

Leadership Practices of Women Superintendents: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe the leadership practices of women superintendents of public school divisions. The researcher interviewed eight women superintendents in the Commonwealth of Virginia examining the participants' self-perceived leadership practices and their reflections of these practices. Data collection occurred through use of interviews, member checks, field notes, a reflexive journal and completion of the *Leadership Practices Inventory-SELF*. Descriptive accounts of the women's leadership practices in the context of their professional lived experiences and within the framework of transformational leadership theory are presented in a narrative format. Findings and conclusions, were determined by analyzing the collected data, the research question and the review of literature. The findings produced eight leadership practices: 1) use consistent and accurate communication with all stakeholders, 2) be visible, 3) use limited delegation, 4) be collaborative, 5) remain poised, 6) accept personal sacrifice of time and family, 7) exhibit confident, and 8) self-educate, be a quick learner. The findings concluded that women described their leadership practices as relationship building practices and practices incorporating issues of gender and silencing. An implication for future research included discussion for a study which would go beyond the self-described leadership practices of the women superintendents and examine how their leadership practices are implemented and perceived by stakeholders and employees. Data from these direct observations may offer further, detailed insights as to how the described leadership practices of this study are practiced, implemented and perceived by others.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my children, Harrison and Mira. You have both amazed me with your understanding and patience throughout my entire doctoral process. I can only hope through the sacrifices made that I have and will continue to set a good example to you both.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Figures.....	xii
List of Tables.....	xiii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	
Statement of the Problem.....	1
Purpose of the Study.....	2
Significance of the Study.....	2
Theoretical Framework.....	2
Definition of Terms.....	3
Limitations of the Study.....	6
Overview of the Dissertation.....	6
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	
Introduction.....	10
Literature Search and Review Process.....	10
Contextual History of Women in the Superintendency.....	10
The Role of Gender.....	11
Progressing Theories of the Superintendency.....	12
Contemporary Leadership Theories.....	13
Post-Modern Feminist Theory.....	13

Synergistic Leadership Theory.....	14
Difficulties in Accessing the Role of Public School Division Supt.....	15
Importance of Women as Public School Division Superintendents	16
Transformational Leadership Theory	17
Historical Development of Transformational Leadership	18
Transactional Leadership Theory.....	18
Transformational Leadership Theory.....	18
Idealized Influence.....	18
Inspirational Motivation.....	19
Intellectual Stimulation.....	19
Individualized Consideration.....	19
Importance of TLT on Women’s Leadership Practices	20
Criticism of Transformational Leadership Theory.	21
Leadership Practices Inventory-SELF	23
Challenging the Process.....	23
Inspiring a Shared Vision.....	24
Enabling Others to Act.....	24
Modeling the Way.....	25
Encouraging the Heart	25
Successful Leadership Practices for Women.....	26
Chapter Summary	28

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction.....	29
Research Question.....	29
Research Design for the Study.....	29
Rationale for the Qualitative Study.....	29
Role of the Researcher.....	30
Selection Process.....	31
Study Population.....	32
Site Selection.....	32
Informed Consent Procedures.....	33
Assurance of Confidentiality.....	34
Gaining Access and Entry.....	35
Data Collection.....	35
Interviews.....	35
Member Checks.....	39
Field Notes.....	39
Reflexive Journal.....	40
Leadership Practices Inventory-SELF (LPI-SELF).....	40
Data Quality Procedures.....	41
Confirmability.....	41
Dependability.....	42
Credibility.....	43
Transferability.....	43

Summary.....	43
Data Management and Analysis.....	44
Data Management.....	44
Data Analysis.....	45
Data Analysis of the Interview, Member Checks, Field Notes & Reflexive Journal.....	45
Chunking and Coding Data.....	45
Constant Comparative Method.....	46
Hypothesis or Theory Development.....	46
Data Analysis of LPI-SELF.....	46
Audit Trail.....	47
Summary.....	47
Chapter Summary.....	47
PROLOGUE TO CHAPTER 4.....	49
Participant Selection	49
Description of the Individual Participants	49
Superintendent Paris.....	50
Superintendent Brussels.....	50
Superintendent Oslo.....	50
Superintendent Madrid.....	51
Superintendent Bern.....	51
Superintendent Rome.....	51
Superintendent London.....	51
Superintendent Dublin.....	52

Leadership Development	52
Mentors.....	55
Mentors to the Participants.....	55
The Importance of Being Mentors.....	57
Women’s Struggles within the Superintendency.....	58
Acceptance by Stakeholders.....	58
Career Experiences and Job Performance.....	59
Summary.....	60
 CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS	
Introduction.....	62
Leadership Practices of the Participants.....	62
Communication.....	63
In the Community.....	63
Among Staff Members.....	64
With the School Board.....	65
Visibility.....	66
Delegation.....	66
Collaboration.....	67
Poise.....	67
Personal Sacrifice.....	68
Confidence.....	68
Self-Educate.....	69
Findings of the Leadership Practices Inventory-SELF.....	69

Challenging the Process.....	69
Inspiring A Shared Vision.....	71
Enabling Others To Act.....	71
Modeling the Way.....	71
Encouraging the Heart.....	72
Chapter Summary	72
 CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	
Introduction.....	74
Summary of Methodology and Findings	74
Conclusions.....	75
Relationship Building.....	75
Gender and Silencing.....	78
Recommendation for Future Research.....	81
References.....	83
Appendices	
Appendix A. Interview One—Life History Interview.....	91
Appendix B. Interview Two—Current Experiences Interview.....	92
Appendix C. Interview Three—Reflection on the Meaning Interview.....	93
Appendix D. Pattern Variables, Rules for Inclusion, and Category Codes.....	94
Appendix E. Chart of Thematic Analysis.....	101
Appendix F. Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI-SELF).....	103
Appendix G. Kouzes and Posner Permission Letter.....	105

Appendix H. Posner Correspondence.....	106
Appendix I. Letter of Introduction to the Study.....	107
Appendix J. Interest Questionnaire.....	108
Appendix K. Qualitative Consent Form.....	109
Appendix L. Demographic Data Questionnaire.....	112
Appendix M. Definitions of Terms Provided on the Demographic Data Questionnaire.....	113
Appendix N. Matrix of Participants Selected.....	115
Appendix O. Matrix of Alternates* and Non-Selected Participants.....	116
IRB Letter of Acceptance.....	117

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURES

Figure 1.1	Description of the leadership practices within the Leadership Practices Inventory-SELF (LPI-SELF) as adapted by the researcher from Kouzes and Posner (2007).....	5
Figure 1.2	Description of the domains within Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT) as adapted by the researcher from Bass and Avolio (1994).....	7
Figure 1.3	Common themes as adapted by the researcher of the LPI-SELF (Kouzes & Posner, 2007), and TLT (Bass & Avolio (1994).....	8

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE

Table 3.1	Outline of the Qualitative Research Design Timeline.....	37
Table 4.1	LPI-SELF Leadership Practices and Individual Percentile Rankings.....	70

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Over a decade ago, Glass (1992) determined that 93% of superintendencies in the nation's school districts were filled by men, whereas women comprised 74.4% of public education employees (NCES, 1997). In a later study by Glass, Bjork and Brunner (2000) women had increased to 13% of the United States' public school superintendent population, almost doubling the findings from Glass' (1992) earlier study. The predominant history of men within the position of school division superintendent and the prevailing vision of what constitutes a successful public school superintendent have been based in the study of leadership practices and theories derived largely from the experiential histories of these men (Shakeshaft, 1989).

Some researchers have determined that these general leadership practices for success can be applied to either sex, yet others advance that women possess additional, or a unique set of practices (Brunner, 1998; Grogan, 2000; Lutz, 1996; Petersen & Short, 2001). Many practices including working collaboratively, displaying charisma, and mentoring and promoting others are common to both transformational leadership theory and the leadership practices associated with Kouzes and Posner's (2007) Leadership Practices Inventory-SELF. Exploring the leadership practices of superintendents who are women and determining if these individuals actually possess these practices and are utilizing them in the conduct of their position, is a field of inquiry that is still relatively new to the educational profession (Brunner, 1998; Grogan, 2000; Shakeshaft, 1989).

Statement of the Problem

As more women are able to break through the *glass ceiling* and attain the position of public school division superintendent (Brunner, 1999), knowledge of their leadership practices needs to be examined and shared. Women may be able to increase their opportunities to be successful superintendents if they are able to identify the leadership practices they use. Findings from this research could also broaden acceptance for a wider repertoire of these leadership practices by successful superintendents; a profile that often thwarts women candidates for the job among traditionally informed school board members and job search consultants.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe the leadership practices of women superintendents of public school divisions in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The guiding research question for the study was: *How do women in the role of public school division superintendent describe their leadership practices?*

Significance of the Study

Grogan (2000) and Tallericco (2000a) have noted that the superintendency is fraught with uncertainty and circumstances beyond one's control. What is within their control and what women superintendents can attain is the ability to understand their leadership practices (Brunner, 1998; Skrla et al., 2000). Conclusions from this study could give women a greater understanding of the leadership practices they already utilize and those that could benefit them in the future. This study could also incorporate the findings of how women superintendents lead into already established curriculum within the current teachings and texts in educational administrative preparation programs at colleges and universities.

Theoretical Framework

Before the nationwide movement of school accountability which began in the 1990s, superintendents were primarily focused on management and order (Grogan, 2000). Many superintendents have now taken a stronger role in instructional practices as heightened scrutiny of instructional accountability has come to the forefront (Petersen & Young, 2004). Grogan and Brunner (2005) reported that women “often are more knowledgeable about the fundamental instructional issues of literacy and numeracy—important considerations if superintendents are expected to be [successful] instructional leaders” (p. 48). Researchers cite a successful leader as one who establishes an *ethic of care*, is more follower and child focused and provides an environment of collaborative leadership (Bass, 1999; Brunner, 2000; Gilligan, 1982; Grogan, 2000; Shakeshaft, 1989; Skrla, 2000; Tallericco, 2000a). Currently, superintendents are prompted to adopt a transformational approach to leadership over the past traditional leadership paradigms which were derived from the more secular research based on the practices of male superintendents (Bass, 1998; Kowalski, 1999).

Transformational leadership theory (TLT) establishes strength in placing a greater value on the perceived needs of the follower, not the leader (Bass, 1999). TLT also emphasizes a high moral standing of the leader, and expects him or her to encourage the followers to think for themselves and for all to work collaboratively (Avolio & Bass, 1987; Bass, 1998; Bass & Avolio, 1994). These practices of transformational leadership are not exclusive to men or women, but some suggest those who implement this theory possess traits that have more commonly been associated with strengths attributed to women (Bass, 1998, 1999; Genzen, 1993). Kouzes and Posner (1995) also recognized the importance of transformational leadership theory when they established the Leadership Practices Inventory-SELF (LPI-SELF). Although discussed in further detail in Chapters 2 and 3, the LPI-SELF will be used in this study as a self-administered instrument (in conjunction with other qualitative measures) by which the women superintendents' leadership practices will be examined. Describing leadership practices of women superintendents as they perceive them to be, within the theoretical framework of transformational leadership theory, will serve the researcher in answering the study's research question.

Definitions of Terms

In order to help clarify the readers' understanding and to avoid any unnecessary confusion, key vocabulary terms are defined. The following terms are referenced frequently, and characterized similarly, throughout a large majority of the field research: *leadership practices*, *Leadership Practices Inventory-SELF*, *superintendent*, *transactional leadership theory* and *transformational leadership theory*. Precise definitions for purposes of this study follow.

Leadership Practices

For the purpose of this study, the term *leadership practices* is used to define the various characteristics concerning the way in which one leads. It is the beliefs and style leaders have established about themselves and implemented among their followers. Leadership practices can incorporate numerous distinctions and formulate a full range of abilities. This range was reflected in Bell and Chase's (1995) study on leadership styles (a term similar to leadership practices) where the researchers described leaders as task-

focused (authoritative, managerial and structured), or follower-focused (promotes shared decision-making abilities).

Leadership Practices Inventory-SELF

The Leadership Practices Inventory-SELF, commonly referred to as the LPI-SELF, was developed by Kouzes and Posner (2003b), and will be utilized in this study to elicit further insight into the women superintendents' perceived leadership practices. According to Kouzes and Posner, this instrument incorporates five leadership practices: *challenging the heart, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way and encouraging the heart*. The researcher's adapted definitions from Kouzes and Posner's (2007) research are shown in Figure 1.1.

Superintendent

A *superintendent* is defined as the chief executive officer in a public school division within the Commonwealth of Virginia that offers at least a program encompassing grades Kindergarten through 12, inclusive, or unified. In the Commonwealth of Virginia, the use of the term *public school divisions* is generally synonymous with the term *districts* in other states.

Transactional Leadership Theory

Transactional leadership theory is sometimes associated with transformational leadership theory and could be considered its precursor. Developed and further elaborated upon by Downton (1973), Burns (1978) and Bass (1985), transactional leadership theory centers itself on an *exchange relationship* between the leader and the followers. This relationship, more accurately termed *management-by-exception* by Bass (1985), establishes a system in which leaders use a reward or merit system for followers' positive results, and reprimands or demotions for those that provide negative results. Leaders are seen as more managerial in their approach to task completion and in their interactions with their followers (Bass, 1998).

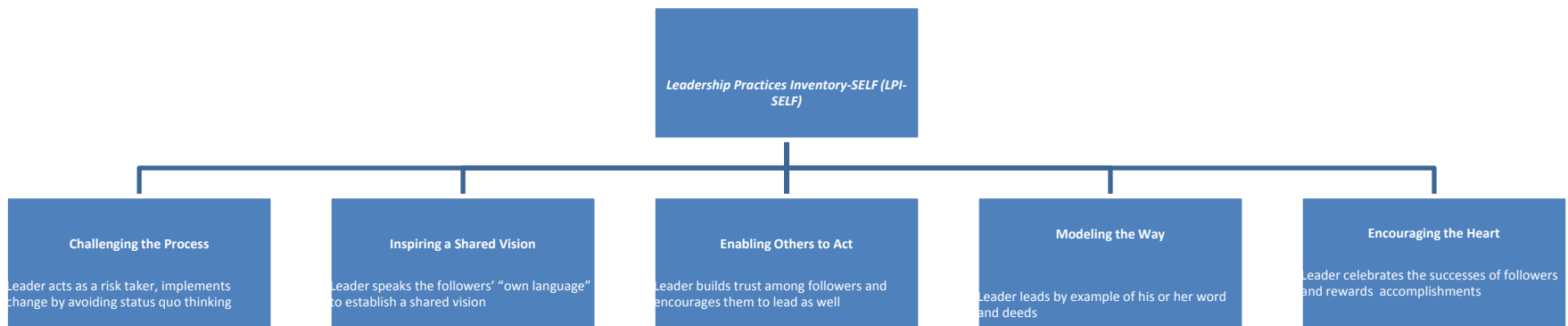


Figure 1.1. Description of the leadership practices within the *Leadership Practices Inventory-SELF (LPI-SELF)* as adapted by the researcher from Kouzes and Posner (2007).

Transformational Leadership Theory

Collectively defined by Burns (1978), Bass (1998) and Avolio and Bass (1987), *transformational leadership theory* (TLT) is leadership which establishes a high moral ground for its leader and followers. The relationship of *management-by-exception* does not occur between transforming leaders and their followers. The leader instead encourages the followers to think for themselves, to become leaders over time and for all to work collaboratively towards the better good of the organization. Bass (1998) includes four domains within this theory: *idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration*. Together these domains focus on leadership practices which contribute to making a leader successful (Bass, 1999; Kouzes & Posner, 2007). An adaptation of the definitions taken from Bass and Avolio's (1994) research for each of the individual domains of TLT is provided in Figure 1.2. The common themes shared by both TLT and the LPI-SELF are displayed in Figure 1.3. Both sets of domains contribute to demonstrating leadership practices that women can employ as public school superintendents. In sum, transformational leadership theory provides the theoretical framework for this study.

Limitations of the Study

An assumption was made that the women superintendents' lived experiences were honest reflections to their responses to the phenomenological interviews and to the LPI-SELF as they were described to the researcher. The thick, rich accounts that the participants gave should provide a perspective to the reader as to how these women superintendents experienced and perceived their leadership practices. Additionally, there were few variances in the demographic data of the participants revealing a homogenous group. This could account for some of the similarities in the data presented. Knowledge of the limitations could assist the reader in determining the trustworthiness and transferability of the methodology, the findings and the conclusions so that the reader can apply them accordingly to his or her own particular situation.

Overview of the Dissertation

The purpose of this study was to describe the leadership practices of women superintendents of public school divisions in the Commonwealth of Virginia. This study

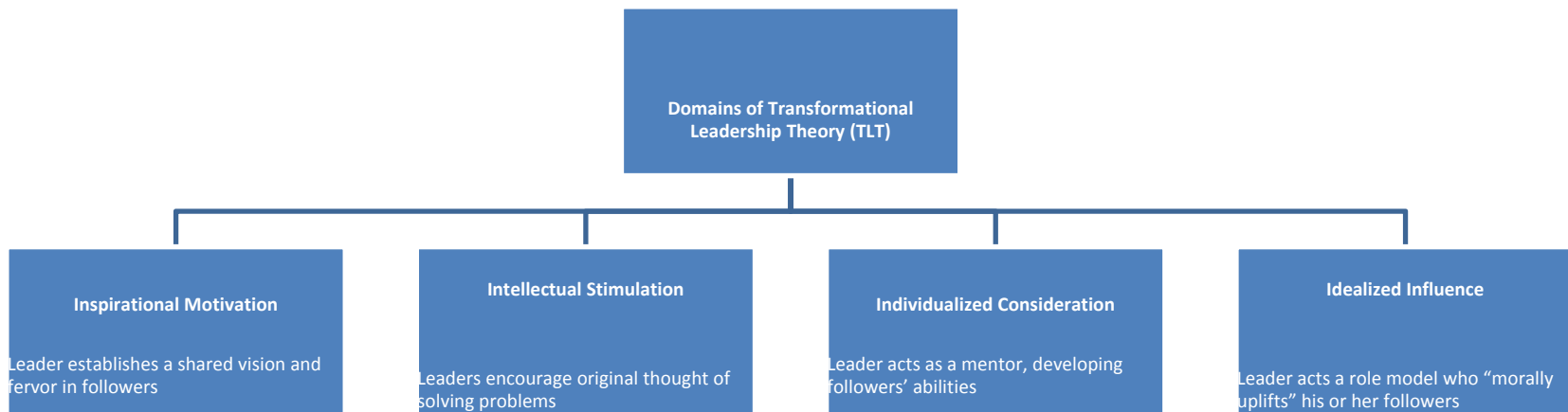


Figure 1.2. Description of the domains within Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT) as adapted by the researcher from Bass and Avolio (1994).

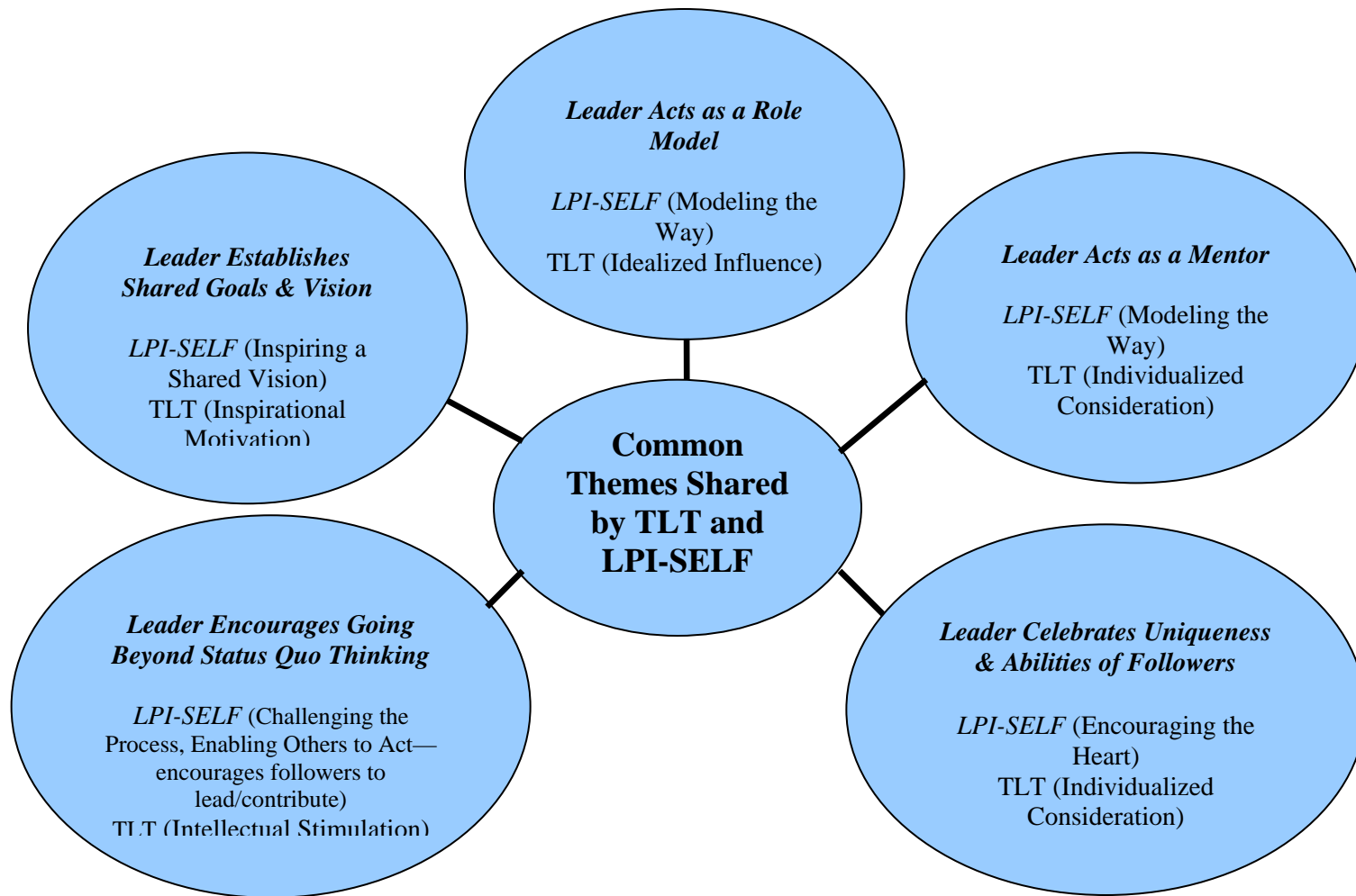


Figure 1.3. Common themes as adapted by the researcher of the LPI-SELF (Kouzes & Posner, 2007), and TLT (Bass & Avolio (1994)

sought to answer the question—How do women in the role of public school division superintendent describe their leadership practices? An introduction, the statement of the problem, the purpose and significance of the research, a list of definitions of terms, limitations and delimitations of the research and an overview of the dissertation was completed in this chapter. An explanation of the literature search and review process is presented in Chapter 2. The review of the established literature in the field focused on the contextual history of women superintendents, a discussion of related literature on gender and progressing theories of the superintendency, transformational leadership theory, the Leadership Practices Inventory-SELF and lastly, strategies for success. Chapter 3 provides a discussion of the study’s methodology which is set in a qualitative research design. Discussion of the research design and its rationale, informed consent procedures, the data collection and data quality procedures and the process for data management and analysis, and information regarding the study’s chain of evidence in order to establish an audit trail are also presented. Chapter 4 presents in narrative format the collective findings of the study and is organized according to the themes that emerged during the analysis. The conclusions of the study as they were determined in accordance with the overall findings, the research question and the existing literature are presented in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Scholarly research pertaining to women in the role of public school superintendent is still in its infancy (Grogan, 2000). As more and more women aspire to or attain this position within public education, the need for this particular research will increase. The purpose of this study was to describe the leadership practices of women superintendents of public school divisions in the Commonwealth of Virginia. This chapter contains a review of the literature as it pertains to women superintendents' leadership practices and is divided into five sections: the literature search and review process, the contextual history of women in the superintendency, transformational leadership theory, Leadership Practices Inventory-SELF, successful leadership practices for women and concludes with a chapter summary.

Literature Search and Review Process

Relevant studies and literature which pertained to the research questions were obtained from four electronic databases which included: ERIC (Ovid), ERIC (FirstSearch), Dissertation Abstracts Online and WilsonWeb. All databases were explored using the following key terms: *female, women, administrator, gender, school administration, leadership practices, and superintendent*. Results returned from all four databases yielded 198 documents. One hundred and thirty-one returns were opinion papers, dissertations, literature reviews and reports, leaving only 67 journal articles to represent the minority of collected documents. In addition, the researcher employed the use of 37 texts to assist with knowledge from other books in the field of inquiry, and 28 texts concerning references and procedures for the study design. Common themes centering on the research question and the purpose of the study found within searched documents and texts included: the history of women in the superintendency, related literature on gender and feminist leadership theories, transformational leadership theory, the Leadership Practices Inventory-SELF, and strategies of success leadership practices.

Contextual History of Women in the Superintendency

The role of school superintendent within the 20th century has undergone numerous changes and dealt with many issues (Bell & Chase, 1995). Hill and Ragland (1995)

acknowledge that in achieving success the past must be examined to find individual and gender-specific ways to progress. This section will discuss the role of gender, a review of progressing theories of the superintendency, contemporary leadership theories, difficulties in accessing the role of public school division superintendent and conclude with an explanation concerning the importance of women as public school division superintendents.

The Role of Gender

Throughout the literature gender has predominantly been defined separately from, and is usually disassociated with, one's sex (Doyle, 1985). The two terms are quite different and convey altogether two divergent meanings. Many researchers collectively agree that gender is a term that involves cultural and or societal influences upon the sexes which are then defined as feminine or masculine depending upon their nature (Doyle, 1985; Grogan, 1996; Skrla, 2000; Shakeshaft, 1989; Tallericco, 2000b). Conversely sex deals then only with the biological functions and structures or physical characteristics that make one male or female (Doyle, 1985).

Gender behaviors have come to be associated as being solely female or solely male. These traits have been socially constructed and have become accepted as societal norms (Skrla, 2000b). Grogan (1996) explains that superintendents are invariably viewed as being a man superintendent or a woman superintendent and that their gender is inextricably intertwined and not easily removed from the role itself. She further advances that gender ideals, or biases, can set up an oppositional relationship between a woman superintendent and her board, colleagues and or community members (Grogan). Tallericco (2000b) supports Grogan's viewpoint by affirming that gender issues can put women at a disadvantage in terms of how they choose to act because their critical influences are largely beyond the women's control. Brunner (2000) also supports Grogan's (1996) claims that women are always women in the role of superintendent and that their gender is never disassociated from the role they have assumed.

Shakeshaft (1989) introduced the term *androcentric bias*, which she defines as examining the world and its perceived reality from a *male lens*. As this term is not entirely unique as it is also similarly discussed in Doyle's (1985) research, *androcentric bias* furthers the argument that gender bias does exist and that it is a valid issue which

must be addressed to ensure equality for women seeking such a predominantly male-dominated profession. Shakeshaft (1989) also asserts that curricula typically included in educational leadership programs are gender biased in that their ideas and ideological forms are based on observations and assumptions formulated largely by males about the male experience. This research is important in that these curricula are likely being presented to male and female future and current administrators alike in educational administrative programs throughout the country. From the perspective of Shakeshaft (2000) and Grogan (1989) much of the literature is based in male ideals or thought processes and may promote gender bias and may be disadvantageous to men and women as they progress and perceive women in the field.

What is curious is how the women themselves react to researchers when studies are conducted to gain insight to the women's own personal experiences in the role of superintendent. Both Brunner (2000) and Skrla (2000a, 2000b) note that women often silence themselves in talking about or even acknowledging gender issues or bias in their professional experiences. Some studies further suggest that women avoid discussing or associating gender issues with themselves and the position as superintendent in order to negate any negative connotations (Brunner, 1999; Grogan, 1996; Tallerico, 2000a).

Progressing Theories of the Superintendency

In order to better understand the role of superintendent, and later the role of women superintendents, we must first begin with Callahan (1962), who, with his *Thesis of Vulnerability*, equated superintendents with managers, defined as top-down, and task-related individuals (Kowalski, 2005). Callahan's criticism of superintendents, as described by Kowalski (2005), was unsympathetic. Instead of being seen as change agents, and crusaders of education, Callahan saw them as weak, vulnerable followers prone to giving into demanding boards and community politics. This thesis condemns the scientific management model and criticizes not only those who adhere to it, but those who promoted it in educational administrative preparation programs (Lutz, 1996ab). This leadership viewpoint of superintendents as vulnerable managers would continue from 1912, as Callahan claims it began, to roughly 30 years after its publication in 1962 (Eaton & Sharp, 1996; Grogan, 2000; Iannaccone, 1996; Lutz, 1996ab).

In the 1940s, Stogdill challenged this managerial focus and deemed that one

should not only study leaders, but also the situations and social contexts to which they are subjected (Bell & Chase, 1995). These two beliefs assisted in the creation of situational leadership and social influence theory. For the purposes of this review, situational leadership, as defined by Maduakolam and Bailey (1999), is the ability to adopt a different leadership style depending on a given situation; and, social influence theory is “an interactional view of behavior of an individual attempting to persuade another individual” (Petersen & Short, 2001, p. 539). Combining characteristics of task-oriented behaviors (managerial) and social behaviors (interpersonal/communication skills), these theories have influenced several researchers to believe that these leadership practices provide school leader’s with the general ability to be successful and productive (Bjork, 2000; Davis, 1998; Maduakolam & Bailey, 1999). Leadership theories and their practices can evolve with social consciousness. Some of these advances in current leadership practices are reflected in the discussion of contemporary leadership theories.

Contemporary Leadership Theories

Although this study is grounded in the transformational leadership theory, research in contemporary leadership theories is worthy of discussion in that the theories offer a complementary viewpoint when examining women’s leadership practices. Thus, in keeping with Shakeshaft’s (1989) belief that leadership is most commonly viewed through a *male lens*, the researcher will go beyond the scope of the aforementioned leadership theories. The study of male practices is not an issue, but can be problematic when the assumption is made that these behaviors or practices are appropriate for understanding all leadership behavior (Shakeshaft). As more women have entered leadership positions, leadership theory has progressed to include women’s unique behaviors and styles in the discussion of what constitutes successful leadership practices. These practices or behaviors are reflected in two contemporary theories, post-modern feminist theory and synergistic leadership theory, as examined within the context of their significance to women superintendents.

Post-Modern Feminist Theory

Post-modern (or poststructuralist) feminist theory is not an easily defined theory due to researchers’ conflicting definitions. Some agree that language, or discourse, and its usage and influence on gender relations are predominant in its fundamental beliefs. This

theory focuses on gender relations and experiences, and how society thinks about them and equally does not think about them (Flax, 1990). Grogan (2000) further contributes to the definition by stating that “our understanding of the ways we should behave and what we should think in the various discourses within which we are positioned are dependent on our relative power in each discourse.” Butler (1990) also suggests that as gender is a socially constructed entity, the language behind it is always evolving, and that therefore, no gender can be readily characterized. Frug (1992) supports Grogan’s notion of language and power by affirming that language also helps to mold and constrain people’s realities. She admits that since language is constantly open to being re-interpreted by others, resistance to this shaping and restriction in language can occur which could cause negative effects (Frug, 1992). Discourse, in its use, misuse, and relative power within in each discourse all contribute to what former researchers have individually defined as post-modern feminist theory.

Synergistic Leadership Theory

Irby, Brown, Duffy and Trautman (2001) developed the synergistic leadership theory, a post-modernist theory, in order to offer an alternative to traditional leadership theories. This theory includes a range of male and female leadership behaviors which are portrayed in the interaction of four key factors: leadership behaviors (ranging from autocratic to nurturer), organizational structure (characteristics of an organization and how it operates), external forces (influencers outside the control of the organization), and attitudes, beliefs, and values (interconnectedness of these traits with the leader and the organization) (Irby et al.). This theory suggests that although all four factors among men and women can be and are often different; they can be used by both sexes, are reflective of female leadership experiences, and address gender, cultural and political issues unlike other more predominant theories of the past (Irby et al.). Synergistic leadership theory also suggests that a leader can determine his or her ability to succeed or not succeed based on all factors being congruent with one another.

In sum, the post-modern feminist theory and the synergistic theory both separately demonstrate that women’s leadership practices coupled with ideologies of traditional leadership theories are salient and contribute an inherent worth to current research. Both theories give a feminine voice to the theories previously reviewed, and bring a certain

consciousness to mind concerning the importance of discourse and gender issues. In the landmark article, *Laying the Groundwork for a Reconciliation of the Superintendency From Feminist Postmodern Perspectives*, Grogan (2000) further asserts that the role of superintendent is in need of reconstruction altogether, and that if the superintendent is to succeed and remain in the position, Grogan emphasizes that he or she should abandon the desire for certainty, live with the paradoxes of the job and acknowledge that governments on all levels are in constant change outside of the superintendent's control. In consideration of these aforementioned variables, some have questioned whether the position of superintendent is still an enviable one (Howley, Pendarvis, & Gibbs, 2002).

Difficulties in Accessing the Role of Public School Division Superintendent

In achieving the position of public school division superintendent, the candidate must be capable of numerous responsibilities and achievements (Grogan, 2000). The most basic credentials include obtaining the proper education and licensure, previous and appropriate work experience and the art of negotiating politics (Tallerico, 2000b). This knowledge of how women attain the superintendency provides insight as to how these women established and strengthened their own chosen leadership practices as they accessed this position. Being aware of the necessary superintendency requirements provides a clearer explanation as to what others (school board members, *headhunters*, or subordinates) value or deem as successful leadership practices. "When assessing the qualities of administrative candidates, it is generally true that the attributes of a candidate's success in his or her previous position are assumed to predict success in more responsible or higher status positions" (Davis, 1998, p. 49).

As the role of the public school division superintendent has become increasingly more complex and demanding, Glass and Bjork (2003) in their study of superintendent shortage found that low applicant pools, and the difficulty in finding quality superintendents, were more situational than a widespread problem as some researchers have come to believe (Cooper, Fusarelli & Carella, 2000; Howley, Pendarvis & Gibbs, 2002). By situational, it is meant that politics between board members and superintendents and their weighty demands contributed greatly as to how they determined hiring and terminating superintendents' positions (Alsbury, 2003; Eaton & Sharp, 1996). Similar findings were discovered in other studies to support this data (Fusarelli et al.,

2003; Kowalski, 2003; Wimpleberg, 1997). Glass and Bjork (2003) also conducted a national survey of school board presidents of newly hired superintendents. From their research findings, they were able to conclude that administrative educational programs do little to encourage women, or those of color, to pursue the superintendency as a career. Wolverton and Macdonald (2001), who surveyed women within the Northwest to determine the most commonly exercised path to the superintendency by women, also concede that the scrutiny and crisis that come with the position turn some women away, leaving them to opt for more supportive roles instead.

Tallerico's (2000b) data, in *Gaining Access to the Superintendency: Headhunting, Gender and Color*, further supports the idea that women may be discouraged from applying to superintendent positions. The qualitative study which involved interviews with men and women superintendents, *headhunters* (job hiring companies) and school board members within the state of New York, states women can be disadvantaged in obtaining the role of superintendent by a mixture of *unwritten selection criteria*. Using gatekeeping (which puts applicants through a series of flow channels) and career mobility (how men and women differ in the cultural, personal and socialization factors) theories as her theoretical framework, Tallerico (2000b) concludes that those criteria include decisions based on school boards' and *headhunters'* preferences to: define the quality of applicants in terms of assigned hierarchies to particular job titles, stereotype applicants by gender, and the boards' occurrences to "hypervalue feelings of comfort and interpersonal chemistry with the successful candidate" (p. 37). While overcoming some of these obstacles can prove difficult, women candidates applying to the superintendency have a lot to offer, bringing with them their own unique sense of leadership style (Blount, 1998).

Importance of Women as Public School Division Superintendent

Women are still significantly outnumbered by men in the role of superintendent (Glass, Bjork, Brunner 2000). Yet, it is not the intention of this study to suggest that women necessarily make better leaders than do men, or to imply that more women should be superintendents than men. Rather, this study is merely acknowledging the importance of women as public school division superintendents and identifying women's successful leadership practices once the position has been attained.

Although both sexes contribute greatly to the leadership practices of what

constitutes a successful superintendent, women can and do bring added qualities and skills that may be lacking in the traditional male paradigm (Blount, 1998). Many of these abilities are focused on women's characteristics to be: caring, communicative, and follower-focused (Bass, 1998; Brunner, 1999; Grogan, 1996). By examining the leadership behaviors women display along with how gender and women's leadership theories influence women's ability to lead, the reader may develop a greater understanding as to the importance of women in the role of superintendent. In the following section, transformational leadership theory, which encompasses many of the aforementioned ideals of this section, is discussed.

Transformational Leadership Theory

Since the inception of transformational leadership theory over 20 years ago (Burns, 1978), it has become one of the most influential and commonly applied leadership theories in practice (Bass, 1999; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Goethals, Sorenson & Burns, 2004; Kouzes & Posner, 2007). This research study grounds itself in the transformational leadership theory. The researcher chose to build the theoretical framework around transformational leadership due to its longevity, and reliable and valid reputation (Bass, 1999). This theory associates itself with predominant leadership practices rather than to isolated personality behaviors as many other theories ascribe (Thibodeau, 1999), and stresses the nurturance of the followers through a process of socialization with the idea that women are more adept at doing so in comparison to men (Pounder & Coleman, 2002). Bass and Avolio (1994) proposed that these predominant leadership practices can determine the success of a leader and that those practicing transformational leadership were deemed most effective.

Field and Herold's (1997) study found that both transformational and transactional leadership behaviors could be interpreted as very similar to those described by the five leadership practices found in the LPI-SELF. This finding (from their examination of subordinates' assessments from the LPI-SELF to measure their leaders' use of transactional and transformational leadership traits) suggests a positive correlation ($p < .05$) between the leadership practices of transformational leadership and those found in the LPI-SELF. Field and Herold's (1997) study reinforced the nexus between these two sets of leadership practices, a valuable contribution to the premise of this study as the

LPI-SELF and other qualitative data were used to assess women superintendents' leadership practices under the context of transformational leadership theory. This section will continue with a discussion of the historical development of the theory, its importance to women's leadership, and its criticisms.

Historical Development of Transformational Leadership

In the Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *Leadership*, Burns (1978), elaborating on Downton's (1973) original theory, discussed two theories of leadership: transactional and transformational. These two leadership styles were then further developed and refined through the work of Bass (1985) and then collaboratively with his colleague Avolio (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Goethals et al., 2004). As this particular research study is grounded in the transformational theory, it is necessary to also discuss the transactional approach as each theory represents a contrast to one another. Whereas both can be utilized by either men or women leaders, behaviors associated with transformational leadership theory tend to lend themselves more to female leadership styles, as transactional leadership has traditionally been more closely linked to male leadership styles (Bass, 1999; Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Transactional Leadership Theory

Transactional leadership is based on an exchange relationship whereupon the leader states his or her expectations of the followers and expects the followers to adhere and carry out said expectations (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1998). When the expectations are fulfilled the leader then bestows some sort of reward or merit system, or in some cases transactions are coercion based (Downton, 1973). This type of reward or punishment system was later termed "management-by-exception" by Bass (1985). A direct example of this style of leadership would be a boss giving his subordinate(s) an accolade, promotion or raise if the expectation was met successfully, or conversely, a demotion, reprimand or dismissal if it was not.

Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational leadership theory (TLT), conversely, is more complex and promotes a closer, more defined relationship between the leader and the follower. It does not support the traditional leadership paradigm. Instead, leaders and followers form a joint partnership to achieve a goal that will collectively benefit their organization.

Through his work in examining leadership practices, Bass (1985) established four major components for effective transformational leadership, they are: *idealized influence*, *inspirational motivation*, *intellectual stimulation* and *individualized consideration*.

Idealized Influence. This trait establishes the leader as a role model for the followers. The leader acts as someone who “morally uplifts” (Burns, 1978) his or her followers, encouraging them to follow and eventually become leaders themselves. Often in the literature, the ability of a leader to act this way or to influence his or her followers in this fashion relied on the leader’s “charismatic” nature (Goethals et al., 1994). Earlier literature, however, left some researchers to conclude varying definitions of charisma. Later, Bass (1990) clarified his definition by determining that a leader transforms so as to promote his or her followers to “a higher purpose, not down” (Goethals et al., 1994). Therefore, researchers who had previously considered Hitler and Stalin to be charismatic leaders were corrected by Bass’ (1990) elaboration. Transformational leaders build a group up yet not at the expense of tearing another group down (Goethals et al., 1994). Thus, a leader using idealized influence may be forced to make a choice that while presently unpopular with the group would benefit them in the long-term. An example of this situation would be one in which Jack Welch (former CEO of General Electric) made a decision to completely reorganize the company. Yet as many workers were dismayed originally, his decision helped the company become a world-class leader in technology (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Inspirational Motivation. The second trait involves a shared vision and a strong commitment to goals established by the leader. The leader establishes fervor in his or her followers, motivating them to collaboratively fulfill the required responsibilities. Often the leader will develop a special “catch phrase” and use it repeatedly to emphasize the theme of the vision. For example, United States President George W. Bush (2001-2009) in an effort to increase educational standards nationwide, established leadership for the policy for No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Even though it is a federal mandate to which states must adhere, it has also become a term used to promote a stronger educational vision for the United States as well.

Intellectual Stimulation. The third trait examines how leaders challenge the thinking processes of their followers. Leaders push their followers to go beyond status

quo thinking and encourage them to think about solving old problems in new ways, or ways that may differ from the leader's own ideas (Avolio & Bass, 1994). Followers are encouraged to be creative in their problem solving whereas leaders avoid criticism to avoid stifling original thought. School followers' participation and leaders' promotion of the school improvement process or collaborative site-based management would be an example of this trait.

Individualized Consideration. Finally, the fourth trait establishes the leader as a mentor, one who genuinely cares for each follower as an individual. Here, the leader encourages and assists to develop the follower's "unique needs and abilities" (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). The leader actively listens to the concerns and needs of his or her followers. A supportive climate is developed by the leader to promote new learning opportunities for the followers (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Also, the leader appropriately delegates tasks to followers, managing by providing support and direction when necessary, but in a way in which followers do not feel as if they are being checked on. A superintendent that considers the abilities of each individual principal to run his or her school using site-based decision-making demonstrates this behavior.

In sum, both the transactional and transformational theories offer ways to lead. However, transformational leadership promotes and encourages its followers in a more productive manner making it more effective than transactional leadership (Bass, 1998). All of the aforementioned behaviors contribute to the current definition of what forms the basis for transformational leadership theory. Next, this review will examine these behaviors and their influence on women's leadership practices. Exploring the use of transformational leadership, in conjunction with how women lead, is important in understanding what contributes to making women superintendents successful.

Importance of TLT on Women's Leadership Practices

Bass (1998) concedes that women are more transformational leaders than are men and that subordinates of women experience to some degree greater satisfaction levels and effectiveness ratings. As cited by Trinidad and Normone (2005) in their article, *Leadership and Gender: A Dangerous Liaison*, it is much more acceptable for women to display their emotions and feelings. Women believe in shared decision making, participative or democratic styles of leading and generally avoid working from a position

of power (Brunner, 2000; Skrla, 2000; Trinidad & Normore, 2005).

Both Carless (1998) and Martinek (1996) have also conducted studies which were grounded in transformational leadership and focused on differences between how men and women lead. Carless (1998) examined how 120 Australian women and 184 Australian men, who were in the same position and at the same level of occupational hierarchy, used transformational leadership. She also examined if these men and women were evaluated differently by their followers. Both the superiors and the women managers rated themselves as being more transformational than the leaders that were men as the subordinates evaluated both the men and women equally. Similarly, Martinek's (1996) national study, which examined superintendents (29 women, 37 men) and how they viewed their leadership roles in their position, found that men and women view an effective superintendent as one who uses transformational leadership (33% return of usable data responses). However, when asked to describe their role preference, men listed managerial duties (such as personnel management, budget and finance issues and goal setting/planning), whereas women listed preferences which displayed more instructional (such as board relationships, interpersonal support/autonomy and visionary/setting the climate) or transformational leadership roles (Martinek, 1996). Both studies concluded that women were not only perceived as utilizing transformational leadership more than men, but that they also were better at skills that required interpersonal relationships. These findings are not to imply that men cannot be successful as transformational leaders too; however, it does acknowledge that in some areas of leadership, namely in interpersonal relationships, these studies have indicated that women have displayed transformational qualities more often than have men. Thus, in turn, these abilities could help women be successful in positions of higher executive leadership.

Criticism of Transformational Leadership Theory

Although stated earlier that the transformational leadership theory has become an established and valid theory supported by several researchers (Bass, 1990, 1998, 1999; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Downton, 1973; Kouzes & Posner, 1995), it is not without its share of criticism. Areas of criticism examined in this section were: researchers' definition of charisma, the hierarchy of transformational leaders, and the influence of gender concerning transformational leadership behaviors.

The first criticism examines the conflicting opinions of some scholars' (House, Spangler & Woycke, 1991; O'Connor, Mumford, Clifton, Gessner & Connelly, 1995) definition of what constituted a charismatic leader. These researchers expanded upon Burn's (1978) definition by including a discussion of socialized (positive) versus personalized (negative) charismatic leaders. Goethals et al. (2004) claim that these definitions mark a distinction between charismatic leaders which act for the good of the society and those that opt for personal aggrandizement. As previously mentioned in this chapter, Bass (1990) affirmed that a true charismatic leader strived to benefit a group, but not at the expense of others.

Second, some researchers debate the issue of where transformational leaders are found within a leadership hierarchy. For example, Bennis and Nanus (1985) and Tichy and Devanna (1986) felt that transformational leaders only occurred at the top of an organization, Avolio and Bass (1987) disagreed by stating that such leaders can occur at any level of an organization. Whether this last statement is true or not, it is still one that is argued in the study of this particular theory and in the study of instruments used to measure this theory's effect on leaders, for example the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Bass & Avolio, 1990), and the Leadership Practices Inventory-SELF (Kouzes & Posner, 1995).

Lastly, in examination of the final criticism, few studies have concluded that gender made no difference in the outcome on how certain administrative duties were carried out when the leader used transformational leadership traits (Bell & Chase, 1995; Tucker, Turner, Barling, Reid & Elving, 2006). Bell & Chase (1995) concluded from their qualitative study in which they interviewed 27 women superintendents (along with 44 school board members, 8 state-level observers of the superintendency, 4 administrative staff members and 9 husbands or partners of superintendents) that they employ both interpersonal and task oriented traits. Later, Tucker et al. (2006) found that gender, when examining whether the use of apologies by leaders was seen as a weakness or as contributing to traits of a transformational leader, did not affect how the followers perceived their leaders. One reason for this outcome, as noted by the researchers, could be due to not really whether the apology is made or not, but in how it is delivered. The

authors suggest their findings support previous research that women's perceptions (more than men's) are more strongly affected by their sense of responsibility and regret (Tucker et al., 2006).

To conclude, of the two theories transformational leadership is a more progressive and effective form of leadership due to its ability to "transform" followers by encouraging them to exceed what is expected performance. It is a more evolved form of leadership in that it transcends the reward and punishment system by replacing it with a collaborative give and take between the leader and the follower. Additionally, transformational leadership incorporates many of the leadership behaviors which women already possess and utilize. Lastly, transformational leadership theory along with beliefs established in the LPI-SELF help formulate leadership practices that when utilized successfully could greatly benefit women superintendents.

Leadership Practices Inventory-SELF

This study will employ the Leadership Practices Inventory-SELF (LPI-SELF) instrument created by Kouzes and Posner (1993b). The purpose and function of the instrument's use was to elicit from the participants information that may be excluded from the qualitative interviews. Individual scores for each participant will be compared and contrasted with the other data sources included in the study (interviews, member checks and field notes). The authors believe, that the LPI-SELF, which is explicated in their book *The Leadership Challenge* (Kouzes & Posner, 2007), and the leadership practices promulgated in their instrument are similar and conducive to the beliefs outlined in transformational leadership theory. The authors also acknowledge that there is a strong commitment of the transformational leader to lift his or her followers up to a higher, moral code of collaboration, and that without this dedication a leader is not able to lead productively or efficiently (Kouzes & Posner). The leadership practices within the instrument are: *challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way and encouraging the heart.*

Challenging the Process

This leadership practice promotes the belief that leaders should seek out and solve challenges. For a leader to be truly successful he or she must incorporate the ideas and considerations of his or her followers, and routines within the organization should be

abandoned, whereas risk-taking (which occasionally can contribute to selective rule-breaking actions) can be necessary and should be relatively encouraged (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Good leaders acknowledge change as an opportunity to grow, learn and teach. They welcome change and are considered change agents. They learn from their mistakes and incorporate their lessons when considering new endeavors.

The above beliefs as outlined by Kouzes & Posner (2007) may be directly linked to the domain of *intellectual stimulation* found within TLT. Both *challenging the process* and *intellectual stimulation* encourage the leader to go beyond status quo thinking in problem-solving, facing challenges and in dealing with ways to collaboratively work with their followers. In her discussion of a reconception for the superintendency, Grogan (2000) addresses the problem of uncertainty and contradiction and suggests that if superintendents are to be successful, knowledge and skill in risk-taking leadership practices is not only a vital part of their education, but a necessary prerequisite to obtaining the role itself.

Inspiring a Shared Vision

Kouzes & Posner (2007) described how a leader should envision the future. A leader is called upon to be a visionary and to use his or her intuitiveness to be successful and influence his or her followers. Leaders must also rely on experiences of the past to affect the present, therefore, “while the past is the prologue, the present is the opportunity” (Kouzes & Posner, p. 107). The authors also encourage leaders to write down their visionary goals, form agendas, research future trends within other organizations and test their assumptions (Kouzes & Posner).

This leadership practice relates to the domain of *inspirational motivation* found within TLT as both involve the leader as a futurist and creative thinker. This particular way of leading is what Callahan (1962), with his Thesis of Vulnerability, was in favor of so many years ago. Callahan (1962), along with Bass (1989) and Kouzes & Posner (2007) acknowledge that an important skill for a leader to possess is their ability to envision the future and know how to successfully attain it. In our present culture of school division accountability, many superintendents are asked to submit their school division’s short and long term plans to their school board and state.

Enabling Others to Act

Establishing collaboration, relationship-building and successful delegating are behaviors found within this leadership practice. A leader must realize that in order to be truly successful, one cannot lead alone, but must instead depend on a group or team effort to realize organizational goals. Kouzes & Posner (2007) ascertain that a good leader not only communicates well, but is also a good listener. The leader hears what is important to his or her followers and learns about their individual capabilities; thereby, establishing trust and confidence in them by educating and delegating tasks to them in which they think the follower will be successful.

This leadership practice draws on two traits within TLT, *intellectual stimulation* and *individualized consideration*. Through the expected collaborative relationships, followers are asked to further develop their creative thinking skills while at the same time the leader is there to foster and mentor these working partnerships. Mentoring and collaborative leadership contribute to Brunner's (1998) research that women do lead in this fashion, and more specifically lead from a *power to* rather than a *power over* approach.

Modeling the Way

In order for a leader to establish credibility, Kouzes & Posner (2007) state that one must *say* (clearly state his or her values) and *do* (turn their beliefs into actions). Leaders lead by example and would be adverse to expect something from their followers that they would not do themselves. While some of the previous leadership practices focused on long-range goals, this domain examines short-term goals and *wins*. These small *wins* help followers to obtain rewards, pushing them toward and making them more appreciative of the long-term goals. The authors encourage leaders to be personable, and even dramatic in setting their values. One example is Kouzes & Posner's (2007) recounting of an executive that promised he would swim across the corporate pond if the company increased their assets by a certain amount. This story is similar to tales of superintendents that have offered to kiss a pig (or other stunts) in front of the staff and student body audiences if test scores were raised to certain percentages.

Today's superintendents realize that a school division's goals can only be accomplished with the dedication of the staff, students, parents and community. The

domain of *individualized consideration* from TLT is closely associated with *modeling the way* in that both describe the importance of delegating to followers and of the leader as mentor. In order to be successful, women superintendents must hone both of these skills not only for themselves, but for those for whom they act as an example.

Encouraging the Heart

Of all the leadership practices, in a previous research study conducted by Kouzes & Posner (1995), women leaders showed their greatest strength in *encouraging the heart*. This finding is further supported in Finncannon's (2004) study in which she employed the LPI-SELF to survey 31 Indiana women superintendents and their respective school boards. Although she discovered that the school boards and superintendents differed in their overall beliefs of what constitutes effective and successful leadership, she was able to establish that both sets of participants rated the women superintendents as utilizing successfully the leadership practices described in this leadership practice more than the others (Fincannon, 2004).

Encouraging the heart suggests that leaders should celebrate the successes of their followers. The authors suggest that this can be done formally through public events, or even informally in smaller meetings. The authors feel that recognizing the followers' commitment to the shared values and goals is important to the overall continuance of success in any given organization (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

In relation to transformational leadership theory, *encouraging the heart* is closely related to *individualized consideration*. *Individualized consideration* deals with mentoring and acknowledgement of followers' capabilities. As women superintendents deal with the responsibilities of the position, the needs of their communities and the demands of the state and federal governments, they will need to perfect their leadership practices, truly establishing an *ethic of care* and support for their followers (Grogan, 2000).

Successful Leadership Practices for Women

In the article *Gender in the Theory and Practice of Educational Leadership*, in which the authors interviewed 27 women superintendents, their husbands, school board members and administrative staff members to examine how gender affected the women's leadership strategies, Bell and Chase (1995) concluded that women do not differ in their

styles as compared to men, but do differ in their strategies, and that women need to be aware of gender in regard to male contexts within the work environment. They suggest this knowledge may influence how women move (or rather how they conduct themselves differently) in their career path. This difference in successful leadership practices is a topic echoed in Brunner's (1998, 1999) study as well.

In *Sacred Dreams*, Brunner (1999) found that women superintendents “articulated and carried out gender-specific strategies [for success] which created, in part, their support while in the superintendency” (p. 181). She defined success as women superintendents that others deemed capable, effective, respected, and well-liked. From an earlier article, *Women Superintendents: Strategies for Success*, later published as Chapter 11 in her book, Brunner (1998, 1999) conducted a qualitative study interviewing 12 women superintendents from across the nation, and two other individuals (per each of the 12 participants) that were familiar with these women. These data were then categorized into a list seven strategies for success for women superintendents. The list includes the following strategies: 1) women need to balance between role-related and gender-related aspects of the job, 2) keep agendas simple, keep focus on care of children and achievement, 3) remain feminine, and still be heard in a masculine culture, 4) do not “act like a man,” 5) remove or let go of that which blocks success, 6) remain fearless, courageous, risk-takers, and *can do* people, with a plan to retreat if necessary, and lastly, 7) share power and credit (Brunner). The last three strategies described above are directly related to traits found within transformational leadership theory and the LPI-SELF described by Kouzes & Posner (1995).

According to Brunner (1998, 1999), the only bias within her study was the women who had allowed, at times, a male to speak on their behalf in order to accomplish a certain task with a particular audience. This need to share power and credit, as revealed in strategy number seven, speaks to Brunner's (1999) assertion that women express discomfort in discussing power or rather exerting power. This uneasiness which women feel in establishing a *power over* approach to leadership, also supported by Grogan (2000), further supports the idea that women are more transformational in their leadership practices than transactional.

Grogan (2000), also strengthens Brunner's (1999) previous strategies when she

states that the superintendent's role is "partial and limited by gender...[and that he or she should be]...child-centered, relational, community sensitive, instructionally expert, politically savvy, ethically oriented and efficient, and deeply involved in reform." In her call for a reconception of the superintendency, Grogan (2000) offers the following particular strategies as being successful: comfort with contradiction (empowering others), working through others (reflecting on who benefits from changes made), appreciating dissent (listening to differing points of view in order to make the best decision possible), displaying a critical awareness of how children are being served (taking a stand on social justice), and demonstrating an ethic of care (dealing with individuals for who they are as said individuals exclusive of a social group). She further asserts that such a reconception could possibly contribute to more non-traditional aspirants, whom she identifies as women, to seek out the superintendency as part of their career goals. Although Grogan's strategies are not as gender-specific as Brunner's (1999) contributions, together they both acknowledge that successful women superintendents face uncertainty, and that they must persevere and implement specific practices to make them successful in a predominantly male-dominated role.

Chapter Summary

Through review of the extant literature, the contextual history of the women in the superintendency has been examined. This chapter included a discussion of the progressing theories of the superintendency, difficulties in accessing the role of public school superintendent, and the importance of the women as a public school division superintendent. Next, the role of progressing superintendent leadership theories and contemporary leadership theories were reviewed. The chapter continued with a review of transformational leadership which is the theoretical framework for this study. The historical development of the theory, its four domains and criticism of the theory were included. Closely linked to the beliefs of transformational leadership theory, the LPI-SELF and its five leadership practices were reviewed. A further and more expanded discussion of the instrument is found in Chapter 3. Lastly, strategies of success for women superintendents were discussed. These strategies relied on previous research conducted by Brunner (1999) and Grogan (2000) and suggested that women may need more gender-specific strategies in order to be successful.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe the leadership practices of women superintendents of public school divisions in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The researcher sought to understand how the participants described their past and current histories (and meaning of these histories) within their professional position. The stories of the women superintendents were examined and written into a collective narrative of their lived leadership practice experiences.

Research Question

The research question for this study was:

How do women in the role of public school division superintendent describe their leadership practices?

This chapter explains the research design of the study which includes a rationale for a qualitative study, the role of the researcher and the selection process of the potential participants and setting. A discussion concerning informed consent procedures follows with the next section explaining the data collection procedures. The following sections explicate the data quality procedures and the data management and analysis to which the study adhered. The chapter ends with a summary of all the aforementioned sections.

Research Design of the Study

This section explains the rationale for a qualitative study and describes the research design which includes the role of the researcher, and the selection process for the participants chosen from women superintendents of public school divisions within the Commonwealth of Virginia. This study employed a qualitative research design with phenomenological interviews. These interviews used open-ended, in-depth questioning techniques as suggested by Seidman (2006) with the intention being that the participants reconstruct their experiences within the context of their self-perceived leadership practices.

Rationale for the Qualitative Study

Quantitative research provides statistical data, whereas qualitative research focuses more on the nonmathematical analytic procedures which are formulated from a

variety of sources (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Qualitative research ideally seeks to offer a perspective on a given situation and provide rich, in-depth descriptive analysis which demonstrates the researcher's ability to illustrate the described corresponding phenomenon under study (Myers, 2002). The research design utilized for this study was qualitative and employed phenomenological interviewing. Phenomenological research relies on the description of the lived experiences of an individual and how meaning is construed within a context (Coles & Knowles, 2001; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). This qualitative research design assisted the researcher in examining the past and present histories of the women superintendents' experiences and self-perceived leadership practices by allowing the participants to provide in their own discourse their life histories and by having them reflect upon their experiences on a deep and personal level. These assumptions provided a framework for the phenomenological interviews as outlined by Seidman (2006).

Data collection included interviews, member checks, use of field notes and a reflexive journal, and completion of the LPI-SELF. The codes and themes that emerged, discussed further in the data analysis section, were analyzed and presented using the guidelines described by Anfara, Brown and Mangione (2002) who suggest a three-iteration strategy. These strategies included 1) chunking and coding the data; 2) constant comparative method to elicit patterns and, 3) hypothesis or theory development (Anfara et al.). All data were analyzed until saturation occurred and salient themes among all participants were found and could be concluded.

Role of the Researcher

The importance of the role of the researcher is explained to the reader to portray how the researcher came to be interested in conducting this study. The term *researcher* (use of the third person) in lieu of *I* (first person) is used to reflect the personal preference and comfortability of the researcher in reference to herself and her role within the qualitative study. One role for this researcher was her position as a doctoral student completing her dissertation in partial fulfillment for her degree. The researcher invested a considerable amount of time and effort during the course of the study to produce an organized and ethical outcome. The salient themes as presented in the findings and conclusions were determined by the researcher based on her interpretation of the

participants' own words.

The researcher's own professional history reflects nine years in the field of public school education. The first five years were spent teaching at the secondary level with the last four years in various administrative positions. Upon entering a doctoral program in educational leadership and policy studies, the researcher began to examine the complexities unique to women's leadership practices in public school education administrative positions, particularly the role of superintendent of schools. The researcher also had the experience of working with one women superintendent during one year of her tenure as an administrator and she aspires to be a superintendent herself. Based on these previous experiences, the researcher felt an openness and willingness to learn from women superintendents currently within the field and gain a greater understanding of their experiences and self-perceived leadership practices. This topic was developed with the desire to understand women's leadership practices and to share such knowledge with other women superintendents and university and college educational administrative programs.

Researchers have a scientific responsibility to their participants, research study and profession to produce data that is worth knowing and that is credible and transferable (Kvale, 1996). Being mindful and aware of bias broadens the researcher's capacity to craft a better understanding of the phenomena being studied (Hein & Austin, 2001). It is the researcher's hope that evidence from this study will add to the already existing literature of women superintendents and their leadership practices.

Selection Process

This study employed purposive sampling. Based on the research question, and selecting a sample from which the most information could be learned, the researcher sought to establish parameters concerning the participants, setting and the social phenomena that was studied (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Using purposive sampling allowed the study to elicit *information rich* findings (Patton, 2002). Women superintendents who were currently employed as a public school division superintendent in the Commonwealth of Virginia during the 2007-2008 school year (as determined from an online list posted on the Virginia Department of Education website) were solicited to participate (37 total). As the study proceeded, three potential participants could no longer

be considered either due to retirement or termination of employment during the school year (leaving 34 total potential participants). Retired or terminated superintendents were not considered in order to reflect only current leadership practices of presently serving women superintendents. Further explanation of the study population and site selection follows.

Study Population

Participants (8 total) were solicited via a Letter of Introduction to the study (Appendix I), an Interest Questionnaire (Appendix J) and a Demographic Data Questionnaire (Appendix L) sent in the postal mail. Definitions of Terms Provided on the Demographic Data Questionnaire (Appendix M) were also included. For convenience and to assist in the prompt return of the questionnaires, a self-addressed stamped envelope was provided within the mailing. Upon receipt of the returned questionnaires, two matrices (Appendix N, Appendix O) were constructed from the women superintendents' responses using the following criteria: 1) she had agreed to participate, and 2) she had held the position of a public school superintendent for at least the period of one year or more (either within the state selected for the study or within any other state within the United States). The researcher selected eight participants from the responding potential participants (who agreed to participate, 14 total) to convey a multiplicity of the women superintendents' voices, perceptions and beliefs of their leadership practices. This diversity in voice reflected the demographic data responses which included information regarding the participants' age, race, years of experience in education, salary range, years of tenure in present position, locale and school district size. County or city locations were also considered, but are not listed on the matrices in order to protect the confidentiality of the respondents. Alternates (3 total) were also selected to serve in case a participant was unable to complete the study.

Site Selection

The site selection strategy that was used for this study was maximum variation sampling. Patton (2002) describes this sampling as "capturing the core experiences and central, shared aspects or impacts of [the participants and settings]" (p. 172). It is also recommended as being the most effective of sampling strategies in choosing a setting by Seidman (2006). Thus, although the women solicited to participate in this study differed

in their demographic voice, they all had in common the shared experiences of being a women superintendent within a public school division. The sites selected were each of the individual public school divisions of the Commonwealth of Virginia in which a woman superintendent was currently employed.

Rossmann and Rallis (2003) describe four essential criteria when selecting the site and participant location. These criteria include 1) entry by the researcher, 2) a richness of participant potential, 3) the opportunity for the researcher to develop strong relationships with the participants, and 4) ethical and political matters are not overwhelming. First, from professional work experiences, the researcher has had many opportunities to become familiar with the setting and the women superintendents. Entry by the researcher did rely to some extent on the reputation of the university with which the researcher was affiliated.

Second, the site selection consisted of a reasonable number of potential participants of women superintendents (within the Commonwealth of Virginia) from which the researcher could interview and collect data from the participants in order to answer the study's research question. Third, the women superintendents discussed their perceptions of their leadership experiences and practices over a period of a three interview process, and confirmed their statements through member checks (through which all participants were given the occasion to add, delete or comment on the interview transcripts). This provided the researcher with an opportunity to develop a relatively close relationship with each participant as data were collected and reviewed. Fourth, and last, the researcher anticipated that some possible ethical and political considerations could occur in that only currently employed public school division superintendents would be asked to participate, while former superintendents would not.

Finally, the researcher had discussed possible personal employment opportunities with some of the superintendents that were potential participants, and this could have represented a conflict of interest. These concerns represented minimal ethical or political regard to the study. The interview research and completion of the *LPI-SELF* (discussed further in this chapter) occurred in a mutually agreed upon location by the researcher and the participant. Most often this location was the superintendent's school division office.

Informed Consent Procedures

To ensure ethical considerations, such as the rights and welfare of the participants and sites that have been acknowledged, the study must provide the participants with respect for each individual's autonomy, beneficence (maximize benefits, and minimize risk), and justice (equitable selection and fairness to all participants involved) (National Commission for the protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). The researcher sought and received informed consent from each participant. Seidman (2006) describes the informed consent as the "first step towards minimizing the risks participants face when they agree to be interviewed" (p. 61). Informed consent is also a necessary requirement of the researcher's university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedures.

Seidman (2006) outlines the following eight steps to elaborate on the specific IRB conditions: 1) an invitation to the study which describes the scope, length, purpose and sponsors of the research, 2) explanation of potential risks, 3) rights of the participants, 4) possible benefits of the study and to its participants, 5) confidentiality, 6) explanation of how the results will be disseminated, 7) consent for participants under the age of 18, and 8) researcher and IRB's contact information and use of appropriate language is comprehensible to participants. The researcher provided all of the necessary information, previously described above, on the appropriate forms to the researcher's Institutional Review Board for expedited review. Upon acceptance and approval by the IRB committee in January of 2008, the researcher sent via postal mail the informed consent forms (Appendix K). Once participants were established, a copy of said consent form and the interview protocol (each protocol was mailed separately before the corresponding interview session or sessions as some were conducted within the same day) was mailed to each participant prior to the commencement of the data collection. As consent was required, it was also the researcher's duty to maintain the participants' confidentiality.

Assurance of Confidentiality

Participants were informed that all information collected for this study was to be kept confidential at all times. Using Seidman's (2006) definition, the researcher maintained "the confidentiality of the name of the participants who are the source of the records, tapes, and transcripts and any other material that could identify the participants

in [the] research” (p. 70). The researcher employed codes and pseudonyms so as to limit any identification of parties or locations mentioned by the participants. Permission for the right to use direct quotations within the findings and conclusions was requested on the consent forms previously described. Participants were also informed that in addition to the researcher, the researcher’s doctoral committee could also have access to the collected data, and that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the researcher’s university could view the study’s collected data for auditing purposes. With exception to the aforementioned individuals (or committees), the results of the study were not given to anyone else without the participants’ written consent. The researcher also only accessed the study’s data from a computer that was not connected to the internet, and saved any files only onto a flash drive or CD. Any written materials when not in use by the researcher remained in a locked filing cabinet within the researcher’s personal residence. All materials upon completion of the study will be secured in a locked file cabinet for the remainder of one year whereupon all materials pertaining to the study will be destroyed by the researcher.

Gaining Access and Entry

The participants as current public school division superintendents represented the top of the hierarchy within their profession. However, the researcher did acknowledge that school boards were the employer of the participants and that consent from them could have been required. It was also assumed that the professional background of the researcher, and her status as a doctoral candidate and affiliation with the university, would be sufficient to establish the necessary trust, mutual respect and quality relationship as described by Seidman (2006). Access from the women superintendents was sought directly via a professional letter of introduction to the study on the university’s letterhead. The researcher attempted to conduct all communication in a professional manner. After participants were selected, the researcher contacted each participant via telephone (or email) to arrange meeting location times and dates in order to conduct the interviews and completion of the LPI-SELF.

Data Collection

The primary method of data collection in qualitative research involves the use of interviews (Creswell, 2003; Glesne, 1999; Kvale, 1996; Polkinghorne, 2005; Seidman,

2006). This study employed phenomenological interviews using in-depth, open-ended questioning and member checks. The researcher also used field notes, a reflexive journal and the LPI-SELF instrument. An outline of the qualitative research design timeline can be found in Table 3.1.

Interviews

Interviews are often considered the primary and most beneficial means by which researchers can access the participants' personal beliefs from their lived experiences (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Thoughts, feelings and sentiments expressed by the participants in their own words and own understanding of their experiences or situations aid the researcher to provide a framework through which he or she can collect qualitative data (Patton, 2002; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). In order to establish the time and location for each of the scheduled face-to-face interviews, the researcher contacted each participant by telephone or email. The interview protocol for Interview One—Life History Interview (LHI) (Appendix A), Interview Two—Current Experiences Interview (CEI) (Appendix B), and Interview Three—Reflection of the Meaning Interview (RMI) (Appendix C) was mailed to the participants prior to the scheduled interview dates. The Qualitative Consent Form (Appendix I) was mailed prior to the first interview session. All of the participants elected to conduct two of the interviews back to back, and conclude the following day with the third interview. All interview questions were developed in relation to the study's research question. Interviews were structured using the guidelines proposed by Seidman (2006), who recommends using three separate interviews from each participant to better understand the experiences and the meaning of those experiences as the data pertains to the study's purpose and research question. Interviews were conducted from February 5, 2008 to April 16, 2008. The researcher conducted twenty-four interviews total, three per each participant. The first interview, the Life History Interview, focused on the participants' life history and their perceptions of how she came to be a woman superintendent. This interview required the participants to reconstruct their experiences and stories from the past until the present. The second interview, the Current Experiences Interview, examined the details of participants' present day life experiences. Women superintendents were asked to describe their daily routines and how they related and interacted with the individuals and tasks they

Table 3.1

Outline of the Qualitative Research Design Timeline

Qualitative Data Collection	Timeline	Appendix
Participants were mailed the Letter of Introduction, the Interest Questionnaire and the Demographic Data Questionnaire and Definitions of Terms Provided on the Demographic Questionnaire	January 8, 2008	I, J, L, M
Consent Forms were mailed to selected participants along with a self-addressed stamped envelope	January 25, 2008	K
Consent Form Explanation (signed in the presence of the researcher), Interview One—Life History Interview was conducted	All interviews transpired between February 5, 2008- April 16, 2008	K, A

Table 3.1 (continued)

Outline of the Qualitative Research Design Timeline

Qualitative Data Collection	Timeline	Appendix
Interview Two—Current Experiences Interview was conducted, and participants complete the LPI-SELF	All interviews transpired between February 5, 2008- April 16, 2008	B, F
Interview Three—Reflection of the Meaning Interview was conducted	All interviews transpired between February 5, 2008- April 16, 2008	C
Field Notes	Taken before, during and after each participants' interview session(s)	N/A
Reflexive Journal Entries	Occurred as an on-going process during the research study	N/A
Member Checks	Requested after interviews were transcribed, all comments, suggestions, deletions collected by April 30, 2008.	N/A

experienced every day. In the third and final interview, the Reflection on the Meaning Interview, participants were asked to reflect on the meaning and their own understanding of their past and present day experiences. This interview draws upon previously gathered data and is only productive if a clear foundation is established by the first and second interviews (Seidman). All interviews were scheduled to last 60 to 90 minutes each (with all three interviews taking place within a 10 week timeframe). Participants were informed that all interviews were to be audio-taped. Taping the interview allowed the researcher to focus more on the conversation at hand to better extract the depth of the participant's beliefs in the phenomena being studied. Taping also allowed the researcher to maintain a precise record of the interview that occurred so that the data gathered could be reviewed and examined for further information and or explanation at a later date (Merriam, 1998). Furthermore, all interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher and coded to extrapolate the themes and categories as demonstrated by the data. A detailed description of the coding and analysis procedures that were used can be found in the data management and analysis section of this chapter and in Appendix D.

Member Checks

Participants were given a copy of the transcript for their review after the interviews were transcribed. Member checks allowed the researcher 1) to examine whether or not the perspectives relayed to the researcher were accurately documented, 2) to be informed if there were any sections which could be problematic (personally or politically) to the participant if the data were published, and 3) to assist her in helping with the development of new ideas and interpretations (Glesne, 1999). Participants were provided the opportunity to share with the researcher any of the abovementioned concerns. These data then served to contribute to the findings and conclusions.

Field Notes

While audio-taped and transcribed interviews offer a great wealth of in-depth data, there are many other nuances of the interview encounter which cannot be captured by this technique alone. Therefore, in order to avoid reliance on a *decontextualized interview*, one that does not include “the visual aspects of the situation [of the participants themselves],” (Kvale, 1996, p. 160-161) the researcher employed the use of field notes. A researcher's field notes provides an opportunity to evidence documentation of all

observations and conversations that occur in the field (Schwandt, 2001). These notes were taken at the onset of initial participation contact, during the interview and after the interview process.

Details about the interactions between the researcher and participant were recorded when the study first began. Personal impressions and insights by the researcher, as the relationship between the participants and the researcher developed, contributed to maintaining the data in an accurate and systematic manner. Note-taking provides the participants with non-verbal cues that what they are saying is or is not important, and that what they do say is of overall value to the study's purpose (Patton, 2002). Field notes also serve in keeping the researcher focused and detail-oriented during the process (Patton). During the interview process the researcher noted ideas for prompt questions, or other areas of interest, but primarily kept her focus on the participant and remained an active listener. Notes taken after the interviews concentrated on needs for further development, understanding, clarification or meaning. This documentation process helped the researcher develop a better and more in-depth understanding of the collected data from those it represented.

Reflexive Journal

Reflexive journal entries assist the researcher in recognizing and articulating their personal influence and biases of the participants, themselves and the processes leading to the findings and conclusions (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). These journal entries provided the researcher with insight to concerns and realizations as the study began, progressed and concluded. The reflexive process recorded within these journal entries included: reflexivity concerning the participants, the development of the data collected, the procedures of the analysis of the data, the progression towards the results and the final outcome of the study, and most importantly, self-reflexivity of the researcher's role throughout the study.

Leadership Practices Inventory-SELF (LPI-SELF)

The Leadership Practices Inventory-SELF (Kouzes & Posner, 2003b) (Appendix F) served as an additional source of data collection. The purpose and function of the instrument's use within the study was to elicit from the participants information that could have been missed from the qualitative interviews. Creswell (2003) suggests that

researchers go beyond the norm of interviews and observations as data collection and *stretch the imagination* to promote reader interest. Completion of the LPI-SELF and the reflection that occurs when one reads the statements contained therein may have prompted participants to share or rethink information they gave previously in the interviews, or to reflect more accurately or deeply in the third and final interview.

Kouzes and Posner (1988, 2005) developed the LPI-SELF instrument from data collected from a synthesis of qualitative and quantitative studies of an individual's *personal best* leadership experiences. The use of the survey was provided *pro bono* to the researcher as the authors granted permission providing that a copyright statement be included on all copies of the instrument (Appendix G). Additionally, at the request of the authors, the survey was not permitted for online use (Appendix H).

The organization of the LPI-SELF consists of thirty statements which incorporate five domains of leadership practice (*challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way, and encouraging the heart*). Each leadership practice is measured by six statements within the instrument. All statements are preceded with the question "To what extent do you typically engage in the following behaviors?" and are answered using a ten point (10 being the highest and 1 being the lowest) Likert-scale response. Descriptions of the responses are as follows: 1) almost never, 2) rarely, 3) seldom, 4) once in a while, 5) occasionally, 6) sometimes, 7) fairly often, 8) usually, 9) very frequently, and 10) almost always. Completion of the LPI-SELF takes 8 to 10 minutes. Explanation of how the data from the LPI-SELF was assessed is outlined in the data analysis section.

Data Quality Procedures

Anfara, Brown and Mangione (2002) present four criteria to address the rigors of a qualitative study: confirmability, dependability, credibility and transferability. The researcher applied all four criteria to preserve the integrity and rigor of the data to be investigated. An explanation of how each one was addressed follows.

Confirmability

Denzin (1994) states that confirmability, or trustworthiness, "builds on audit trails...and involves the use of written field notes, memos, a field diary, process and personal notes, and a reflexive journal" (p. 513). The researcher subscribed to the

aforementioned suggestion by using field notes, and reflexive journaling. Additionally, member checks, matrices for participant inclusion, and charts displaying pattern variables and rules for inclusion in coding procedures are all included and explained for the reader in Chapter 4 or within the Appendices. The reader can then inspect the data and the researcher's interpretations of the data to ascertain the confirmability or trustworthiness of the study.

Denzin (1978) describes four triangulation methods: data, investigator, theoretical and methodological. The researcher employed data triangulation to enhance confidence in the overall findings. Use of triangulation allowed for cross-checking of the collected data from the independent sources which contributed to the findings of the emergent themes and categories. The ability of the researcher to cross-check data also increases confidence in the study's overall results and conclusions by allowing the researcher to contrast and compare the data as they are interpreted among the varied sources (Denzin). The researcher acknowledged that not all sources and participants agreed on some of the findings and documented these differences in the reflexive journal.

The technique of *bracketing*, which is to suspend the "natural attitude [which] is the everyday assumption of the independent existence of what is perceived and thought about" (Schwandt, 1997, p. 114), was also employed. Bracketing (or phenomenological reduction) provides the reader with the reminder that the researcher (through self-observations and self-comments) was indeed a part of the text (Kleinsasser, 2000). The researcher provided bracketed comments throughout the study's findings and conclusions by applying an on-going process, using direct quotations from the participants' interviews and interpretations from the collected data. These brackets of self-reflexive thought were documented in the reflexive journal.

Dependability

Dependability concerns the steadfastness, or rigor, of the study's data and design processes over time with the given sample (Kvale, 1996). It is a similar equivalent to reliability in quantitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) place more emphasis on validity (credibility and transferability) than reliability (dependability) when they state, "Since there can be no validity without reliability (and thus no credibility without dependability), a demonstration of the former is sufficient to establish the latter." (p.

316). Through use of data triangulation, data qualities that were objective and defensible, and an audit trail, the researcher was able to establish dependability to construct the emerging themes and categories. Quotations within the transcripts from the women superintendents were compared and contrasted among interviews and with other data sources to verify that the data were consistent throughout the information extracted.

The researcher also established the necessary information needed for a clear and precise audit trail (further discussed in the data management and analysis section of this chapter), suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as an important source of establishing dependability. The data qualities described in this section were also employed to assist in the study's rigor. This allowed the researcher to verify the management and systemization of all data sources collected and analyzed from the time of the women's first interview sessions until data saturation occurred and salient themes had emerged.

Credibility

The closest comparison to internal validity in qualitative research is credibility. The results of the research must be credible or believable from the perspective of the participant in order to describe or understand the phenomena being studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher used several procedures (interviews, member checks, LPI-SELF, field notes and the reflexive journal) to portray the participants' own perceptions of their lived experiences as women superintendents. Creswell (2003) recommends using at least two of the following eight primary strategies to establish credibility: 1) triangulation, 2) member-checking, 3) use of rich, thick description, 4) bias clarification, 5) use of negative information (that demonstrates views which are converse of the themes presented), 6) prolonged engagement in the field, 7) peer debriefing and 8) use of an external auditor. This study used the first four strategies mentioned above. Lastly, all interview sessions were coded and transcribed so that the researcher was be able to read and re-read the data, allowing the researcher to demonstrate that the data collected were a true representation of what occurred in the field.

Transferability

The reader can reasonably consider that the findings apply to similar circumstances and have transferability provided that the findings of a qualitative study contain thick, rich descriptions of the participants' viewpoints (Schwandt, 2001). Patton

(2002) suggests the use of purposeful sampling to gather objective in-depth, information rich descriptions and meanings of the participants. As stated in Chapters 1 and 2, women superintendents compose the minority of the total number of superintendents nationwide (Glass et al., 2000). Collectively as women have had to break through the *glass ceiling*, it is reasonable to believe that these women may share similar perceptions among their leadership practices (Brunner, 1999). Readers must ultimately determine for themselves whether the findings of this study apply directly to their own situation.

Summary

This section described the data quality procedures that were used to demonstrate the rigor and depth of the qualitative study and set the boundaries for the established criteria of confirmability, dependability, credibility and transferability. These procedures assisted the researcher in providing the reader with a study that is both believable and trustworthy. The researcher managed and analyzed the studied phenomena of women superintendents' leadership practices as the understanding and meaning of the data were collected and quality was exhibited.

Data Management and Analysis

All data, according to the research question, were organized and transformed into thick, rich descriptions which were then further analyzed so that the data transferred into the findings. This section describes the data management, data analysis, and audit trail used by the researcher for all collected data.

Data Management

The researcher must develop techniques and methods that timely and accurately organize and manage the vast amounts of data collected within a qualitative study so that the data can be easily and quickly accessed (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Data management involves preparing the data for analysis and using different analyses to move to a deeper understanding, representation and interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2003). The data collected consisted of interviews, member checks, field notes, a reflexive journal, and the LPI-SELF. All interviews were transcribed as soon as possible after they occurred, and coding for each set of interviews began as soon as all transcripts were completed. The researcher numbered the lines of data from the interview transcripts to allow for easier organization and retrieval of information when needed. Completed LPI-SELF

instruments were collected and coded after the second interview session. Separate, colored folders (with notebooks) containing documentation for all data sets were managed and maintained for each participant. Copies of the data were made and collected in color-coded *participant notebooks* so that the researcher could separate the data and then collect quotations from the participants as they pertained to the emerging themes and categories (Appendices D, E). These copies were labeled according to the participant, site, and method of data collection.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was based on the research question and the study's purpose. The purpose of this study was to describe the leadership practices of women superintendents of public school divisions in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Transformational leadership theory served as the theoretical framework for the research analysis. The researcher did not assume, nor should the reader, that the data collected by the participants were necessarily effective or successful leadership practices. The data reflected only the descriptions that the women superintendents conveyed to the researcher through the various data sources. All data collected were coded and themed accordingly. This section is separated into two sections, 1) data analysis of the interviews, member checks, field notes and reflexive journal, and 2) data analysis of the LPI-SELF.

Data Analysis of the Interviews, Member Checks, Field Notes and Reflexive Journal

The codes and themes that emerged from the interviews, member checks, field notes and reflexive journal were analyzed and presented using the guidelines described by Anfara et al (2002) who suggests a three-iteration strategy. These strategies include 1) chunking and coding the data, 2) constant comparative method to elicit patterns, and 3) hypothesis or theory development (Anfara et al., 2002).

Chunking and Coding Data. Coding of the documentation involves putting the data into “chunks” before one brings meaning to those “chunks” (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p. 171). The researcher used broad words, phrases or ideas such as *relationships, lessons learned, strengths and weaknesses, valued characteristics* expressed by the participants to form the initial chunks for each data set. As the chunks became more repetitive and definitive, the researcher was able to categorize these initial chunks into smaller groups of information or codes and major themes such as *mentor,*

communication, visibility and so forth.

Constant Comparative Method. This iteration involves pattern analysis with the researcher comparing and theoreticalizing the participants' findings by grouping the themes and categories together as they are expressed by the participants within the setting (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). As analysis of qualitative data were on-going and a reflexive process, the researcher also realized that the many codes and themes that emerged, could be reformulated during the study. A *theme notebook* was used to organize and compare and contrast all emergent themes according to each of the collected participants' responses, field notes and reflexive journal entries. Tables and appendices such as those displaying the participant matrix selection, and code and theme inclusion patterns were generated to organize the data, as they pertained to the research question for both the benefit of researcher and the reader. This also assisted in establishing a clear and concise audit trail.

Hypothesis or Theory Development. The third iteration explores the hypothesis or theory development within the context of the study's purpose and meaning (Anfara et al., 2002). The researcher reveals the lessons learned and conveys the meaning of these lessons through comparison of the findings and the data presented in the already current literature (Creswell, 2003). The researcher did not project a theory or confirm a hypothesis in this study but was able to make conclusions which extend current theories concerning women superintendents and their leadership practices.

Data Analysis of the LPI-SELF

Cumulative scores for each individual leadership practice within the LPI-SELF range from 6 to 60 with total score ranges from 60 to 600. Kouzes and Posner's (1997) normative scale was used, which allowed the researcher to rank each of the five leadership practices along a continuum of high, moderate and low scores for each participant. These rankings are based upon a study of more than 12,000 leaders who utilized the LPI-SELF and who scored at or below the following given levels of 70 to 100 as high, 30 to 69 as moderate, and 0 to 29 as low (Kouzes & Posner). These percentile rankings (further discussed in Chapter 4) and the responses the participants gave were compared and contrasted, with the codes and themes developed from the interviews, member checks, field notes and reflexive journal data.

Audit Trail

Audit trails are established to demonstrate the researcher's analytical process from raw data sources to the final interpretations of the data. The researcher developed chunks and codes which developed into the emergent themes according to the women superintendents' descriptions and the context to which they were referring (Appendices D, E). These chunks and codes were extracted and refined with the constant comparative technique using data triangulation of the interview transcriptions, the member checks, the field notes and the reflexive journal. Data from the interviews and the LPI-SELF (as presented in Table 4.1) responses were triangulated and are presented using a narrative description. Charts and tables (further explained in Chapter 4 and the Appendices) from all data sources were used to document and present the findings. The reflexive journal fully documented the researcher's on-going interpretations and the process as it proceeded and concluded so that the reality of the field experience was accurately portrayed in the findings and conclusion. Lastly, the researcher's dissertation advisors were debriefed to verify all processes of the qualitative study.

Summary

This section has demonstrated that the rigor, trustworthiness and meaning of the participants are inherent in establishing the "quality of the craftsmanship" within the study (Kvale, 1996, p. 241). The study's trustworthiness and credibility was established by an audit trail along with data quality procedures and the three iterations mentioned. Only when the researcher concluded the member checks, reviewed and re-reviewed the multiple sources of data, and employed the data triangulation method were the findings completely presented and formulated, thereby representing a rigorous qualitative study.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 began with an introduction including the research question which sought to answer how women in the role of public school division superintendent described their leadership practices. The qualitative methodology and its rationale for the study was discussed as was the role of the researcher, the selection process for the participants and the setting and confidentiality procedures. The chapter described how the researcher gathered data consisting of: interviews, member checks, the LPI-SELF, field notes and a reflexive journal. Data quality procedures addressed how the researcher

accounted for the confirmability, dependability, credibility and transferability. Procedures for data management and analysis were explained using the three-iteration strategies which included chunking and coding the data, constant comparative method and hypothesis or theory development. Lastly, the researcher described the way in which the audit trail was established and documented.

PROLOGUE TO CHAPTER 4

The following prologue which provides background information concerning the participants has been added to allow the reader to better understand the findings of the study. The prologue is divided into the following five sections: 1) participant selection, 2) description of the individual participants, 3) leadership development, 4) mentoring, and 5) women's struggles within the superintendency.

Participant Selection

As outlined in Chapter 3, there are few women public school division superintendents within the Commonwealth of Virginia (34 out of 138 school divisions). According to the Virginia Department of Education, thirty-seven women public school division superintendents were employed at the beginning of the 2007-2008 school year. In January of 2008, the researcher mailed 37 letters of introduction, interest questionnaires and demographic data surveys to the public school divisions. A minority of women school division superintendents responded positively (14 total). Some superintendents indicated that they did not want to participate (11), and some were non-respondents (12). There were two potential participants from the initial 37 superintendents that subsequently left their positions and could not be considered. In January of 2008, one superintendent retired and was replaced with a male.

The criteria (Appendix N, Appendix O) described in Chapter 3 were used to select the eight pre-determined school division superintendents from the total superintendents (14) that wished to participate. Public school division superintendents that were not chosen (6 total) were asked to serve as alternates (3) or were not selected (3). All of the participants were Caucasian, over the age of 46, with a minimum of 25 years or more in service to public education, with one to ten years of experience in the superintendency. There were six participants employed in rural school divisions and two employed in urban school divisions. Salaries ranged from \$75,000-\$121,000 or more, and the average daily membership of the school divisions ranged from 300-25,000 students.

Description of the Individual Participants

Due to the public nature of the public school division superintendent, the limited number of study participants, and the confidentiality agreement, the researcher was restricted in providing a more detailed description. Further details could make them

personally identifiable to others. Therefore, the following descriptions are focused on their number of years in education and as a superintendent, their experience as related to educational settings (public school/higher education), and their initial thoughts on their chosen profession. Lastly, European capitals were used as pseudonyms to assist the researcher in the maintaining the participants' confidentiality.

Superintendent Paris

Superintendent Paris is in her late-50s, nearing retirement, and has previously taught collectively for 20 years within the public schools and also in higher education settings. She has worked within public education for over 30 years (as both a teacher and administrator) within relatively the same geographical region of Virginia. She was not sure originally that she wanted to be a teacher, but after completing her student teaching experience during her undergraduate college years, her decision was confirmed. She has been a superintendent for two years in an urban school division, and considers the superintendency to be a terminal position after her contractual obligations have been met.

Superintendent Brussels

Superintendent Brussels is in her mid-50s and has been a public school division superintendent for the past seven years in a rural county. Although she has had previous experience working in other states, the majority of her teaching and administrative positions have been from within the same school division. She has over 20 years of teaching experience in public education with as she said a "couple of [those] years" teaching in higher education. She was raised in the same county in which she is employed as superintendent and is the first woman superintendent to represent that school division. Although she does not plan to retire any time soon, she does desire to remain in public education in some capacity even after her superintendency either in grant writing or doing other contractual work.

Superintendent Oslo

Superintendent Oslo is in her mid-50s and has been the superintendent in her rural public school division for the past two years. She has over 30 years invested as a teacher and an administrator in public education at both the public school level and in the higher education settings. She is the first woman superintendent in the rural county in which she also resides. She has had the opportunity to work in a variety of school divisions and

serve in administrative roles outside of public education within and outside of the Commonwealth of Virginia and the United States. This diversity of experience has given her a multi-faceted view of leadership. She was one of the few participants that said that she had never wanted to be a superintendent.

Superintendent Madrid

Superintendent Madrid is in her late 50s and knew from early childhood that she had always wanted to be a teacher and work in public education. She was raised in the same rural school division in which she has had all of her public education experience and where she has served as superintendent for almost eight years. She has over 30 years of total experience. Being a superintendent had not originally occurred to her, but at the time she was approached by the school board, she “had the most knowledge in [that] office” and was then happy to accept the position.

Superintendent Bern

Superintendent Bern is in her mid-50s and is in her third year as a public school superintendent in a rural school division. She has over 30 years in service to public education in and outside of the Commonwealth of Virginia. She did not decide to become a teacher until her senior year of college. Years later, after experiencing the major life change of divorce, she says she “felt this freedom to do what [she] really wanted to do” and realized the potential to help more students if she were to become an administrator (and ultimately a superintendent) than if she remained in a teaching position.

Superintendent Rome

Superintendent Rome has over 30 years of experience in the field of public education and is in her mid-50s. She is in her fourth year as a public school superintendent in a small urban school division. While the majority of her teaching and administrative career has occurred in the Commonwealth of Virginia, she has also had the experience of working abroad early in her career. She sought out a superintendency to experience a greater challenge, so that she could contribute to “the bigger picture.”

Superintendent London

Superintendent London is in her early 50s and is completing her first year as a public school superintendent in a large, public rural school division. She has worked in public education for at least 25 years and all of her working experience has been within

the Commonwealth of Virginia. She did not aspire to the superintendency until very late in her career as she became more confident in her leadership practices while pursuing her doctoral degree.

Superintendent Dublin

Superintendent Dublin is in her fourth year as public school superintendent in a small rural school division and has over 30 years of experience in public education. All of her teaching and administrative positions have been held in the Commonwealth of Virginia in several different school divisions. She considered entering education when she realized, as she stated, she had two career choices. She could either be a nurse or a teacher, and she “couldn’t stand the sight of blood.” She sought a superintendency later in her career because she wanted to be a part of making things happen and because she felt there were so few women in the position of superintendent that she still saw it as a “frontier.”

Leadership Development

Many of the participants had not realized until reflecting for this study that they had held, or been in informal leadership positions since their formative years of grade school. These roles often varied but most usually included positions in student government offices, clubs or sports teams. They were encouraged by their parents, friends and self-confidence to assume these informal roles wholeheartedly. One participant stated, “I was always starting things and taking the initiative, I wanted to get things done!” All of the participants indicated that they felt leadership was a part of their personality, and not so much a choice, but a compelling internal force which they needed to fulfill.

For the conduct of this study, as stated in Chapter 1, a superintendent is defined as the chief executive officer in a public school division within the Commonwealth of Virginia that offers at least a program encompassing grades Kindergarten through 12, inclusive, or unified. As all of the superintendents voiced contentment in their chosen profession, half stated (4 out of 8) that they had not always known they had wanted a career in education until later in their college years, much less to become a superintendent as their careers developed. The majority of the participants (6 out of 8) had somewhat of a standard career ladder in that they had held teaching positions, then

moved through various administrative positions. These formal leadership positions often included but were not limited to assistant principal, principal, central office (which included in many cases Director of Instruction and Curriculum and Assistant Superintendent), and finally becoming a superintendent. Only two participants were promoted directly from the classroom to central office without ever having been a school level administrator. Those that had been building level administrators had usually served as principals of elementary schools and not high schools as is typical of male superintendents and further supported by Grogan (2005) and her studies concerning women superintendents.

Most of the participants (7 total) conceded that they had not sought the superintendency when they began their career in education. Superintendent Oslo stated that she had never wanted to be a superintendent, preferring to stay in the “number two” position as she called it, “the supporting role” [of assistant superintendent], and letting “somebody else run interference on the sidelines for [her].” Many of the participants expressed an overwhelming desire to help children or to “have a bigger impact” in education as a driving force in their desire to accept the superintendency. They liked being able to share their knowledge, and their passion for the organization. Superintendent Dublin emphasized the desire in wanting to move from teaching to administration when she stated “...as a teacher there is no way to elevate yourself up, and I've always had goals you can see from this, well, what do I want to do next? Where do I want to go? And there is no place to go as a teacher.”

All of the participants realized through experiences in their own personal education (which often included a doctoral program) and their professional positions, that they could have a stronger influence on a larger group as a superintendent. The participants also wanted to be able to play an integral part in helping students either receive more services or better services than they were currently receiving. Superintendent Rome discussed the *inner drive* that many participants alluded to having outgrown their previous leadership positions prior to the superintendency. She explained that building level administration had developed a *certain rhythm* and that it had become less exciting than it originally had been.

Many participants attributed their recognition and promotion to a series of

serendipitous acknowledgement. Superintendent Paris affirmed, “And they just appointed me superintendent. I didn’t apply or anything...so it worked out for me...it just kind of seemed like I was in the right place at the right time.” Superintendent London summarized the majority of the participants’ reflections on their career ladder when she stated, “When I look back at my career path, every new door that opened was always the right door. I feel very blessed. I feel surrounded by excellence and good people who saw in me whatever skills needed to happen for next. And I think I’ve had good mentors and leaders alongside or above me, along the way that saw this, and did the right thing and pushed and pushed and, um, I think that may be the only regret that I have is that I wish I would have done it a little sooner....” This inner confidence and support from mentors (as well as *bad* leadership examples) was also reflected in the participants’ perceptions about their eventual retirement from the superintendency itself.

Almost all of the participants (7 out of 8) agreed that they have struggled with the idea of fully retiring from their present superintendency. They still were inspired by future goals and unfulfilled aspirations having to do with their leadership practices and personal desires. The majority of the participants described the superintendency as *fun* and *challenging*. Several of the women’s self-perceptions described their competence level as being *at the top of their game*. Superintendent Dublin supported this belief when she stated, “and so if I stay here or if I go on to one of the other two things that I aspire-- whoever gets me next will get the best of me.” This sentiment was displayed similarly among the participants. The researcher did note that many of the women superintendents asserted that their confidence, uniqueness of character and particular situations or beliefs were exclusive or unique of others’, yet they were often remarkably similar. Additionally, the majority of participants directly asked the researcher and was anxious to know if their remarks were *okay*, or comparable to what others had said.

Regardless of their personal career ladder, the participants believed in themselves and the work that they were doing and continue to do. Throughout the interviews, the majority of the women superintendents discussed and gave thanks to professional mentors that recognized their abilities to lead and moreover gave them the opportunity to develop these abilities. Most participants felt their mentors (or in one case the lack of mentors) had also contributed to helping the participants establish some of their own

leadership practice experiences and perceptions.

Mentors

“And I was very lucky to be in certain positions and to be noticed by people at certain times. So I think mentoring is very important. So what does it mean? It means that people do notice you” (Superintendent Paris). Defined by Roberts (2000), mentoring is “a formaliz[ed] (and in some cases non-formalized) process whereby a more knowledgeable and experienced person actuates a supportive role of overseeing and encouraging reflection and learning within a less experienced and knowledgeable person, so as to facilitate that persons’ career and personal development.” (p. 18). Most of the participants attributed some of their success to mentors that had helped, influenced or encouraged them throughout their careers. All but one of the participants indicated that they had had temporary or life long mentors (or both). All participants agreed that both good and poor leadership as portrayed by their mentors influenced how they had formulated their own self-reflective leadership practices. These *good* and *poor* influences are expounded in the following two sections, mentors to the participants and the importance of being mentors to others.

Mentors to the Participants

The majority of the participants (7 out of 8) acknowledged that their parents had encouraged and been very supportive of them throughout their careers. Several participants conveyed that their parents had shown them since childhood the value of hard work and discipline required of a leader. Three participants had parents that had been in education and understood the trials of their work. These parents were supportive in offering solicited and occasionally unsolicited advice. Almost all of the participants expressed that their parents took great pride in the fact that their daughter had achieved her current position.

The primary mentors described by most of the participants were colleagues that were in positions higher than their own. Many times the mentors were principals or central office staff, and at times, a former superintendent with whom they had worked. The majority of the participants had male mentors. A minority of the women superintendents (3 out of 8) had women who had mentored them. All, but one, of the participants recognized that in order to move ahead and attain those higher positions, they

needed to have someone who recognized their abilities and put them in situations where they could implement them.

Superintendent Rome expressed a common sentiment felt by most of the participants when she explained that her mentor “saw some of the innate abilities [she] had as a leader, but also saw where [she] needed work.” It was important to participants that the mentors provide the necessary feedback they needed so that they could learn and grow as a leader. Superintendent Madrid added that her mentor allowed her opportunities to get involved with the budget and other areas of the entire system. She stated that this professional growth contributed to her interest in remaining in a leadership role. Both the ability to provide feedback and professional growth were seen as good leadership abilities in the mentor, whereas a mentor that portrayed poor leadership was seen more as uncommunicative, uncaring and unpromoting.

Superintendent Dublin also appreciated the professional freedom that one mentor offered her when she was an assistant principal. He was nearing retirement and at that point had basically given her free reign to run the entire school. He had told her, “You do whatever you want. When you need me, call upon me.” She admired the way that he trusted her and recognized her abilities to inspire other teachers. Another participant remarked that a school board chair had acted as mentor upon her arrival to her current school division. Superintendent Bern explained that her school board chair “kind of broke the ice” for her when she was hired and showed her how to communicate just by example with the city manager and city council with whom he was familiar.

Several participants mentioned leadership practices they admired in others along their career path. Others recognized their mentor’s shortcomings, and adjusted their leadership practices to avoid some of their mentor’s mistakes. Superintendent London emphasized this point when she stated, “You work with somebody and you learn from your boss, and you take those skills that are best to your next job...I’ve added what I believe to be my strengths to those strengths that he had and that he has taught me. And I think, I hope I am, I mean in some ways I can outline for you where I think I am better, and maybe not as good as he was...”

As Superintendent London points out, observation of positive experiences in their own professional experiences, led some of participants to reflect on the impact of

negative experiences, and how they influenced their self-perceived leadership practices. At least half of the participants had experienced working for a superintendent prior to their own position where they were looked upon as a perceived threat. These frustrations and detrimental experiences are expressed by Superintendent Dublin's statement, "But anyway, it made me stronger. And I can sit here because I watched him. I watched the ruthless things he did not only to me but to other people. And I knew exactly how I would be as superintendent. So I learned a great deal...[but]...the one thing you learn is that you don't ever burn a bridge. Don't ever burn a bridge." The exact phrase "don't burn a bridge" was used by at least four other participants when describing difficult working situations.

Superintendent Oslo further explained that she tells her current colleagues, protégés and mentees, and educational leadership students that she has "learned as much about good leadership from working under bad leaders as good leaders." She also questions if perhaps leaders take the good ones for granted and do not "celebrate the things that went well." She concluded by stating, "No, so I will say that my own leadership practices reflect to a large degree the things that I absolutely don't ever want to do." In sum these realizations, positive and negative, have influenced how the women superintendents mentor and perceive the process of mentoring. All agreed that mentoring others was a leadership practice that they strongly believed in and that they should strive to do.

The Importance of Being Mentors

In her approach to mentoring others, Superintendent Paris discusses an important trait that could possibly hinder the mentoring process—fear. She explained, "I was very lucky in that the people who mentored me weren't fearful of me. I guess surpassing them, so I have that feeling that I need to really mentor people and not worry about them doing better than I am, because that's what I want, I want people to do better." Almost all of the participants talked about "empowering others." They wanted to inspire those with whom they worked to also be the best leaders they could be.

Superintendent Rome acknowledged that being a mentor, however, was not always an easy task, and that she has discovered throughout her career that although some colleagues could be at their best, they could still be considered "high maintenance"

in need of “heavy lifting.” She was resigned to think that mentors needed to grow accustomed to and accept these characteristics in working with others. Superintendent Oslo viewed mentoring from a practical approach when she expressed she has always considered mentoring to be one of her absolute responsibilities, and she felt obliged to take “all comers.” Superintendent Brussels also recognized that mentoring takes time, time which sometimes is difficult for superintendents to find within their busy schedules.

In sum, participants realized the importance of remaining open to receiving mentors’ help and being able to mentor others themselves in relationships that were based in mutual trust. The researcher also found herself being mentored to some degree by the participants’ stories, situations and direct unsolicited advice. Superintendent Oslo questioned the credibility of the timing surrounding one’s ability to willingly receive mentoring and the availability of mentees when one is able to mentor. During her interview, she asked the question, “Do we create situations or do we wait for them to present themselves?” Understanding this question requires a greater understanding of how one perceives him or herself and how one feels he or she is perceived by others.

Women’s Struggles within the Superintendency

All of the participants agreed that their leadership centered not so much on the reality of how they led, but rather how their leadership was perceived by their community, colleagues and school board. Many of the participants still felt, albeit at differing levels, the fact that they were a woman in a profession mainly occupied by men still had some relevance as to how they were perceived by others in their leadership practices. Evidence of this phenomenon is discussed in previous literature (Brunner, 1998; Grogan, 2000; Grogan & Brunner, 2005). Some of the participants had been told in the past that they “didn’t look like” a superintendent. This section focuses on two sub-themes developed from the women superintendents’ self-perceptions of their leadership and gender within the superintendency: 1) acceptance by stakeholders, and 2) career experiences and job performance.

Acceptance by Stakeholders

Several participants contrasted how their superintendency and the acceptance of it by the community and the school board might be perceived differently if they had been male. Even before securing the position of superintendent, Superintendent Oslo and

Superintendent Dublin commented on times when they felt being a woman hindered them from moving up in the administrative career ladder. Superintendent Dublin felt that she would have “skyrocketed” in her profession had she been a man and that even though she chose to lead in the Commonwealth of Virginia, she stated that there was “still this kind of good old boys’ network.” These sentiments conflicted with other participant’s comments who felt that men had begun to be more inclusive, accepting and appreciative of their input and presence within the profession. Those participants that differed similarly stated that their male counterparts had been accessible and gracious in sharing information or collaborating with them when asked.

All of the participants took pride in being a woman in their given profession, and the fact that they were in many cases the first woman superintendent in their school division. Superintendent Oslo recounted that her county had never had a woman superintendent prior to her, and that she was somewhat surprised that it was “such a big deal to [the school board] in a positive way.” She did express concern at being “under a magnifying glass as a woman superintendent” and that although it remained somewhat unspoken, people still maintained some of the gender stereotype questions. She stated, “Well, how is she going to do with this discipline here?...How about Rotary and Kiwanis and those things, you know, how about athletics? You know, a woman is not going to know anything about athletics.”

One participant, Superintendent Madrid, who was very involved in two school building constructions within her division, brought more notice to her situation by wearing a pink hard hat when visiting the construction sites. She was proud to be a woman and to be seen taking charge of her school division’s needs which encompassed all areas of need namely those outside of curriculum and instruction. She expressed that more and more women were capable of doing the job well, and proving it to those that have been skeptical. In sum, the majority of the participants (7 out of 8) conceded that neither men nor women were better in the profession, but rather brought a different perspective to the position.

Career Experiences and Job Performance

Participants similarly expressed they were acutely aware of the fact that they could not “mess up,” and that if they did so, not only would it reflect poorly on them, but

on all women that hold the position. Superintendent Oslo stated that if women were not successful in their jobs, people perceived it as being more about their gender and not their lack of skill or ability. Superintendent Dublin added that the position was “fluid and full of risk” and that “once you are ousted from a superintendency, it's very difficult to, to regroup, especially for women...” They also realized that while they would prefer to be seen as only “superintendent,” many stakeholders still associated them as being a “woman superintendent.” Most participants acknowledged that no matter how much they knew or did, they were often times still viewed as a woman in the position. This perception is also reflected in Grogan’s (2000) work on the superintendency. Women superintendents generally felt they could combat this perception if they “worked smarter and harder” to achieve the same success as a man.

When asked the question, “What does it mean to be a successful woman superintendent?” almost all of the participants responded in the same genderless way, using the questions—Are your schools running smoothly? Are students achieving? “Is it Lake Wobegon?” (Superintendent Rome). Most participants suggested removing the word “woman” from the question entirely. Participants continuously presented a discontinuity or lack of reconciliation between acknowledging their gender and denying it. Thus, even though all of the participants did not agree about how women differed or if they differed in their approach to the superintendency, most were united in their approach to how they defined a “successful superintendent” to be. Superintendent Madrid exemplified this belief when she stated, “We all have a responsibility, and everything is based on what's in the best interest of kids. That's what our decisions are based on. That's part of what leadership is, is to know what the vision is and know what your mission is and so everything you do is based around that.”

Summary

Characteristics of the participant selection and the individual participants were provided in the prologue. All of the participants were current public school division superintendents from the Commonwealth of Virginia, Caucasian, over the age of 46, with a minimum of 25 years or more in service to public education, with one to ten years of experience in the superintendency. Six participants were employed in rural school divisions and two employed in urban school divisions. Salaries ranged from \$75,000 to

\$121,000, and the average daily membership of the divisions ranged from 300 to 25,000 students. An introduction to each participant was given concerning their years in education, the superintendency, and their initial thoughts regarding their profession. The majority of the participants realized that they had been leaders throughout their lives, and that they valued mentors who had recognized and encouraged their abilities. Many participants appreciated the value of being a mentor now that they were a superintendent. At least half of the participants recognized that there were some difficulties associated with being women superintendents in a profession commonly occupied by men, but most felt that women were quite capable of performing the duties well, even though their self-perception is that they may have to work harder and smarter than men. These background data were provided to allow the reader to better understand the findings and conclusions in Chapters 4 and 5.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

The findings in this chapter represent the self-perceived leadership practices of eight women school division superintendents within the Commonwealth of Virginia. The data were reflected through the use of the qualitative methodology which served to answer the research question:

How do women in the role of public school division superintendent describe their leadership practices?

The chapter is divided into three sections which discuss the leadership practices of the participants, the findings of the Leadership Practices Inventory-SELF, and the chapter summary.

Leadership Practices of the Participants

The leadership practices outlined in this section were established from analysis of the emergent themes in the data. Participants discussed with the researcher their successes, frustrations, and ultimately, the lessons they learned in the process of formulating their current leadership practices. Many participants did not realize the numerous responsibilities of their job until they were in their superintendency. Several felt that their previous positions and education had adequately prepared them, but many still felt unprepared or discouraged in ways that they had not anticipated. One recurring appeal of being a superintendent mentioned by all participants was that it was a position in which they were *in charge*. They felt influential in making positive changes and contributions to their school divisions' children. Many participants had even developed a self-mantra to seek continuous improvement in themselves and others. For example, Superintendent Rome continually asked herself and her staff "Can we do it better?" The majority of participants similarly remarked that this constant need for improvement and accountability of themselves and their school division, manifested in their ability to clearly establish the following eight self-perceived leadership practices: 1) communication, 2) visibility, 3) delegation, 4) collaboration, 5) poise, 6) personal sacrifice, 7) confidence, and 8) self-education.

Communication

All of the participants agreed communication was one of the most important aspects of their leadership practices. For purposes of this study, superintendent communication was defined as “the communication transactions between individuals and/or groups at various levels and in different areas of specialization that are intended to design and redesign organizations, to implement designs and to coordinate day-to-day activities” (Frank & Brownell, 1989, p. 5). Participants’ efforts to communicate were daily. They recognized the detriment of miscommunication (which also included not communicating) among their stakeholders. Superintendent Madrid noted, “there is very little that is a secret within the school system.” Participants commonly restricted their description of communication to include only their verbal or written interactions with stakeholders. However, communication could also be seen in the ways that the participants interacted with their staff, presented themselves in dress and manner and in how their office was decorated. Many superintendents came out of their office to personally greet the researcher. There was a general relaxed, but professional calmness in the offices and within observed interactions of the superintendents and their staff. Offices varied in size (most were contained in the school board office building, others were in shared buildings). All were decorated with personal touches which generally included art work, degrees from their universities, family photos, or books pertaining to leadership or education. Most kept an organized desk free from clutter, and were responsive to and explanatory of any interruptions that occurred during the interviews, although in most cases interruptions were limited. This next section will describe how the participants communicated in the community, among staff members and with the school board.

In the Community

All of the participants realized that their career went beyond the hours of a “9 to 5” job. Superintendent Oslo stated, “It is not only a typical Monday through Friday day, but it's talking with people in the grocery stores, it's going to church, and it's running into people at the basketball game, the football game.” As superintendent, participants were often asked to attend or speak at various local clubs and or organizations. All of the participants recognized the importance that these community activities contributed to their community’s perception of their leadership practices, and when possible willingly

participated in these events.

Several participants specifically mentioned the grocery store as a common location for communication opportunities within the community. The majority of the time the participants welcomed these informal occasions to speak with their community members, however, some participants like Superintendent Brussels did acknowledge that public approachability could be difficult at times. She expressed that in the position of superintendent one is sometimes viewed as if they are in a “goldfish bowl” and that whatever they say or do is “constantly taken apart, and put together.” Superintendent Paris also emphasized that the public face of the superintendent was on-going, and that not promoting it was “bad public relations,” and that this was all a necessary part of the job whether one liked it or not. Women superintendents subscribed to the leadership practice of realizing that they were in a “gold fish bowl”, but took every advantage to communicate and be visible with stakeholders in formal and informal settings.

Among Staff Members

Women superintendents often expressed that their ability to communicate with their staff was in a large part due to how they made themselves accessible. This could be done in person or in written communication. All relied on email and telephone calls as an important way to communicate. Many participants also mentioned that the use of personal notes (to thank, congratulate, or send condolences, or acknowledge Christmas) was also an essential practice.

The specific term “open door policy,” meaning that staff (or any stakeholder) had access to them should they wish to speak with her, was used by several participants. Superintendent Oslo further emphasized that people can have an “open door policy” but they must also have an “open door personality” in order to make it truly successful. Some participants also noted that the continuance but necessity of the accessibility could be difficult and frustrating.

The majority of participants (5 out of 8) were also cognitive of their tone and non-verbal interactions in their communicative leadership practices. At various points in their leadership, all of the participants discussed occasions when they had to correct or confront an employee regarding the employee’s conduct. Participants acknowledged that the situation and their knowledge of the employee’s demeanor or personality contributed

to how they talked or non-verbally reacted to that individual in that moment. No matter the situation, most participants' comments were similar to Superintendent Rome's when she stated that a superintendent cannot be afraid of the difficult conversations and the hard decisions, but that one must try to do so "in a way that people don't lose their humanity."

With the School Board

All participants were mindful that even with a supportive school board the relationship could be tenuous at times as is supported by Eaton and Sharp (1996). All of the women superintendents felt that their boards were encouraging and supportive. During the interviews, two sub-themes emerged. One, the need for the participants to establish and maintain a good rapport with their boards, and two, their need to educate their boards in terms of the superintendent's job and their own jobs as school board members. It is important to note for the reader that in the Commonwealth of Virginia, school divisions (known as districts in other states) are fiscally dependent upon their locally governing county or city governments and that these boards do not have the authority to levy taxes as in other states. Thus, superintendents are often placed in precarious positions as they try to maneuver their way through complicated, and often political relations among their school boards and their local governing bodies (City Councils or County Board of Supervisors). Superintendent Madrid acknowledged, as did others, that "no matter how unpolitical you are, it's a political job..."

Superintendent Oslo outlined her position to allow for several communicative possibilities in relating to her board when she said, "Sometimes it's my job to be the lightning rod, um, if we're really going to have to make [the Board of Supervisors or community] mad about something. Then it's my job to get them mad at me so that the board members can work with their individual supervisors. Sometimes it's my job to keep my board members from having too much of a knee jerk reaction, because I think they can probably work this out in the long run. Sometimes it's my job to get my board riled up so that they recognize when there is something coming that's going to be really [controversial], and that we can either help keep that from happening, or they can be prepared when that time happens. So it depends on the situation."

Every participant understood clearly the importance of keeping their school board

well informed of actions they were taking or wanted to take. Unlike most professions, the superintendent's boss is in most cases either appointed or elected. All of the participants had elected boards and most had experienced some school board member turnover during their current term as superintendent. In sum, all participants recognized that accurate and consistent communication was important in meeting the needs of their school board's and community's expectations and politics.

Visibility

All of the participants agreed that visibility was very important to maintaining a continuous and positive relationship with their stakeholders. Participants defined visibility as being physically seen and accessible to their stakeholders. In the majority of cases, they felt they were perceived as being successfully visible by their stakeholders if they were anywhere else other than in their office. Many participants felt that being visible meant creating a presence in the community by attending Rotary or other similar civic organizations or by attending local area churches. Other participants expressed a need to also attend their City Council or Board of Supervisors meetings so that they could establish a better relationship between the city or county government and their own school board.

A strong desire of all participants was to be visible daily within their many schools. However, most acknowledged that the lack of time within their already busy schedules made this especially difficult. Many of the participants found if they scheduled time for visiting their division's individual schools into their daily calendars it helped to alleviate this problem.

Delegation

Delegation proved to be a great difficulty to many of the participants. Through their lack of delegating or reluctance to do so, the women superintendents established a successful leadership practice of often not delegating. Issues with delegation respected the established administrative hierarchies within the public school divisions, but most participants were unwilling to delegate tasks outside of employees' roles. Some participants had grown more comfortable with delegation throughout their careers as their trust in others' abilities and their own developed. Others still felt a need to do certain tasks themselves (from the mundane such as making copies to ensuring and monitoring

staff's implementation of new procedures) rather than ask others on their staff to do them. For example, during the interviews there were several instances where the superintendents (4 out of 8) would request a copy of a study document and in most of those instances the researcher observed that the superintendents themselves made the copies. Some participants mentioned that even when they were able to delegate, the temptation to "revisit" the task was at times overwhelming to resist. The majority of the participants expressed that their inner conflict to delegate or not to do so also often stemmed from the pressures and responsibilities they felt to "get things done" and to "do them right."

Collaboration

The majority of the participants believed in the leadership practice of collaboration, working together for a common cause, and labeled themselves as "collaborative leaders." They welcomed input from several sources when making decisions, were open to new and opposing viewpoints to their own, and knew how to access "key" personnel resources so that they were better informed and knowledgeable about decisions made. However, most of the women superintendents did feel that patience sometimes eluded them in their dealings with staff, and in decision-making processes with others. Participants expressed frustration at the slowness of their staff to occasionally implement changes or to deal positively with those changes once they were in place. Some participants even labeled themselves as a "go-getter," and admitted that they purposefully had to "sit back" in meetings or situations and let the meetings evolve without stepping in and individually drawing closure themselves.

Poise

Several participants discussed their ability to remain poised and calm in any given situation as a great strength and leadership practice. Poise was commonly defined by the majority of the women superintendents as keeping one's feelings and emotions "in check," and not allowing others to rattle their professional appearance or perception. One participant mentioned a specific occasion at which she had "taken a beating" from her school board, but was proud of how she had handled her composure throughout the process. She remained direct and responsive, but unemotional. Another participant summarized many participants' thoughts when she stated that she was "very careful all of

the time” and that her ability to remain unruffled was built into her “whole psyche” and that no one would ever see her cry in her school division about anything. Superintendent Dublin said that she developed “the face,” a trait she had observed from a former supervisor. She said, “...sometimes you need ‘the face’ to go with the action, even though your heart might be telling you something different.” Ironically, as many of the superintendents discussed this particular point of precisely not showing emotion, they became quite emotional during the interview. Those that did were surprised by the spontaneity of their emotions and the researcher found them apologizing and claiming that this was “quite unexpected” and that this would never happen publically.

Personal Sacrifice

All of the participants acknowledged that the leadership practice of personal sacrifice which involved loss of time spent with family, friends and non-professional endeavors as expected and necessary demands of the job. Most also mentioned that their families or husbands (if applicable) were very supportive and understanding. Half of the participants commented on the physical and mental toll of the position and how that distracted them. Participants stated that they never truly left their work at the office, but were always fielding late night phone calls or sending emails and thinking about “the next thing” on their on-going agendas. Women superintendents often felt guilty about how much time the job demanded of them, but consoled themselves in the progress they felt their school division’s had made during their term as superintendent.

Confidence

Women superintendents similarly articulated that an established leadership practice was to be confident in one’s appearance and genuinely in oneself. Participants stated that the importance of “not taking things personally” as crucial in succeeding and persevering in difficult situations or circumstances. All participants appeared as savvy, well spoken, and gutsy women who were not afraid to take on risks or confront complicated issues in the interviews. The majority of women superintendents acknowledged that “just because you are doing the right thing, doesn’t mean that it is not going to get you in hot water.” Participants expressed strong beliefs in doing the right thing for children even if it could be to their professional detriment with the school board or other stakeholders.

Self-Education

Women superintendents realized that an important leadership practice was to be a quick learner, and to self-educate in all areas of professional deficit. Participants contributed to their self-education opportunities by exploring resources that they deemed useful. For example, for some participants this involved calling on mentors for advice, reading and researching important issues, or establishing timeframes of observation before implementation of action. One area of great concern to many women superintendents was school division finance. Several superintendents (5 out of 8) expressed that their administrative courses in finance did not adequately prepare them for the rigors in preparing public school division budgets. Few participants had had direct experience with preparing and presenting school division budgets in their former positions before becoming a superintendent. Many participants had to rely on their Director of Finance, mentors, and their own on-the-job self-education to master the complexities of the school budget.

Findings of the Leadership Practices Inventory-SELF

All participants completed the Leadership Practices Inventory-SELF survey after concluding the second interview. After determining each participant's individual score, the researcher used the LPI percentile rankings chart as outlined by Kouzes and Posner (2001) to determine each participant's individual percentile ranking (Table 4.1). Participants that scored from 70 to 100 were ranked high, 30 to 69 moderate, and 29 to 1 as low. These scores represent the percentile rankings of 18,000 previous respondents within the authors' database (Kouzes & Posner). The collective scores of the participants were discussed using the five leadership practices (*challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way, and encouraging the heart*) established by Kouzes and Posner (1995). The researcher examined how the LPI-SELF results compared and contrasted with the interview findings.

Challenging the Process

The *challenging the process* leadership practice encourages leaders to go beyond status quo thinking, work collaboratively with their followers and accept risk. The majority of the superintendents (7 out of 8) demonstrated a high percentile ranking in this domain with individual ratings ranging from 78 to 95. One participant was ranked in the

Table 4.1

LPI-SELF Leadership Practices and Individual Percentile Rankings

Superintendent	LPI-SELF Practices/Percentile Ranking Scores				
	ETH	CTP	ISV	EOTA	MTW
Paris	100 H	93 H	85 H	69 M	88 H
Brussels	45 M	98 H	48 M	32 M	45 M
Oslo	53 M	42 M	40 M	40 M	28 L
Madrid	72 H	78 H	96 H	68 M	96 H
Bern	80 H	79 H	95 H	79 H	60 M
Rome	93 H	95 H	95 H	88 H	94 H
London	34 M	84 H	30 M	39 M	34 M
Dublin	79 H	84 H	98 H	96 H	92 H

moderate percentile ranking with a score of 42. Overall, participants viewed themselves as collaborative leaders.

Inspiring a Shared Vision

This leadership practice, *inspiring a shared vision*, focuses on leaders establishing a vision of the future. Leaders set agendas, research future trends within organizations and use their intuitiveness and influence to help their organization attain their vision themselves in the moderate percentile ranking with scores ranging from 30 to 48. Most participants perceived themselves to be influential change agents within their school divisions. The majority of the women superintendents expressed that establishing a vision came relatively easily to them while the patience to see the vision to fruition sometimes proved difficult and frustrating.

Enabling Others to Act

Promoting collaboration and building relationships are the foundation of the *enabling others to act* leadership practice. Leaders are encouraged to communicate well, be good listeners, mentor, and delegate tasks to promote followers' success (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Few participants (3 out of 8) rated themselves in the high percentile ranking with scores ranging from 98 to 79. The majority of the participants were ranked at a moderate percentile ranking with scores ranging from 39 to 69. Data analysis of the qualitative interviews for this study reflected that participants do have a reluctance to delegate, but consider themselves to be strong in areas of communication, listening and being a mentor.

Modeling the Way

This leadership practice, *modeling the way*, focuses on the leader setting an example to her followers, and determining short-term goals or wins (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Half of the participants ranked in the high percentile ranking with scores ranging from 96 to 88. The remaining participants (3 out of 8) ranked at a moderate percentile ranking with scores ranging from 34 to 60, with one participant ranked in the low percentile ranking with a score of 28. Some participants stated that they "sat back" in meetings to display to others their openness in being receptive to new ideas. Most participants expressed that they modeled the way for their stakeholders and staff by responding promptly and accurately to perceived needs in communication and in their

general professional demeanor.

Encouraging the Heart

In this leadership practice, *encouraging the heart*, leaders are to celebrate the successes of the followers' commitment to the shared values and goals of the organization (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). The majority of the participants (5 out of 8) ranked in the high percentile ranking with scores ranging from 72 to 100. The remaining participants ranked at a moderate percentile ranking with scores ranging from 34 to 53. Participants acknowledged the importance of recognizing their follower's abilities in several ways. Most used personal handwritten notes, congratulated employees in person, made personal speeches or appearances at events, and some participants (3 out of 8) celebrated their followers by hosting retirement or Christmas parties at their private residence. Two participants invited only administrators, and one participant had an annual open house party for any employee who could attend within her public school division.

In sum, the LPI-SELF results in contrast and comparison with the interview data demonstrated that the participants feel they are highly collaborative, accept risk and go beyond status quo thinking. The majority stated they set clear visions of their goals, but expressed impatience with the implementation process. Participants perceive themselves to be good communicators and listeners, but recognized their reluctance and difficulty in being able to delegate tasks. Most participants expressed appreciation of their followers' successes and recognized them in various formal and informal ways.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the findings of the study. Through interviews and the LPI-SELF, the researcher was able to collect, analyze and discuss how the participants (eight women public school division superintendents within the Commonwealth of Virginia) self-perceived their leadership strategies. Participants acknowledged that communication and visibility were important leadership practices upon which they needed to continue to improve and emphasize. Participants appeared to have difficulty with delegating or simply chose not to delegate at all. Patience proved difficult for some as they tried to contain their "take charge" attitude. Women superintendents also discussed their attitudes regarding dealing with emotions in the professional setting, dealing with personal and

family sacrifice of time, not taking situations or people too personally and managing school finance issues. Results of the LPI-SELF determined that participants perceived themselves to be highly collaborative, accepting of risk, going beyond status quo thinking, good communicators and listeners. The majority of the participants set clear visions of their goals, but had difficulty with patience in the implementation process. Participants also recognized their difficulties in being able to delegate tasks. Most participants were appreciative of their followers' successes and recognized them in various formal and informal ways.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Introduction

The conclusions for the study were developed from the collective examination of the research question, the findings, and the review of literature. The purpose of this study was to describe the leadership practices of women superintendents of public school divisions in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The chapter is divided into four sections: summary of methodology and findings, discussion, and recommendation for future research.

Summary of Methodology and Findings

The researcher interviewed eight women superintendents currently employed by public school divisions within the Commonwealth of Virginia during the school year of 2007-2008. A qualitative research design was used to examine one research question: *How do women in the role of public school division superintendent describe their leadership practices?*

Phenomenological interviews, using guidelines proposed by Seidman (2006), examined past and present leadership experiences and asked participants to reflect on the meaning of these experiences. Each of the three separate interviews per participant was approximately an hour long, ultimately producing three hours or more of qualitative data per participant. All qualitative data which also incorporated data from the field notes, member checks, and reflexive journal were transcribed and coded personally by the researcher. Participants also completed the Leadership Practices Inventory-SELF, and data collected from both the interviews and the survey data were analyzed by the researcher. The collected data, as prescribed by the research question and emergent themes, served to articulate how the participants' described their current leadership practices.

The findings of the study resulted in eight self-described leadership practices by the women superintendents:

1. Consistent and accurate communication
2. Visibility
3. Limited delegation

4. Collaboration
5. Remaining poised
6. Accepting personal sacrifice
7. Confidence
8. Self-education

These findings, previously discussed in Chapter 4, contribute to the existing knowledge research base in three ways. First, Grogan (2000) stated that research on women superintendents was in its early stages. To date, present literature on the subject of women superintendents and their leadership practices is increasing, but limited. The collected data and conclusions from this study assist in adding to and supporting the current literature. Second, the thick, rich descriptions provided by the participants through their interview data provide the reader with leadership practices that women superintendents employ and deem successful. Examination of data in this way was supported by Eisner (1998) who asserts that the greater importance is in being able to understand what one experiences rather than focusing merely on what they do. The leadership practices examined in this study are described by women superintendents as they experienced and perceived them, but are not exclusive to women. Both men and women who are presently superintendents or aspiring superintendents could use these findings to reflect upon their own leadership practices and consider whether to incorporate the participants' practices for their own use. Lastly, programs for administrative preparation which have been limited to more traditional male leadership paradigms could benefit from the findings and conclusions of this research by increasing their acceptance of leadership practices by women superintendents.

Conclusions

In consideration of the research question, the findings and review of the existing literature, the researcher determined two conclusions:

1. Women superintendents were able to describe their leadership practices as relationship building practices.
2. Women superintendents were able to describe their leadership practices as incorporating issues of gender and silencing.

Relationship Building

Leadership practices described as relationship building go beyond the technical or bureaucratic duties of a superintendent. “Educational leaders who acknowledge that human interactions are basic to our lives, to the creation of meaning, and to the development of understanding are more likely to take full account of the *why, who, what, where, and when* of schooling” (Shields, 2006, p.76). Leadership practices described by the participants as being relationship building practices were communication, visibility, collaboration, delegation, and self-education.

Participants unanimously agreed that communication (verbal and non-verbal) was their greatest influence among stakeholders, and that failure to do so wisely was their greatest hindrance and undoing. Through trial and error and from valuable lessons learned from observance of mentors and *bad* leadership, participants were able to develop their communicative styles. Participants found it difficult “to not take things personally” and wondered if they had handled certain situations appropriately to achieve the resulting outcome. The majority of the participants asked upon completion of their interviews if they “did ok” and were concerned about their answers in comparison to others. This need to verify if their data were acceptable contradicted their predominantly outward appearance of confidence and how they comported themselves during the actual interviews. Kowlaski (2005) suggests that administrative programs in higher education adopt a process to aid the superintendent in being a competent communicator by increasing his or her knowledge (in relation to communication and school curricula), application skills (“hands on” role play, or applying communication theory to real life experiences) and dispositions (students “challenge traditional communication processes prevalent in districts and schools”) (p. 11). An approach incorporating Kowalski’s recommendations could assist women superintendents (or those aspiring to it) to be more confident and work to alleviate the feeling of communicative matters being more professional and less internally personal.

Participants in this study did not “act like a man” as some participants in Brunner’s (1998) study had, or perceived that they had to do so in order to be a successful communicator. Most did struggle with opportunities to communicate with stakeholders in terms of their visibility which the majority of women superintendents defined as being

physically seen and accessible to their stakeholders. Being visible proved to be a difficult task for most participants due to the numerous and continuous demands on their time. Several participants found scheduling specific dates and times for school building visits to be helpful and important to their success. By being visible in the schools and community, participants were able to demonstrate leading by example as is mentioned in transformational leadership theory's domain of *idealized influence* and the Leadership Practices Inventory-SELF's domain of *inspiring a shared vision* and *modeling the way*. Boone (1997), who examined leadership differences among men and women superintendents using the LPI-SELF, found statistically significant differences between men and women in the leadership practices of *challenging the process* and *modeling the way* with women perceiving themselves to engage in these practices more consistently than their male counterparts. Participants of this study affirmed Boone's (1997) findings in *modeling the way*. How women superintendents demonstrated their communicative abilities and the availability to be seen utilizing them consistently was at the crux of their self-perceived success among their stakeholders.

This ability to successfully model communication and visibility assists in supporting Davis' (1998) assessment of an effective administrator, which she defines as a superintendent that knows how to read her audience to determine when to be more collaborative or directive. Participants described themselves as being collaborative instructional leaders who remained follower focused and child-centered in their planning and decisions. These characteristics have been noted by other researchers as being common to women superintendents (Bass, 1998; Brunner, 1999; Grogan, 1996). Participants were not afraid or intimidated to seek help or advice in difficult situations from trusted mentors or other colleagues, and to set smaller goals in order to attain larger goals. Conversely, women superintendents did experience frustration in their collaborative efforts when they deemed that progress was slow or resisted by others. For many participants the patience required of them in working with others was viewed as an on-going effort in self-improvement and acceptance. The researcher could not determine if the cause of this frustration was due to the participants' resistance to delegate, but can suggest that there may be a relationship between their patience and trust in others and their ability to delegate.

Participants many times put themselves in a knowing quandary in that they expressed they were incapable of “doing it all” and that delegation was necessary to task completion, and their own peace of mind. However, many participants contradicted themselves by expressing that either they did not delegate, or would delegate but then later felt compelled to “revisit” what had been previously been assigned. Most of the participants acknowledged their reluctance to delegate by rating themselves as moderate and not high in the corresponding LPI-SELF leadership practice of *enabling others to act*. This refusal to delegate often caused the participants self-admittedly to do more work than was necessary. The lack of delegating may demonstrate a trust issue on the part of the participant and those with whom they worked. Davis (1998) advises that some of the typical reasons school leaders can fail are due to their disinclination “to let go of the details, to delegate, or to move beyond favorite areas of interest” (p. 50). The perplexing conclusion here is that the majority of women superintendents fully recognized the benefits of delegating, but was either unwilling, or uncomfortable to do so. Lack of delegation did not prevent the participants as viewing themselves as successful superintendents.

Self-educating and being “a quick learner” to account for professional deficiencies assisted participants in viewing themselves as successful superintendents. In formal and informal conversation, participants were cognizant of tone and discourse when establishing their communicative style in speaking with their changing school boards and other stakeholders as individuals or collectively. Women superintendents reorganized schedules for optimal visibility, and chose not to delegate so that many subordinate responsibilities rested with them. Participants expressed a need for more education in working with budgets, but were able to adapt by relying on others advice or expertise. School budgeting was an area where most found themselves lacking the crucial skills necessary to the position.

Gender and Silencing

This section furthers the discussion of participants’ self-education to temper their patience and remain poised in collaborative and difficult or often political situations, and how they readily accepted and became accustomed to personal sacrifice while still remaining confident in their abilities. Skrla, Reyes, and Scheurich (2000) describe gender

and silencing as occurring through personal silence (where women denied their gender or issues relating to it), silent preparation programs (higher education administrative preparation programs where women's leadership was not discussed) and silence of the profession (where issues of gender pertaining to women were silent among professional organizations or state legislatures in terms of sexism and discrimination). Gender and silencing in this study occurred as the majority of women superintendents presented contradictory information in their discourse by simultaneously accepting and rejecting their gender (personal silence) in regards to the position of superintendent. Many participants appeared to avoid the topic of gender, preferring to view it as a non-issue. The reference to *woman superintendent* used in the interviews was seen as awkward and somewhat derogatory, with participants preferring to be called simply superintendent in order to avoid any self-perceived negative connotations as participants in similar studies have done (Brunner 1999; Grogan, 1996, 2000; Tallerico, 2000a). As is later discussed, women superintendents also acknowledged the silent preparation programs to which Skrla et. al. (2000) referred. Leadership practices self-described by the participants concerning issues of gender and silencing were remaining poised, accepting personal sacrifice of time and family, and confidence.

The appearance of remaining poised was of great importance to all participants in dealing with their stakeholders. As previously mentioned, many participants advised against "taking things personally," in essence being too emotional, or allowing emotions to overwhelm them especially in public settings (specifically crying or being visibly upset). As public school division superintendents, the participants had to make daily, numerous decisions from mundane matters to the most significant. Some of the decisions were made in a solitary fashion whereas others were determined via committee. The majority of the participants felt capable and confident in their decisions once they were made, but often took to heart any negative resulting effects of their decisions once behind their own personal doors. Learning to develop *the face* as referred to in Chapter 4, was seen by many to be an on-going personal and necessary inner struggle, requiring learned patience. The effort to remain professional without being emotional could be seen as a generic professionalism to which any superintendent might adhere, but one to which women superintendents were acutely aware of due to their own gender cultural norms.

The fact that the participants acknowledged and were aware of the difficulty in hiding (or silencing) their emotions in these confrontational or complicated situations is attributed to a gender difference in leadership practices that may not be present among men, but instead particular to women. The ability to keep emotions *in check* also assisted the participants in retaining their power or *in charge* demeanor. Power, using Brunner's (1999) definition, is defined in this study as more of a *power to* than *power over* approach.

Time and responsibilities devoted to the superintendency often took precedence over the family or personal life of the women superintendents. Participants felt justified in their sacrifice and often alleviated their guilt by concentrating on the successes of their school division. Support from a spouse, if applicable, was described as being of great importance to managing the professional and home life success of the participants, a finding further supported in a nationwide study conducted by Grogan and Brunner (2005).

All of the participants described themselves using similar confident phrases such as *go-getter*, *risk taker*, and *gutsy*. Most suggested that they continually think beyond the status quo in their daily and long term visions. These aforementioned characteristics are directly associated with leadership practices found within the domains of transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985) and the LPI-SELF (Kouzes & Posner, 2007) leadership practices. Brunner (1998), in her qualitative research on women superintendents' success strategies, collectively termed these characteristics as a *can do* attitude or belief. In dealing with political uncertainty and differences in social discourse, participants persevered by exuding confidence in themselves and their decisions. Grogan (2000) acknowledged these characteristics as contributing to a needed change, or reconception, of the superintendency in order to promote more non-traditional aspirants, which she classified as women, to the superintendency.

In sum, the findings and conclusions of women superintendents' self-described leadership practices reveal relationship building practices and practices concerning gender and silencing issues. Both sets of leadership practices (with perhaps the exception of non-delegation) support the definition of an *ethic of care* (interacting with individuals as individuals with whom we have relationships, not as representatives of social groups)

that many other researchers have determined useful if a school superintendent is to be a successful leader (Bass, 1999; Brunner, 2000; Gilligan, 1982; Grogan, 2000, Shakeshaft, 1989; Skrla, 2000, Tallericco, 2000). The leadership practices outlined in this study are not exclusive to women, nor do they suggest that women lead superiorly to men. What can be argued is that by applying consistent communication, visibility and collaborative leadership practices along with acknowledging the unique practices women display in poise, personal sacrifice and confidence, this study further promotes the reconception, or change, within the role of superintendent as suggested by Grogan (2000).

Women superintendents' leadership practices have progressed beyond the scientific management theory and Callahan's (1962) criticism of this theory, towards those practices reflected in transformational leadership theory. The development of other theories, such as post-modern feminist theory which incorporates discourse in relation to gender and how we think or do not think about such issues (Flax, 1990); or synergistic leadership theory, developed by Irby, Brown, Duffy and Trautman (2001), which includes a range of male and female leadership behaviors, in relation to this study's findings also promote a greater need and understanding for the complementary characteristics women superintendents contribute to the current and accepted traditional leadership paradigms.

The researcher concludes that further development in the curricula of administration preparation programs, which could incorporate the leadership practices of transformational leadership theory and the Leadership Practices Inventory-SELF is needed to accommodate the current leadership practices of women. This development should not be offered as a replacement to the already existing curricula, but rather offered as a complement to it.

Recommendation for Future Research

The self-perceived leadership practices voiced by the women superintendents offered important contributions about their professional lives and lived experiences. The leadership practices articulated by these women and conclusions from the findings could assist in helping current or aspiring superintendents in understanding the complexities and demands of today's women superintendents. A study which conducts case studies of women superintendents focusing on how these relationship building and gender and

silencing leadership practices are implemented is recommended. Future studies could go beyond the self-descriptions of the participant to include observations of the women superintendents by their employees or other stakeholders in formal and informal settings. Data from these direct observations may offer further, detailed insights as to how the described leadership practices of this study are practiced, implemented and perceived by others.

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APPENDIX A

Interview One—Life History Interview

I. Introduction Statement: During the next 60 to 90 minutes, I would like to discuss with you events that have occurred during your past that may have influenced your life experiences and brought you to the point of eventually becoming a women superintendent. During this time, you will have an opportunity to answer these questions in as much detail as you would like, however, if there are any questions that you would prefer not to answer, please let me know. I look forward to our discussion and learning about your past experiences.

II. Interview Questions:

1. Tell me as much as you can remember about times when you have had experience with leading and or leadership. How did you accomplish leading in these experiences?

Prompt Questions:

- a) Tell me as much as you can about experiences concerning leading in grade school (and college)
 - b) Tell me as much as you can about experiences concerning leading in outside school activities (ie. sports teams, clubs, community, local government)
2. Can you describe the ways in which someone in your life has encouraged you to become a leader? What leadership skills did they suggest you have to offer?
 3. Can you tell me about a particular situation you have experienced that encouraged you to become a leader?
 4. When you think of a professional mentor in your past, what leadership practices did they subscribe to that you admired and used for yourself as well?
 5. Why did you decide to become a public school superintendent?

III. Concluding Statement: Thank you for your time and valuable information. I look forward to our next meeting which we have scheduled for _____, at that interview we will be discussing your current experiences in regards leadership practices. Additionally, I will provide you with a written transcript of this interview as soon as it is transcribed so that you will be able to provide any feedback, deletions or necessary changes that you feel are necessary.

APPENDIX B

Interview Two—Current Experiences Interview

I. Introduction Statement: During the next 60 to 90 minutes, I would like to discuss with you events which concern your current, day to day experiences, and more specifically, how they relate to your leadership practices as a superintendent. During this time, you will have an opportunity to answer these questions in as much detail as you would like, however, if there are any questions that you would prefer not to answer, please let me know. I look forward to our discussion and learning about your current experiences.

II. Interview Questions:

1. Tell me as much as you can about what your life is like in a typical day as a public school leader. (Prompt: Tell me as much as you can about your relationships (how you communicate, relate and how you believe they might perceive you) with stakeholders.)
2. Could you describe a time in which you took a risk as a leader?
3. Aside from describing policy procedures, could you describe a situation in which you had to implementing change? How did you communicate this change (or changes) to your faculty?
4. How do you personally reward or celebrate faculty successes? How do you personally deal with faculty's difficulties or failures?
5. What is your greatest leadership strength? Weakness?

III. Concluding Statement: Thank you for your time and valuable information. I look forward to our next meeting which we have scheduled for _____, at that interview we will be discussing your overall meaning and feelings about your personal leadership practices in regards to being a superintendent. I would now like to ask you to complete the LPI-SELF which should take about 8 to 10 minutes. Additionally, I will provide you with a written transcript of this interview as soon as it is transcribed so that you will be able to provide any feedback, deletions or necessary changes that you feel are necessary.

APPENDIX C

Interview Three—Reflection on the Meaning Interview

I. Introduction Statement: During the next 60 to 90 minutes, I would like to discuss with you events which concern the meaning of the experiences you have previously expressed in interviews one and two and how they relate to your leadership practices as a superintendent. During this time, you will have an opportunity to answer these questions in as much detail as you would like, however, if there are any questions that you would prefer not to answer, please let me know. I look forward to our discussion and learning more about how you make sense of the leadership practices you believe are important to being a public school superintendent.

II. Interview Questions:

1. Reflecting back on your past and considering your present experiences, what have you come to understand about your own leadership practices?
2. Applying the adage, “If you knew then, what you know now” what advice would you give your younger self in terms of leadership practices?
3. How has your leadership changed over the course of your career?
4. What has become most important to you in how you lead?
5. What does it mean to be a successful women superintendent?
6. What realizations have you learned about yourself during your participation in this study?
7. How do you believe your leadership practices will influence your future as a leader?

III. Concluding Statement: Thank you for your time and valuable information. I have enjoyed our interview sessions and am very appreciative of your contribution to this study. I look forward to sharing the final results with you after the study is fully completed. Additionally, I will provide you with a written transcript of this interview as soon as it is transcribed so that you will be able to provide any feedback, deletions or necessary changes that you feel are necessary.

APPENDIX D

Pattern Variables, Rules for Inclusion, and Category Codes

Theme Patterns	Rule for Inclusion	Category Code
<p>Career Paths</p> <p>Ascent to</p> <p>Superintendency</p> <p>Grade School Experience</p>	<p>Leadership opportunities in youth set the tone for formulating leadership experiences and practices</p>	<p>CPAS-GSE</p>
<p>Career Paths</p> <p>Ascent to</p> <p>Superintendency</p> <p>College Years</p>	<p>Leaders decided upon educational path during the college years</p>	<p>CPAS-CY</p>
<p>Career Paths</p> <p>Ascent to</p> <p>Superintendency</p> <p>Serendipitous</p>	<p>Leaders recognized and promoted serendipitously</p>	<p>CPAS-S</p>
<p>Career Paths</p> <p>Ascent to</p> <p>Superintendency</p> <p>Career Ladder</p>	<p>Participants describe various positions from teacher to superintendency</p>	<p>CPAS-CL</p>
<p>Career Paths</p> <p>Ascent to</p> <p>Superintendency</p> <p>Doctoral Program</p>	<p>Doctoral program encouraged further educational growth and desire for superintendency</p>	<p>CPAS-DP</p>

APPENDIX D (continued)

Pattern Variables, Rules for Inclusion, and Category Codes

Theme Patterns	Rule for Inclusion	Category Code
<p>Career Paths</p> <p>Ascent to Superintendency</p> <p>Mentors</p>	<p>Mentors encouraged further educational growth and desire for superintendency</p>	<p>CPAS-M</p>
<p>Career Paths</p> <p>Ascent to Superintendency</p> <p>Bigger Impact</p>	<p>Leaders wanted to fulfill a larger vision and have a bigger impact, greater influence by helping all children within a school district</p>	<p>CPAS-BI</p>
<p>Career Paths</p> <p>Retirement & Superintendency</p> <p>Unfulfilled aspirations</p>	<p>Superintendents expressed a desire to continue working after retirement due to future goals/aspirations they still had</p>	<p>CPRS-US</p>
<p>Career Paths</p> <p>Retirement & Superintendency</p> <p>Fun</p>	<p>Participants describe their position as fun and that they are having a good time doing it</p>	<p>CPRS-F</p>
<p>Career Paths</p> <p>Retirement & Superintendency</p> <p>Challenging</p>	<p>Participants describe their position as challenging</p>	<p>CPRS-C</p>

APPENDIX D (continued)

Pattern Variables, Rules for Inclusion, and Category Codes

Theme Patterns	Rule for Inclusion	Category Code
<p>Mentors To the Participants Parents</p>	<p>Parents supported and encouraged further educational growth and desire for superintendency</p>	<p>MTP-P</p>
<p>Mentors To the Participants Colleagues</p>	<p>Professional colleagues supported and encouraged further educational growth and desire for superintendency</p>	<p>MTP-PC</p>
<p>Mentors To the Participants Traits of Colleagues</p>	<p>Superintendents admired leadership traits that they saw in their mentors/bad leadership examples</p>	<p>MTP-TC</p>
<p>Mentors Being A Mentor To Others Fear</p>	<p>Superintendents recognized that fear can hinder or impede mentor development or relationships</p>	<p>MBM-F</p>
<p>Mentors Being A Mentor to Others Empowering Others</p>	<p>Superintendents wanted to inspire others and empower them so colleagues could be their best</p>	<p>MBM-EO</p>
<p>Mentors Being A Mentor to Others Time</p>	<p>Mentoring takes time—to help others succeed, scheduling time, availability to mentees, and timing in life</p>	<p>MBM-T</p>

APPENDIX D (continued)

Pattern Variables, Rules for Inclusion, and Category Codes

Theme Patterns	Rule for Inclusion	Category Code
<p>Communication In the Community Community Activities</p>	<p>Participants are asked to attend community events/organizations</p>	<p>CIC-CA</p>
<p>Communication Amongst Staff Members Personal Notes</p>	<p>Participants use personal notes to thank, congratulate and send condolences</p>	<p>CASM-PN</p>
<p>Communication Amongst Staff Members Open Door Policy</p>	<p>Participants use an open door policy to promote communication</p>	<p>CASM-ODP</p>
<p>Communication Amongst Staff Members Difficult Conversations</p>	<p>Superintendents do not let employees lose their dignity in reprimanding them during difficult conversations</p>	<p>CASM-DC</p>
<p>Communication With the School Board Supportive Relationship</p>	<p>Superintendents discussed that their boards were supportive and encouraging</p>	<p>CWSB-SR</p>

APPENDIX D (continued)

Pattern Variables, Rules for Inclusion, and Category Codes

Theme Patterns	Rule for Inclusion	Category Code
<p>Communication With the School Board Maintain Relationship</p>	<p>Superintendents work is on-going to maintain positive board relations</p>	<p>CWSB-MR</p>
<p>Communication With the School Board Educating Board</p>	<p>Superintendents help educate board members of their specific duties and those of the superintendent</p>	<p>CWSB-EB</p>
<p>Visibility Community Organizations Rotary/Churches</p>	<p>Superintendents attended community events/organizations, and churches to make themselves more visible within the community</p>	<p>VCO-RC</p>
<p>Visibility Community Organizations Board of Supervisors</p>	<p>Superintendents expressed interest in attending or continuing to attend the Board of Supervisors meetings</p>	<p>VCO-BS</p>
<p>Visibility Within Schools District Schools</p>	<p>Superintendents want and need to make time to visit their individual schools on a routine weekly basis</p>	<p>VWS-DS</p>

APPENDIX D (continued)

Pattern Variables, Rules for Inclusion, and Category Codes

Theme Patterns	Rule for Inclusion	Category Code
<p>Women’s Struggles with Superintendency</p> <p>Acceptance by Stakeholders</p> <p>Leadership Perception</p>	<p>Superintendents acknowledge the difference between reality of their leadership and perception</p>	<p>WSABS-LP</p>
<p>Women’s Struggles with Superintendency</p> <p>Acceptance by Stakeholders</p> <p>Woman Superintendent</p>	<p>Participants made reference to preferring being called a superintendent and not a woman superintendent</p>	<p>WSABS-WS</p>
<p>Women’s Struggles with Superintendency</p> <p>Acceptance by Stakeholders</p> <p>Men Are Inclusive</p>	<p>Some superintendents thought that men had become more inclusive, accepting and appreciative of the women’s position</p>	<p>WSABS-MAI</p>
<p>Women’s Struggles with Superintendency</p> <p>Career Experiences & Job Performance</p> <p>Construction</p>	<p>Dealing with construction issues/concerns as a woman as compared to a man</p>	<p>WSCEJP-C</p>
<p>Women’s Struggles with Superintendency</p> <p>Career Experiences & Job Performance</p> <p>Men and Women</p>	<p>Neither men or women were considered better, just bring a different perspective to the position</p>	<p>WSCEJP-MW</p>

APPENDIX D (continued)

Pattern Variables, Rules for Inclusion, and Category Codes

Theme Patterns	Rule for Inclusion	Category Code
<p>Women’s Struggles with Superintendency</p> <p>Career Experiences & Job Performance</p> <p>Don’t Mess Up</p>	<p>Women superintendents felt pressure not to “mess up” for their own reputations and those of other women</p>	<p>WSCEJP-DMU</p>
<p>Women’s Struggles with Superintendency</p> <p>Career Experiences & Job Performance</p> <p>Career Growth</p>	<p>Career growth slower and harder to “break in to”</p>	<p>WSCEJP-CG</p>
<p>Confidence</p> <p>Self-Mantras</p>	<p>Leaders developed self-mantras to keep themselves on track as well as others</p>	<p>C-SM</p>
<p>Delegating</p> <p>With Tasks</p>	<p>Leaders expressed difficulty delegating, either could not, or would “revisit” assigned tasks</p>	<p>D-WT</p>
<p>Poise</p> <p>With Self</p>	<p>Leaders were not patient with themselves in accepting the slowness of change within their district</p>	<p>P-WS</p>

APPENDIX D (continued)

Pattern Variables, Rules for Inclusion, and Category Codes

Theme Patterns	Rule for Inclusion	Category Code
Collaboration With Others	Leaders were not always patient with others in regards to task completion, idea acceptance or decision-making processes	C-WO
Personal Sacrifice Personal Time	Superintendents acknowledge that the position requires time away from personal interests and family	PS-PT
Communication & Poise Taking Things Personally	Superintendents mentioned not to take people, situations, position too personally	CP-TTP
Self-Education Finance	Previous finance courses in educational programs were insufficient for position needs	SE-F

APPENDIX E

Chart of Thematic Analysis

Leadership Development	Relationship Building	Gender & Silencing
Career Paths (C) Mentors (M) Women’s Struggles within Superintendency (Ws)	Communication (CM) Visibility (V) Delegation (D) Collaboration (COL) Self-Education (SE)	Poise (PO) Personal Sacrifice (PS) Confidence (CON)

APPENDIX F

LPI SELF

Leadership Practices Inventory

by JAMES M. KOUZES
& BARRY Z. POSNER

INSTRUCTIONS

Write your name in the space provided at the top of the next page. Below your name, you will find thirty statements describing various leadership behaviors. Please read each statement carefully, and using the RATING SCALE on the right, ask yourself:

The RATING SCALE runs from 1 to 10. Choose the number that best applies to each statement.

“How frequently do I engage in the behavior described?”

- Be realistic about the extent to which you *actually* engage in the behavior.
- Be as honest and accurate as you can be.
- DO NOT answer in terms of how you would like to behave or in terms of how you think you should behave
- DO answer in terms of how you typically behave on most days, on most projects, and with most people.
- Be thoughtful about your responses. For example, giving yourself 10s on all items is most likely not an accurate description of your behavior. Similarly, giving yourself all 1s or all 5s is most likely not an accurate description either. Most people will do some things more or less often than they do other things.
- If you feel that a statement does not apply to you, it's probably because you don't frequently engage in the behavior. In that case, assign a rating of 3 or lower.

1	=	Almost Never
2	=	Rarely
3	=	Seldom
4	=	Once in a While
5	=	Occasionally
6	=	Sometimes
7	=	Fairly Often
8	=	Usually
9	=	Very Frequently
10	=	Almost Always

When you have completed the LPI-Self, please return it to:

Thank you.

For each statement, decide on a response and then record the corresponding number in the box to the right of the statement. After you have responded to all thirty statements, go back through the LPI one more time to make sure you have responded to each statement. *Every statement must have a rating.*

Used with permission

Your Name: _____

To what extent do you typically engage in the following behaviors? Choose the response number that best applies to each statement and record it in the box to the right of that statement.

- | | | |
|-----|--|----------------------|
| 1. | I set a personal example of what I expect of others. | <input type="text"/> |
| 2. | I talk about future trends that will influence how our work gets done. | <input type="text"/> |
| 3. | I seek out challenging opportunities that test my own skills and abilities. | <input type="text"/> |
| 4. | I develop cooperative relationships among the people I work with. | <input type="text"/> |
| 5. | I praise people for a job well done. | <input type="text"/> |
| 6. | I spend time and energy making certain that the people I work with adhere to the principles and standards we have agreed on. | <input type="text"/> |
| 7. | I describe a compelling image of what our future could be like. | <input type="text"/> |
| 8. | I challenge people to try out new and innovative ways to do their work. | <input type="text"/> |
| 9. | I actively listen to diverse points of view. | <input type="text"/> |
| 10. | I make it a point to let people know about my confidence in their abilities. | <input type="text"/> |
| 11. | I follow through on the promises and commitments that I make. | <input type="text"/> |
| 12. | I appeal to others to share an exciting dream of the future. | <input type="text"/> |
| 13. | I search outside the formal boundaries of my organization for innovative ways to improve what we do. | <input type="text"/> |
| 14. | I treat others with dignity and respect. | <input type="text"/> |
| 15. | I make sure that people are creatively rewarded for their contributions to the success of our projects. | <input type="text"/> |
| 16. | I ask for feedback on how my actions affect other people's performance. | <input type="text"/> |
| 17. | I show others how their long-term interests can be realized by enlisting in a common vision. | <input type="text"/> |
| 18. | I ask "What can we learn?" when things don't go as expected. | <input type="text"/> |
| 19. | I support the decisions that people make on their own. | <input type="text"/> |
| 20. | I publicly recognize people who exemplify commitment to shared values. | <input type="text"/> |
| 21. | I build consensus around a common set of values for running our organization. | <input type="text"/> |
| 22. | I paint the "big picture" of what we aspire to accomplish. | <input type="text"/> |
| 23. | I make certain that we set achievable goals, make concrete plans, and establish measurable milestones for the projects and programs that we work on. | <input type="text"/> |
| 24. | I give people a great deal of freedom and choice in deciding how to do their work. | <input type="text"/> |
| 25. | I find ways to celebrate accomplishments. | <input type="text"/> |
| 26. | I am clear about my philosophy of leadership. | <input type="text"/> |
| 27. | I speak with genuine conviction about the higher meaning and purpose of our work. | <input type="text"/> |
| 28. | I experiment and take risks, even when there is a chance of failure. | <input type="text"/> |
| 29. | I ensure that people grow in their jobs by learning new skills and developing themselves. | <input type="text"/> |
| 30. | I give the members of the team lots of appreciation and support for their contributions. | <input type="text"/> |

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APPENDIX G

KOUZES POSNER INTERNATIONAL

15419 Banyan Lane
Monte Sereno, California 95030
FAX: (408) 354-9170

October 9, 2006

Ms. Sarah du Plessis
23 Crestview Drive
Radford, Virginia 24141

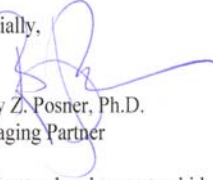
Dear Sarah:

Thank you for your request to use the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) in your dissertation. We are willing to allow you to reproduce the instrument as outlined in your request, at no charge, with the following understandings:

- (1) That the LPI is used only for research purposes and is not sold or used in conjunction with any compensated management development activities;
- (2) That copyright of the LPI, or any derivation of the instrument, is retained by Kouzes Posner International, and that the following copyright statement is included on all copies of the instrument: "Copyright © 2003 James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner. All rights reserved. Used with permission.";
- (3) That one (1) **electronic** copy of your dissertation and one (1) copy of **all** papers, reports, articles, and the like which make use of the LPI data be sent **promptly** to our attention; and,
- (4) That you agree to allow us to include an abstract of your study and any other published papers utilizing the LPI on our various websites.

If the terms outlined above are acceptable, would you indicate so by signing one (1) copy of this letter and returning it to us. Best wishes for every success with your research project.

Cordially,


Barry Z. Posner, Ph.D.
Managing Partner

I understand and agree to abide by these conditions:

(Signed)  Date: 10/20/06

APPENDIX H

Print

Page 1 of 1

From: Barry Posner
To: Sarah du Plessis
Date: Tuesday, October 17, 2006 5:16:54 PM
Subject: Re: Salutations and Thanks

Sarah,

We simply want to receive a copy of any publications which use the LPI. We don't intend or want to preview or review them prior to publication.

We are unable to provide permission for you to use the LPI in any electronic form. If you want to use the LPI (self and observer) ONLINE, you can do so as a scholar for a cost of \$10 per leader (unlimited observers).

Barry

>>> Sarah du Plessis <lapin_99@yahoo.com> 10/17/06 5:37 AM >>>
Dear Dr. Posner,

I received your letter of acceptance to use the LPI as my instrument for my research study and am quite grateful. In order to meet all of the requirements requested on the letter you sent, I would like to ask for some clarification. The letter states that all articles or reports also using the LPI and used in my study are to be forwarded to you. Do you mean that I will need to send copies of all such material to you or simply reference them? Also, I am aware that the LPI-SELF (only) is not available to administer on-line (whereas the LPI-SELF and LPI-OBSERVER is). I was curious if I could use Survey Monkey, an online site, to administer the survey as long as I provide the copyright information in the introductory section.

I appreciate your guidance and expertise in these matters and look forward to hearing from you,

Sarah du Plessis
Doctoral Candidate
Virginia Tech University
Blacksburg, VA 24060

<http://us.f382.mail.yahoo.com/dc/launch?.rand=ejlpnp025b8bl>

10/21/2006

APPENDIX I

Letter of Introduction to the Study

<Date>

<Superintendent>

<School Division>

<Address of Business>

<City, State, Zip>

Dear <Superintendent>:

I am currently a doctoral candidate at Virginia Tech working to complete my doctoral dissertation in Educational Leadership under the guidance of Dr. Lisa G. Driscoll and Dr. Glen I. Earthman. I would like you to consider participating in my dissertation research which is entitled, *Women Superintendents: An Examination of Leadership Practices*.

The purpose of this study is to describe the leadership practices of women superintendents of public schools. This study will seek to describe and understand women superintendents' leadership experiences as they are perceived by the women themselves. Data will be gathered through three interviews (60-90 minutes each), and completion of the *Leadership Practices Inventory-SELF*. All data will be kept strictly confidential and destroyed within one year of completion of the study.

All current women superintendents within Virginia will be invited to volunteer to be participants. Please find enclosed a questionnaire by which you can indicate your interest in participating in this research study. A second questionnaire, the Demographic Data Questionnaire, should also be filled out and returned, if you are interested in participating. As soon as I receive these materials, I will contact you at your earliest convenience to discuss the next steps with you.

I hope that you will decide to participate in this important study. Your input will be a valuable contribution to the research on women superintendents' leadership practices. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at sduplessis@vt.edu or 540.320.8533.

Sincerely,

Sarah B. du Plessis, Ph.D. Candidate

Lisa G. Driscoll, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor

Glen I. Earthman, Ed.D
Professor Emeritus

APPENDIX J

Interest Questionnaire

Dissertation Title: *Women Superintendents: An Examination of Leadership Practices*

Name: _____

Date: _____

School Division: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email: _____

After reading the letter of invitation concerning the proposed study of women superintendents and their professional leadership practices—

_____ I am interested in participating, please contact me.

_____ I am interested, but would appreciate more information before making a final decision.

_____ I am not interested in participating in the study.

All data will be kept strictly confidential and destroyed within one year of completion of the study.

Please return this Interest Questionnaire along with the Demographic Data Questionnaire in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided within the next 10 days.

Thank you.

Should you need to contact me, you may reach me at (cell) 540-320-8533 at sduplessis@vt.edu

APPENDIX K

Qualitative Consent Form

Informed Consent of Participants in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

Title of Research Project: *Women Superintendents: An Examination of Leadership Practices*

Investigators: Lisa G. Driscoll, Ph.D., Glen I. Earthman, Ed.D.,
Sarah B. du Plessis, Ph.D. Candidate

I. Purpose of this Research/Project

The purpose of this study is to describe the leadership practices of women superintendents of public schools. This study will seek to develop an understanding of how women in superintendent positions describe their past and current histories (and apply meaning to these histories) in regards to their perceived experiences concerning their leadership practices within their professional position. Using a phenomenological research design, the researcher will tell the stories and describe these experiences through the women's own words and personal reflections, thus portraying a clearer picture of how these women describe their personal leadership practices within the role of public school superintendent. Eight to ten women will be asked to participate from those that show interest to volunteer.

II. Procedures

As a participant in this study you will be expected to: (1) participate in a three-part interview process, and (2) complete the *Leadership Practices Inventory-SELF*, and (3) assist the researcher in follow-up member checks of the interview transcript.

Each participant interview will include an overview of the study's description and will be scheduled to last between 60 to 90 minutes. Completion of the demographic questionnaire should take no more than 5 minutes with the definitions provided by the researcher. Completion of the *Leadership Practices Inventory-SELF* should take 8 to 10 minutes, and participants will be asked to complete it directly after the second interview occurs. The organization of the *Leadership Practices Inventory-SELF* consists of thirty statements. All statements, which are preceded with the question "To what extent do you typically engage in the following behaviors?" are answered using a ten point (10 being the highest and 1 being the lowest) Likert-scale response.

III. Risks

This study presents no or minimal mental, social, financial, legal, dignity or physical risk to the participant.

IV. Benefits

No promise or guarantee of benefits or compensation has been made to encourage you to participate. Your participation in the interview, completion of the *Leadership Practices Inventory-SELF* and the findings of this accumulated information will add to the research concerning women superintendents and their perceived leadership practices. Should you wish, you may contact the researcher after completion of the study and final defense of the dissertation for a summary of the research conclusions.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

All responses to the interviews, the *Leadership Practices Inventory-SELF* and all other data will be kept confidential and identifiable only to the researchers. At no time will the data be released to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent. The researchers will use unidentifiable quotations from the participants to emphasize salient points within the research. It is possible that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view this study's collected data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research. All interviews will be transcribed verbatim by the researcher. All study information and data products will be kept confidential at all times and maintained in a secure locked file for the remainder of one year whereupon all materials pertaining to the study will be destroyed. The researcher will also only access study data from a computer that is not connected to the internet, and save any files only onto a flash drive or CD. There is a possibility that some readers of the final dissertation may be able to recognize and identify the participating superintendent from the study narrative.

VI. Compensation

You understand that you will not be monetarily or otherwise compensated for your time and participation in this research study.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, and you are free not to answer any questions that you choose without penalty.

VIII. Approval of Research

This research has been approved, as required by the School of Education and by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

IX. Subject's Permission

If you agree, please sign below.

I have read and understand the informed consent and conditions of the project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation for

_____ in this project.

Date

_____ Please check here if you would like a summary of the research results when available.

Should I have any pertinent questions about this research or its conduct, and research subjects' rights, and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury to the subject, I may contact:

Sarah du Plessis, Ph.D. Candidate, Virginia Tech School of Education- (540) 320-8533
sduplessis@vt.edu .

Dr. Lisa G. Driscoll, Assistant Professor, Virginia Tech School of Education - (540) 231-9718 or (540) 231-5642 ldriscol@vt.edu

Dr. Glen I. Earthman, Professor Emeritus, Virginia Tech School of Education - (540) 231-5642 earthman@vt.edu

Dr. David M. Moore, Chair, Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, Office of Research Compliance, 1880 Pratt Drive, Suite 2006 (0497) Blacksburg, VA 24061 (540) 231-4991 moored@vt.edu

You will be given a complete copy or duplicate original of the signed Informed Consent.

APPENDIX L

Demographic Data Questionnaire

Women Superintendents: An Examination of Leadership Practices

Name: _____

Please circle the most appropriate response for demographic purposes only as they relate to you and your current position. Please refer to the definitions sheet, if needed.

Age:

1. 30-35
2. 36-40
3. 41-45
4. Over 46

Race:

1. White (Caucasian)
2. African-American
3. Asian
4. Hispanic
5. Native American/Pacific Islander
6. Other

Years of Experience in Education:

1. 0-5
2. 6-10
3. 11-15
4. 16-20
5. 21-25
6. 25-30
7. 30+

Salary Range:

1. \$75,000-\$90,000
2. \$91,000-\$105,000
3. \$106,000-\$120,000
4. \$121,000 or greater

Years of Experience in the Superintendency:

1. 0-5
2. 6-10
3. 11-15
4. 16-20
5. 21-25
6. 25-30
7. 30+

Locale:

1. Urban
2. Rural

School District ADM:

1. 300-2,500
2. 2,501-10,000
3. 10,001-25,000
4. Above 25,000

APPENDIX M

Definitions of Terms Indicated on the Demographic Data Questionnaire

Age—years of life each respondent has lived from birth to present, categorical age ranges from which respondents can choose are: less than 35, 36-40, 41-45, 46+.

Years of Experience in Education—years of total practice and employment in the education field as certificated teaching and administrative personnel only, categories from which respondents can choose are: 0-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, 21-25, 25-30, 31+.

Years of Experience in the Superintendency—total number of years of professional experience the respondent has served (in any current and/or any previous positions) as a superintendent of schools; year ranges from which participants can choose are: 0-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, 21-25, 25-30, 31+.

Ethnicity—defined for this study as people sharing similar backgrounds in descent or heredity; respondents will self-select one ethnicity from among the five racial/ethnic categories: Caucasian, African-American, Asian, Hispanic, Native American/Pacific Islander and Other.

Salary—gross estimate before taxes are withheld of the amount of monetary payment respondent receives within each fiscal school year for their employment with the exclusion of any fringe benefits (i.e.; housing/car allowances, health insurance, travel, annuities, honoraria etc.). Salary ranges from which participants can choose are: \$75,000-\$90,000, \$91,000-\$105,000, \$106,000-\$120,000, \$121,000 or greater.

Locale—defined as two geographical areas consisting of urban (major cities and their commercial and industrial sub-districts and neighborhoods), and rural (areas of large expanses of undeveloped or agricultural land, may also include small towns/provinces).

School District ADM—the size of the current school district as determined by the present student enrollment in average daily membership (ADM). School district sizes from which participants can choose are: 300-2,500, 2,501-10,000, 10,001-25,000 or above 25,000.

1. **Locale**—defined as three geographical areas consisting of urban (major cities and their commercial and industrial sub-districts and neighborhoods), suburban (metropolitan areas with less population densities than major cities), and rural (areas of large expanses of undeveloped or agricultural land, may also include small towns/provinces).

2. School District Size—the size the current school district as determined by the present student enrollment, school district sizes from which participants can choose are: 300-, 2,500, 2,501-10,000, 10,001-25,000 or above 25,000.

APPENDIX N

Matrix of Participants Selected



APPENDIX O

Matrix of Alternates* and Non-Selected Participants



