Leadership Practices of Successful Elementary Turnaround Principals

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**Abstract**

Educational leaders have shared concerns of the shortage of qualified candidates applying for principal openings, particularly at challenging schools, such as turnaround schools (Gurley, Anast-May, & Lee, 2015; Kutash et al., 2010). The challenge of turning around a failing school makes it essential to study when and how successful turnaround principals adapt their leadership practices in their unique contexts. Kouzes and Posner (2017) studied leaders at all levels from a variety of organizations. Their research identified five common leadership practices. Good leaders model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

The purpose of this study was to compare Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices with what successful elementary school turnaround principals described as performing at their personal best. This research was conducted at a Mid-Atlantic school district, Riverdale Public Schools (pseudonym). Seven successful elementary school turnaround principals were interviewed. The leadership practices of these principals were compared to Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices to determine where their leadership practices were consistent with what turnaround principals described as their personal best experiences. The information gained will contribute to the knowledge base of prioritizing essential leadership actions for turnaround leadership.

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**General Audience Abstract**

Being an elementary school principal is challenging work. Leaders have shared concerns of the shortage of qualified principals applying for schools that failed to meet state or national academic benchmarks (Gurley, Anast-May, & Lee, 2015; Kutash et al., 2010). The challenge of improving a failing school makes it important to study when and how successful principals lead in these situations. Kouzes and Posner (2017) studied leaders at all levels from a variety of organizations. Their research identified five common leadership practices. Good leaders model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

This study compared Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices with what successful elementary school principals described as performing at their personal best. This research was conducted at a Mid-Atlantic school district, Riverdale Public Schools (pseudonym). Seven elementary school principals who were hired to lead a failing school were interviewed. The leadership practices of these principals were compared to Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices to determine where their leadership practices were consistent. The information gained from this research study will contribute to the knowledge base of prioritizing essential leadership actions for failing schools.

## Dedication

Principal leadership matters especially in a school required to make substantial academic improvement.  Fullan (2017) said that the best contribution a leader could make to an organization was to build the individual and collective capacity in others.  I dedicate my research study to turnaround principals like Anthony, Ella, Francesca, Jakob, Zac, John, and Vivienne. Their inspirational stories provide learning opportunities for others who are appointed to lead failing schools.

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**Chapter 1**

**Study Background**

During the 1980s, policymakers were interested in measuring the principal's impact on student achievement (Bloom & Owens, 2011; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1994). Since the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was enacted in 2002, school districts identified low-performing schools that did not meet student achievement growth measures, or Adequate Yearly Progress. Failing to meet annual targets established by NCLB resulted in corrective action such as replacing the school's leadership and teachers, restructuring the instructional program, closing the school and reassigning students to higher achieving schools, or transferring governance to an approved outside provider. When President Barack Obama designated $5 billion in Race to the Top funding to improve the nation's lowest-performing schools in 2009, the focus on the principal's leadership gained even more prominence (Kutash, Nico, Gorin, Rahmatullah, & Tallant, 2010; Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010).

School reform policy has focused on the principal's impact on student achievement because his/her leadership influences teaching and learning, and therefore, student achievement (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Marks & Printy, 2003). Scholars generally agree that the principal indirectly impacts student achievement (Dolan, 2009; Hallinger, 2003; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1994; Kaplan, Owings, & Nunnery, 2005; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Vanderhaar, Muñoz, & Rodosky, 2006). Therefore, the leadership of the principal is one of the most important factors influencing the success of the school.

An effective principal's leadership behaviors vary depending on the conditions at the school. Effective leaders respond to the changing needs of their context (Hallinger, 2003).

School contextual factors, such as a school's percentage of economically disadvantaged students or a school's percentage of students with a disability, also impact student achievement. A principal must understand the contextual factors at his/her school because these circumstances will influence what leadership style is most effective for his/her school (Leithwood et al., 2010; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985).

NCLB magnified the focus on improving student achievement in the lowest-performing schools that often serve students in challenging situations (Leithwood et al., 2010). Turning around a failing school called for immediate action, often in a short period of time. If schools failed to meet annual targets under NCLB, they faced a series of progressively serious sanctions including the removal of the principal, replacement of the staff, or school closure. In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replaced NCLB.

Both NCLB and ESSA prescribed corrective actions for underperforming schools. These corrective actions may include removing the principal, taking over the school, or converting the school to a charter school. However, ESSA gives greater flexibility to states to develop comprehensive school accountability plans to receive federal funding. The ESSA mandates that each state will identify the worst-performing schools and create a corrective action plan (ESSA, 2015). Given the influence of the principal on student outcomes, turning around a low-performing school cannot happen without good leadership. Leithwood, Harris, and Strauss (2010) suggested that turnaround schools are unique contexts to examine the leadership practices of turnaround principals.

**Statement of the Problem**

Educational leaders have shared concerns of the shortage of qualified candidates applying for principal openings, particularly at challenging schools, such as turnaround schools (Gurley,

Anast-May, & Lee, 2015; Kutash et al., 2010).  Increased accountability, complexity, and demands of the principalship contributed to this shortage of high-quality principals who were prepared to lead challenging schools, so many advocated that school districts needed to proactively plan for principal vacancies by creating a pipeline (Kutash et al., 2010).  Finding qualified leaders was further magnified in the Donnell-Key Foundation's survey of Colorado superintendents who identified recruitment, mentoring, and retention challenges of qualified turnaround principals (Dolan, 2009).

The shortage of qualified principals combined with the challenge of turning around a failing school makes it essential to study when and how successful turnaround principals adapt their leadership practices in their unique contexts.  Knowledge of these factors can assist district administrators in selecting the most promising candidates for the principalship at turnaround schools.  Furthermore, this insight can inform district administrators of how best to support current turnaround principals and develop principal pipelines.

**Purpose of the Study**

Effective school leaders share leadership practices despite their school's context.  Kouzes and Posner (2017) studied leaders at all levels from a variety of organizations. They gave the leaders an opportunity to describe their personal best experience and interviewed a broad range of people regarding extraordinary leadership experiences.  Their research identified five common leadership practices.  Good leaders model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

The purpose of this study was to compare Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices with what successful elementary school turnaround principals described as performing at their personal best.  The information gained will contribute to the knowledge base of prioritizing

essential leadership actions for turnaround leadership. This research was conducted at a Mid-Atlantic school district and aimed to study the leadership practices of seven elementary school principals who successfully led a turnaround school to meeting accreditation benchmarks. To ensure confidentiality, the school district is referred to as Riverdale Public Schools (RPS) throughout this research. The leadership practices of these principals were compared to Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices to determine where their leadership practices were consistent with what turnaround principals described as their personal best experiences. I hoped to determine the extent that the universal practices described by Kouzes and Posner (2017) applied in the specific context of turnaround schools.

**Research Questions**

In this study, I analyzed how successful school leaders viewed their leadership practices by asking Kouzes and Posner's (2017) enduring question, "What did you do when you were at your personal best as a leader?" The overall research question for this study was "What are the leadership practices of elementary school principals who have successfully led a school turnaround?" A secondary question was "To what extent do these leadership practices correspond to Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices?"

**Definitions**

Specific terms are used throughout this research and are related to the study's scope.

*Contingent, or contingency leadership*: a leadership style in which the leader adjusts his or her behavior(s) to address the needs of a school's unique context. Contingent leaders are skilled at problem solving to achieve the school's goals and increase the school's capacity to respond to demands for change (Hallinger, 2003).

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*Instructional leadership*: a leadership style that prioritizes teaching and learning to enhance the effectiveness of teachers' classroom practices. Instructional leaders rely on their expert knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy to increase student achievement.

*Intensive school*: a designation for a turnaround school in RPS whose principal has been replaced with an experienced leader. Additionally, the school receives fiscal, human capital, and professional development supports from RPS.

*Leadership practice*: a principal's specific behavior or action toward an individual or the organization. Examples of leadership practices are model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

*Leadership style*: a pattern of the principal's practices or behaviors (Kowalski, 2010). A principal's leadership style relates to his/her influence on individuals or the organization (Hallinger, 2003). Examples of leadership styles are transactional, transformational, instructional, or contingency leadership.

*Personal best*: an experience that an individual believes he/she is performing at a high level (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

*School context*: source of constraints, resources, and opportunities that the principal must understand in his/her setting to lead (Hallinger, 2003).

*Targeted school*: a designation for a formerly intensive school that receives some fiscal, human capital, and professional development support from RPS. The school has successfully met accreditation benchmarks for two consecutive years.

*Transactional leadership*: a leadership style that focuses on maintaining routines and managing existing relationships within the organization.  Transactional leaders value efficiency and productivity to achieve the school's goals (Hallinger, 2003; Silins, 1994).

*Transformational leadership*: a leadership style that focuses on the organization's capacity to innovate (Hallinger, 2003).  Transformational leaders develop the capacity of others to increase the school's capacity to continuously improve (Hallinger, 2003).

*Turnaround school*: a school that has not met full accreditation in a Mid-Atlantic state.

*Universal school*: a designation for a formerly targeted school that may receive some fiscal support from RPS.  The school has successfully met accreditation for four or more consecutive years.

## Limitations and Delimitations

**Limitations**. This study was limited using a single, albeit large school district in the Mid-Atlantic region.  This study contributed to the knowledge base of prioritizing essential leadership actions for turnaround leadership.  Testing turnaround leadership practices against Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices was both a strength and weakness, especially since Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices are still relevant after 30 years.  A limitation of this study may be that while it focused on elementary school principals serving in turnaround schools, it was also possible that the findings from turnaround principals may be no different than if the study focused on principals, in general.

**Delimitations**. While there are examples of school principals who have been successful in turning around a school during periods of not meeting accreditation, this study was restricted to seven RPS-designated intensive schools and whose principal was appointed after the removal

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of the previous principal.  Four of the principals in this study served in their turnaround school fewer than three years, two served fewer than four years, and only one served in his turnaround school for five years.  Furthermore, successful turnaround experiences may be found at the elementary, middle, or high school levels.  This study was restricted to successful elementary turnaround principals.

**Summary**

Increased school accountability measures magnified the principal's prominence of having an impact on student achievement.  For low-performing schools, these accountability measures resulted in corrective action to improve the school's overall academic performance.  Kouzes and Posner (2017) suggested that certain leadership practices were universal despite school context. The purpose of this study was to compare Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices with what elementary school turnaround principals described as performing at their personal best. The information gained from this study will contribute to the knowledge base of essential leadership actions for turnaround leadership.

**Chapter 2**

**Literature Review**

This literature review discusses the topic of school leadership and how the principal's leadership style impacts student achievement. It is organized into six sections: leadership perspectives, types of leadership styles, school context, the principal's impact on student achievement, Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices, and a summary. The first section is a brief history of evolving leadership perspectives, the American school curriculum, and the growing complexity of the principal's responsibilities. The second section summarizes transactional, transformational, instructional, and contingency as styles of principal leadership. The third section highlights the importance of the school's context in understanding the principal's style of leadership. The fourth section examines the principal's impact on student achievement. The fifth section reviews Kouzes and Posner's five practices of exemplary leadership. The final section summarizes the literature review.

**Evolving Leadership Perspectives, the School Curriculum, and the Growing Complexity of the Principal's Role**

This section presents a brief chronology of how social and political actions influenced American leadership perspectives. The national context greatly shaped the American school curriculum. Kliebard's (1986) historical perspective of the American school curriculum serves as the fundamental source for this section of the literature review for identifying what was taught in schools. The national context and the school curriculum provide a glimpse of the growing complexity of the principal's role. This section is organized into four topics. First, I provide a summary of Kliebard's interest groups that influenced the American school curriculum. Second, I discuss the influence of scientific management and social efficiency on curriculum and

leadership.  Third, I explain the resurgence of humanism and its influence on leadership after World War II.  Lastly, I describe leadership in the late twentieth century to present.

**Overview of Kliebard's Interest Groups.** Kliebard's (1986) *The Struggle for the American Curriculum: 1893-1958* identified four interest groups (humanists, developmentalists, social efficiency educators, and social meliorists) that competed for control of the school curriculum.  Table 1 defines each group's key characteristics.  Kliebard (2002) noted that the emergence of a particular interest group's ideology did not necessarily displace another group's ideology.  Rather, he described ideologies as resurfacing based on prevailing social and political conditions (Kliebard, 2002).

Table 1

*Key Characteristics of Kliebard's Interest Groups*

| *Interest Group* | *Key Characteristics* |
|---|---|
| Social efficiency educators | • Wanted schools to serve the needs of the economy<br>• Saw the primary role of schools as preparing students for the workforce<br>• Believed that the school curriculum should be focused only on topics that would assure efficiency in society |
| Humanists | • Believed that the school curriculum should be organized around academic subjects like literature, history, foreign languages, math, and science |
| Social meliorists | • Believed that the school curriculum should bring about social improvement and change |
| Developmentalists | • Believed that the school curriculum should be organized around the psychological development and needs of the learner. |

*Note.* (Kliebard, 1986)

Kliebard (1986) also noted that each group had distinct times of importance. Humanism was prominent in the nineteenth century, social efficiency in the first two decades of the twentieth century, developmentalism in the 1920s, social meliorism in the 1930s, and the resurgence of humanism in the 1950s. Because a secure and vibrant economy was always important in the national landscape, Kliebard (1986) further asserted that social efficiency educators never lost importance even as other interest groups rose to prominence.

**Scientific Management and Social Efficiency.** Hoerr (2005) traced management practices through time to show how perspectives evolved in organizations. Entity theory, the idea that an organization's success was dependent on its leader, dominated most of the twentieth century (Kaplan & Owings, 2017). Business and industry provided leadership models with clear, hierarchical lines of authority and established organizational structures. Leaders made decisions for work output with little input from workers. Frederick Taylor's scientific management approach and Henry Ford's assembly line were management practices that increased organizational efficiency and fairness among workers and leaders (Hoerr, 2005; Kaplan & Owings, 2017). Taylor prescribed the angle that a shovel should go into the ground to ensure that the worker was as efficient as possible (Hoerr, 2005), while Ford's assembly line allowed workers with little formal education or training to perform the same function hour after hour (Hoerr, 2005). Leaders desired efficiency and predictability from their workers (Kaplan & Owings, 2017).

Efficiency and predictability were also trademarks of schools in the twentieth century. During the social efficiency movement, schools were mechanisms for future adult-life roles and occupations (Kliebard, 1986). The school curriculum focused on programs of study that would prepare individuals to positively contribute to society. To learn anything beyond what was

needed to successfully perform a role was deemed wasteful (Kliebard, 1986). Leaders of the social efficiency movement noted the high rate of school dropouts and the frustration that many children expressed about schools (Kliebard, 1986).

Schools operated like industries with principals functioning as school managers (Kowalski, 2010). According to Tienken and Orlich (2013), school officials were more concerned with maximizing efficiency by eliminating inefficiencies out of the system. For example, after William Wirt became superintendent in Gary, Indiana in 1908, he proposed that classrooms should not be empty during the school day because it was a sign of waste (Tienken & Orlich, 2013). Furthermore, Wirt proposed that academic subjects be departmentalized for efficiency. This organizational structure became known as the Gary Plan and resulted in platoon schools, aptly named for the hyper focus on educating the most students within the shortest number of hours. Principals led the daily operations of the school, allocated and managed resources, and monitored and evaluated employees (Kaplan & Owings, 2017, Kowalski, 2010). Hoerr (2005) cited curriculum materials that were so scripted that any teacher could be successful with it. By the late 1960s, school leaders suggested that if teachers followed Madeline Hunter's instructional model, success would follow (Hoerr, 2005). Like Ford's assembly line that produced efficient and consistent results, schools were predictable and constant.

**Post-World War II and the Resurgence of Humanism.** A shift from the scientific management approach followed World War II. Deming emphasized quality control and measurement to help Japan restore its manufacturing base (Hoerr, 2005; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Deming's Total Quality Management (TQM) encouraged employers to seek input from their workers. Leaders realized that workers performed better if they felt good about

their jobs (Hoerr, 2005).  Although TQM was created for the business world, it influenced leadership practices in education (Marzano et al., 2005).  School leaders followed the tenets of TQM by focusing on the needs of staff and students, engaging in cycles of continuous improvement, and creating effective systems to maximize employee's performance (Peck & Reitzug, 2012).

Social efficiency continued post-war as Americans yearned for normalcy (Kliebard, 2002).  The scientific curriculum gave way to the life adjustment curriculum whose basis was to help Americans adapt to what life had in store for them (Kliebard, 2002).  The life adjustment curriculum was a hybrid of the social efficiency, social meliorism, and developmentalism curricula (Kliebard, 1986).  A major feature of life adjustment education was its emphasis on the indefinite expansion of the scope of the curriculum (Kliebard, 1986).  When national conflict re-emerged with the Cold War in 1947, life adjustment education gave way to humanism.  The prevailing thought was that the curriculum needed to include tough academics and strenuous mental activity, especially in math and technology (Kliebard, 2002).

**Late Twentieth Century to Present.** The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries marked another shift from the leader listening and seeking input to the leader learning with and from colleagues (Hoerr, 2005, Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999).  Fullan (2001) suggested that leadership in both business and in education followed similar patterns.  Schools were discovering that new ideas and collaboration were essential to solving learning problems (Fullan, 2001).  Collectivist theory, or leadership and management through collaboration and teamwork, dominate the current Knowledge Era (Kaplan & Owings, 2017).  Schools were viewed as learning organizations, collegiality was valued among staff, and principals were responsible for creating conditions that fostered growth (Hoerr, 2005).

The publication of the 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk*, highlighted significant concerns about the poor academic performance of students in the U.S. education system. The report marked the start of the standards movement and greater public scrutiny in school academic performance (Bernstein & Shierholz, 2014; Bloom & Owens, 2011; Klar & Brewer, 2013; Sanzo, Sherman, & Clayton, 2011). Bloom and Owens (2011) suggested that the standards movement resulted in increased accountability of the principal and school staff. Another landmark event that involved the nation's governors and influenced the school accountability movement was President George H. W. Bush's National Education Summit in 1989. The summit advanced three key accountability measures for principals and schools: (1) achievement goals that emphasized academic competency at all grade levels; (2) a requirement that schools create an improvement plan; and, (3) a mandate that standardized testing be used to measure student performance (Bloom & Owens, 2011).

School accountability was further defined with the passage of the NCLB Act in 2002. NCLB was a reauthorization of the 1965 civil rights law, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The ESEA and its subsequent reauthorizations provided federal funding to state educational agencies to improve the quality of elementary and secondary education (ESSA, 2017). NCLB focused on stronger federal accountability measures by requiring public schools to administer statewide standardized assessments annually (Kutash et al., 2010). Furthermore, this federal mandate brought attention to achievement gaps and rewards and sanctions for teachers and schools (Sanzo et al., 2011). The principal was vital in ensuring that his or her school continually met the federal Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) benchmarks, as well as the state's accreditation standards (Sanzo et al., 2011). Schools were accountable for student achievement on state assessments, regardless of the populations they served.

NCLB renewed the notion that principals influenced student achievement (Siegrist, Weeks, Pate, & Monetti, 2009). The community's interest in schools translated to holding the principal accountable for student achievement. The principal's job shifted from simply managing the daily operations of the school to a focus on making decisions about what needed to be done to improve schools (Kowalski, 2010). Principals needed to work collaboratively to build a shared vision and inspire stakeholders to work toward achieving the vision. Fullan (2014) said that in addition to instructional leadership, principals were expected to "run a smooth school; manage health, safety, and the building; innovate without upsetting anyone; connect with students and teachers; be responsive to parents and the community; answer to their districts; and above all, deliver results" (p. 6). These growing expectations added to the complexity of the principal's leadership responsibilities.

In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replaced NCLB. The ESSA provides states with greater flexibility to develop rigorous and comprehensive accountability plans. As a condition of receiving federal funding, ESSA holds states accountable for developing a plan that addresses student academic achievement in the lowest-performing schools, where student subgroups are not making progress, and where graduation rates remain low over time (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Further, ESSA acknowledges the importance of principal leadership to school improvement and student achievement and provides funds to promote effective school leadership (Young, Winn, & Ready, 2017).

**Types of Leadership**

A principal was influential to the successful functioning of a school and the quality of school performance was linked to the principal's style of leadership (Nir & Hameiri, 2014). Interest in the principal's behaviors and practices grew due to the school restructuring and

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accountability movement during the 1990s (Hallinger 2003).  Leithwood and Jantzi (2000)

suggested that principals demonstrated certain styles of leadership such as transactional,

transformation, instructional, and contingency depending on context.  This section of the

literature review summarizes each of the four leadership styles separately, followed by a

summary.

**Transactional leadership.** Burns (1978) defined transactional leadership as an exchange

of one thing for another.  Following the twentieth century business management practices that

viewed the principal as a school manager, transactional principals were focused on efficiency

and productivity, management of existing relationships, a stable environment, and maintenance

of routines (Hallinger, 2003; Silins, 1994).  Although transactional leaders recognized what

followers needed and wanted, principals typically carried the burden alone and reduced the

voices of stakeholders in school-wide decision making (Leithwood & Day, 2007; Hallinger,

2003).  According to Leithwood and Day (2007), a transactional principal was likely to closely

supervise teachers, prescribe a school-wide model of instruction, and monitor how time was used

in the classroom.

A principal with a transactional leadership style was interested in maintaining the status

quo (Nir & Hameiri, 2014; Silins, 1994).  However, a tension existed in schools where the

principal maintained the status quo but the school had not met student achievement benchmarks.

Fullan (2014) opined that a different style of leadership, a transformational leader who motivated

teachers to new levels of energy and commitment, would create the change needed for

turnaround schools.

**Transformational leadership.** Burns (1978) defined transformational leadership as

leadership focused on change.  While Burns saw transactional and transformational leadership as

distinct styles at opposite ends of a continuum, he believed that transformational leadership was more powerful because a transformational leader engaged with others for mutual benefit. Leithwood and his colleagues viewed transformational leadership as a productive leadership style in school restructuring efforts (Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Leithwood et al., 1999). Transformational leaders were focused on change, fostered high levels of motivation and commitment, and developed the capacity of others (Fullan, 2014; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Marzano et al., 2005). These actions resulted in extra effort and greater productivity. Followers were inspired by a shared vision and challenged to be innovative problem solvers (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Silins (1994) suggested that a bond was forged between the leader and followers within the collaborative change process.

Leithwood (1994) provided an early concept of transformational leadership. Transformational leadership was an appropriate style to address the restructuring challenges facing schools. Restructuring schools required first- and second-order changes. While first-order changes were those improvements and adjustments that occurred as the system grew and developed, "attention to second-order change is [was] essential to the survival of first-order change[s]" (Leithwood, 1994, p. 501). Second-order change involved a commitment and motivation from those within the organization to improve the school without specific direction from the principal (Hallinger, 2003). Leithwood (1994) identified "six leadership dimensions (building school vision and goals, providing intellectual stimulation, offering individualized support, symbolizing professional practices and values, demonstrating high performance expectations, and developing structures to foster participation in school decisions) and two management dimensions (contingent reward and management by exception)" (p. 507). The management dimensions were largely transactional actions; however, Leithwood and his

colleagues recognized that some transactional actions were necessary to ensure the organization's stability (Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999). This contrasted with Burns (1978), who said that transactional and transformational leadership were distinct leadership styles on opposite ends of the continuum.

Researchers suggested that the concept of transformational leadership evolved over time based on the context of the school organization (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Marzano et al., 2005). Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) adapted Leithwood's (1994) earlier concept of transformational leadership by maintaining the six leadership dimensions and identifying four new management dimensions. The four management dimensions were staffing, instructional support, monitoring school activities, and community focus. Bass and Riggio's (2006) Full Range of Leadership Model also included both transformational and transactional leadership components. The transformational components were idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The transactional components were contingent reward, management by exception, and laissez-faire leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006). What remained constant in subsequent concepts of transformational leadership was the interdependency of dimensions or components.

Nearly a decade after Leithwood's conceptualization of transformational leadership, Hallinger (2003) stated that this leadership style focused on the organization's capacity to innovate. A transformational leadership style produced changes in people (Hallinger, 2003). Hallinger adapted Leithwood's transformational model (Figure 1) to include eight components: individualized support, shared goals, vision, intellectual stimulation, culture building, rewards, high expectations, and modeling.

*Figure 1.* Adaptation of Leithwood's Transformational Leadership Model (Hallinger, 2003)

Hallinger (2003) noted two distinctions of Leithwood's transformational leadership concept.  First, unlike the instructional or transactional models that suggested that leadership came from the principal (top-down), the transformational model suggested that leadership may come from teachers as well as the principal (bottom-up).  Second, the model was grounded in the needs of individuals (second-order change), rather than the transactional idea of the principal directing staff towards a desired outcome (first-order change).  A principal demonstrating a transformational leadership style created the conditions for the school to function as an organizational entity rather than individual units.

**Instructional leadership.** Ronald Edmonds' effective schools research from the 1980s identified seven correlates that determined a school's success (Leithwood & Day, 2007; Kutash et al., 2010).  Instructional leadership was among these correlates.  School leaders who prioritized teaching and learning made a significant difference in student learning (Bloom &

Owens, 2011; Leithwood & Day, 2007; Hallinger, 2003; Marks & Printy, 2003; Persell, 2013).

This resulted in a shift from the managerial, transactional style of leadership to one focused on instructional leadership (Richardson, Specker, & Hollis, 2016; Siegrist et al., 2009). The principal as an instructional leader elevated the importance of the role of the principal. Furthermore, principals needed to become curriculum and instructional leaders if they were also to improve schools (Bloom & Owens, 2011; Burch, 2010; Dolan, 2009; Finnigan, 2010; MacNeill, Cavanaugh, & Silcox, 2003; Vanderhaar et al., 2006).

Researchers agreed that instructional leadership placed principals in the iconic and hierarchical position of observing teachers, evaluating their effectiveness, and if necessary, directing teachers to change their teaching practices (Bloom & Owens, 2011; Glassman, 1984; Kowalski, 2010; Leithwood et al., 1999; Marks & Printy, 2003). Researchers also agreed that Hallinger's instructional leadership framework was the most extensive and widely used (Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood & Day, 2007; Leithwood et al., 2004).

Hallinger (2003) proposed "three dimensions of instructional leadership: defining the school's mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school-learning climate" (p. 332). These dimensions were further defined into ten instructional leadership practices shown in Figure 2.
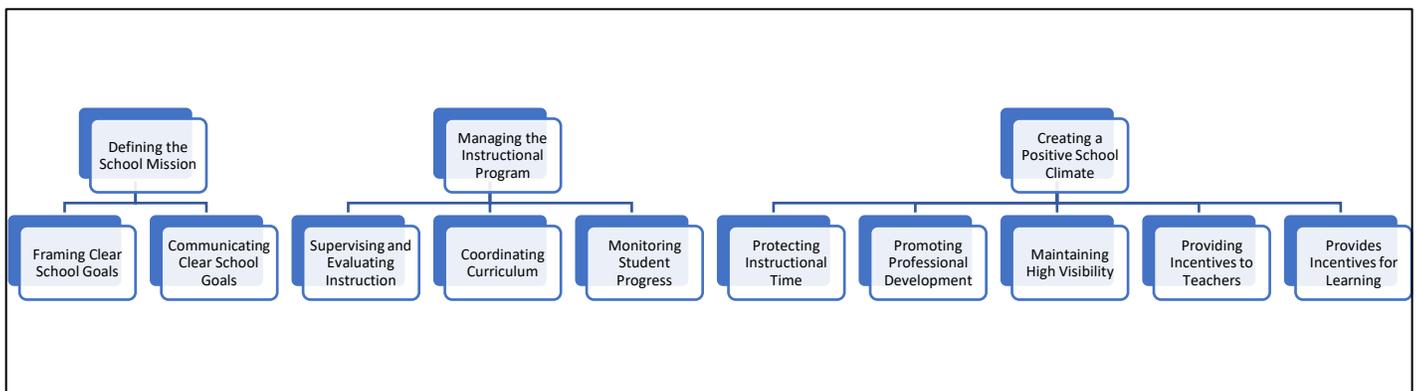


*Figure 2*. Instructional Leadership Framework (Hallinger, 2003)

Despite the comprehensive nature of Hallinger's instructional leadership framework, researchers argued that the concept of instructional leadership was a narrowly defined leadership style (Gurr & Drysdale, 2007; Fullan, 2014). Hallinger stated that "instructional leadership focused on school improvement, but it was largely transactional and represented first-order change because it sought to manage staff to move toward a predetermined set of goals" (Hallinger, 2003, p. 338). Principals were expected to carry out a wide range of functions, both instructional and non-instructional (MacNeill et al., 2003; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012) and instructional leadership placed too much attention on the principal as the expert and authority on teaching and learning (Hallinger, 2003). Furthermore, the principal as an instructional leader was expected to micromanage instruction, supervise teachers into better performance, and have high levels of pedagogical expertise (Fullan, 2014; Leithwood et al., 1999). This expectation was especially challenging in larger elementary schools or secondary schools.

Recognizing these criticisms of instructional leadership, Marks and Printy (2003) developed a conceptualization of shared instructional leadership. Their conceptualization moved away from the top-down importance and was not dependent on a role or position. Instead, the principal and teachers collaborated on curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Marks & Printy, 2003). Teachers shared authority and were involved in problem-solving and decision making (Burch, 2010; Kowalski, 2010).

**Contingency leadership.** Despite the popularity of transactional, transformational, and instructional leadership through the years, some researchers suggested that no single leadership style was best nor pure (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982; Duke, 2010; Hallinger, 2003). Instead, different circumstances or school contexts called for different styles of leadership (Duke, 2010; Paletta, Alivernini, & Manganelli, 2017). Fiedler's contingency theory (1967) stated that a

leader's effectiveness was dependent on matching the appropriate style with a situation. Contingent, or contingency, leadership was based on the idea that effective leaders responded to the unique needs of their school contexts (Bossert et al., 1982; Fiedler, 1967; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Leithwood et al., 1999; Leithwood et al., 2004; Hallinger, 2003).

Noting that principal behaviors had different effects in different organizational settings, contingent leaders understood the dynamic interactions between leadership, school conditions, and family educational culture (Hallinger, 2003).  Furthermore, principals who demonstrated this leadership style could master many different leadership styles (Leithwood et al., 1999).

**Summary.** Table 2 summarizes each of the leadership styles.  Four leadership styles, transactional, transformational, instructional, and contingency, were summarized and presented as distinctly different approaches; however, researchers agree that a style is neither best nor pure (Bossert et al., 1982; Duke, 2010; Hallinger, 2003).  What is agreed upon is that the principal is important in the success of a school because his/her leadership style influences his/her leadership practices.

Table 2

*Summary of Leadership Styles*

| *Approaches to school leadership* | *Who exerts influence* | *Sources of influence* | *Purposes for influence* | *Outcomes of influence* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Transactional | • Usually the principal | • Hierarchical power<br>• Rules, policies, and procedures | • Ensure timely completion of tasks by members | • Achieve school's goals |
| Transformational | • May be the principal<br>• May be team/grade-level leaders or department chairs | • Inspire higher levels of commitment among members<br>• Build capacity | • Greater effort and productivity<br>• Develop more skilled practice | • Increase school's capacity to continuously improve |
| Instructional | • Usually the principal<br>• In shared instructional leadership, may be others in formal leadership roles | • Hierarchical power<br>• Expert knowledge | • Enhance the effectiveness of teachers' classroom practices | • Increased student growth |
| Contingent | • May be the principal<br>• May be team/grade-level leaders or department chairs | • Leader's behavior adjusts to school's context<br>• Expert problem solving | • Better meet the needs of schools<br>• More effective responses to school's challenges | • Achieve school's goals<br>• Increased school capacity to respond to internal and external demands for change |

*Note.* (Adapted from Hallinger, 2003)

**Understanding School Context**

Most scholars agree that the school's context influences principal leadership behaviors (Hallinger, 2003; Klar & Brewer, 2013; Leithwood et al., 2008; Leithwood et al, 2004; Rowan & Denk, 1984; Vanderhaar et al., 2006).  A school's context is important to consider when examining student achievement (Klinger, Rogers, Anderson, Poth, & Calman, 2006).  Context is a source of limitations, resources, and opportunities that the principal must understand to lead (Hallinger, 2003).  Leithwood et al. (2008) provided an important distinction that it was not the contextual factor itself, but the way the principal applied his or her leadership style in response to the context that determined the degree that he or she influenced student learning.  Examples of school contextual variables include student background, community type, organizational structure, school culture, teacher experience, fiscal resources, and school size.  Table 3 provides additional examples of school contextual factors.

Table 3

*Examples of School Contextual Factors*

| *Related to* | *Examples of School Contextual Factors* |
|---|---|
| Principal or staff | • Years of experience<br>• Years in the building<br>• Average teaching experience<br>• Gender |
| Students | • % of English-language learners<br>• % of students with a disability<br>• % of students receiving Free and Reduced Meals<br>• % of students receiving gifted services<br>• % of students who are economically disadvantaged<br>• Mobility rate |
| Parents or families | • Socioeconomic status (SES)<br>• Income<br>• Mother's highest educational level<br>• Involvement with school<br>• Eligibility for Free or Reduced lunch<br>• Military-connectedness |
| Schools | • Special programs, such as a schoolwide literacy model<br>• Organizational factors such as size or level (elementary or secondary)<br>• Policy issues such as turnaround schools<br>• Student to teacher ratios<br>• Expenditures by function and program<br>• Location (urban, suburban, or rural)<br>• Fiscal resources |

Two school contextual factors, turnaround schools and high poverty schools, are worth expanding upon. Each is discussed briefly.

**Turnaround schools.** Leaders provide direction and exercise influence (Leithwood et al., 2004). Turnaround schools are unique contexts to study and analyze the principal's leadership behaviors. Turnaround schools are defined as low-performing schools that experience dramatic

and comprehensive interventions. These interventions produce significant gains within two years and the school develops the long-term capacity to transform into a high-performing organization (Kutash et al., 2010). The most commonly used indicator of educational performance is student achievement on federal and statewide assessments (Klinger et al., 2006). Schools are held accountable for student achievement regardless of the populations they served (McCoach, Goldstein, Behuniak, Reis, Black, Sullivan, & Rambo, 2010). Thus, NCLB targeted improvement for an entire school rather than specific student populations (Klar & Brewer, 2008).

**High poverty schools.** School leaders must develop and expand their leadership repertoires especially because a leadership style that is effective in one setting may not be as effective in another setting (Hallinger, 2003; Paletta et al., 2017). Schools at all levels of poverty experience social and academic challenges. Bernstein and Shierholz (2014) suggested that children from disadvantaged households performed less well in school on average than those from more advantaged households. Klar and Brewer (2008) pointed out that high poverty school communities in California were tasked to improve their schools despite being more likely to have underqualified teachers than their affluent counterparts. Furthermore, high poverty schools may experience greater student mobility.

## Principal's Impact on Student Achievement

During the 1980s policymakers were interested in measuring successful schools. High stakes accountability increased the attention on factors that affected student achievement (Sanzo et al. 2011). The most often used criterion in measuring educational productivity is student achievement tests (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Watkins & Moak, n.d.). Policymakers wanted to know the principal's impact on student achievement (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1994).

Classroom teaching has the greatest impact on student achievement (Sanzo et al., 2011). There is widespread agreement among scholars that the principal's leadership indirectly impacts student achievement by influencing teachers' behaviors and attitudes or other features of the organization (Dolan; 2009; Hallinger, 2003; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1994; Kaplan et al., 2005; Leithwood et al., 2004; Leitner, 1994; Paletta et al., 2017; Sanzo et al., 2017). Marzano et al. (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of studies of K-12 schools in the U.S. that directly or indirectly examined the relationship between the principal's leadership and student achievement. Sixty-nine studies spanning from 1978 to 2001 and representing 2,802 schools met the criteria. Their meta-analysis found 0.25 positive correlation between effective leadership and student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005). Strong leadership skills mattered (Richardson et al., 2016).

Principals are tasked to improve teaching and learning. Leithwood and his colleagues (2004) offered three ideas of how successful leadership impacted student achievement. First, how and what leaders spent their time on (observing classrooms or participating in team meetings) contributed to student learning. Second, who or what they paid attention to within the organization contributed to student learning. Principals knew what the priorities should be in the organization and had a conception of what the ideal looked like. Third, what leaders did to develop the capacity within the organization contributed to student learning. A principal who created synergy among the educational processes and the school's fiscal, material, and human resources could impact student achievement (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012).

**Kouzes and Posner's Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership**

Kouzes and Posner (2017) asserted that successful leadership was less about an individual's personality and more about his/her behavior. For over thirty years, they collected stories of individual standards of excellence and presented these vignettes in *The Leadership*

*Challenge*.  Five leadership practices have endured since asking individuals the same question

from 1982, "What did you do when you were at your personal best as a leader?"  Although each

story was unique in its individual expression, the actions leaders took remained the same.

When leaders were asked to describe performing at their personal best, five practices of

exemplary leadership emerged.  These five practices of exemplary leadership emerged regardless

of gender, age, race, organization, position, or geographical location.  Good leaders model the

way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart

(Kouzes & Posner, 2017).  Kouzes and Posner (2017) suggested that organizations could be

extraordinary if leaders understood and utilized the five practices of exemplary leadership.

Within each of the five practices, Kouzes and Posner (2017) further described behaviors and

actions.  Referred to as The Ten Commitments of Exemplary Leadership, these behaviors and

commitments explained how leaders accomplished extraordinary things in their organization.

They are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

*Five Practices and Ten Commitments of Exemplary Leadership*

| *Practice* | *Commitment* |
|---|---|
| Model the Way | • Make values clear.<br>• Align what you do with shared values. |
| Inspire a Shared Vision | • Imagine the possibilities.<br>• Bring others on board by appealing to common aspirations. |
| Challenge the Process | • Look beyond the current situation for innovative ways to improve.<br>• Be a risk taker, learn from those experiences, and generate small wins. |
| Enable Others to Act | • Build trust and nurture relationships.<br>• Build capacity among stakeholders. |
| Encourage the Heart | • Praise individual excellence.<br>• Promote a spirit of community. |

*Note.* (Kouzes & Posner, 2017)

Kouzes and Posner (2017) concluded that leaders who engaged in the five practices of exemplary leadership were more effective than those who did not. They administered a *Leadership Practices Inventory* (LPI) and collected responses from three million people (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). The LPI asked direct reports the frequency that their leader engaged in specific behaviors of the five practices. It also asked ten questions about the direct reports' feelings about the workplace (such as levels of satisfaction, pride, and commitment) and assessments about their leader (such as trustworthiness and overall effectiveness).

Kouzes and Posner (2017) found that how leaders behaved made a difference in explaining why employees worked hard, their commitment, pride, and productivity. They found that nearly 96 percent of direct reports who were most highly engaged believed their leader very frequently or almost always used the five practices. Less than 5 percent of direct reports were

highly engaged when their leaders seldom used the five practices (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). They concluded that learning and applying the five practices enabled great leaders to have a significant impact on others, organizations, and communities.

**Summary**

The principal's role evolved from managing and running an efficient school to being held accountable for student achievement. The ESEA (1965) and its subsequent reauthorizations provided federal funding to states to improve the quality of elementary and secondary education. The ESSA's mandate to identify and effect positive change in the lowest-performing schools acknowledges the importance of the principal's leadership. Principals exercise a variety of leadership styles depending on the context of the school. Scholars agree that a principal has an indirect impact on student achievement by influencing teachers' instructional practice or the organization's collective capacity.

**Conceptual Framework**

Kouzes and Posner's (2017) asserted that the leadership practices of model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart are universal. These leadership practices would be corroborated when asking turnaround principals to describe the personal best experience. By testing the reality of Kouzes and Posner's five common leadership practices with elementary school turnaround principals' personal best experiences, this allowed me to study the context of principal leadership in a turnaround school. This included being able to describe the principal's direct impact on teachers' instructional practices and the organization's collective capacity, as well as the principal's indirect impact on student achievement (see Figure 3).
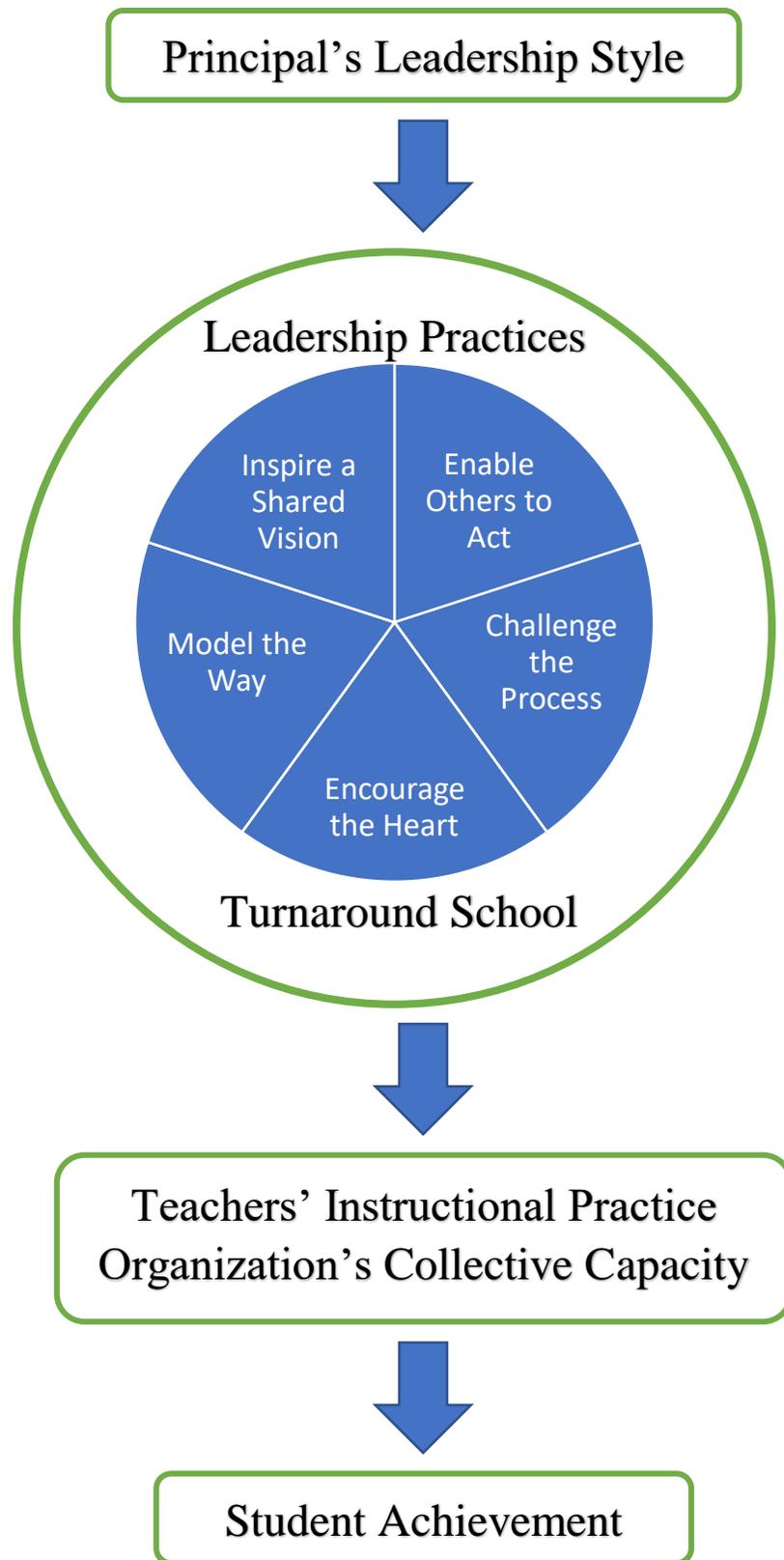
*Figure 3.* Conceptual Framework for the Study

## Chapter 3

## Methodology

This research applied a qualitative methods case study design to compare and contrast Kouzes and Posner's (2017) five leadership practices with what turnaround elementary school principals described as performing at their personal best. The principals worked in the same Mid-Atlantic school district. The district appointed each of the principals to lead an elementary school following failure of the school to meet full accreditation. The information gained in this study will contribute to the knowledge base of prioritizing essential leadership actions for turnaround leadership.

## Research Questions

In this study, I analyzed how successful school leaders viewed their leadership practices by asking Kouzes and Posner's (2017) enduring question, "What did you do when you were at your personal best as a leader?" Given that approach, I employed a qualitative methodology because qualitative research provides the best way to understand how people make sense and meaning out of their daily lives (Mertler, 2016). The overall research question for this study was "What are the leadership practices of elementary school principals who have successfully led a school turnaround?" A secondary question was "To what extent do these leadership practices correspond to Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices?"

## Research Approach and Justification

This section describes the research approach I used to study the leadership practices of elementary turnaround principals. I begin with the philosophical assumptions I brought to my study then explain the methods I used to conduct my study. Creswell and Creswell (2018)

suggested a framework when describing an approach to research.  This framework includes the discussion of philosophical worldview, research design, and research methods.  Each of these topics is discussed below.

**Philosophical worldview.** A researcher's worldview, or general philosophical orientation, influences the choice of research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Constructivism, or interpretivism research, relies on the participants' interpretations of the situation being studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).  It is a central characteristic of qualitative research in which the researcher wants to understand the phenomenon from the perspective of those involved (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).  Constructivism underlies qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015) and serves as the philosophical orientation for this research study.  A constructivist approach entails describing, understanding, and interpreting the meaning that others have of the world (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).  This philosophical perspective assumes the existence of multiple interpretations of a single event (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In this study, elementary school principals who were appointed to lead change in a failing school were asked to describe performing at their personal best.  A personal best experience differs from simply asking principals to describe their everyday leadership practices because it requires the principal to be highly reflective of a successful moment in time.  The telling of a personal best experience magnifies the principal's impact on others.  The question allows leaders to describe practical things they believed made a positive difference.  I engaged in constructivism by analyzing a principal's personal best experience.  I wanted to learn how closely the principal's practices during a personal best time corresponded with Kouzes and

Posner's leadership practices of model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart.

**Research design.** I conducted a multiple case study of the best practices of elementary school principals who successfully turned around a school. Stake (2006) defined a multiple case, or multicase, study as a collection of individual cases that share a common characteristic. The common characteristic of my cases was principal leadership in a turnaround school.

Case studies are bounded systems (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 2006) due to a limit to the number of people who can be interviewed or a finite time for observations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). My multiple case study was bounded because only eight elementary school principals in Riverdale Public Schools (RPS) met the criteria of being appointed to lead a failing school. The principal at one such school declined to participate in the study, leaving seven participants.

A case study proved to be a more appropriate methodology than the most plausible alternatives. Grounded theory, which builds, rather than tests, theory (Patton, 2015) was not appropriate for this study because the research literature contains substantial material regarding leadership practices. Kouzes and Posner (2017) asserted the universality of the five leadership practices of model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. Therefore, these practices should be corroborated when asking turnaround principals to describe their personal best experience. Comparing Kouzes and Posner's five common leadership practices with turnaround principals' personal best experiences allowed me to study principal leadership in the specific context of a turnaround school.

**Research methods.** Creswell and Creswell (2018) defined the research methods as the forms of data collection, analysis, and interpretation used in a study. Semi-structured interviews with eligible elementary school turnaround principals served as the primary research method in this study. The interviews of these principals enabled me to determine the leadership practices they used in their turnaround school. I also reviewed school documents (school report card, school improvement plan, and school manual), which provided additional contextual information to better understand or support the principal's personal best experience. I interpreted themes or patterns that emerged from the transcriptions of the principal interviews.

## Researcher Role and Reflexivity

As discussed earlier, qualitative research involves interpretation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Reflexivity refers to a characteristic of qualitative research in which the researcher examines his/her role in the study, particularly how the experiences of the researcher shaped the interpretations of the data. My role in the study, personal background, and experiences shaped the direction of my study and the meaning I made of the data, as discussed below.

**Past and current experiences.** As a principal supervisor, I work directly with and supervise principals at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. One of the requirements for me to be a principal supervisor is to have served as a principal myself. I understand leadership practices through my service as a high school principal in a fully accredited school.

I work extensively with principals who work in all types of schools. Some of the schools in my purview are turnaround schools, while others are fully accredited. I also serve as a liaison in the office that provides intensive and targeted supports to turnaround schools and am involved in principal hiring. I work collaboratively with other principal supervisors and assistant

superintendents and also have some influence in determining professional development for principals.

**Past experiences shape interpretations.** My interest in conducting this research study derives from my experiences as a principal and principal supervisor, supporting turnaround schools, and my role in hiring qualified principals. I recognize how these experiences shaped my interpretations during the study. I wrote notes in a reflexive journal about my experiences during the study to practice reflexive thinking (see Appendix A for my Researcher Reflexivity Journal template). Creswell and Creswell (2018) highlighted the need to practice enough reflexibility by recording notes during the research process, reflecting on my personal experiences, and considering how my personal experiences may shape interpretation of the results.

## Site and Sample Selection

To discover, understand, and gain insight on the leadership practices of successful elementary turnaround principals, I selected a sample of elementary turnaround principals from which the most can be learned using purposeful sampling (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this section, I discuss where the research took place (setting), who was interviewed (participants), what the participants were interviewed doing (events), and the evolving nature of events undertaken by the participants within the setting (process).

**Setting.** Riverdale Public Schools (RPS) is a large suburban school district serving more than 75,000 students in a Mid-Atlantic state. Approximately 29% of its students are eligible for free and reduced lunch meals, 29% of its students are English language learners, and more than 14% of its students receive special education services (Riverdale Public Schools, 2018).

This Mid-Atlantic state fully accredits elementary schools if a certain percentage of students achieve passing scores on end-of-year tests in English, mathematics, and science. Thus, a school's accreditation status represents student achievement. RPS defines a turnaround school as a school that has a trend of not meeting full accreditation. RPS defines a turnaround principal as one who became principal of a school not meeting full accreditation and whose school subsequently achieved state accreditation during that principal's tenure. Eight turnaround principals in RPS met the criteria for being a turnaround principal and were invited to participate in this study.

Turnaround schools benefit from additional staffing, instructional support, and fiscal support from RPS. RPS takes corrective action in schools with a trend of not meeting full accreditation by replacing the principal with a proven, experienced leader. Turnaround schools that become accredited and sustained full accreditation for at least two consecutive years continue to receive supports, such as fiscal resources, targeted professional development, and additional staffing, above and beyond the resources provided to schools without any accreditation issues.

**Participants.** I focused this study on current turnaround principals who were hired to improve a school that failed to make accreditation. A purposeful sample of eight turnaround principals within RPS met the defined criteria, so I invited them to participate in a face-to-face, semi-structured interview. Seven of the eight eligible principals participated in the study. I fixed the design inquiry in that I predetermined the turnaround principals selected for this study, the inquiry question, and design.

**Events.** The questions in the semi-structured interview protocol focused on the personal best experiences as described by the turnaround principals who chose to participate.

Specifically, each was asked to describe a personal best experience from his/her current school assignment. Probing questions were asked to better understand the principal's experiences. Each turnaround principal was interviewed at a mutually convenient time and location. Their responses were transcribed and analyzed for themes.

**Processes.** By conducting interviews with turnaround principals and reviewing school documents, I hoped to gain an understanding of each principal's leadership practices in his/her current school setting. I paid particular attention to each principal's leadership practices that corresponded to Kouzes and Posner's model the way, encourage the heart, enable others to act, challenge the process, and encourage the heart. This focus allowed me to make sense of how a principal prioritized these leadership practices in a turnaround elementary school.

## Instrument Design

An interviewer conducted one-on-one, in person interviews at a mutually agreed time and location with each of the seven principal who agreed to participate in my study. The research team used a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix B), which allowed the interviewer to ask several base questions, but also gave her the option to follow up a given response with a probing question, depending on the situation (Mertler, 2016). In addition to the data from the semi-structured interviews, I examined other sources of data from the following school documents: school report card, school improvement plan, and school manual. I selected these school documents because they provided demographic information or represented data to which the elementary turnaround principals have given attention. These documents provided additional contextual information to better understand or support the principal's personal best experience.

## Data Collection and Gathering Procedures

Data were collected during February of 2019. Data collection included an approximately 60-minute recorded interview with each elementary school turnaround principal. A second recording device was used as a contingency. I reviewed the school report card, school improvement plan, and school manual for each principal for the years he/she served as principal in the turnaround school.

**Institutional Review Board.** I completed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Subjects Protection training on October 16, 2016 (Appendix C). An application for this research study was submitted to Virginia Tech's Institutional Review Board and RPS for approval. This study received approval by IRB on January 2, 2019 and approval by RPS on January 22, 2019. Following these approvals, a member of the research team sent e-mail invitations to the eight turnaround principals (Appendix D).

**Ethical considerations.** To ensure confidentiality, I referred to the school district as Riverdale Public Schools (RPS) throughout this research. Research team members sent e-mail invitations, obtained informed consent (see Appendix E for informed consent form), and conducted the face-to-face interviews with each of the principals. A team member established a pseudonym key code for each of the seven principals who agreed to participate in this study and his/her school.

The interviewer sent the audio recordings to a professional service for transcription. Each verbatim transcription was made available to the participant to review, but only one principal requested to review the transcription. The participant had one week to review the relevant transcription and advise the team whether he/she wished to correct the data for accuracy or delete information that he/she did not want used in the research. The participant provided no corrections or deletions to the reviewed transcript.

**Records retention and storage.** The audio recordings were encrypted and stored securely on a password-protected laptop. The coded data and de-identified interview transcriptions were stored securely on my password-protected laptop. The signed consent forms and the study key code that linked real names with pseudonyms were stored in my dissertation chair's office. These records will be retained per Virginia Tech's IRB policy of at least three years after the completion of my research. Any data or document that could identify a participant or the school district will be destroyed after the minimum three-year retention of data.

## Data Analysis Procedures

Qualitative data analysis involves the process of inductive analysis. Patton (2015) described inductive analysis as beginning with specific observations and building toward general patterns. For this research study, I used Stake's (2006) worksheets for organizing my data and his step-by-step procedures to help me analyze my data.

The research questions I established for this study asked what were the leadership practices of successful turnaround principals and to what extent these leadership practices corresponded to Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices of model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. These questions were most important in understanding what principals do when leading in a turnaround school. These research questions served as the basis for establishing the themes of my multicase study (see Appendix F for my Themes Template).

I started with the themes of model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. My themes template allowed me to anticipate what might emerge from my data analysis. Stake (2006) cautioned researchers to be mindful of trying

to force a study to be solely about the established themes.  In my case, this meant trying to force my data to fit into one of Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices.  Throughout my data analysis, I remained open to the possibility that new themes might emerge.

Next, I prepared individual case reports of each principal's interview (see Appendix G for my Analysis of Themes – Individual Cases Template).  I read through each principal's transcript multiple times and distilled key information from the transcript that aligned with each theme.  This was an iterative process of rereading and recategorizing data into my themes until I was unable to generate any new information.  Merriam and Tisdale (2016) referred to this process as saturation.   For each case report I developed specific findings that captured the essence of what I learned from the principal's personal best experience.  Stake (2006) described the importance of findings as a way to preserve special circumstances of each case that would later be helpful in the cross-case analysis.  I generated as few as two findings and as many as four findings for each individual case report.  The individual case findings allowed me to answer my first research question, "What are the leadership practices of elementary school turnaround principals who have successfully led a school turnaround?"

My next step consisted of completing a cross-case analysis.  Stake (2006) described cross-case analysis as taking evidence (findings) from the individual case studies and showing how consistent or how different the data proved to be across the cases. Applied to this study, I analyzed the data across the cases to search for consistent findings that characterized leading in a turnaround school.  I created a matrix of the case findings and analyzed these findings with the themes (model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart).  See Appendix H for my Multiple-Case Analysis of Findings and Themes matrix.  I determined whether the finding was high importance, middling importance, or low

importance in understanding how successful principals lead in a turnaround school. The cross-case analysis allowed me to answer my second research question, "To what extent do these leadership practices correspond to Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices?" Stake (2006) explained that assertions were derived from the cross-case analysis. After my cross-case analysis, I developed assertions about leadership practices in a turnaround school.

**Trustworthiness**

Qualitative researchers are concerned with the data's trustworthiness (Mertler, 2016; Merriam & Tisdale, 2016; McMillan & Wergin, 2010). Trustworthiness concerns are like issues related to reliability and validity in quantitative research. Trustworthiness is established by examining the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the qualitative data. Each is discussed below.

**Credibility.** McMillan and Wergin (2010) defined credibility as the extent that a research design is rigorous, the researcher's position is clear, the analysis of data is transparent and open to cross-examination, and the results accurate and trustworthy. Credibility involves being able to consider the complexities of a turnaround principal leading in a turnaround school. I used two primary means of ensuring credibility. The first means was peer debriefing, or cross-examination of the data (McMillan & Wergin, 2010). A colleague who is a principal supervisor and works with turnaround schools, but is not involved with this research proposal, reviewed and critiqued my processes of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. I carefully considered my peer reviewer's feedback throughout my study especially if it challenged my assumptions or interpretations. We discussed areas of disagreement and reached consensus before I proceeded.

The second means of ensuring credibility was member checking.  Member checking involves soliciting feedback on preliminary or emerging findings from some of the participants interviewed (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016).  Each turnaround principal who participated in my research had an opportunity to review the interview transcription.  Besides the accuracy of the transcription, my third-party interviewer received feedback from two of the participating principals about my preliminary analysis.  As I worked with my third-party interviewer to receive participant feedback, three actions emerged: no further action necessary, amend as suggested, or provide the participant with further explanation.  As I conducted member checking throughout the course of my study, I maintained a table of the principal pseudonym, his/her comment(s), and my action(s) taken.

**Transferability.** Transferability is the degree to which the results of a qualitative study can be applied in a different setting (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016; Mertler, 2016; McMillan & Wergin, 2010).  Readers of a study need to understand the similarities and differences between the circumstances of the study and those in their own setting to determine how well the results would apply in their circumstances (Mertler, 2016).  A researcher, therefore, must provide extensive descriptions of the context of the study to provide the detail necessary for the reader to consider how well the results of the study transfer to the context in which the reader operates.

In this study, transferability depended on my ability to portray a highly descriptive account of the turnaround principal's personal best experience.  To achieve transferability, I needed to provide rich, detailed descriptions of the turnaround setting.  My review and analysis of the school documents and interviews was helpful in describing the principal's leadership practices.  These descriptions allowed a reader to gain a clear, in-depth understanding of the school setting and how turnaround principals led.

**Dependability.** Dependability refers to whether the results are consistent with the raw data collected (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). A researcher wants to ensure that if others were to look over my data, they would also make similar interpretations about the data. Establishing dependability ensures that nothing was missed in the research study. I used two primary means of establishing dependability. The first means was by the use of an external audit, or the use of an outside individual to review and evaluate a final research report (Mertler, 2016). I asked an RPS official to review and evaluate my final research report. I carefully considered my peer reviewer's feedback of my research report especially if it challenged my findings and interpretations. We thoroughly discussed areas of disagreement and came to consensus before I proceeded.

The second means for establishing dependability was through triangulation. Triangulation occurs when a researcher examines evidence from different data sources to justify research themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I established dependability by triangulating interview data with two document sources. These two documents were the school improvement plan and the school manual. These were selected because the principal was highly involved in the creation of these two documents as a blueprint for improving the school's accreditation status.

**Confirmability.** The final component of trustworthiness is confirmability. Mertler (2016) described confirmability as the process of establishing the neutrality and objectivity of the data and findings. This means that the research findings are based on the participants' stories. I established confirmability by two means. The first means was by use of an audit trail. This was a detailed account of my methods, procedures, and interpretations (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). I documented my actions throughout my research study. For example, I reviewed my case reports,

findings, and assertions multiple times during data analysis and provided a rationale for this action. The second means of establishing confirmability was through reflexivity. Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested that I clarify the bias I bring to my research study to create an honest narrative. I practiced reflexivity by maintaining a journal, intermingling how my thoughts and interpretations were shaped by my background and position.

**Summary**

By applying a qualitative multiple case study design, I interviewed elementary school principals in a Mid-Atlantic school district that were appointed to lead a turnaround school. I received approval to conduct my research from both IRB and RPS. Our research team sent e-mail invitations to eligible principals to participate in a face-to-face semi-structured interview. Additionally, I reviewed selected de-identified school documents (school report card, school improvement plan, and school manual) for each year the principal successfully served in his/her turnaround school.

A professional service transcribed each interview. After transcription, we provided the de-identified transcription to each principal for review. Following the principal's approval to use the transcription, I used various worksheets to capture the themes of my research study, to prepare individual case reports, and to merge findings and themes in a matrix. These worksheets allowed me to analyze my data and develop findings and assertions to learn the leadership practices of turnaround principals and to what degree these practices of successful elementary school turnaround principals corroborated with Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices.

# Chapter 4

## Findings

Chapter one introduced the importance of the principal's impact on student achievement. With increased federal accountability measures, school districts were expected to have a plan in place to improve low-performing schools. Kouzes and Posner (2017) suggested the universality of certain leadership practices. As applied to this study, the theory implied that elementary school turnaround principals would share common leadership practices of model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. The overall research question for the study was "What are the leadership practices of elementary school principals who have successfully led a school turnaround? A secondary question was "To what extent do these leadership practices correspond to Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices?" The information gained from this study will contribute to the knowledge base of essential leadership actions for turnaround leadership.

Chapter two discussed a review of the literature. The national context influenced what was taught in the American school curriculum. This impacted how the principal's leadership role evolved over time. Transactional, transformational, instructional, and contingency leadership styles were explained to offer how the principal's leadership style influenced his/her leadership practices (or actions). Kouzes and Posner's (2017) five exemplary leadership practices were reviewed and used to inform the conceptual framework for this study.

Chapter three explained the methodology for this research study. This research study used a multiple case study design to examine the personal best experiences of seven successful turnaround elementary school principals in a Mid-Atlantic state. The remainder of chapter three

discussed the site and sample selection, instrument design, data collection and gathering procedures, trustworthiness, and data analysis procedures.

This chapter contains the findings of my research study. Following a brief review of the research questions, I share the demographic information of the turnaround principals and their respective school's accreditation status. Then I summarize the relevance of the additional documents I reviewed for this study. Next, I present vignettes of the individual principal's personal best experiences and an analysis of each principal's leadership practices. I then discuss cross-case findings according to Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices. Next, I offer multi-case assertions from this research study that demonstrate what turnaround principals do when hired to lead in a failing school. Finally, a summary closes the chapter.

## Research Questions

As previously discussed, successful school leaders were asked Kouzes and Posner's (2017) enduring question, "What did you do when you were at your personal best as a leader?" The overall research question for this study was "What are the leadership practices of elementary school principals who have successfully led a school turnaround?" A secondary question was "To what extent do these leadership practices correspond to Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices?"

## Demographic Information

Seven principals participated in this research study. Five of these participants had previous principal experience within Riverdale Public Schools (RPS). See Table 5 for a summary of the participants. These participants were appointed to lead an elementary school

that had accreditation concerns.  See Table 6 for a summary of the accreditation status of each

school during the current principal's tenure.

Table 5

*Demographic Data about Participants*

| Participant | School | Gender | # of Years in Current School | Previous Principal Experience |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Principal Anthony | Meadows Elementary | M | 4 | Yes |
| Principal Ella | Sandalwood Elementary | F | 3 | No |
| Principal Francesca | Evergreen Elementary | F | 4 | No |
| Principal Jakob | Hillview Elementary | M | 5 | Yes |
| Principal Zac | Vista Elementary | M | 3 | Yes |
| Principal John | Woodcreek Elementary | M | 3 | Yes |
| Principal Vivienne | Oceanside Elementary | F | 3 | Yes |

Table 6

*Accreditation Status of Each School*

| Participant | School | SY 2014-15 | SY 2015-16 | SY 2016-17 | SY 2017-18 | SY 2018-19[A] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Principal Anthony | Meadows Elementary | Accredited with Warning | Accredited | Partially Accredited: Warned School-Pass Rate | Accredited | Accredited |
| Principal Ella | Sandalwood Elementary | Accredited with Warning | Partially Accredited: Warned School-Pass Rate | Partially Accredited: Warned School-Pass Rate | Accredited | Accredited |
| Principal Francesca | Evergreen Elementary | Accredited with Warning | Partially Accredited: Warned School-Pass Rate | Partially Accredited: Warned School-Pass Rate | Partially Accredited: Reconstituted School | Accredited |
| Principal Jakob | Hillview Elementary | Accredited with Warning | Partially Accredited: Warned School-Pass Rate | Accredited | Accredited | Accredited |
| Principal Zac | Vista Elementary | Accredited with Warning | Partially Accredited: Approaching Benchmark-Pass Rate | Partially Accredited: Approaching Benchmark-Pass Rate | Accredited | Accredited |
| Principal John | Woodcreek Elementary | Accredited with Warning | Partially Accredited: Warned School-Pass Rate | Partially Accredited: Reconstituted School | Partially Accredited: Reconstituted School | Accredited |
| Principal Vivienne | Oceanside Elementary | Accredited with Warning | Partially Accredited: Warned School-Pass Rate | Accredited | Partially Accredited: Warned School-Pass Rate | Accredited |

*Note.* (Mid-Atlantic State Department of Education School Report Cards, 2019). The highlighted box represents the year that RPS appointed the principal to the elementary school. The accreditation status represents the academic performance of students from the previous year. [A] The Mid-Atlantic state changed its accreditation standards to reflect ESSA.

**Document Review**

       I analyzed the school report cards from the Mid-Atlantic State Department of Education to detail each school's accreditation status over five academic school years.  I analyzed two additional document sources, namely the school improvement plans and the school manuals.  In the following sections, I discuss the relevance of each to this research study.

       **School Improvement Plans**. A school improvement plan serves to signal the academic areas of focus for the school.  Plans were reviewed for each year the turnaround principal served in his/her school.  All schools used a common template provided by RPS.  Each school plan included a roster of committee members, including the principal.  Other individuals on the roster tended to be instructional coaches, grade-level team leaders, and subject-specific resource teachers.  Schools wrote academic goals based on student achievement measures.  Table 7 shows the academic areas of focus in the school improvement plans for the years that the turnaround principal served in the school.  The school improvement plan further listed the strategies that staff would use to help students achieve the academic goals.

Table 7

*Areas of Focus in School Improvement Plans*

| Participant | School | SY 2014-15 | SY 2015-16 | SY 2016-17 | SY 2017-18 | SY 2018-19 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Anthony | Meadows ES | | English<br>Math<br>Science | English<br>Math<br>==Science== | English<br>Math<br>Science | English<br>Math |
| Ella | Sandalwood ES | | | ==English==<br>Math<br>==Science== | English<br>Math<br>Science | English<br>Math |
| Francesca | Evergreen ES | | English<br>Math<br>==Science== | ==English==<br>==Math==<br>Science | English<br>Math<br>==Science== | English<br>Math<br>Innovation |
| Jakob | Hillview ES | English<br>Math<br>==Science== | English<br>Math<br>==Science== | English<br>Math<br>Science<br>Engagement | English<br>Math<br>Science | English<br>Math<br>Science |
| Zac | Vista ES | | | English<br>Math<br>==Science== | English<br>Math<br>Science | English<br>Math<br>Science |
| John | Woodcreek ES | | | ==English==<br>Math<br>==Science== | ==English==<br>==Math==<br>==Science== | English<br>Math<br>Science |
| Vivienne | Oceanside ES | | | English<br>Math<br>Science | English<br>Math<br>==Science== | English<br>Math<br>Science |

*Note*. Information retrieved from School Improvement Plans. Highlighted subject(s) represent(s) the area(s) of accreditation concern.

**School manuals**. Six of the seven school manuals were available for review. Manuals

from Sandalwood, Vista, Woodcreek, and Oceanside Elementary Schools were explicitly created

by a team of teacher leaders. Vivienne was the only principal who included a personal letter to

her staff. She stated that their purpose as educators at Oceanside Elementary was to share in the

belief that their students could learn at high levels and therefore, their task was to teach at high

levels. The Vista Elementary team best captured the overall purpose of the manuals – to develop

a common understanding of "how we do it" to support continued student growth as well as to

share professional expectations for staff. Hillview Elementary School's manual focused solely

on their work as a professional learning community and how staff worked on their grade-level

collaborative teams. Evergreen Elementary School's manual served more as a compilation of

school logistical and managerial items. See Appendix I for a summary of the characteristics of

the school manuals.

**Personal Best Experiences – Individual Cases**

Each elementary school principal shared a personal best experience from his/her tenure in

a turnaround assignment. The following section describes each participant's personal best

experience and is presented in the order the transcript was returned to the research team. Each

principal's personal best experience is followed by an analysis that answers the primary research

question of "What are the leadership practices of elementary school principals who have

successfully led a school turnaround?"

**Anthony**. Principal Anthony's personal best experience at Meadows Elementary School

involved achieving full accreditation during his four-year tenure. He inherited a school that was

accredited with warning. Despite the challenges at his school, he described learning that his

school became fully accredited last year. He stated, "Last year in the spring, when the new color-coding [new accreditation measures] came out with all of the new metrics. . .and we have more English second language learners than any other school in the district…our achievement [last year] was fully in the green (passing) [for all student subgroups]."

Principal Anthony attributed Meadows' success to two key leadership actions. First, he used his Title I and school budgets to fund additional positions: administrators, instructional coaches, and special education leaders. These staff members along with his literacy resource teachers and math resource teachers made sure that instructional best practices were in place. He created a master schedule that allowed these resource staff members to support teachers in the classroom with job-embedded professional development. Each morning, an intervention resource team met with each grade-level team and they discussed student progress. Principal Anthony described the importance of these daily meetings,

> Everybody's watching the success of every student together. I partner up with my special education lead and instructional coaches for the primary [and I have teams for the upper grades] and we meet every morning to monitor data. So, you don't have to wait for a local screening committee [usually a monthly committee] to tell you to go back and try certain strategies.

Principal Anthony used his staffing allocations to create an intervention resource team that allowed his staff to monitor the progress of individual students. This resource team also developed teachers' instructional capacity at Meadows Elementary School.

The second leadership action Principal Anthony undertook after arriving at Meadows was creating a positive school environment. This involved improving the physical aesthetics of the building. He described,

> I cleaned the school up…it was a mess. I was very intentional about cleaning up the grounds, getting rid of the [signs of] homelessness that was happening [on our school's perimeter], the litter, the trash, the alcohol bottles everywhere, broken things. Getting rid of old furniture. Painting the front doors.

Principal Anthony said that the feedback he heard from former students was gratifying. He remembered students said, "Look at this place. It looks amazing. They did this all for us." Principal Anthony shared other actions he did to foster a positive school environment:

> I've moved around things at the school. I brought all of our Spanish speakers to the front part of the office. I moved our social worker up to the front office so that all of those resources to support parents' needs were ready. I moved all of our office parking, instead of it being in front of the school, I made those all reserved for parents….We now have parenting classes. We have ESL [English as a Second Language] classes. We have play groups for kids. We have reunification classes where we work with families that have been separated. You know there's a lot going on at this place and so I think together those things all work.

He expressed pride in providing a supportive environment for all of Meadows Elementary School's stakeholders – students, staff, parents, and community.

***Analysis of Anthony's personal best experience.*** Four key leadership practices emerged from Principal Anthony's personal best experience. Because leading in a turnaround school was extremely challenging, successful turnaround leaders built sufficient organizational and teacher capacity that could be sustained. Second, the principal must build teacher capacity through job-embedded professional development or coaching, which was paramount to teachers believing that they could positively impact student achievement. Third, Principal Anthony nurtured staff relationships and believed that his staff could turn around the school. These three practices were evident by Principal Anthony's actions of allocating financial resources to create a resource team and by developing a master schedule that enabled the resource team to work directly with teachers. The fourth practice that emerged involved Principal Anthony taking action to create a positive environment. He demonstrated this practice through his improvement of the aesthetics of the school building and grounds and with the relocation of specific bilingual staff who could readily support the needs of his parent community.

**Ella**. Ella's personal best experience as principal of Sandalwood Elementary School occurred when she had a meeting with her teachers and shared her belief that they could turn around the school. Principal Ella stated, "I gave them a 'why,' and the 'why' was we're the Navy SEALs of teaching and this is what we have to do – be Navy SEALs." She used this analogy of Navy SEALs to impress upon her staff the need for them to deliver highly specialized instruction to students at Sandalwood Elementary. To achieve accreditation success, teachers needed to work interdependently.

Principal Ella acknowledged that leading Sandalwood Elementary was not always easy. When she first joined the school, she determined that staff wanted organization and clear processes. Principal Ella addressed the school's positive behavior approach for handling student

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behavior concerns. Through RPS providing support for staff restructuring for turnaround schools like Sandalwood, she identified the teachers she would recommend for reassignment. These teachers, as she described, "were not in our vision of being a Navy SEAL of teaching." Principal Ella maintained the dignity of each staff member who was recommended for reassignment and felt that the remaining staff would have said, "Well, those people needed to go."

During her tenure, Ella reinforced the message, "You can't do this alone." She described her leadership impact as building the capacity of others. During a collaborative team meeting, Ella noticed an "us versus them" attitude emerging. A member of the grade level team later shared with Principal Ella how she felt "disrespected" by an instructional coach. Principal Ella met with her instructional coaches and reinforced how the coaches need to "add value" to the quality of the collaborative team meetings. Rather than simply telling teachers what they should do, Principal Ella emphasized that the instructional coaches should be helping teachers with what they should do. She said, "Teachers have to want you in their classrooms."

She cited this scenario as an example of how synergy evolved at Sandalwood. By building relationships with individual staff members and with teams, Principal Ella felt that trust became more apparent in her school. She stated, "I think there was this sense of trust with the teachers. We started finding success. And, we learned to celebrate the little successes."

***Analysis of Ella's personal best experience***. Three key leadership practices emerged from Principal Ella's personal best experience. Principal Ella recognized the absence of a quick way to turn around a failing school. So first, she took inventory of who was in the building and what skills each person brought to his/her grade-level team. Second, she based her de-staff decisions on what Sandalwood Elementary School needed. Third, Principal Ella enabled her

staff to take risks and provided them with support. This action enabled her to build trust and capacity among her staff. It also advanced the school's collective capacity to solve problems. All three of Principal Ella's key leadership practices resulted from her vision that Sandalwood Elementary students needed staff members who were the Navy SEALs of teaching.

**Francesca**. Principal Francesca described her "journey" at Evergreen Elementary School as her personal best experience. When she became its principal four years ago, she acknowledged feeling overwhelmed by the experience. Besides failing to meet state accreditation benchmarks, she reported that student discipline was "out of control." The community shared a negative view of the school. Many parents did not feel that it was safe for their children to attend. Principal Francesca stated, "Although the work was hard to rein in the discipline and establish a positive learning environment, that was a bit of an easy win."

During her first year, Principal Francesca clearly expressed her expectations and commitments. She expected staff to collaborate. She and the staff identified their goals and how they would achieve them. Principal Francesca was committed to improving instructional capacity and leadership capacity and relentlessly "stay[ed] true" to these expectations. Her reflection of that first year was that work seemed to be coming together. The overall school environment certainly grew more positive. Also, she noted that collaborative teams saw academic improvement.

Principal Francesca continuously worked with her staff to refine the school's commitments around the learning environment, instructional practices, collaboration, and professional learning. Teachers identified a need to have an Evergreen "bootcamp" for the 10 new teachers who would be joining the Evergreen staff the following year. During one of these bootcamp events, Principal Francesca observed her teachers leading professional learning around

the workshop model, differentiation, and positive classroom environments. Not only was she proud of her teachers for recognizing a need to induct their new colleagues, she was proud that her teachers led the training. At that point, Principal Francesca felt, "What we're doing is working."

Principal Francesca described an important leadership action of hers as unwavering from these shared commitments. Despite teachers expressing doubt from time to time, Principal Francesca stated, "Although there was a lot of testing pressure, not veering off into test prep or some other pieces…was huge." The school saw significant gains in math and reading scores that year. In year three, everyone seemed confident that Evergreen Elementary was going to meet all accreditation benchmarks. Reading and math scores "skyrocketed." However, Principal Francesca learned that the school missed the science accreditation benchmark by only a few students. She stated, "I was heartbroken. I never knew what it felt like to be heartbroken until today." Even though she experienced doubt herself, Principal Francesca said, "You've got to still stick with what is working, and then have a real hard, honest conversation with yourself and with staff." Further, Principal Francesca reflected, "…there are going to be bumps in the road, but you've got to be able to own the bumps, and reflect on it and as a staff say, 'What could we have done differently?', and let's do it."

Principal Francesca described herself as open, transparent, team-oriented, and very focused. She saw herself as a part of every team but knew when the need for a leadership decision arose, she made the decision. At Evergreen, she promoted a community of learners among the adults so that they could "figure out what our students need and how to get there." She felt that the community would describe Evergreen today as a more positive, more welcoming school with a staff working hard to support students' needs.

***Analysis of Francesca's personal best experience***. Three key leadership practices emerged from Principal Francesca's personal best experience. First, leading in a turnaround school was overwhelming because the school could experience tremendous success as quickly as it could experience failure [not making accreditation]. How a leader responded during times of failure was just as important as what he/she did to move the school toward success. Second, leading in a turnaround school required Principal Francesca to be highly reflective and to have the courage to make difficult decisions, such as not veering off into standardized test preparation and staying true to high-quality classroom instruction. Third, in successful turnaround schools, teachers worked interdependently. Principal Francesca showed this point when she described her teachers being a community of learners and developing their capacity to solve problems.

**Jakob**. Principal Jakob's personal best experience at Hillview Elementary School occurred during his first year when he worked with Amelia, a third-grade teacher in her third year of teaching. Principal Jakob noticed that Amelia was struggling to meet the instructional needs of her students, despite being provided with coaching and support throughout the year. One day as they were conferencing, he said, "Can I just be honest? This does not feel like you're feeling good about yourself. Do you feel like you can do this job?" An emotional Amelia acknowledged that she was struggling to meet the instructional needs of students at Hillview. Furthermore, Amelia divulged that if she had shared that she did not want to be in a high English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Title I school, it would make her a "bad" person. Principal Jakob assured her that she was not a "bad" person.

Once Principal Jakob got to this root cause, he helped Amelia work on her resume so that she could find another teaching opportunity in a non-Title I school in RPS. Principal Jakob later received feedback from Amelia's principal that she was excelling as a teacher in her new school.

In fact, Amelia's principal acknowledged that the training that Amelia received while working at Hillview actually made her more skilled than other teachers. In helping Amelia find the right school match for her strengths, Principal Jakob stated that he was doing what was best for his students at Hillview.

Principal Jakob cited using inquiry and active listening as ways of building leadership capacity with his staff. By asking staff questions that promoted their own thinking and problem solving, he did not have to be the one with all the answers. As a result, he described himself as highly empathetic and skillful at building relationships with staff. Principal Jakob stated, "You can't underestimate the power of relationships in a school like Hillview. We talk about the most important driver in raising student achievement is by building relationships with our students." As principal, Jakob never saw his role as being the singular reason that Hillview would become fully accredited. Instead, he said, "How do I get others to believe they can turn it around? How do I tap into their strengths so that they can make decisions to do what's right for students?"

*Analysis of Jakob's personal best experience*. Three key leadership practices emerged from Principal Jakob's personal best experience. First, positive relationships were extremely important in building capacity and collective efficacy at Hillview Elementary School. Second, turning around a failing school was not just the work of the principal, it required the work of the entire staff. By nurturing trusting relationships, Principal Jakob felt that he was building his staff's capacity to figure out and respond to what their students needed. Third, in helping Amelia move to a different school, Principal Jakob de-staffed based on the needs of his school and also on the needs of his teacher.

**Zac**. Principal Zac's personal best experience at Vista Elementary School occurred when he had the opportunity to hire a significant number of new staff. Given the opportunity of school

staff restructuring within RPS, through staff attrition, and through teacher reassignment, Principal Zac was able to create a "considerable shift in the trajectory of the school." He decided which teachers were being recommended for reassignment and described this as a very lonely and difficult process. He stated, "It was just me and I tried to do everything in my power to not pour salt in the wounds – I mean these people deserved dignity." After months of observing, he selected those teachers who would be de-staffed – teachers who had been at Vista for more than two decades, teachers whose instruction was too traditional, or teachers who did not collaborate well with their teammates. While identifying who these reassigned teachers should be, Principal Zac also managed the rest of the staff's "fears and rumors."

Principal Zac met with the identified teachers individually. He supported each teacher's needs as he/she returned to the classroom that day and as each finished out the school year. He worked hard to help those who wanted to continue teaching find jobs within RPS. He then realized that he had to hire their replacements. He said, "Now I've got to go find the right people and I must have done 150 interviews [that spring and summer]." Hiring staff was a leadership skill that Principal Zac thought he did well. He described his knack for successful hiring as not settling for an individual. He shared, "Resist saying 'that's the one' right away unless you know it…find those intangible pieces within a person. They may not have all of the experience you need, but they have that work ethic, that drive, that grit. . . . They're just that kind of person." He made it clear to potential teacher candidates that he valued teacher leadership, teacher voice, and teacher involvement at Vista.

Principal Zac capitalized on the synergy created by new teachers on staff at Vista Elementary. He saw his second year at Vista as an opportunity to make a lot of other changes. Principal Zac established the routines and norms of the school. For example, he noticed that

during fire drills and evacuation drills, staff who were not with students thought it was optional to exit the building. At student arrival time, Principal Zac noticed teachers arriving after the students. He realized, "Oh, so we have a long history of how we do things here. So, we had to change some of that. But it had to be one by one." Vista did not have grade-level team leaders; Principal Zac created these positions and gathered those team leaders during the summer to work collaboratively on the school improvement plan.

He focused on strengthening relationships with the staff that remained and building relationships with the new teachers. During his third year at the school, Principal Zac first noticed a sense of pride in the school. Teachers started thinking about a three-year school improvement plan. He described the teachers' aspirations for Vista as well as their pride in the school as, "We want to be a model school. We want people to come see us, see how we're doing things."

*Analysis of Zac's personal best experience*. Three key leadership practices emerged from Principal Zac's personal best experience. First, in a turnaround school, some actions fell solely on the principal, such as identifying who to de-staff. However, Principal Zac's role of building trust and capacity with others was paramount to sustaining the instructional improvement work. Second, hiring staff for a turnaround school who would work toward a shared vision was an essential action. Third, nurturing positive relationships contributed in important ways to developing collective efficacy among Vista's grade-level teams.

**John**. Principal John identified his personal best experience as the implementation of a comprehensive multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) at Woodcreek Elementary School. When he became its principal three years ago, he noted that one-third to two-thirds of the students at every grade level read below benchmarks. He knew from his prior principalship

experience in a similar school that Tier 1 instruction allowed for all students to access grade-level standards in the classroom. Tier 2 instruction provided additional support to some students so they could access grade-level standards. Tier 3 instruction provided intensive remediation in basic skills. Woodcreek Elementary lacked a systematic way for teachers to talk about students at the Tier 1, 2, or 3 levels.

Principal John's direct supervisor even cautioned him about taking on MTSS in his first year. Principal John persisted, "Well, we're going to try to do it and we're going to do it well." He had conversations with his leadership team and his team leaders. He wanted to know what instructional programs were in the school and what RPS was doing across the district. He learned from stakeholders about the cumbersome nature of both the school and the district processes. He shared, "It was very difficult [for staff] to navigate the online database. . .very difficult to track interventions and folks felt that they had to do all three components – reading, math, and behavior all at once, or they couldn't do anything else." Principal John challenged his staff to focus on academics as a starting point because data from a universal screener indicated that two-thirds of Woodcreek's students were below grade-level standards.

Principal John and his staff defined each tier. Collaboratively, they defined the structure of what the meetings would look like. Principal John designed an intervention template that the working group agreed would be used. Somewhat unique to Woodcreek, they crafted ways they would communicate to parents that a child was receiving intervention(s). Principal John took his staff through a thorough process of defining MTSS for Woodcreek Elementary. He was especially proud that the process was working well for his staff and that their school's success with MTSS was influencing other schools and offices within RPS. He stated, "What we found was that our work was either being replicated or being shared at other schools in RPS…. I feel

like we are doing some good work and feel pretty proud about that because it's more than just you and your school." Principal John attributed the school's focus on MTSS as the catalyst they needed to achieve full accreditation within two years.

Principal John attributed his success to five specific leadership actions. First, he stated, "I always say you have to 'model the way'. . . . You have to be able to do things the way in which you expect things to be done." If he was going to expect teachers do something, Principal John needed to be at the center of these expectations. Second, Principal John knew it was important to build capacity by building relationships. He felt that doing so motivated individuals to do things that they would not normally do. He shared, "It was absolutely important for me to be able to rely upon my background and experiences as a former principal in a Title I school and use those experiences to know that I have to build that capacity and move folks to do it [the work]." Third, Principal John stated that he recognized and celebrated people. He said,

> I celebrated those individuals because we are asking them to do things they didn't
> have to do, beyond the scope of their job.… I write cards to my teachers. I
> personalize it. I do every year what I call the State of the Union [address] with
> my staff, and I always start the first part of that presentation with a celebration.
> You know, when it comes to 'encouraging the heart,' we do a toast…. We talk
> about the key things that are working well.

Fourth, he provided data to support his next steps. Principal John's fifth valuable leadership skill was being highly visible in the school and community.

Principal John attributed his ability to lead school reform at Woodcreek to having a clear vision with clear steps to get to that vision. Because more than three-fourths of the teachers were

new to Woodcreek Elementary, Principal John worked with staff to create a vision and mission. He focused on building a culture of collaboration to ensure that people's voices were heard. He believed, "If people can see it [vision and mission], they are more apt to believe they can get there." Woodcreek's vision focused on meeting the needs of children and making them lifelong learners. Through his experience at Woodcreek Elementary, Principal John learned that you have to differentiate supports for staff. He stated, "…while you may have a vision…doing those check-ins and pausing to reflect and look at other pieces that you may not see, is huge." Finally, Principal John compared his leadership at Woodcreek with his other principal experience. He stated,

> This work of school improvement, school reform, is hard work. But there is no
> one way to do it and having been a principal in two districts and two separate
> schools, I will say that both experiences have been very different. And the entry
> points that we took at Woodcreek were what was needed. It may not be what's
> needed at another school down the road, and it may not be the same exact thing
> that's needed ten years from now.

Principal John further summarized that Woodcreek was now a place where there was strong commitment to do the work of instructional improvement and an environment where everyone felt welcomed.

*Analysis of John's personal best experience*. Four key leadership practices emerged from Principal John's personal best experience. First, turning around a school was hard work without any prescription of what to do first. This practice came through in Principal John's reflection about the importance of analyzing data because it provided specific entry points for the

leader.  Second, providing teachers with professional development and differentiated coaching support was important for teachers to be able to meet the needs of students.  Third, he needed to establish the vision for the school so that new and veteran staff members could work toward this shared aspiration.  Fourth, finding opportunities to celebrate individuals, teams, or the community at-large was an essential action evident in Principal John's example of a "toast" of what was working well at Woodcreek Elementary School.

**Vivienne**. Vivienne's personal best experience as principal of Oceanside Elementary School occurred when she could officially share with her teachers that they and their students would be fully accredited for the 2018-19 school year based on student performance on standardized tests at the end of the 2017-18 school year.  This accomplishment assumed greater significance given that three-fourths of her teachers were new to Oceanside and only seven teachers were veterans at the school.  She remembered vividly the look of pride on the teachers' faces on that day.  Principal Vivienne stated, "Not only did it confirm for me that yes, I'm in the right place; yes, I'm doing the right work; and, I'm doing the right work in the right place with the right people."

When Vivienne was appointed principal in September 2016, she felt that the Oceanside teachers had given up and did not believe that students could learn.  She felt that students didn't believe in themselves.  Teachers attributed their failure to meet the needs of students because of the high ESOL population in the school.  Principal Vivienne referred to these circumstances as "Epic Failure 101."  Given the opportunity for school staff restructuring within RPS, through staff attrition and through teacher reassignment, Principal Vivienne hired individuals who wanted to be a part of the turnaround experience at Oceanside Elementary.  She emphasized transparently to the incoming staff that "Children are first.  Children are why we are here."

Principal Vivienne's unwavering commitment to meeting the needs of students showed through in Oceanside's school improvement plan. The school improvement plan focused on teachers providing high-quality instruction in language arts, math, and science – Oceanside's areas of accreditation concerns. Principal Vivienne monitored the grade levels' collaborative team meetings and aligned each team's work around the collaborative team cycle of unpacking standards, sharing instructional strategies, and planning interventions and enrichments. Oceanside's teachers had access to in-school and ongoing professional development in reading workshop implementation, math workshop implementation, and science instruction. Principal Vivienne trained teachers and teams on how to use and understand multiple data sources. She held teachers accountable for maintaining a student progress monitoring spreadsheet for their class.

Camaraderie and positive relationships evolved from the work of teachers within their collaborative teams. Teachers accepted becoming interdependent because they could "trust that their colleagues were doing the right work to meet the needs of the children." Principal Vivienne attributed her personal best experience to her leadership skills of organization, grit, integrity, and trustworthiness. Additionally, she described her ability to design a "tight" master schedule that provided meaningful blocks of time to each subject, as well as sufficient teacher and team planning time.

In sharing her personal best experience, Principal Vivienne reflected, "Leading in a turnaround school is a lot of work. It's hard work. Don't wait to fix something if it's broken, even if it's unpopular to do. Our most important asset is our students and their learning." Principal Vivienne recounted a conversation with a longtime itinerant staff member. The staff member said, "You know, this feels like a school. Things are calm. Kids are smiling. Teachers

are happy.  Kids want to be here.  Teachers want to be here."  Finally, Principal Vivienne summarized, "The work of a school leader is not the work of one, it's the work of many, and the commitment to turning a school around, there's not a formula for it…. If you spend your time focusing on children and doing the right work for kids, the adults are going to be OK with that because that's why we're here."

*Analysis of Vivienne's personal best experience*. Three key leadership practices emerged from Principal Vivienne's personal best experience.  First, moving a school from failing to successful was the work of many, not just the principal.  All teachers collaborated to meet her expectation that teams worked around the collaborative team cycle.  Second, she encouraged her staff to take risks, then she provided them with support or professional development.  Third, she established trust and nurtured relationships with her teachers.  This allowed her teachers and teams to work interdependently.

## Cross-Case Findings

Each of the principals' personal best experiences generated findings that answered the research question, "What are the leadership practices of elementary school principals who have successfully led a school turnaround?"  In this section, I answer the second research question, "To what extent do these leadership practices correspond to Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices of model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart?"  I share the dominant, high importance examples from the principals' personal best experiences to illustrate their correspondence to each of Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices.  See Appendix H for the multiple-case analysis of findings and themes matrix.

**Theme 1: Model the way**. When principals model the way, they make their values clear to stakeholders and align their actions with shared values. Four principals had evidence to support model the way. Principal Anthony valued a positive environment and acted on improving the aesthetics of the school and relocating bilingual staff to meet the needs of his school community. Principal Francesca acknowledged that when her school failed to meet accreditation despite feeling confident that they would achieve accreditation, she responded by owning the failure. She analyzed collaboratively with her teachers what they could have done differently and stayed true to those instructional practices they knew worked best for students. Principal John explicitly identified "model the way" as one of his key leadership actions. He established a vision for Woodcreek Elementary School and he saw himself as a collaborator in the development of MTSS. Principal Vivienne described her work and visibility within collaborative teams as hands-on. She held teachers accountable for monitoring student progress and she trained teams on how to use and analyze data. Principals who model the way are clear in what is important for stakeholders. They lead by example and work alongside their staff.

**Theme 2: Inspire a shared vision**. When principals inspire a shared vision, they imagine the possibilities for their stakeholders and they bring others on board who will work toward the shared aspirations. All seven principals had evidence to support inspire a share vision. All of the principals in this study described leading in a turnaround school as complex work. Each principal attributed his/her school's success to the work of everyone in the school. Principal Ella, Principal Francesca, Principal Zac, Principal John, and Principal Vivienne each mentioned new staff members who were hired for their respective schools. The principals hired staff who understood the challenges of working in a turnaround school and individuals who believed that

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students were at the heart of decision-making.  Each of these principals believed that the staff they hired could work collaboratively with others to turn around the school.

**Theme 3: Challenge the process**.  When principals challenge the process, they look for ways to improve structures, protocols, or ways of working.  They willingly take risks and learn from experiences.  Five principals had evidence of challenge the process.  Principal Ella, Principal Francesca, and Principal Vivienne described allowing their teachers to take risks and supporting them along the way.  This risk-taking allowed their schools to build its collective capacity to solve problems.  Both Principal Anthony and Principal John highlighted providing professional development and job-embedded coaching for their teachers as ways to improve instructional quality.  Principals who challenge the process constantly strive to find efficient ways of working that enable stakeholders to meet the needs of students.

**Theme 4: Enable others to act**.  When principals enable others to act, they build trust and nurture relationships.  They also build capacity among stakeholders.  Of Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices, enabling others to act was a high importance leadership practice in all seven of the principals' personal best experiences.  The seven principals were either in their third, fourth, or fifth year of service to their turnaround school.  Although no school has maintained full accreditation annually since the turnaround principal's arrival, enabling others to act was a prominent leadership action of the principal.  Principal Anthony described building teacher capacity.  Principal Ella figured out who in the building could do what.  Principal Francesca explained the importance of teachers working interdependently.  Principal Jakob stressed positive relationships as key to developing efficacy.  Principal Zac stated that building trust and capacity were paramount to sustaining the work.  Principal John explained that professional development and differentiated support developed capacity among

teachers. Principal Vivienne stated that trust was the basis for teachers and teams working interdependently.  In a turnaround school context where there may be high or frequent staff turnover, leaders constantly need to foster collaboration and strengthen others.

**Theme 5: Encourage the heart**. When principals encourage the heart, they praise individual excellence and promote a spirit of community.  Of Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices, encourage the heart was a high importance leadership practice in only one of the principals' personal best experiences.  Only Principal John described finding opportunities to celebrate within his community.  He described the toast before a meeting to celebrate what was working well at Woodcreek Elementary School.

## Multicase Assertions

These cross-case findings and their correspondence to Kouzes and Posner's five leadership actions allowed me to make three assertions.  First, turnaround schools are unique contexts, so a principal's leadership actions will vary according to the school's context.  Second, in early years of turnaround work, principals tend to prioritize two of Kouzes and Posner's leadership actions: enable others to act and inspire a shared vision.  Third, turnaround principals focus their energy on building teacher capacity and interdependence on teams.  Each of these assertions is discussed.

**Turnaround schools are unique contexts**. A principal's leadership actions will vary according to his/her school's context.  While all of the principals discussed leading in their turnaround school as challenging work, the only common turnaround entry point was that each principal was appointed to lead a school that was previously accredited with warning.  Five schools benefitted from RPS' staff restructuring.  Principals in these schools described leadership

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actions such as establishing trust, inducting new staff members, hiring teachers with leadership potential, and providing professional development. At Meadows Elementary School and Hillview Elementary School, Principal Anthony and Principal Jakob, respectively, discussed how they developed the instructional capacity of the teachers they inherited. Thus, Principal John summarized turnaround schools as unique contexts best when he stated that his entry points at Woodcreek Elementary School were what was needed there. These entry points "may not be what's needed at another school down the road."

**Enable others to act and inspire a shared vision**. Of Kouzes and Posner's five leadership actions, the turnaround principals in this research study tended to prioritize enable others to act and inspire a shared vision. Perhaps because of where these schools were in their turnaround process, building trusting relationships and leadership capacity among stakeholders seemed to be articulated the most in the principals' personal best experiences. Principals enabling others to act attained prominence when principals described turnaround as the work of not just the principal, but the entire staff.

Inspire a shared vision tended to be the second priority leadership practice. Principals hired and supported staff who wanted to work in a turnaround context. In Principal Jakob's personal best experience, he counseled an unsuccessful teacher at Hillview Elementary School into another teaching position with RPS where she achieved more success. Principal Vivienne articulated that if teachers had the will to work in a turnaround school, she could help with the skills they would need. Inspire a shared vision also meant imagining the possibilities. Principal Zac's teachers wanted Vista Elementary to be a model school for RPS. Principal Ella told her teachers she needed them to be the Navy SEALs of teaching.

**Building teacher capacity and interdependence among teams**. This third assertion is essentially Kouzes and Posner's enable others to act contextualized for what turnaround principals would describe as essential actions for sustaining the work. When asked to describe their personal best experience, these turnaround principals focused less on describing themselves and more on their impact with teachers and teams. Turnaround principals described the importance of building teacher capacity and interdependence among teams. Principal Anthony had resource staff members who provided job-embedded coaching for teachers. Principal Jakob used inquiry as a way to ask staff questions that promoted their own thinking and problem solving. Principal Zac created teacher leadership positions that empowered the school team to develop a three-year school improvement plan. Principal John collaborated with his staff to define the intervention tiers at Woodcreek Elementary School. These actions over time seemed to give school staff confidence that they could positively impact student achievement.

**Summary**

Kouzes and Posner (2017) suggested that when leaders shared their personal best experience, certain universal leadership practices would emerge regardless of the profession. In this research study I asked principals who were hired to lead in a turnaround school to share their personal best experience. After analyzing their interview transcripts, I learned the leadership practices of turnaround principals. Through my cross-case analysis of individual personal best cases with Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices I learned how the principal's leadership practices corresponded with model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. This allowed me to generate three assertions for principal leadership in a turnaround school. First, turnaround schools are unique contexts and a principal's leadership actions will vary according to the school's context. Second, turnaround principals

tend to prioritize two of Kouzes and Posner's leadership actions: enable others to act and inspire

a shared vision.  Lastly, turnaround principals focus their energy on building teacher capacity

and interdependence on teams.

**Chapter 5**

**Discussion**

In the previous chapter, I shared my findings of the leadership practices of turnaround principals. I analyzed Kouzes and Posner's leadership practices of model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart across all seven of the principals' personal best experiences to generate three assertions for principal leadership in a turnaround school. First, turnaround schools are unique contexts and a principal's leadership actions will vary according to the school's context. Second, turnaround principals tend to prioritize two of Kouzes and Posner's leadership actions: enable others to act and inspire a shared vision. Third, turnaround principals focus their energy on building teacher capacity and interdependence on teams.

In this chapter, I discuss my research findings in context with the literature and my conceptual framework. First, I discuss what it means to be a principal amid national policies that expect the principal to positively impact student achievement. Second, I review my conceptual framework. Third, I relate each assertion I made from chapter four in context with what we know about principal leadership. Fourth, I share suggestions for further research. Fifth, I share reflections of my study. Finally, I close the chapter with a summary.

**Being a Principal and Impacting Student Achievement**

For the majority of the academic school years in this study, NCLB prescribed the federal accountability measures for schools, followed by the ESSA federal accountability measures that went into effect for school year 2018-19. Annual statewide assessments served as a measure of student achievement. Under NCLB, the annual statewide assessments for elementary schools in this Mid-Atlantic state were administered in English, math, science, and social studies. When

ESSA went into effect, the annual statewide assessments for elementary schools in this Mid-Atlantic state were administered in English, math, and science.

These Mid-Atlantic statewide assessments in specific content areas were interesting given Kliebard's (1986) historical perspective of the American school curriculum. The emphasis on standardized testing seemed to signal humanism, or the school curriculum being organized around academic subjects. Likewise, social efficiency seemed to also be the focus to prepare students for the workforce. Kliebard (2002) suggested that ideologies resurfaced based on prevailing social and political conditions. The current reality is that all four of Kliebard's interest groups have some degree of influence over what is taught in the curriculum. Developmentalism, or how the curriculum meets the needs of the learner, is present when students engage in problem-based learning opportunities. Principal Francesca's 2018-19 school improvement plan had an explicit goal written for innovation. Social meliorism, or how the curriculum brings social improvement, is present when students advocate for themselves. Principal Jakob's 2016-17 school improvement plan had an explicit goal written for student engagement. See Table 7 for Areas of Focus in School Improvement Plans.

The principal was seen as vital to ensuring his/her school met AYP benchmarks. NCLB and subsequently ESSA accountability measures held schools to the same standard for student achievement, regardless of the populations they served. Principals were held accountable for student achievement. The principals in my study recognized the prominence of their role in school improvement. However, the principals uniformly articulated that their staffs were also responsible for student achievement. Nir and Hameiri (2014) suggested that principal leadership was influential to a successful school. Scholars generally agree that the principal indirectly impacts student achievement by influencing teacher's behaviors and attitudes or the

organization's collective capacity (Dolan, 2009; Hallinger, 2003; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1994; Kaplan, Owings, & Nunnery, 2005; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Vanderhaar, Muñoz, & Rodosky, 2006).

**Review of Conceptual Framework**
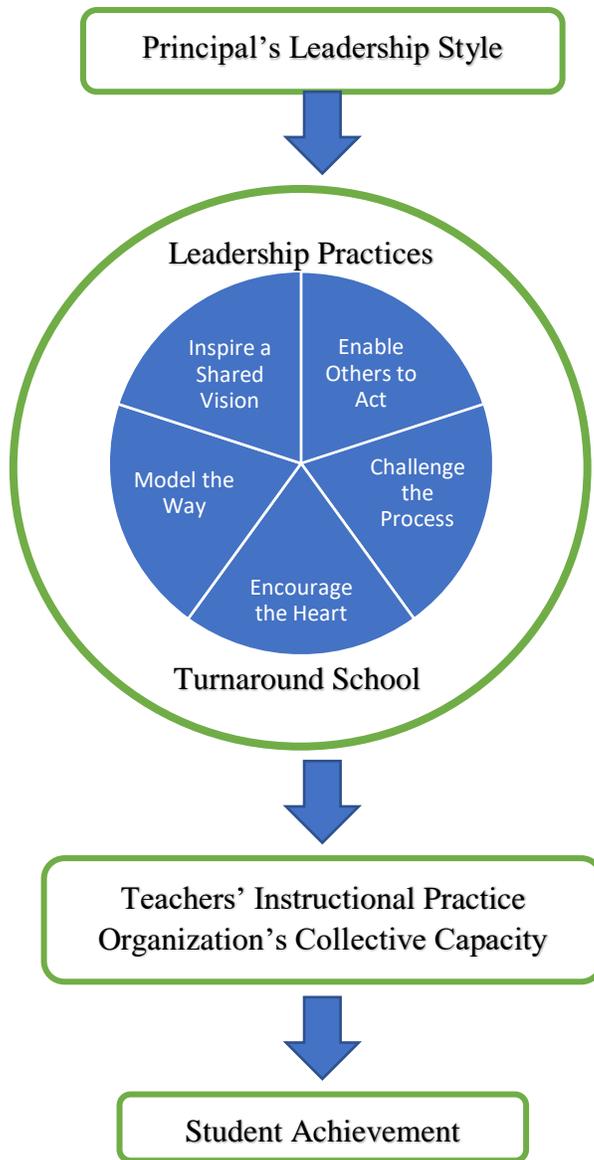


*Figure 3.* Conceptual Framework for the Study

The conceptual framework I presented in chapter two is copied again here for reference (See Figure 3). I developed the conceptual framework to help me answer two research questions: What are the leadership practices of elementary school principals who have successfully led a school turnaround? To what extent do these leadership practices correspond to Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices? The framework begins with the principal's leadership style. I summarized four leadership styles in my literature review: transactional, transformational, instructional, and contingency leadership. Though each was presented as distinctly different approaches, researchers agree that a style is neither best nor pure (Bossert et al., 1982; Duke, 2010; Hallinger, 2003).

The principal's leadership style influences what he/she does (leadership practices) in a turnaround school context. Kouzes and Posner's (2017) five leadership practices of model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart are offered as leadership practices (or actions) that turnaround principals demonstrate to impact teachers' instructional practice and/or the organization's collective capacity to solve problems. Teachers are then able to meet the instructional needs of their students and have a direct impact on student achievement (accreditation). My conceptual framework implies that the principal has a direct impact on teachers' instructional practice and an indirect impact on student achievement which aligns with the research. I will discuss the alignment between my conceptual framework and my findings in the next section.

**Assertion 1: Turnaround Schools are Unique Contexts**

Leithwood, Harris, and Strauss (2010) suggested that turnaround schools present unique contexts to examine the leadership practices of turnaround principals. Hallinger (2003) referred to context as the limitations, resources, and opportunities, that a leader must understand to lead.

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Furthermore, a leader's effectiveness depended on his/her ability to respond to the changing needs of the school (Leithwood et al., 2008; Hallinger, 2003). The seven schools in this study were all designated "intensive" turnaround schools by Riverdale Public Schools (RPS) because each was accredited with warning for the 2014-15 school year. An RPS "intensive" designation also meant that the previous principal was removed. Each school in this study was also a Title I school and served high numbers of students who were living in poverty. RPS appointed a leader with strong Title I leadership experiences to lead each failing school. Klar and Brewer (2008) pointed out that high poverty schools were more likely to have underqualified teachers who lacked the skills to meet the instructional needs of their students than their affluent counterparts.

School leaders must develop and expand their leadership repertoires especially because a leadership style that is effective in one setting may not be as effective in another setting (Hallinger, 2003; Paletta et al., 2017). Leaders with a contingency leadership style were able to respond to the unique needs of their school contexts (Bossert et al., 1982; Fiedler, 1967; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Leithwood et al., 1999; Leithwood et al., 2004; Hallinger, 2003). This meant that contingent leaders could demonstrate transactional, transformational, and instructional styles based on the needs of their school. Specific examples of transactional, transformational, and instructional leadership styles from the principals' personal best experiences are highlighted to illustrate these specific leadership styles. However, the seven principals in this study were largely contingent leaders because he/she adapted multiple leadership styles to meet the school's needs.

**Transactional leadership**. Besides student achievement as a contextual factor, four of the principals specifically described needing to make changes in either the environment or the routines of the school. In these scenarios, the principals' leadership style was largely

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transactional because he/she singularly made decisions to improve the environment or the routines of the school. Principal Anthony "cleaned the school up" and improved the aesthetics of Meadows Elementary. Both Principal Ella and Principal Francesca established a positive behavior approach for how staff should respond when students were not meeting behavioral expectations. Principal Zac made clear what time he expected staff to arrive to school and what staff should do during drill evacuations.

**Transformational leadership**. Transformational leaders focused on change, fostered high levels of commitment, and developed the capacity of others (Fullan, 2014; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Marzano et al., 2005). Five schools specifically benefitted from RPS' staff restructuring efforts. Principal Zac described his de-staffing of veteran teachers as an important opportunity for Vista Elementary School because it "changed the trajectory [of the school]." All of the principals in this study discussed the importance of building teachers' instructional capacity. Principal Francesca's Evergreen bootcamp provided her new staff an opportunity to engage in professional learning around the workshop model, differentiation, and positive classroom environments.

**Instructional leadership**. Marks and Printy's (2003) shared instructional leadership model focused on the principal and teachers collaborating on curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Principal Anthony held daily student progress meetings with each grade level. Principal John collaborated with his staff and created a multi-tiered systems of support structure so that they could discuss students' instructional levels. Principal Vivienne regularly participated in collaborative team meetings and taught teachers how to use and analyze data.

**Alignment with my conceptual framework**. The seven principals in this study described leading a turnaround school as challenging work. Each demonstrated various

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leadership styles depending on the scenario he/she described. Although the examples provided above were presented as distinctly transactional, transformational, or instructional leadership, the principals did not solely use one style in sharing a personal best experience. This reinforced the idea that the principal is important in the success of a school because his/her leadership style influences his/her leadership practices.

My study affirmed that turnaround schools are unique contexts and a principal's leadership actions will vary according to the school's context. I examined each principal's personal best experience with Kouzes and Posner's leadership practices of model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. According to my conceptual framework, I believed Kouzes and Posner's practices would be evident in the personal best experience. Indeed, I found evidence of all five leadership practices. However, enable others to act and inspire a shared vision emerged as priorities. These two leadership practices are discussed in the next section.

**Assertion 2: Enable Others to Act and Inspire a Shared Vision**

Of Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices, the turnaround principals in this study tended to prioritize enable others to act and inspire a shared vision. Each of the principals was appointed to turn around a failing school. In order to do so, they needed to improve teaching and learning. Leithwood and his colleagues (2004) suggested that what leaders did to develop the capacity (enable others to act) within the organization impacted student learning. Secondly, who or what they paid attention to within the organization contributed to student learning. Principals who knew what the priorities should be in the organization, had a conception of what the ideal looked like, and brought others on board to work on the shared aspirations (inspire a shared

vision) also contributed to student learning.  I discuss how my research's prioritization of enable others to act and inspire a shared vision positively contributed to student learning.

**Enable others to act**. The principals in this study prioritized building the capacity of others as an essential action when leading in a turnaround school.  Each principal recognized that he/she could not do the work of school turnaround alone.  Principal Anthony and Principal John both described building teacher capacity through job-embedded professional development.  Principal Ella allowed her staff to take risks and supported them along the way.  Principal Francesca stressed the importance of teachers working interdependently.  Principal Jakob and Principal Zac believed that positive relationships with their respective staffs enabled individuals or teams to solve problems.  By building both instructional capacity and leadership capacity, these turnaround principals empowered their staffs to improve instruction for students and/or increase the school's collective capacity to continuously improve.

**Inspire a shared vision**. Following enable others to act, inspire a shared vision was the second essential Kouzes and Posner leadership action.  Leithwood and his colleagues (2004) described an impactful principal as one who knew what the priorities should be in the organization, had a conception of what the ideal looked like, and brought others on board to work on the shared aspirations were likely to impact student learning.  Principal John discussed knowing what entry points were needed at Woodcreek Elementary that were different from his entry points at a previous turnaround school.  Principal Ella envisioned a staff at Sandalwood Elementary School comprised of the Navy SEALs of teaching.  Principal Francesca worked with her staff to refine the school's commitments around the learning environment, instructional practices, collaboration, and professional learning.  Five principals in this study received RPS

support to restructure their staff.  Each principal talked about hiring and supporting staff who wanted to work in a turnaround context.

**Assertion 3: Building Teacher Capacity and Interdependence Among Teams**

Turnaround principals focus their energy on building teacher capacity and interdependence among teams.  This assertion is essentially Kouzes and Posner's enable others to act but is contextualized specifically for leaders in turnaround schools.  I found that these turnaround principals' personal best experiences focused more on their impact with teachers and teams.  These turnaround principals capitalized on this synergy to increase the school's capacity to innovate or solve problems.  A principal who created synergy among the educational processes and the school's fiscal, material, and human resources impacted student achievement (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012).  These principals created the conditions for their school to function as an organizational unit rather than individual units (Hallinger, 2003).

Principal Francesca's personal best experience captured this assertion of building teacher capacity and interdependence well when she described her four-year tenure at Evergreen Elementary School.  There seemed to be no doubt in central office leaders' minds that Evergreen would meet all accreditation benchmarks at the end of the 2016-17 school year and be fully accredited for 2017-18.  When the school learned that it missed the science benchmark by only a few students, the organization rebounded and stayed true to providing high-quality classroom instruction.  Because teachers at Evergreen worked interdependently, they had the organizational capacity to reflect and determine what they needed to do to address science instruction while maintaining student performance in language arts and math instruction.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

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I recommend continued learning on the leadership practices of successful elementary turnaround principals. Turnaround schools are unique contexts and I confirmed that Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices were evident in the principals' personal best experiences. Further research is suggested in two areas. First, I suggest a longitudinal study of schools that start as turnaround and then successfully graduate to full accreditation. Second, I suggest surveying teachers about the frequency that their principal engaged in specific behaviors of Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices. I discuss these two suggestions further.

For the 2014-15 school year, all seven of these schools were accredited with warning and for the 2018-19 school year, all seven of these schools were accredited. Principal Ella, Principal Zac, Principal John, and Principal Vivienne have served in their schools for three years. Principal Anthony and Principal Francesca have served in their schools for four years. Only Principal Jakob has served in his school for five years. Given the accreditation history of the schools over a five-year period, it would be interesting to see if Kouzes and Posner's leadership practices are prioritized differently as a school moves from intensive to targeted to universal status. Only Principal John explicitly described the leadership action of encourage the heart by celebrating his staff with a toast. I wonder as a school continues to experience academic success and moves to a universal status if other of Kouzes and Posner's leadership practices are more dominant.

This study only asked turnaround principals to describe their personal best experiences. Even though the interview protocol asked principals to describe the impact of their actions on others, it would be interesting to survey teachers in these schools about their principal's behaviors. This would give some indication of the staff's engagement in the school and further describe the principal's impact on teachers and the organization.

**Reflections**

This study confirmed my opinions that turnaround schools are unique contexts and that turnaround principals' leadership actions would correspond to Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices. Of the five practices, I thought that enable others to act would be a high priority leadership practice and this was confirmed in my study. In turnaround schools, principals must be keenly aware of the needs of their particular school. This may mean improving the aesthetics of the building first. Or, this may mean hiring more than two-thirds of the staff and building their instructional and leadership capacity. As Principal John captured, the entry points are unique to a school and what is needed in one school may not be the same entry point in another turnaround school.

Of the five practices, I was surprised that model the way was not as prominent as enable others to act and inspire a shared vision. I expected that principals might articulate examples of how their actions matched their words. Though some principals did exactly that, I suspect that because principals were in year one, two, three, four, or five of their turnaround story, they chose a personal best example that highlighted building teacher capacity and interdependence among teams.

Principal leadership matters. I strengthened my understanding of what turnaround principals do. Like the principals in this study articulated, leading school reform is difficult work. I believe that a school district should continue to support those who are appointed to lead a failing school with fiscal, human capital, and professional development support.

**Summary**

Kouzes and Posner (2017) asserted that when individuals shared their personal best experience, five universal leadership practices would emerge.  Good leaders model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart.  In this research study, seven successful elementary school turnaround principals shared their personal best experience.

Being a principal is hard work.  Federal accountability measures hold schools to the same standard for student achievement regardless of the populations they serve.  Though principals are described as having an indirect impact on student achievement, the principal is often the most visible individual when a school is failing.  RPS removed the principals of seven failing schools and appointed leaders who had successful experiences working in Title I schools.

This study found that turnaround schools are unique contexts and a principal's leadership actions will vary according to the school's context.  Principals in this study tended to prioritize Kouzes and Posner's leadership actions of enable others to act and inspire a shared vision.  The principals in this study also focused their energy on building teacher capacity and interdependence among teams.

It makes sense to continue studying successful turnaround leaders.  A longitudinal study of schools that start as an intensive turnaround school and then successfully graduate to full accreditation may show a shift in the prioritization of Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices.  Additionally, surveying teachers about the frequency that their principal engaged in specific behaviors of Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices may give some indication of the staff's engagement in the school and further describe the principal's impact on teachers and the organization.

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**Appendix A: Researcher Reflexivity Journal Template**

Adapted from Patton, 2015

**Participants:**                                    **Date:**

Self-Reflexivity - *Prompts:* How do I know what I know about principal leadership?  What shapes my perspective?  What has shaped my perspective?

Reflexivity About Participants - *Prompts:* How do these principals know what they know?  What shapes and has shaped their world view?  How do they perceive me as the inquirer?   Why?  How do I know?

Reflexivity About Audience - *Prompts:* How do those who review my findings make sense of what I give them?  What perspectives do they bring to the findings I offer?  How do they perceive me?  How do I perceive them?

## Appendix B: Semi-structured Interview Protocol

**Introduction**

Thanks for taking the time to meet with me today. I'm excited about this opportunity and I look forward to your insight. I am exploring the leadership experiences of successful elementary school turnaround principals. I am interviewing you today to determine what you did when you were at your personal best as principal. When I say "personal best," I mean a time during your tenure at _____ Elementary School when you felt that you professionally achieved at the highest level.

If you understand what I mean by a personal best experience as a principal in your turnaround school, we can begin with the interview and I will begin recording your responses.

*Start recording*

**Opening Questions**

Please state your name and the elementary school that you are serving as principal. How many students and staff are in your school? What are the demographics of your school? How many years of experience do you have as a principal?

**Content Questions**

1. In your role as a school principal, describe an experience where you performed at your personal best. This may have been an experience that confirmed your belief in your abilities as a principal (and especially for your school). For example, describe your "best day" at work since becoming a principal or describe an instance that confirmed you were the right match for your school or a situation or project or initiative that you took pride in leading.
   a. Probing questions: Tell me more about that. How did you get to that place? What does "XXX" mean?
   b. Probing questions for Kouzes & Posner five leadership actions:
      i. Model the way: Tell me more about how your actions matched your words.
      ii. Inspire a shared vision: Tell me more about how you encouraged others to commit to the work in your turnaround school.
      iii. Challenge the process: Tell me more about your willingness to take risks [and/or allow others to take risks].
      iv. Enable others to act: Tell me more about how you developed leadership [or instructional] capacity among your staff.
      v. Encourage the heart: Tell me more about how you created a spirit of community [or ownership] in your turnaround school.
2. Tell me about two to three of the most important actions you took as a leader in this situation.

3. What was the impact of those decisions and actions?

4. What skills did you rely on to achieve your personal best in that experience?

5. What lessons did you learn from that experience?

6. Consider which (if any) of your actions in this experience were clear to others in the school community.  How did they respond to your actions?  What do you think they would say about your leadership because of seeing you lead in this instance?
    a. Probing questions: How did other members of the school community react (teachers, students, parents, admin team, others)?

7. Is there any further information that you would like to share that we have not covered?

**Conclusion**
Thank you for your time and for sharing your experience with me.  If you have any questions, you know how to reach me. My contact information is on the consent form you signed at the beginning of this interview.  Thank you again.

*Stop recording.*

**Appendix C: IRB Human Subjects Protection Certificate of Completion**

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*Certificate of Completion*

This certifies that

*Evangeline Rizal Petrich*

Has completed

**Training in Human Subjects Protection**

On the following topics:
Historical Basis for Regulating Human Subjects Research
The Belmont Report
Federal and Virginia Tech Regulatory Entities, Policies and Procedures

on

*October 16, 2016*

David Moore, IRB Chair

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**Appendix D: Study Cover Letter and Invitation**

January 28, 2019

Dear Principal:

This study is being conducted by a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech). The candidate is undertaking a dissertation study entitled, "*Leadership Practices of Successful Elementary Turnaround Principals.*"

The candidate has received the necessary approvals by Virginia Tech and Riverdale Public Schools to begin the data collection. I am serving as the candidate's third-party interviewer and am assisting her with recruitment and interviews to protect your confidentiality. I will interview you about a time during your leadership in your turnaround school when you felt that you were at your personal best. You will be asked about your experience, the actions you took, and the impact of those actions. You will also be asked what skills you relied on and how members of the school community responded to your actions. If you participate, I will conduct a face-to-face interview with you at a mutually convenient time and location. You can expect that the interview will take no more than one hour.

No identifying information linking you or your school will be included in the data. Following the interview, if you choose, you will have the opportunity to read the transcription prior to it being used in the research. Should there be any information you would like revised or removed, you will have the opportunity to provide me with that guidance.

Please let me know by Friday, February 1, 2019 if you are willing and able to participate in this research. I will schedule your interview during February 4 through 18, 2019. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you are unable to participate, please know that there will be no repercussions. Likewise, you are free to withdraw from this study at any time if you no longer wish to participate.

I look forward to your response. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,


Ms. Deborah Tyler (Debi)

<center>**Appendix E: Approved IRB Informed Consent Form**</center>

<center>Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University</center>

<center>Informed Consent for Participants Participating</center>

<center>in Research Project Involving Human Subjects</center>

**Title of Project:**     Leadership Practices of Successful Elementary Turnaround Principals

**Research Investigators:**     William J. Glenn, wglenn@vt.edu, 703-538-8493

Evangeline R. Petrich, epetr1ch@vt.edu, 757-575-6083

Deborah L. Tyler, deborahtyler827@gmail.com, 703-577-1062

## I.     Purpose of this Research

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the knowledge base of prioritizing essential leadership actions for turnaround leadership. Specifically, the study is designed to lead the investigator to understand the leadership practices of elementary school principals who have successfully led a school turnaround. The research will include the collection of information about the principal's personal best leadership experience. From this, the investigator intends to understand its relationship to Kouzes and Posner's five exemplary leadership practices.

The study will involve data collection from eight elementary school turnaround principals in a common school system who were each appointed to lead a school that failed to meet state accreditation.

The results of this study will be used for publication and a dissertation.

## II.     Procedures

You, the participant, will be asked to sign an informed consent form prior to the collection of any data. Should you choose to participate, the following public documents for your school will be retrieved for analysis: school report card, school improvement plan, school manual, and engagement survey.

Next, you will participate in a one-on-one interview with Ms. Deborah Tyler which will take no more than one hour. The interview will take place at date, time, and location that are mutually agreed upon by you and the investigator. The interview will be scheduled during Winter 2019.

During the interview, you will first be asked some questions relating to the demographics of your current school and your career experiences. This should take no more than five minutes. This information will be de-identified by the investigator. The remainder of the interview will explore a personal best experience during your time as the principal of your turnaround school. The interview will be recorded using a voice recorder.

A transcription will be made of the interview. All identifying information will be removed from the transcription. You will have the right to review the transcript and to provide the investigator with any revisions such as omissions, clarifications, or additions to the interview, prior to the

<center>100</center>

transcription being used for research.  You will have seven days from the time you receive the transcription to provide revision to the investigator.

All data collected (including the transcription of your interview, audio recording of your interview, and documents created by the investigator from the data you provide) will be kept confidential by the investigator and will be retained for three years following the publication of the study.  After that, the investigator will shred and destroy all hard copy documents and permanently delete all data collected and stored on technology.

## III.  Risks

There is little to no risk to you to participate in this study.  If, however, you experience any emotional distress during any part of this research and no longer wish to participate in the study, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

You may experience concerns about confidentiality.  The investigator will not divulge your identity and data will de-identified by the investigator.

## IV.  Benefits

There is no direct benefit accrued to you as a participant beyond the benefit of professional reflection on the topic presented.  No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage you to participate.  Understanding made by the investigator from your data will be published in a dissertation so that others can learn from your leadership practices in a turnaround school.

## V.   Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

The data collected during this research will be conducted in a confidential manner and your identity will be held in confidence by the investigator.  Pseudonyms for people and places will be used in the collection and reporting of results.  Ms. Petrich will not be informed whether or not you chose to participate in the study.  Demographic and interview data will be de-identified and coded in ways only known to Ms. Tyler and Dr. Glenn.  Data and keys to such coding will be stored in a secured manner, in separate locations from one another.  At no time will the researchers release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent. The Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view the study's data for auditing purposes.  The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

## VI.  Compensation

There is no compensation to participate in this research.

## VII. Freedom to Withdraw

It is important for you to know that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. You are free not to answer any questions that you choose or respond to what is being asked of you without penalty.

Please note that there may be circumstances under which the investigator may determine that a subject should not continue as a subject.

Should you withdraw or otherwise discontinue participation, you will be compensated for the portion of the project completed in accordance with the Compensation section of this document.

## VIII. Questions or Concerns

Should you have any questions about this study, you may contact one of the research investigators whose contact information is included at the beginning of this document.

Should you have any questions or concerns about the study's conduct or your rights as a research subject, or need to report a research-related injury or event, you may contact the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board at irb@vt.edu or (540) 231-3732.

## IX. Subject's Consent

I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

_____   _____

Subject signature                                                              Date

_____

Subject printed name

*Transcription Review*

☐ I would like the option to review the transcripts of this interview. I understand that I will have seven days to review the transcripts from the date that the researcher sends them to me. If I do not respond with edits during that time frame, the researcher will assume that I do not want to make any changes and will move forward with the transcript analysis.

☐ I do not want the option to review the transcripts of this interview.

**Appendix F: Themes Template**

Adapted from Stake, 2006 Worksheet 2

Research Questions: What are the leadership practices of elementary school principals who have successfully led a school turnaround?  To what extent do these leadership practices correspond to Kouzes and Posner's five leadership practices?

| |
|---|
| Theme 1:  Model the Way |
| Theme 2:  Inspire a Shared Vision |
| Theme 3:  Challenge the Process |
| Theme 4:  Enable Others to Act |
| Theme 5:  Encourage the Heart |

## Appendix G: Analysis of Themes – Individual Case Template

Adapted from Stake, 2006 Worksheet 3

| | |
|---|---|
| Case Code | |
| Principal Pseudonym | |
| Synopsis of Personal Best Experience (demographics, description of experience) | |
| Situation Constraints | |
| Uniqueness among other cases | |
| Prominence of Theme 1 in this case: | |
| Prominence of Theme 2 in this case: | |
| Prominence of Theme 3 in this case: | |
| Prominence of Theme 4 in this case: | |
| Prominence of Theme 5 in this case: | |
| Finding I | |
| Finding II | |
| Finding III | |
| Finding IV | |

Adapted from Stake, 2006 Worksheet 5A

| Case AC: | Theme 1 Model the Way | Theme 2 Inspire a Shared Vision | Theme 3 Challenge the Process | Theme 4 Enable Others to Act | Theme 5 Encourage the Heart |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Finding I**<br><br>Leading a turnaround school is extremely challenging.  Successful turnaround leaders build sufficient organizational and teacher capacity that can be maintained from one leader to another. | M | H | H | H | L |
| **Finding II**<br><br>Building teacher capacity, through job-embedded professional development or coaching, is paramount to teachers believing that they can positively impact student achievement. | M | H | H | H | L |
| **Finding III**<br><br>The learning environment received a face lift that resulted in the belief that the principal and other cared about students, staff, and the community. | H | M | L | M | M |
| **Finding IV**<br><br>The principal believed that his staff could turn around the school. | L | H | M | H | M |

*Note*. H = high importance; M = middling importance; L = low importance

| Case ES | Theme 1<br>Model the Way | Theme 2<br>Inspire a<br>Shared Vision | Theme 3<br>Challenge the<br>Process | Theme 4<br>Enable Others<br>to Act | Theme 5<br>Encourage the<br>Heart |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Finding I**<br><br>There is no quick way to turn around a failing school. That's the "why." You have to take inventory of what and who is in the building to help you figure out the "how." | M | H | L | H | L |
| **Finding II**<br><br>Allow staff to take risks and provide them with support along the way. This build their collective capacity to solve problems. | L | L | H | H | L |
| **Finding III**<br><br>Make de-staff decisions based on what the school needs. Maintain each individual's dignity in the process. | L | H | L | H | L |

*Note*. H = high importance; M = middling importance; L = low importance

| Case FC | Theme 1 Model the Way | Theme 2 Inspire a Shared Vision | Theme 3 Challenge the Process | Theme 4 Enable Others to Act | Theme 5 Encourage the Heart |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Finding I**<br><br>Leading a turnaround school can be overwhelming.  The school can experience tremendous success as quickly as it can experience failure [not making accreditation].  How the leader responds during times of failure is just as important as what he/she does to move the school toward success.  [Owning failure] | H | H | H | L | L |
| **Finding II**<br><br>Leading in a turnaround school requires individuals to be highly reflective and to have the courage to make difficult decisions.  Some decisions can be the team's; other need to be the principal's decision. | L | L | H | H | L |
| **Finding III**<br><br>In successful turnaround schools, teachers work interdependently. | L | H | M | H | L |

*Note*. H = high importance; M = middling importance; L = low importance

| Case JB | Theme 1 Model the Way | Theme 2 Inspire a Shared Vision | Theme 3 Challenge the Process | Theme 4 Enable Others to Act | Theme 5 Encourage the Heart |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Finding I**<br><br>Positive relationships are extremely important in building capacity and collective efficacy in a turnaround school. | L | M | L | H | M |
| **Finding II**<br><br>Turning around a school is not just the work of the principal, it's also the work of the staff. | L | H | L | H | L |
| **Finding III**<br><br>Make de-staff decisions based on what the school needs.  Maintain each individual's dignity in the process. | L | H | L | H | L |

*Note*. H = high importance; M = middling importance; L = low importance

| Case ZW | Theme 1 Model the Way | Theme 2 Inspire a Shared Vision | Theme 3 Challenge the Process | Theme 4 Enable Others to Act | Theme 5 Encourage the Heart |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Finding I**<br><br>In a turnaround situation, there are some things that the principal has to do [identify who to de-staff] but building trust and capacity with others are paramount to sustaining the work. | M | H | L | H | L |
| **Finding II**<br><br>Hiring staff for a turnaround school is an important, essential action. | M | H | L | L | L |
| **Finding III**<br><br>Positive relationships are important to developing collective efficacy among teams. | L | L | L | H | L |

*Note*. H = high importance; M = middling importance; L = low importance

| Case JH | Theme 1 Model the Way | Theme 2 Inspire a Shared Vision | Theme 3 Challenge the Process | Theme 4 Enable Others to Act | Theme 5 Encourage the Heart |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Finding I**<br><br>School reform is hard work and there is no prescription to what to do first. Analyzing data is important; it provides entry points for the leader. | L | H | H | M | L |
| **Finding II**<br><br>You have to provide professional development and differentiated support (or coaching) for teachers. | L | L | H | H | L |
| **Finding III**<br><br>The leader is vital to establishing the vision for the school. However, his/her actions must match those words. | H | L | L | L | L |
| **Finding IV**<br><br>Find opportunities to celebrate individuals, teams, or the community at-large. | L | L | L | L | H |

*Note*. H = high importance; M = middling importance; L = low importance

| Case VB | Theme 1<br>Model the Way | Theme 2<br>Inspire a<br>Shared Vision | Theme 3<br>Challenge the<br>Process | Theme 4<br>Enable Others<br>to Act | Theme 5<br>Encourage the<br>Heart |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Finding I**<br><br>There is not a formula for turning around a school.  Turning around a failing school is the work of many, not just the principal. | L | H | L | H | L |
| **Finding II**<br><br>Principals have to be willing to encourage staff to take risks and then provide them with support [professional development]. | L | L | H | L | L |
| **Finding III**<br><br>Trust is the basis for teachers and teams working interdependently. | H | H | L | H | L |

*Note*. H = high importance; M = middling importance; L = low importance

**Appendix I: Summary of the Characteristics of School Manuals**

| Participant | School | Characteristics of School Manual |
|---|---|---|
| Anthony | Meadows ES | |
| Ella | Sandalwood ES | • Created by teacher leaders<br>• School's mission and vision<br>• Expectations for collaborative teams<br>• Calendar of when collaborative teams meet<br>• Instructional expectations and non-negotiables<br>• School's response to intervention process<br>• Expectations of implementation of the structure for reading and writing workshop; math workshop<br>• Inclusion of various forms |
| Francesca | Evergreen ES | • A-Z compilation of topics, including logistics and managerial items<br>• Academic progress monitoring<br>• Behavior progress monitoring<br>• Collaborative teams planning time and professional learning schedule<br>• Instructional expectations<br>• Responsive instruction<br>• Student behavior support process |
| Jakob | Hillview ES | • Working as a professional learning community<br>• Team norms with the message – You OWN this! |
| Zac | Vista ES | • Created by the Teacher Leadership Team<br>• Provides a common understanding of how staff work to support continued student growth<br>• Blueprint for shared, common understanding of effective core instruction<br>• Professional expectations for staff |

| Participant | School | Characteristics of School Manual |
|---|---|---|
| | | • Expectations of implementation of the structures for reading and writing workshop; math workshop; and science instruction<br>• Integration of critical and creative thinking strategies in all content areas |
| John | Woodcreek ES | • Document defines the what, why, and how of the work<br>• Focus on the collaborative team instructional cycle<br>• Establishes team members' roles and working agreements<br>• Includes lesson plan template<br>• Tier 1 supports and scaffolds for high-quality instruction<br>• Expectation of implementation of the structures for reading and writing workshop; math workshop; and science instruction<br>• Norms of Collaborative Work and Effective Communication<br>• MTSS Structure, academic and behavioral tiers defined |
| Vivienne | Oceanside ES | • Letter from the principal<br>• School's mission and vision<br>• Importance of job-embedded professional development<br>• Functioning as a Professional Learning Community<br>• Expectations and roles for collaborative team meetings<br>• Expectations for language arts and math instruction<br>• ESOL services and the role of the Evergreen ESOL team in supporting teachers<br>• Response to intervention flowchart |