Principal Leadership in Building a Culture of Disciplinary Literacy

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Dissertation submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education
In
Educational Policy and Leadership Studies

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December 7, 2020
Falls Church, Virginia
Keywords: Disciplinary literacy, culture of literacy, professional development, distributing leadership

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated principal leadership in building a culture of disciplinary literacy. Previous studies investigated and validated the uniqueness of disciplinary literacy (Moje, 2015; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Spires et al., 2018). Case studies on individual schools looked at literacy within the context of a specific school community (Faulkner, 2012; Francois, 2014; Gilrane et al., 2008). These studies, although they touched on teacher and principal leadership, did not focus on leadership at the core of creating a community of literacy. This study focused on the essential actions and dispositions of principals who successfully built and maintained a culture of disciplinary literacy. Eight principals from a large, suburban Northeastern school district were interviewed to ascertain their actions. Open coding with constant comparative analysis yielded common themes, dispositions, and actions of principals.

Common leadership themes emerged as principals discussed leading disciplinary literacy: demonstrate why change is needed, recognize that leading literacy requires a plan, link the district priorities to disciplinary literacy, distribute leadership, provide targeted professional development, and utilize established resources. What emerged from this study was that one person alone could not build a culture of literacy within a school. Rather, changing instructional practices to put literacy at the center of learning requires the community to embrace literacy. As school leaders look to improve equitable outcomes for all students, they must look at the variation in instructional practices across the disciplines and ensure that literacy research-based practices are being used across all content areas. Change of this magnitude is a multiyear shift with student learning at the center of all instructional decisions. The complex task of leading

instructional change requires a principal to learn about disciplinary literacy. If schools want equitable education for all students, principals must understand and place priority on disciplinary literacy.

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General Audience Abstract

This study investigated principal leadership in building a culture of disciplinary literacy. Disciplinary literacy is the ability to read, write, think, and discuss like an expert in the field. For example, classes with disciplinary literacy at the core would ask students to read like a scientist or write an original score like a musician. Previous studies investigated and validated the uniqueness of disciplinary literacy (Moje, 2015; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Spires et al., 2018). Case studies on individual schools looked at literacy within the context of a specific school community (Faulkner, 2012; Francois, 2014; Gilrane et al., 2008). These studies did not focus on principal leadership at the core of creating culture of disciplinary literacy. This study focused on the essential actions and dispositions of eight principals who built a culture of disciplinary literacy in each of their secondary schools.

Common leadership themes emerged as principals discussed leading disciplinary literacy: demonstrate why change is needed, recognize that leading literacy requires a plan, link the district priorities to disciplinary literacy, distribute leadership, provide targeted professional development, and utilize established resources. As school leaders look to improve equitable outcomes for all students, they must look how literacy is taught in the disciplines and ensure that students have an opportunity to learn the real-life practices of professionals in the field. The complex task of leading instructional change requires a principal to learn about disciplinary literacy, so he or she can encourage teacher-experts to explicitly teach authentic disciplinary literacy skills in their classes.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, John Wilson Roberts III. In his short life, he showed a great love for learning and believed that education could change the lives of many as it did for him. His plans to earn an advanced degree were cut short outside of Dan Nang, Vietnam. I have to believe that he too would have been a Doctor.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There is a 20-year gap between the completion of my master's degree and the defense of my dissertation. In between, I had my second child, moved to four different states, attended the memorials of family members, held seven different jobs, and divorced. The culminating tumult of those events prepared me *slightly* for the four years of being mentally and emotionally stretched to balance full-time motherhood, school division leadership, and what I affectionately call "docland" or graduate school. This day is shared with many who inspired, consoled, and gently nudged me through the last four years.

Sound guidance from my Virginia Tech professors has led me to this point. Thank you to my committee for reading the good, the bad, and the ugly throughout this process. Dr. Glenn stepped in when my original chair left. Humor never left Dr. Glenn and I during this process, but I am sorry to say I did not fulfill his dream for me to be "the biggest statistics comeback story" and write a quantitative dissertation. Dr. Gratto joined my committee when we needed his support; his feedback helped me to clarify how my research could benefit practitioners. Dr. Mallory remained on my committee after retirement. When Dr. Glenn took medical leave, Dr. Mallory jumped in to support me with chapters 3 through 6. I made a couple of special deliveries to my fellow 22046 resident. I cannot leave out Dr. Ellen Reilly. She convinced me to apply to the Virginia Tech program, delivered hard advice when I needed it, and continues to guide my career as my mentor and friend. This dissertation would not have been possible without the support of this dedicated committee.

The sacrifice has been great and borne by those besides me. My daughters, Sarah and Hannah, have been understanding when my head was constantly in a book. Through encouraging words, home cooked meals, and loads of laundry folding, we have made it together. With hope, I

have proved to them that a woman, of any age, can achieve her goals. My own mother's weekly sanity checks helped reassure me that I was making the right choice — to actualize lifelong learning. The love of my dog, Maxine, lasted 15 years; never was there a more loyal friend. And then there is Mike: my personal tutor in statistics, the household and emotional fix-it man, and the love of my life. Even though he has more degrees than I, he can call me Doctor. I am blessed with an amazing family who loves me for my strengths and shortcomings.

Finally, I am indebted to the principals who participated in this study. Each gave of his or her time willingly and shared the struggles and successes of leadership in a time when so much is asked of secondary leaders. They are champions of literacy; making it the center of instruction in each classroom in the buildings they lead. They are the heroes of education.

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Chapter 1

Background

Secondary school teachers generally have expertise in their subject areas, with between 24 and 45 credit hours in their fields (Virginia Administrative Code, §§ 23, 2018). These content area teachers possess the ability to read, write, think, and discuss with precision as members of their discourse communities (Fang, 2012; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Teachers, though, may not recognize their own skills in making meaning of complex texts. Without being cognizant of these skills, some teachers may not model their reading, writing, and thinking processes aloud for students (Mac Mahon, 2013). Students in secondary schools require direct instruction or what Moje (2015) calls being "apprenticed into the discourse of the disciplines" (p. 258). This apprenticeship requires that students be provided opportunities to make meaning of the complex concepts and practice with the guidance of skilled mentor teachers (Moje, 2015). Principals, as literacy leaders in their building, have the difficult task of possessing a basic understanding of disciplinary literacy in a wide array of subjects and supporting the development of teachers and students in the pursuit of disciplinary literacy (Irvin et al., 2007).

The Definition of Literacy

A misconception exists that literacy equates to reading alone at any level — elementary, middle, and high school — and that it has to do with remediation (Gere et al., 2007; International Reading Association, 2012). Research into literacy and the progression of literacy explicates that literacy includes reading, writing, thinking, and discussing (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Graham & Perin, 2007; Fountas & Pinnell, 2018; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). For the purpose of this study, the working definition of *literacy,* as used by the researchers cited above

and the International Reading Association (2012), will be the ability to read, interpret, write, and discuss ideas in differing contents and contexts.

Students learn to decode and make meaning of a text, then move to higher levels of understanding through engaging with the text in different ways. Each stage of literacy — basic, intermediate, and disciplinary — presents pedagogical challenges for the classroom teachers (Gere et al., 2007; International Reading Association, 2012; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008).

Basic literacy occurs in elementary school or during a stage of academic language when students learn to decode, string words together, recognize high frequency words, and comprehend text (Fountas & Pinnell, 2018; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Students learn the routines of a reader. For example, in a narrative text, readers start at the left-hand side of the page and read the words in that line across to the right-hand side of the page and then move to the next line. Fountas and Pinnell (2018) describe basic literacy as "reading within the text" (p. 11). During this stage of meaning making, students learn independent reading and "fix up" strategies to comprehend the text (Tovani, 2000, p. 5-6). As students move through grades and coursework, text complexity and variety of text structures increases (Fang, 2012; Lent, 2016). In upper elementary and middle school, students employ *intermediate literacy skills* to monitor their own comprehension and overcome reading obstacles they face (Howes et al., 2007; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). They learn to discern word meanings based on the context of the sentence, question the text, and make connections between the text and the world around them (Beers & Probst, 2013; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Tovani, 2004). "Thinking beyond the text" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2018, p. 12) requires students to move from content area reading or reading for understanding into the nascent stages of disciplinary literacy, which demands that students use the content information to inform discussion and thinking in a particular discipline

(Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012). The ability to read and understand a text or *content area reading* requires direct instruction so a student can gain access to the text. Content area reading requires teachers to provide effective vocabulary instruction […] and reading comprehension strategies [...] that are distinct to a given subject to help students understand the subject (Heller, n/d). The purpose of content area reading is for students to gain information. *Content area literacy* is practiced when students read and write using a series of generalizable strategies (Fang 2012; Shanahan & Shanahan 2012). A generalizable skill or strategy is one that can be transferred from one discipline to another (Faggella-Luby et al., 2017; Graner et al., 2012).

Students, though, must progress beyond content area reading and literacy to learn how to think, discuss, and write across all disciplines (Graham et al., 2017; Hannanet & Jetnikoff, 2017). *Disciplinary literacy* is marked by text structures that are defined by subject areas, for example narratives, laboratory reports, graphs and charts that communicate critical data, and documents that communicate historical perspectives (Bain, 2012; Fang, 2012; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Content area literacy alone will only partially support student disciplinary literacy. Where content area literacy falls short is that each discipline is characterized by different "cognitive practices consistent with those of content experts" (Fang, 2012, p. 19); therefore, the skills will be specific to the discipline to prepare students to engage in authentic practices of experts in the field.

Through the Lens of Reading

Although secondary teacher preparation programs include at least one course like *reading in the content area* as evidenced by state licensure requirements in several states, these courses may or may not contain information on discipline specific skills (California Teacher Certification and Licensing Guide 2019; VA Administrative Code 20-23-190 §, 2018; Wu, 2018). Therefore,

as teachers look to deepen their capacity in disciplinary literacy, building on their knowledge of content area reading is a place to start as teachers think about how they might explain disciplinary skills to students. Teachers, like students, need to be apprenticed by veterans who can model disciplinary literacy (Moje, 2015). Although universities have begun to address disciplinary literacy as well as content area reading, tension exists in teacher preparation programs on what to prioritize in preservice teacher programs - learning content, methodology, and practical experience (Bain, 2012).

Fang (2012) defined disciplinary literacy as "the ability to engage in social, semiotic and cognitive practices considered consistent with those of content experts" (p.19). Disciplinary literacy requires students to employ skills beyond those that transfer across disciplines to those which are discipline specific (International Reading Association, 2012). For example, as students are acquiring basic literacy skills, students learn to read from left to right. As students progress to highly specialized texts, like a science text, reading from left to right might not be the most *effective* way to make meaning of the text. A scientific reader who reads text structures including research abstracts, tables, figures, diagrams, maps, drawings, photographs, and section headings will often preview the text for those structures in order to inform himself or herself on the text written in paragraph form (Lee & Spratley, 2010; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). This specific strategy would aid the student in learning how an expert reader approaches a text and is taught by a science teacher (Fang, 2012). Although jumping straight into reading the paragraphs and ignoring the figures until afterward is not *wrong*, a scientist would approach the reading in a different manner. To be a part of the scientific "discourse community," students must engage in reading the language, form, and structure that is particular to that discipline (Fang, 2012, p. 19).As a student progresses through school, the responsibility to educate the student in reading,

writing, thinking, and discussing is owned by all teachers (Lent, 2016; Ritchhart, 2015). The most recent data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicated a drop in reading scores at the fourth and eighth grades (2019). The decrease in reading scores was consistent across all subgroups (2017). This creates a sense of urgency to address literacy in elementary and secondary schools.

Students in secondary schools are mastering complicated texts and are engaging in a variety of courses with multiple teachers (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Graham & Perin, 2007; Shanahan & Shanahan 2008). Secondary schools face the problem of the scarcity of literacy instruction at all. Students in middle and high school move from course to course, potentially seeing seven teachers a day. As they "navigate the disciplines" (Moje, 2015, p. 256), students' success is determined by the teacher in each discipline. Therefore, their instruction in literacy can vary based on the teacher's capacity. As Shanahan and Shanahan (2008, p. 45) put it, "By the time adolescent students are being challenged by disciplinary texts, literacy instruction often has evaporated altogether or has degenerated into a reiteration of general reading strategies" in intervention courses which most likely benefit only the lowest-functioning students to include students who receive special education and ESOL services. The lack of attentiveness to literacy instruction for all in the secondary grades impacts the subject areas because "adolescents do not understand the multiple dimensions of content-based literacy" (Gere et al., 2007, p. 3) without explicit instruction.

Disciplinary Literacy Is More than Reading

The definition of literacy includes more than reading (National Council of Teachers of English, 2007; International Literacy Association, 2012), which further intensifies the need for

teachers to recognize the literacy demands of their disciplines. Literacy includes reading, writing, thinking, and discussing. Graham and Herbert (2010) noted in *Writing to Read* "that to organize information into knowledge [in writing]—can be viewed as tantamount to a survival skill" (p. 2). A 2013 survey of content area teachers from the four core subjects (English, mathematics, science, and social studies) found that students spent 30% of their class time writing (Gillespie et al., p. 1060). The type of writing students engaged in, though, included note taking, worksheets, short responses, and explanation (Gillespie, et al., 2013, p. 1061). Analysis, which requires a synthesis of information, was identified as being used by only 20% of the teachers (Gillespie et al., 2013, pp. 1061-1062). Studying student stances or opinions on writing, Jeffery and Wilcox found that student writing was powerful when "knowledge-transforming, disciplinary, and ... beyond a transmission of what is already known" (2013, p. 1113).

In *Visible Learning for Literacy*, Fisher, Frey, and Hattie used Hattie's database of 1,200 metanalyses to review the literature on literacy and craft recommendations for their book. They note that the effect size of writing on deep learning is 0.44 and the effect size for summarizing is 0.63 (2016). An effect size over 0.4 supports the practice as moving students to become literate in a discipline. Therefore, teachers who are not asking students to write are missing a critical component of disciplinary literacy that is clearly correlated to student competency in a subject area. Fisher, Frey, and Hattie (2016, p. 124) described writing as the "result of the construction of knowledge." By expanding the definition of literacy to include writing, which requires deep thinking, students are placed in an active role in their education rather than passively taking in information.

Disciplinary experts form discourse communities with distinct language, texts, symbolic tools, and ways of knowing, doing, and communicating that are specialized to discipline (But et al., 2017; Dew & Teague, 2017; Howes et al., 2009; Mac Mahon, 2014; Rainey, 2017). The goal, then, of the disciplinary teacher, whether a core or elective subject teacher, is to help students gain access to the academic community of which the teacher is a member. If the aim of disciplinary literacy is to help students navigate reading, writing, thinking, and discussing in each of the disciplines, then teachers must first understand the distinctness of these actions within their disciplines (Chandler-Olcott 2017; Graham et al., 2017; Mac Mahon, 2014; Stolle, 2017; Goldman et al., 2016; Rappa & Tang, 2018). This approach presents a distinct shift in pedagogical practices, which makes teachers feel less comfortable or adept (Clarence & McKenna, 2017; Doerr & Codruta, 2018; Mac Mahon, 2014).

Ensuring a deep understanding of content requires teachers and administrators to make meaning of the complexity of literacy at its different developmental stages and to effectively utilize strategies to help students access the content in each discipline (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Graham & Perin, 2007; Fountas & Pinnell, 2018; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). If the educators want to foster students who “enrich themselves by learning to read with understanding and write with the skill and clarity to do so not only for themselves and their families but for our nation as well” (Graham & Herbert, 2010, p. 2), then the teaching of literacy is the responsibility of all teachers and administrators. All school personnel must engage to support students in gaining disciplinary skills, thus helping them to become more productive citizens.

Statement of the Problem

Research indicates that shifting learning to include literacy practice is required for deep understanding of a given discipline (Frey et al., 2016, 2017; Graham & Herbert, 2010; Lent, 2016). Secondary schools offer many disciplines to their students. Principals are the instructional leaders in their buildings, including in the field of disciplinary literacy. Questions loom, though, as to the distinct role of principal leadership in creating a culture of disciplinary literacy in middle and high schools. What is the principal's understanding of disciplinary literacy? How can principals become aware and provide meaningful professional learning for their staff? As they lead literacy efforts, what factors do principals see as the most important to lead a culture of disciplinary literacy in their buildings? Answers to these questions will help inform school leaders on shifting school culture to embed literacy in all content areas. Beers and Probst (2013) call these schools "intellectual communities where students are encouraged to be risk takers, to be curious, and be willing to try and fail …" (p. 24).

Rationale and Significance

A schoolwide focus on content understanding built through literacy instruction requires teachers and administrators to be literacy experts and leaders (Irvin et al., 2007). Students acquiring skills in each subject area through authentic learning and creating products of learning is *how* to build disciplinary literacy or deep fluency in the content (Bennett, 2011; Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Graham & Perin, 2007; Hannanet & Jetnikoff, 2017). This study focused on understanding disciplinary literacy and the readiness of principals to lead this work and provides some suggestions for principals who seek to become leaders of disciplinary literacy.

The main "drivers" of the inculcation of disciplinary literacy in a school can be categorized as leadership capacity, resources (money, data), support for teachers through professional development, and culture (Irvin et al., 2007). The highest leverage driver can be determined by asking the question: Which factor impacts the most parts of the system? When a literacy teams in a large school district conducted causal analysis to determine this factor, 42 of the 57 teams noted leadership practices as the high leverage driver (Northeastern, 2018). Figure 1 delineates what literacy teams named as the highest driver. If leadership practices — of teachers and administrators — touch the most parts of the system, what specific role does the principal play in literacy leadership? Irvin et al. (2007) note "it is school leaders who can best lead the charge for literacy improvement" (p. 16).

Figure 1

Highest Leverage Drivers of Disciplinary Literacy

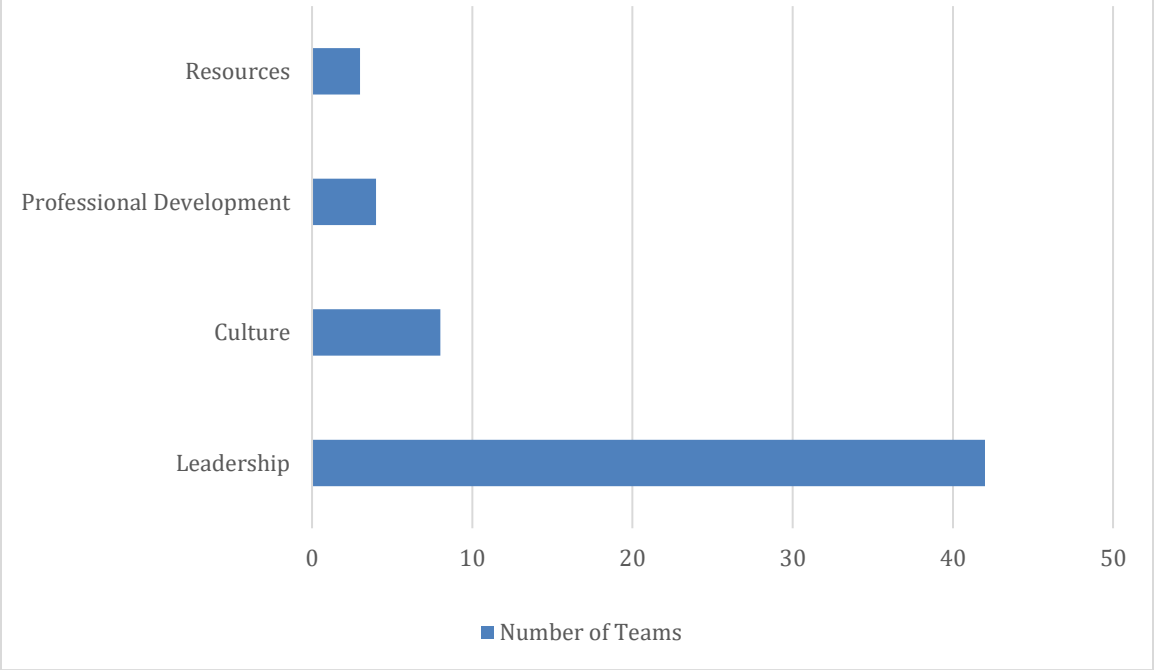


Figure 1. Highest Leverage Drivers of Disciplinary Literacy. The bar graph in the figure depicts literacy teams' highest leverage driver to move literacy in their buildings.

Research Question and Subquestions

The question and sub-questions that I answered in this investigation were

1. What is the principal's role in creating and maintaining a culture of disciplinary literacy?
    a. What are principals' understanding and awareness of disciplinary literacy?
    b. How can principals provide meaningful professional learning in the area of literacy for their staff?
    c. What factors do principals regard as the most important to lead a culture of disciplinary literacy in their buildings?

Literature Review

A review of the literature suggests distinct components of disciplinary literacy to address. Explicated in the literature review is the research base in leadership in literacy, implementation and implementation, professional learning and culture as the aforementioned support embedding disciplinary literacy in middle and high schools.

Expanding Leadership

The literature indicates that explicitly embedding literacy into disciplines requires leadership in the main office and in the classroom. Schools with a strong leadership team of teachers and administrators, who possess knowledge of literacy, distribute the leadership throughout the school (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016; Francois, 2014; Irvin & Dukes, 2007; Konza & Michael, 2011; Witte, Beemer, & Arjona, 2010). Individual schools and school districts that consider the long-term goals of literacy learning invest in multiyear planning that includes literacy teams with teachers and building leaders, ongoing professional learning around literacy

across the disciplines for teachers and leaders, and communicating success to the stakeholders (Fountas & Pinnell, 2018; Francois, 2014; McConachie & Petrosky, 2010; Witte et al., 2010). When leaders distributed the responsibility for literacy, themes emerged that fostered success: time and space to learn and plan for literacy, examples of teacher agency, and literacy leadership (Francois, 2014; McConachie & Petrosky, 2010). Professional development should be for teachers *and* administrators as partners because this approach builds legitimacy in the process (Irvin et al., 2007).

A literacy team can share some of the responsibilities for leading professional development and determining areas of school focus, but some decisions rest with the principal and administrative team. A principal can leverage the key players on the literacy team to serve in the areas of their strength (Irvin et al., 2007; Phillips, 2005). Literacy coaches and teacher leaders can fulfill roles such as performing non-evaluative observations, team teaching, planning with teacher teams, and working one-on-one with students to model practices (McConachie & Petrosky, 2010). Moreover, these key people play a role in building a community of teachers as inquirers which can "drive the type of bottom-up and context-specific changes that are necessary to dramatically shift the work being done within schools …" (Charner-Laird et al., 2016, p. 981).

Literacy or instructional coaches can coach what Killion calls "light or heavy" (p. 2). Coaching light "occurs when coaches want to build and maintain relationships more than they want to improve teaching and learning," while coaching heavy is characterized by "curriculum analysis, data analysis, instructional changes, and conversations about beliefs and how they influence practice" (Killion, 2008, pp. 1-2). Coaching heavy for disciplinary literacy can only be successful when a great deal of trust and transparency develops between the coach and teachers

from working and setting goals together (Wilder, 2014). This further necessitates the need for all members of the community to be learners and leaders of literacy.

Administrators who participate in literacy professional learning with teachers are more focused on the *student* descriptors of literacy learning (Overholt & Szabocsik, 2013; SURN Principal Academy 2012). The expectation of teachers imbuing disciplinary literacy practices in a classroom requires principals and other observers to focus on "effective reading and writing instruction strategies when they are incorporated into the content-area lesson" (Irvin et al., 2007, p. 152). The shift from watching the teacher to watching the students engaged in learning requires the leaders to be able to identify effective practices.

The pedagogical change from teacher as teller of information to teacher as facilitator of knowledge encourages literacy practices and shifts practice from efficiency to effectiveness (Tovani & Moje, 2017). As students read and talk about content, the teacher becomes more of a facilitator of learning and lets go of the knowledge keeper role (Tovani & Moje, 2017). Not all teachers, though, are comfortable with the changing role that teaching with literacy strategies involves, even though they are experts in their disciplines (Lent, 2016). Teachers also may feel grief in changing practice (AMLE, 2018). Wormeli (2018) discussed how change forces teachers to reflect on their practices and acknowledge that some practices that they have held in the past were ineffective and/or potentially a detriment to student learning. This change can bruise the teachers' egos. Administrators who address conflicts, grief, and culture shift will find more success than those who simply manage the conflicts (Ylimaki & Brunner, 2011). Therefore, moving culture requires acknowledging cultural forces and factors.

Implementation

As schools move to intentionally infuse literacy practices, administrators hear a common question, “Do I really have to teach reading in high school?” Tovani (2004) asserted that rather than teaching reading, educators are “teaching students how to remember and reuse information” (p. 7); this is disciplinary literacy for a purpose. Students in secondary school are bombarded daily by the written word in various forms. From Instagram posts to books and teachers’ information on learning management systems, the form of a text requires students to code shift as they search for the surface and deeper meaning of the language and messages being conveyed. Secondary teachers must teach reading, as well as *intermediate* and *disciplinary* literacy to help students navigate the varied text structures (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008, 2012).

Secondary students who lack basic literacy skills when they arrive in middle or high school should receive additional support through direct reading instruction from a certified reading specialist in addition to intermediate and disciplinary reading instruction in content courses (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Dobbs et al., 2016; Fountas & Pinnell, 2018). Some general literacy strategies of strong readers include asking questions, making predictions, testing hypotheses, and summarizing and monitoring comprehension (Beers & Probst, 2013; Goldman, et al. 2016; Lee & Spratley, 2010). However, these strategies will only go so far in supporting students as they matriculate through high school and postsecondary years. Specific demands are placed on readers from all disciplines. As discussed earlier, adolescent readers will struggle if not provided explicit instruction in the type of reading needed in each discipline.

The implications for teaching content knowledge through literacy practices require teachers to reinforce concepts prior to reading, shift responsibility of making meaning to students, sequence inquiry tasks to support reading, provide time for students to have content

area talk, and provide supports for students to gain efficacy (Lee & Spratley, 2010; Fallen, 2017; Rappa & Tang, 2018). Success in the classroom occurs when teachers consciously address literacy specificities in all classes, students actively engage in literacy practices, students receive instruction explicitly in the subject area, and educators teach disciplinary literacy as a daily occurrence, not just an event (Dew & Teague, 2015; Cervetti & Pearson, 2012; Fallen, 2017; Konza & Michael, 2011; Coppola & Ward, 2018). Thoughtful facilitation of student learning by the teachers and high student engagement drive literacy success (Hattie, 2003; Ritchhart, 2015).

Literacy education benefits all students, not only students who struggle, or those who receive special education support or English for speakers of other languages services, because students are provided the skills to be literate like experts in the field. Teachers need to take responsibility to provide literacy education for all their students and differentiate their literacy practices to meet the needs of each student (Athanases & Oliveira, 2014; Biancarosa, 2012; Collins & Ferri, 2016; Harmon et al., 2016). Three habits of mind must exist for teachers to embrace this pedagogical shift: they take responsibility for all students, they presume competency of students, and they recognize that the demands of learning new information is an interaction between the learner and literacy (Bain, 2012; Collins & Ferri, 2016).

Harmon et al. (2016) noted the gap between students' and teachers' perception in the areas of reading strategies and instruction in literacy. This cognitive dissonance highlights the intense need for teachers of all disciplines to understand the uniqueness of their content area and the need to address the distinctness through research-based literacy strategies. For teachers to use these practices requires thorough and ongoing professional learning.

Professional Development

Research establishes that preservice teachers struggle to learn the complexity of layering content, pedagogical methods, and practical experience (Bain, 2012; Levine, 2006; Paul, 2018). The integration of literacy practices in all coursework better prepares new teachers (Bain, 2012; Levine, 2006). Colwell's work with preservice teachers in social studies indicates that teacher practices can shift when mentors explicitly engage preservice teachers in integrating scaffolds and supporting students in social studies (2016). If teachers are not prepared in preservice programs, though, the burden to educate teachers in disciplinary literacy will fall on the school districts and agencies. Greenleaf et al. (2018) found professional learning experiences "must engage teachers in inquiry-based learning experiences" that balance their expertise and new learning that transforms learning practices rather than layering on another educational trend (p. 237).

To build teacher capacity in the area of disciplinary literacy takes time and dedication by all stakeholders. Teachers who have engaged in a reading in the content area class may understand *content area literacy* as "the ability to use reading and writing for the acquisition of new content in a given discipline" *(*McKenna & Robinson, 1990, p. 184), yet possess little knowledge that disciplinary literacy differs from content area literacy (Bain, 2012; Moje, 2015). The National Center for Literacy Education (2013) found that 65% of teachers believed that literacy should be taught by all disciplines not just English. However, only 48% felt prepared to teach literacy and less than 25% felt prepared to teach students with disabilities, English learners, or academically disadvantaged students (Nelson, 2014, p. 12). Kenna et al. (2018) found that although teachers could define *literacy*, they struggled to define *disciplinary literacy* and therefore, to embed the required pedagogical practices into their classrooms. Disciplinary

literacy requires students to read, write, think, and discuss like experts in the field of study (e.g., how a mathematician engages in these practices) or to manipulate the reading and information for the purpose of engaging with the discourse community (Fang, 2012; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008).

Professional learning for teachers is multifaceted. Elements of quality professional learning and development to support literacy instruction include: it is implemented and sustained over time; it is recursive and meets some moral imperative, it builds teacher capacity, it aligns with existing policy, it encourages the use of literacy teams or groups of teachers as an integral part of building momentum for literacy and offers literacy mentors for non-evaluative assistance to teachers, and provides a space (virtual or brick and mortar) for teachers to collaborate (But et al., 2017; Dail et al., 2018; Faulkner, 2012; Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016; Greenleaf et al., 2018; Moje, 2015; Rappa & Tang, 2018). Professional learning should include research-based literacy strategies to promote high-levels of student engagement and thinking (Graham et al., 2017; Ritchhart, 2015). The learning experience for teachers and students follow parallel tracks — to engage the learner in literacy experiences.

Teachers must be able to identify the practices they use as those of experts in the field. Paul (2018) found that although teachers might use intermediate reading strategies of annotation and defining words, they did not identify the strategies of their discipline like contextualization or sourcing — which are critical in their discourse community (p. 165). This demonstrates that professional learning should not only teach the generalizable strategies but also explicitly tie those strategies to how experts in the field use them, making them discipline specific. By using literacy practices that require students to read, write, think, and discuss, teachers become

facilitators of learning, thus "transferring the ownership of learning to the students" (Greenleaf et al., 2018, p. 234). Teachers then can model the strategies as best practices.

In supporting teacher understanding and professional development in disciplinary literacy instruction, state standards and the Common Core Standards mention teaching practices to build student knowledge (About the standards, 2018; Virginia Department of Education, 2017). These standards support *how* to teach, though they vary in their depth based on the discipline and provide more theoretical rationale than best practice guidance (English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects, 2018; Common core state standards for mathematics: Appendix A, 2018). Therefore, based on these standards, teachers must deliver large amounts of content with little pedagogical guidance. For example, a social studies teacher needs to explain to students that sourcing helps to evaluate historical thinking or a science teacher models inquiry through questioning as the students investigate ecosystems (Frey et al., 2016).

Culture

A culture embodies the social values, beliefs, language, and symbols of a people (Francois, 2014; Davis, 2008; Moje 2015). "This culture of literacy is evident throughout the school environment ...When every member of the school community takes responsibility for literacy efforts, a culture of literacy becomes pervasive" (Irvin et al., 2007, p. 103). Furthermore, aligning the literacy initiative with other school priorities will help to sustain the culture as literacy will not be another passing phase (Irvin et al., 2007; Phillip, 2005). In building the culture, attention should be not only efforts within the school, but outside of the school (Davis, 2008; Jacobson, 2017). Parents and the greater community can be engaged for support. Building

a culture of disciplinary literacy, then, would require schools to embrace the practices, language and beliefs of not just one discipline, but value and honor those of the multiple disciplines in the building.

Using the Frayer model to define a culture of disciplinary literacy can help to illuminate where initiatives fall short (Frayer et al., 1969). If building a culture of literacy means honoring "curriculum specifications" (Irvin et al., 2007), then it follows that defining characteristics provides possibilities for schools to tailor literacy to suit their school contexts. Table 1 notes the definition, characteristics, an example, and a non-example of a culture of literacy.

Table 1

Frayer Model of Culture of Literacy

Definition	Characteristics
A culture embodies the social values, beliefs, language, and symbols of a people	• Student work displayed in the building. • Students and teachers engaged in authentic conversations in all classes. • Parents are part of the discussion on literacy at school and Parent-Teacher-Student-Organization meetings. • During school and after school events embrace literacy. • Teachers and students celebrate literacy success. • Community outreach encourages greater stakeholder involvement. • On-going job-embedded professional development builds teacher capacity.
Example	**Non-example**
The school develops a literacy plan with the support of teachers, leaders, coaches, and specialists. The plan will: • include specific strategic goals with actions • align to the school district priorities • include a teacher professional learning in disciplinary literacy • offer opportunities for peer models of practice in each discipline • look at evidence of student success.	Restricting literacy to occur at a certain time of the day or in a certain class.

(Francois, 2014; Davis, 2008; Irvin, Meltzer, & Dukes, 2007; Jacobson, 2017; Moje 2015; Phillips, 2005)

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework shown in Figure 2 shows principals driving a literacy focus in a building. The arrows from the principal show the direction of influence emitting outward as he or she impacts the shared leadership practices, professional development and learning, and the resources allocated to implement literacy. With the three drivers in place, the principal can grow a culture of disciplinary literacy in his or her building.

Figure 2

Conceptual Framework

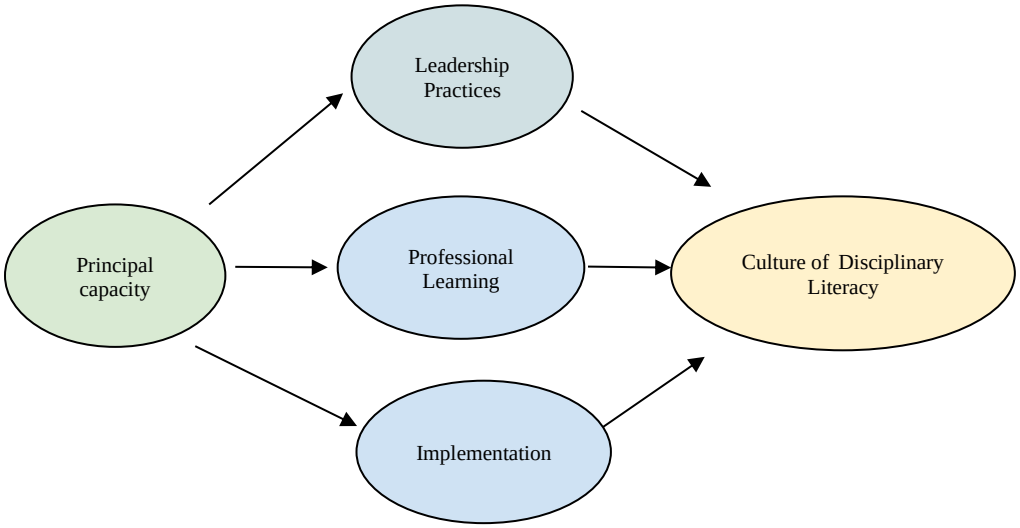


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework. This conceptual framework illustrates the principal's potential influence on building a culture of disciplinary literacy.

Limitations

All studies have limitations that the researcher cannot control. In this study of principals who lead disciplinary literacy, the results might not be generalizable to a larger population. Although I used the method of grounded theory, the principals I interviewed have a deep knowledge of literacy and disciplinary literacy due to the extensive professional learning

provided through the school district. Given these limitations, the investigation informs the research base.

Delimitations

The pool of candidates was limited to one suburban, Northeastern school division. The intent of the study was to provide a theory that informs the larger body of knowledge in support of operationalizing disciplinary literacy in secondary schools. Therefore, I restricted the study to secondary school principals. For similar reasons, I narrowed the pool of principals to include those who successfully lead disciplinary literacy in schools, as opposed to principals who have not been as successful in this area. This distinction will be derived from public-facing documents to include the school improvement plans (SIP), social media such as Twitter, and website postings to find evidence of school leaders and teachers building a culture of disciplinary literacy. I looked for school leaders who actively and publicly share classroom and school activities, lessons, and learnings that reflect the leadership, school and teacher values of literacy.

Definitions

- **Coaching heavy –** occurs when coaching "includes curriculum analysis, data analysis, instructional changes, and conversations about beliefs and how they influence practice" (Killion, 2008)
- **Coaching light** – occurs when "coaches want to build and maintain relationships more than they want to improve teaching and learning" (Killion, 2008)
- **Content area literacy** – the ability to use reading and writing for the acquisition of new subject matter in a given discipline (McKenna & Robinson, 1990, p. 194)

- **Content area reading** – effective vocabulary instruction […] and reading comprehension strategies [...] that are distinct to a given subject to help students understand the subject (Heller, n/d)
- **Code shift -** changing from the language of one discipline to another
- **Culture of disciplinary literacy** – an environment where the uniqueness of each discipline is honored as teachers engage students to be part of their unique discourse community
- **Disciplinary literacy** – the ability to engage in social, semiotic, and cognitive practices considered consistent with those of content experts (Fang, 2012, p. 19)
- **Disciplinary literacy strategy** – a reading or writing strategy that is particular to a discipline, e.g., field notes in science or a close reading of a passage looking at a literary theme (Lent, 2016)
- **Driver** – main area of influence to advance an aim (Bryk et al., 2017)
- **General literacy strategy** – a reading or writing strategy that can be used across the disciplines, e.g., annotation or summarizing (Lent, 2016)
- **Literacy** – literacy is the ability to read, interpret, write and discuss ideas in differing contents and contexts (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Graham & Perin, 2007; Fountas & Pinnell, 2018; International Reading Association, 2012; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008)
- **Literacy Team** – a team to include teachers, administrators, reading specialist, and curriculum coordinators established to distribute leadership in leading building literacy (Irvin et al., 2007)

Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation contains six chapters. Chapter 1 contains an introduction and literature review that support the current body of knowledge on disciplinary literacy. Chapter 2 explains the methodology used and the rationale for using grounded theory. Chapter 3 is a synthesis of the data obtained from principals with recommendations for school divisions to support building a culture of disciplinary literacy. Chapter 4 contains an article for publication in an academic journal. Chapter 5 contains an article suitable for publication in a practitioner journal. Chapter 6 contains a reflection on the alternate dissertation format. This dissertation seeks to inform school leadership on the role of the principal as literacy leader.

Chapter 2

Methodology

Purpose

This study focuses on principals as the leaders of literacy communities. Research on literacy establishes the uniqueness of literacy in each discipline (Bain, 2012; Moje, 2015; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008, 2012), the need for students to receive explicit instruction in literacy in each discipline (Fang, 2012; Lent, 2016; McConachie & Petrosky, 2010), and the school principal's role as a literacy leader (Francois, 2014; Irvin et al., 2007; Nelson, 2014). Principals possess the responsibility of leading an entire school and must create and maintain a culture of disciplinary literacy in their buildings. Researchers need to understand how principals' strategic actions bridge the knowing-doing gap to ensure that high quality literacy instruction occurs in their buildings.

The discussion on literacy in the last 15 years evolved to include all disciplines (Common Core Standards, 2010; Next Generation Science Standards, 2018; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). This further complicates the process for a principal leading literacy in a building where teachers embed literacy that looks and sounds different in all content areas. By investigating principals' reflections on their experiences, I identified essential actions and key beliefs that help define successful site-based leadership in disciplinary literacy.

Successful school leaders touch each facet of a school. Principals drive the school culture through their leadership actions in the application of resources — human and fiscal, professional development and learning, and distribution of leadership to others in the building (Irvin et al., 2007; Overholt & Szabocsik, 2013; Phillips, 2005). Although the scope of principal influence is a factor thoroughly investigated in literature, a gap in the literature exists about specific actions

and current methods that principals use to create a culture of disciplinary literacy in middle and high schools. Through interviews with eight principals, I learned the specific actions that were effective and provided a research base for other schools and districts who seek to build a culture of disciplinary literacy in middle and high schools.

Research Question and Subquestions

The questions that I sought to answer in this investigation were

1. What is the principal's role in creating and maintaining a culture of disciplinary literacy?
    a. What are principals' understanding and awareness of disciplinary literacy?
    b. How can principals provide meaningful professional learning for their staff?
    c. What factors do principals regard as the most important to lead a culture of disciplinary literacy in their buildings?

Research Design

I used a qualitative approach in this study because I examined the experiences of the principals as they lead disciplinary literacy in their buildings. By using open-ended questions, I began to see behavior patterns, dispositions, and strategies that address the phenomena. This inductive approach allows for "a way of discovering methods that are grounded" (Gibbs, 2010, min 3:20-3:26) in those involved in the work.

Grounded theory focuses on the experiences of participants during a process. Charmaz explains grounded theory as "mak[ing] patterns visible and understandable" (2014, p. 89). Grounded theory allows for the data to determine the theory without predetermined categories or defined strategies. In other words, the lived experiences of the participants expressed in the interview data will drive the conclusions of the study and ultimately the theory of action. In a

discussion about the difference between phenomenology and grounded research, Franchuk (2004) noted the distinction between understanding the beliefs and disposition as being phenomenological and grounded theory which focuses on the *role* of the participant in the phenomena. Although a study using grounded theory as a methodology honors the lived experiences, it seeks to find commonalities in order to develop a theory that can be applied to other contexts.

I selected grounded theory as the theoretical basis of this study because it involves principals and their actions as they lead a school to embrace disciplinary literacy. My interest is in *how* principals lead literacy in secondary school buildings. Because each school has local conditions that vary based on student population, demographics, unique school programming, and teacher experience with disciplinary literacy, it was critical to see what commonalities arise despite the school differences. Moreover, this study supports operationalizing and scaling successful leadership practices through a theory of action for principals. This theory was grounded in not only the research in disciplinary literacy, but also in the qualitative research gathered from successful principals who have led the work. The principals helped to develop the theory by making visible and concrete actions and disposition of the literacy leader.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework shown in Figure 2 places principals driving a literacy focus in a school. The arrows from the principal show the influence moving outward as he or she impacts the shared leadership practices, professional development and learning, and the resources allocated to implement literacy. With the three drivers in place, the principal can grow a culture of disciplinary literacy in his or her building.

Figure 2

Conceptual Framework

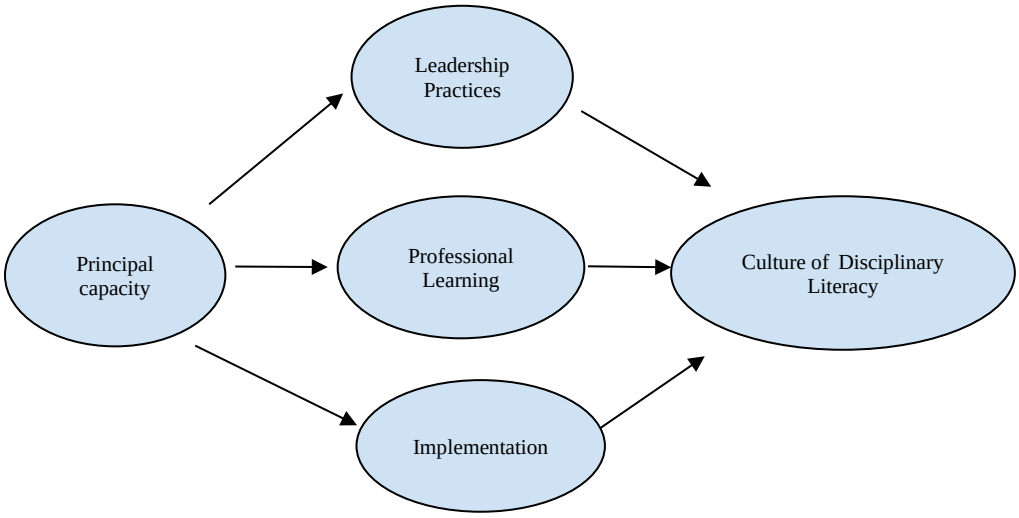


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework. This conceptual framework illustrates the principal's potential influence on building a culture of disciplinary literacy.

Participant Selection and Sample

I used purposeful sampling when conducting this study and no additional participants we added after the start of the study (Patton 2015, p. 269). I focused on eight middle and high school principals in a large, suburban, Northeastern school district who have successfully led literacy in their buildings. I chose both middle and high school because each has challenges and looking at both yielded common practices that were generalizable in both contexts. Literacy is a topic that has been thoroughly investigated in the elementary schools and embedded in the Common Core and state guidance varies from discipline to discipline, yet less research has been conducted on secondary literacy and the principal role (Common core state standards for mathematics, 2018; English language arts standards, 2019; Texas Education Agency, 2017, Virginia Department of

Education, 2018). Significant district funds and staff time have been allocated to the disciplinary literacy effort in this school district.

The Northeastern School District prioritized literacy through professional learning opportunities and internally developed literacy frameworks to help support school leaders and teachers. The district's strategic plan lists student success as goal one. This goal includes eliminating gaps in opportunity, access, and achievement for all students. Success is defined as be[ing] successful in reading and mathematics; be[ing] college or career ready by graduation; graduat[ing] on time …" (Northeastern School District 2019). In terms of literacy, this means that each child will be able to read, write, think, and discuss in all the subject areas. Because of this district focus for literacy for several years, I was interested in principal progress in leading this effort. Evidence of a movement towards or a sustained culture of disciplinary literacy can inform the great body of literature and principal practice.

I was interested in studying principals who have embedded the work of literacy in their schools and not those who have struggled. I looked at the public-facing documents for evidence of a culture of literacy in schools, including social media posts, school websites, principals' letters to the community, and School Improvement Plans (SIP). The selection instrument is in Appendix A. The shift to a model of instruction that embeds literacy practices took several years (Francois, 2014; Orechovsky, 2010; Witte et al., 2010); therefore, I looked back at these documents from the last three years.

Interview Process and Procedures – Instrument

Principals were contacted via email to determine if they had an interest in participating in the study. Appendix B contains the email that was sent to principals. Those who expressed interest were provided a consent form, interview questions, and potential times to conduct the

interview. The interview consisted of open-ended questions that were recorded using two devices. I had two devices in case one malfunctioned. The data from the interviews were stored on an external device, which was kept in a locked drawer. The list of participants and school names were stored on a separate drive also kept in a locked drawer.

The questions listed in Appendix C began by eliciting background information about the principal. As most principals had been classroom teachers, they had also experienced teaching a variety of disciplines. Although link subject area teaching experience and literacy leadership was not a primary focus of this investigation, including this information yielded insight for additional studies. The subsequent questions further probed the principal's understanding of literacy in general and disciplinary literacy. I then asked questions that investigate the principal's actions regarding literacy priority of the school division.

Principals were sent a thank you emails and notified that they could participating in member checking. Appendix D contains the email that will be sent to all participating interviews. Maintaining a rapport with the principals was critical to ensure the participants that I am an impartial investigator seeking to broaden the base of research in principal leadership in disciplinary literacy.

Data Collection

The bulk of the data collected were qualitative data, gathered during hour long interviews with the principals. All the interviews took place face-to-face with the same base questions. Data collected included an initial interview with the principal and, if they had it, data collected from teachers during the implementation of the disciplinary literacy initiative. The interviews were conducted in November and December of 2019. All interviews were recorded using two digital recorders.

The open-ended questions allowed the participant to answer in a thorough manner with an answer relevant to them (Patton, 2015). These types of questions did not guide participants to a specific response, which would "inhibit development of ... grounded theory" (Scott, 2017, para 6). I followed the base questions with prompts to initiate an expansion on the ideas expressed. During the interviews I listened and followed up on comments made by the participant to understand the phenomena or lived experience of the principals. As Charmaz (2014) has noted about the interviewing process, "someone will say something that captures and crystallizes what other people indicated in earlier interviews" (p. 90). As the "theoretical centrality" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 90) emerge, the direction of my inquiry changed as the nascent stage of the theory took shape. After the second interview, I realized that I needed more prompts to get a deeper understanding of the experiences. Prompts like, "Could you explain that further?" or "What does that mean in the context of your school?" were added.

Data Analysis

The data from the recorded interviews were transcribed by a third party who is experienced with transcription and education. I selected this individual because of her base knowledge of educational terms and her experience in transcribing documents. To become familiar with the transcription process, I transcribed one interview and compared it to that of the transcriber. Through this process, the transcriber and I standardized the format of the transcriptions to be best conducive to coding.

Coding the data was a multistep process. Open coding was used with constant comparative analysis, defined by Corin and Strauss (2008) as "the analytic process of comparing different pieces of data for similarities and differences" (p. 65). As I coded the data, I consciously compared it to other pieces of data included in the interview being coded as well as

in other interviews. The process helped me to generate a theory which is "integrated, consistent, plausible and close to the data" (Glaser, 1965, p. 437). During the open coding, I needed to make meaning of the data by sorting it into categories (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). During the analysis of the data, I then looked for the "recurring regularities" in it (Patton, 2015, p. 555). These recurring regularities were then brought together to create some cohesion in the data during the next step of data analysis.

Once all the data from interviews was initially coded or pulled apart, axial coding began. During axial coding, I took the fragmented data and organized it by larger themes. The method of axial coding assisted me in determining the central aspects of the phenomena, as well as the strategies, consequences, and connections between these (Flip, 2014). Establishing "theoretical adequacy" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 90) or the core concepts of the categories is central to shaping the theory. The process illuminated whether additional data needed to be collected through interviews or school documents.

***Trustworthiness*.** I established validity based on the actions I took before, during, and after the data collection. Trustworthiness is "established by the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the qualitative data …" (Mertler, 2016, p. 210). Before the data were collected, participants were provided an informed consent that outlines the procedures, risks, benefits, extent of anonymity, compensations, freedom to withdraw, and responsibilities in accordance with Virginia Tech guidelines (General Research Policies, 2019; Patton, 2015). Trustworthiness was established by four tools that I engaged with — interview protocols, memoing, triangulation, and member checking.

***Dependability*.** In qualitative research, trustworthiness was not measured by metrics but rather through procedures and protocols to ensure dependability (Lani, 2019). To establish

dependability, I engaged in routines that can be replicated by others. The interview questions were provided to the participants prior to the interview. Each interview was recorded and transcribed by a third party. I then reviewed each recording and read the transcription for accuracy.

Credibility. As the data were being recorded and the coding began, I engaged in memoing to note my initial reactions to the emerging categories. Memoing allowed me to make visible my learnings from the interview in time proximal to the interview. Appendix E details the data that were included in each memo. This process of reflexivity or noting my feelings or reactions allowed me to capture my thoughts to use in the process of triangulation or comparing against other data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I triangulated the data from memoing, interview transcripts, and any school-based data shared with me. Through triangulation, I reflected on the trustworthiness of each piece of data.

In addition, I engaged in member checking with the participants to determine whether their original intent was captured. This important process was optional and was communicated to the principals in the post-interview thank you detailed in Appendix D. Only one principal added clarifying information. The data and interpretation were key to the credibility of the data. The data's trustworthiness were core to the grounded theory.

Transferability. For qualitative data to be trustworthy and transferable, the results should be applicable to a larger population (Mertler, 2016). In looking at principal literacy leadership in a large, suburban school district with varied school demographics, I hoped to generate a theory that can be used in other school divisions. All school districts, regardless of whether they use the common core, address the topic of disciplinary literacy in varied modes (Common Core State

Standards Initiative, 2010; Nelson, 2014; Phillips, 2005). Therefore, educators must address the critical need for a theory of action to inform principal leadership.

Confirmability. Establishing confirmability requires that a researcher consider the interpretation of the data (Mertler, 2016). I was attentive during the interviews so I could follow up with questions to clarify the interviewee's response. Factual accuracy is critical to ensuring trustworthiness (Mertler, 2016) and is not impacted by the researcher's motive (Lani, 2019). Rather than make assumptions regarding responses in any part of the interview, I needed to inquire about each response that appears unclear. I also reflected on my process through detailed memoing after each interview and data dive. This helped me determine if my interpretation of the data was factually accurate. Member checking allowed the source of the data to confirm that my interpretation was aligned with their intent.

Research and Ethics

As I work in a school district in the area of literacy, I may have inherent biases in the area of research. It was important that I was conscious of these biases before, during, and after the principal interview. Patton (2015) outlines guiding principles in ethical issues, which include "be[ing] clear, honest, and transparent about your purpose" (p. 496).

Summary

The intent of this study was to gain insight into the actions and dispositions of principals who successfully lead school staff to embrace disciplinary literacy in their buildings. Through the use of grounded theory, I allowed the answers to determine the theory without have a predetermined set of actions that I was looking to validate. The study provided a theory of action for future and current school principals who have an interest in shifting schools to champion cultures of disciplinary literacy.

Chapter 3

Study and Findings

Purpose

Principals are literacy leaders responsible for building and maintaining a culture of literacy in their schools. Given the differences in literacy in each discipline (Bain, 2012; Moje, 2015; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008, 2012), the need for students to receive explicit instruction in literacy in each discipline (Fang, 2012; Lent, 2016; McConachie & Petrosky, 2010), and the school principal's role as a literacy leader (Francois, 2014; Irvin et al., 2007; Nelson, 2014), principals must manage the complex process of building a culture of disciplinary literacy. Research into the actions and disposition of successful principals inform others in the field on how to bridge the knowing–implementation gap hampering the spread of disciplinary literacy in secondary schools.

Overview of the Study

To investigate principal leadership of disciplinary literacy, principals were selected from a large, suburban Northeastern school district. The school district was selected because, over several years, the district focused on literacy learning for teachers and school leaders at both elementary and secondary levels. The focus on secondary literacy in this district was unique, as time and research has tended to focus on elementary literacy at the expense or "neglect of literacy support at middle and high school" (Irvin et al., 2007, p. 3). The intent to call attention to literacy at the secondary level is addressed in the Common Core Standards and states that use their own standards, yet wide variation of implementation exists in states using the Common Core Standards and individual state standards (Common core state standards for mathematics,

2018; English language arts standards, 2019; Texas Education Agency, 2017; Virginia Department of Education, 2018).

To identify the secondary school principals for this study, I reviewed public facing documents including school improvement plans, parent letters to the school community about literacy, school-wide literacy events, school initiatives like Drop Everything and Read (DEAR), and social media postings from principals and teachers that used a common language and named literacy or disciplinary literacy. The principals selected all included at least one literacy goal in their school improvement plan. Social media posts included not only literacy events, whole school reads and evening literacy events, but also the day to day photos of students engaged in literacy — reading, writing, thinking, and discussing. Messages to the community through parent letters provided tips for parents to support their students' adolescent literacy. Twelve principals were contacted via an email that outlined the study and requested commitment to participate in the study. Eight principals agreed to participate in the study, four middle school and four high school principals.

The school district's office of research approved the study with special conditions. A full explanation of the special considerations can be found in Appendix F.

All the interviews were conducted during a 2-week window approved by the school district. The interviews were conducted in person. I provided all the questions to the participants prior to the interview and obtained a signed consent. To protect the identities of the principals and schools, the participants and their respective schools are identified as Principal A-H, with the same corresponding letter for school.

Research Questions

The research question and subquestions driving the study are:

1. What is the principal's role in creating and maintaining a culture of disciplinary literacy?
    a. What are principals' understanding and awareness of disciplinary literacy?
    b. How can principals provide meaningful professional learning for their staff?
    c. What factors do principals regard as the most important to lead a culture of disciplinary literacy in their buildings?

Data Collection

Each principal was individually interviewed in person. A consent and the questions were sent to the principal prior to the interview. Principals had an opportunity to review the questions in order to prepare documents to reference during the interview. The interviews were recorded using two devices. All interviews were transcribed by a third party who has knowledge of educational language.

After the data were gathered, open coding was used with constant comparative analysis, as defined by Corin and Strauss (2008). While reviewing each transcription and coding the data, I was comparing the codes to the previous interview. Although the same subquestions were asked of all participants, variation in experiences led participants to share their literacy leadership journey through stories and discussion of essential actions. Once the initial coding was completed, axial coding required me to collapse and rethink codes.

Common leadership themes emerged as principals discussed leading disciplinary literacy: demonstrate why change is needed, recognize that leading literacy requires a plan, link the district priorities to disciplinary literacy, distribute leadership, provide targeted professional development, and utilize established resources. As these essential components for leading literacy emerged, principals used stories of their essential actions to move disciplinary literacy

through their buildings. Each of these themes will be further explained with specific examples of essential actions from the school leaders.

Principal Findings

Defining Literacy and Disciplinary Literacy

All principals had different backgrounds in teaching prior to becoming administrators. Their areas of content expertise included math, speech pathology, science, world language, social studies, English, special education, and health and physical education. Despite these different backgrounds, they all could articulate the difference between literacy and disciplinary literacy. Figure 3 highlights the components of literacy that principals used in their definitions.

Figure 3

How Is Literacy Defined?

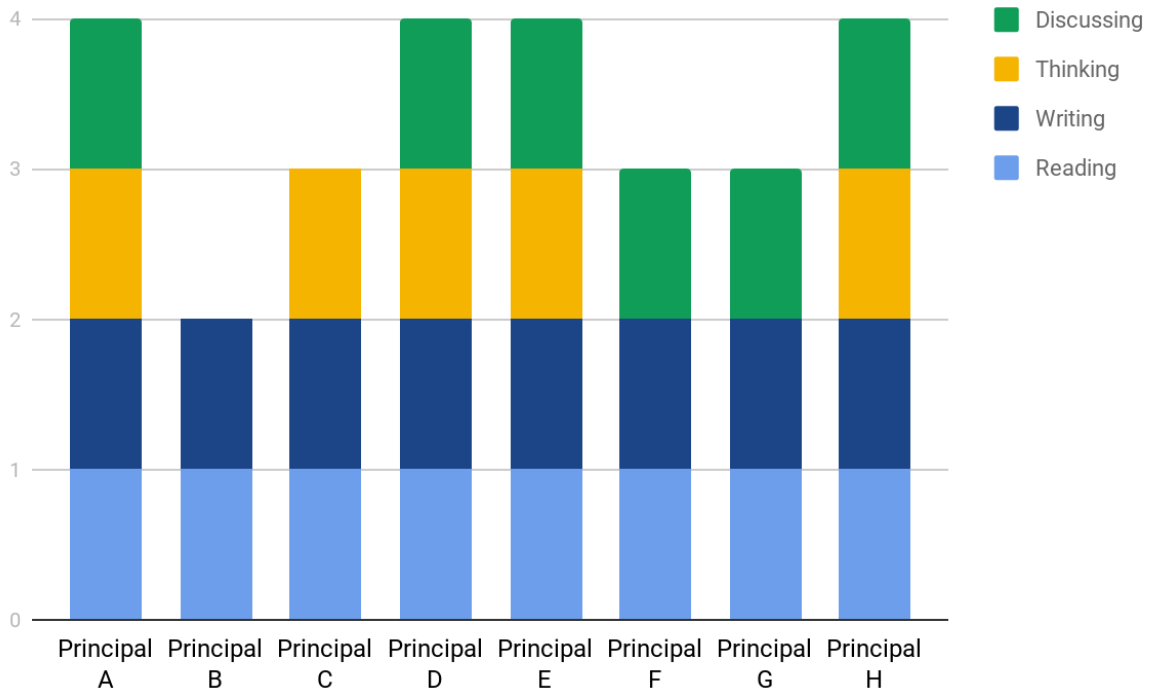


Figure 3. How Is Literacy Defined? This figure highlights the components of literacy that principals included when asked to define literacy.

In an initial response to the questions, “How do you define literacy? And how do you define disciplinary literacy?” the principals’ answers varied. But over the course of the conversations, some went back to add more to their original definition. All the principals included reading and writing as components of literacy. Six principals included discussing as critical to literacy, while five used thinking in the definition. Regardless of their teaching background, all reiterated the importance that literacy played in a child’s education. Their responses were similar to the working definition of literacy for this dissertation: the ability to read, interpret, write, and discuss ideas in differing contents and contexts.

Principals used examples to describe disciplinary literacy. Much like the definition of literacy all of them included reading and writing as part of the definition. Principal D explained, “So, it’s how a scientist thinks and reads and writes is what I would consider disciplinary literacy.” Principal D recognized that a scientist uses reading skills different from other professionals. One principal, a former science teacher, explained, “So, as a science teacher I write in a certain scientific manner that I would not necessarily write in if I was a historian or my content was more a literature based … So, it’s learning the best ways to write about and to think about literacy in your content ...” Principal F described disciplinary literacy, “And then disciplinary literacy, in my mind, would be learning how to read well in the content area. ... breaking down charts and graphs in science.” Four principals used the discipline of science as they described reading and writing in disciplinary literacy.

As leaders, principals valued literacy in all disciplines and understood the limitations placed on leading multiple disciplines. In the words of Principal E, “from a leadership role — from the principal role — I don’t think that you need to be an expert [on content], because I am not.” Principal E recognized that it was impossible to know all the disciplines intimately. To

delve deeper Principal E shared, “But you do need to have an understanding around the importance of it [literacy] and how you address it, how you deal with it by individual student, by groups of students and then systematically as a school.” Principal C further described leading literacy as:

> a principal walking into classrooms, looking at what teachers are doing, I have to have some minimal standard, or minimal knowledge — content knowledge — with regard to understanding some of the strategies and some of the ways that a math teacher, a history teacher, a science teacher, can utilize strategies in their content area to get ideas across to kids and to help kids express ideas in that manner.

Without knowing all the state standards in each content area, Principal C leaned on the ability to see literacy strategies that supported content learning. Principal E echoed “[W]hen I think about just the intricacies of supporting students with reading and writing, I quickly learned that it is really complex but really important.” This complexity required staff to have not only a passion for their subject area but also an understanding of what literacy looks like and sounds like (discourse) in their content area.

Principals noted the important roles that teachers play in supporting disciplinary literacy regardless of the grade level. The complexity extends to all the disciplines, as Principal G explained, “But it [disciplinary literacy] also, to me, implies that there is somebody at the head of that classroom that understands, that is the expert, and understands the importance of that literacy.” Their reflections on disciplinary literacy reiterate the complicated nature of teaching practices grounded in literacy and the urgency for all subject area teachers to understand their role in supporting students in literacy.

The Golden Circle. To help unpack the story of these principals and their leadership actions, I will refer to the work of Simon Sinek, who discussed the way leaders inspire using something he calls "the Golden Circle" (2010). In his leadership work, Sinek stated that great leaders inspire people to act boldly. Successful leaders, in both public and private sectors, start with the "why." Sinek asserted that "people don't buy what you do [product or idea], they buy WHY you do it" (41). Applying this to education, the principals in this study knew what needed to change — embedding disciplinary literacy practices in all classrooms. The challenge they faced was shifting teacher practice in schools of 100-200 teachers. Teachers and administrators needed to know *why* they should change their teaching practices to include literacy strategies. Figure 4 illustrates that the *why* is at the center, so building a case for change needs to start with why teaching with disciplinary literacy at the core is important, then move to how it is done, and finally, what it looks like.

Figure 4

The Golden Circle

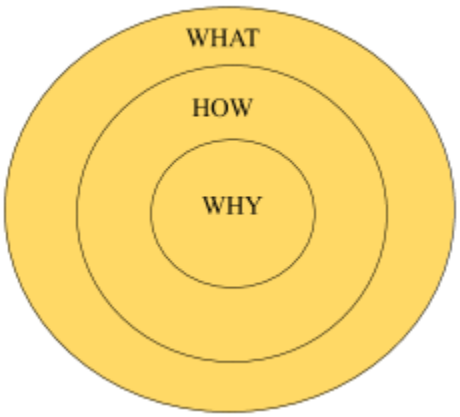


Figure 4. The Golden Circle. Illustrating how Leaders must "Start with the Why" to encourage change.

Demonstrate Why Change Is Needed

Principals described the need to look at their school and community first to get a sense of where the current instructional focus lay and the data that supported it. Through "see[ing] the system that produces the current outcomes," principals recognized the complexity of moving a belief in disciplinary literacy through a secondary building (Bryk et al., 2015, p. 57). Principals described looking at data, including state tests, district benchmarking, engagement surveys, and attendance; conducting classroom visits or walkthroughs, and having conversations with staff and students to assess the current state of disciplinary literacy in their buildings. The intentional search to understand the current state of literacy aided principals to build a case for instructional change. Although the methods for building a sense of urgency differed, all principals noted that identifying the reason for the change was critical to making the change.

Principals C and G discussed the importance of data to build a reason for change. "I think you have to be transparent with everyone about the data that you see," explained Principal C. By sharing the data with everyone, Principal C was able to build a "collective vision" and use this as a rallying cry for changing instructional practice. Principal G discussed the need for disciplinary literacy, "[to] start with, do you believe what the data tells you about the results of being literate in your discipline? And do you believe that this [disciplinary literacy] is going to help students?" Powerful data helped Principal G begin to "sell" disciplinary literacy, in particular writing in the disciplines, to the school staff. It was not easy to convince staff in areas outside of English to create writing prompts across the disciplines. Principal G posed the topic, "Let's talk about writing for learning. Let's talk about how we can put some prompts out there that engage our kind of student." Through these conversations about low stakes writing, Principal G was able to stay focused on writing as a way of making thinking and understanding visible. Principal G

added the necessity of incorporating student writing as a method of formative assessment, "I think it's important for people to understand that if you don't place the importance on it [writing], then your teachers are going to fall into the same trap as you are, which is I give you the info, you give me the feedback." Importance was placed on writing in the disciplines. In the literacy plan at Principal G's school, all teachers administered quarterly writing assignments germane to the content area. The student writings were normed in a collaborative team meeting using a rubric for content understandings.

Principals A and B discussed pairing standardized testing data and observational data to build a reason for an instruction shift to embed disciplinary literacy into instruction. Careful to name the instructional leadership element, Principal A explained, "it is incumbent upon the principal to determine what you value instructionally ... What is our big focus instructionally? Because there are a million things you can focus on." By focusing on engagement to support student learning, Principal A's administrative staff began to observe teachers. Without naming what they were looking for in classrooms, the team convened to find, "we were everywhere ... our feedback was a mile long and that is no way to engage a teacher and make a better teacher." These data helped the team to understand they needed a clear observational tool to gather clean data which informed next steps and build the why for the school.

Principal B leaned on data with keen observations to support the data as a way to see the school learning environment. In an educational environment where standardized tests determine accreditation, Principal B expressed, "I'm very fortunate that we have a really strong staff here. They are Type A people that care about kids. They understand and they really do break down the data and look at things at what kids need to know." Staff knowing the data was not enough, though, Principal B noted: "And for a principal, when you go in and observe do you know

what's being taught? Do you know *why* kids are getting it [the learning]?" With a focus on instructional practices, Principal B noted that modeling teaching practices during staff meetings is a way to move literacy, to establish change, and to introduce literacy practices.

Principals D, E, F, and H explicated the need for teachers to understand their role in literacy. Through conversations and leaning on content area teachers as experts, these principals built a clear reason for disciplinary literacy. Principal D explains,

> I think that they [teachers] don't understand that it is their job to teach them [students] how to read, and write, and speak, and think as a scientist, as a mathematician, as a historian. I think everybody just considers it to be the English teacher's responsibility, and it is not. It is everybody's responsibility to teach kids how to read from different areas ...

By including all teachers as literacy teachers, Principal D honored both the distinctness of the disciplines and the collective responsibility. Principal E explained disciplinary literacy, "I think what you quickly realize is literacy ... disciplinary literacy, it is the foundation for learning, right. And if you don't have that foundation, nothing else matters." Principal F echoed the need for all to teach through a disciplinary literacy lens:

> [W]e all do need to think of ourselves as literacy teachers, disciplinary literacy teachers. But if we are not giving the kids the opportunity to read, write, discuss text in class, we can't expect kids are going to improve in those skills. The reasons to reflect on instructional practice — embedding reading, writing, thinking, and discussing in each class did garner pushback.

Principal F explained that using content area teachers who could demonstrate how it [disciplinary literacy] was done contextualized the work of literacy for teachers.

As principals, intent on building reasons for disciplinary literacy, worked with staff, they noted pushback. They discussed individual conversations with staff. Principal H explained, “They [teachers] get the big concept [literacy], but the process to get them there was tricky.” This speaks to the difference between generalizable literacy strategies for all and strategies specific to the discipline and the balance needed between the two (Dobbs et al., 2016; Faggella-Luby et al., 2012; Shanahan and Shanahan, 2017). When Principal F utilized content teachers as the experts in the classroom, the conversations were clearer for teachers,

> So, I think it is easier for them [teachers] to understand why it is important for kids to be able to navigate through information in their particular content area. And I think they do appreciate the fact that it is different from subject area to subject area.

Still, a shift in teaching practices created fear in teachers as Principal E noted, “So, I think the idea of changing instruction because of it [literacy], it’s like just going through the change process. It’s scary.” As principals reflected on the process of building the reasons for shifts in instruction, they recognized the need for a multiyear plan.

Make A Clear Plan

During conversations with principals, each expressed the complexity of spreading literacy and why it required a clear plan. The literacy plan was what Sinek would call “the how.” They shared success and failure based on the ability to actualize the plan. Principal C explained,

> The year one goal really was to get people familiar with some of the strategies that were taught in year one [through centralized professional learning] and to get them [teachers] thinking about them. By focusing on one thing and how can you use that, and giving them some tools ... You don’t want to have them reinventing the wheel.

The plan for Principal C allowed teachers the space to learn without the fear of failure as they tested disciplinary literacy strategies in their classrooms. Principal C also learned alongside teachers to build understanding in the research and practice. Francois' case study of Bank Street School (2014) and Gilrane et al.'s study of Eagleton Elementary (2008) support the power of the same dynamic: teachers and their principal building their understanding of literacy together. When the leader demonstrates that he or she does not have all the knowledge, the teachers appeared more willing to take on new learning.

Clarity and expectation of what to do with the new learning emerged as important. Learning from other schools informed Principal H in clarifying the school plan. "As we heard from other schools who are far more like, demonstrative, like 'thou shall do this,' we said, 'Okay, we need to make sure that we're being real clear about what we want for the staff to try.'" Principals also expressed the concern about balancing workload on teachers and the urgency to stay the course with literacy. Principals D and F explained literacy plans shifting instructional practice over three to five years because teachers needed to build their understanding on the research and the concrete practices in each discipline. Principal G explained what can happen when shifting practice, "You know, when you quickly take your eye off of it [literacy plan], it quickly goes. It goes south again really quickly." This statement clearly captured the struggle that principals face daily — staying focused on the school mission and addressing the problem de jour.

Creating and staying focused on the plan is supported by literature. Irvin et al. describe designing a literacy plan as "essential for school leadership who are serious about addressing the literacy and learning needs of their students" (2008, p. 118). All principals interviewed had disciplinary literacy at the heart of their school improvement plans. Principals, though, expressed

a balance that was struck between plans that could be responsive to teachers' needs, either through more professional learning or time to plan for literacy and staying true to the focus on disciplinary literacy. As school staff and district priorities fluctuate, principals noted the need to link literacy to other priorities or initiatives that take life in a changing school district.

Link the Initiatives

Principals A, B, and F shared staying focused on literacy with the pull of other district priorities. Staying focused is another essential action for how to move literacy. "We have three big areas of focus here," explained principal A. "It's building engagement, building unity, and building capacity, like growth. And that's it; if it doesn't fit there, it doesn't fit here." Principal A described activities that fall outside of those priorities as "a false start. We will try it [new idea] and we will forget about it because it doesn't align with the other work that we are doing." This connects to the clarity mentioned earlier; staff need to hear a consistent message, from multiple sources, to internalize the importance.

Repeating a common message, Principal F explained, "I just had like a few graphics that I would always come back to, and back to, and back to, and back to, and that's kind of how we did it [stayed focused]." The responsibility to keep the message consistent and provide stability for the staff lowered anxiety. Principal F fostered calm with a "one-pager" or short document that explained all the school priorities. When there was a question about how a new district initiative or idea fit in, Principal F referred to the one-pager, which had literacy — reading, writing, thinking, and discussing — at the core of all instruction.

As Principal A explained, the principal must set the priorities and stay focused. For principals in this study, it meant linking the district priorities to disciplinary literacy as the foundation for instruction. Heller and Greenleaf (2007) noted that being competent in academic

content "requires more than just applying the same old skills and comprehension strategies to new kinds of texts. It requires skills and knowledge reasoning processes that are specific to particular disciplines (p. 10). If the principal knows this, he or she can stay the course and keep the staff focused on the main component — student access to high quality disciplinary literacy instruction. Redding and Viano addressed "focus" in a discussion on difference minimizing (2018). When designing innovation or change of practice in this case, aligning the change to the "school's local context ... reduced the burden associated with adopting a new program" (Redding & Viano, 2018, p. 16). Principals who established a focus, had the ability to stay the course as they built the culture of disciplinary literacy.

Distribute Leadership

Principals described their journeys in leadership from seeing a narrow view when they were teachers to a larger view as a principal. This full scope of instruction highlights when the variation in instructional practices. Principal D described the "ah-ha" moment when disciplinary literacy becomes clear:

> [I]t wasn't until I became a principal and worked with the assistant principals that I had who were truly instructional knowledgeable, that I was able to really see the bigger, overall, arching [view]. Because then I had to see the entire school and see all four core [math, English, social studies and mathematics], but also the importance of, also seeing the importance of how they all are related. And it's not until you see that you have the entire school that it [disciplinary literacy] becomes even more pressing.

The scope of a principal's view extends into every classroom as he or she visits to see literacy in action. Nothing in the current literature on disciplinary literacy spoke to the principal "ah-ha moment" that was prompted by a staff member. The openness of a principal to learn from his or

her staff further highlights the principal as truly the lead learner — acquiring knowledge through what he or she sees, reads, and discusses.

Although the realization of disciplinary literacy helped individual principals recognize the need for literacy, the principal alone cannot change the culture. Principal E continued to explain the role of leadership:

> And that's why I think from a leadership role ... from the principal role, I don't think that you need to be an expert, because I am not. But you do need to have an understanding around the importance of it [literacy] and how you address it [literacy], how you deal with it [literacy] by individual students, by groups of students and then systematically as a school.

Principals need to recognize best practices in disciplinary literacy when they are happening in classrooms.

Principals talked about getting key stakeholders invested in the idea of disciplinary literacy. Principals A, C, and D spoke specifically about building the administrative team's capacity in literacy and then moving to other leadership structures within the school. Principal D explained, "It's starting with administrators, the department chairs, and then your team leads or your leaders in your building." By building the capacity of these stakeholders, Principal D was able to distribute the leadership of the lead learner to others closer to or in the classroom. Principal C and D discussed early adopters or as Principal C described, "the coalition of the willing." These people supported the spread and scale of disciplinary literacy and their examples of sound teaching practices added legitimacy to the movement. When teachers and leaders have a role in designing change, they tend to be more invested (Redding & Viano, 2018).

Utilize teams — administrative, instructional, subject area, grade level, and interdisciplinary — was named as method for spreading the power of disciplinary literacy through leadership structures that already existed in the school. These stakeholder groups provided forums for small-group professional learning and conversations about literacy. Named groups that support and test instructional changes related to literacy (reading, writing, thinking, and discussing strategies) are described in Appendix G.

It is important to note that principals used different leadership structures in their schools to embed literacy. Consistent amongst all eight were the administrative, collaborative and literacy teams. Sometimes, too, the leaders moved straight to teachers because the teachers had more willingness and vision to shift practices than those in traditional leadership roles like assistant principal or department chair. Teacher leaders, with or without a title, provided models for what disciplinary literacy looks like and sounds like in each content area. Building the knowledge base to understand the urgency for disciplinary literacy in each content area is critical if the leadership structures are to support a school improvement plan rooted in literacy.

Principals in this study utilized several leadership structures in their building that had not been fleshed out by the literature. Whereas the literature looked at literacy teams, instructional coaches, and administrators, principals in this study noted collaborative team leaders, interdisciplinary teams, and instructional councils (made up of department leaders) as other groups who needed to learn about literacy and share a consistent message. Staffing models in Northeastern School District did not include an instructional coach at each school, so principals needed to leverage different staff members to lead literacy.

Provide Targeted Professional Development

All principals in this study improved disciplinary literacy by providing professional development to their staff. Principals discussed using professional learning to increase knowledge on current best teaching practices in disciplinary literacy. Research shows the need to shift beliefs on disciplinary literacy to include a focus on pedagogical practices balanced with content (Colwell, 2016; Mac Mahon, 2013; Scott et al., 2018). Five of the eight principals specifically noted the need for small-group learning through collaborative learning teams. Principals A and E discussed early misfires in professional development planning. Principal A said, “And I also think that when we look at how we’ve developed our PD [professional development] over time, the whole school PD [professional development] for literacy, we’ve done that. I don’t recommend that.” Although the content was strong, the message could be lost in the large setting. Smaller, more targeted professional learning for the content areas resonated with teachers. Gilrane et al. (2008) found that teacher choice and voice in the type of professional development yielded a greater transfer of learning from professional development to changing instructional practice.

Principal E first tried personalizing professional learning, “I will tell you, I failed miserably my first year because I made professional development too individualized, right. … every teacher had an individualized whatever.” In an effort to meet every learner’s need, the system for monitoring professional learning became unmanageable for the administrative team. Principal E continued, “The next year I overcorrected and said we are going to do it entirely as a school. That didn’t work either. ... rolling out professional development through the [collaborative] teams as opposed to schoolwide has been a game changer for us.”

Principal C introduced literacy through curriculum teams. “[The] school district started literacy institutes a couple years ago for secondary, I participated myself in the first two years and I think it, in some respects it reenergized me.” Principal C and the literacy team brought back the ideas to their school. To scale this, Principal C shared “I g[a]ve teachers time in groups within the school day, to be able to sit down and talk about some of the strategies that we were working on and figure out some intentional ways to utilize some of that [new learning from professional development].” Allowing teachers time to plan in curriculum or collaborative teams for literacy spurred on the use of literacy. Principal E shared that teams bring the theory to action: “What’s the one thing that they [teachers] are going to work on to improve their practice? And looking at it from their team’s perspective, what are some strengths and areas of improvement of their teams?” Having all the Algebra I or English 7 teachers try a strategy or literacy practice could create a greater impact than just one teacher working in isolation. Translating this work into a plan-do-study-act cycle (Bryk et al., 2015, p.121) in collaborative team meetings provides clear data on the impact of the new strategy or teaching move. If teachers plan high-leverage teaching moves grounded in literacy together, they find collective success.

Using master teachers to lead the professional development was a strategy that Principals D, E, F, and G used. Principal D explained, “I don’t want somebody from the outside coming in saying here, this is what we’re doing.” Principal D pointed to teacher experts sharing lessons from the field with their peers as success data. Providing anecdotes of success lowered change anxiety. Principal F described how the literacy team took centralized professional development and tailored it to the school’s needs, “You know, when [literacy] became an initiative for the district, we were provided with an opportunity to put a [literacy] team together and go to the

training together. And we were able to turn that information around very quickly with the staff." Although Principal F used whole school professional learning, the learning was short, 60-90 minutes, and targeted to one or two key ideas that could be put into practice in a classroom immediately.

Professional learning was an identified driver in the research to promote disciplinary literacy in middle and high schools. Studies by Bain (2012) and Colwell (2013), identified that teacher preparation programs lacked robust coursework in literacy. If teachers are not receiving instruction on disciplinary literacy in preparation programs, the responsibility falls on the school districts to help teachers acquire the competency. Furthermore, the varied state standards outside the Common Core leave much up to the individual teacher to discern high yield literacy strategies to use instructionally (Common core state standards for mathematics, 2018; English language arts standards, 2019; Texas Education Agency, 2017; Virginia Department of Education, 2018). This wide variation in teacher preparation and state guidance leaves school districts and principals to guide disciplinary literacy work at the secondary level.

Utilize Resources

Resources as defined by principals included people, time, and money. Research also supports the notion that money is not the only factor in implementing literacy (Irving et al., 2007). When looking to embrace literacy in their schools, each principal turned to current structures and people to build their culture of disciplinary literacy. None of the principals hired additional people; rather they used the staff time differently. Principal H explained, "Well, certainly we had the time and commitment of like that core group of teachers who went to workshops, came back, planned different turn-around trainings for our staff." The workshops, attended by Principal H's literacy team, were provided by the school district and substitute pay

was paid for through Title II funding. Once again, the theme of teachers leading the work in individual buildings emerged. Principals B and H changed how time in staff meetings was used. Rather than information giving, administrators and teachers modeled literacy strategies and shared brief anecdotes about student growth as a result of explicitly teaching students how to read and write in disciplines.

"People are everything," Principal E explained. "Money is secondary, I would say. It's not that it's not important." Principal E, like H, D, A, C, and F, believed the most valuable resource to shift practices was not just professional development delivered by peers, but also models of best practices in content area classrooms. To see a team member teach or a colleague talk about a disciplinary literacy strategy that worked in a classroom acted as the data for some to try to shift practice. Hattie's research into effective teaching practices provides clear evidence that teachers are the vehicle for improving student achievement (2003). Helping teachers to become great, responsive teachers requires teachers to learn practices that are research-based that have been studied to work for "surface, deep and transfer learning" (Hattie et al., 2016, p. 20). In *Visible Learning for Literacy*, Fisher, Frey, and Hattie identified teacher credibility, which includes trust, competency, dynamism and immediacy, as having an effect size of .90 (2016, p. 11). If teachers are to grow and gain credibility, providing models of sound teacher practices will support their growth. Principals, in this study, provided release time for classroom visits and/or planning for literacy with successful teachers in their building.

Once the decision was made to prioritize instruction with a focus on disciplinary literacy strategies, hiring decisions were made based on a teacher's understanding of literacy. Principals B, C, D, and E specifically noted that hiring teaching with a background in literacy was critical to build a culture. Whether they hired people who seemed "excited about instruction," came with

an elementary background, or had a mindset that all students can learn, principals explained hiring staff with strong literacy practices was critical.

Conclusions

Principals interviewed in this study identified essential actions needed to change instructional practice to be deeply rooted in disciplinary literacy, or the "what" in the Golden Circle. The essential actions noted by principals were:

1. Demonstrate why change is needed. With stakeholders, review data from state, federal, and benchmarking assessments, engagement surveys, observations and conversations to "see the system that produces the current outcomes" (Bryk et al., 2015, p. 57). Make known that teaching disciplinary literacy is every teacher's responsibility.
2. Recognize that leading literacy requires a plan. Include disciplinary literacy by name in the multi-year school improvement plan. Set goals, with stakeholder input, for each year. Create a safe space for teachers to learn about and try disciplinary literacy strategies in their classrooms.
3. Link the district priorities to disciplinary literacy. To help stay focused, repeat a common message, and craft a one-pager or graphic to remind people of the disciplinary literacy focus and how it connects to other district priorities.
4. Distribute leadership. Utilize existing leadership structures – administrative, instructional, collaborative and literacy teams - to

use and spread disciplinary literacy. Build the capacity of teachers to lead disciplinary literacy.

5. Provide targeted professional development. Build capacity of all stakeholders in a common language – what is literacy vs. disciplinary literacy and what are generalizable strategies and discipline specific strategies. Differentiate for disciplines through small group learning to ensure depth of understanding. Utilize teacher leaders as models of practice.
6. Utilize established resources. People and time are the greatest resources. Use teachers to facilitate new learning. Offer release time for team learning and planning. When positions are vacant, hire people with knowledge of disciplinary literacy.

Each principal described a literacy journey; none of them described their schools as being at a destination. They spoke to the need for planning and aligning all the distractors to keep a focus on literacy as a core to effective instruction. Mindful of the different demands in the disciplines, principals sought to honor teacher expertise to test small changes in instructions and being models of best practice.

The findings in this study provide a set of considerations that other school leaders can use as they seek to make instructional change. If a principal believes that literacy is the foundation for all instruction, he or she must prioritize the type of instruction that lends itself to students engaging in reading, writing, thinking, and discussing each day. With teachers and leaders learning about disciplinary literacy together, schools can shift to classroom practices to be student-centered and improve student outcomes. Schools that allow for authentic learning,

address the demands of each discipline, and celebrate student success in each discipline are those who deeply hold a culture of disciplinary literacy.

Chapter 4

"Leading through the Lens of Disciplinary Literacy"

Abstract

This study investigated principal leadership in building a culture of disciplinary literacy. Previous studies have investigated and validated the uniqueness of disciplinary literacy from content area literacy (Moje, 2015; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Spires, et al, 2018). Case studies on individual schools have looked at literacy within the context of a specific school community (Faulkner, 2012; Francois, 2014; Gilrane et al., 2008). These studies, although they touched on teacher and principal leadership, did not focus on leadership as the core of creating a community of literacy. This study focused on the essential actions and dispositions of principals who successfully built and maintained a culture of disciplinary literacy. Eight principals from a large, suburban Northeastern school district were interviewed to ascertain these actions and dispositions. Open coding with constant comparative analysis yielded common themes, dispositions, and actions of principals.

Common leadership themes emerged as principals discussed leading disciplinary literacy: demonstrate why change is needed, recognize that leading literacy requires a plan, link the district priorities to disciplinary literacy, distribute leadership, provide targeted professional development, and utilize established resources. What emerged from this study was that one person alone could not build a culture of literacy within a school. Rather, changing instructional practices to put literacy at the center of learning would require the community to embrace literacy at the core of learning. As school leaders look to improve equitable outcomes for all students, they must examine the variation in instructional practices across the disciplines and

ensure that research-based literacy practices are being used across all content areas. Change of this magnitude entails a multi-year shift with student learning at the center of all instructional decisions. The complex task of leading instructional change requires a principal to be a learner of disciplinary literacy. If schools want equitable education for all students, the principals must understand and place priority on disciplinary literacy.

Relevant Literature

A review of the literature highlights several key elements that support building a culture of disciplinary literacy. First, principals must expand leadership beyond themselves as their time is limited by competing demands. Implementation of disciplinary literacy requires teachers to lead students to understand the authentic practices of each discipline. Leaders also need offer professional development to support teacher understanding of how to teach skills authentic to experts in the field. Finally, the culture of a secondary school needs to be inclusive of various subject areas. An overview of the stages of literacy begins this review, followed by the literature supporting each of the four components discussed above.

Literacy includes reading, writing, thinking, and discussing (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Graham & Perin, 2007; Fountas & Pinnell, 2018; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). For the purpose of this study, the working definition of *literacy* was the ability to read, write, interpret (think), and discuss ideas in differing contents and contexts, as used by the aforementioned researchers and the International Reading Association (2012). Students learn to decode and make meaning of a text, then move to higher levels of understanding through engaging with the text in different ways. Each of the three stages of literacy — basic, intermediate, and disciplinary — presents

pedagogical challenges for the classroom teachers (Gere et al., 2007; International Reading Association, 2012; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008).

Basic literacy generally occurs in elementary school during a stage of academic language development when students learn to decode, string words together, recognize high frequency words, and comprehend text (Fountas & Pinnell, 2018; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Students learn the routines of a reader.

In upper elementary and middle school, students employ *intermediate literacy skills* to monitor their own comprehension and overcome reading obstacles they face (Howes et al., 2007; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). They learn to discern word meanings based on the context of the sentence, question the text, and make connections between the text and the world around them (Beers & Probst, 2013; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Tovani, 2004).

In the stage of *disciplinary literacy* students read, write, think, and discuss like experts in the field of study (e.g., how a mathematician engages in these practices) or manipulate the reading and information for the purpose of engaging with the discourse community (Fang, 2012; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Disciplinary literacy is marked by text structures defined by subject areas, for example: narratives, laboratory reports, graphs and charts that communicate critical data, and documents that communicate historical perspectives (Bain, 2012; Fang, 2012; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Therefore, the reading, writing, thinking, and discussing skills will be specific to the discipline to prepare secondary school students to engage in authentic practices of experts in the field.

Expanding Leadership

The literature indicates that explicitly embedding literacy into disciplines (math, English, social studies, science, etc.) requires strong leadership from administrators and teachers. A school with a strong leadership team of teachers and administrators who possess knowledge of literacy distributes the leadership throughout the school (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016; Francois, 2014; Irvin & Dukes, 2007; Konza & Michael, 2011; Witte et al., 2010). Individual schools and school districts that consider the long-term goals of literacy invest in multiyear planning that includes a literacy teams with teachers and building leaders, ongoing professional learning around literacy across the disciplines for teachers and leaders, and communicating success to the stakeholders (Fountas & Pinnell, 2018; Francois, 2014; McConachie & Petrosky, 2010; Witte et al., 2010). When leaders distributed the responsibility for literacy, researchers identified themes that fostered success: time and space to learn and plan for literacy, examples of teacher agency, and literacy leadership (Francois, 2014; McConachie & Petrosky, 2010). Professional development should be for teachers and administrators as partners because this approach builds legitimacy in the process (Irvin et al., 2007).

Implementation

Disciplinary literacy by definition honors the uniqueness of each discipline. Teacher who use disciplinary literacy practices in their classroom apprentice students into their subject area (Moje, 2015). The implications for teaching through literacy practices requires teachers to reinforce concepts prior to reading, shift responsibility of making meaning to students, sequence inquiry tasks to support reading, provide time for students to have content area talk, and provide supports for students to gain efficacy (Lee & Spratley, 2010; Fallen, 2017; Rappa

& Tang, 2018). Success in the classroom occurs when teachers consciously address literacy specificities, students actively engage in literacy practices, students receive instruction explicitly in subject area, and educators teach disciplinary literacy as a daily occurrence, not just an event (Dew & Teague, 2015; Cervetti, & Pearson, 2012; Fallen, 2017; Konza & Michael, 2011; Coppola & Ward, 2018). Thoughtful facilitation of student learning by the teachers and high student engagement drive literacy success (Hattie, 2003; Ritchhart, 2015).

Disciplinary literacy benefits all students because it enables them to participate in a given field in an authentic manner. Literacy education must not be regarded as remedial services provided to students who struggle, or those who receive special education support or English for speakers of other language services. Teachers must take responsibility for the literacy education for all their students and differentiate their literacy practices to meet the needs of each student (Athanases & Oliveira, 2014; Biancarosa, 2012; Collins & Ferri, 2016; Harmon et al., 2016). Three habits of mind must exist for teachers to embrace this pedagogical shift: they must take responsibility for all students, they must presume competency of students, and they must recognize that an academic struggle is an interaction between the learner and literacy (Bain, 2012; Collins & Ferri, 2016). In addition, Harmon et al. (2016) noted the difference between students' and teachers' perception in the areas of reading strategies and instruction in literacy. This cognitive dissonance highlights the intense need for teachers of all disciplines to understand the uniqueness of their content area and the need to address the distinctness through research-based literacy strategies. For teachers to use these practices requires thorough and ongoing professional learning.

Professional Development

To build teacher capacity in the area of disciplinary literacy takes time and dedication by all stakeholders. Research has established that preservice teachers struggle to learn the complexity of layering content, pedagogical methods, and practical experience (Bain, 2012; Levine, 2006; Paul 2018). The integration of literacy practices in all preservice teacher coursework would better prepare new teachers for complex teaching challenges (Bain, 2012; Levine, 2006). Colwell's (2016) work with preservice teachers in social studies indicated that teachers' practices can shift when mentors explicitly engage preservice teachers in integrating disciplinary literacy scaffolds and support for students in social studies.

Although teachers understand the importance of literacy, many teachers feel they lack the skills to teach literacy. A study conducted by the National Center for Literacy Education in 2013 found that 65% of teachers believed that literacy should be taught by all disciplines, not just English. However, only 48% felt they were prepared to teach literacy and less than 25% felt prepared to teach students with disabilities, English learners, or academically disadvantaged (Nelson, 2014, p. 12). Kenna et al. (2018) found that although teachers could define *literacy*, they struggled to define *disciplinary literacy.* Teachers who do not possess a basic understanding of disciplinary literacy cannot be expected to embed the pedagogical practices related to it into their classrooms.

If teachers are not prepared in preservice programs, the burden to educate teachers in disciplinary literacy will fall on the school districts and local agencies. Greenleaf et al. (2018) found that professional learning experiences "must engage teachers in inquiry-based learning experiences" that balance their expertise and new learning, thus transforming teaching practices rather than layering on another educational trend (p. 237).

Professional learning in disciplinary literacy for teachers must be multifaceted in order to be effective. Elements of quality professional learning and development to support literacy instruction include several crucial components. Effective professional learning must be implemented and sustained over time, meet some moral imperative or urgency, build teacher capacity, align with existing policy, encourage the use of literacy teams or groups of teachers as an integral part of building momentum for literacy, offer mentors for non-evaluative assistance or models, and provide a space (virtual or brick and mortar) for teachers to collaborate (But et al., 2017; Dail, Goodsite, & Sanders, 2018; Faulkner, 2012; Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016; Greenleaf et al., 2018). Professional learning should consist of research-based literacy strategies to promote high-levels of student engagement and thinking (Graham et al., 2017; Rappa & Tang, 2018; Ritchhart, 2015). The learning experience for teachers and students follow parallel tracks — to engage the learner in literacy experiences.

Teachers must be able to use the practices of experts in the field. Paul (2018) found that although teachers might use intermediate reading strategies of annotation and defining words, they did not identify the critical strategies in their discourse community of their discipline, like contextualization or sourcing (p. 165) as those they needed to teach students. Teacher lesson plans only included intermediate literacy strategies not disciplinary literacy strategies (Paul, 2018). This finding highlights that professional learning must not only teach the strategies, but explicitly require teachers to apply those strategies used by experts in the field. Teachers then can model the strategies for their students as best practice.

Culture

A culture embodies the social values, beliefs, language, and symbols of a people (Francois, 2014; Davis, 2008; Moje 2015). “This culture of literacy is evident throughout the school environment ...When every member of the school community takes responsibility for literacy efforts, a culture of literacy becomes pervasive” (Irvin et al., 2007, p. 103). Furthermore, aligning the literacy initiative with other school priorities will help to sustain the culture as literacy will not be another passing phase (Irvin et al., 2007; Phillip, 2005). In building the culture, attention should be not only efforts within the school, but outside of the school (Davis, 2008; Jacobson, 2017). Parents and the greater community can be engaged for support. Building a culture of disciplinary literacy in a secondary school with many subject areas requires the school to be inclusive of various practices thus honoring all the disciplines.

Theoretical Framework

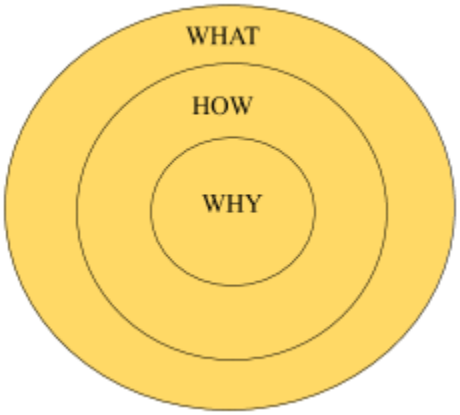
The Golden Circle

To help unpack the story of these principals and their leadership actions, I will refer to the work of Simon Sinek, who discussed the way leaders inspire using something he calls “the Golden Circle” (2010). In his leadership work, Sinek discusses how great leaders — who can be found in both public and private sectors — inspire people to act boldly; successful leaders start with the “why.” Sinek asserts that “people don’t buy what you do [product or idea], they buy WHY you do it” (2010, p. 41). Applying this to education, the principals in this study knew what needed to change, embedding disciplinary literacy practices in all classrooms. The challenge they faced was shifting teacher practice in schools of 100-200 teachers. Teachers and administrators needed to know *why* they should change their teaching practices to include literacy strategies.

Figure 1 illustrates that the *why* is at the center and building a case for change needs to start with why teaching with disciplinary literacy at the core is important; then move to how it is done, and finally, what it looks like.

Figure 1

The Golden Circle, Illustrating how Leaders must Start with the Why



Methodology

To investigate principal leadership of disciplinary literacy, eight principals — four from middle school and four from high school — were selected from a large, suburban Northeastern school district. The school district was selected because, over several years, the district had focused on literacy learning for teachers and school leaders at both elementary and secondary levels. The focus on secondary literacy at this school district was unique, as time and research in most school districts has tended to focus on elementary literacy at the expense or "neglect of literacy support at middle and high school" (Irvin et al., 2007, p. 3). Each principal was selected because of his or her focus on disciplinary literacy. The focus was determined after a thorough

review of public-facing documents that included social media posts, school websites, principals' letters to the community, and school improvement plans (SIP).

To solicit participation in the study, principals were contacted via email. Those who expressed interest were provided a consent form, interview questions, and potential interview times. The interview consisted of open-ended questions which were recorded using two devices. The questions began by eliciting background information about the principal. The subsequent questions focused on the principal's understanding of literacy in general and disciplinary literacy and then moved to questions that investigated the principal's actions regarding literacy priority of the school division.

Data were collected during face-to-face hourlong interviews with the principals. Data included an initial interview with the principal and, if the principal had it, data collected from teachers during the implementation of the disciplinary literacy at the school. The open-ended questions allowed the participant to answer in a thorough manner relevant to them (Patton, 2015). These types of questions did not guide participants to a specific response, which would "inhibit development of ... grounded theory" (Scott, 2017, para 6). To facilitate this conversation, there were base questions with prompts to initiate an expansion on ideas. As the "theoretical centrality" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 90) emerged, the direction of inquiry changed as the nascent stage of the theory took shape. This tightening of the focus prompted circling back to the question: What essential actions would you suggest to other principals?

The data from the recorded interview were transcribed by a third party and sent to principals for review. Only one principal added to her transcript with clarifying a comment. Member checking ensured the principals' views were correctly portrayed.

Coding the data was a multi-step process. Open coding was used with constant comparative analysis, defined by Corin and Strauss (2008) as "the analytic process of comparing different pieces of data for similarities and differences" (p. 65). The themes that emerged were noted in memos about the data. Once all the data from interviews were initially coded or pulled apart, axial coding began. During axial coding, the fragmented data was organized by larger themes. The method of axial code determined the central aspects of the phenomena, as well as the strategies, consequences, and connections between these categories (Flip, 2014). Establishing "theoretical adequacy" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 90) shaped the theory. Initially, 12 themes emerged. Through analysis of the data and memos that were written after interviews and data analysis review sessions, the 12 themes were collapsed into six themes.

Findings

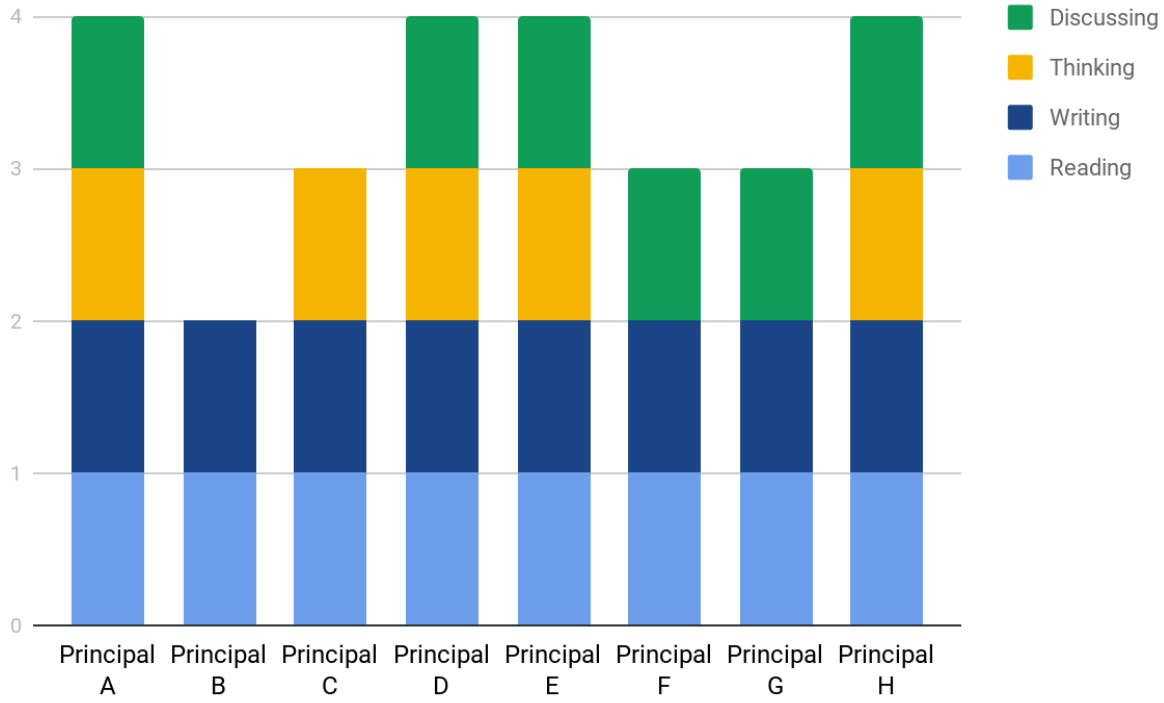
Principals who successfully built a culture of disciplinary literacy spoke of the difficulty and complexity of making change. As the lead learner in their buildings, they owned their role in learning alongside teachers and defining literacy relative to disciplinary literacy. They recognized that shifting teacher practice to place literacy at the heart of instruction takes time, focus, and a team of dedicated people. Common leadership themes emerged as principals discussed leading disciplinary literacy: demonstrate why change is needed, recognize that leading literacy requires a plan, link the district priorities to disciplinary literacy, distribute leadership, provide targeted professional development, and utilize established resources. Before discussing these findings, there will be a discussion of how the principals defined literacy and disciplinary literacy.

Defining Literacy and Disciplinary Literacy

All principals had different backgrounds in teaching prior to becoming administrators. The content areas of expertise included: math, speech pathology, science, world language, social studies, English, special education, and health and physical education. Despite these different backgrounds, they all could differentiate the difference between literacy and disciplinary literacy. The working definition of literacy for this study was the ability to read, interpret, write and discuss ideas in differing contents and contexts**.** Figure 2 displays the four components of literacy and the components that each principal used in his or her definition.

Figure 2

The Components Principals Used to Define Literacy



In an initial response to the questions, “How do you define literacy? And how do you define disciplinary literacy?” the principals’ answers varied. Over the course of the

conversations, some went back to add more to their original definitions. All the principals included reading and writing as components of literacy. Six principals included discussing as critical to literacy and five used thinking in the definition. Regardless of their teaching background, all reiterated the importance that literacy played in a child's education.

Principals used examples to describe disciplinary literacy and much like the definition of literacy all of them included reading and writing as part of the definition. Principal D explained, "So, it's how a scientist thinks and reads and writes is what I would consider disciplinary literacy." Principal D recognized that a scientist uses reading skills different from other professionals. One principal, a former science teacher, explained, "So, as a science teacher I write in a certain scientific manner that I would not necessarily write in if I was a historian or my content was more a literature based ... So, it's learning the best ways to write about and to think about literacy in your content ..." Principal F described disciplinary literacy, "And then disciplinary literacy, in my mind, would be learning how to read well in the content area. ... breaking down charts and graphs in science." Four principals used the discipline of science as they described reading and writing in disciplinary literacy.

As leaders, principals valued literacy in all disciplines and understood the limitations placed on leading multiple disciplines. In the words of Principal E, "from a leadership role — from the principal role — I don't think that you need to be an expert [on content], because I am not." Principal E recognized that it was impossible to know all the disciplines intimately. To delve deeper, Principal E said, "But you do need to have an understanding around the importance of [literacy] and how you address it, how you deal with it by individual student, by groups of students and then systematically as a school." Principal C further described leading literacy as follows: "as a principal walking into classrooms, looking at what teachers are doing, I have to

have some minimal standard, or minimal knowledge — content knowledge — with regard to understanding some of the strategies and some of the ways that a math teacher, a history teacher, a science teacher, can utilize strategies in their content area to get ideas across to kids and to help kids express ideas in that manner." Without knowing all the state standards in each content area, Principal C leaned on the ability to see literacy strategies that supported content learning. Principal E echoed, "[W]hen I think about just the intricacies of supporting students with reading and writing, I quickly learned that it is really complex but really important." This complexity required staff to have not only a passion for their subject area but also an understanding of what literacy looks like and sounds like (discourse) in their content.

Principals noted the important roles that teachers play in supporting disciplinary literacy regardless of the grade level. The complexity extends to all the disciplines, as Principal G explains, "But it [disciplinary literacy] also, to me, implies that there is somebody at the head of that classroom that understands, that is the expert, and understands the importance of that literacy." Their reflections on disciplinary literacy reiterate the complicated nature of teaching practices grounded in literacy and the urgency for all subject area teachers to understand their role in supporting students in literacy.

Demonstrate Why Change Is Needed

Sinek's framework can explain how leaders in this study made a case for instructional change. In education, principals must demonstrate there is a need for change. Principals described the need to look at their school and community first to get a sense of where the current instructional focus lay and the data that supported it. Through "see[ing] the system that produces the current outcomes," principals recognized the complexity of moving a belief in and practice of disciplinary literacy through a secondary building (Bryk et al., 2015, p. 57). Principals built a

need for change by looking at data including from state tests, district benchmarking, engagement surveys, and attendance; conducting classroom visits or walkthroughs; and having conversations with staff and students to assess the current state of disciplinary literacy in their buildings. The intentional search to understand the current state of literacy aided principals to build a case for instructional change. Although the exact actions for demonstrate why change was needed differed, all principals noted that creating a reason for the change was critical to making the change.

Principal G built urgency by looking at the Northeastern school district data, which showed performance gaps between White students and Black, Latinx students, language learners, and students with disabilities. Principal G asked teachers a tough question, "[D]o you believe what the data tells you about the results of being literate in your discipline?" Sharing disaggregated data that displayed achievement gaps within subgroups created transparency and a vision for why all teachers needed to focus on literacy within their discipline. Principal G's data sharing illuminated the disparities in student success across the system. The requirement for change then became equity driven — disciplinary literacy for all.

Principal C also discussed data points to see what was happening in the building. Those data points could be state or national assessments and included classroom observations. "I think you have to be transparent with everyone about the data that you see," Principal C stated. This transparency helped to build the why by spurring conversations among the faculty. Literacy then became owned by all staff in the building, not one or two disciplines.

Principals A and B also used data points that included standardized test scores, attendance, and observations to help teachers and administrators see and understand the current state of student literacy. Principal A had initially found that during observational rounds,

members of the administrative team were using different observation points to determine student engagement. So the administrative team could not collect clear data on engagement because they had different "looks fors." These data drove the administrative team to establish a clear definition of engagement and standard "look fors." Principal A: "So, we have our seven standards of engagement. We came up with those as an instructional council." The data drove the administrative team to clearly define a term so critical to their school improvement. The subsequent classroom observational data was the impetus for change.

Principal B's team learned to look beyond the standardized testing data to observational data. Teachers and administrators could read the data — "they understand and they really do break down the data and look at things at what kids need to know." Rather than being content with success data, Principal B posed the question, "Do you know *why* kids are getting it?" That question spurred conversations about disciplinary literacy strategies. Teachers did not know why some students were being successful and the disciplinary strategies that were used to help them. As a result, those practices could not be used in other disciplines or scaled throughout the school. Beyond the numeric data, observational data was essential to improvement.

Make A Clear Plan

Irvin et al. (2008) describe designing a literacy plan as "essential for school leadership who are serious about addressing the literacy and learning needs of their students" (p. 118). Sinek would refer to the literacy plan as the "how" or those essential actions to build on the why. With disciplinary literacy at the heart of their school improvement plans, principals in this study found a balance between plans that could be responsive to teachers' needs, either through more professional learning or time to plan for literacy and staying true to the focus on disciplinary

literacy. As school staff and district priorities fluctuate, principals noted the need to link literacy to other priorities or initiatives that take life in a changing school district.

Principals talked about "how" building a culture of disciplinary literacy required a multiyear literacy plan. Principals D and F explained literacy plans, strategically outlining how to change instructional practice over several years. During this time, teachers build their understanding in research and concrete literacy practices in each discipline. "And so it's not a one-year process, it's usually a three-year process to get the level of excitement to other teachers," said Principal D. This multiyear shift of instructional practice requires building capacity in school leaders — both teacher and administrative. Principal F shared a 5-year plan that utilized every opportunity for professional development (beginning of the year meetings, half days, collaborative learning team and faculty meetings) focused literacy. Shifting teacher practice was a slow and thoughtful process.

Principals expressed the complexity of spreading literacy and why it required a clear plan. Once a principal understood the current state of literacy, it was important that he or she provided the time and space for teachers to engage with research and learning new strategies in a low-stakes environment. Principal C noted that "The year one goal really was to get people familiar with some of the [literacy] strategies." Using the strategies was not linked to end of the year testing or teacher evaluation because Principals C believed teachers needed the space to learn without fear of failure. Principal G explained balancing patience and providing teachers with time to learn new pedagogical approaches with a deep need to help students. "You know the teachers would say, 'we're going too fast' and I'd say, 'this is me standing on the brakes. Like I am standing on the brakes trying to go slow.'" Principal G was not alone; shift teaching practices

takes time and learning in a supportive environment. The principal perspective is more global than a teacher and although the pace might need to be adjusted, the vision must be clear.

Principals themselves need to learn with teachers and from each other too. Through networking opportunities, principals shared the success and missteps in leading literacy. Principal H explained learning from other schools, “As we heard from other schools who are far more demonstrative, like ‘thou shalt do this,’ we said, ‘Okay, we need to make sure that we’re being real clear about what we want the staff to try.’ ” Learning from peers helped Principal H refine the school’s literacy plan. Mapping out a multiyear plan for instruction shifts helped principals stay focused on literacy.

Link the Initiatives

Another part of establishing Sinek’s “how” involved linking school and district initiatives to literacy. Principals A, B, and F shared that staying focused on literacy with the pull of other district priorities was difficult. “We have three big areas of focus here,” explained Principal A. “It’s building engagement, building unity, and building capacity, like growth. And that’s it; if it doesn’t fit there, it doesn’t fit here.” Principal A described an activity that falls outside of those priorities as “a false start. We will try it [new idea] and we will forget about it because it doesn’t align with the other work that we are doing.” Staff needed to hear a consistent message, from multiple sources, to internalize the importance of disciplinary literacy.

Repeating a common message was used by other leaders. Principal F explained, “I just had like a few graphics that I would always come back to, and back to, and back to, and back to, and that’s kind of how we did it [stayed focused].” The responsibility to keep the message consistent and provide stability for the staff lowered anxiety. Principal F fostered calm with a “one-pager” or quick snapshot that focused on all the school priorities linked to literacy. When

there was a question about how a new district initiative or idea fit in, Principal F referred to the one-pager, with literacy — reading, writing, thinking, and discussing — at the core of all instruction. Other strategies principals cited for a consistent message include: a graphic with all the priorities listed, a literacy success story shared at faculty meetings or in grade level team meetings, and a specific area of literacy (increasing reading, writing, thinking, and discussing) as a focus in the school improvement plan. Principals noted the frustrating tug and pull from the latest educational trend and the importance for leaders to stay focused on every teacher being a teacher of literacy.

Principals must set the building priorities and stay focused. For principals in this study, it meant linking the district priorities to disciplinary literacy as the foundation for instruction. Heller and Greenleaf note that being competent in academic subject "requires more than just applying the same old skills and comprehension strategies to new kinds of texts. It requires skills and knowledge reasoning processes that are specific to particular disciplines" (2007, p. 10). If the principal knows this, he or she can stay the course and keep the staff focused on the main component — student access to high quality literacy instruction. Redding and Viano addressed "focus" in a discussion on difference minimizing (2018). When designing innovation or a change of practice, principals in this study aligned the change to the "school's local context … [and] reduced the burden associated with adopting a new program" (Redding & Viano, 2018, p. 16). Principals who established a focus had the ability to stay with the identified priority as they built the culture of disciplinary literacy.

Distribute Leadership

Another essential action or "how" is that a principal alone cannot change the culture. Principals need to know enough about disciplinary literacy to support embedding practices in the

classroom with the help of school leaders – teachers and other administrators Principals must get key stakeholders invested in the idea of disciplinary literacy in order to spread the message and urgency of literacy embedded instruction. Leaders with and without defined titles serve as conduits for moving disciplinary literacy through a building. Redding & Viano (2018) found when teachers and leaders have a role in designing change, they tend to be more invested.

Principals discussed various leadership structures that existed in their schools that supported the spread of disciplinary literacy. All the principals interviewed had an administrative team made up minimally of assistant principals, director of student services, and school-based technology specialist. Some schools had additional staffing to include director of student activities, instructional coach, assessment coach, and a reading teacher. This team was tasked to create short and long-term goals; address school-wide issues; ensure that school district strategic goals are the essential components in school goals; and maintain safety and security in the school. Principal C explained, “And my administrators participated in that [professional learning] as well, because I wanted both teachers and administrators, obviously working together with a specific goal and a specific vision in mind.” Principal D noted a shared understanding “So, the first thing that you have to do is you have to have your administrators in it [professional learning]. You have to have the ones who lead each of the cores to understand it [disciplinary literacy], to believe in it, to then start bringing it to their leaders.” Members who supervised groups of teachers needed to understand literacy in the disciplines to help teachers understand the urgency and ultimately better support students.

Principals utilized other leadership structures such as an instructional council or instructional leadership team and collaborative learning teams. Principal D explained, “It’s starting with administrators, the department chairs, and then your team leads or your leaders in

your building." Principal D saw the progression of learning trickle down through multiple leadership structures. Building the administrative team's capacity in literacy, as Principal D explained, is critical because those leaders can then move to other leadership structures within the school such as department chairs and master teachers to act as models of best practice. By building capacity in various leaders, the principal was not the only person talking about disciplinary literacy and looking for use of strategies in classrooms.

Most notable is that all principals in the study led schools that had a literacy team made up of teachers and administrators who engaged in professional learning (in-county centralized, out-of-county, and in school) on disciplinary literacy, determined current state of literacy and what professional learning needs to occur to support school literacy goals, planned professional learning, and led celebration on school literacy success. Principal H shared, "our main resource was the time and the planning of the literacy team and their ability." The literacy team at Principal H's school provided a model of practice, teachers in the field took a risk to do things differently and include disciplinary literacy practices in their classrooms. Principal H's literacy team members led professional learning, opened their classrooms, and showed a willingness to engage their colleagues in best practices.

Principals in this study utilized a number of leadership structures in their building that had not been fleshed out by the literature. Whereas the literature looked at literacy teams, instructional coaches, and administrators, principals in the study noted collaborative team leaders, interdisciplinary teams, and instructional councils (made up of department leaders) as other groups who needed to learn about literacy and share a consistent message. This ensured the message of literacy was not only coming from administrators who did not teach students but also teacher leaders who were in classrooms everyday trying literacy strategies. Staffing models in

the Northeastern School District did not include an instructional coach at each school, so principals leveraged different members of staff to lead literacy.

Provide Targeted Professional Development

All principals discussed professional learning to increase knowledge on current best teaching practices in disciplinary literacy. Research shows the need to shift beliefs on disciplinary literacy to include a focus on pedagogical practices balanced with content (Colwell, 2016; Mac Mahon, 2013; Scott et al., 2018). Five of the eight principals specifically noted the need for small group learning through collaborative learning teams. Principals A and E discussed early misfires in professional development planning. Principal A said, "And I also think that when we look at how we've developed our PD [professional development] over time, the whole school PD [professional development] for literacy, we've done that. I don't recommend that." Although the content was strong, the message could be lost in the large setting. Smaller more targeted professional learning for the content areas resonated with teachers. Gilrane et al. (2008) found that teacher choice and voice in professional development yielded a greater transfer of learning from professional development to changing teacher practice.

Principal E first tried personalizing professional learning, "I will tell you, I failed miserably my first year because I made professional development too individualized, right. … every teacher had an individualized whatever." In an effort to meet every learner's need, the system for monitoring professional learning became unmanageable for the administrative team. Principal E continued, "The next year I overcorrected and said we are going to do it entirely as a school. That didn't work either. ... rolling out professional development through the [collaborative] teams as opposed to schoolwide has been a game changer for us."

Principal C introduced literacy through curriculum teams. “[The] school district started literacy institutes a couple years ago for secondary; I participated myself in the first two years and I think it, in some respects it reenergized me.” Principal C and the literacy team brought back the ideas to their school. To scale this, Principals C, “ g[a]ve teachers time in groups within the school day, to be able to sit down and talk about some of the strategies that we were working on and figure out some intentional ways to utilize some of that [new learning from professional development].” Allowing teachers time to plan in curriculum or collaborative teams for literacy spurred on the use of literacy. Principal E shared that teams bring the theory to action, “What’s the one thing that they [teachers] are going to work on to improve their practice? And looking at it from their team’s perspective, what are some strengths and areas of improvement of their teams?” Having all the Algebra I or English 7 teachers try a strategy or literacy practice could create a greater impact than just one teacher working in isolation. Translating this work into a plan-do-study-act cycle (Bryk et al., 2015, p. 121) in collaborative team meetings provides clear data on the impact of the new strategy or teaching move. If teachers plan high-leverage teaching moves grounded in literacy together, they find collective success.

Professional learning was an identified driver in the research to promote secondary literacy in middle and high schools. Bain (2012) and Colwell (2013) identified that teacher preparation programs lacked robust coursework in literacy. If teachers are not receiving instruction on disciplinary literacy in preparation programs, the responsibility falls on the school districts to help teachers acquire the competency. Furthermore, the varied state standards outside the Common Core leave much up to the individual teacher to discern high yield literacy strategies to use instructionally (Common core state standards for mathematics, 2018; English language arts standards, 2019; Texas Education Agency, 2017; Virginia Department of

Education, 2018). This wide variation in teacher preparation and state guidance leaves school districts and principals to guide disciplinary literacy work at the secondary level.

Utilize Resources

Resources as defined by the principals in this study included people, time, and money. Principals looked at existing leadership structures and people to move literacy through their building; no principal hired additional staff to support disciplinary literacy nor were they provided funds specifically earmarked for literacy. Principals A, C, D, and F cited the centrally provided professional learning on literacy as the impetus for the discussion on literacy in their buildings. As Principals D mentioned, "I mean, I think we're fortunate we have a county that, you know, is big enough that we have the training inside our own county." Principal D did not feel money was the key resource, rather people were.

In *Visible Learning for Literacy*, Fisher, Frey, and Hattie (2016) used Hattie's database of 1,200 metanalyses to review the literature on literacy. *Visible Learning for Literacy* details the effect size of research-based literacy teaching strategies (pp. 169-173). If teachers are to grow and gain credibility, they must be provided with models of sound teacher practices as noted by research. Principals in this study provided release time for classroom visits or planning for literacy with successful teachers in their building, thus helping improve credibility. Both people and time were valuable resources that principals named.

Hiring a staff of literacy leaders was important to the principals in this study. Principal B noted, "as a principal, I want to make sure I hire the best people to do this [literacy]." Principals A, D, and E also cited hiring as a key function of changing instruction to focus on disciplinary literacy. New staff hired needed to have knowledge of disciplinary literacy and a clear understanding of their role as a disciplinary literacy expert in the classroom. Principals explained

how they reviewed resumes and crafted interview questions and scenarios to elicit responses from interview candidates that demonstrated knowledge of disciplinary literacy.

Discussion

Significant research has been focused on disciplinary literacy to establish the need for teachers to use disciplinary literacy strategies to improve student learning and achievement. Variation in instructional practices causes great inequities in the quality of education for students. This study, rather, focuses on the principal's role as the literacy leader in a secondary building. To ensure high quality literacy-embedded across all the disciplines, a principal must take up the cause and promote disciplinary literacy.

The essential actions for principals detail how others might help their teachers place literacy at the center of instruction and build a culture of disciplinary literacy. First, principals need to demonstrate why change is needed. This can involve staff looking at data and conducting class observation. Qualitative and quantitative data collected presents a picture of the current state of literacy. It makes clear the inconsistencies in instructional practices and inequities in student achievement.

Next, the leadership structures that exist in the school help to distribute the leadership of literacy to other school-based leaders. Administrators, department chairs, and team leaders in the buildings can establish disciplinary literacy as a core tenet of quality education. Once a shared understanding is created, principals craft a literacy plan with instructional leaders (administrative team, department chairs, team leaders). The 3- to 5-year plans capture the school and district priorities and link them to literacy goals. The plan includes professional learning for teachers and a review of school data to build a sense of urgency. It is helpful to have a one-page document or

graphic that places literacy at the center of the school's work. To keep the school moving forward on the literacy plan, principals reference the one-page document, graphic, or short literacy plan to keep the focus on literacy when outside distractors emerge.

As noted by researchers and by the principals in this study, it is necessary for leaders to learn alongside their teachers to have a shared understanding of disciplinary literacy in secondary schools. Principal knowledge of disciplinary literacy extends to understanding the uniqueness of literacy in each discipline not the specifics of each discipline. Content area teachers need to be the experts in the classroom, not the principal. Also, when resources are tight, principals utilize the staff in their buildings to share authentic examples of literacy in action — colleagues learning from each other rather than from an outside source. Sharing and learning can occur on professional development days, and at team and staff meetings. As new staff are hired, they should have a base understanding of literacy and disciplinary literacy to support the school mission. Principals who take these steps will see success in embedding literacy in their secondary buildings.

Research has soundly established that teachers must embed disciplinary literacy in each class. Principal D explains a key misconception that is associated with literacy, "I think everybody just considers it [literacy] to be the English teacher's responsibility, and it is not. It is everybody's responsibility to teach kids how to read in different areas." In order for every teacher to take on the role of a literacy teacher, they must understand the uniqueness of navigating their own discipline and be prepared to teach students how to read, write, think, and discuss. The explicit instruction of literacy in each discipline by the experts in the classroom, the teacher, opens opportunities and closes learning gaps. Only then will students become members

of the teacher's discourse community and see success in navigating the demands of learning across contents.

This study was conducted in a school district that highly valued K-12 literacy and disciplinary literacy. Significant district funds had been allocated to provide central professional learning. Within the district, only principals who have successfully led communities that embrace disciplinary literacy were selected. Given the small pool of individuals, generalizing the result in districts that have not prioritized literacy might be difficult.

Conclusion

The findings in this study provide a set of considerations that other school leaders can use as they seek to make instructional change. If a principal believes that literacy is the foundation for all instruction, he or she must prioritize the type of instruction that lends itself to students engaging in reading, writing, thinking, and discussing each day. The actions noted by principals as key to building a culture of disciplinary literacy were demonstrate why change is needed, recognize that leading literacy requires a plan, link the district priorities to disciplinary literacy, distribute leadership, provide targeted professional development, and utilize established resources. With teachers and leaders learning about disciplinary literacy together, schools can shift to classroom practices to be student-centered and improve student outcomes. Schools that allow for authentic learning that addresses the demands of each discipline and celebrates student success in each discipline, are those who deeply hold a culture of disciplinary literacy.

Chapter 5

Leading Literacy Leaders - L^3

Practitioners Journal

As school leaders balance short- and long-term planning, day-to-day operational challenges, and community relations, the time and space to reflect on culture seems elusive. Culture, though, defines the success of each learner — staff and students — in the building. A culture embodies the social values, beliefs, language, and symbols of a people (Francois, 2014; Davis, 2008; Moje 2015). When secondary school principals build a culture of disciplinary literacy in their buildings, staff feel empowered to honor unique disciplines and students become members of the discourse communities (Fang, 2012). High student engagement and student ownership of their learning results from this type of culture (Irvin, Meltzer, & Dukes, 2007).

During a day, students move from class to class encountering discourse communities with skill sets that become more distinct as they matriculate through school (Spires et al, 2018). Research on literacy establishes: the uniqueness of literacy in each discipline (Bain, 2012; Moje, 2015; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008, 2012), the need for students to receive explicit instruction in literacy in each discipline (Fang, 2012; Lent, 2016; McConachie & Petrosky, 2010), and the school principal's role as a literacy leader (Francois, 2014; Irvin et al., 2007; Nelson, 2014). In addition to the complexity of literacy, each participant in a learning community brings unique skills, experiences, strengths, and challenges to a middle or high school. As the literacy leaders in buildings, principals face the difficult task of knowing enough about disciplinary literacy to build a culture of disciplinary literacy that honors all the content area discourse communities.

A high bar is set to build a culture of disciplinary literacy in secondary schools. Although teachers are hired to be experts in the content areas, research indicates that few teachers feel prepared to model the reading, writing, thinking, and discussing techniques of their disciplines (Bain, 2012; Gillespie et al., 2013). Moreover, university requirements for literacy learning in preservice programs vary greatly (Levine, 2006; Paul 2018; Scott et al., 2018). Although research has established the need for disciplinary literacy in secondary schools, there was a gap in the literature on essential actions that a principal might take to build a culture of disciplinary literacy. Through interviews with middle and high school principals, I found recurring themes as they led literacy leaders. Principals discussed leading disciplinary literacy through demonstrate why change is needed, recognize that leading literacy requires a plan, link the district priorities to disciplinary literacy, distribute leadership, provide targeted professional development, and utilize established resources.

Demonstrate Why Change Is Needed – *Identify the urgency for change*

Simon Sinek posits that building a "why" or compelling reason when trying to sell a product is critical to gain customers' interest (2010). Principals who seek to build a culture in their schools where students are reading, writing, thinking, and discussing in each discipline need to have compelling reasons to shift current practices. These principal change-makers dig into achievement and engagement data, conduct classroom visits, and have conversations with staff and students about learning. Activities like these help the principals "see the system that produces the current outcomes" (Bryk et al., 2015, p. 57). Before a leader can make change, he or she must have a sense of the current conditions that exist beyond the numbers on standardized test scores.

A Clear Plan – *Embrace a multiyear plan to shift teaching practices*

Spreading disciplinary literacy through a building requires a complex plan. Once a principal understands the current state of literacy, he or she must provide the time and space for teachers to engage with research and learning new strategies in a low-stakes environment. Principals, themselves need to learn with teachers and from each other too. Through networking opportunities, principals can share the success and missteps in leading literacy. Irvin et al. described designing a literacy plan as "essential for school leadership who are serious about addressing the literacy and learning needs of their students" (2008, p. 118). With disciplinary literacy at the heart of their school improvement plans, principals find a balance between plans that respond to teachers' needs either through more professional learning or time to plan for literacy *and* staying true to the focus on disciplinary literacy. As school staff and district priorities fluctuate, principals need to link literacy to other priorities or initiatives that take life in a changing school district.

Link the Initiatives – *Literacy cannot be another thing; it is the thing*

Principals must stay focused on literacy with the pull of other district priorities. Staff needed to hear a consistent message, from multiple sources, to internalize the importance of disciplinary literacy. Strategies for maintaining a consistent message included a one-pager that visualized all the priorities, a graphic with all the priorities listed, literacy successes shared at faculty meetings or in grade-level team meetings, and literacy as a focus in the school improvement plan. There will always be the frustrating tug and pull from the latest educational trend, so it is important for leaders to stay focused on every teacher being a teacher of literacy.

Distribute Leadership – *Leverage administrators and strong teachers to move literacy through a building*

A principal alone cannot change the culture. The balcony view of a principal is not one that corrects every line of an actor rather views the play in its entirety. Principals must get key stakeholders invested in the idea of disciplinary literacy in order to spread the message and urgency of literacy embedded instruction. Building the administrative team's capacity in literacy is critical because those leaders can then move to other leadership structures within the school such as department chairs and master teachers to act as models of best practice.

Provide Targeted Professional Development – *Get the people the information that connects to their context*

Principals must provide differentiated professional learning to increase knowledge on current best teaching practices in disciplinary literacy. Sharing foundational understanding was important for all staff and large sessions are sufficient for building working knowledge. As learning continues, though, principals should consider smaller, more targeted professional learning for the content areas. Teachers want to know high leverage literacy strategies for their specific disciplines. Moreover, using master teachers in the building to demonstrate best practices builds a community of trust.

Utilize Resources – *People, time and strategic hiring bolster a culture of literacy*

Resources included people, time, and money. In public schools funding is always a problem. So principals need to look at existing structures to move literacy through their building. Principals should use teacher leaders to provide professional development in small and large group professional learning. Offering teachers release time to visit other classrooms provides an opportunity to see literacy strategies in action. Most importantly, all new staff hired need to have

knowledge of disciplinary literacy and a clear understanding of their role as a disciplinary literacy expert in their classrooms.

If a principal believes that literacy is the foundation for all instruction, he or she must prioritize the type of instruction that lends itself to students engaging in reading, writing, thinking, and discussing each day in each class. Essential actions for building a culture of disciplinary literacy include demonstrate why change is needed, recognize that leading literacy requires a plan, link the district priorities to disciplinary literacy, distribute leadership, provide targeted professional development, and utilize established resources. With teachers and leaders learning about disciplinary literacy together, schools can shift classroom practices to be student-centered and improve student outcomes. Schools that allow for authentic learning that address the demands of each discipline and celebrate student success in each discipline are those who truly hold a culture of disciplinary literacy.

Chapter 6

Contextualizing the Findings

Significant research on literacy and disciplinary literacy has established the need for teachers to use disciplinary literacy strategies to improve student learning and achievement (Athanases & Oliveira, 2014; Biancarosa, 2012; Collins & Ferri, 2016; Harmon et al., 2016). Variation in instructional practice causes great inequities in education for students. To ensure high quality literacy embedded across all the disciplines, a principal must take up the cause and promote disciplinary literacy (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016; Francois, 2014; Irvin & Dukes, 2007; Konza & Michael, 2011; Witte et al., 2010). This study focused on the principal's role as the literacy leader in a secondary building.

First, principals needed to demonstrate why change is needed or what Sinek calls "the why." The why for disciplinary literacy in school is defined by Gabriel and Wenz as being able to "increase students' access to deep content knowledge that engages them in school and prepares them for life after graduation" (2017). Principals built the urgency through looking at data, conducting observation, and clearly defining terms to assess the current state of literacy in their buildings. What they found and shared with teachers showed vast gaps in student engagement and academic success. Their detailed explanations and the steps they took provided insight into the type of leadership required to build a culture of disciplinary literacy — one that honors and supports students reading, writing, thinking, and discussing as professionals in the fields. Not only did the principals look at the current state of literacy, they were active participants in making pedagogical change.

Next, the principals used the leadership structures that existed in the school to distribute the leadership of literacy to other school-based leaders. Administrators, department chairs, and team leaders in the buildings established disciplinary literacy as a core tenet of quality education. Charner-Laird, Ippolito, and Dobbs called this "bottom-up and context-specific changes" (2016, p. 981). Principals in this study utilized a number of leadership structures in their building that had not been fully investigated by the literature. Whereas the literature looked at literacy teams, instructional coaches, and administrators, principals in the study noted collaborative teams, interdisciplinary teams, and instructional councils (made up of department leaders) as other groups who needed to learn about literacy and share a consistent message. Staffing models in the study school district did not include an instructional coach at each school, so principals leveraged different staff members to lead literacy.

Once a shared understanding was created, these principals crafted a literacy plan with instructional leaders (administrative team, department chairs, team leaders). The 3- to 5-year plans captured the school and district priorities and linked them to literacy. The plan included professional learning for teachers and a review of school data to build a sense of urgency. Previous research in the field noted the importance of a well-documented, multiyear literacy plan (Fountas & Pinnell, 2018; Francois, 2014, & McConachie & Petrosky, 2010). Although the literature did not specifically address the marketing of literacy, principals in this study found it helpful to have a one-page document or graphic that placed literacy at the center of the school's work. To keep the school moving forward on the literacy plan, principals referenced the one-page document, graphic, or short literacy plan to keep the focus on literacy when outside distractors emerged.

As noted by prior research (Irvin et al., 2007) and these principals, it was necessary for leaders to learn alongside their teachers to have a shared understanding of disciplinary literacy in secondary schools. Principal understanding of disciplinary literacy, though, extended to an awareness of the uniqueness of literacy in each discipline not the specifics of each discipline. Content areas teachers needed to be the experts in the classroom. Pedagogical shifts for teachers took time, required leadership beyond the principals, and involved robust professional learning.

Resources in public education are often at a premium. When resources were tight, principals utilized the staff in their buildings to share authentic examples of literacy in action — colleagues learning from each other rather than from an outside source. Sharing and learning occurred on professional development days, during team and staff meetings. Research shows that teachers can make pedagogical shifts with mentoring and contextualization (Bain, 2016; Paul 2018). Principals in this study, though, detailed the need for whole school learning to ground the staff in common vocabulary as well as small group professional learning in each of the disciplines. As new staff were hired, principals included interview questions that asked about literacy because a baseline understanding of literacy and disciplinary literacy was necessary to support the school mission.

Principals, who took these steps, saw success in embedding literacy in their secondary buildings and ultimately, student success. In order for every teacher to take on the role of a disciplinary literacy teacher, they must understand the uniqueness of navigating their own discipline and be prepared to teach students how to read, write, think, and discuss within their field. The explicit instruction of literacy in each discipline by the experts in the classroom, the teachers, opens opportunities and closes learning gaps. Only then will students become members

of the teacher's discourse community and see success in navigating the demands of learning across contents. Successful schools are those with a culture of disciplinary literacy.

Recommendations for Further Research

My study on principal leadership in building a culture of disciplinary literacy yielded essential actions for other leaders to follow. Additional research is needed in the leadership of disciplinary literacy, particularly in the areas of sustainability and measuring student success. This study does not address how to sustain a culture of literacy over time and prepare for staff turnover. One investigation might be if schools with a culture of disciplinary literacy have a better staff retention rates. Other areas of investigation might include how principals measure the impact of a culture of disciplinary literacy on student success. A study on the impact of disciplinary literacy might yield connections between schools with cultures of disciplinary literacy and student success on national normed tests. Student perspectives were not address in this study either. I wonder how student perception on their own disciplinary literacy growth would impacting their success. A greater connection between disciplinary literacy and student success would strengthen the need for principals to champion disciplinary literacy.

Personal Reflections

Completing a dissertation is a messy process. Narrowing the research question(s) or shifting the topic, culling, and synthesizing research, determining methodology, conducting a study and analyzing the data might seem linear to an outsider. To the student, though, it is a series of rabbit holes into related, tangential, and unlinked topics. As the months collect, the student begins to see the work form into something vaguely coherent and the prospect of completion increases with time on task. With an end goal of producing something of value for

others to use, the only logical part of the nonlinear process was to embed two articles into the body of the dissertation.

The embedded articles provided me an opportunity to vary the voice and structure to three distinct audiences. The full dissertation was intended for those who sat on the committee and others who were either intrigued enough to read the novella length document or felt the familial obligation to read it. Crafting an article for a scholarly publication both terrified and excited me as the field of literacy is deep with scholars. Potentially adding to a body of useful information for principals appealed to the practitioner in me as an educator and member of leadership and curricular organizations. As we ask our secondary students to know their audience, I was forced to attend to, not only content, but also style and register.

Lessons Learned

Read

Trite as it might sound, reading widely and deeply is important. Becoming familiar not only with the research, but also the suggestions for further studies informed potential research areas that shaped my topic. Each study I read identified leaders as part of literacy. I found a hole that existed in the research. Nothing I read looked at *several* middle and high school principals and asked them about their journeys as literacy leaders. It was clear that if I interviewed multiple successful principal literacy leaders, I could look for common themes that aided these principals in building a culture of disciplinary literacy in their respective buildings.

Focus

My first attempt at a topic failed; it was an unwieldy, large and complex topic that might have stopped me from getting past chapter 2. My committee helped me to shift my topic to something that was manageable and could inform current principal practice. That also required me to

rethink the type of study — narrowing it between phenomenology and grounded theory. The setback of several months slowed me down and that was okay in the long game. The murky process became clear after my first interview. There, after the first interview, I sat in my car and realized that I *might just* finish my dissertation, and someone *might just* read it.

Plan to Adjust

Timelines are important, but do not become obsessed with them. Although I had a draft timeline, life happened, and I needed to treat myself and my research with the respect and kindness that both deserved. Not many worthwhile things in life are easy; this dissertation proved to be difficult and worthwhile. I needed to listen to feedback from my committee, find space and time to think deeply, and put fingers to keyboard to write. The final product is more than I thought it could be because I forged ahead taking necessary pauses when required.

Dr. Price told our cohort that through writing a dissertation we would know a lot about a very narrow topic. He was right, sort of. My understanding of the leadership of disciplinary literacy is deep as a result of writing my dissertation and I knew that would be the case. What I did not expect to happen was a greater respect for the research process and those who research and publish — for academia. Perhaps this process would get easier with subsequent studies. For now, though, I am quite content with completing my dissertation.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Evidence of a Culture of Disciplinary Literacy

Evidence	Person Posting	Date
Literacy goals in school improvement and innovation plans (SIIP)		
Social media postings of teachers engaging students in reading, writing, and discussing topics within the disciplines		
Social media or school postings of content area author or experts' visits		
Parent Teacher Association sponsorship of evening events for parent learning on literacy		
Principal letters encouraging parents to read with their students on different topics prior to science fair or during school breaks		
Social media posting of principal participation in classroom discussions, labs, or projects		
Principal and teacher use of the words "literacy" or "disciplinary literacy" in their social media posts		

Common language about disciplinary literacy used in social media posts from principal and teachers within the same building

School posting of summer reading challenges and goals

Social media documentation of school success in building readers and writers

School structures that allow time for students to read — Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) days

Social media and website postings highlighting student work in the disciplines

Principal and teacher postings of their literacy habits

Other

Appendix B

Email Inviting Principals to Participate in the Study

Dear (insert principal name):

My name is Paige Whitlock and I am currently a doctoral student at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. I kindly request your participation in a study titled: Principal Leadership in Building a Culture of Disciplinary Literacy. The intention of my study is to develop a theory of action for principals as they look to bolster the culture of disciplinary literacy in their schools. This study involves principals who have successfully spread literacy in their buildings and are in the developing or sustaining levels of literacy in the areas of leadership and culture of literacy as defined in the literacy measurement tool.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time during the process. This study is anonymous, and you will not need to place your name on any of the documents. Your school will be referred to by "school ___ (letter A-J). Your participation will involve a one-hour long interview, which can be face-to-face or video-conferencing platform — Skype, Google Collaborate, or Zoom and a review of your transcribed responses after the interview. Prior to the interview you will be provided the questions. No preparation for those questions is required other than to preview them. After the interview, you will also be given an opportunity to read the transcript in a process called member checking. During this time, you may choose to elaborate on an answer.

If you have questions about the study, you may call me at 703-862-1946 or email me at whitlockpaige@gmail.com. I have attached the consent form from Virginia Polytechnic Institute

and State University, which describe the assurances you are provided as you participate in this study.

Thank you for considering participation in this study. As we grow the body of research in principal leadership, your input is invaluable.

Sincerely,

Paige Whitlock

Enclosure 3 - attachments

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University Consent

Interview Questions

Appendix C

Interview Questions

Research Question and Subquestions

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1. What is the principal's role in creating and maintaining a culture of disciplinary literacy?
    a. What are principals' understanding and awareness of disciplinary literacy?
    b. How can principals provide meaningful professional learning for their staff?
    c. What factors do principals see as the most important to lead a culture of disciplinary literacy in their buildings?

Interview Question	Relates to Research Question	Answer
Tell me about your background in education.	1 a.	
Could you share with me your literacy story?	1a.; 1b.	

How do you define literacy? How do you define disciplinary literacy? ● How would you differentiate disciplinary literacy from literacy? ● Is this distinction important? Why or why not? ● Why is this important to a principal?	1a
What was your process for learning about disciplinary literacy? ● When did this happen? ● How did this happen?	1b.
As a principal, why is knowing about disciplinary literacy important?	1c
How did you begin to get teachers interested in the concept of disciplinary literacy?	1c
What was their response to a discussion of disciplinary literacy? Did this change over time?	1c
What specific actions did you take to spread literacy?	1c
How did you utilize resources to meet the school literacy needs?	1c
What influenced you in making decisions about literacy and suggesting instructional change?	1c
What have been the outcomes of using this action and strategies?	1
What actions can principals take to	

become more proficient leaders of disciplinary literacy?

Appendix D
Email: Thanking Principals for Participation and Notification of Member Checking

Dear (principal):

Thank you, sincerely, for your participation in the Principal Leadership in Building a Culture of Disciplinary Literacy Study. The intention of the study is to develop a theory of action for principals as they look to bolster the culture of disciplinary literacy in their schools. You were one of eight principals who participated. It is only with the help of leaders like you that we can build a body of research in the area of principal leadership for disciplinary literacy. Your interview will be transcribed and coded with the other interviews to identify patterns in actions and dispositions of successful literacy leaders. I anticipate having completed all the interviews by October of 2019.

Once the transcription of your interview is completed, I will send it to you electronically for member checking. If you feel there is something you would like to add at the time, we can schedule a follow up interview. I truly value the time you are committing, and I want your answers to be representative of your experience. Your contributions to this study will help other leaders engage teachers and communities in building cultures of disciplinary literacy at other schools. Upon completion of the data analysis, I will provide you with the findings prior to completion of the dissertation.

Again, thank you for your participation.

Paige E. Whitlock

Appendix E

Memo Template

Memo

Date/Time

Artifact of reflection

Affective disposition

General observations

Wonderings in regard to the process

Concepts emerging

Appendix F

School District Special Consideration

The Northeastern School District's office of research approved the study with the following requirements: voluntary participation

1. Participation in this research study is voluntary for all parties. Data collection from staff requires written informed consent. The Researcher is obligated to maintain evidence of consent for all participants for a period of at least three years after data are collected. Furthermore, at any time during the three-year period, upon request, the Researcher agrees to provide to the school district evidence of consent for any or all study participants.
2. Anonymity of the district, individual schools, and all individual persons participating in this project will be preserved in the reporting of the results. Any disclosure of the name of the district, school, or participants requires written approval from the Superintendent or designee.
3. The Researcher may study site-based leadership on discipline literacy. The Researcher must abide by the following conditions:
    - The Researcher may not collect data at schools during blackout periods reserved for beginning-of-year, testing, and end-of-year activities.
    - The Researcher may recruit the principals of schools named in the research application.
    - Participation includes one 60-minute, in-person interview to be conducted December 2-16, 2019.

- Participants will have the option of reviewing interview notes January 15-29, 2020.

4. The Researcher will share a copy of the final report with the sponsor and office of research.
5. This approval is valid for SY 2019-2020. If the methodology changes during the course of the year, the Researcher must request a Research Modification Form. If the Researcher would like to continue study activities beyond June 2020, the Researcher must reapply using a Division Research Screening Application. The Researcher understands that modification requests and future research requests are subject to the policies and practices in place at the time of the request; Research Screening Committee cannot guarantee continued support or approval for requests to continue or modify this study.
6. The Researcher will follow the procedures approved by the Research Screening Committee. The Researcher will adhere to all school district policies and regulations.
7. In conducting this research, the Researcher will comply with best practices endorsed by professional research and evaluation organizations (i.e., American Evaluation Association, American Educational Research Association, National Council on Measurement in Education, and American Psychological Association), including the involvement of human subjects.
8. The Lead Researcher must sign and return an executed Acknowledgement of Researcher Responsibilities before a decision letter can be issued by ... and may not begin any study activities before receiving the decision letter.
9. The Researcher is authorized to oversee this research study and ensure that all responsibilities listed above are fulfilled.

10. Failure to meet one or more of the responsibilities listed above may result in the immediate termination of research approval for this study. Furthermore, ... reserves the right to void any other current research approvals that Researcher may have and deny, without review, any applications for future research studies.

Appendix G

Leadership Structures within a School

Team	Possible Membership	Purpose
Administrative	● Principal ● Assistant principals ● Director of student services ● Director of student activities ● Instructional coach ● Assessment coach ● Reading teacher ● School-based technology specialist	● Create short and long-term goals ● Address school wide issues ● Ensure school district strategic goals are the essential components in school goals ● Maintain safety and security in the school
Instructional Council or Instructional Leadership Team	● Department chairs ● Principal ● Assistant principal ● Director of student services ● Director of student activities ● Instructional coach ● Assessment coach ● Reading teacher ● School-based technology specialist ● Librarian	● Reflect on how school short and long-term goals impact respective stakeholder groups ● Address school wide instructional issues ● Support professional learning plan ● Build leadership capacity in each department ● Analysis of school and department level data

Collaborative Learning Team	• Teachers of the same course (Algebra 1, English 7, etc.) • Instructional coach • Assessment coach • Principal or Assistant principal supervising the department	• Meet on a regular cadence to discuss instructional plans for students in the course • Create learning materials and assessments for students • Norm student work • Use data to inform next actions for student instruction
Interdisciplinary Team	• Teachers of different courses who teach the same grade level • Instructional coach • Assessment coach • Principal or assistant principal supervising the department	• Meet on a regular cadence to discuss instructional plans for students in grade. • Create opportunities for concepts and skills to be taught across content areas. • Use data to highlight cross-cutting skills with which students struggle.
Literacy Team	• Principal • Assistant principal • Director of student services • Director of student activities • Teacher leaders • Instructional coach • Assessment coach • Reading teacher • School-based technology specialist • Librarian	• Engage in professional learning (centralized, out of county, in school) on disciplinary literacy • Determine current state of literacy and what professional learning needs to occur to support school literacy goals • Plan professional learning • Lead celebration on school literacy success