

THE MIDDLESCENCE PRINCIPAL: PROFESSIONAL GROWTH IN TIMES OF
INCREASED ACCOUNTABILITY

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Doctor of Philosophy

by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

THE MIDDLESCENCE PRINCIPAL: PROFESSIONAL GROWTH IN
TIMES OF INCREASED ACCOUNTABILITY

Presented by Charlotte M. Miller

a candidate for the degree of doctor of philosophy

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my dad, who believed in me from as early as I can remember. As a young child, I remember him instilling in me the importance of education. When many said, “I was doing the best that I could”, you believed in me and pushed me to the next level. Even in your last week of life on earth, you continued to encourage me to persist in accomplishing this life goal. Our frequent telephone calls, discussing the progress of my dissertation, and the push to keep going, will always be treasured. I miss you and mom, especially now, as I am completing this milestone.

In addition, this work is dedicated to my three boys, Kenny, Justin, and Joseph who will always be the in the center of my heart. Your love and encouragement to accomplish this educational dream has been so special to me. My hope is that you find that love of learning and always seek to be the best version of yourself. Always keep God at the center of your life and make family a priority. Take care of your family, Deanne and Beth, and my precious grandchildren, Aubrie, James, and Henry.

To my brothers and sisters, Sandy, Helen, Ralph, and John and your families, this is dedicated to you as well. You have encouraged, and sometimes nagged me, to complete this work.

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ABSTRACT

Middlescence is a term coined for a professional in mid-career and how this can be “a time of burnout or rejuvenation” (Morison, Erickson, & Dychtwald, 2007, p. 1). This qualitative narrative case study explores the lived experiences and perceptions of a highschool principal in mid-career and the challenges that he, as do other public school administrators, face when confronted with increased accountability and student performance demands across the country. Effective school research, leadership and career development provide a theoretical foundation for this study.

Although the study examines the participant’s entire professional experiences, much emphasis has been placed on his mid-career period and the school’s improvement implementation process. Specific focus identifies the signs of burnout and his desire and need for rejuvenation. The story of one identified principal is studied to understand what lead to burnout and the strategies that supported his growth and rejuvenation.

In relation to middlescence, in-depth unstructured interviews allow for an understanding of the lived experiences of this principal and how it relates to career development and professional growth. The principal selected in this study had a historical career change in principal positions every three years during the first part of his career in school administration. What we know about principal retention suggests that school leaders are crucial to the school improvement process and that they must stay in a school a number of consecutive years for the benefits of their leadership to be realized. In addition, emerging research and theory has found that “Principal turnover has *direct* negative effects on student- and school-level achievement, and that the

strongest impact appears immediately after turnover occurs” (Béteille, Kalogrides, Loeb, 2011).

The leader in this rural Missouri school found himself on a trajectory of burnout and feeling the need for rejuvenation. Through this narrative study, the principal, in middlescence, was found to be transformed. Now in his 8th year at the same school, he attributes his stability to the leadership within the district and the professional coaching and informal mentoring that occurred. Critical conversations were held that instilled a sense of urgency to improve. In addition, he participated in the Missouri Professional Learning Communities project. Along with his leadership team, the school implemented this model with fidelity and was recognized within the state for deep implementation. Throughout this process, the participant created a network of support and trusted colleagues that continue his professional learning.

The major finding from this study found the importance of relevant training, consistent coaching, and the mentor relationship, all of equal importance, for the success and growth of the middlescent principal. This research study can be used by other school administrators, district leaders, and preparation institutions to better support administrators in mid-career. Recognition of the signs of burnout will also trigger the guidance necessary to focus the principals toward rejuvenation. Keeping our quality leaders in our schools is important to the continued success in school.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

“Middlecence is a term coined for a professional in mid-career and how this can be a time of burnout or rejuvenation” (Morison, Erickson, & Dychtwald, 2007, p. 1). This qualitative narrative case study explores the lived experiences and perceptions of a high school principal in mid-career and the challenges that he, as other public school administrators, faces when confronted with increased accountability and student performance demands across the country. Effective school research, leadership and career development provide a theoretical foundation for this study. Although the study examines his entire professional experiences, much emphasis has been placed on his mid-career period and the school’s improvement implementation process during this time.

In traditional PK-12 administration, principals are identified by several stages in their development (Day & Bakioglu, 1996; Earley & Weindling, 2007). “The mid-career principal is identified in the establishment stage – and defines an administrator who is often characterized as one having feelings of competence, confidence, and enthusiasm – in essence, being in control. In this stage, principals may feel a sense of complacency verses renewal” (2007, p. 73). In the business world, the word *middlescence* has been coined to describe the mid-career administrator. “Like adolescence, it can be a time of frustration, confusion, and alienation. But it can also be a time of self-discovery, new direction, and fresh beginnings” (Morison, Erickson, & Dychtwald, 2007 p. 1). The federal policy, *No Child Left Behind*, adds additional challenges to mid-career administrators who often feel that they are in control, yet their success is based upon the academic achievements of those under his/her leadership. Yet, few middlescent

administrators are provided the benefit of professional coaching. Given the trimorphic challenges – mid-career (vacillating insecurity/insecurity in professionalism), demands of accountability, and lack of professional coaching, this middlescence stage of administration can be most threatening to an administrator’s career.

This single case study utilizing a narrative methodology examines the lived experiences and perceptions of a high school principal in mid-career bounded within the timeframe of the school’s improvement process. The research will identify how this process impacted his professional growth as a leader and the trajectory of his career. According to Brandell and Varkas (2010), “Narrative research deals with the human experience. A narrative provides links, connections and meaning to human activity” (p.298). This narrative case is chronological in nature. Brandell and Varkas (2010) indicated that narrative research “will allow the researcher to make inferences about causality or about the linkage between events” (p. 298). A constructivist worldview is used as the theoretical perspective in this study.

Constructivist thinking assumes that all humans (a) are naturally and actively engaged in efforts to understand the totality of their experiences in the world, (b) are not able to gain direct access to external realities, and (c) are continually evolving and changing” (Niemeyer, 1993, as cited in Brandell & Varkas, 2010 p. 295).

The administrator for this study is principal, pseudo name, Derrick Chance of a high school that now demonstrates above average and increasing Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) and ACT results. But what were this principal’s barriers, experiences, and challenges in the interim of this turn-around? This school is a part of the Missouri

Professional Learning Communities Project (PLC) and has implemented this structure with fidelity as shown by their evaluation report and their state recognition. The researcher will interview the principal and explore his administrative career historically and specifically hone in on his experience in middlescence through the school's improvement process, and what perpetuated his professional growth and success. Common themes will be identified that describe the essence of this principal during his mid-career and describe the changes that occurred during this period.

The focus of the questions for this qualitative study is what factors might precipitate professional renewal in middlescent principals? What, if any major events influenced and/or supported this principal's growth during the schools improvement process? Were the influences of his personal situation, professional development and/or informal mentoring perceived to impact his leadership skills and development in the midst of his middlescence stage? How did this period of the principal's experience compare to that of his earlier career? The findings from this study will enable administrators, school districts and preparation institutions to understand and determine the needs of middlescent principals, identify signs of burnout and the need for rejuvenation, and apply these successful practices to facilitate high levels of student learning and continuous improvement within schools. This research can support professional growth for leaders in their mid-career as they struggle with increased demands and accountability in schools today?

Problem Statement

Many PK12 principals, due to increased accountability, find themselves in mid-career with a need for rejuvenation. There is a gap in the literature that addresses the

specific needs of mid-career leaders. Novice principals receive assigned mentors, but those in mid-career are thought to not need continued coaching and support because of their years of experience. Literature is indicating a growing number of principal leaving the field, impacting our schools today.

The implementation of curriculum standards, evaluation requirements, and increased assessments are expected in our schools. “Principals are being asked to improve student learning by implementing mandated reforms that have inconsistently proven ineffective in raising student achievement” (DuFour & Mattos, 2013 p. 39). In addition, principals are likely to burnout due to the complex demands of their job. “The principal’s work-world is characterized by overwhelming responsibilities, information perplexity, and emotional anxiety” (Whitaker, 1996, p. 61). In a report entitled, *The High Cost of Principal Turnover*, School Leaders Network (2014) it was found that “twenty five thousand (one quarter of the country’s principals leave their schools each year, leaving millions of children’s lives adversely affected” (p. 1). Further comments suggest that

Funding excellent principal preparation programs that yield highly effective candidates is one solution. However, approaching the problem of ineffective school leadership with focus almost exclusively on principal entry into the profession ignores the problems of ‘churn’ – currently schools lose scores of experienced principals each year, requiring replacements with less effective, novice principals on an average of every three years (2016 p. 1).

Principal induction and mentoring is very common for novice and principal candidates in preparation programs. Little formal mentoring and support is given to principals in their mid-careers, and yet expectations for accountability and school

improvement continues. In addition, high school principals in rural areas tend to be isolated and have few colleagues in which to discuss best practice and other school improvement issues.

Middlesence is a difficult time for leaders and can cause challenges professionally and in their personal lives. It is sometimes difficult for leaders to balance work family in addition to developing their career (Morison, Erickson, & Dychtwald, 2006). The principal selected in this study will be interviewed to determine how he characterizes his past leadership experiences, and what changes occurred throughout the school improvement process during his mid-career. This principal has had an unstable history with changing leadership positions every three years throughout the first half of his career. He is now in his 8th year at his present school district.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

This descriptive narrative research uses components of Leadership Development and Middlesence, which arises from Career Development, to frame the study. A Social Constructivist Theoretical Framework will also encompass this work. Constructivists claim, “All reality, as meaningful reality, is socially constructed” (Crotty, 2013, p. 54). “In social constructivism, individuals seek to understand the world in which they live and work” (Creswell, 2012 p. 24). Creswell continues to explain that the goal of research is to rely on the participants views of the situation. Narrative inquiry will be important to this case to allow the participant to reflect on his experiences and hone in on the particular time during middlesence.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

Much research has been conducted regarding principal leadership practices in past years, but with increasing demands in state and federal mandates, how does a principal in mid-career continue his or her professional growth and maintain a self-described enthusiasm and passion for learning? Many studies have identified reasons for the increasing burnout among school leaders but few have focused on the skills that prevent or rejuvenate principals. According to the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) in their book, *Breaking Ranks*, the authors discuss four themes and ten skills for successful 21st Century School Leaders. “The themes include: educational leadership, resolving complex problems, communications, and developing self and others” (NASSP, 2010 p. 11). Schools look to the principal to guide these improvement efforts and without leadership; schools are challenged (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). The School Leaders’ Network, in their report on *The High Cost of Principal Turnover* “challenges the myth that developing a strong principal pipeline is where America should be focused. CHURN reveals the multitude of significant impacts principal turnover has on schools and school systems” (School Leaders’ Network, 2016).

The purpose of this qualitative narrative case study is to identify the experiences and perceptions of a high school principal in *middlescence* as he develops professionally through the school’s improvement process. Changing districts every three years defines an unstable trajectory for this leader until coming to school E, where he continues to serve. The narrative will analyze his earlier career and identify any common themes toward burnout and the need for rejuvenation. While at his current school, the principal has been informally mentored by the district’s superintendent, has been an active

participant on the district leadership team including other principals in the district, and has participated along with his building leadership team in Missouri's Professional Learning Communities, three-year training program. The high school was awarded "Excellence in Implementation" for this project.

Given the increasing demands for accountability in schools, there is significant need to understand what supports are important for mid-career principals. In order to reduce burnout in these key leaders, "It is important to encourage renewal and help the middlescent obtain more productive and meaningful roles in their careers" (Morison, Erickson, & Dychtwald, 2007 p.1). What growth in leadership skills and self-efficacy resulted during this timeframe of the school improvement process for this high school principal? Knowledge of these factors could be used to reduce principal turnover and possible burnout for these *middlescent* leaders. The findings from this study could be used by policy makers and school leaders as they identify professional development models that support and retain effective leaders. With that in mind, there are two questions framing this study:

Research Questions

1. How does a mid-career principal characterize his leadership and growth throughout the school improvement process?
2. What influences might precipitate professional renewal of middlescent principals?

Gaps in the literature

There is a significant research regarding the key role that administrators play in school improvement efforts (Fullan, 2001; Leithwood & Sun, 2009). However, little research has focused on mid-career leaders and their abilities to impact school reform and

continuous improvement. “Like adolescence, it can be a time of frustration, confusion, and alienation” (Morison, Erickson & Dychtwald, 2007 p.1). If these mid-career principals are neglected, schools struggle.

In addition, there is little research on effective professional development for experienced school leaders. In a study by Public Agenda for Wallace Foundation in 2007, “Principals overall felt that leadership programs in education are out of touch with current realities” (Darling-Hammond, et al, 2007).

Definition of Terms

ACT: Assessment given primarily to high school students to determine college and career readiness.

Burnout: A psychological syndrome in response to chronic stressors associated with an individual’s occupation (Maslach et al., 2001).

Churn- Refers to the turnover of principals in schools and its impact on students and teachers (School Leaders Network report, 2016).

Constructionism – “It is the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and the world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Crotty, 2013).

Continuous School Improvement: Refers to a school that understands improvement is a continual process that unfolds progressively, that does not have a fixed or predetermined end point. The school sets specific targets, monitors the progress, and makes the necessary modifications to increase learning.

Mentoring/ Professional Coaching: The establishment of a personal relationship for the

purpose of professional instruction and guidance.

Middlescence: A business term referring to mid-career employees, ages 35-54.

Missouri Assessment Program (MAP): Assessment tool which measures a school's performance on Missouri's standards. Missouri high school MAP consists of end of course exams in core content areas.

Open Coding: Taking data (e.g., interview transcriptions) and segmenting them into categories of information (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Professional Learning Community (PLC): A structural design of a school in which collaboration exists and the focus is on student learning. The Missouri PLC project began in 2003 and their training supports school improvement efforts within schools.

Self-Efficacy: The individual's belief about what he or she can achieve in a given context (Bandura, 1997).

SMART Goals: Introduced in 1981, this acronym stands for Specific, Measurable, Assignable, Realistic, and Time-based. In other words when you set a goal you make sure it is specific, measurable, assignable, realistic and time based.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized in five chapters. The introduction provides the background, purpose and significance of the study and the research questions. Chapter two is a review of literature related to the study. Themes include middlescence, career development and professional growth, and effective leadership skill related to school improvement. Understanding the characteristics leading to burnout and understanding the need to rejuvenate will be critical to this study. Topics such as professional coaching, networks of support, and PLC strategies are reviewed as a means to reduce burnout and increase

effectiveness of the leader. Chapter three describes the research design and plan for the study. The design is a qualitative narrative case study exploring the lived experience of a mid-career principal bound within the school's improvement process. Chapter four will provide the findings and results collected from the study. It begins with an historical timeline of the Mr. Chance's career, then focus specifically on the principal's mid-career. The participant's trajectory toward burnout, and him sensing the need for rejuvenation, will be explored as the major core finding. Secondary themes emerged that support the major finding and are found to cross-over in both burnout and rejuvenation. Chapter five will serve as a discussion of the conclusions of the research conducted. A model for addressing the needs of middlescent leaders was created that expanded the work of Maslach et al., (2001). This model and the significance of implications for superintendents and leadership preparation programs will be given insight.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The foundation for this study with respect to principal career development is drawn from research in the areas of middleage, career development and professional growth, and effective principal leadership. Because the secondary focus of the study includes Professional Learning Communities (PLC) as a possible strategy to counteract middleage, literature surrounding PLCs serves as a secondary focus is included. Specific research in reference to signs of burnout and rejuvenation will be reviewed. This literature provides support to the primary question this study seeks to address: How does a mid-career principal characterize his leadership and growth throughout the school improvement process, and what influenced his professional growth?

Middleage

Middleage is a term coined in the business world to describe managers in mid-career, ages 35-54. Like adolescence, it can be a time of frustration, confusion, and alienation, but it can also be a time of self-discovery, new direction, and fresh beginnings” (Morison, Erickson, & Dvchtwald (2007 p. 80).

These leaders can become discontent if neglected. These managers continue to stay in their positions because of the need for money. “Their lack of energy, innovation, and focus will impact the success of the company” (Morison, et al., 2007 p. 80). According to the Bloomberg report, “Millions of mid-career men and women are wrestling with middleage – looking for ways to balance work, family, and leisure while hoping to find new meaning in their jobs” (Morison, et al., 2006 p. 79). The school principal in the study is considered in middleage. It will be important to determine how he perceives personal and professional balance.

Saunders (2008) describe the mid-career professional as people who still have and desire productive years ahead of them. In her study from *Culture Work* (2007) many surveyed indicated “they experienced a loss of enthusiasm as well as feeling they were at a plateau in their life” (p.1). Saunders discusses this period, ranging from 35 and 59 years of age, spanning different generations, as a time professional’s sense “the need to take on new positions with greater authority, start families, newly empty nests, caring for aging parents, and the connections between their life values and their professional missions” (p. 1). Her hypothesis found, in this study, that the lack of meeting these needs, will cause burnout and cause movement from the field (Saunders, 2008).

Career Development and Professional Growth

Career development goes beyond professional development in that it looks at the whole person. Career development includes coaching and mentoring and includes clarity of job responsibilities and expectations. It also involves fresh training and development of personal creativity. The training needs to be in-depth education and not short workshops. In order for organizations to invest in mid-career employees, improved listening and inquiry must be the focus to support their commitment and thrive at work (Saunders, 2008). Dychtwald, et al. (2006) asserts “mid-career workers are often ready for a serious dose of training and development. They continue to argue that listening and thinking imaginatively is about creating solutions and creating improved loyalty, productivity, and enthusiasm” (2008, p. 2).

In a study of 305 school heads in England, Bakioglu, Ozcan, and Hacifazlioglu (1993) examined the influence of trust in principals’ mentoring experiences across different career phases. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used. They

suggested that the impact of school change becomes more relevant as the leader's experience increase. They suggest, "Principals pass through five stages of professional socialization: survival, control, stability, educational leadership and professional actualization" (p. 43). Their thought is that 'trust' in mentoring experiences must vary in different career stages. The study identified career phases of the principals as "(1) initiation, (2) development, (3) autonomy phase, and (4) disenchantment" (Bakioglu, 1993, Day & Bakioglu, 1996, as cited in Bakioglu, et al., 2010, p.246). For this narrative study, the principal selected falls into the development and/or autonomy phases. In the development phase, "Principals seemed enthusiastic, seemed to enjoy working, and were more contributing although there were occasional changes in their enthusiasm" (Bakioglu, 1993, Day & Bakioglu, 1996, as cited in Bakioglu, et al. 2010, p.246). In addition, principals felt less pressure and focused on developing the standards for their schools that were aligned with their vision (1993, 1996). In the autonomy phase, "Principals turned out to be more competent in handling difficult situations and being able to manage the school easier (Bakioglu, 1993, Day & Bakioglu, 1996, as cited in Bakioglu, et al. 2010, p.247).

Bakioglu, Hacifazlioglu, and Ozcan (2010) noted that a mentoring relationship is on-going and support problem solving. The mentor is perceived as the role model, nurturing the relationship. Their findings revealed that trust was critical to the collegial relationship and mentoring experience (2010). In contrast,

Some of the effects of hierarchical school leadership on colleagues are feelings of inadequacy, inability to express oneself, inability to influence anyone, feelings of being shut out, increase in cynicism, increase in destructive feelings, feelings that

anyone has either to dominate or be dominated, feeling that to conform is the safest way forward, feeling that intolerance and exploitation have to be accepted, feeling that those at the top are not interested in these feelings and that there are no easy ways of communicating with them (Day, 2004, p. 134).

Elliott pointed out “the importance of ‘the personality’ of the mentor in determining the effectiveness of the relationship” (Bolam, McMahon, Pocklington, & Weindling, 1995, p. 247). Bolam et al. (1995) suggested, “The relationship was successful for these head leaders because they were given practical help in solving problems that were real to the situation at hand” (p. 29).

In a study, Young, Alvermann, Kaste, Henderson, and Mnay (2004) found that “interdependency encouraged individual growth while simultaneously facilitating a sense of friendship, collegiality, connectedness, and caring between mentors and mentees” (p. 23). “When the school is accepted as a learning opportunity for principal’s professional development, principals need to trust not only their mentors but also their colleagues in the interaction process” (Day, Harris, Hadfield, Tolley, & Beresford, 2000. p. 24). They concluded, “Leaders thrive with a trust in self and others” (p. 24).

Andragogy (Adult Learning)

Knowles' theory of andragogy is an attempt to develop a theory specifically for adult learning. Knowles (1984) emphasizes that adults are self-directed and are expected to take responsibility for decisions. She describes five assumptions of the adult learner:

1. Self-concept – the person becomes more self-directed
2. Adult learner experience – the person accumulates a wealth of experiences for an increasing resource for learning

3. Readiness to learn – the person becomes focused on the developmental tasks of his/her social roles
4. Orientation to learning – the person’s perspectives change, their orientation shifts from subject-centeredness to problem centeredness
5. Motivation to learn – the person matures and the motivation to learn is internal (Knowles, 1984, p. 12)

Adult learning programs must accommodate this fundamental aspect (p. 1).

Andragogy makes the following assumptions about the design of learning: (1) Adults need to know why they need to learn something (2) Adults need to learn experientially, (3) Adults approach learning as problem solving, and (4) Adults learn best when the topic is of immediate value (Knowles, 1984, p. 1).

In practical terms, andragogy means that instruction for adults needs to focus more on the process and less on the content being taught. Strategies such as case studies, role playing, simulations, and self-evaluation are most useful. Instructors adopt a role of facilitator or resource rather than lecturer or grader (Knowles, 1984).

Burnout and Self-efficacy

The continued focus on educational reform and accountability has impacted the role of principals and made the job less attractive to those entering the profession. Leithwood and Montgomery (1984) identified obstacles that impact principal leadership. They included, “deficits in leadership skill, time management, organization, problem solving, decision making, budgeting, building management, and teaching and learning” (p. 310). In addition to these obstacles, turnover rates of practicing principals have been increasing and can be attributed somewhat to burnout. The overwhelming role and demands can

create a sense of inadequacy causing a desire to change positions (Cusick, 2003; Cushing, Kerrins, & Johnstone, 2003; Lashway, 2003). Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter (1986), author of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), defined burnout as “feelings of low personal accomplishment, and strong feelings of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (p. 63)”.

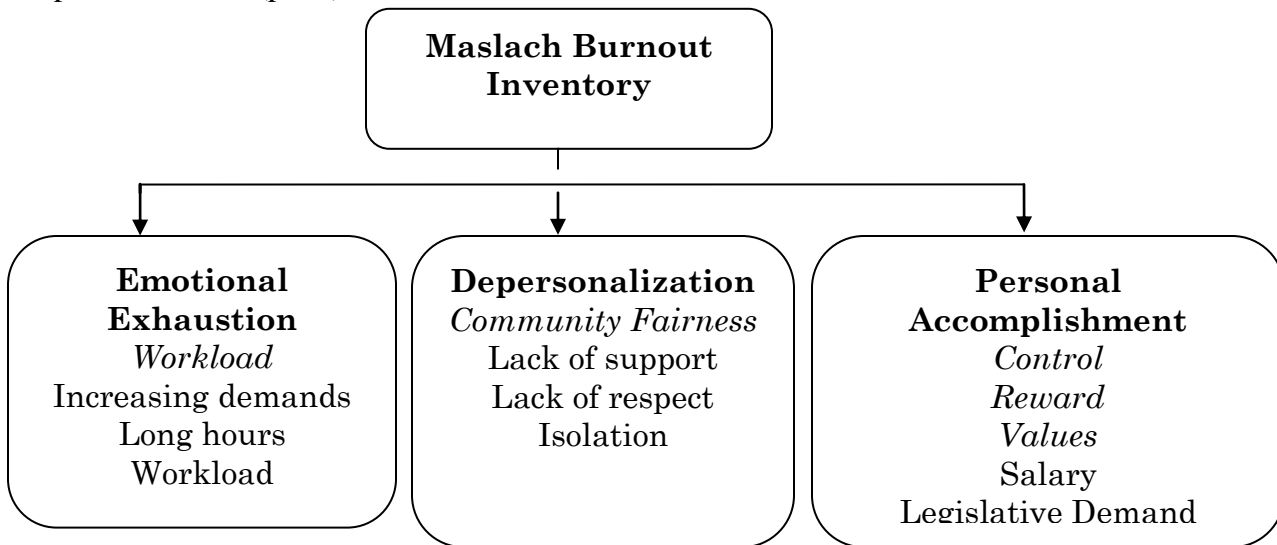


Figure 2.1 Maslach’s three constructs of burnout and stress factors related to burnout (2001)

Maslach et al. (2001) go on to describe possible supports that prevent the feeling of burnout. The following graphic describes possible efforts that might lower that feeling of stress.

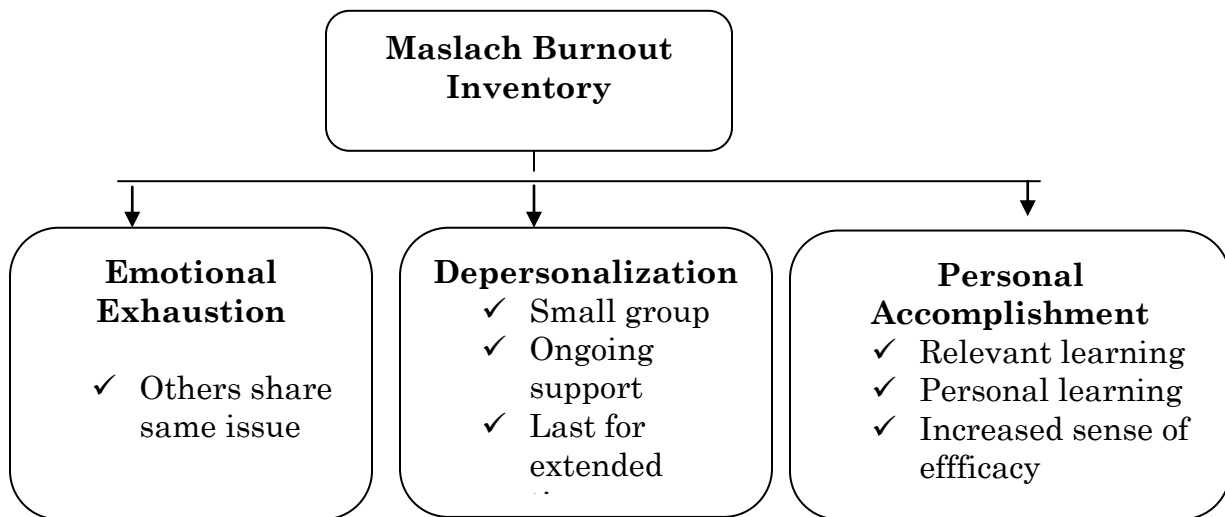


Figure 2.2 Principals networks addressing constructs of burnout (Maslach, et al., 2001)

As interviews are conducted, it will be important to identify what perceptions and where this principal perceived himself on this scale throughout his administrative career. In addition, what networks and factors supported him in his time of school improvement?

Federici and Skaalvik (2012) conducted a study to determine the impact that self-efficacy has in relations to burnout, job satisfaction and motivation to quit. The results indicated that, “principal self-efficacy was positively related to job satisfaction and motivation to quit and negatively related to burnout. Burnout and job satisfaction were negatively related. Burnout was positively related to motivation to quit whereas job satisfaction was negatively related” (2012, p. 295). A positive self-efficacy has been found to be critical to continued success as a leader (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 1997). Additional research studies have indicated that positive self-efficacy is related to adaptive functioning. Licklider and Niska (1993) found a relationship with self-efficacy with the quality of teacher supervision. Osterman and Sullivan (1996) found principals are more focused on pursuing their goals and are more flexible with regards to change. Moreover, “principals with high self-efficacy experience higher levels of work engagement and job satisfaction, and lower levels of burnout and work alienation” (Federici & Skaalvik, 2011; Tschunnen-Moran & Gareis, 2004 cited in Federici & Skaalvik, 2012, p. 297). Smith et al. (2006) found that the quality of teaching and learning is related to the self-efficacy of the leader.

The researcher will utilize this information while analyzing the narrative described by the participant in the study to determine if any or some of these characteristics were in play throughout his career, and what impact they had on his growth. Particular focus will be on looking at his self-efficacy and trajectory toward burnout or rejuvenation.

Professional Coaching

Professional coaching is used in many career paths in an effort to impact turnover, increase quality of work, and job satisfaction (Karsten, Baggot, Brown, & Cahill, 2010).

Professional coaching is described in literature as a process through which an individual is provided with one-on-one interaction to either address specific developmental issues, receive feedback on strengths and opportunities for improvement, or to receive support and guidance through times of transition, either in their personal role or throughout the organization (2010, p. 140).

Coaching can provide administrators the tools and support to enhance their current role and to help them gain more self-awareness and confidence. McNally and Lukens (2006) were able to demonstrate positive outcomes from a coaching program with nursing leaders, such as “an increased feeling of competence and confidence in abilities, as well as a significant return on investment related to turnover” (p.155). Executive coaching as it is sometimes called in the business world has been found to improve relationships and overall effectiveness of leaders (Karsten, et. al, 2010). “Evidence suggests that coaching leads to higher levels of engagement among leaders, enhanced communication skills, improved decision-making skills, motivation to succeed, increased retention, and improved outcomes that ultimately provide a significant return on investment to the organization” (as cited in Karsten, et. al 2010, p. 141).

Karsten, Baggot, Brown, & Cahill (2010) conducted a study at Saint Joseph Hospital in Denver Colorado. They were struggling with extreme leadership turnover. It was apparent to them that leadership in the area of nursing was critical for success and improvement. “Administrators presented behaviors of self-preservation including:

withdrawal, silence in meetings, and fear” (Karsten, et al., 2010, p.141). With this intensity of change, creating an effective culture within the leadership team was paramount. The solution was to introduce and implement leadership coaching as a strategy for improvement. “The chief operations officer and chief nursing officer shared openly; her belief was that leaders at all levels at all times can benefit from a coach” (2010, p. 141).

Feldman (2001) identifies three key elements to executive coaching relationships as follows: “It consists of one-on-one counseling about work related issues; it involves the use of 360-degree feedback on executives’ strengths and weaknesses as its starting point; and its purpose is to improve managers’ effectiveness in their current position” (cited in Karsten, 2010, p. 140). The conclusion of this study indicated that professional coaching resulted in lower turnover and had a positive impact on achievement. It also resulted in a positive perception in the outcome of their teams. This organization continues to use professional coaching as a means for enhancing the culture of safety and improvement of one’s own learning and development (2010).

For this high school principal he was involved with professional coaching from his superintendent, collaborated with other principals in the PLC project, and was part of the leadership team within the district.

Trust

Jane Westberg (2001), *Helping Learners Become Reflective Practitioners*, pointed out the importance of building trust in a relationship. She commented that helping others depends on our ability to first earn trust before any other work can be done. “Learners who don’t trust us are likely to withhold observations about themselves. Even if they

have a good insight about their needs, they will probably share their concerns with us only if they are convinced we are truly their advocates and able to help them” (p. 316). This article discussed was related to health professional; her suggestions had practical implications for the superintendent/principal and principal/teacher relationships.

Lencioni (2002) uses a fable narration to highlight a model that can destroy effective teams. Figure 2.3 details his model that will destroy the working of teams.



Figure 2.3 Five dysfunctions of a team (Lencioni, 2002 p. 174)

At the very base of this model, is the absence of trust. Lencioni (2002) instructed that, “achieving vulnerability-based trust is difficult because in the course of career advancement and education, most successful people learn to be competitive with their peers and protective of their reputations” (p. 196). He remarked that even though difficult, it is critical to the success of the team and organization that trust be built.

Lencioni (2002) created two charts that detail traits of members of teams with an absence of trust and one with members of a trusting team:

Members of teams with an absence of trust...

- Conceal their weaknesses and mistakes from one another
- Hesitate to ask for help and provide constructive feedback
- Hesitate to offer help outside their own areas of responsibility
- Jump to conclusions about the intentions and aptitudes of others without attempting to clarify them
- Fail to recognize and tap into one another's skills and experiences
- Waste time and energy managing their behaviors for effect
- Hold grudges
- Dread meetings and find reasons to avoid spending time together

Members of trusting teams...

- Admit weaknesses and mistakes
- Ask for help
- Accept questions and input about their areas of responsibility
- Give one another the benefit of the doubt before arriving at a negative conclusion
- Take risks in offering feedback and assistance
- Appreciate and tap into one another's skills and experiences

Lencioni (2002) concluded that it is important for the leader to model vulnerability in order to build the trust of their subordinates.

Effective Principal Leadership

It has been found that leadership matters. “The contributions of leaders in education are crucial to initiatives aimed at improving student learning. From research we know that leadership is second only to classroom instruction as an influence on student learning” (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004, p. 5). “Leadership is about vision. But leadership is equally about creating a climate where the truth is heard and the brutal facts confronted” (Collins, 2001a). Looking specifically at *Managing People, Data and Processes* in the Wallace Report (2011) they indicate school leaders must manage their school and staff effectively. A 2012 Wallace Foundation report stated, “The simple fact is that without effective leaders most of the goals of educational improvement will be very difficult to achieve” (2012, p. 15). “Researchers at the University of Washington found that effective principals nurture and support teachers and others to meet standards” (Portin et al., 2009). But is this enough for today’s leaders in this age of increased accountability?

Wallace Foundation (2012) identified five practices that are keys to effective school leadership. They found that effective principals: “shape a vision for academic success, create a climate hospitable to education, cultivate leadership in others, improve instruction, and manage people, data, and processes” (p. 55). This is similar to the framework in the research in professional learning communities. The study questions aim to look at how the development of the leader and his professional growth supported school improvement in this high school.

To identify the strategies and skills needed for today’s administrators in schools, the researcher will review research on Professional Learning Communities (PLC). Rick

DuFour, Ed.D, is a recognized leader in developing and creating PLC within schools. He was the superintendent of Adlai Stevenson High School District 125 in Lincolnshire, Illinois. His high school is one of the most recognized and celebrated high schools in the nation. Much of the researchers training and work in schools has been grounded in Professional Learning Communities Framework. The researcher has visited Adlai Stevenson and has seen the strategies and structures in place that have proven to increase student learning and develop a positive school culture. One of the key components of successful implementation of PLC is in the developing of a collaborative leadership team.

Pictured in figure 2.3 and described previously was Patrick Lencioni' *Five Dysfunctions of a Team* (2002). The value of building a trusting relationship, and previously discussed, was at the base of developing an effective team. The other components that will harm the work of a team are the “fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability, and inattention to results” (p. 188-189). To address these dysfunctions, Lencioni (2002) details methods to overcome these dysfunctions.

Fear of Conflict

Teams that are strong need productive conflict, although this is difficult and not always accepted (Lencioni, 2002). But, according to Lencioni (2002), “Teams that engage in productive conflict, know that the only purpose is to produce the best possible solutions, in the shortest period of time” (p. 202). He found in his study that these teams, “resolve issues more quickly and completely than others, and they emerge from heated debates with no residual feelings or collateral damage, but with an eagerness and

readiness to take on the next important issue” (p. 202). An effective leader must encourage healthy conflict and model respectful conversation.

Lack of Commitment

The third dysfunction of a team described by Lencioni (2002) has similarities to DuFour’s model for Professional Learning Communities. Both discuss the importance of having strong commitment and not just compliance. According to Lencioni (2002) in order to address a lack of commitment, a team must create consensus and the need for certainty. “Great teams ensure that everyone’s ideas are genuinely considered, which then creates a willingness to rally around whatever decision is ultimately made by the group” (p. 207). Certainty comes when teams are able to pride themselves in their unity. As far as the role of the leader, it is important that clear communication exists and that the principal is comfortable with the prospect that the solution might not be correct or what the leader perceives as the answer (Lencioni, 2002).

Avoidance of Accountability

Lencioni (2002) in his fourth dysfunction describes a team without accountability as one whom:

Creates resentment among team members who have different standards of performance, encourages mediocrity, misses deadlines and key deliverables, and places an undue burden on the team leader as the sole source of discipline. A team with a priority on accountability holds one another accountable. The school has high expectations and the leader is challenged to allow all members of the school to hold each other accountable (p. 214).

Inattention to Results

The final dysfunction described by Lencioni (2002) is the inattention to results. Similar to DuFour and Mattos (2013) and Schmoker (1999) effective schools are result orientated and use data to guide their goals and improvement efforts. Lencioni (2002) indicates that teams care more about other things rather than the established goals. To overcome this dysfunction “the leader must set the tone for a focus on results. Results must be clear and rewards must be contributed to those results” (p. 218).

Barriers to Effective Leadership

Both cultural and institutional barriers make the job of leading schools very difficult. It is easy for school leaders to be overwhelmed the management responsibilities. Community and parental issues and increasing federal and state mandates challenge leaders. Muhammad, (2008) remarked that attention to adult learning is a “non-negotiable” for addressing these challenges and improving student learning.

In an article from the *Journal of Educational Administration*, Mulford, et al. (2009) discussed their study of school principals in late career. Results from a 2005 Australian Education Union (AEU) survey of school leaders in public schools confirms the increased workload as a major factor in the leaders in mid-career leaving the field. Seventy-five percent of the school leaders agreed, “There is so much work to do. I never seem to get on top of it”. Eighty percent feel that they “Come home too tired to do some of the things they like to do” (AEU, 2005 in Mulford, et al., 2009, p. 37). School leaders also related stress and health issues to the complexity of this job (2009).

School Improvement and Accountability

Schools are in an era of high-stakes accountability. “Fueled by sweeping federal education accountability reforms, such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top in the United States, school systems are being forced to increase academic standards, participate in high-stakes testing, and raise evaluation standards for teachers” (Barnett, Shoho, & Bowers, 2013, p. 1). Managing these demands challenge principals to balance the need to create learning focused school environments, encourage community engagement, address public question, and maintain positive teacher attitudes (2013).

The National Association of Secondary School Principals have written several publications in their Breaking Ranks series in which they have analyzed several high schools and have developed frameworks and recommendations that support reform and improvement efforts in these buildings. To achieve the greatest gains in school improvement, the Breaking Ranks Framework calls on school leaders “to focus simultaneously on three core areas: collaborative leadership, personalizing your school environment, and curriculum, instruction, and assessment” (NASSP, 2011, p. 4). This document goes on to say that no major improvement can take place without a change in culture. They describe “the importance of their foundational concepts that support their framework: leadership, professional development, culture, and organization” (p.4). These align closely with Professional Learning Communities research.

Professional Learning Communities

Creating professional learning communities is not an event – it is the way of doing business.

Three big ideas encompass the creation of a PLC within a school. “Big idea one focuses on ensuring that students learn. There is a shift from teaching to learning. The school’s mission promises learning for all” (DuFour, 2004, p. 4). The second big idea is the creation of a culture of collaboration. “Collaborative teacher conversations must quickly move beyond ‘What are we expected to teach?’ to ‘How will we know when each student has learned?’ (p. 4). Teachers find it a priority to work together and create structures that enhance learning. As a school faculty, decisions are made collaboratively and with consensus. Problems are solved school-wide, not in isolation. Big idea #3 is a focus on results. “Working together to improve student achievement becomes the routine work of everyone in the school” (p. 5). Teachers develop common assessments that monitor the progress of the students and design interventions to support learning. “Educators must embrace data as a useful indicator of progress. They must stop disregarding or excusing unfavorable data and honestly confront the sometimes brutal facts” (p. 6).

This qualitative study includes the selection of a high school that participates in the state’s PLC Project and has implemented these processes. Does having these processes and structures in place support the increased accountability and demands in today’s schools? Other experts within the field of school improvement that align closely with PLC are the work of Mike Schmoker. According to Schmoker (1999) in his book, *Results: the Key to Continuous School Improvement*,

The combination of three concepts constitutes the foundation for positive improvement results: meaningful teamwork; clear, measurable goals; and the regular collection and analysis of performance data. Principals must lead their school through the goal-setting process in which student achievement data is

analyzed, improvement areas are identified and actions for change are initiated. This process involves working collaboratively with staff and school community to identify discrepancies between current and desired outcomes, to set and prioritize goals to help close the gap, to develop improvement and monitoring strategies aimed at accomplishing the goals, and to communicate goals and change efforts to the entire school community. Principals must also ensure that staff development needs are identified in alignment with school improvement priorities and that these needs are addressed with appropriate professional learning opportunities (p. 34).

Common themes are found in the work of these educational researchers. They continue to emphasize vision, collaboration, use of data, and goal setting. This study will specifically look at how leaders create a collaborative culture and identify the strategies and structures that are in place in their schools. How do they prioritize and manage their time?

Missouri PLC Program

The Missouri Professional Learning Communities program is a school improvement project sponsored by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. According to their website (2016), “Our mission is to support schools in building and sustaining professional learning communities where collaborative cultures result in high levels of learning for all and increased student achievement”. The states program is structured with three years of curriculum supported by coaching and facilitation to help the school’s leadership team implement with fidelity. They encourage the principals to take an active role but for some schools this is difficult. Year 1 training helps the school

develop their mission/vision and develop that effective team practice and understanding of shared leadership. They also look at developing both formative and summative assessments to gain a current reality of the school culture and achievement. SMART goals begin to take form to guide their work. Year 2 focuses on living their mission and putting data teams in process. Continued work on effective collaboration and team process underline their work. During this year, the school looks deeper into their data and grading practices and how assessments can guide instruction. Year three is a critical year as the school solidifies the PLC structures to allow for continuous school improvement. The teachers are now progress monitoring students and putting tiered interventions in place. At this point, effective implementation is very systematic and the culture is focused on student learning.

Collaborative Leadership

Austin Buffum, a colleague of Rick Dufour, has done training within the researcher's district as the school district worked on high levels of PLC implementation. Buffum, et al. (2008) in his book, *The Collaborative Administrator, Working Together as a Professional Learning Community* quotes DuFour in saying,

Leaders who share authority, empower others, and assess their effectiveness as leaders on the extent to which they create the conditions that result in higher levels of learning – both for students and adults. These administrators value the collective wisdom residing within the schools, and create the structures and cultures to allow staff members to tap into that wisdom (p. 2).

The researcher has seen the changes that occur when teachers are empowered and included in the leadership and decision making process. This has resulted in improved

student learning and teacher morale.

This study will look closely at the principal's leadership development toward developing the school's structure and process through their school improvement process. Closing the achievement gap in schools is the challenge of every school and must be the central theme of improvement efforts. NASSP, *Breaking Ranks II* (2004) provides a framework to help schools become more focused on student learning. This publication details three core areas for improvement:

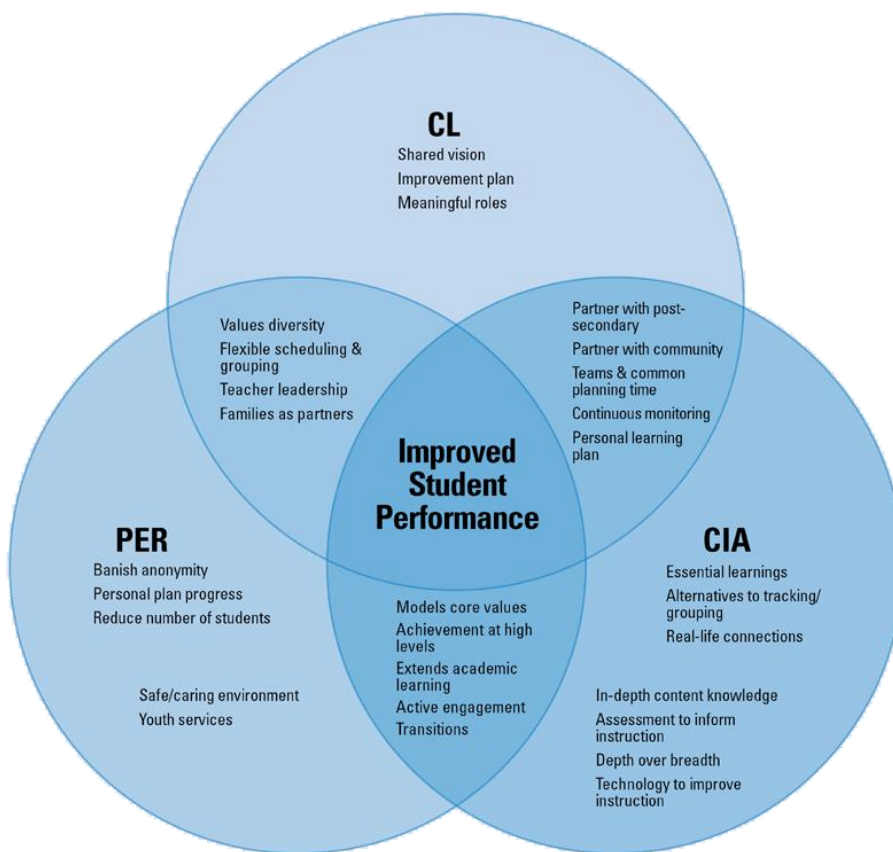


Figure 2.4 *Breaking Ranks: A Field Guide for Leading Change*, (NASSP, 2009)

Distributive Leadership

Traditionally, expectations for school improvement rely solely on the principal (Danielson, 2007). Researchers studying principal leadership have noted that leaders cannot solely attempt school reform and improvement. According to Hargreaves and Fullan (1998),

The constant bombardment of new tasks and the continual interruptions keep principals off balance. Not only are the demands fragmented and incoherent, but even good ideas have a short shelf life as initiatives are dropped in favor of the latest new policy” (p.6).

A body of knowledge concludes that distributed leadership can impact school improvement for both staff and students. It is critical and important for teachers to feel empowered to take on leadership responsibilities and support decision making and problem solve as a community (Johnson, 2008). Leech and Fulton (2008) stated, “School administrators create a culture of collegiality and shared responsibility for organizational success by focusing on ‘power through’ people and not ‘power over’ people” (p. 632). Similarly, research has indicated that schools where distributed leadership is in place are likely to have improved success as a school (Harris & Spillane, 2008). This study aims to identify the principal’s leadership style, how leadership is distributed and the impact on the school.

Summary of Review of Literature

A study of this literature review provides the background to support the question as to, how does a mid-career principal characterize his leadership and growth throughout the school improvement process, and what factors supported his professional growth?

Middlescence can be a critical time in a principal's life, and one that can guide the positive or negative trajectory of one's career. This review will allow a foundation to understand the experiences and perceptions of this principal and identify his career stage and times that he might have experienced frustration, possible burnout and/or increased self-efficacy. What part did his participation in the PLC project play in his growth? A look at effective school leadership research compared to what happened in the selected school will give insight into this principal's growth. An understanding of professional coaching and collaboration with other administrators will also support the understanding of how this principal developed and what part each played.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Leaders in middlecence can be a time for burnout or possible rejuvenation and growth in self-efficacy. The focus of this study is to analyze the lived experiences of a high school principal in mid-career who, in a pre-interview, was found to change positions every three years and had difficulty staying within a district. He now is in his 8th year at his particular district and has engaged in school improvement efforts within this school. What has impacted this change in his career trajectory? This narrative case study will support the research questions:

1. How does a mid-career principal characterize his leadership and growth throughout the school improvement process?
2. What influences might precipitate professional renewal of middlescent principals?

Ultimately, this study can help districts and preparation institutions retain good leaders and understand the needs of mid-career principals with the increased demand and accountability in schools today? The following chapter gives a description of the research design and context followed by specifics regarding data collection and analysis process. I have also discussed areas of ethics and trustworthiness as it relates to this qualitative study.

Research Design

This research utilizes a narrative case study approach exploring the lived experiences and perceptions of a mid-career high school principal. “Rationale for a single case and selecting a critical case can be important to a theoretical proposition. Such a study can help to refocus future investigations in an entire field” (Yin, 2014, p. 51). Using a qualitative narrative case study, the personal stories and feelings of the principal

in regards to his leadership demands and improvement efforts will surface. The principal's leadership development is analyzed through this process. According to Riessman (2008) narratives are experience-centered. "They do not merely describe what someone does in the world, but what the world does to that someone. They describe those events in person's lives that might be unwilled, unpredicted, and often unwished for by the person" (p.22). The focus in narrative interviewing is to allow for descriptive accounts rather than brief answers to selected questions (p. 23). "Looking at how interviewees connect their responses into a sustained account, that is, a story, brings out problems and possibilities of interviewing that are not visible when attention is restricted to question-answer exchanges" (Mishler, 1986, p. 67). Although ebb and flow responses were central to the interview process in this narrative study, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (2001) was referenced through the analysis of the interviews to determine if characteristics of burnout existed within the principal's experiences and if any of the possible interventions supported his development (see figure 2.1 and 2.2, Maslach's constructs related to burnout and networks to address these needs).

Documented information and other school evidence were not reviewed prior to the interview with the principal in an effort to allow the data to emerge and not limit the findings. However, continued follow up interviews and artifact reviews were conducted in order to focus the study. The continuation of an ebb and flow conversation was the basis for the interviews (See appendix D and E). The initial interview will be conducted and focus on the principal's historical timeline of his leadership positions and experiences. A historical grid will be created with the principal and charting of the highs and lows of his career will be identified. This information will guide the focus of the

interviews and allow for in-depth narration of specific timeframes in his career. Follow up interviews will take place if necessary to clarify, continue the conversation, and confirm and verify accuracy of transcription. Not only will the researcher pay attention to the words but also focus on the tone contained in the conversation.

“To elicit a less imposed and therefore more ‘valid’ rendering of the informant’s perspective, the influence of the interviewer should be minimal, and the setting should be arranged to achieve this minimizing of the interviewer’s influence” (Jovchelovitch & Bauer 2007, p. 4). Listening skills and avoiding leading the interviewee is critical. The key is to allow the story to be told and to avoid imposing any language not used by the principal during the interviews (2007).

Rationale for Using Qualitative Methods

The selection of a qualitative narrative case study approach is best suited for this research because this method allowed for the participant to share his lived experiences, and thereby connect his professional highs and lows. In doing narrative, the researcher was provided an opportunity to better understand the most influential causes of his growth. Riessman (2008) argues that the narrative approach “does not merely describe what someone does in the world, but what the world does to that someone” (p. 22). The researcher thought it significant to provide an opportunity for the principal to voice the intricate weavings of his personal and professional life as it related to his career trajectory down through the years. Furthermore, Riessman states that narrative allows

Us to infer something about what it feels like to be in that story world. Narrative for by the actors, even if those very actors set the events in motion in the first place....Narratives do not merely refer to past experience but create experiences

for their audiences (Riessman, 2008, p. 22).

In a preliminary interview with the principal, it was noted that his trajectory as a school leader was that of job change every three years. Using a narrative allows the selected leader to bring the story to life and bring out the problems and possibilities that existed throughout his career. Solely using a question/answer interview restricts the exchange of thought. “The goal in narrative interviewing is to generate detailed accounts rather than brief answers or general statements. If one desires to understand the experience, the story must be told” (Riessman, 2008, p. 23).

Limitations of Research Design

This study is limited to a specific time period for exploring the lived experiences of this principal. His perceptions were critical to understanding what impacted his growth through this school improvement implementation. According to Spence (1993), “Heavy reliance can be placed on anecdote and narrative story. The interviewee can possibly withhold critical information because of confidentiality or the narrator’s possible distortion or omission. The entire story might not be told” (p. 296).

Administrative experience by the researcher can be both an advantage and limitation of the study. The knowledge base and experience with school improvement will add to a deeper understanding within the interviews and observations. The limitation could be in making accurate inferences throughout the process. Another concern is the openness of the participants. The researcher has served as a superintendent and is familiar with the district and this principal.

In order to address these limitations, an awareness of these possible concerns must be acknowledged. Excellent listening skills and open communication with the participant

will be critical. In addition, sensitivity to the confidential nature of the data is important. The researcher must encourage the participant/s to be open in their responses to the interview questions and create a non-threatening environment.

Selected Participant

The participant selected for this study is forty-nine years old and considered in middleage. Given a pseudo name, Derrik Chance, provides confidentiality of his identity. He is a high school principal in a Midwest rural community. The population of the high school is 500 students, with a poverty rate nearing 20% and little cultural diversity. Mr. Chance is in his 20th year in school administration and his 8th year in his current district.

Rationale for Selection

Professionals between the ages of 35-59 are considered mid-career (Saunders, 2008, p. 1). Research has noted that “middleage can be a time of rejuvenation or burn out” (Morison, Erickson, and Dvchtwald, 2007, p. 1). In a pre-interview prior to selection, it was noted that this mid-career principal had a history of administrative job change every three years. Currently he is in mid-career and is now in his 8th year within the same district. He, along with his administrative team, participated in the Professional Learning Communities project and was awarded recognition for implementation. This study will explore what the principal perceived the reasons for this change in his career trajectory.

Recruitment Procedure

The researcher identified a school district that was actively involved in the school improvement process and was noted for outstanding implementation of professional learning communities. The school has also demonstrated improving student achievement within the last three years. The principal was in his mid-career and had sustained several years within the same district. The school superintendent was contacted and informed of the desire to do research within the high school and specifically to interview and study the career of the high school principal. Permission was granted from the superintendent to proceed with this study (Appendix B).

Context or Setting

The school selected in this study is chosen from those Missouri schools participating in the PLC state project as their structure for school improvement. The researcher's training and background experience in the implementation of professional learning communities will allow depth of understanding from the interviews and observations. The common knowledge of PLC and familiarity with the process will support the rapport with the school leaders and allow for deeper understanding of the processes and strategies in place.

The high school selected demonstrates above average and increasing Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) and ACT results. This school is a part of the Missouri Professional Learning Communities Project (PLC).

Data Collection

Biographical Life History

An historical biographical life history grid was co-created by the interviewee and interviewer indicating highs and lows in his career trajectory. “By moving backwards and forwards between the different areas of the respondent’s life, the memory is stimulated” (Elliot 2005, p. 31). This timeline gives an overview of the career experiences and perceptions of Derrick’s administration and personal career. It was used as a guiding document for more in-depth interviews that followed.

Interviews

Open-ended narratives interviews were conducted, transcribed and evaluated for information related to research questions. A comparison of interview findings with the Maslach Burnout Inventory (2001) supported the analysis of the narratives.

Informal Observations

Informal walk through observations were held with the principal during the school collaboration times. Specific the researcher was looking for signs that support the findings of PLC implementation and school culture.

Other Data Sources

Brief review of demographic and achievement data was reviewed. In addition, a review of school surveys, self-study and the state evaluation report were reviewed to assess the school’s PLC implementation.

Procedures

The goal of this study is to understand the lived experience of the selected high school principal framed during his mid-career at the district in which he currently serves.

This narrative case study begins with an interview and the development of a historical biographical life history grid in order to understand the principal's career trajectory. A series of five 65-minute interviews were conducted over an eight week period with the participant in the school setting. Open-ended interview were conducted to allow the participant to describe his administrative experience and indicate the highs and lows of these experiences. This will give a basic understanding of his career, which will guide the interviews to follow. Interview two will allow for an in-depth discussion of his early career in school administration especially focusing on his perceived leadership skills. The researcher will be listening for specifics in the areas of his leadership development and challenges that he incurred. Interview three will focus on his experiences prior to coming to his current position and again listening for his leadership development and challenges to his work. Both interviews will be viewed through the lens of the literature related to career development and effective school leadership studies. Interview four will focus on his work during the district in which he is currently HS principal. Interview five is established for member checking of previous transcripts and a reflection of his entire administrative career (Appendix D: Interview 4 guide). A narrative discussion will allow him to describe his leadership skills while participating in the state PLC project and the school improvement process. In a preliminary interview, he describes this time as change in his career trajectory and one of rejuvenation. Which lead to my question as to what changed this trajectory? What does he perceive as the supports that lead to his development and the school's improvement? Review of PLC evaluations and other survey and self-evaluation data will be analyzed to support the findings and themes that emerge.

Analysis of the Data

“In thematic narrative analysis, language is viewed as a resource, objectivist modes of analysis where themes appear to be unmediated by an investigator’s theoretical perspective, interests, mode of questioning, and personal characteristics” (Riessman, 2008, p. 59).

Interviews will be recorded and transcribed verbatim. In addition, listening to the interviews multiple times allow for emotions and feelings to emerge from the interviewee’s stories. The investigator will “review each individual case, isolating and ordering relevant events in chronological order. The researcher focused in to identify the underlying assumptions in each account and name them” (Riessman, 2008, p. 57).

Detailed descriptions will identify themes related to the research questions. Inductive thematic coding will be used and common categories will be examined to understand the lived experiences of the principal’s career. During the *open coding process*, a line-by-line manner will be used to identify the underlining main ideas. As the researcher goes back through the interviews, data will emerge and substantive codes identified. As themes emerge, a comparison and identification of his career stages and development from the research will be noted. What caused frustrations, confusion, and alienation for this principal? In addition, how did he balance work and family?

A particular focus will be examined during the principal’s mid-career while engaged in school improvement efforts in his high school. The interviewer will review the transcript and isolate and organize the episodes into a chronological order. A life history grid with high and low points will be created to guide subsequent interviews. Conclusions will be formed by the researcher regarding the overall professional growth of this

principal, noting what factors might precipitate burnout and/or his professional renewal. A descriptive summary will be created identifying those strategies and structures that could be used by other school leaders in mid-career development.

Delimitations

This study is delimited to a chronology timeframe during the school's improvement process. This scope will allow the data to emerge that reflects the impact this process had on this principal and his leadership within the school.

Credibility/Dependability Issues

The broad assumptions that the researcher brings to this study is that of an experienced administrator for 22 years. The beliefs are grounded in the fact that administrators are a critical factor in the success of student learning within schools. Developing as a school leader supports continuous improvement in schools and allows for a positive trajectory for learners. The researcher's interest lies in how principals sustain continuous professional growth throughout their career. How can leaders continue to make school improvement a priority and sustain passion for learning?

Reflexivity as a researcher will be considered. The only possible vulnerability in this study would be the experience the research has in the field. The researcher is familiar with the school and community and knows the growth that has been made within this district and the PLC recognition given for implementation. Awareness of this will help the interactions to remain neutral. The researcher's personal background and experiences as a school administrator will allow for better understanding of the findings. The use of member checking will be used for the principal interviewed. The triangulation of the data

will support the accuracy of the findings. Interviews and review of demographic, evaluations, and achievement data will allow for depth of this study.

Ethics and Trustworthiness

In order to maintain ethical and trustworthiness of the study, the researcher will avoid siding with the interviewee and remain neutral throughout the process. Contacting the site for the interviews and detailing the purpose of this study will begin to develop rapport with the building leader. The researcher will not pressure the administrator into their participation. IRB approval will be obtained. Confidentiality of any identifying names will be excluded from the study to protect the privacy of the participants. There appears to be no known risk for the participants. Communication of the findings will be done in a clear concise method, and reported accurately and honestly. Following the study, the researcher will share findings with those involved and allow them the reciprocity to gain information gleaned from the study to further their work in schools.

Summary of Methodology

With the increase in school leaders leaving the profession, it is critical that school districts, policy makers, and educational preparation institutions acknowledge the needs of mid-career principals in order to retain the expertise in schools. It has been found that during middlecence, leaders can burnout or possibly rejuvenate. In analyzing the lived experience of this mid-career principal, the goal is to identify the focus that must occur for the development of these leaders. Mattingly (1998), describes narratives as event-centered-depicting human action- and they are experience-centered at several levels:

They do not merely describe what someone does in the world but what the world does to that someone. They allow us to infer something about what it feels like to

be in that story world. Narratives also recount those events that happen unwill the events in motion in the first place (Mattingly, 1998, p. 8).

Through a series of historical biographical life history timeline, unstructured interviews, informal observations, and review of survey and evaluation documents, information related to how a mid-career principal can characterize his leadership and growth throughout the school improvement process and what influenced his professional growth comes to light.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Chapter four discusses the findings and results of the study. The introduction reviews the purpose as it relates to the middescent principal, how the data was gathered and analyzed and the value of utilizing narrative case study. The narratives, his lived experiences, are discussed in chronological order and displayed in the life history grid in figure 4.1. Common themes throughout his life study have emerged and were coded and categorized. Derrick's stories signaled a trajectory toward burnout and then, in mid-career, seem to gain stability and demonstrate signs of rejuvenation. More detailed analysis was conducted during this middlescence timeframe. The chapter concludes with the creation of a process model for addressing the needs of middlescent leaders in schools and thus leading to possible rejuvenation for school administrators.

Introduction

The purpose of this narrative case study is to understand the career development of a principal in mid-career. Research question #1 asks; how does a mid-career principal characterize his leadership and growth throughout the school improvement process? Specifically, the study seeks to understand the principal's perceptions of leadership bounded within the timeframe of the school's improvement process. Knowing that middlescence can be a time of burn-out or rejuvenation, this narrative can inform educators toward solutions to support mid-career school leaders and maintain stability within the field.

A narrative case study's purpose is to tell a story and gain the essential information related to the experience. Through narrative inquiry, the study seeks to allow the participant to reflect on his career and give voice to the experiences.

A series of five 65-minute interviews were conducted over an eight week period with the participant in the school setting. Consistent with narrative study, an ebb and flow interaction during the interview took place. Appendix D details the purpose and protocol for the interviews and the reference for these narrative discussions. Seidman (1998) encourages the participant “to tell stories as a way of eliciting the specifics of his/her experiences” (p. 32). Suggested in Seidman’s work, in the final interview, the researcher has the participant reflect on his understanding of these lived experiences. Interviews began with the creation of a life-history grid (Appendix G) to give the foundation to understand the principal’s career trajectory. This life-history grid became the guiding document to allow for deeper discussions to follow. Interview two and three explored each school district A- D in depth related to his leadership experiences. The fourth interview focused on his mid-career and his current position as a high school principal in school district E, framed specifically during their school improvement process. Interview five was used to member check previous findings and gives the participant an opportunity to reflect back on his administrative career and note the changes that had occurred and possible causation to the stability in his career. Throughout these interviews, I felt the principal spoke candidly and was open in the dialogue. I did not note at any time, by his body language or words, that Mr. Chance felt uncomfortable discussing the challenges that he had experienced.

The Narratives - Life History

The purpose of interview one was to co-create a life history grid, which provided an overview of his administrative career and a guide for future interviews. The following

presents a chronology of Derrick's career experience and a description of major family events that occurred as an administrator.

School A

In July of 1997, Derrick began his principal career at age 30 in a 9-12 Catholic High School in which he had been teaching for several years. He found it difficult shifting from a teacher to a school administrator within the same building. He stated in the narrative,

It was a challenge going from friend (teacher) to administrator. It was rough. I will never forget; you and I happen be good friends, and then, all of the sudden...nothing changed but the title...and I noticed you were not talking to me. It was an eye opener. I didn't think that I had changed. Maybe I did. And so, I learned there was a lot more to the principalship than I ever had imagined.

The community was steep in tradition. Derrick with the support of the priest stopped the hazing and drinking tradition held by the senior football players. The principal and community became at odds and frustrated Derrick enough that he felt the need to move to another school district after three years.

School B

From 2000-2003, Derrick served as principal in a neighboring, very small rural 7-12 high school. Although it was pleasant, he felt isolated and did not meet the needs of his growing family. According to Mr. Chance, "The school was a wonderful place, just poor, rural, and isolated. I had to drive 20 minutes one way... Pleasant but too rural and

isolated”. He continued in the conversation, “That’s not my lifestyle, not a good fit. They lacked a lot of resources. I could never grow as a leader”.

School C

In July of 2003, he and his family desired to move closer to family so he took a pay cut and accepted an assistant principal position in a larger high school. He became the assistant HS principal as well as the Athletic Director. This was a tough place for Derrik and one that he wished he had not accepted. His second daughter was born while principal at this school. Derrik described School C as a *horrible place*. “I was in survival mode and was a sustained low point. I didn’t feel it much at the time, but looking back, combined with the drive and the job, this was the worse of the stops by far.” After three years, moved on to a new position.

School D

At age 39, the study participant took a position at School D. He remained there another three years, but was overwhelmed by the schedule and workload. He felt very micro-managed and had little trust in district leadership. Little support from the superintendent and conflicts with work/home balance encouraged him to look for another school district.

School E

As you can see in figure 4.1, this principal was on a trajectory of leaving his position every three years. He indicated negative feelings through every school district until arriving at school E in which he continues to be principal. In 2009, Derrik began as principal of a growing high school with a student population of 500. He was then 42 and in his middlescence. This was a turning point in his career and one that he demonstrates

much pride. According to Derrik, “Today I’m not concerned about survival. That is not the #1 goal now. Now my expectation is all about our school and students and our staff and making sure that we as a school building, and that includes all the people inside are doing the right thing and for the right reasons.

Life History Grid

Timeframe	Age	Year in Admin	Position/Location	Reason for leaving	Additional comments
1990- 91			Teaching High School Social Studies (5 years)		Married May '91
1995			School A HS Social Studies and coached		
1997-98 1998-99 1999-2000	30-32	1-3	School A HS Principal (3 yrs)	Made changes not popular with some students and leaders in community Felt uncomfortable	Child 1 born ('97) Elementary Principal and Father D was great support
2000-01 2001-02 2002-03	33-35	4-6	School B HS Principal (3 yrs)	Felt isolated, locations did not fit the needs of family Pleasant memories	Elementary principal was a support
2003-04 2004-05 2005-06	36-38	7-9	School C HS Asst.Principal/AD (3 yrs)	Tough place, horrible place, survival mode	Child 2 born No support
2006-07 2007-08 2008-09	39-41	10-12	School D HS Principal (3 yrs)	Felt micro-managed, stress level increased, struggled with home/work balance Overwhelming school schedule	Child 3 born Lack of trust and support
2009-10 2010-11 2011-12 2012-13 2013-14 2014-15 2015-16 2016-17	42-49	13-20	School E HS Principal	Remains in this position Has made great strides in school improvement Very happy, confident in the work, positive and enthusiastic Still overwhelming sometimes, but can handle it well	Family likes schools, comfortable and active in community PLC, Collaborative Great support and professional coaching/ mentoring

Figure 4.1 Life History Grid

Emerging Themes

The major theme that emerged as Mr. Chance discussed his school leadership experiences was his trajectory toward burnout and his need for rejuvenation. Secondary themes crossed over and supported the findings related to burnout. As the interview narratives were transcribed and examined, thematic codes arose that indicated the influences impacting this principal's career development. The participant talked about feelings of isolation, challenges and disengagement with the communities, balancing work and family, and lack of support in an ever increasing time of accountability in schools. All of these seemed to add to Derrick's stress and his perceived need to change schools.

Specific examination of his lived experiences in mid-career and during the school improvement process in school E is analyzed in more depth. It was during this time that he realized his need for rejuvenation thus altering his trajectory toward burnout.

Toward Burnout

Figure 4.2 outlines Maslach's Signs of Burnout identifying emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment as major targets leading to burnout. The participant in his experience as an early principal through age 42 was on a trajectory toward burnout.

At one point, Derrick considered leaving the field of education and applied for another position. When asked more specifically, "At any point do you recall just wanting to get out of administration?" the participant explained:

Maybe get out of education...Well definitely...I was questing some of the school A years; not sure this was for me. But then while I was at school

C, there was no doubt. I actually applied and was interviewed for a job in another field outside of school administration. I didn't get the job, but I thought seriously about finding something else.

Emotional Exhaustion

Several times the participant recalls the demands of the job being overwhelming. Commuting to school outside of where he and his family lived added to his exhaustion. The participant talked about the increased discipline that he had to address on a daily basis. It seemed to Derrick that he never had enough time to get the job done. He indicated that he would come home tired most nights. Especially during his experience at school C, where he was both AD and assistant principal that feeling of exhaustion was revealed.

Depersonalization

Community Conflict and Disengagement

Discussing school A, Mr. Chance remembers the conflict with the community following needed changes. "I felt so isolated with not only staff, but also parents and the community members. I still wear the battle scars". Then reflecting on school C; "I felt horrible; I didn't like my job, I didn't like what I was doing". When asked to elaborate, he exclaimed, "I felt like I was fighting a battle with a small number of people helping me out vs. the rest were either definitely against me or somewhere in the middle". Also indicating feelings of depersonalization was his lack of respect Mr. Chance felt toward his superintendent at school D.

The community at school district A was very long in tradition. Many community members went against him in protest as the participant discontinued a long-standing tradition with members of the football team. Although his supervisor supported him and

believed this tradition should stop, the board did not support him and he received much push back from the community. During the interview, you could still sense Derrick's frustration when he said, "I am still wearing some of the battle scars; there was blood. He indicated that he had to leave because "it got so uncomfortable". Mr. Chance felt the pressure and knew the town would never change.

The participant discussed school B and as suggested before, had good memories of the families, but the location was so isolated from even a grocery store that this location did not fit the needs of his family. Mr. Chance commuted to school C and D, and indicated that he was not involved and did not feel connected to the community. As Derrick looked to move from school D, he listed community as a top priority in his decision to relocate. "It is important that I live in the community that I serve, and that my family can grow up in the same school district".

Lack of Support

Throughout the interviews, when asked about those who gave him support, it was noted that lack of support caused him frustration and stress in developing as a leader. Derrick commented that at school A, his supervisor and the elementary principal, were friends and colleagues. "Those guys were authentic" stated Derrick. He continued, "They weren't really mentors, but did support me. They had a lot of experience".

Discussing further, regarding the support he perceived, Derrick commented that at school B, the K-8 principal was a friend and one that he felt he could talk to, but as far as a mentor, he didn't feel that was the case. "I didn't grow as a leader" the participant commented.

Continuing our discussion of support and mentors, we moved to school C. Derrick reflected a very negative experience.

I had no one at school C that supported me. Nobody! I was so disconnected. The principal even moved my office away from the main office. Clear down the other hallway. She sent a message. Where is the assistant principal's office? Out of the way".

School C was such a horrible experience stated the participant. "She hid from everything and stuck... stuck all of the hard stuff at me. And she took care of the glorified things."

When asked more about possible support in his fourth district, Derrick learned that he could not survive in an environment that is, in his words, "led by a leader who is looking over your shoulder all of the time and a micro-manager. You just lack trust."

Through several of his school experiences, the participant did comment on his growing network of school administrators in the area. He would attend conference meetings that would give him minimal support and collegiality. Derrick stated, "There were some really good schools in the conference, so I developed some network of colleagues in other districts. Some were beginning to "fly high in PLC" and they would share their experiences. But according to the participant, he didn't have any formal training to support his growth until coming to school district E.

Isolation

The principal commented that he felt isolated in several of the schools. At school A, as stated earlier, moving from teacher to principal was tough. Once a friend, then a supervisor; Derrick commented,

I remember the effect of going from being a teacher, colleague and a friend with probably every teacher, to all of the sudden, what the heck changed in one summer? Everything changed. That was very hard. That was so different from teacher to being ignored as an administrator.

School District B was so remote and the participant continued to feel isolated and disconnected. He commented, “I can’t fit into a totally rural community”. Again, in school D, his office was so removed from the main office that he also felt that disconnect. It wasn’t until he came to school E that he totally was immersed into the community and felt welcomed. He and his family became active and his children attended the same school district in which he served.

Personal Accomplishment

Derrick frequently commented on his failures throughout the narratives. He acknowledged regarding his first administrative experience, “I was not prepared for what I was about to experience, there was no way I was prepared.” The participant described his departures from school A, C, and D, leaving with very negative and unsuccessful feelings. He also commented on the lack of compensation related to the responsibilities of the jobs. This was a challenge for him and his family. Challenges always brought the need to “escape”. The pride and enthusiasm expressed today regarding school E are in direct opposite to feelings earlier in his career.

Family/Work Balance

Throughout all of the interviews, the participant expressed the value that he placed with his wife and children and the need to balance work and family. As his family began to grow, he experienced challenges maintaining that balance. He stated several times their

goal to move closer to family. This caused much stress and at times was a tipping point in his decision to leave a district. School district B was so remote that the participant chose not to live in this community and thus had a commute each day. He commented that this community would not be good for his family and their family priorities. Having just one baby at home didn't become as great of a problem as his experience in school C and D. His second child was born while serving in school C and his work was so overwhelming, with work overload and long hours, he often came home very stressed, frustrated and exhausted. He often commented, "I was in survival mode". The most challenging time for his family was during his stint at school D. His school schedules started to conflict with his oldest daughter, who was now in school in another community. His superintendent demanded his attendance at all activities and was not flexible or considerate in letting him miss to attend his daughter's school events. That was not allowable, according to the participant. "This would not work for any of us. I had to leave". He indicated that he did not like missing his daughter's activities. In closing this discussion, he commented, "Living where I work was important to us. Home/family balance started to fall apart and it had to be repaired".

Further into our interviews when asked, "What does a new principal going into the field need to know?" the participant commented,

You better know you are going to do it, and be committed. If you have a family or married, you better have the buy in of your family. You can't do it without that.

You and your family have to make it work. When I was younger, it was easier.

But now the kids have more events. Make sure they are on board.

This comment reinforced the participant’s priority in keeping work and family in balance. He remarked in the interview that he knew he had to leave school D and find a district in which his family could live and grow. In coming to school E, he sensed from the beginning this could be a community that he and his family could thrive. “I felt welcomed from the beginning” the participant stated. Now with three children, two of school age and in mid-career he took on the principalship for school E. When talking about his current experience at school E, Mr. Chance commented,

We are happy. My family and I have settled into this community and feel that we are making an impact. My children love school. Because I work and live in the community that my children attend, I don’t miss anything. I can be involved in their lives as well as the schools.

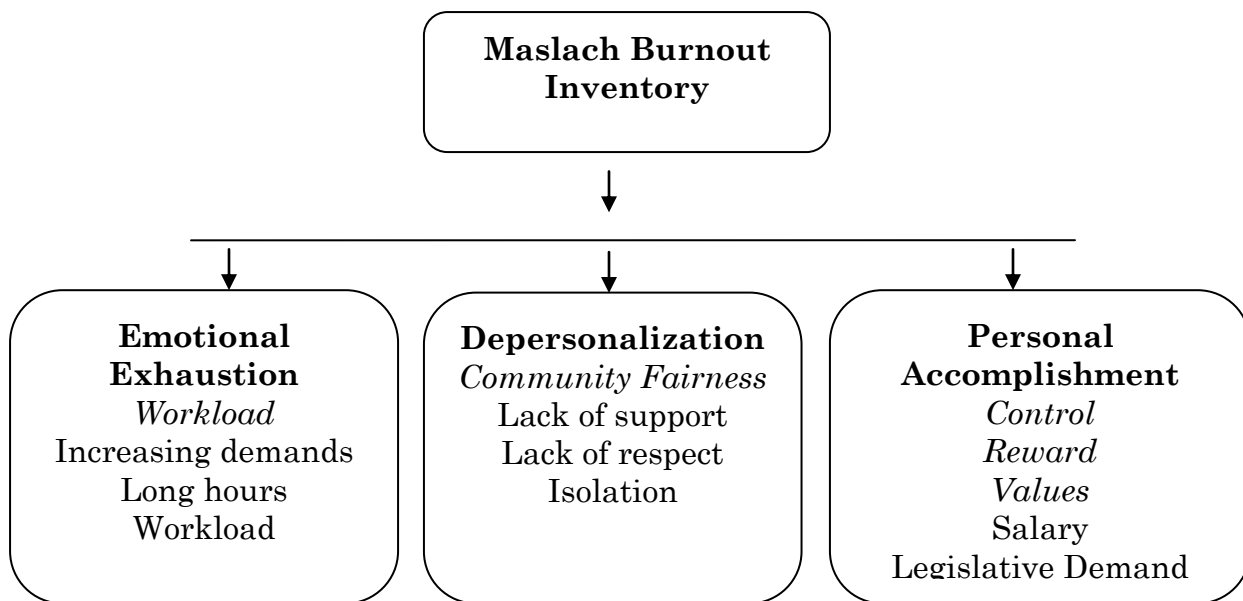


Figure 4.2 Maslach’s three constructs of burnout and stress factors related to burnout (Maslach, et al., 2001)

Turning Point – Mid-career

Derrick, now 42 years old and in mid-career started as principal in school E. This is the first time that he and his family lived in the community that he worked. Now with three children, two of which are school age, he begins this new position. Derrick commented early on in him taking the position, “Obviously, I was happy and we knew this was a place we could live and all that was good”. He indicated that there were a lot of good things about the school. There was a positive district culture. We met as a leadership team and were challenged with improving our schools. “The expectation for improving our schools was a priority”. According to Mr. Chance, “I knew from the interview that this was a positive place”. This was the largest of schools that the participant had served and he noted that he appreciated the collegiality of the administrative team and the support of the superintendent. Soon into his first year, Derrick knew that improvement was needed. “Once I got there, I learned that I was going to have a little trouble in the building. Right away, I knew things at the high school needed improvement. Their achievement was declining and yet the reputation of the school was high to the staff and community.”

The participant, in his narrative reflects on this first year when he saw trouble ahead as he had to address the needs toward school improvement. There were teachers, as Derrick articulated, “Skating by”. He stated, “I quickly learned the school culture was not good. Our ACT was lower and our achievement wasn’t as good, and we had to address these problems”. When asked to elaborate the participant explained,

I have to go back to the chapter in *C to Shinning C, from Compliance to Commitment*. Teachers will say one thing and nod their head, and be very

compliant, but they won't mean it. When they are in that kind of stage, we stay here. So, in that first year, I was trying to get to know the school. It was rocky. When asked what that meant, he further explained, "I never quite felt comfortable...too many problems. We had the achievement, discipline issues, and school vandalism continually. Not quite what I expected from this school".

According to the participant, "We were not there, even in the second year". He indicated that he had great administrative team within the district who met regularly to discuss school improvement and study best practice. He also indicated that he had a great relationship of support from the superintendent. "I felt that I could discuss school issues and problem solve together". But it wasn't until year three, that the participant started to get that feeling of being overwhelmed and increased stress. It was in that year, in conversation with the board and superintendent that he knew things had to change.

When asked in the interview, "What do you think are some of the turning points?" Mr. Chance articulated,

Every time I ran into something bumpy, and every time I failed, I think all of those failures back over the years were what caused me to move. Whenever my career...and there were a few, fairly major problems...I was stuck at the crossroads. 'What are you going to do now?' At school E, something inside me made me respond...had to be the right way and not do something ridiculous...find myself out on the street.

In order to fully understand this tipping point in the participant's career, I used re-analysis of the larger narrative as I discuss his turning point in his mid-career as principal. Figure 4.2 is a short story selection from the transcript of interview #4 detailing the

turning point perceived in the participant’s career. This conversation for the administrator took place in December of his third year at school district E. Data analysis is used to identify how the participant’s stories represent his perception of his lived experience and turning point in his three-year trajectory. Identified themes are color coded and identified in the script.

	Short story – The turning point	
	What changed your trajectory?	
	Having kids and growing up a bit.	Middlescence/mid-career
	I still have to go back to the conversation that I had with the superintendent; that played a huge role, and honestly I don’t know exactly what it was about, the conversation itself, I remember the topic and sitting in her office. I remember leaving, and as I was leaving I called my wife and said, ‘Mary just talked to me, and we have a decision to make, now. ’	Critical conversation
	I was stuck at the crossroads, ‘What are you going to do now?’	
Renewed commitment	There wasn’t a decision to make for us. There was ‘OK, we are going to fix this right now.’	
Relevant training	So there had to be something in the way she delivered the message that was different, and then the PLC opportunity came about right after that.	
	With her talk with me, and shortly thereafter the PLC training offer, I had the wakeup call and then the tools to dig myself out of this mess of myself.	
	Yes, it was me in the mess. I had to take the issues that were brought to me but then also to accept the opportunity to do something with it.	

<p>Fidelity of implementation</p>	<p>Me and 8 other teachers went and learned PLC together. We learned and implemented PLC. We became an exemplary program.</p>	
<p>Sense of renewal</p>	<p>That made me hopeful and made me want to improve. It didn't make me mad. I knew she was right. ...not being upset with her, not liking the message.</p>	<p>Relationship of trust</p>
	<p>So I always think about that, I always think about her personally taking the time to talk to me about that and obviously it made an impact but there was something about the way you delivered the message.</p>	
	<p>I still consider what she would do. I don't want to let her down.</p>	<p>Impact of mentoring relationship</p>

Figure 4.3 Selected Narrative Unit- Turning point

As the participant reflected back on this experience, he reiterated, “The superintendent sat me down and looked me in the face and brought to my attention the need to improve, I had to decide either to fix it or history will repeat itself pretty fast.

As Derrick continued his conversation, he indicated that school district E is the only place he and his family want to be. He said, “We feel very involved and supported. We live here. I like it a lot. We have lived here longer than all of the other schools together. I haven't felt isolated. I had to make it work”.

Supports for Growth

Professional Coaching and Mentoring

For this study, professional coaching and mentoring includes the establishment of a personal relationship for the purpose of professional instruction and guidance. Unlike some studies on middlecence, this study filled the gap on the need for reinforced mentoring in mid-career, where most often, researchers and educators assume there is no need because of the years of experience. However, mentoring includes collegiality and

the development of which creates trusting relationships. It also allows for honest feedback and the ability to set clear expectations and accountability. This environment enables the supervisor to be able to have crucial and critical conversations that move a leader forward in their growth. Throughout the interviews, questions were asked as to mentors or colleagues who supported the participant during his career. “Looking back, who impacted your leadership?” In his earlier years Derrick indicated that, although he had some colleagues in leadership positions, no one stands out as to supporting my growth as a leader. Considering the impact of leaders in superior roles, the participant was asked, “When you think about all of the leaders that you worked for, what have you learned if anything?” Mr. Chance responded,

It taught me you have to be honest with people...honest being that, don't string people along or give them bits of information. ‘What the heck did you just say?’ Be honest, maybe the word is credibility. It is establishing credibility. In school C, she avoided tough issues and sticking them all on the assistant principal. I learned you shouldn't assign anything that you are not willing to do. ‘That's not how you treat people’.

At school D, it was the micro-managing thing. You have to have trust in those who are underneath you. ‘People have to have room to maneuver’. This did not help me develop as a leader, but I learned what not to do. In school B, I was trying the best that I could. I probably wasn't that good. I had all of the grade levels. I had constant discipline...All of the time...Overwhelmed with discipline and management. As far as any kind of leadership, in terms of instructional leadership, it had to be minimal. In terms of trying to be there to help people with

morale and discipline and try to be steady and those kinds of thing, I'm sure I did fine, I don't think that I would have gotten ahead in my leadership in that situation. No growth.

Surprisingly, the participant commented that the climate at school E, with the informal mentoring and coaching by the superintendent, was an important factor in his stability as an administrator. He indicated a trust and respect in her leadership and the climate that was established within the district. Still today, he comments that he feels supported, part of a team and more confident in his ability to lead.

The importance in developing a trusting relationship in order to have critical conversations came out in the interview. According to the participant,

My superintendent's conversation... she could have used different words and it could have been it. Thankfully it wasn't. I say that in contrast to school C and D. I started to show growth as a leader with these adverse conditions, but my leadership didn't grow any further. I left because I felt hopeless.

The participant reflected in detail about the critical conversation that he and the superintendent had in year 3. You could see on his face him reliving this critical encounter.

Starting with that meeting... something came through in that meeting that didn't kill all of my hope inside me, even though it was a negative meeting and the message was bad. Somehow, she crafted it in a way; she didn't distinguish all of the hope. Her credibility had to go up. I didn't want to run and leave or fill out any applications. That is a great feeling. So now, my leadership style is able to continue to grow and develop and become finer tuned. More narrow in what kind

of leader I want to be. Not narrow in my approach. My approach is even better. I focus more.

As he continued to reflect, “I remember that I could not survive in school D, there was no trust. Then, considering school C, “There was more defiance from both the students and the teachers, and I don’t do well with defiance. I don’t respect defiance. I don’t appreciate that...I would never do well in that environment”.

Our discussion then turned to his current school, “She (the superintendent) gave me honest feedback and we had a great working relationship. She was supportive and seemed to believe in me, which helped a lot. Without that it would have been another 3 years and out again”. Derrick had recognized his concerning trajectory. He indicated they had a lot of things that had to be undone and changed. He remembered the superintendent saying,

Things are moving for the better, but for whatever reason, things are deficient, and I was deficient; we are not making progress fast enough or deep enough and we have to fix that. As opposed to ‘nothing is happening’. She seemed to believe in me.

Even today, the principal indicated the support that he feels in the district, “The Assistant Superintendent continues to gives me that support. It is very a collaborative environment. I see a long future here”.

Relevant Training

“The PLC journey changed me,” the participant declared. The whole idea of a more collaborative environment and putting PLC in practice started at school C. Derrick stated that he didn’t know how to make it work. School C said they were a PLC school (3 years in the process) but had very little buy-in. I was introduced to PLC there. The staff was

compliant but no commitment. I wasn't a part of any teams. And then, at school C, he indicated that it was more lip service. In describing the learning culture at school D, the participant reflected,

We started to dive into the exploration of a PLC there, but that did not go anywhere. It was not going to be supported as a real PLC. I will say this; I did some PLC things there, because I started to learn from school C. We formed some teams at school D, because you know school C had the structures. I don't think we ever got to a leadership team. We set up some collaborative teams with the teachers to work on curriculum. That is as far as it got. Not a true PLC.

Our narrative then moved to his current school where he, along with a team of his teachers, embarked on the PLC journey. The participant remembers that the opportunity to go to this training came soon after the critical conversation with the superintendent regarding the needed improvement within their high school. Mr. Chance commented, "Part of me saw that she was giving me support in this tough time. 'You want help, take this'. That was part of my motivation that we went to that". As Derrick described this journey, you could observe the pride and accomplishments that he felt. He remembered at other school districts having speakers and going to workshops, but nothing seemed as impactful as this journey into PLC and its implementation.

He further explained,

Our leadership team went through the training with me. It was powerful three-year training (Appendix I: training content). The implementation has been fantastic. You know, then, we had our really high moments, and we've struggled, but we continue to achieve. Collaborative structures are

in place. It keeps going higher. We are still maintaining the principles of the PLC and I feel like we're doing a really good job with it. The network continues and our growth is continuing.

As Derrik thought back, the big eye-opening experience for him was going from compliance to commitment and working through that at his current school. He learned, "If you are going to be a PLC, you have to do it, it can't be a farce or it just can't be saying it. It will not work". Their school received recognition in year 3 of PLC for exemplary implementation at the state conference. You could observe the pride the principal felt. He stated,

The PLC model helped us. I feel like I can go to more people with ideas, questions, help, and both above me and below me on the pay scale. It continues to make a difference. Even today, we are very collaborative and making gains. We have never veered from our mission statement all of these years.

The participant continued to state that they get support from the county coalition group after they have completed the PLC 3 year training. "The network continues" Derrik commented.

When asked in the interview to describe their PLC journey, he elaborated on the processes that they now have in place. "Our leadership team has been strong from the start". Mr. Chance continued to talk about the dramatic change in how they solve problems. We want to involve as many people as possible and listen. "It is our hope that everyone in our school feels they have a voice".

It might be more efficient to involve less people, but that's not really a learning community. That's not really finding the voice of everybody; and I can't say that I have not mastered the art of hearing every voice, but we are putting into place the processes where we are more collaborative. It takes us longer. And, too, you've got to be willing to deal with opinions and answers that don't necessarily fit what we're looking to hear. But we definitely have built a more trusting culture and come to good solutions. We are stronger as a staff.

The other components that the participant indicates are in place are the PLC guiding questions that provide the foundation for their work. They are clear and have structures in place to address these questions:

What do we want students to know and how are we going to teach it? (Curriculum and instruction) How do we know if and when they have learned? (Using formative, common, and summative assessment) How do we respond when students aren't learning? (Differentiated instruction and intervention), and what do we do if they already know it? (Enrichment and extensions) (DuFour & Mattos, 2013).

Evaluation and Feedback

During each interview, the topic of evaluation and feedback was brought to the participant's attention. In his first experience as a school administrator, he did not recall any formal evaluation or feedback. As he moved to school district B, again, he received no feedback on performance or evaluation. While serving at school C, Derrick recalled the feedback being all superficial, although he did remember that board meetings would go long. "All good evaluations...Didn't mean anything. I don't think they cared...Cared as

long as I was doing my job and keeping those messes out of their hair. It was obvious that she didn't want to get involved". At this school he did remember no pre-warnings if there were issues. "That was nerve-racking. You never knew what to expect...very stressful".

As discussed prior, he received honest feedback and evaluations regarding his growth the first three years at school E. Sometimes these weren't pleasant, but he also felt that his supervisor cared and wanted to see him grow as a leader. The encouragement toward the PLC experience demonstrated that support to Derrick and he indicated this was the reason for his success today. The superintendent has changed, but Derrick continues to feel that support, gets regular feedback and evaluations that encourage his continued growth.

Signs of Rejuvenation

The participant through the narratives showed signs of rejuvenation and renewal in his leadership. His passion and enthusiasm came as he discussed his development at school E.

It was a great environment for growing as an administrator...great support and honest feedback. I feel that I am continuing to learn. I refocused myself. Right now, like for me personally, as far as my career, I feel, I really feel good. This is year 26 and it doesn't feel like that anymore. We are getting results. We can solve tough problems together. Can be hard and stressful sometimes, but we can succeed.

He continued to talk about his current experience with observable enthusiasm.

We were also gaining steam as a school. If I ever get to the point that I am hanging on, well then I need to get the heck out of here, but now I am just

motivated and so as long as I can keep finding ways to stay fresh and I'm lucky.

Figure 4.3 continues the re-analysis of the narrative from interview #4 and highlights signs leading to rejuvenation as described by Maslach, et al., (2001).

Short story - Signs of Rejuvenation		
Pride	What do you say is your most personal accomplishments?	Enthusiasm Sense of purpose
	The number of years I have been a high school principal.	
	I have tons of enthusiasm for this job.	
	I love this job and believe in what we are doing. I love this occupation.	
	The impact... we are living it and seeing it. It is inspiring. It does make a difference. You don't get that from a lot of jobs	
What drives you?		
It is the hope, no more than hope; it knows that we are going to make a difference.		
Confidence Ability to solve problems	We might know the answers to problems, but we are going to figure it out. Knowing that I can work with a group of people working together on this problem.	
	We can make a difference, and that is a huge part.	

Figure 4.4 Selected Narrative Unit – Signs of Rejuvenation

When asked to describe his leadership currently, the participant said,

I'm very collaborative and I feel like I am...I care about the other people. I feel like I am available and I want to help people, them, the kids, the teachers. I am very committed to helping this school and I am very passionate about it. I want to say that I am confident. I don't want to sound too arrogant, I am just confident in us as a building that we are going to

figure it out. I am confident that, if you want to come visit our school, or want an example, anything, yes, 'come in and visit'. You are going to see something good. You are going to see a good environment in this building right away. You are going to see that you are in a good place. So, I now feel that I am a lot more appreciative of where I am in my career. I am not in survival any more. I am trying to grow and constantly improve. I really enjoy my job even though there are things going on that are challenging. I can lead.

As the participant began to reflect on his school and the school improvement process that they had gone through, he commented,

I am so appreciative of going through the PLC process and implementing it here with this staff. There's a group of us who are all...there's a group of us who are in that same age group, and you know, we're determined that when we walk out of this place, we're going to stand for something. We are making a difference.

Summary of Findings

The study focuses on the lived experiences of a mid-career principal and how his trajectory toward burnout changed to that of rejuvenation and a sense of renewal. His life history grid gave an overview of the participant's career and how he navigated the challenges. Themes emerged as the interviews explored his narratives in more detail. Allowing for an ebb and flow conversation encouraged the leader to share his story and reflect on his experiences. As the researcher summarizes the findings, they are framed in the participants trajectory toward burnout and then of his rejuvenation.

Heading Toward Burnout

Summary 1: Feelings of Isolation and Disconnect

Feelings of isolation was felt in many of the settings and continued to the point of serving at school E. These feeling came from a variety of sources as he described in his first principal position, the struggle he had going from teacher to principal. This was tough for Derrick, and in the interview you could still see the challenge and surprise that he felt in that situation. The participant also became alienated in this community after he challenged a long standing tradition. Other thoughts of isolation came from the remote location at school B. As he recalled,

This small 7-12 school was in the middle of nowhere, very rural. And the school's not going to go anywhere, you know, it's just...neat place, neat people, but good Lord, we can't live there...it's just not going to work.

Not living in the places that he worked and longer commutes also disconnected him from the communities he served. It wasn't until he began at school E, living and working in the same community that he no longer felt that isolation.

Summary 2: Feelings of Survival

Many times throughout our discussion, the participant identified feelings of work overload and being overwhelmed with the demands on his time. Particularly, in school setting C, being assistant principal in charge of all discipline and athletic director required much time and energy. The principal seemed to “dump”, according to the participant, all of the tough work. School B also at times was overwhelming to Derrick for responsibility of 7-12 and having little support for discipline and a lack of resources to do the job. Mr. Chance described stress and survival feeling at school D because of the lack of trust in

the superintendent. Her micro-managing style left him insecure in his abilities to make decisions. The participant's lack of confidence was evident throughout his school leadership experiences. He remarked early on, "I learned that even in my early career, I wasn't ready. The job was a lot more demanding than what I thought, more encompassing. I had no idea". He further described not feeling confident in the wide array of issues that were hitting him on a daily basis. "That was a struggle for me personally".

Summary 3: Work and Family Balance

Throughout the interviews, the topic of balancing his work and family came up. This appeared to be a struggle for the participant especially in the fact that he did not live in the same communities in schools B, C, and D. He did not enjoy the commute and as his family grew, this became more of a challenge. Feelings of disgruntlement came to a peak at school D when he was expected to attend the majority of school events and miss some important activities of his daughter. According to Mr. Chance, this started to make a negative impact on his family dynamics.

Summary 4: Lack of Support, Feedback and Trusting Relationship

The participant experienced little support in his administrative career. He recalls little to no feedback or evaluations that gave him guidance for development of his leadership skills. Although in school A and B he had friends whose experience gave some guidance, he felt he did not grow as a leader. Schools C and D were very negative experiences for the participant. Mr. Chance was very overwhelmed with the lack of support in trying to be both assistant principal and athletic director. Combined with the commute and extra supervision, the participant stated that he disliked everything about

the job and experience. Lack of a trusting relationship was apparent at school D. Mr. Chance soon learned that he could not work for a micro-manager looking over his shoulder. “There was no trust. That increased my stress level...I just couldn’t do it”.

Signs of Rejuvenation

Now in mid-career, the participant takes on yet another leadership position. As he was 2 years into this new leadership role, challenges once again came to Derrik’s attention. With professional mentoring and coaching and relevant training he changed his path in a positive nature and began to show signs of rejuvenation.

Summary 5: Professional Mentoring/Coaching

Coming to school district E was a turning point in the participant’s career. He stated that he knew from the interview that this was a positive culture and one that he could grow as an administrator and his family could be happy. Regular administrative meetings support Mr. Chance through their book studies and the collegiality he felt with the other administrators. “It was a professional culture. We, as a district were continually working toward school improvement”. I can remember my superintendent’s constant message, “Are we getting the right results with what we are doing?” The participant indicated feeling strong support and encouragement. He had developed a trusting relationship with the central office administrators and knew that he could go to them with problems.

As discussed earlier describing the participant’s turning point, the superintendent, in their evaluation gave honest feedback and expressed his need to improve. He was heading for year 3 and had reached a crossroads. The high school was making some growth but expectations were greater for their improvement. The participant described his thoughts at that time:

Are we going to keep this pattern going? How many times can you move in your life? But, I think the other part of it was in the message. I wish I could go back and really remember every detail of that conversation. I know I couldn't be real receptive at first. But, there was something... I'm going to say respect... it had to be respect. There was something different about the approach of my superintendent, I never felt like she was a 'boss'. It was never 'shape up or ship out'. She was respected by the whole school and community. I had great respect and thus responded and listened.

Summary 6: Relevant Training

Implementation of PLC with fidelity according to Mr. Chance "Transformed our school and changed the culture. We believe in what we are doing". When asked what the culture looks like, the participant commented,

We have a strong leadership team and have shared leadership within our school, not top down. Our staff has made collective commitments and our conversations can flow. The weekly collaboration that has been scheduled within the school day allows for curriculum work, creating common assessment and analyzing student data. We are student focused. We now have tiers of intervention to make sure that students receive the needed support to be successful. Sometimes it is hard, but we keep trying.

According to the participant, they are still growing and continuing to learn. Mr. Chance recalled talking to one of his key leadership team members, who are around his same age.

“We are hiring some very young teachers now, but we joked, that you better keep up with us as far as our energy. I could never say that before. I can be very genuine”.

The cultural shift described by a Solution Tree document (2010) was evident in this high school during a field observation and was detailed in the school’s evaluation report from the state PLC project. As the participant and researcher walked through during the school collaborative time we observed teachers reviewing common assessments, discussing curriculum, and looking at student data and planning intervention for the students. The discussions were student focused and it was evident that true PLC was in place. From this narrative and observations a cultural shift had taken place in this high school. From the PLC evaluation tool, the following was evident:

A shift in fundamental purpose – From teaching to learning

A shift in use of assessments – more common formative assessments

A shift in the response when students don’t learn – Interventions in place for students

A shift in the work of teachers – Creation of collaborative teams

A shift in focus – A focus on results using SMART goals

A shift in school culture – From compliance to commitment

A shift in professional development – Relevant training; learning by doing

(Evaluation taken from: *Cultural Shifts in a Professional Learning Community, Learning by Doing*, 2010)

Sometimes a lack of time and limited resources challenge their continued improvements. But, Derrik went on to say that, “We really do buy in to that *Excellence in Learning for All* mission. That is our attitude; we can’t be satisfied with where we are”.

In closing this chapter, I refer to research question #2, what influences might precipitate professional renewal of middlescent principals? A process model detailed in Chapter five is created to support the rejuvenation of principals in middlecence. At the core of this model is professional coaching and mentoring. This was found to be a critical piece to the turning point of the participant. It entailed strong communication, ongoing support founded in trust and credibility, relevant training and the implementation of the PLC model, connectedness with the community, and accountability with clear expectations. With the growing shortage of effective leaders in schools today and the need for continuous school improvement, processes must be in place to address the needs of these mid-career administrators.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

When the participant was asked in the narrative discussion, “What would you like your superintendent to know about your needs in mid-career as a leader?” He replied, “Don’t forget about me, I still want to learn and continue to grow. Trust me to do good work.”

The contents of chapter five include the key findings in relation to the research questions:

1. How does a mid-career principal characterize his leadership and growth throughout the school improvement process?
2. What influences might precipitate professional renewal of middlescent principals?

The importance of keeping school leaders in the field has been noted in the literature as critical to the success of schools. “What we know about principal retention suggests that school leaders are crucial to the school improvement process and that they must stay in a school a number of consecutive years for the benefits of their leadership to be realized (Béteille et al., 2011). In “The High Cost of Turnover”, a report from School Leaders’ Network suggests, “Investing in the backend of principal retention will carry front-end pipeline investments much further, proposing specific solutions to reverse the current flood of leadership out the door” (p. 2).

This study is a snapshot of one principal struggling to find stability and thus make impact on school improvement. School administrators must address the needs of the middlescence for school principals in order to keep quality leaders in the field.

The findings and key themes detailed in chapter four will be reviewed. Based on these findings a process model was created and discusses and acknowledges the critical role that professional coaching/mentoring plays for the success of middlescent principals.

In addition, continuous adult learning and fidelity of implementation of Professional Learning Communities is discussed and how it relates to the literature. Consolidation of adult learning theory along with the coaching/mentoring relationship was found critical to rejuvenation of the mid-career leader. This helped elevate the process and developed a trusting/ mentoring relationship that was respectful of one's longevity, age and experience and develops and thrust the principal into continuous learning. The conclusion details the implications for action and recommendations for future research in effective school research to prevent burnout rejuvenate the middlesecent leaders and sustain quality principals in the schools.

Review of Key Findings

Research Question #1

How does a mid-career principal characterize his leadership and growth throughout the school improvement process?

The participant was on a negative career trajectory, changing positions every three years until 2009, at age 42, things changed for Mr. Chance. He now remains in that school and is in year nine serving in the same district. The participant has attributed his success to the mentoring/coaching of the superintendent, the collegial environment of the school and community, and relevant training of the PLC. In Derrik's words, "This experience has changed my life."

Day and Bakioglu (1996) and Earley and Weindling (2007) identify several stages of development of career administrators in PK-12 education.

The mid-career principal is identified in the establishment stage – and defines an administrator who is often characterized as one having feelings of competence,

confidence, and enthusiasm – in essence, being in control. In this stage, principals may feel a sense of maintenance verses renewal (p.205).

The lived experience of the participant in this study did not appear to be defined as competent, having confidence and/or enthusiasm at age 42 when beginning his position at school E.

Morison, Erickson, and Dychtwald (2007) compares middlecence to adolescence; “It can be a time of frustration, confusion, and alienation. But it can also be a time of self-discovery, new direction, and fresh beginnings” (p.1). The participant in this case aligns with their findings and definitely showed the signs of frustration, confusion, and alienation. Morison, et al. (2007) continued to comment that with challenges of leadership comes the “vacillating insecurities in professionalism” (p. 2). They noted the benefits of professional coaching as a means to support these leaders in mid-career. Found in the data was just that. Mr. Change’s unstable trend in school leadership changed in his experience at school E.

Throughout the narrative, the participant was definitely showing signs of burnout as described in Figure 5.1 (Maslach, et al., 2001). When asked “Did you ever consider wanting to get out of administration, the participant replied, “Maybe get out of education...I was questioning some of the school A years. Then during the school C and D, there was no doubt. I actually applied for other jobs”. According to the participant,

It was escaping, probably... That was during those times that I felt horrible; I didn’t like my job. I didn’t like what I was doing. I was so overwhelmed with so much work. And in school D it was being so micro-managed. I felt useless and uncertain. I never knew what he wanted.

Looking back, when asked about how his expectations of leadership had changed over the years, Derrik replied,

My expectations have changed dramatically. At first no expectations; and today I have a lot of them. I went from manager to now I'm getting this bigger picture of what this is about. Moving from survival type mode to now spending a big chunk of time as an administrator. I was hoping to survive, and doing well sometimes, and not doing well sometimes to now, today, not concerned about survival, that is not the #1 goal. Now my expectation is all about our school, and students, and our staff and making sure that we as a school building, and that includes all the people inside, are doing the right thing and for the right reasons. I never had those expectations earlier.

As the participant began his stint at school E and he was in a district that focused on continuous school improvement, things changed. The tipping point and sense of urgency felt by the participant began toward the end of year of two during his critical conversation with the superintendent as discussed in chapter 4. The honest, yet hard conversation was Derrik's "wake-up call" to action. The support he felt and the opportunity to participate with his team of teachers guided him in a trajectory toward rejuvenation.

Research Question #2

What influences might precipitate professional renewal of middlescent principals?

Maslach et al. (2001), describes possible supports that prevent the feeling of burnout and lowers the feelings of stress. "They discuss addressing emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment" (p.). As can be seen in figure 5.1, these

researchers suggest providing time to share with others, small groups, on-going support, providing relevant and personal learning and increasing the leaders sense of self-efficacy.

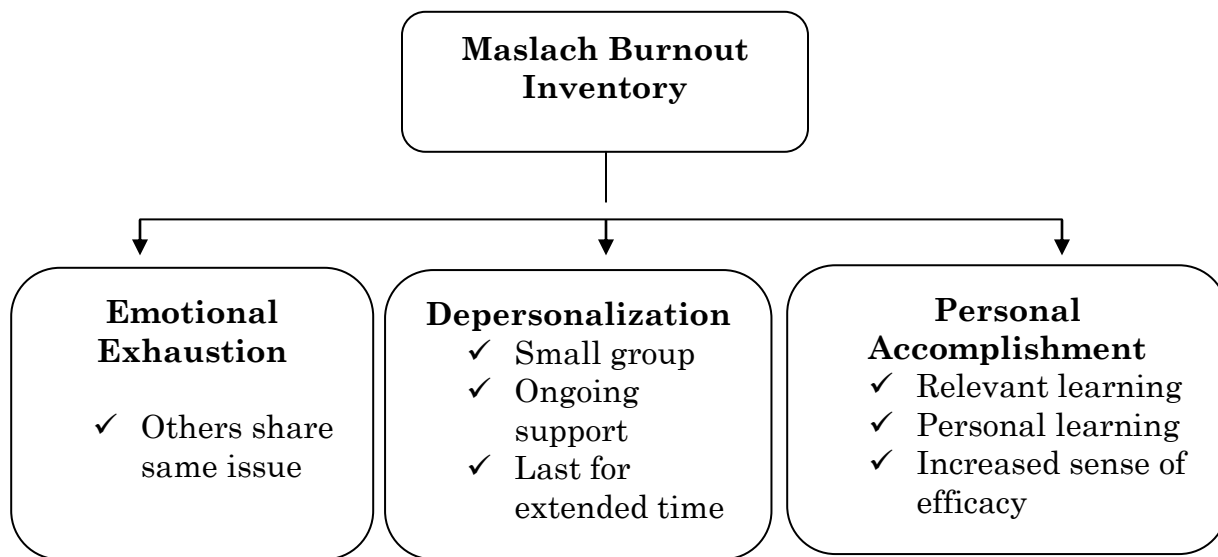


Figure 5.1 Principals' networks addressing constructs of burnout (Maslach, et al. 2001)

The process model developed through this study expands on Maslach's thinking and reflects upon the success of the participant's experience. These critical thoughts stand out: the development of a professional coaching and mentoring experience, which includes effective communication and supports, which demonstrate trust and respect in the relationship, relevant training which support adult learning and leads to fidelity of implementation of Professional Learning Community, and gaining a sense of network and community, which supports work family balance.

Renewal for Middlecent Leaders – The Process Model (Figure 5.2)

In this model (figure 5.2), professional coaching is at the core to meet the needs of the principal in middlecence. Similar to the work in *Effective Coaching* by Michael J. Cook (1999), coaching encourages the person to take ownership for their own work.

“Coaching is way to provide leaders with tools and supports to excel in their current role

and to gain a sense of self-awareness that allows them to enhance their effectiveness and relationship with people in the workplace” (cited in Karsten, et al., 2010, p. 140). The participant in this study indicates the power that having a mentor/coach that can be honest have on the impact of his career. With that trust comes the ability for the supervisor to be able to have critical conversations when needed and then give the support necessary to continue to develop the growth of the leader. Derrik remarked, when asked, what a superintendent can do for a mid-career leader:

Give us support and hope. Don't just leave us alone and think we know everything. Then all of the sudden, when things go bad....That is equally damaging as killing the fire when situations are not dealt with. Done appropriately, that is the trick.

Model for Addressing the Needs of Middlescence in School Administrators

The following (figure 5.2) is the process model created in response to the addressing the needs of mid-career principals and support from the findings of this qualitative research study.

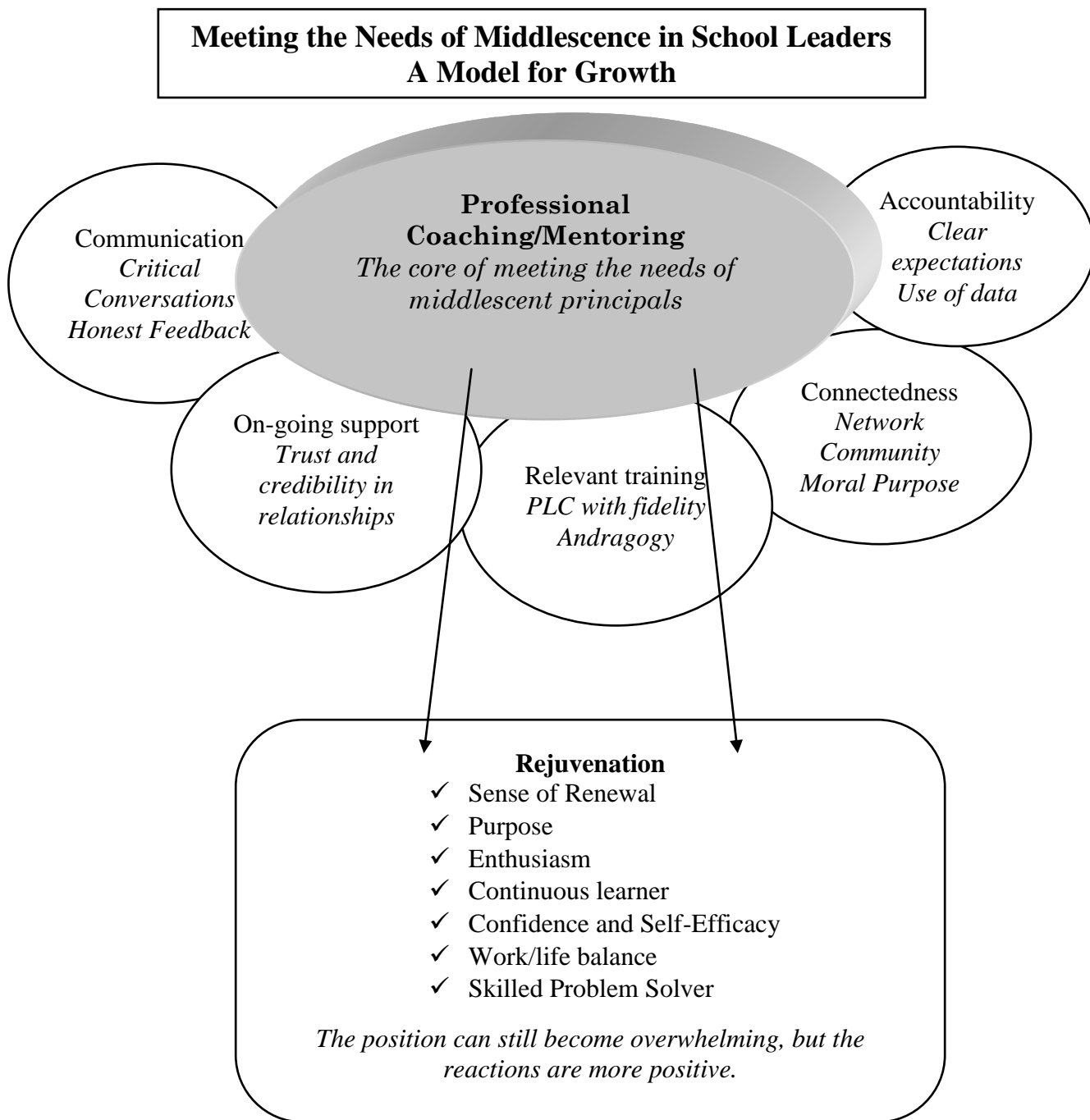


Figure 5.2 Process Model – Meeting the Needs of Middlecence in school principals

Leading to the rejuvenation of a school leader and found in the participant in this study is the relationship that the principal has with his/her supervisor. As noted with Derrick, in mid-career in his experience at school E, he was supported by what he calls a “credible leader”. He had a supervisor who he felt he could discuss problems, a team of colleagues in which they studied best practice and school improvement, and a strong leadership team within his school. The trusting relationship became important when difficult and crucial conversations had to occur. In the book, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, Lencioni (2002) acknowledges *trust* as a basis for a successful team. In the absence of trust, he goes on to say, “Team members are unwilling to be vulnerable within the group. Team members who are not genuinely open with one another about their mistakes and weaknesses make it impossible to build a foundation for trust” (p.195). The participant was open to the conversation that was had in discussing his need to make improvements. Although it was a difficult conversation, Derrick responded in a positive manner, and began to make significant growth as a leader.

When asked of the participant, what supports mid-career principals need, Derrick responded:

Trust them, build a relationship...be visible in the schools. The superintendent needs to know that I want to continue to learn about my job and grow in my position. I need somebody to help point me in the way. You don't have to do the work for me, don't talk down to me, just tell me and be straight with me. 'This is what you need to work on'...and be aware of the resources and support o training that would help. Give me the tools to grow so that we can educate ourselves.

Relevant Training and Fidelity of Implementation

Adult learning outlined by Knowles (1984) emphasizes “Adults are self-directed and expect to take responsibility for decisions” (p. 12). Discussed in the review of literature, adult learning must involve the adult in the planning, it must be relevant, and be problem-centered (Kersley, 2010). Andragogy makes the following assumptions about the design of learning:

- (1) Adults need to know why they need to learn something
- (2) Adults need to learn experientially,
- (3) Adults approach learning as problem solving, and
- (4) Adults learn best when the topic is of immediate value (Knowles, 1984, p. 12).

Mr. Chance saw the critical need for improvement and the PLC opportunity aligned with what research indicates about powerful adult learning. It was found that relevant embedded training could support the principal. The PLC training and continued ongoing support for this initiative continues to strengthen the participant’s leadership skills and were responsible for the school improvement success of their high school. The fidelity of implementation of the PLC model was a major factor in the stability and rejuvenation of the participant. This school was recognized at the state conference as an exemplary school for PLC implementation.

Network and Connectedness

Another important priority in this model is the organizational socialization and connectedness of the leader. Leaders are most effective when they feel connected to the community and have a sense of importance within their school. Fullan (2002) discusses the need for leaders both, in business and education, “to have a moral purpose and

demonstrate that hope and unwarranted optimism, enthusiasm, and energy” (p. 2). He identified five action-and-mind sets that effective leaders combining: “A strong sense of moral purpose, an understanding of the dynamics of change, and emotional intelligence as they build relationships, a commitment to developing and sharing new knowledge, and a capacity for coherence making (enough coherence on the edge of chaos to still be creative)” (p. 2).

Throughout the narrative, the participant commented on the struggles that he felt with balancing work and family. Coming to school E and living within the community that he worked, was a positive change for him. Derrick commented something that he learned, early on:

No matter where you live, when principal, you are principal 24/7. There is tons of people that I don't know, but they know me, or they know who I am, and so, I am never not the principal. No matter where I go, whatever I do, I am the principal. That was tough. It took me a long time to adjust to that. I had to get use to it.

The principal lives in the community with his family. “This is the best place that we have been” indicated Derrick. My family is happy; I have a wonderful school and feel that I am making a difference”.

In addition, the PLC network is strong and continues to give him and his school support as they continue continuous school improvement efforts. “I have built quite a network and others school our school. That makes us feel good. When asked, how you would describe the high school now in comparison to when you first came, the participant responded:

This is a place I am really proud of. This is a place that I am happy to have my daughters in or anybody's daughters or sons; and it wasn't always like that. We are doing the right things; I really feel that we have the right structures in place. I want the structures to outlast any of us. I want those structures not dependent on people.

Impact of the Research Study

Emerging research and theory has found that principal turnover has *direct* negative effects on student- and school-level achievement, and that the strongest impact appears immediately after turnover occurs (Béteille et al., 2011). "Turnover rates of practicing principals have been increasing and can be attributed somewhat to burnout. The changing role can create a sense of inadequacy and causing a desire to change career paths" (Cushing, Kerrins, & Johnstone as cited in Béteille et al., 2011).

Similarly, found in this study, they School Leaders' Network (2014) details the following solutions to retaining leadership within schools:

Continue to invest in leadership development beyond pipeline investments.

Engage principals in authentic peer networks where principals can learn from other principals the art of practice of leading schools. Provide one-to-one coaching support to principals beyond the first two years. And, revise the structure and purpose of district office principal supervisors' roles (p. 2).

The findings of this research study will be used by other school administrators, district leaders, and preparation institutions to better support administrators in mid-career. Knowledge of the challenges and barriers to school administrators and understanding the supports that are needed will assist in retaining the quality of school leaders.

Superintendents who can recognize signs of burnout and possible problems with connectedness can use this information to change the negative trajectory the leaders are heading.

The study by Leithwood and Montgomery (1984) identified obstacles that impact principal leadership. They include “deficits in leadership skills, time management, organization, problem solving, decision making, budgeting, building management and teaching and learning” (p. 310). The PLC model implemented with fidelity was found to address many of these barriers and support a continuous improvement process in schools. As for school E, implementation of PLC creates a culture of learning, and collective responsibility for the learning of all students, according to Mr. Chance. As is detailed on the state’s website acknowledging exemplary implementation, “The school is recognized for creating solutions and creating improved loyalty, productivity, and enthusiasm” (MO PLC, 2016).

Implications for future study

This study has current implications for superintendents in today’s schools. Future study relating to the overlay of consistent coaching, the mentoring relationship and relevant training can expand this research and impact middleclass. What part does reflection by both superintendent and principal have on this process? What part do self-assessment and that critical moment of crisis have on acceptance and the need for rejuvenation?

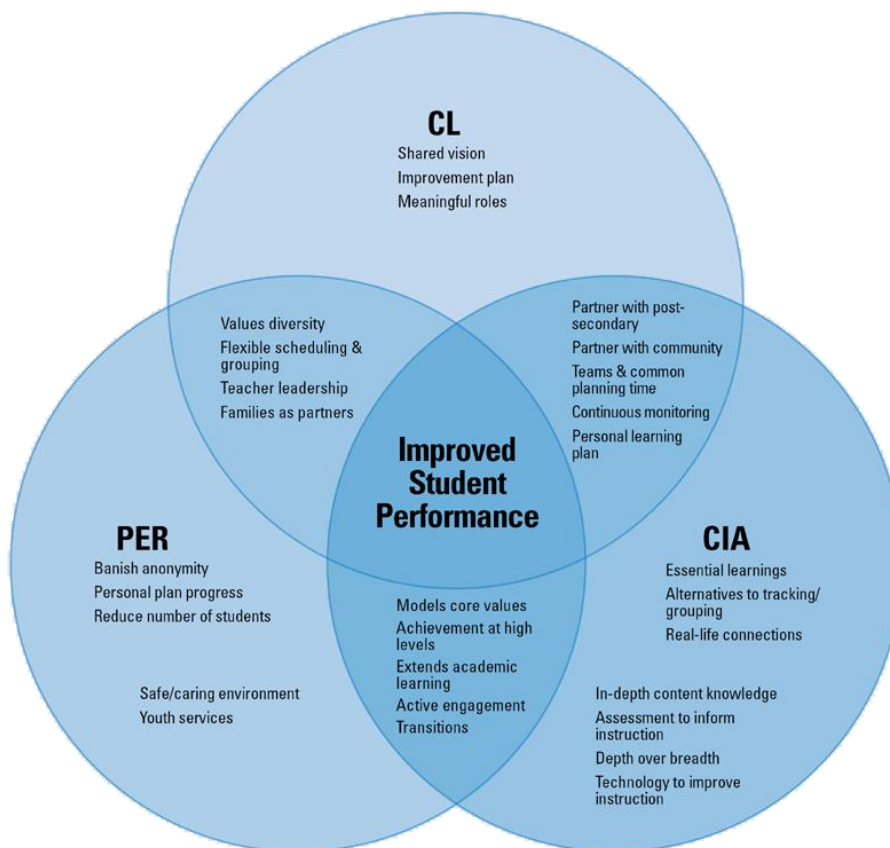
Conclusion: Effective School Leadership leads to Effective School Leadership

According to Michael Fullan (2002), “What standards were to the 1990s, leadership is to the future” (p. 1). He explains that just having these standards in place is not enough

to sustain reform and keep our leaders in place in such challenging times in schools.

“Establishing the high-quality leadership that will facilitate reform is difficult because we are losing scores of talented people as demographics shift and early retirements mount” (Fullan, 2002). Furthermore, focus must be devoted to developing leadership.

This study looked closely at the mid-career principal’s leadership development toward developing school’s structure and process through their school improvement process. As found in NASSP Breaking Ranks II (2004) a framework helps schools become more student-centered.



The authors discuss four themes and ten skills for successful 21st Century School Leaders. “The themes include: educational leadership, resolving complex problems, communications, and developing self and others” (NASSP, 2010, p. 11). As discussed in the literature review in chapter 2, “schools look to the principal to spearhead change

efforts and without strong leadership; schools cannot make growth “(Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004 as cited in NASSP, 2010, p. 11).

In conclusion, the lived experience of this middlescent principal was one of several critical stages from heading toward burnout to rejuvenation. His reflection and learning through his negative school experiences built “lessons learned”, and with the support and relevant training at school E, he was able to re-direct his career and success as a school and family. The focus on school improvement and the network of support and mentorship along with relevant training and fidelity of implementation of the PLC, impacted this principal in a positive manner.

Findings within this study saw the development of the principal in middlecence grow and develop as a leader. The process model (figure 5.2) is designed to address the needs of mid-career leaders and lead to these effective leadership practices, and ultimately maintain quality leaders in schools. It takes *Effective Leaders to Create Effective Leaders*. Superintendents must support and develop a culture that recognizes strong and struggling leadership and create a culture of learning that gives critical coaching and mentoring and provides learning resources that help their growth.

When Mr. Chance was asked to give advice to novice principals starting their career, he exclaimed,

Love what you are doing and make sure you have your family on board. Know the extent of the time it takes. It is always on your mind 24/7. You have to have heart. I would have never seen that in my earlier years.

Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter



Institutional Review Board
University of Missouri-Columbia

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irb@missouri.edu

November 3, 2016

Principal Investigator: Charlotte Miller
Department: MU Partnership Educ Renewal

Your IRB Application to project entitled The Middlescence Principal: Professional Growth in Times of Increased Accountability was reviewed and approved by the MU Institutional Review Board according to the terms and conditions described below:

IRB Project Number	2002113
IRB Review Number	203544
Initial Application Approval Date	November 03, 2016
IRB Expiration Date	November 03, 2017
Level of Review	Exempt
Project Status	Active - Open to Enrollment
Exempt Categories	45 CFR 46.101b(2) 45 CFR 46.101b(4)
Risk Level	Minimal Risk
Type of Consent	Exempt (Consent Script)
Internal Funding	Personal funds

The principal investigator (PI) is responsible for all aspects and conduct of this study. The PI must comply with the following conditions of the approval:

1. No subjects may be involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date.
2. All unanticipated problems, adverse events, and deviations must be reported to the IRB within 5 days.
3. All changes must be IRB approved prior to implementation unless they are intended to reduce immediate risk.
4. All recruitment materials and methods must be approved by the IRB prior to being used.
5. The Continuing Review Report (CRR) must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval at least 30 days prior to the project expiration date. If the study is complete, the Completion/Withdrawal Form may be submitted in lieu of the CRR.
6. Maintain all research records for a period of seven years from the project completion date.

Appendix B: School District Consent Letter

██████████

Superintendent of Schools

January 30, 2016

To Whom This May Concern:

I am granting permission to Charlotte Miller to conduct a narrative case study on, the middlescence principal, which explores the leadership experiences, perceptions, and growth of a mid-career principal in his high school. Ms. Charlotte Miller will conduct voluntary interviews and observe faculty and leadership team meetings focusing on the leadership of the principal. In addition, Ms. Miller will review documents already accessible to the general public relating to this study. All identifying names and references to the school district will remain anonymous with the use of pseudo names. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the process. Ms. Miller may utilize any data collected for the purposes of completing requirements for a record of study towards a PhD from the University of Missouri, Columbia.

Respectfully,

██████████, Superintendent

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

University of Missouri IRB:

I am granting permission to Charlotte Miller to conduct a narrative case study on *The Middlescence Principal*, which explores the lived experiences throughout my administrative career in education. Mrs. Miller will conduct interviews which entails a study of my historical timeline in administration as well as discussion of my experiences throughout my leadership career. She will also review historical documents that are available to the general public and observe my work within my current school. I understand that all identifiable names and references to the school and district will be anonymous with the use of pseudo names.

My consent is being given voluntarily. I am free to withdraw at any time without any negative effect on my relations with the University of Missouri or my school district. I have been assured that confidentiality will be maintained at all times and that the research will only be used for the purpose of completing requirements for a record of study toward her PhD from the University of Missouri.

Sincerely,



Principal Research Participant,

Appendix D: Narrative Interview Guide

Narrative Interview Guide

Allows for ebb and flow of the narrative

Focus of Study: Understand the lived experiences of a mid-career principal framed during the school's improvement process

Research questions:

- 1. How does a mid-career principal characterize his leadership and growth throughout the school improvement process?**
- 2. What influences might precipitate professional renewal of middle-aged principals?**

Areas of focus for narrative reference

- Effective Leadership (instructional leadership/management)
 - Professional preparedness, induction, mentoring
 - Shape vision for academic success, climate hospitable to education, cultivate leadership in others, instruction, management, data, and processes
 - School improvement process
- Training - Professional Learning Community (PLC) – Mission, vision, values, goals, collaborative culture, teams, collective inquiry and continuous improvement, focus on results, action orientation, and experimentation, results orientation
- Barriers and challenges to effective leadership
- Federal/state accountability

- Supports for growth (in district and network of supports)
- Mentoring, professional coaching
 - Collegiality, friendship
- Organizational socialization
 - Sense of connectedness
 - Trust, respect
 - Confidence
 - Competence
- Evaluation and feedback
- Experience and aptitude, competence, experience in the job
- Satisfaction/dissatisfaction
- Job fit, clarity, responsibility and expectations
- Climate, location
- Meaning/ purpose, value of work
- Pressures, stress, anxiety

Signs of burnout (Maslach, et al., 2001)

Burnout – Feelings of low personal accomplishment and strong feelings of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization.

Self-efficacy – the individual’s belief about what he or she can achieve in a given context

Appendix E: Narrative Interview # 5 Guide

Focus: Member checking and looking back on lived experience and career in school administration.

Guiding questions to allow for ebb and flow conversation

- What do you recall to be your expectations going into leadership? How has your expectations changed since those early years?
- Describe yourself as an administrator in your 30s, 40s and currently. Or describe your leadership in your early years, middle years, and present. How do you describe your work?
- Talk about your professional growth throughout your career?
 - Have you had a breakthrough in your learning? (possible follow up)
 - Tell me why that particular moment stands out? (possible follow up)
- In the previous interview, you talked about coming to school E was a turning point in your career. Tell me more about this. Why was this a turning point?
- Looking back on your administrative career. Tell me about major successes and failures as a leader.
- What experiences impacted your career?
- What motivates you? What do you value?
- You talked about being rejuvenated? Talk to me about that. What can you attribute to this?
- What do you feel are the most important skills to have as a leader? Why?
- Describe how your leadership skills compare to your earlier years.
- What advice would you give a new principal going into the field today?

Appendix F: Sample Transcript

Interview #2

October 17, 2016

Focus of Interview: Examining his first few administrative positions based on his historical grid

The last time we met we went over your life history grid. I want to make sure this is accurate. We just hit the surface of your positions and family information. And some of the things you highlighted. What I would like to do, I want you to make sure you understand the confidentiality of this information. There will be no identifiable information. All of the identifiable information will be

Sure, OK

Today I would like to review the beginnings of your administrative career.

Just kind of getting a feel for, I want to go more in depth in those early years.

DV (That's hard)

I know. That is one of the difficult parts of the narrative is remembering those things that stick with you in the far past.

Let's start with you going to school A as a teacher

I taught, coached baseball

...and then I understand, from the previous interview, that the administrative job opened up at school A

Nun retired, Sister Mary Kay (pseudo name), she retired

So you applied for the job?

Yes

Talk to me about that experience and what interested you in administration at that point.

I thought I could do better than her. I had no idea what I wanted to do. I didn't have any aspirations to be a principal. I was in the right time and place, and knew I could do better than her. But I have always, since far back as I can remember... always wanted to keep moving up. Whatever moving up meant... for whatever position in time. I get restless in that regard... and so. I don't know that I was unhappy; I assume I was happy in my teaching and coaching and enjoyed it and I don't know there was anything there. I do very distinctly remember thinking... I was convinced that I could do better than she was doing. I had a lot of friends on the staff that I met when I got there. I knew I had a lot of support from them, and it's school A. I don't know how many people applied for the position, but we were a smaller catholic school in the vicinity, I think they required you to live in Mountain Home (pseudo name). I think I remember we moved. I'm sure there were a ton of people applying for the job (sarcastic). My odds of getting it were pretty good, compared to the pool. I can't imagine many people applied. I was also friends with the principal at the K-8. So I started talking to him and he convinced me that I should do this...and so, there you go.

How would you describe your principalship at school A?

We made changes. We made a lot of changes; I know that, both in discipline and in religion. I mean I couldn't ... Then there was a change in pastors. Father Francis, James Francis (pseudo name). He became the pastor of the church right about the same time. That was just a coincidence. He was on the same wave length that I was, so it was made to be. At school A we didn't go to church. At the time I can't say that I was devote

as we are now, but still, we went to church and it just struck me as odd that here in this catholic school, we had confession, but we didn't go to church as a school. I always thought that was odd. So we went to church. Mass once a week, we started that. This to me just seems obvious. The church was on the same campus as the high school. It wasn't like it was a very far walk. It was on the same piece of concrete. Then there were things like discipline. We only had about 200 kids or so. It seemed like it was a crazy place. And so, they weren't radical changes, but like we have to have something regarding discipline. But those were the big things, the area of discipline and the area of religion.

How would you describe the community as well as the school community?

It was very close. I remember there was a Wal-Mart that wanted to come in and they went before the board. The town did not accept that. Wal-Mart was not coming in. It was a town of much tradition and pride. They are very steep in tradition... Good and bad. The school culture was....It's hard to answer that question. Because there were a lot of good things, but the problem was the neighbor right up the hill.... Public is such a good public school. It is a school of 500. And it is really good school. And so, you start running into some families that... I started noticing some splits. There would be cases where one kid went to school A and one went to the public school. A lot like here, where the school is the center. The school does define the community...same with Mountain Home. There are two high schools...the catholic and public that was defining it. I remember Father Francis talking about how the enrollment of the families that went to church was always low. I remember him talking about the percentage being low and that was his reason for wanting us to go to mass. Mine seemed obvious. It was right there.

We had religion classes, so I think that the tradition is definitely one of the ways to characterize it. A lot of things it was in both schools define who the city was itself.

When you get two schools in the community, and it did cause conflict. There was a good side and a negative side to that. But then I don't know if you are familiar with driving to Mountain Home. You really have to want to get there. You have to get off the highway. You have to go 5 miles off the highway. It is not right, off the highway, and once you get there, it is land locked. It is kind of remote. It is not like an easy commute such as here getting to a larger community. to get to Columbia. It is a tougher commute to get to anywhere else, to the nearest neighbors.

How do you see that first principal position?

It was rough. I will never forget the sudden... You and I happen to get to be good friends, and then, all of the sudden... nothing changed but the title... and I noticed you were not talking to me. It was an eye opener. It was.... I didn't think that I had changed. Maybe I did. And so, I learned there was a lot more to the principalship than I ever had imagined. And I was lucky, I had my colleagues there to help me, otherwise... it was different being at a catholic school. There were not as many regulations, thankfully. There was a school board. I went, but Father Francis was the one with the final say. It was kind of like the reverse relationship between the Supt and BOE in Public School. The board president... The pastor is ultimately in charge. You had school board meetings. They were more advisory. They had a role, but they didn't have a lot of power behind the role.

I did a lot of the same tasks that I do right now, but there were not as many regulations. Maybe I wouldn't know what it would have been right now. It was 20 years ago. I

learned that even in that position I really wasn't ready. The job was a lot more demanding than what I thought...more encompassing. I had no idea.

When you say you weren't ready, what do you mean?

I wasn't ready for the wide array of issues that were going to hit me on a daily basis...community things. That's when I learned that I was always the principal and there was nothing I could do about that. That was a struggle personally. We lived in a surrounding community and so we got out and did things but all the sudden. It is like here too... There is tons of people that I don't know, but they know me or they know who I am, and so, I learned right away that I'm the principal 24-7. And I am never not the principal. No matter where I go, whatever I do, I am the principal. That was tough. It took me a long time to adjust to that. I didn't exactly go to large metropolitan areas; I had to get use to it. I was not use to that at all. I had to learn everything I do now, that is probably my paranoia... Maybe not. Anything I do could be seen or heard by anybody. I don't know who those people are. They may or may not care.

Talk about the accountability at school A.

We had a board we went through. We had an annual review. It was different from a public school. It was not as strenuous as a public school. All private schools had to go through a review panel similar to our state system... you go through a 5 year review. You had to submit things annually. But I do remember that it wasn't anything like public school. There was accountability, but you can't just tank it, you did have to have those committees and had to report those test reports. We didn't have state testing. At school A our student ACT scores were off the charts for the kids who took it. I do remember that. Spectacular. That wasn't an issue.

What kind of preparation did you have at school A?

I was a teacher... I wasn't prepared... maybe me being a coach. I had those two guys that I worked with. Thankfully,

I was looking to try to move up to whatever the situation was. I tried to... I always ended up with some kind of leadership role. I think mentally, I have that in me to do.

But, so, I can keep my wits about me, I wasn't going to fall apart. But as far as the day to day tasks... I had a great secretary. I got along with her. Thanks the Lord for that. I think she was more excited that I got the job. I remember that we had a good relationship when I was a teacher. I don't think she was the previous principal's fan. I think that is an understatement.

When I got the job, I know she was very happy. She was very involved in the process of the school. She is a lifelong community person. So she cared what was going to happen there.

Did they have any kind of mentoring or induction?

Are you kidding? There was no mentoring or training.

You talk about your colleagues. Talk to me about how they supported and/or helped you.

Anything I needed they were there. I will never forget, I a meeting with a parent that we knew wasn't going to go well. And the K-8 principal came over. That meant a lot to me. I didn't realize at the time. That was huge. What he did.

So, what did he do?

In that parent conference, he was there. I just know that the meeting wasn't good. We weren't meeting on good terms. All I remember was that he was there. I can't remember

what he did there. I know it made me feel really good. I don't remember where the divide was but there were two buildings. K-12 and his part K-8 was divided into two different sections. Part of his was in the HS. So he had two offices. But for part of the day we were in the same building so we ate lunch in the same facility. So there were parts of the day where our paths crossed. So seeing him was easy. The priest, his office was in the building where the church was, and as I said, not far. Whenever our students hadfor PE it was out the back and there was a huge patch of concrete. Huge area, where we had recess and PE and that is close to the church. And so that would give me reason, I would go out there to see those classes. Classroom observations hardly did that. But it was real easy to get over to see the Father Francis. Anytime. And then he would be... I could talk to him about anything, it wouldn't matter, personal, school, religion....whatever it was, he was there.

Did they do any type of evaluation?

I don't remember any type of formal evaluation.

Any type of feedback?

Probably not the kind of feedback that we consider today...More informal. I think there wasn't any official feedback. It was just more like friends trying to help each other. I'm sure they did. What they gave me was as viable mentoring as anybody or any type of program today. I know we didn't use that term 20 years ago.

It sounds like you kind of found people to support you.

They were friends, those guys were authentic and so was my secretary. I don't have any recollection that they were trying to avoid me or not willing for me to go to them. I don't have any recollection of that. Not that it was all roses.

What do you remember is the most important experience that you got there?

What was mostly negative was that hazing and drinking thing that we had stopped. Years of tradition of hazing at school. There was a party, and the players were made to contribute... to give money to the seniors who played football. And, every male in the school plays football. It was both a pro and a con. But they collected money and gave it to the seniors and they said it was for gifts for the coach, but it was really for an end of the year party. And you do your job as a freshman; you are invited to the party. It is always at a parent's house and they had alcohol and drink. It had gone on for decades. And Father Francis and I stopped it and so it was blood. And I am still trying to wear some of the battle scars. And that it one of the reasons I left, because it got so uncomfortable. My successor...she didn't have to deal with it. After I left and went to school B I haven't heard that they had drifted back into that party. No one knew of it. Where it used to be everybody knew about it.

When you said, that when deciding to leave, you felt uncomfortable. What did you mean?

The pressure got to be... You paid a price for doing that. I will never forget, a noted community member and business man...his son was one of kids involved and he was a senior and his dad the insurance agency, when you drove into the community, and there is a huge sign...a huge billboard... and that was his dad and of course his son was the ring leader of that group. The family has been in the community, for who knows... 3000 years, who know how long...in the trenches. And of course, it was people like that who would run the show. But, Father Francis and I...we didn't let the kid play sports all year. That was the punishment. They had to get all of the money turned back and suspended

from extracurricular activities all year. And I will tell you. We had a relationship with that family, but after that, forget that. We had a relationship, but not like before, (cynical laughter) and so just... social things like that, after school made it where, nothing really happened... things just changed, and you could just tell, just from reactions from people... different little things that would pop up. OK, this not worth it. No event occurred, that I can remember, but just different people's reactions. Not everyone agreed that it should come to an end. Even some of the parents of the freshman came in to the office in tears, some of those were not in agreement that they got busted.

Would they come in and talk?

Yes, they came in, freshman boys, seriously crying about them trying to get this money. So I ran with this story and took care of it...of all places. There is the church in the shadows, so we did. What it did though...and what the beginning did, talking about on learning, O my... goodness gracious, I don't care what size school, so you had a small school, there is not official help. I had no support. But they are not principals and so I learned there is one of me. The lessons I learned were largely born from negative experiences, but it make tougher in that regards. It made me realize that I have to keep my head about myself. I can't go off the deep end. I can't express... that is a tough one. That is what I have had to learn over the years. I wanted to get angry. I can't express my feelings. I had to just try to do something else with it. I learned the amount of responsibility it took. The other one would be and realize that I'm never...I'm always principal 24/7. I am always the principal. My wife and I use to go out and stuff. Forget that. Now we have 3 girls, later in life, I was 30 so... that became a blessing. None of these are complaints. They all worked out. I never ever...it is probably for the best that

I didn't know any of that when I decided to put by application in for the job. I wouldn't...

As a new person deciding to go into the principalship, what advice would you give them?

You better make sure you want to do it. It is all encompassing. I would not talk you out of it. I wouldn't want to do anything else with my life.

You better know you are going to do it and be committed, and if you have a family or married, you better have the buy in of your family. You can't do it without that. It is not a burden. Not that we are losing stuff. In our case, I was a principal, and then my wife and I had kids. So the girls know me in no other way... as a principal. They had no second before me not being a principal. We only know one way of life. And so, my wife and I were married for 6 years, I was a teacher and then I became a principal, and so she got to see the principal part of it and what was involved. But she saw the coaching side of it. Coaching probably is as good of prep for an admin job. It is definitely a good preparation for that. So she knew. So I don't look... I could be wrong. My perspective, the time spent on the job... I don't see it as time away from family. We just make the two work together. Like Friday night, I went to the football game at a school in our conference. My middle daughter had an event and the oldest had a band event. My wife went with one and the youngest went to the football game with me. These are just examples of those.

But almost any of those kinds of things, there is some faction of family. When I was younger, it was easier, but now they have more events. Each of those three kids has grown up around the school, so we just make it work. It's fine. That would be the thing

that a new administrator, if you already have a family, you have to make sure they are on board...you can't take short cuts.

You know some time I am swamped, and I don't know how to get out of it. It never slows down. It can be a lot of pressure, but... There is a lot of accountability. I don't mind that. I am not a fan of pressure. So I try to take care of things so that I don't have pressure. You have to either walk in totally naïve or walk in to the job with your eyes wide open. And be able to accept all of this. You are the principal. It matters what you say and what you do.

CM Well we got through the first school... (laughter)

Then you left, for school B, tell me about that experience.

DV There is not much to say there.

I was at school B for three years. The thing about this school...I had a friend there, he was the superintendent, but he had been their K-8 principal and he was a coach and I had met him when I was in the same conference. We got to talk so anyway, I was making \$36,000 as principal, teaching either American history or PE, depending on the year. Combined I made... It was during my years at school A that my daughter was born and my wife wanted to stay at home. She was an accountant, in the city. She gave that up, so...our budget got a lot tighter and so we had to make some changes, so that was one of the reasons to move. They were offering a lot more money, small school; School B, calls itself a village, population 200 people. School has more than the village. School was kind of nice actually. It was a really good place; I had a good time there for three years. It was a good place; I don't have any bad memories there, except board meetings. They

lasted forever; they were marathon session, lasting to midnight. They were long...micro-managing board...but good people on the board.

But it was in the middle of nowhere, it would take a half hour one way to the grocery store. We couldn't do that anymore. So, we ended up leaving there. Actually to going from school B to school C we had to take a pay cut, which was ok, because it was closer to closer to family. So we were back on our path again trying to be closer to our families. Of course that didn't turn out as you can see. In hindsight, I shouldn't have gone to school C.

Tell me about being principal at school B.

They still had corporal punishment.

That was always a choice, Wow.... I had to use corporal punishment? That was a surprise. I wouldn't do that.

What type of professional development opportunities did you have?

We were in rural school B...so none.

Was there anybody that might have helped or mentored you?

Yes, the superintendent...he was a good guy, but not really a mentor. Tons of experience....but the other thing there, being back, by this time, now, I'm in the same conference, now there are other principals, specifically in our size schools. There were some really good schools in that conference that is where it came from, the other principals. Going to the meetings, I didn't even know they existed when I was at school A. We didn't supervise very many activities, which was wrong. So it was a lot... I am still on this informal tract. Peers in my conference, people who were very good. There were three top notch schools in the area. Those are three really good high schools, they

have very good people and I became friends with. There was nothing formal and nobody at school B... no way school B, and even the superintendent...they couldn't offer... they didn't have the expertise to offer anything. And even me, I didn't have any formal training for my job.

Did you get any formal evaluation, or did they give you feedback and let you know how you were doing?

No, nothing official. The only thing that might have come up at closed session of the board meetings. They hear from someone in town....That something was going on....But no feedback on performance. Board meetings, they would go around that talk about the issues.

The superintendent would not know what would come up. That was nerve-racking. You never knew what to expect.

If you had to summarize your experience and quality of your leadership, what would you say?

I was trying the best that I could. I don't know. I probably wasn't that good. I had all of these grade levels. I had constant discipline. I was doing discipline, it seemed all of the time. As far as any kind of leadership, in terms of instructional leadership, it had to be minimal. In terms of trying to be there to help people with morale and discipline and try to be steady and those kinds of thing, I'm sure I did fine, but I would have been...I probably was doing a good job as asst. principal but I don't know how. I remember thinking for quite a while afterwards, how would I have ever gotten ahead to do my job in that situation. I don't know how I would have done it.

How many students did you have?

Like 250 or something, mid 200s

So what were the biggest challenges.

Location, discipline, and that the grade span was 7-12... Having no help. I remember my office was down the hall from the main office, it was a classroom, except it was a small room. You would go to the office, there was a copy machine, and you went down the hall on the right to the principal's office... so I was always disconnected from the office. That was just my own little room, nice room, but not by the office ... disconnected. Next door was the guidance counselor, but there was a brick wall... kind of weird, there too.

So then you go to school C.

Ugh, the vain of my existence. Racism was alive and well.

My second daughter was born during this time.

You had said, it was survival. Talk to me about that experience.

I was assistant principal and athletic director

I went there thinking that this would get us back on the tract near family. Our goal was to get back to where our family is from.

I met the principal at two difference PD events, and so when I applied I knew who she was and I liked her, and the feelings were mutual and I got the job. It turned out as a principal; I didn't like her at all. I found her to be phony. She relied on me too much to take care of everything. My leadership... I was the disciplinarian. I was the guy who cleaned junk up, I was the supervisor. I just got so tired of discipline. I am still tired of discipline. That is what I love about Dave; he is so good with discipline.

There were so many white vs. black issues. Just had to learn, you just had to deal with it. Somebody will always be upset and thank the Lord for my secretary. We moved her to

my office, she wanted to come into my office. That is not really the best practice, but it was survival. She was my secretary. She moved into my office because she wanted to help. She did help. The principal wouldn't touch any issue that involved conflict with teacher, student, parent, or like a dance or home event. I learned a lot of things not to do. She would make an appearance then leave. OK, on the one hand that sounds great, ok, but when she just left, guesses who is there? So I learned. Now my administrators here are the benefactor of that. I still, I never...if one of us are to leave early. I send them. I am not going to be the one that goes home early...Unless we worked out something in advance... those kinds of things. School C was a mess. And we lived for a 1 ½ years in a surrounding community. The traffic was bad. I was driving into traffic both ways. It was bad. That was another whole fiasco. That was hard. And then of all things, it didn't pay. It paid less than the principal job at school B. That was a whole another issue. How could that be possible? I worked, I learned, I really learned at school C. The AD part of the job, setting up for those football games. Getting those referees, and set up. I learned that for the AD, the hard work is pre-game. A huge sigh of relief when it is ready. You have to clean up all of that junk afterwards. I have an appreciation of the AD. I learned the hours and that work. But my leadership was a traditional asst. principal role. The principal would want to talk to me about school wide issue, and come talk to me and finally got to the point where she was asking me those questions. I don't think she wanted to hear what I wanted to say. She had her own agenda. I'm sure it was my view of the world. I knew what places to avoid, she was not going to touch the dirty places. So that is where I was.

I stayed there and then, I mean, I think I did a pretty good job. I actually had 3 board members, and I had several teachers, when she announced she was leaving, that ask me to be the principal. I figured I took enough years off of my life. There was no way.

So, why were you not interested in that principalship?

It was school district C. I can tell you from 2003-2006 it was a terrible school, wild, crazy in the halls, crazy in the classrooms, racism....senior prank filled with junk, lack of control. My discipline files, holy cow....the number of OSS and ISS that I would sign. Mercy.... It was amazing...The number of kids that were suspended on a daily basis.

How would you describe the community?

It was a PLC, lead by the principal, not a true PLC. It was not an authentic PLC...Maybe because they were new. I'm not trying to be critical, but it is how it was. It was a new PLC school, 3 years in the process, not brand new. Principal appointed people and tasks for things. I learned from just hearing people and seeing it that there was no buy-in or very little buy in. And that same lesson applied here... Things were going decently, but it was a big eye opener going from compliance to commitment and working on this thing. I have the chapter of the book... It was a culture here of compliance but not commitment and I'm not even sure. At school C there were lots of good teachers and I'm sure there were a lot of compliant people, but there was also more defiance from both the students and the teachers, and I don't do good with defiance. I don't respect defiance... I don't appreciate that. I am not defiant. I don't think anybody should be. That environment I would never do well in... So I just ...that... and my kids, just the fact that kids felt that they could get out of class and scream in the halls at random times. It was going to be worse for the asst. principal.

Were you part of the PLC?

I wasn't on any of the teams, no, I wasn't. That position was not on the team. So no, I was not. I did start. She did ask me to start a team regarding discipline. And so I did, and we worked on discipline. But it wasn't any kind of leadership kinds of thing.

Did you have any leadership training? Did she send you to any professional training?

No, my training took place during here, during this PLC, when I was offered the PLC training here. Only one of us spoke up to go and it turned out that all of us got to go from this school, a whole team. No, that was the first training I got.

No, not formally, if they did I don't remember. It was just... deal with the discipline, stack of discipline referrals and take on the full-time AD. So it was largely... do the asst. principal job from whatever time in the morning to school is out and stay and do the AD job till... whenever.

How would you describe your relationship with the principal.

It was professional. It stayed professional. We never... it never got bad. It was professional. I never used her as a resource after I had been there for a little bit, because she didn't know. She just... She was not the kind of person that would get involved in things that were involved with my job and so, I would use the ISS teacher, I would use classroom teachers, and sometimes the police were involved. But, I wouldn't use her as a resource on many things. I would use people from other schools. Now my network had expanded pretty big and I had connection with other schools. I had new ones from the conference around school C.

Did anyone stand out as a mentor during that time?

No, not as a mentor. I had friends that would help me, but no mentor. I had no one at school C that supported me. Nobody!

Looking back at that particular experience, what could you have changed... what would have enhanced your leadership?

A true collaboration would have really helped. Trying a non-top-down model would have helped. Cause one of things she did, my second year, she wanted to move our offices, we use to be not in the same office but weren't too many doors from each other. She came up with this idea that we needed the building covered better. She had a good rationale, but, she moved my office and the ISS....All the way to the back of the building, we were in the very back outskirts of the building. You had to leave the building and go down the hallway to get to us. It was one of those moments I wanted to be cynical. I could have said, you sent a message about our place...disconnected from the school. Where is the assistant principal's office... out of the way.

As you reflect on your experience at school C, how did you feel at that time?

It was tough, lots of pressure, lots of stress, I did not like my job, but I did it, I made it and I did get an evaluation and good evaluation all of the time.

Any good feedback that helped you?

No, it was all superficial. All good evaluations...didn't mean anything.

Seriously, it sounded horrible, they would never get involved. I don't think they cared...cared as long as I was doing my job and keeping those messes out of their hair. I'm sure they had enough going on. I get it. And I did that, I made sure the principal didn't get involved in any of that stuff. I'm sure that drifted her away. I really tried hard

to not get her involved. It was very obvious on how she felt about getting involved.

Don't consult her.

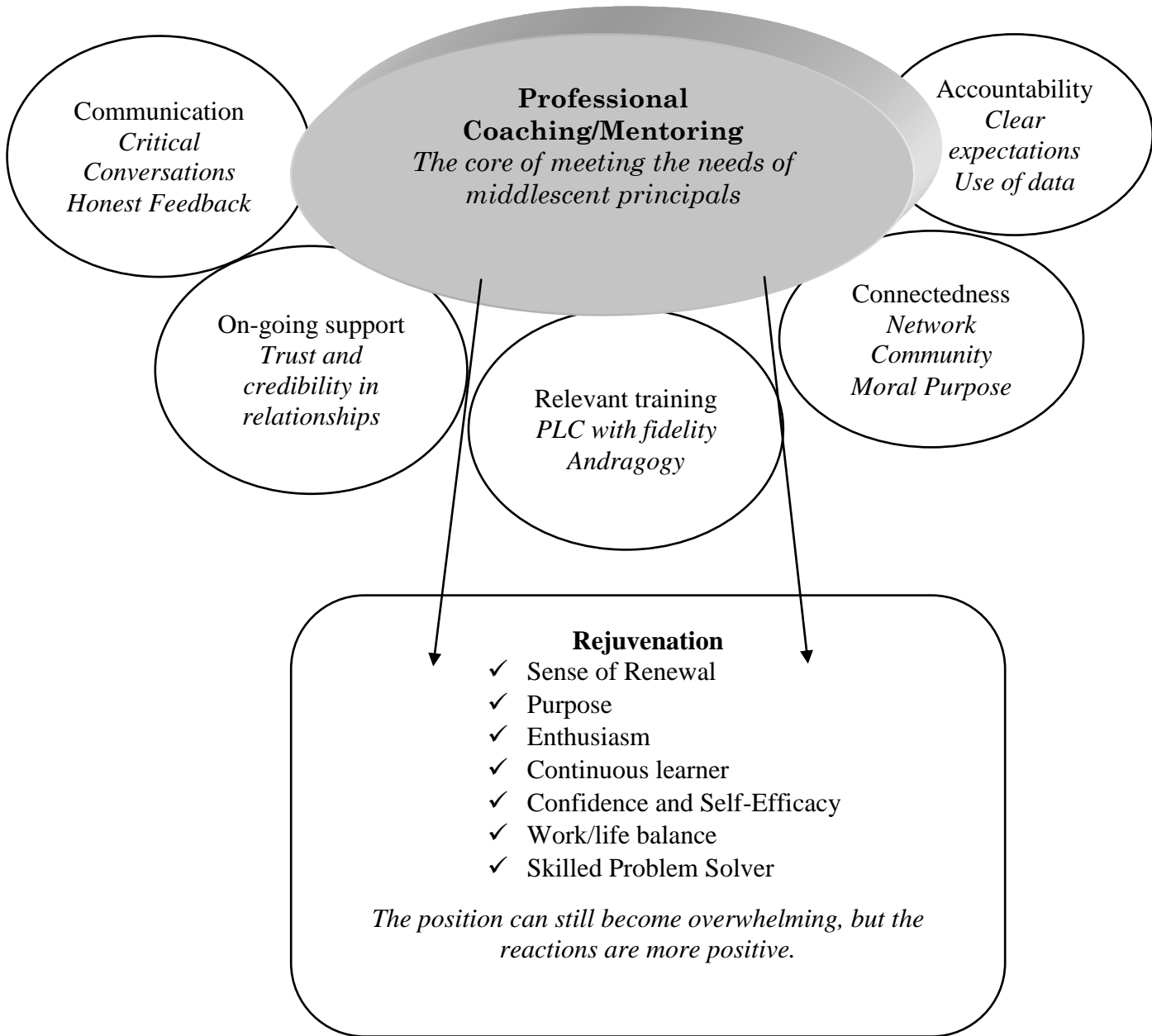
We are going to stop here. Thanks so much for taking this time to talk.

Appendix G: Life History Grid

Timeframe	Age	Year in Admin	Position/Location	Reason for leaving	Additional comments
1990			Teaching High School Social Studies (5 years)		
1991			Married in May		
1995			School A HS Social Studies and coached		
1997-98 1998-99 1999-2000	30-32	1-3	School A HS Principal (3 yrs)	Made changes not popular with some students and leaders in community Felt uncomfortable	Child 1 born ('97) Elem. Prin. And Father D Great support
2000-01 2001-02 2002-03	33-35	4-6	School B HS Principal (3 yrs)	Felt isolated, locations did not fit the needs of family Pleasant memories	Elem. Princ was a support
2003-04 2004-05 2005-06	36-38	7-9	School C HS Asst.Principal/AD (3 yrs)	Tough place, horrible place, survival mode	Child 2 born No support
2006-07 2007-08 2008-09	39-41	10-12	School D HS Principal (3 yrs)	Felt micro-managed, stress level increased, struggled with home/work balance Overwhelming school schedule	Child 3 born Lack of trust and support
2009-10 2010-11 2011-12 2012-13 2013-14 2014-15 2015-16 2016-17	42-49	13-20	School E HS Principal	Remains in this position Has made great strides in school improvement Very happy, confident in the work, positive and enthusiastic Still overwhelming sometimes, but can handle it well	Family likes schools, comfortable and active in community PLC, Collaborative Great support and professional coaching/ment oring

Appendix H: Process Model

**Meeting the Needs of Middlescence in School Leaders
A Model for Growth**



Appendix I: MO PLC Best Practice Implementation

Best implementation practices (www.mopl.org/best-implementation-practices.html, 2016)

1. Learning Community Culture & Continuous Improvement
 - Establishing mission, vision and collective commitment
 - Analyzing building level data
 - Setting SMART goals
 - Engaging in action research
 - Sustaining a culture of learning
2. Effective Building Leadership Teams
 - Developing shared leadership
 - Modeling effective meetings
 - Communicating with teams
 - Monitoring team progress and providing feedback
 - Monitoring building SMART goals
3. How Effective Teams Work
 - Effective meeting conditions and collaborative processes
 - Monitoring team work
 - Focusing on results from data
 - Developing trust and participation
4. What Students Need to Know and Do
 - Identifying priority standards
 - Unwrapping priority standards

- Aligning both horizontally and vertically
- Establishing instructional timelines

5. How Will We Know They Have Learned

- Developing assessment literacy and design
- Utilizing formal and informal assessments to drive instruction
- Providing effective feedback to students
- Engaging students in their own learning
- Collaboratively scoring student work
- Establishing consistent grading/reporting practices

6. Systemic Process for Student Success

- Establishing collective responsibility for student learning
- School wide systems for communicating data
- Developing tier 1 core instruction
- Providing tier 2 intervention
- Providing tier 3 intervention
- Establishing protocols for student enrichment

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