallen by the waist side in many school communities. It is not something that all leaders value in their schools. Collaborating with all stakeholders in the decision-making process will help build ownership in a school. When stakeholders collaborate appropriately the group benefits from the collaboration. Each member of the group has expertise in different areas therefore getting their input helps with the end result of the ultimate goal. In this study it showed the positive effects collaboration had on this school. The principal encouraged collaboration among the staff and the community. She understood that the

importance of getting all stakeholders involved therefore everybody felt valued and supported in their role in the school.

Implication 3: Principals should develop an environment that will provide and produce positive energy within the school culture instead of ambiguity and fear.

Working out of fear does not always provide the best results. Not knowing if you are going to be chastised for the things you do can make anybody feel uneasy. An environment that does not promote risk takers can develop unmotivated individuals. If people are unmotivated about the work they are doing it tends to play a part in the negative energy that takes place in the school building.

To help develop the positive energy within the school environment principals need to model the type of behaviors and practices that they want their staff to exhibit. For example, if the principal expects the teachers to greet and smile at the students when they enter the classrooms the principal should also be in a central location in the school greeting the students with a smile every morning as well. The principal should also look for ways to display the positive things that are going on at the school. Using emails, acknowledgement boards, or announcements to share all of the good things going on are a few of the ways the principal could help establish a positive environment.

Implication 4: Principals should be visible and accessible to students, staff, and community members on a daily basis and not hidden within the school building.

When principals are visible and accessible to the school community it shows that they care about the people and the work of the school. Being accessible is important. It builds a sense of relationship among the students, staff, and community members.

To be visible in the building the principal should visit classrooms daily. They can learn a lot about what's going on in the school building by having informal conversations and doing walkthroughs. Being in the classrooms for example may help with appropriately rating teachers on the evaluation instrument. Sometimes there are areas on the evaluation instrument they may not be observed during an observation but can be seen during a walkthrough. Another way to be visible in the building is taking on extra duties. Doing morning duties and afternoon duties allows immediate access to the principal during the day. The principal being visible in this study impacted the relationships with the students, staff, and community members.

In order to make sure that all of these implications are put in place there is a need for a strong committed leader. The leader has to have a vision about where the school will go and a plan of action that will be taken in order to get the best results for the school. From this study new leaders will be able to understand how the principal in this Title I School helped guide her staff in making these cultural shifts that has ultimately had an impacted on student learning.

Recommendation for Future Research

After reviewing the current literature and considering the data retrieved from this study I would like to see further research conducted on this particular school. It would be interesting to see if the collaborative efforts among the current principal and the next principal would have a direct impact on moving the school forward and maintaining a positive school culture. Collaborating about where they school was, where the school is now, and the next steps to keep the momentum going could be useful to this district when

they bring a new leaders into this Title I School. A second area for future research on this particular school would be the impact of teacher leaders on the continuous growth of the positive school culture. The principal in this study seems to believe that the teacher leaders could help with the continuous growth but it would be interesting to see if another leader could come in and align their vision with what's already happening at the school to keep the positive school culture moving forward.

Research could be done on new principals with no experience and their impact on school culture. It was proven in this study that the principal that changed the culture within this Title I School had previous experience as a principal in a traditional school setting but no experience in a Title I school setting. It would be interesting to see if having some previous experience impacted the decisions that were made about changing the culture in this Title I School.

There is need for a study to compare schools that are student focused with schools that are test prep focused. Using various indictors from research done on school success could show which school setting has more impact on student learning. The data collected from this particular study did not give conclusive evidence on whether being student focused versus test prep focused contributed to the shifts apparent in the study; however the North Carolina school report showed a slight increase on the test scores when the school focused more on the students rather than the test. Comparing the various indictors will help school leaders and district leaders determine which method is best to use when educating the whole child.

A study on schools where there is extensive collaboration is a recommendation for further research. It would help identify the benefits and drawbacks of collaboration in a school setting. The pros and cons of collaboration would be evident. Although collaboration is a much needed effort in schools, leaders have to take into consideration how the collaboration has impacted student learning and instruction as well as the time committed needed. In this study the teachers felt like collaboration changed their instruction and the professional relationships within the school but this study did not solely focus on the pros and cons of the collaboration therefore further research is needed.

Another area for further research is to study whether teachers perform better in a positive school culture or a culture of fear. Knowing what motivates teachers to work hard and get the job done would be interesting to find out. A study focused on this would be beneficial district leaders when they place principals in different schools settings.

A final recommendation for further research would be to study how principals that are highly visible in the school are able to fulfill the other managerial responsibilities. The principal in this study did not share how she fulfills her other daily responsibilities. Having a better understanding of how principals are able to maintain their visibility and complete other managerial responsibilities would be helpful to any school leader.

The intended contribution of this study was to add to the limited body of research done on leadership, change, and school culture in Title 1 schools. This study showed in detail how one principal guided the culture shifts that took place at her school. Hopefully

this study will help guide new leaders in the right direction to lead change within their Title I schools. Developing a school environment where all students can and will succeed should be the ultimate goal of all 21st century school leaders.

Personal Reflection

This study has impacted my own leadership practices within my school. It helped me understand that change does not happen overnight. It took the principal in this study at least 3 years to fully implement the shifts that were apparent in her school. This is my third year as the principal in my school and I see things that she has done that I still need to work on as a leader. Although I feel like I communicate my expectations to my staff, it is apparent that some of them are still clueless about my expectations about daily instruction. This year has been moving at an extremely fast pace, due to a new Superintendent, but it has helped me become a better instructional leader which has ultimately change the culture of instruction and best teaching practices at my school. Next year, I will start the school year with a clearer vision for the school so that I can make sure that all decisions made at my school are truly in the best interest of the students. Letting the staff know exactly where we are going and how we are going to get there will be my main focus at my opening staff meeting. Giving people a road map of where they are going will ultimately determine their final destination. It is my goal for all staff members to end up at the same destination at the end of our trip.

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