

COLLABORATIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHY: A VEHICLE FOR ADMINISTRATOR
REFLECTION ON MULTIPLE ACCOUNTABILITY PRESSURES

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COLLABORATIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHY: A VEHICLE FOR ADMINISTRATOR
REFLECTION ON MULTIPLE ACCOUNTABILITY PRESSURES

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ABSTRACT

COLLABORATIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHY: A VEHICLE FOR ADMINISTRATOR REFLECTION ON MULTIPLE ACCOUNTABILITY PRESSURES

by

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This study focused on five administrators' perceptions of multiple accountability pressures. The administrators used collaborative autobiography to address accountability pressures within the context of their personal and professional lives. This included reflective writing from the administrators on their experiences with different types of accountability pressures, their perceptions of whether accountability pressures conflicted with one another, their experiences negotiating the various pressures, and their perceptions of the effect of the pressures on their lives. The administrators also examined their life histories to determine connections between those life histories and how they

negotiated accountability pressures. The study examined the benefits of collaborative autobiography, including how the administrators used the collaborative inquiry process to develop strategies to better negotiate pressures in the future. The participants shared their reflective writing with one another during group sessions and provided feedback to each other on its meaning and significance, creating a shared understanding. This collegial dialogue was an essential part of the study. The administrators also created recommendations for principal preparation programs, school district leadership, and policymakers based on their experiences participating in the study.

Findings included the discovery that it was difficult for participants to classify different accountability pressures and their sources because of overlap and interaction among those pressures, but that efforts to do so helped the administrators to reflect deeply on those pressures and their causes, something they had not done previously.

Administrators often found that, because accountability pressures were interwoven, they often dealt with more than one pressure at a time. Administrators found multiple ways to negotiate pressures. These included attempting to maintain a positive school climate, and using goal creation and data-based decision-making as tools to manage pressures.

Participants shared that many negative effects of accountability pressures stemmed from the Texas accountability system. Participants found the writing of their life histories to be significant emotional experiences. They discovered that writing about and discussing the connections between their life histories and their reaction to accountability pressures was helpful in reflecting on how they could better deal with accountability pressures in the future. Participants believed that they could better negotiate pressures in the future by changing how they perceived and understood the pressures they experienced.

Collaborative autobiography was a successful method for allowing the participants to write and share about their experiences and plan for a better future. Learning how to build meaningful relationships with teachers was a key theme raised during participants' discussion of recommendations for principals' professional development. Participants also felt that central office administrators need to understand the pressures affecting campus level administrators, model effective strategies for dealing with the pressures, and collaborate with campus administrators in addressing the pressures. Participants believed that policymakers should build relationships with campus administrators in order to see the impact of accountability pressures, many of which stem from policy decisions involving testing and funding.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The United States federal government has always played a role in public education. Before World War II, however, it was largely left up to the states to decide what was best for education. This was characterized as “layer-cake” federalism (Wong, 2008). Federal involvement in education increased after World War II, when the federal government and states began to “share responsibilities in addressing common policy concerns” (Wong, 2008, S175). This “marble-cake” or categorical federalism focused on “the level of resources, regulatory safeguards, and other ‘inputs’ to meet the learning challenges of special needs students” (Wong, 2008, S176). With the passing of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001, a new phase of accountability began. NCLB was seen as a “dramatic expansion of federal authority over public schools and a departure from prior federal education policies, with implications for education policy and power distribution” (Wong, 2008, S177). This new era was “based on the assumption that external accountability and the imposition of sanctions will force schools to improve and motivate teachers to change their instructional practices, resulting in better school performance” (Sunderman, Orfield, & Kim, 2006, p. 16).

School administrators often feel the brunt of these new measures of accountability. The school administrator must juggle “a myriad of responsibilities on a

daily basis” which include “(a) developing, implementing, and monitoring procedures and practices, (b) leading the development and evaluation of data-driven plans, (c) assisting instructional staff in aligning curriculum, and (d) managing human and financial resources” (Normore, 2004, p. 70). Along with these roles, the school administrator must be cognizant of multiple accountability pressures, including political, bureaucratic, market, professional, and moral accountability. Thus, one of the most vexing issues for current school leaders is how to successfully navigate through the maze of accountability pressures.

Statement of Problem

This study identified and analyzed the types of accountability pressures facing Texas principals because of NCLB and the mandates of the Texas accountability system. Principals of low-performing schools are greatly impacted because NCLB focuses on the “threat of sanctions and market mechanisms – choice and supplemental educational services – to force school improvement” by requiring schools to “try to produce very large gains every year for every subgroup of students” (Sunderman, Orfield, & Kim, 2006, p. 16).

While many researchers have investigated principal’s perceptions about state-mandated accountability, including standardized tests, little research had been conducted on how leaders experience, interpret, and respond to multiple types of accountability pressures. This topic deserved attention in today’s age of accountability. Normore (2004) found that a considerable gap exists “between the perceptions of academics and the educational practitioner when it comes to defining accountability” (p. 72). With the

reauthorization of the NCLB, this research study was timely because it addressed many of the concerns raised by the federal regulations as well as current state regulations.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to identify types and sources of accountability pressures facing Texas administrators, conflict among these pressures, how administrators negotiate accountability pressures, and the perceived effect of accountability pressures on administrators through a case study of administrators participating in collaborative autobiography. Collaborative autobiography was chosen as the means for administrators to explore their experiences with accountability pressures because it was essential for administrators to assess their own context and knowledge about accountability. The study also looked at the benefits of collaborative autobiography, including administrators' plans for better negotiating accountability pressures in the future.

By investigating the types of accountability pressures that administrators' face, the researcher hoped to help the larger educational community and policymakers understand the impact and significance of these accountability pressures. Although previous researchers examined only one source of accountability at a time, this research attempted to "understand the mix of accountability pressures [that] leaders face in specific school situations" (Firestone & Shipps, 2005, p. 82). The researcher hoped to ascertain if "leaders can contribute to student learning by interpreting external and internal accountabilities" which include the external pressures of political, bureaucratic, and market accountability and the external/internal pressures of professional and moral accountabilities (Firestone & Shipps, 2005, p. 83).

Research Questions

The research questions for this study included the following:

- 1) What accountability pressures do participating school administrators face and what are the sources of those pressures?
- 2) In what ways, if any, do the school administrators perceive accountability pressures to be in conflict with one another?
- 3) How do the school administrators negotiate accountability pressures and conflicts?
- 4) What are the effects of accountability pressures and conflicts on the school administrators?
- 5) To what extent, if any, are the school administrators' life histories reflected in the way they negotiate accountability pressures and conflicts and how they are affected by those pressures and conflicts?
- 6) What strategies do the school administrators develop as part of their collaborative autobiographies to better negotiate accountability pressures and conflicts in the future?
- 7) What, if any, benefits do the school administrators perceive they receive from their participation in collaborative autobiography?
- 8) What do participants recommend that central office leaders, principal preparation programs, and policy makers do to assist school administrators in dealing with accountability pressures?

Theoretical Framework

A constructivist epistemology was used for this study, based on the belief that learners develop their own knowledge through constructing meaning. Merriam (1998) noted that conducting qualitative research from a social constructivist epistemology allowed the researcher to understand the meaning people have constructed or “how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 6). A further discussion of constructivism and its use as the epistemological basis for this study is provided in the section on the design of the study.

This study initially utilized the typology created by Firestone & Shipps (2005). The typology defined five different types of accountabilities experienced by school leaders today, including political, bureaucratic, market, professional, and moral. Political pressure can be from local, state, and federal entities, in the form of citizen pressure and legal mandates. Bureaucratic pressure can be either process-oriented, through requiring compliance to regulations, or outcome-oriented, requesting alignment with goals and incentives. Market pressure often takes the form of competition for resources. Professional accountability is grounded in the need to gain consensus about the practices that are important to excel as a principal. The fifth type, moral accountability, is focused on the values that principals espoused and the commitments that they made.

Figure 1 represents the researcher’s conceptual view of the study, which was informed by the literature and the research questions. In Figure 1, the various accountability pressures are seen as related, and the meaning the campus administrator makes of the pressures that impact the administrator’s leadership behaviors.

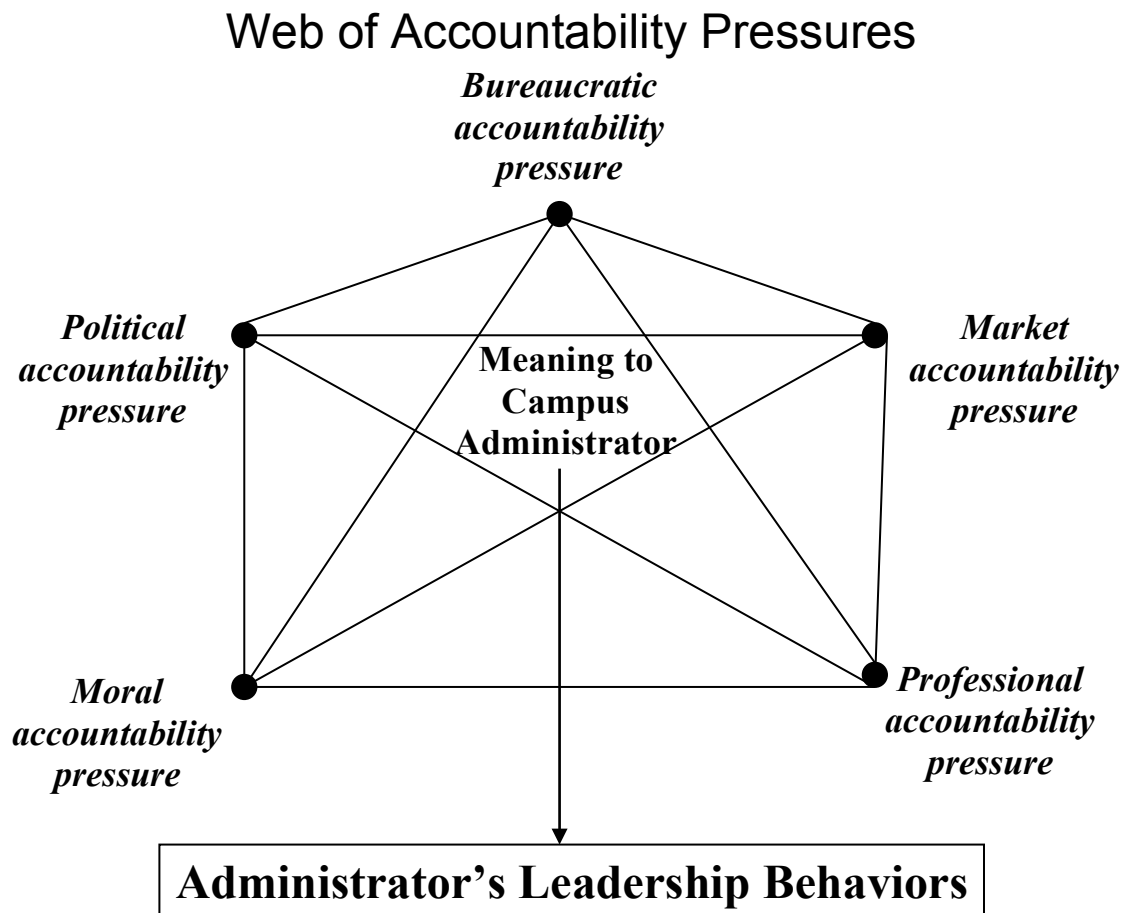


Figure 1: Web of Accountability Pressures

My Perspective

The researcher serves as the primary instrument for collection of data in qualitative research. Three important characteristics of a qualitative researcher that I value highly are that she “must have an enormous *tolerance for ambiguity*...must be sensitive to the context and all of the variables within it...[and] must be a good communicator [who] empathizes with respondents, establishes rapport, asks good questions, and listens intently” (Merriam, 1998, p. 20-23). Throughout the study, I made every attempt to practice tolerance for ambiguity, sensitivity to context, and good communication.

I taught third grade in San Antonio, Texas during the course of the study. I had nine years of experience in elementary education. My previous research was carried out as a graduate student and graduate assistant and was primarily qualitative. Thus, I was comfortable with gathering and analyzing qualitative data.

I chose to study how administrators’ experience accountability pressures for two reasons. First, I believe administrators play an extremely vital role in schools, and thus anything that impacts administrators is important. Having taught at four different elementary schools, I have seen how an administrator can change the entire tone of the school – either in a positive or negative light. Let me describe three principals I have worked for to better understand my perspective. Principal A at one school would literally yell at teachers in front of students for any misstep made, such as being late for duty. Principal B was rarely seen out of her office as she was nearing retirement. Students would ask when the principal came into the classroom, “Who is that lady?” Principal B seemed disengaged from the faculty. At the other end of the spectrum, Principal C was

completely engaged in making sure that students were learning and visited classrooms frequently. Those classroom visits were often to talk with students about what they were learning, as well as to watch the teacher's instruction. Principal C was also open to professional development opportunities, encouraging teachers to attend events throughout the year as a school business day, rather than making teachers take a personal day as Principal B had done.

The second reason for this study is that accountability is everywhere. Accountability permeates everything that schools do everyday. Many classroom teachers complain that they are under constant pressure to make sure that students pass the state accountability tests. As a researcher, I realize that my campus principal shields me from many types of accountability pressure, but I believe that many classroom teachers do not understand the complete role of the principal. Principals are mired in a web of accountability pressures, struggling to do what was best for students. I hope that this study gives administrators in the study, other campus administrators, and district leaders insight into accountability pressures impinging on principals.

Assumptions

The assumptions for this study included the following:

- a) Participants have experienced multiple accountability pressures.
- b) Participants would be able to accurately describe the types of accountability pressures that affect them.
- c) Participants would be able to articulate whether and how the pressures were in conflict with each other.

- d) Participants would honestly respond to all reflective writing assignments and interview questions.
- e) Participants would use a reasonably high level of self-reflection in responding to the reflective writing prompts and interviews questions.
- f) Participants would attend the collaborative autobiography sessions and actively participate in group discussions.

Significance of the Study

This study was valuable because it provided insight into each administrator's experience with multiple accountability pressures. Firestone and Shipps (2005) note that "educational leaders have long juggled conflicting accountabilities" but researchers rarely "examine the interaction of multiple, simultaneous accountabilities" even though this is a critical question (p. 81). Firestone and Shipps argue that a major problem for educational leaders is to determine how to cope with multiple, conflicting accountabilities.

Researchers and practitioners support the notion that administrators must be prepared to meet multiple types of accountability pressures. Elmore (2006) notes that the "work of running schools – managing the use of time and money, motivating and supervising people, connecting the school to its clients, meeting performance targets – has meaning only if its effects can be seen in the classroom" (517). Hall (2006), superintendent of a large public school district, had found that "politics is always a major factor in key decisions at every level of the school system; for most of us, political maneuvering can be a make-or-break game" (p. 525) and thus administrators must be prepared to deal with political accountability. Hall (2006) noted that school leaders "must learn to frame moral questions and solve ethical problems in collaboration with others" (p. 525) in order to

deal with moral accountability. Lashway (2000) expertly sums up the current challenge noting that accountability is “not just another task added to the already formidable list of the principal’s responsibilities. It requires new roles and new forms of leadership carried out under careful public scrutiny while simultaneously trying to keep day-to-day management on an even keel” (p. 13). Thus, this study provided insight into how to help administrators who struggle daily with accountability pressures.

Definition of Terms

1. *Accountability*: Accountability is a frame placed around the education system which determines to whom states, districts, schools, and educators must answer and what they are responsible for, after which sanctions or rewards are often determined.
2. *Accountability system*: Implemented at the state level, a system of procedures used to score student, school, and district performance in order to provide performance data available to the public and trigger rewards and sanctions to districts and schools.
3. *Adequate yearly progress (AYP)*: A federal accountability program mandated by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* which evaluates each state’s measures of yearly progress on reading/ELA scores, math scores, and either graduation rates (at high school) or attendance rates (for elementary and middle schools).
4. *High-performing schools*: Schools whose students have higher-than-average test scores on state standardized assessments when compared to similar schools.
5. *High stakes testing*: Large-scale, standardized assessments that evaluate students’ knowledge in order to determine grade level promotion or graduation. The results of the testing can also impact the teacher, principal, and the school, by either generating rewards for high performance or sanctions for low performance.

6. *Low-performing schools*: Schools whose students have lower-than-acceptable test scores on state standardized assessments.
7. *No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001*: The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act which represented a striking change in government's role in public schools through requirements on assessment, accountability, and teacher quality. The law requires states to test students in grades 3-8 annually and to disaggregate the scores by race, disability, and other factors.
8. *Standardized test*: A test, usually multiple-choice, that is provided in the same format for all test takers and is designed to be administered and scored in a standard manner with the goals of validity, reliability, and fairness.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of the literature will address the definitions and purpose of accountability, the recent history of educational accountability, alternative approaches to accountability, and issues related to accountability. Literature will also be presented about the school administrator as a leader, the types of accountability pressures that administrators face, and the impact of these pressures on administrators. Literature on collaborative autobiography will also be reviewed.

Accountability

Definitions and Purpose

Accountability in education is difficult to define. The term is used daily in schools, districts, and state education agencies, and yet there is no agreed upon definition. After analyzing the literature on accountability, Browder (1975) concludes the following:

- 1) There are no commonly agreed-upon definitions. The basic term itself, “accountability” has definitions ranging from the relatively loose idea of simply holding someone responsible for doing something to highly detailed technical specifications.
- 2) As a concept, accountability needs refinement. The failure to produce a recognized, basic, multi-dimensional framework that sorts out, differentiates, and

comprehensively unifies levels, degrees, and forms of accountability contributes to the confusion.

3) Accountability has become politicized. Almost invariably, educational problems are complex, time-consuming, and require a kind of sophistication, patience, and expertise that does not mix well with political wrangling. (p. 3-5)

Many authors have created their own discrete definitions depending on their philosophies of education. Ravitch (2007) defines accountability as “individuals (e.g., students, teachers, or administrators) or organizations [being] held responsible for improving student achievement” and “either rewarded for their success or sanctioned for their lack of success in doing so” (p. 8). Leithwood, Edge, Jantzi (1999) note that being accountable implies an obligation “to give a report, description, explanation, justifying analysis, or some form of exposition of reasons, causes, grounds, or motives for what we have observed” (p.13). Bernauer and Cress (1997) believe that accountability “refers to the belief that teachers and students should answer to the public for the academic achievement of students” through high-stakes tests that cause unintentional negative consequences and that “reduce the importance of other indicators of achievement” (p. 72). Nelson, McGhee, Meno, and Slater (2007) agree with this view of accountability, noting that the “focus on test data also created an environment in which scores from standardized tests came to be viewed as the primary – and sometimes the only – valid measure of performance” (p. 706).

Psychologist Linn (2003) notes that the purpose of accountability systems is to answer two questions: (1) What counts? and (2) Who is held accountable? To determine the measures that count, “accountability systems should be broadly conceived and

provide information on a wide range of outcomes, contextual, and process variables” (Linn, 2003, p. 3). Normore (2004) argues that we must be able to answer the questions “accountable to whom, for what, in what manner and under what circumstances, with what consequences and/or effects?” (p. 57). Linn (2000) provides four reasons why policymakers push for accountability through testing, including the fact that (1) tests are inexpensive, (2) tests can be externally mandated, (3) tests can be rapidly implemented, and (4) results are visible to all stakeholders. Fox and Brown (2000) explain why accountability is problematic to define:

Operationalizing such an open-ended concept is fraught with complications, starting with the politically and technically contested issue of assessing performance. Even if the measurement problem were solved, the factors explaining the process have received remarkable little research attention. For example, although political science has sought broad generalizations to explain wars, treaties, military coups, legislation, electoral behavior, and transitions to democracy, it has not produced empirically grounded conceptual frameworks that can explain how public accountability is constructed across diverse institutions. (p. 12)

Recent History of Educational Accountability

A Nation at Risk

The modern accountability movement began under the administration of President Ronald Reagan with the report entitled *A Nation at Risk*. Reagan’s secretary of education, Terrell Bell, formed the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) in 1981 to identify reasons why, in Bell’s view, the U.S. educational system was failing to

produce a competitive workforce. The commission presented its report in April 1983. The commission findings of weaknesses of the American educational system were stark, as shown in the following comment from the report:

We report to the American people that while we can take justifiable pride in what our schools and colleges have historically accomplished and contributed to the United States and the well-being of its people, the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. ... We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament. (NCEE, 1983, A Nation at Risk main body section, para. 1 & 2)

The committee found numerous deficiencies in the educational system. One such deficiency was that “‘Minimum competency’ examinations fall short of what is needed, as the ‘minimum’ tends to become the ‘maximum,’ thus lowering educational standards for all” (NCEE, 1983, Finding section, para. 4). The committee then issued recommendations, such as the following:

Standardized tests of achievement (not to be confused with aptitude tests) should be administered at major transition points from one level of schooling to another and particularly from high school to college or work. The purposes of these tests would be to: (a) certify the student's credentials; (b) identify the need for remedial intervention; and (c) identify the opportunity for advanced or accelerated work. The tests should be administered as part of a nationwide (but not Federal) system of State and local standardized tests. This system should include other diagnostic

procedures that assist teachers and students to evaluate student progress. (NCEE, 1983, Recommendations section, para. 6)

The impact of this report was monumental, beginning a wave of educational “reform” across the country, beginning with the standards movement.

A Nation at Risk has been critiqued as a political document supporting a conservative educational agenda rather than a scientific report. Critics, for example, point to a 1991 report commissioned by Secretary of Energy James Watkins and conducted by Sandia Laboratories which reported that student achievement in the U.S. actually held steady or improved in the 1970’s and 1980’s (Carson, Huelskamp, & Woodall, 1993). But whether the document promoted an agenda or presented data, it started a wave of change in education.

The Modern Standards Movement

The concerns raised in *A Nation at Risk* were first addressed at a summit in 1989 to create national education goals, attended by President George H. W. Bush and state governors. The group developed six broad goals entitled *The National Education Goals Report: Building a Nation of Learners*, and subsequently created the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) to issue reports on the progress in reaching these goals (Marzano, 1998). This work at the summit encouraged subject-matter organizations to create their own content area standards. The first group to create standards was the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) in 1989. Other groups soon followed by creating standards in science, foreign language, the arts, English language arts, history, social studies, civics and economics.

In 1991, Congress established the National Council on Education Standards and Testing (NCEST) to help reach bipartisan consensus on national standards and teaching (McREL, n.d., Table 1.1). In 1992, the NCEST delivered to Congress a report entitled *Raising Standards for American Education* and proposed that a National Education Standards and Assessment Council (NESAC) oversee content and performance standards, but no action was taken. The issue of a national board to review standards was raised again by the NEGP in the “Malcolm Report”, issued in 1993 (McREL, n.d., Table 1.1). In 1994, President Clinton signed the Goals 2000: Educate America Act which created the National Education Standards and Improvement Council (NESIC) to “certify national and state content and performance standards, opportunity-to-learn standards, and state assessments” (McREL, n.d., Table 1.1).

Additional national education summits were held in 1996 and 1999 with President Clinton and forty state governors to commit to designing state standards. They identified three key challenges facing schools including improving educator quality; helping all students reach high standards; and strengthening accountability. They also specified how states would address the challenges (McREL, n.d., Table 1.1). Schools, districts, and states could implement these standards through three approaches: a) external tests, b) performance tasks and portfolios, and c) reporting out by individual standards (Marzano, 1998). Many states then created accountability systems to implement and assess the standards.

Texas Accountability System and High Stakes Testing

Texas began utilizing a school accountability system in 1984 after it was mandated by the Texas Legislature. According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA)

(2005a), a comprehensive accountability system could be implemented because Texas “already had the necessary supporting infrastructure in place: a pre-existing student-level data-collection system; a state-mandated curriculum; and a statewide assessment tied to the curriculum” (p. 7). The first two parts of the system – the data collection and the curriculum – have been in place in Texas for over ten years. The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), the state-mandated curriculum first released in 1996, is the cornerstone of Texas public education. The Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS), implemented in 1990, provides a means for all stakeholders to access campus-, district-, and statewide performance data, along with a dropout rate, student attendance data, participation by instructional program, student and staff demographics, and financial expenditure information.

The third part of the system, the statewide assessment, has been in place since the 1980s. Original versions of the exam were minimum skills tests, including the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS) and the Texas Education Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS), and later the criterion-referenced test, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) (Nelson, et al., 2007). The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test, which Texas began administering in 2003, is administered to students in grades 3-11 in the content areas of reading, writing, English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies, with some content areas only being tested in a few grades. For example, social studies is tested only in grades 8, 10, and 11. School ratings, which were first issued in 2004 for the TAKS test, include the following: (a) Exemplary (90% of students passing); (b) Recognized (75% of students passing); (c) Academically Acceptable (varies by subject); and (d) Academically Unacceptable (varies

by subject). These ratings change yearly, requiring districts to continually raise their expectations of schools and students. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) evaluates performance for all students and for African American, Hispanic, White, and Economically Disadvantaged students. Student groups that have fewer than 30 students tested at each school are not evaluated (Texas Education Agency, 2005a).

According to the TEA, the TAKS test provided many positive results. In the 2008 Comprehensive Annual Report on Texas Public Schools, TEA noted that 2008 passing rates on the TAKS exam increased in all subject areas from the prior year. Twenty-five percent of students taking tests in reading/ELA, writing, and social studies achieved commended performance, showing an increase from the previous year. Passing rates for each student group (White, Hispanic, African-American, and economically disadvantaged students) increased in every subject area. Out of the “1,229 public school districts and charters in Texas, 43 (3.5%) were rated *Exemplary* in 2008, and 329 (26.8%) were rated *Recognized*...818 districts and charters (66.6%) achieved the *Academically Acceptable* rating, and 32 (2.6%) were rated *Academically Unacceptable*” (Texas Education Agency, 2008, p. vii-viii).

Some critics of the TAKS argued that the rising state test scores did not represent progress, because the same students were not doing any better, or are doing worse, on other national tests. For example, the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) tests students nationwide on reading, math, science, and writing and provides the Nation’s Report Card. The 2007 NAEP data for Texas showed the following:

- Math 4th grade – A scaled score of 242 (slightly higher than the nation’s scaled score of 239), with Whites scoring 253, Hispanics scoring 236 and Blacks scoring 230
 - Math 8th grade – A scaled score of 286 (slightly higher than the nation’s scaled score of 280), with Whites scoring 300, Hispanics scoring 277 and Blacks scoring 271
 - Reading 4th grade – A scaled score of 220 (the same as the nation’s scaled score), with Whites scoring 232, Hispanics scoring 212 and Blacks scoring 207
 - Reading 8th grade – A scaled score of 261 (the same as the nation’s scaled score), with Whites scoring 275, Hispanics scoring 251 and Blacks scoring 249
 - Writing 8th grade – A scaled score of 151 (lower than the nation’s scaled score of 154), with Whites scoring 165, Hispanics scoring 142 and Blacks scoring 142.
- (NAEP, 2008)

These test scores do not show any remarked improvement over the rest of the nation, and in fact show a discrepancy among the scores of different ethnic groups.

Beyond the issue of whether TAKS really fostered academic progress, a number of unintended negative consequences have been documented. Nelson et al. (2007) report that unintended outcomes occurred in three main areas: curriculum, assessment, and support systems. Unintended consequences for the curriculum included teachers narrowing the curriculum, focusing solely on tested subjects, and providing test-prep only instead of the full curriculum to students of color. Assessment consequences occurred at the student, campus, district, and state level. Viewing the standardized test data as the primary measure of student/campus performance became commonplace, as did using

district/campus financial resources to purchase and spend time on practice test material. A troubling consequence was that students, teachers and schools have been personally labeled as low-performing or recognized. Professional development for teachers had moved “away from improving teaching and learning and toward raising test scores” (Nelson et al., 2007, p. 707). Thus, principals and teachers accepted testing as the norm because they were “motivated by the perception that people within an organization are bound to uphold ‘the way things are’ because other ways of thinking or acting have become largely unthinkable within a particular organization” (Anagnostopoulos & Routledge, 2007, 1267).

In the spring of 2012, the TEA implemented a new, more rigorous, test to replace the TAKS test based on mandates from the Texas Legislature to ensure that high school students were ready for post-secondary education and careers. The State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) test was similar to the TAKS test in that it tested the same subjects in grades 3-8. One major change involved a reevaluation of the tested curriculum. The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) were split into three categories for the STAAR test: non-testable TEKS, readiness skills that are emphasized in the TEKS and should be the main focus of the testing, and supporting skills that receive less emphasis in the TEKS but should also be tested. At the high school level, another major difference with the STAAR test was that twelve subject-specific end-of-course (EOC) assessments would replace grade specific assessments. The EOC assessments will be phased in, starting with the ninth graders in 2012. The new test is expected to demonstrate Texas’ commitment towards higher academic standards.

No Child Left Behind

President Bush reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 while signing in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. The Texas accountability system, in place when Bush was the governor of Texas, was the model for NCLB. According to its supporters, this act has four main tenants: “stronger accountability for results, increased flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents, and an emphasis on teaching methods that have been proven to work” (Hamilton, Stecher, and Klein, 2002, p. 6). The NCLB accountability system uses a “current status model” in which “schools that meet or exceed targets are considered to be successful, while schools where the test results fall short of the target are considered unsuccessful and may be subject to sanctions” (Linn, 2006, p. 9). NCLB requires yearly testing of students in grades 3 - 8 in reading and math. Results from standardized testing of students must be disaggregated to report how students of every race, gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status are achieving in order to show how schools are narrowing the achievement gap. Linn (2003) notes that “disaggregated reporting for those categories of students provides a mechanism for monitoring the degree to which the goal of leaving no child left behind is being achieved” (p. 7).

Linn (2003) describes positive and negative aspects of NCLB. On the positive side, NCLB “encourages states to adopt ambitious subject-matter standards” and is “praiseworthy for the emphasis on all children and particular attention to promoting the learning of groups of students that have lagged behind in the past” (Linn, 2003, p. 4). However, because results on tests of reading/language arts and mathematics dominate all other indicators used, this causes “narrowing of the instructional focus of teachers and

principals” which in turn causes an “impoverished definition of reading, writing, or mathematics” (Linn, 2003, p. 4). Linn (2003) also notes that “the goals that NCLB sets for student achievement would be wonderful if they could be reached, but, unfortunately, they are quite unrealistic, so much so, that they are apt to do more to demoralize educators than to inspire them” (p. 10). Another caution raised by Linn (2006) concerns the severe limitations of the data gathered because current accountability systems that meet NCLB requirements “usually lack information about instructional practices, teacher characteristics, and student characteristics other than student test scores and some student demographic data...” (p. 21).

All public schools are required to achieve AYP on their test scores, which can vary from year to year but requires that by 2014 schools will have reached 100% proficiency. Test scores from reading/ language arts, mathematics, and one other indicator (either the graduation rate or attendance rate) are used to determine whether a district or campus meets or misses AYP (Texas Education Agency, 2005b). The AYP indicators include both a performance standard (percent of students’ proficient on the test) and a participation standard (number of students present for testing). Schools that do not make AYP go through five stages of improvement requirements. Linn (2003) notes that the “severe sanctions of NCLB for schools that continue to fall into the improvement category may actually hinder educational excellence because they implicitly encourage states to water down their content and performance standards in order to reduce the risk of sanctions for their schools” (p. 8). Linn (2006) also states the following:

Student outcomes, even when prior achievement and student demographic information is included in the accountability analyses do not provide a sufficient basis for making the type of causal inferences that are implied when accountability system results are used to identify successful and unsuccessful schools and to impose sanctions on the latter schools. (p. 21)

Numerous educational researchers and educators have raised concerns about NCLB. One concern about NCLB is the difference between the federal accountability measures and state measures. As Smith (2005) notes, “the two systems do not necessarily concur, in just about every state a higher proportion of schools met state “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) targets but not targets for NCLB” which leaves parents and educators wondering “whose accountability system most accurately reflects progress and achievement in schools” (p. 512). Torres (2005) found that NCLB “bases the understanding of education in strictly and overwhelming economic terms” that makes “testing and accountability the buzzwords of the moment in educational environments” (p. 95).

Neil, Guisbond, Schaeffer, Madden, and Legeros (2004) have argued that NCLB undermines the quality and equity of public education because of two false assumptions adopted by NCLB:

- 1) Boosting standardized test scores should be the primary goal of schools. This assumption leads to one-size-fits-all teaching aimed primarily at test preparation, and it works against efforts to give all children a high-quality education.
- 2) Schools can best be improved by threatening educators with harsh sanctions, since poor teaching is the primary cause of unsatisfactory student performance.

Threats may get teachers to focus narrowly on boosting test scores. They fail, however, to address the underlying problems of family poverty and inadequate school funding that are major reasons why many students start off far behind and never catch up. (p. 1-2)

The authors summarize their entirely negative findings of NCLB by sharing that “in its current form, NCLB is a punitive law that uses flawed standardized tests to falsely label many schools as failures, [and] then punish them with harmful sanctions” (p. 6).

Sunderman (2006) is also critical of NCLB from the standpoint that this is a federal law that states must follow. In the forward to Sunderman’s (2006) research, noted author Gary Orfield clearly states the main problem:

Congress has not provided serious oversight of the working of the law and has not adopted timely amendments. The Bush Administration has not commissioned independent research on the implementation of the policy and refused to admit rather obvious mistakes until virtual rebellion took hold in the field. For years the Administration engaged in political attacks on those who pointed out the problems and then insisted that no substantial changes in the law were needed. (p. 6)

Sunderman’s (2006) research concludes that NCLB needs to be revamped to include the following:

- 1) Reexamine the core assumptions that underlie NCLB, including the assumption that market mechanisms alone can improve schools, the idea that external accountability and the imposition of sanctions will force schools to improve and motivate teachers to change their instructional practices, the

premise that schools can make large and rapid improvements in student achievement, and the view that standardized tests are valid, related to the school curriculum, and fair to all students, among others.

2) Reexamine the mechanisms used by NCLB to improve schools and student achievement, including the reliance on test-based accountability, arbitrary timelines and unrealistic goals for improving student achievement and teacher quality, negative (and unproven) sanctions to improve schools, and an accountability measure (AYP) that lacks validity as a measure of school effectiveness and has a disparate impact on diverse schools and schools serving large numbers of minority and low-income students. (p. 53)

Alternative Approaches to Educational Accountability

At least nine approaches to accountability have been proposed, which include a market approach, decentralized approach, professional accountability, management approach, new managerialism, political accountability, bureaucratic accountability, legal accountability and moral accountability. Each of these alternatives is discussed here.

Market Approach

Market accountability is based on the idea of giving choices among schools for students and parents. Darling-Hammond (1989) states that market accountability is present when governments “allow clients or consumers to choose what services best meet their needs; to preserve the utility of this form of accountability, monopolies are prevented, freedom of choice is protected, and truthful information is required of service providers” (p. 61). The focus of the market approach is to allow school choice by “opening boundaries within and across school systems, school privatization plans, the

creation of charter schools, magnet schools, academies, and other specialized educational facilities” (Leithwood et al., 1999, p. 21-22). Leithwood et al. (1999) also note that competition is increased by “altering the basis for school funding so that money follows students...and by publicly ranking schools based on aggregated student achievement scores” (p. 22). Proponents of the market approach note that “good schools demonstrate accountability by attracting students and maintaining enrollment” while “bad schools are held accountable by parents who leave” (Garn, 2001, p. 578). Adams and Hill (2003) argue that, with market accountability, “schools are not subordinate to bureaucracies but rather enterprises that succeed or fail depending on whether they can attract families and teachers” (para. 2).

Others have raised questions about the validity of the market approach. Darling-Hammond and Ascher (1991) note that “market mechanisms are helpful when consumer preferences vary widely and the state has no direct interest in controlling choice, but they do not ensure that all citizens will have access to services of a given quality” (p. 3). Garn’s (2001) study of the charter school system in Arizona which relied on market accountability found that the charter schools “failed to implement a mechanism for capturing and distributing uniform and dependable performance data that would encourage more informed consumer choices” (p. 594) and thus “thousands of educational consumers selected charter schools with limited safety, quality, and performance information” (p. 596). Garn (2001) provides a critical view of the market accountability approach: “A radio or television commercial, a slick marketing brochure, or a conversation with a friend may be enough to buy a car, but can we afford to settle for the same standard when selecting a school?” (p. 596).

Decentralized Approach

Decentralized, or site-based management, is a way of structuring schools that gives power and authority to schools. The focus of the decentralized approach is to have a “community control form of site-based management in the context of typical governance [of] school structures” (Normore, 2004, p. 63).

Numerous studies have been conducted on site-based management. Ovando and Grosch (1999) examined a Texas school district that had adopted a decentralized approach to school management. Positive findings by the authors included the conclusion that the superintendent was able to “manage and balance the devolvment of authority, responsibility, and accountability to the campus level” by creating a “clearly articulated vision” along with an “organizational structure that he helped develop in order to support school-based management, and his relationship of support, trust, and respect with the school board” (p. 18-19). School-based management allowed the campuses to have decision-making power over budgets, personnel, curriculum alignment and instructional program development, as well as staff development.

Hill and Bonan’s (1991) study on decentralization or site-based management in five school systems drew five main conclusions:

1. Though site-based management focuses on individual schools, it is in fact a reform of the entire school system.
2. Site-based management will lead to real changes at the school level only if it is a school system’s basic reform strategy, not just one among several reform projects.
3. Site-managed schools are likely to evolve over time and to develop distinctive characters, goals, and operating styles,

4. A system of distinctive, site-managed schools requires a rethinking of accountability.
5. The ultimate accountability mechanism for a system of distinctive site-managed schools is parental choice. (p. v-vi)

Smylie's (1994) research on site-based management showed negative findings.

Although the school was redesigned to implement site-based management, teachers' work was not redesigned. "Ancillary roles and roles may have been added to teachers' jobs, but the fundamental character of their activities and relationships with students, other teachers, and administrators remains unchanged" and thus the goal of improved classroom instruction and student learning does not occur (Smylie, 1994, p. 162).

Because state and federal policy is often not consistent with this type of district policy, site-based management is often at odds with accountability (Smylie, 1994).

Professional Approach

Professional accountability is "based on the demonstration of educators to their peers that they have the appropriate knowledge, values, and skills to ensure competence and serve the public interest" (Garn, 2001, p. 578). The professional model of accountability is used in the educational system "by granting autonomy to teachers, and others who have been trained in and have access to relevant bodies of professional knowledge and whose professional ethics leads them to act always in the interest of their 'client' – the student (Normore, 2004, p. 63). This approach to accountability holds "teachers, as a group, accountable to parents, students and the district office for the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the school" (Leithwood et al., 1999, p. 26).

Darling-Hammond (1989) notes that “governments may create professional bodies and structures to ensure competence and appropriate practice in occupations that serve the public and may delegate certain decisions about occupational membership, standards, and practices to these bodies” (p. 61). Darling-Hammond and Ascher (1991) note that professional accountability includes the following strategies:

1. All individuals permitted to practice are competent to do so responsibly;
2. Where knowledge about appropriate practice exists, it is used in making decisions;
3. Where certainty about practice (or about the best solution to a particular student need or problem) does not exist, practitioners – individually and collectively, through inquiry and consultation – continually seek to discover the most responsible course of action. (p. 29).

The model of professional accountability is used by the Connecticut Superintendents Network, a group of superintendents who use a medical rounds model to determine large-scale instructional improvement for their districts (Elmore, 2007). The superintendents are held “accountable to each other for their work – for the quality of their observations, analysis, and advice” and for the “discipline of the work and improving their own practice around the work” (Elmore, 2007, p. 20).

The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) created professional accountability standards in 1996 for school leaders, which were updated in 2008. The ISLLC standards provide a measure of professional accountability for members of the profession as well as a guide used by many states to determine measures for principal certification. Three of the standards include creating a vision of learning,

school culture, and learning environment; the other three standards cover collaborating with others, acting as an ethical leader, and responding to the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context surrounding schools (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996).

Many question whether teachers and administrators can ensure professional accountability. Barney (2004) argues that a professional is someone who has the following:

...expertise or mastery of abstract knowledge, which generally comes about through higher education; control over a jurisdiction within which members of the profession attempt to apply their expert knowledge; and legitimacy – the source of professional status – that comes about when such expertise is validated by the client and forms the basis of trust between the profession and the society it serves (p. 86)

Barney (2004) compares the professionalism of teaching with that of lawyers, and notes that “teachers suffer from a serious lack of legitimacy because the general public does not perceive their specialized knowledge to be effective” and thus “many people have perceptions of teaching – the ‘those who can’t, teach’ belief – that are incompatible with an effective system of professional accountability” (p. 80).

Management Approach

The management approach to accountability comes from the business world. In businesses, management accountability is “the expectation that managers are responsible for the quality and timeliness of program performance, increasing productivity, controlling costs and mitigating adverse aspects of agency operations, and assuring that

programs are managed with integrity and in compliance with applicable law” (Rivlin, 1995, para. 4). Leithwood and Earl (2000) share that this approach includes “systematic efforts to create more goal-oriented, efficient, and effective schools by introducing more rational administrative procedures” which allows schools to become “more strategic in their choices of goals and more ‘planful’ and data-driven about the means used to accomplish those goals.”

The management approach has been applied in schools. Leithwood et al. (1999) note that the focus of this approach is to use “systematic efforts to create more goal-oriented, efficient and effective schools by introducing more rational procedures” (p. 28) because essentially there is nothing wrong with current school structures. The management approach includes “a variety of procedures for ‘strategic planning,’ especially at the school district level, as well as multiple procedures for school improvement planning..., school development planning (Giles 1997), and monitoring progress...” (Leithwood et al., 1999, p. 29). Leithwood et al. (1999) emphasize that the whole organization is held accountable but with “more responsibility for such accountability on the shoulders of the senior administrator – the principal of the school, for example” (p. 29).

Others have documented negative consequences from the management approach at the state level. Ogawa and Collom (2000) analyzed effects of the California Public School Accountability Act of 1999. The accountability system assumed that the adoption of a single performance index and annual growth targets would clarify goals, but instead the indicators chosen were too narrow and context dependent (Ogawa & Collom, 2000). The system also believed that the information gained would be used to enhance schools,

but instead educators only used the information to support predetermined positions (Ogawa & Collom, 2000).

New Managerialism

New managerialism is “more of a reform strategy than an approach to accountability” (Normore, 2004, p. 65). It is characterized by “the removal of the locus of power from the knowledge of practicing professional to auditors, policy-makers and statisticians, none of whom need to know anything about the profession in question (Davies, 2003, p. 91). New managerialism represents a way of “trying to categorise and impose managerial techniques – those usually associated with medium and large profit-making businesses – onto the public sector” (Ntshoe, Higgs, Higgs, & Wolhuter, 2008, p. 393). Use of new managerialism includes a “shift in emphasis from (a) policy formulation to management and institutional design; (b) from process to output controls; (c) from organizational integration to differentiation; and (d) from statism to subsidiarity” (Leithwood et al., 1999, p. 83).

Advocates of new managerialism claim that this reform strategy can “improve the economic efficiency of organizations, avoid wastage and be responsive to the needs of a flexible ‘global market’” (Beckmann & Cooper, 2004, p. 6). Unfortunately, every effort to apply new managerialism to schools and education has produced negative results. In Britain, where new managerialism was applied in secondary schools, numerous issues were raised. Principals in these schools “have become focused on short-term, economic objectives, failing to acknowledge the role of education in promoting a caring, cohesive, democratic society, built on the notions of ‘citizenship’” and “teacher disaffection, stress-

related illness and early retirements have led to a retirement crisis” (Beckmann & Cooper, 2004, p. 8). Davies (2003) concurs, noting the following:

Given all of these negatives (the reduction in critical thought and responsible dissent, the pervasive subliminal fear and anxiety, the sense of personal pressure and responsibility combined with a devalued sense of self, the shift of value away from personal and professional considerations towards the single consideration of the economy), it is relevant to ask why so many of us have willingly worked towards the installment and maintenance of new managerialist systems. (p. 94)

This sentiment is echoed by many educators who view new managerialism as having “big brother” watching and analyzing classroom teaching, but who is only concerned with results and not the how and why of teaching.

Political Accountability

Political accountability focuses on the idea of controlling political power, by assessing “the appropriateness of substantive policies and policymaking processes” and bringing “judgment on the personal qualities of political actors” (Schedler, 1999, p.22). Many citizens today view political accountability as something that only occurs through national, state, and local elections. “Elected officials must stand for re-election at regular intervals so that citizens can judge the representativeness of their views and the responsiveness of their decisions” (Darling-Hammond, 1989, p. 61). In the case of school districts, school boards are elected by voters to serve the public interest.

Concerns have been raised about the use of political accountability in education. Smyth (2006) states that the

major problem with the concept of accountability as it is being applied to education is that while it postures as if it is were politically neutral and concerned with only benign technical reconciliations of objectives against measured performance outcomes, it is of course nothing of the kind – it is a highly politically charged entity in the sense that it demands certain action to be performed, while forcefully foreclosing on others. (p. 304)

Political accountability is a “multifaceted enterprise that copes with a considerable variety of actual and potential abuses of power” (Schedler, 1999, p.14). It implies “subjecting power to the threat of sanction” which is seen as enforcement, and “obliging it to be exercised in transparent ways; and forcing it to justify its acts” which can be termed answerability (Schedler, 1999, p. 14).

Bureaucratic Accountability

Bureaucratic accountability is utilized when “agencies of government promulgate rules and regulations intended to assure citizens that public functions will be carried out in pursuit of public goals voiced through democratic or legal processes” (Darling-Hammond, 1989, p. 61). This accountability is based on “procedural compliance with established standards and regulations evaluated by local, state, or federal bureaucrats analyzing compliance reports and/or monitoring at the school site” (Garn, 2001, p. 578). The bureaucratic approach emphasizes that “policies are made at the top of the system and handed down to administrators who translate them into rules and procedures” (Darling-Hammond & Ascher, 1991, p. 4). Samier (2008), an opponent of the bureaucratic approach, argues that it often emphasizes the following:

1. Autocracy: showing a preference for the enjoyment of power and its trappings, status differentials, one-way communication [top-down], and self-interest as vanity, greed and egotism, all of which subvert duty and the public good.
2. Objectification: treating people as things and labeling them by function.
3. Abdication of Responsibility: consisting of appealing to science, submitting to public pressure, adhering to committee decision-making, and obeying superordinates.
4. Red Tape: consists in slowing down and complicating decision-making, passing the buck, protecting executive power, protecting jobs (e.g. empire building), and tactical interpretation of rules. (p. 13)

Other concerns have been raised about the impact of bureaucratic accountability.

Teachers are held accountable for “implementing curricular and testing policies, most often prescribed at the district and state levels, whether or not the prescriptions are appropriate in particular instances for particular students” (Darling-Hammond & Ascher, 1991, p. 5). Many school districts utilize outcome-based bureaucratic accountability in which “they hold schools and school personnel accountable for not delivering designated educational inputs and processes but for producing specific levels or improvements in student learning outcomes” (O’Day, 2002, p. 305).

Normore (2004) asserts that principals use bureaucratic accountability through “teacher evaluation and authoritative actions to direct the work of teachers, but neither of these tools can be counted on to produce marked improvements in teacher performance” (p. 66). Holland (2005) concurs with this point of view. She advocates for standards

linking teacher evaluation and instructional supervision because “interpretation of the [Personnel Evaluation Standards] addressing each of these issues [propriety, utility, feasibility, and accuracy] has been mainly the prerogative of legislators and other policy makers who tend to view evaluation of teaching in terms of bureaucratic accountability” (Holland, 2005, p.68). Holland (2005) notes that interpretation of propriety standards “focuses primarily on matters of legality and form” while utility standards “emphasizes information that is useful to administrators and policy makers, often at the expense of information that is useful to the teachers being evaluated” (p. 68). Interpretation of feasibility standards focuses on the “efficiency of the evaluation process in meeting administrators’ and policy makers’ needs” while the fact that accuracy standards “focus on procedural concerns has led to the collection of evaluation data that does little to inform teachers about their practice” (Holland, 2005, p.68). In contrast to bureaucratic accountability, Holland (2005) suggests that:

Teachers and administrators should work as collaborative partners to identify teachers’ professional development goals, to appropriately assess these goals, to analyze data collected as evidence of effort toward and accomplishment of those goals, and to interpret the implications of such evidence for the improvement of teaching and learning. (p. 70)

Holland argues that administrators should “recognize teaching as a professional practice that involves a wide range of individual and contextual variables” (Holland, 2005, p. 76).

Legal Accountability

Legal accountability is similar to bureaucratic accountability in that there are clearly stated rules or regulations that are controlling a wide range of activities (Romzek

& Dubnick, 2001). Legal accountability is based on “relationships between a controlling party outside the agency and members of the organization,” in which the outside party is able to “impose legal sanctions or assert formal contractual obligations” (Romzek & Dubnick, 2001, p. 186). Unlike the bureaucratic system where supervisors reward or punish subordinates, legal accountability focuses on a “relationship between two relatively autonomous parties and involves a formal or implied fiduciary (principal/agent) agreement between the public agency and its legal overseer” (Romzek & Dubnick, 2001, p. 186). This type of accountability means that “courts must entertain complaints about violations of laws enacted by representatives of the public and of citizens’ constitutionally granted rights, which may be threatened either by private action or by legislative action” (Darling-Hammond, 1989, p. 61). In Texas, one such famous case involving legal accountability was *Edgewood vs. Kirby*, a 1984 case based on the premise that the state’s method of funding public schools discriminated against students in poor school districts; in this case, the courts found the Texas public school funding system to be unconstitutional.

Moral Accountability

Moral accountability “evaluates acts on the basis of prevailing normative standards (independent of formal rules and regulations)” (Schedler, 1999, p. 22). Normore (2004) notes that moral accountability “operates on the premise of personal obligations or sense of duty whereby educators’ actions are conditioned by conscience and loyalty to the work-based principles and values they deem to be important” (p. 66). Schools adapting to moral accountability would need to replace “the technical rational mindset and values with a public ethic infused with political values of democracy” which

would require “changing the conceptual framework and language from that of scientific-type management to humanism in which moral terminology is used” (Samier, 2008, p. 16).

The Principals’ Ethical Decision-Making Study (PEDMS) conducted in 2000 by Australian researchers Mark Freakley, Lindsay Parry, and Neil Dempster investigated the ethical situations that 552 principals faced (Dempster, 2001). When principals were asked what the three most important attributes were in their ethical decision-making, two-thirds of respondents identified interpersonal skills as one of the top three, and over half chose empathy. But only one quarter of the respondents had “little or only moderate confidence in their own interpersonal skills and abilities in situations requiring ethical decision-making” and even less had confidence in their ability to empathize (Dempster, 2001, p. 10). Over a third of the principals surveyed felt that they needed professional development on dealing with ethical situations, with over half of those principals believing the focus should be on developing interpersonal skills needed for ethical decision-making (Dempster, 2001).

Because school administrators are faced with ethical situations and challenges every day, Starratt (1991) suggests that principals create an ethical school by creating a tapestry of the ethic of critique, justice and caring. The ethic of critique draws from critical theory, that by “uncovering inherent injustice or dehumanization imbedded in the language and structures of society, critical analysts invite others to act to redress such injustice” which allows administrators to “move from a kind of naiveté about ‘the way things are’ to an awareness that the social and political arena reflect arrangements of power and privilege, interest and influence, often legitimized by an assumed rationality

and by law and custom” (Starratt, 1991, p. 189, 190). The ethic of justice can be seen when an administrator encourages “specific ethical learning activities [that] are structured within curricular and extra curricular programs to encourage discussion of individual choices as well as discussion of school community choices” which may require “extensive faculty and student workshops on active listening, group dynamics, conflict resolution, values clarification, problem naming, and the like” (Starratt, 1991, p. 193). The ethics of caring can be shown when administrators are “grounded in the belief that the integrity of human relationships should be held sacred and that the school as an organization should hold the good of human beings within it as sacred” (Starratt, 1991, p. 195). Providing administrators with this framework will allow them to consider problems from all three sides (critique, justice, and caring) before responding to issues.

Critical theorists provide a different perspective on moral accountability. Burns (2003) shares, “I believe leadership is not only a descriptive term but a prescriptive one, embracing a moral, even a passionate, dimension. Consider our common usage...I contend that there is nothing neutral about leadership; it is valued as a moral necessity” (p. 2). Kohl (2000) notes how he has a clear “sense of how moral values underlie everything one does, but with the same acceptance of responsibility for creating a decent world” (p. 78). He analyzes the state of schools today:

School bureaucrats are afraid of children’s voices, community control of schools, and critical scrutiny of their work, so, for the sake of survival they use tests, no matter how biased, to evaluate the results of specific efforts and remove the evaluation process from the people most directly affected by programs.

“Objective” testing is often a ruse to protect people who do not have a moral commitment to see education work for all children. (p. 51-52)

This study will only focus on five of the nine accountability pressures discussed in this section. The five chosen for this study – bureaucratic, moral, professional, political and market accountability – are the ones that are discussed in the literature as the most prevalent in schools today.

Issues of Accountability

Issues that have been raised about accountability include a lack of fairness, incompatibility with the art of teaching, undesirable side effects, complexity causing ambiguity, and internal vs. external congruence. Each of these issues is discussed in detail here.

Fairness

Ladd and Zelli (2002) raise issues of fairness in their examination of data from school principals' behavioral responses to North Carolina's accountability system. The accountability system touts that it gives more power to principals to make decisions, such as control over budget and the ability to remove low-performing teachers. One disturbing finding was that “principals in high-poverty schools were much less likely to believe that they gained additional power to remove teachers than were principals in schools with more affluent students” (p. 523). The authors also noted that because the accountability system provided recognition and financial incentives to the teachers and principals of high-performing schools, many principals found it difficult to recruit and retain high-quality staff members at schools labeled as low performing.

Acker-Hocevar and Touchton (2001) conducted a case study involving ten principals of high poverty/minority schools in Florida to determine their perceptions regarding the fairness of accountability. The study determined that the principals were not against accountability but against the “inequity of the method of high-stakes testing to compare students with different needs (high poverty versus more affluent schools) in the grading of schools” (p. 27-28). The researchers concluded that accountability systems are unfair if they favor schools with high-performing students over low-performing students.

Incompatibility

In many states, a standardized test given once a year in the spring “reports a general indication of the content and skills that students have and have not mastered [which] can be extremely valuable for identifying schools and subject areas that may need additional attention or resources...” (O’Day, 2002, p. 310). However, teachers do not receive the results of the testing until the end of the year, which does not allow any time to alter instruction (O’Day, 2002). Thus, the “measure of outcomes through such a test is simply too distant from the complexities of instructional inputs for the teacher to make reasonable attributions of causality” (O’Day, 2002, p. 310). Normore (2004) agrees with O’Day’s assessment of the incompatibility between testing results and instructional implications, and he queries whether “performance-based accountability systems are incompatible with more ambitious and experimental forms of assessment that reformers advocate as essential for encouraging higher-order thinking and problem solving” (p. 67). This type of assessment (that encourages higher-order thinking and problem solving) is not feasibly given by a one-day multiple-choice standardized test.

Side Effects

Many authors have raised concerns about the undesirable side effects that accountability systems entail. Side effects include schools narrowing the curriculum, engaging in frequent test prep or “drill and kill”, causing students to be discouraged or drop out, and utilizing resources to focus on tested subjects. A more detailed discussion of the side effects on teachers, students, and administrators is provided below in the section “Impact of Accountability Pressures.”

Complexity

Normore (2004) notes that many accountability systems are so complex that “administrators within the system do not understand how their accountability systems work” (p. 67). Multiple accountability initiatives at the federal and state level “have been created separately and are evolving on separate, yet often parallel, tracks” (Harbin, Rous & McLean, 2005, 143). In Texas, many administrators find a lack of alignment between the state and federal accountability systems. The Texas accountability system uses 36 academic measures to rank a school’s proficiency, while the federal system uses 29 indicators to determine if a school is achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) (Terry, 2008). A Texas administrator may achieve an Exemplary or Recognized status under the Texas system, yet not achieve AYP under the federal system.

O’Day’s (2002) analysis of the issue of complexity has provided further insight. First, teachers and administrators in schools “vary their definition of a target...and schools have multiple and changing targets” (O’Day, 2002, p. 302). Second, when a goal is agreed upon by a school or grade level, ambiguity remains because the goal may not be clearly defined and measurement is often difficult (O’Day, 2002).

Internal vs. External Congruence

Because conflict occurs within accountability systems, a “standard for evaluating an accountability system must be that system’s ability to support teaching and learning practices which raise student performance” (Normore, 2004, p. 68). Yet, because school accountability systems “focus almost exclusively on outcomes, producing little in the way of reliable information on instruction or organizational practices”, a lack of congruence occurs between the standards that states explicitly require teachers to apply in the classroom and the actual teaching that occurs (O’Day, 2002, p. 310).

The School Principal

In order to understand the types of accountability pressures that a school principal faces, it is first important to address the roles of the principal. This section will address five models by which the principal can be viewed: the principal as organizational leader, moral leader, cultural leader, a social justice leader, instructional leader, and political leader.

The Principal as Organizational Leader

Many principals today are utilizing organizational learning in their schools. Organizational learning is defined by Lam (2004) as “detecting, correcting past errors and changing behaviors using new insights and knowledge generated from the process of information-gathering and sense-making” (p. 157). Mulford, Silins, and Leithwood’s research (2004) on organizational learning in secondary schools over a four year period of time provides insight into the principal’s role. Mulford et al. (2004) found that principals who were skilled in organizational learning used a transformational style to focus on the following:

- Individual support for staff;
- A culture of caring, trust, and respect;
- A structure that promotes participative decision making, supports delegation and distributed leadership and encourages teacher autonomy for making decisions;
- Communicating a vision and goals;
- Having high performance expectations; and
- Providing intellectual stimulation for staff. (p. 6)

Schecter (2008) argues that “in light of [the] standardized reform movement in an age of accountability, the notion of OL [organizational learning] has been superficially understood and implemented by school personnel, perpetuating the historical modern legacy of top-down administration” (p. 176). For organizational learning to be effective in schools, principals must act as the “key players in both introducing learning spaces [and] forums into the ongoing school structure and promoting a learning culture necessary for productive information processing” (p. 180).

The Principal as Moral Leader

Sergiovanni (2005) explains that in leadership one is confronted with moral situations in which “moral action is a struggle to do the right thing according to a sense of values and what it means to be a human being” (p. 115). This moral commitment that a principal must make occurs “when hope, faith, and action are joined, [and] a covenant of obligations emerges, raising the stakes from management commitments to moral commitments” (p. 116).

Starratt (2005a) emphasizes that moral virtues are “essential for the very intellectual quality of learning; without them what passes for learning in schools is superficial,

vacuous, artificial, make-believe, frivolous, and possibly dishonest” (p. 410). Starratt (2005a) created six criteria by which principals can promote the morality that is intrinsic to teaching and learning:

1. Establish good working relationships with teachers and support staff based on respect for, and trust in, their professional and moral competence and based on genuine caring for them in their intrinsic goodness.
2. Establish good working relationships with each student based on open communication, understanding of the students’ cultural and immediate social environment and with respect to the students’ present talents, interests and potential.
3. Identify and articulate personal and civic values and meanings in the curriculum being taught.
4. Translate various units of the curriculum into personally and publicly meaningful learnings that connect with students’ sense of identity, membership and participation in the natural, cultural and social worlds.
5. Cultivate a sense of responsible participation in the world reflected in the material under study in the classroom.
6. Develop with learners rubrics for personally authentic learning. (pp. 408-409)

Starratt (2005b) also explains that an administrator must treat “everyone in the school as human beings with care and compassion, treating them as citizens with rights and responsibilities in the pursuit of the common good, and engaging them in the ethical exercise of the core work of the school, namely authentic teaching and learning” (p. 131). Leaders can “contribute to student learning by interpreting external and internal

accountabilities to help educators promote a shared sense of ethical obligation” (Firestone & Shipps, 2005, p. 82).

The Principal as Cultural Leader

Schein (1992) proposes that the processes of “culture creation and management are the essence of leadership and make one realize that leadership and culture are two sides of the same coin” (p.1). A school leader serves as the “source of the beliefs and values that get a group moving in dealing with its internal and external problems” (Schein, 1992, p. 26). Schein (1992) concludes that cultural leaders must have

1. new levels of perception and insight into the realities of the world and also into themselves;
2. the emotional strength to manage their own and others’ anxiety as learning and change become more and more a way of life;
3. new skills in analyzing and changing cultural assumptions;
4. the willingness and ability to involve others and elicit their participation; and
5. the ability to learn the assumptions of a whole new organizational culture.

(p. 391-392)

Deal and Peterson (1999) propose that a principal should first assess the current culture of a school by asking the following questions:

- What does the school’s architecture convey? How is space arranged and used?
- What subcultures exist inside and outside the school? Who are the recognized (and unrecognized) heroes and villains of the school?
- What do people say (and think) when asked what the school stands for? What events are assigned special importance?

- How is conflict typically defined? How is it handled?
- What are the key ceremonies and stories of the school?
- What do people wish for? Are there patterns to their individual dreams? (p. 86-87).

The principal can then reinforce valuable aspects of the existing culture, revitalize problematic ones, and provide strong antidotes for lethal ones. The role of the principal as the cultural leader is to “reinforce the underlying norms, values and beliefs” in order to support the central purpose and mission of the school (p. 87).

Sergiovanni’s research (2004) into school cultures found that “cultural connections and covenantal relationships are the foundational pillars of collaborative cultures” which are based on “loyalty, purpose, sentiment, and commitment that obligate people to one another and to the school” (p. 51). A school’s culture includes the school’s “customs and traditions; historical accounts; stated and unstated understandings, habits, norms, and expectations; common meanings; and shared assumptions” (Sergiovanni, 2001, p. 105).

McEwan (2003) found that the highly effective principal is a “Culture Builder – an individual who communicates (talks) and models (walks) a strong and viable vision based on achievement, character, personal responsibility, and accountability” (p. 101). Sergiovanni (2001) notes that the principal acts in the “role of ‘high priest,’ seeking to define, strengthen, and articulate those enduring values, beliefs, and cultural strands that give the school its unique identity over time” (p. 105). Thus, the principal must think and plan carefully in implementing culture building.

The Principal as Social Justice Leader

The principal takes on many roles as a leader of diversity, social justice, and cultural responsiveness. Egbo's (2008) research found that a diversity-oriented leader "values and affirms difference...among students" in a way that is "transformative and eclectic, inclusive, emancipatory and oriented to social justice" (p. 43). Transformative leadership occurs by using power to ensure that everyone in the school community has a voice in the decision-making process. Egbo (2008) also notes that leadership is eclectic in that it "explores various models of democratic and humanistic leadership in order to develop an individualized, contextualized and contingent model that is cognizant of the specific needs of the learning community" (p. 44). A leader is inclusive by valuing and respecting the voices of all stakeholders. A diversity-oriented leader raises "critical awareness and consciousness among those who have been marginalized" (p. 44). The leader strives to promote diversity and positive interactions between members of the school and community.

Carlisle, Jackson and George's (2006) research on The Social Justice Education in Schools Project found five characteristics that exemplified schools utilizing social justice:

1. Inclusion and equity. The school promotes inclusion and equity within the school setting and larger community by addressing all forms of social oppression.
2. High expectations. The school provides a diverse and challenging learning environment that supports student development, holds all students to high expectations, and empowers students of all social identities.
3. Reciprocal community relationships. The school recognizes its role as both a resource to and beneficiary of the community.

4. System-wide approach. The mission, resource allocation structures, policies and procedures, and physical environment, exemplify its commitment to creating and sustaining a socially just environment between and among various contingency groups and in all areas of the system.
5. Direct social justice education and intervention. The school's faculty, staff, and administration are committed to "liberatory education," advocate for social justice, and directly confront manifestations of social oppression. (p. 57)

The Principal as Instructional Leader

Practitioners and researchers have provided multiple definitions of the principal's role as the instructional leader. The National Association of Elementary School Principals views "principals as facilitators, guiding and encouraging an educational environment in which administrators and teachers work collaboratively to diagnose and solve problems facing their schools" (Nettles & Herrington, 2007, p. 725). Various educational researchers have tried to get at the heart of what behaviors an instructional leader should exhibit. Blase and Blase's (2000) research on effective instructional leadership by principals included the following seven behaviors: (a) talking with teachers to promote reflection, (b) making suggestions, (c) giving feedback, (d) modeling, (e) using inquiry and soliciting advice/opinions, (f) giving praise, and (g) promoting professional growth. Nettles and Herrington (2007) identified seven critical components emphasized by instructional leaders: (a) creating a safe and orderly environment, (b) determining a mission and vision, (c) encouraging stakeholder involvement, (d) monitoring school progress, (e) having an instructional focus, (f) providing high expectations for student performance, and (g) professional development for teachers. Additionally, Sergiovanni

(1998) identified ten tasks that leaders should emphasize in their practice: (a) purposing (which includes a shared vision), (b) maintaining harmony, (c) institutionalizing values, (d) motivating, (e) problem solving, (f) managing, (g) explaining, (h) enabling (which includes providing resources and support), (i) modeling (both purposes and values), and (j) supervising. Thus, an instructional leader must take on an active and varied role in working with teachers.

The Principal as Political Leader

Principals today are caught in the “web of influences created by community pressures and relentless community politics” (Howe & Townsend, 2000, p. 11). A principal’s political leadership skills “make the difference in maintaining a balance and perspective that serves students through the political turmoil that is part of public school” (Howe & Townsend, 2000, p. 16).

Principals today often have to deal with special interest groups. The principal as political leader must do the following:

- Build a broad awareness of the diverse issues facing schools;
- Develop the ability to respond appropriately to requests by individuals and groups with special interests;
- Understand the positive and negative effects special interest groups have upon the principal, the faculty, and the school community;
- Know what kinds of special interest challenges to expect; and
- Improve skills in problem analysis, judgment, and sensitivity to be able to respond democratically and sensitively to special interest requests. (Howe & Townsend, 2000, p. 12).

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) (1997) determined proficiencies for elementary and middle school principals, including political management. NAESP (1997) determined that the proficient principal does the following:

- A) Develops strategies to attract appropriate financial support for public education;
- B) Involves community leaders in the development and support of the school's program;
- C) Uses effective strategies to deal with the political issues and forces that affect the school's operation;
- D) Understands the dynamics of school district decision-making;
- E) Works effectively with diverse elements of the school community;
- F) Positions the school as a community resource; and
- G) Participates in local, state, and federal legislative activities (p. 18).

Thus, principals must be skilled in dealing with “a range of people, issues, and forces that are represented by individuals, by factions with single agenda interests, and by groups focused upon some specific cause that is at cross-purpose with the school” (Howe & Townsend, 2000, p. 11).

Critical theory takes a nontraditional view of political leadership. Smyth's (2003b) research on the impact of politics in Australian schools found that “in trying to satisfy parents, governments and the business community through blunt accountability requirements, teaching is becoming...over-burdened with concerns about managerialism, marketisation, and accountability imperatives” (p. 21). Smyth (2003a) has found that education policy can be “domesticating, degrading, humiliating, distrustful, demoralizing, enslaving and corrosive – and here I am thinking of fences and enclosures produced by

policies of accountability, testing, competitive rating and ranking, and the disfiguring processes coming with the increasing marketisation of our schools” (p. 23). The prevailing political view of schools is a “‘black box’ mentality...[which is] concerned with what goes into schools, what comes out, and how to measure these within accountability and performance indicator frameworks of inputs and outputs” (Smyth, 2003a, p. 25). Morrison’s (1989) research also found that the administrators of British schools experience political pressure and notes that “such a model casts the relationships of education, democracy, the state and society as problematic, education existing to reproduce the views of society held by the political party in power, as the instrument of such views” (p. 4).

The Principal and Accountability Pressures

According to Firestone and Shipps (2005), principals face five major types of accountability pressures: political, bureaucratic, market, professional and moral. Conflict often occurs between these different accountability pressures. These issues, as well as the impact of accountability pressures on principals, teachers, curriculum, and students will be discussed here.

Types and Sources of Accountability Pressures

Political accountability pressure is an external pressure which includes local, state, and federal pressure. The local pressure is manifested by citizen pressure, which in turn means the school leader must act as a coalition-builder to gain satisfaction. The state/federal pressure is manifested in legal mandates where the school leader must act as the negotiator and be obedient to the mandates.

Bureaucratic accountability pressure is an external pressure which focuses on process and outcome. Process-oriented bureaucracy uses compliance as the primary goal in asking school leaders to take a functionary role to follow regulations. Outcome-oriented bureaucracy wants school leaders to serve as knowledgeable advocates to be in alignment with current goals and incentives.

Market accountability pressure is an external pressure which focuses on using competition to improve schools. The school leader acts as a manager and entrepreneur to deal with market pressures by being efficient and creative.

Professional accountability pressure is both an external and internal pressure. The school leader acts as an expert educator to use knowledge about current practice to determine the preferred course of action to create an effective school, while also weighing the consensus of other school leaders and research to determine current practice.

Moral accountability pressure is another pressure that school leaders face. School leaders must be consistent and empathic while also being a defender of the current value of social justice in today's school system. School leaders must use their current values and commitments, as well as society's to guide their beliefs about improving schools (Firestone & Shipps, 2005).

Conflict Between Different Accountability Pressures

Firestone and Shipps (2005) note that one major problem is “for educational leaders to cope with multiple, conflicting accountabilities” (p. 82). Conflict often exists between the political demands of local communities and the bureaucratic mandates that are handed down from state and federal agencies. For example, superintendents and

principals may receive requests from the state education agency and their local board to increase student achievement by redirecting financial resources, but this may not be in alignment with community groups and local politicians who are requesting that school finances be used for infrastructure, including repairing existing schools and building new schools.

Professional accountability can also be in conflict with bureaucratic accountability, when federal and state mandates threaten sanctions on low-performing schools, leaving principals struggling to keep the professionalism of a school in tact. Principals are often left compromising by allowing teachers to teach to the test and by educational triage, in which “leaders show quick improvement by focusing limited resources on students whose test scores are very near the mark and encourage poor performers to leave school, strategies that meet neither professional nor bureaucratic goals” (Firestone & Shipps, 2005, p. 91). Darling-Hammond and Ascher (1991) note a clash between market and bureaucratic accountability since “bureaucratic accountability standardizes what is offered in different schools, it minimizes meaningful choice” (p. 8). This clash is often apparent in the rising popularity of charter schools, which compete with local public schools for students, while also trying to meet the high standards under NCLB (Firestone & Shipps, 2005).

White’s (2006) study of ten New York high school principals’ experiences with multiple accountability pressures found 82 examples of conflicting accountability pressures. Over half of those instances involved bureaucratic versus professional accountability pressures. White noted that, in the large progressive schools in the study, an example of this type of conflict accompanied “external pressures from supervisors in

the form of mandates influencing activities around curriculum or the professional development of teachers” (White, 2006, p. 102). Political versus professional accountability pressures were seen in ten percent of the instances. One example provided was a principal who was pressured by parents to change the school’s grading policy. Another example was the time commitment that principals felt that had to be given to professional organizations to attend meetings and events, which was a detriment to their ability to be in classrooms and at school. While any of the pressures can be in conflict with any other pressure, bureaucratic accountability pressures were found to be part of the most serious conflicts (White, 2006).

Impact of Accountability Pressures

Impact on principals. School and district administrators, as the educational system’s designated leaders, must decide how to set goals to achieve mandated accountability measures. Stecher’s (2002) synthesis of the potential positive effects of high stakes testing includes “causing administrators to examine school policies related to curriculum and instruction, helping administrators judge the quality of their programs, leading administrators to change school policies to improve curriculum or instruction, and helping administrators make better resource allocation decisions” (p. 86). Thomas (2005) describes strategies administrators often use to cope with the impact of high stakes testing, including “...holding students back, trying new curriculum designs, furnishing cash rewards for test-score improvement, hiring more and better teachers, providing special teacher training, [and] rescuing dropouts...” (p. 160).

On the negative side, Stecher (2002) notes that standardized tests often lead “administrators to enact policies to increase test scores but not necessarily increase

learning” (p. 86). Stecher also states that tests have distracted administrators from school needs and caused administrators to spend money and resources on tested subjects over non-tested subjects, thus wasting resources on test preparation. Additional strategies school principals use to deal with high-stakes testing include “promoting failing students,...encouraging parents to fake pupil disabilities, publicizing class comparisons, falsifying students’ class assignments, and dismissing troublesome staff members” (Thomas, 2005, p.181).

Sanctions against principals as a result of low performance on high stakes tests are another area of concern. Many principals fear the loss of their job as a result of low scores on high stakes exams. McGhee and Nelson (2005) interviewed three accomplished Texas principals who were removed from the position of campus administrator “solely as a result of accountability test scores” which suggests that “in a high-stakes accountability environment, test scores can trump all else when it comes to principal performance” (p. 370). The principals, with over 60 years of service in education, “could not make up for the transgression of one year’s worth of inadequate test performance” (McGhee & Nelson, 2005, p. 371). The authors find that “accountability is creating an environment in which a person’s worth is measured by test scores” (McGhee & Nelson, 2005, p. 371). The principals in this study were all reassigned to other administrative jobs in the district with the same salary. However, the principals felt that “their professional reputations and careers were damaged by the humiliation of being removed from their posts” (McGhee and Nelson, 2005, p. 372). Tucker and Coddling (2002) concur with this conclusion, sharing this principal’s fear:

...if your students do not make progress on the state accountability measures, your school is likely to be put on a public list of low performing schools. If performance does not improve, your school could be closed, the faculty disbanded, and you fired. You will be held responsible for the whole mess. (p. 7)

Lyons and Algozzine's (2006) study found that principals did not support sanctions (in the form of negative publicity, threat or assignment of an assistance team) for schools that do not meet expected growth on high stakes tests because of the additional pressure it places on the school. Billger's (2007) study on the connection between compensation of principals and accountability found that "accountability correlates negatively with principal salaries (for the best principals)"; the author's explanation for this puzzling result was that "high-performing principals were more likely to be assigned to schools that faced substantial accountability standards but had relatively low resources and low pay" (p. 106). Billger (2007) surmises that "perhaps, like many teachers, the best principals were not motivated by money, but by their ability to positively affect students" (p. 106).

Many of the sanctions that principals deal with relate to laws surrounding accountability. Stewart (2005) notes that "as accountability demands have grown so too has the level of legislation and there are many statutes which school principals have to take into account in school policies and programs" (p. 130). Furthermore, studies of principals show that they are largely unaware of how the law impacts their schools (Ogletree, 1985; Pell, 1994).

Labels are utilized frequently to note how schools are performing on high stakes tests. Schools are often called exemplary, adequate, or low-performing on the basis of test

scores. Little research has been conducted to understand the impact that labels have on schools. Murillo and Flores (2002) conducted a four-year study into how the climate of high-stakes testing stigmatized and demoralized schools. The authors noted that the label was “perceived as controllable, the result of a ‘behavioral problem,’ [so that] the stigma of poor performance had negative repercussions and adverse consequences for the school personnel” (p. 103).

High stakes tests also impact the amount of time that principals have to be instructional leaders on campus. Fike’s (2008) study of principals’ perceptions of the impact of standardized assessments found that loss of time was a major issues for principals, in terms of attending meetings about how to administer assessments and time lost ordering and preparing for administering exams. Stecher et al. (2008) also found that administrators in their three-state study believed that they had inadequate time to complete duties related to testing. McQuillan and Salomon-Fernandez’s (2008) study summed up the frustration of many principals with the following quote from an administrator:

I’m constantly preparing information for the state and... it really takes me away from instruction and working in classrooms...It takes a lot of energy...I should be investing in the school...It’s a good thing to have oversight, but there are limits... It’s the most frustrating part of my job. (p. 21)

Stress is a common factor among principals who administer high stakes tests in their schools. Foy’s (2008) interviews with principals about high stakes tests revealed statements such as the following from a principal: “Yes, my school made AYP but at what cost? We were nervous wrecks getting ready for the testing, and nervous wrecks

waiting for the results. It was just awful.” (p. 122). Media coverage of schools is often focused on the results of high stakes tests, and this also places undue stress on principals. Foy (2008) found that media coverage of test scores was unbalanced and unfair, which the principals believed was “due in part to the press’s general lack of understanding of how passing scores are calculated by the department of education” (p. 120). Along with stress caused by media coverage of test scores, morale is also affected. McQuillan and Salomon-Fernandez’s (2008) study of low-performing schools in Massachusetts found that school personnel felt demoralized with being at a school labeled as underperforming. Principals believed that their schools “were disadvantaged by the stigma attached to the underperforming label, which encouraged conscientious parents to enroll their children elsewhere” since parents would ask “Would you want to send your child to a school you know is underperforming according to the state?” (p. 20). Jones (2007) concurs with the idea that school ratings become a label because they are reported and often misunderstood by the media.

The multiple accountability pressures in place in schools today have a significant and profound effect on principals. As Portin, Alejano, Knapp, and Marzolf (2006) noted, “because of these pressures for change, the environment for school leadership today and in the foreseeable future will require those who take on leadership roles to acquire new knowledge and skills, commit to a different set of core values, and develop new images of possibility for the schools they lead and how they are led” (p. 17).

Impact on teachers. Teachers are another major group impacted by accountability pressures in general and high-stakes testing in particular, as they must daily determine how to meet accountability requirements. Baines and Stanley (2004) note

that high-stakes testing “is designed to hold teachers accountable, yet teachers have no vote in determining the composition of classes, the curriculum, or the assessment” (p. 12).

Multiple authors have analyzed potential effects of high stakes testing on teachers. On the pro high-stakes testing side, Stecher (2002) argues that accountability systems “motivate teachers to work harder and smarter and encourage teachers to participate in professional development to improve instruction” (p. 86). Sloan (2007) concluded that high-stakes testing makes teachers “more certain about what to teach and have higher expectations for minority students” (p. 63). Sloan (2007) also concluded that accountability systems can help increase professional satisfaction and bolster professional knowledge.

Negative effects of accountability systems on teachers, however, seem to outweigh the intended positive effects. These negative effects include devaluing teachers’ sense of professional worth, increasing anxiety and stress, and undermining professional knowledge (Stecher, 2002; Sloan, 2007). Jones and Egley’s (2006) study of teachers found that “test results [were not] overly useful or accurate in assessing students’ strengths and weaknesses in reading, writing, or mathematics” (p. 246). The impact of accountability pressures on teacher efficacy is another area of research. A Kentucky study by Koretz et al. (1996) noted that over 75% of teachers felt that high stakes testing put their schools under “undue pressure” and that teacher morale had declined. Seventy-seven percent of teachers in a North Carolina study by Jones et al. (1999) felt that morale had declined because of testing. Fifty-seven percent of teachers in a study by Abrams et al. (2003) felt administrative pressure to increase test scores in their high stakes schools.

Jones and Egley (2006) found that “teachers who felt the most pressure from testing reported spending a significantly higher percentage of their time teaching students test-taking strategies” (p. 246).

Impact on curriculum. The bulk of research on accountability systems focused on high-stakes testing has found that such systems have negative effects on school curriculum. Negative effects include encouraging teachers “to focus more on specific test content than on curriculum standards”, leading teachers “to engage in inappropriate test preparation, and enticing teachers “to cheat when preparing or administering tests” (Stecher, 2002, p. 86). Many researchers have found that high stakes testing has “coerced teachers into aligning their curriculum to the areas tested” (Jones, 2007). Koretz, Barron, Mitchell, and Stecher’s (1996) study of over 200 Kentucky teachers found that 90% of the teachers tended to deemphasize untested material. Gordon and Reese’s (1997) study of 100 Texas teachers found that teachers were “not only ‘teaching to the test’ but also teaching to the test *format*...at the expense of large portions of the school curriculum” (p. 363). Jones’ et al. (1999) survey of 236 elementary teachers also discovered a narrowing of the curriculum related to the high stakes testing movement in North Carolina. Eighty percent of the North Carolina teachers spent 20% of their teaching time preparing students for accountability testing. Jones’ (2007) found that the limited curriculum made lessons less engaging for students and had a negative effect on students’ in-depth learning and understanding.

Reese, Gordon and Price’s (2004) study of 900 teachers found that teachers in low-performing schools were especially likely to emphasize the tested curriculum and use “drill and kill” strategies to prepare students. Locke’s (2005) study of district leaders’

concerns concluded that testing was “a waste of time and money [and caused teachers to] focus only on math and language arts” (p. 53). Abrams, Pedulla, and Madaus’ (2003) survey of 4,195 teachers found that 43% of teachers in high stakes environments greatly increased instruction time on tested areas versus only 17% of teachers in low stakes schools. Seventy-six percent of teachers in the high stakes schools also felt that testing had led them to teach in ways that contradicted good educational practice. As Herman (2004) notes, “WYTIWYG – what you test is what you get – is a continuing truism in the world of standards-based assessment” (p. 150).

Impact on students. Much of the research on student achievement in relation to high stakes testing has taken a statewide or multi-state view. Texas, as one of the early implementers of high stakes testing, has been the focus of numerous studies. The “myth of the Texas miracle” was explored in Haney’s (2000) study that questioned the reliability and validity of the TAAS (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills) test, the version of the Texas’ high-stakes achievement test that preceded the current Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test. Haney found evidence that the TAAS test was discriminatory and did not take measurement error into account. Klein, Hamilton, McCaffrey, and Stecher (2000) found that gains on Texas’ TAAS test were several times greater than NAEP scores. This disparity brought into question the validity of the TAAS test and may have led to the implementation of the newest Texas accountability test, the TAKS.

Considerable research has been done on the impact of high stakes testing on minority students. Valenzuela’s (1999) study of Mexican American students found that school is a subtractive process, because it “divests these youth of important social and

cultural resources, leaving them progressively vulnerable to academic failure” (p. 3). Valenzuela concluded that “the impact of the state-mandated test as a requirement for graduation cannot be underestimated” since “this test is used to determine the destinies of students rather than schools, with youth bearing the primary burden of inferior schooling” (p. 261). McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, and Vasquez Heilig’s (2008) study of Texas high school youth found “that a direct effect of high-stakes accountability is the loss of thousands of youth, particularly students of color, from our public schools” and that school ratings “improve in proportion to these losses of low-performing students” (p. 36). This study examined the “conscious decisions principals and school staffs make as they try to balance genuine school improvement and compliance with the accountability system” (p. 36). These schools are able to “produce positive indicators precisely because weaker students are being triaged out of the system before they, in the form of their test scores, can become liabilities to the school’s publicly reported ratings” (p. 36).

Wheelock’s (2002) study of the Massachusetts testing system questioned the validity of high stakes test scores. She found that “in many Massachusetts schools listed as ‘exemplary,’ statistical patterns associated with small numbers of students tested, changes in the composition of a school’s students...and teaching to the test may artificially improve test scores without improving school quality” (Wheelock, 2002, p. 35). Thus, neither the quality of the school nor the level of student learning was necessarily reflected in high test scores. Jones and Egley’s (2007) survey of over 700 teachers concluded that “nearly all teachers found the testing program to impede students’ learning or to have no effect on it” and over 35 percent believed testing had negative effects on teaching and learning (p. 238). Almost half of the teachers in the

study believed that students would have more skills by the end of the school year if the focus was not on the state exam.

Some of the studies have focused on high school graduation exams, one component of state accountability systems. Based on a study of 16 states with graduation exams, Amrein and Berliner (2002a) found that Texas' high school graduation exam had a negative impact on students. These researchers found that Texas had a strong increase in the overall rate of dropouts and students who did not graduate, and a strong increase in the GED (General Education Diploma) enrollment of younger students. Amrein and Berliner's (2002b) study of states with high school graduation exams found that the impact on student achievement in Texas is unclear based on changes Texas students' performance on the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress), ACT (American College Test), SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test), and AP (Advanced Placement) scores.

Negative effects on students described by Stecher (2002) include "(a) frustrating students and discouraging them from trying, (b) making students more competitive and (c) causing students to devalue grades and school assessment" (p. 86). Another frustration for both students and teachers is that many state testing programs do not release copies of test forms every year, since test questions are often used in subsequent years. This prevents students from using the test items as tools to learn specifically what they missed on the exam (Jones & Egley, 2007).

Baines and Stanley's (2003) study of fifty-two high school students found that students viewed school as "irrelevant, sterile, dull or worse" (p. 168), echoing Stecher's negative results. At least eight states have implemented policies that make promotion

from grade to grade (“gate grades”) contingent upon a high stakes exam (Amrein and Berliner, 2002a). Roderick, Jacob, and Bryk’s (2002) study of Chicago third, sixth, and eighth grade students in gate grades found a substantial test score increase following the implementation of high stakes testing. Nichols, Glass and Berliner (2005) found that “increases in testing pressure are related to larger numbers of students being held back or dropping out of school” (p. ii).

Increased levels of student stress because of accountability systems are also well documented. Sloan (2007) noted that “numerous researchers have concluded that excessive amounts of stress not only undermine students’ ability to perform their best on tests, but also pose potential health risks for students” (p. 67). Hardy (2003) stated that “the stress is so high over the test that [the students] can’t handle it” (p. 18). Adams and Karabenick (2000) surveyed 1656 elementary school teachers and found that 83% of the teachers noted students showing stress through the following symptoms: verbally expressing concerns/fear, inappropriate acting out behaviors, resistance to school attendance, illness, withdrawal at school and home, or sleeping and eating disturbances.

Collaborative Autobiography

Rosen (1998) defines autobiographical discourse as “all those verbal acts...in which individual speakers or writers or two or more collaborators attempt to represent their lives through a construction of past events and experiences” (p. 12). Collaborative autobiography is a tool for “sharing personal and professional experiences in a group setting [that] can promote collegiality within a group by stimulating shared reflection on experiences and insights disclosed by individual members” (Lally & Scaife, 1995, p. 325).

Lapadat (2009) integrated collaborative autobiography into a graduate course on qualitative research and had students each write a piece of autobiographical writing entitled “Who Am I?” which class members then analyzed and interpreted. Results included “powerful, insightful, written pieces, a complex range of analyses, and multi-voiced interpretations...that enhanced an already supportive class community and facilitated professional networking among members of the cohort” (p. 974). In effect, the students acted as co-researchers using collaborative autobiography to “cycle through sequences of oral and written interaction to express, witness, understand, and ultimately act on their own and others’ autobiographical narratives” (p. 958).

Collaborative autobiography is a productive research approach “because writing and then collaboratively analyzing autobiographical material makes visible multiple points of view of the experienced historicity of culture” (Lapadat, 2009, p. 975). Hauserman’s (1993) study included two vice-principals who used collaborative autobiography for professional development. Hauserman (1993) found that collaborative autobiography was especially effective because the participants were able to share “information about past experiences” and he found “reoccurring themes that can be linked to actions that the individuals are taking in the present” (p. 19-20). Lally and Scaife (1995) studied a group of teachers who used collaborative autobiography as a way to legitimize their professional concerns through dialogue and found that “sharing and articulating led to clarification of new pathways to future action: this discussion had generated a sense of professional empowerment” (p. 326). Ruskamp’s (2009) study found that collaborative autobiography creates time and space to negotiate self-other relationships and fosters a culture of inquiry. Butt and Raymond (1989) note that many

reconceptualists use collaborative autobiography because teachers can use “self-understanding as a vehicle for personal emancipation and professional development” (p. 405). Butt and Townsend’s (1990) research on teacher knowledge with graduate students using collaborative autobiography helped the teachers “evolve their personal and professional life stories in collaboration with other teachers so that all participants gain a collective sense of teachers’ knowledge and development while catalyzing the writing and interpretation of each other’s stories” (p. 257). Thus, collaborative autobiography is not only an effective as a means of professional development, it is also an effective tool for individual and collaborative inquiry.

Summary

This review of the literature has defined accountability and also provided a recent history of educational accountability, including the impact of the report entitled *A Nation at Risk*, the modern standards movement, the Texas accountability system and high stakes testing, and the *No Child Left Behind* Act. Alternative approaches to educational accountability were explored, including the market approach, the decentralized approach, the professional approach, the management approach, new managerialism, political accountability, legal accountability, bureaucratic accountability, and moral accountability. Issues raised about accountability — lack of fairness, incompatibility with the art of teaching, undesirable side effects, complexity causing ambiguity, and internal vs. external congruence — were also discussed. Literature was presented on the school principal as an organizational leader, moral leader, cultural leader, social justice leader, instructional leader, and political leader. The five primary types of accountability pressures (political, bureaucratic, market, professional and moral) were explored. The

conflict between these pressures, as well as the impact of accountability pressures on teachers, curriculum, students, and principals, were discussed. The tool of collaborative autobiography was described as a professional development and research tool.

CHAPTER III

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Epistemological Lens: Constructivist Theory

The researcher chose to approach this study through the lens of constructivism. Constructivism as an epistemology became known in the 1930's through the work of Swiss cognitive psychologist Jean Piaget. This school of thought has its own set of assumptions about the ontology, epistemology, and methodology surrounding inquiry. The ontology of constructivism is relativistic, in that people construct reality (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The epistemological perspective of constructivism focuses on the idea that reality is subjective and fluid (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Roelofs and Terwel (1999) explain that "Knowledge is shaped within a continually changing social context — the idea of objective knowledge is fictitious [because] knowledge is created by doing, researching and actively experiencing reality" (p. 204).

The aim of the study was understanding principal's reality and "individual reconstructions [of reality] coalescing around consensus", which was in alignment with constructivism (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 166). Using a constructivist viewpoint allowed the researcher to have the "primary field of interest to be precisely that subjective and intersubjective social knowledge and the active construction and cocreation of such knowledge by human agents that is produced by human consciousness" (Lincoln &

Guba, 2000, p. 176). Patton (2002) sums up the ideas behind constructivism with these three apt questions: “1) How have the people in this setting constructed reality? 2) What are their reported perceptions, ‘truths,’ explanations, beliefs, and worldview? 3) What are the consequences of their constructions for their behaviors and for those with whom they interact?” (p. 96). This study aimed to answer these questions.

I chose constructivism as the lens for this study because it reflects who I am as a person and my own world view. I grew up within the world of classical music, constantly listening to classical music, and imitating and practicing that music on my violin and piano. So although I do not consider myself a composer, I believe that I was interpreting the intention of the composer through my performance of the music. I constructed the meaning behind the music, just as today, I construct meaning through my writing and analyzing other’s writing. Spivey (1995) aptly describes this process:

People construct meaning when they compose texts and when they read and hear texts, and whether in the role of composer or comprehender (interpreter), they build their meanings on the basis of knowledge that they bring to the task and develop when performing it – knowledge that is organized (structured, configured) in some fashion. A written text is merely a blueprint; it offers a set of cues – cues to meaning constructed mentally by the writer during composing, cues selected by the writer to suggest configurations of meaning to readers, and cues used by the readers in mentally constructing meanings of their own. (p. 314)

Thus, because collaborative autobiography mirrored the same process as constructivism, it was a logical lens through which to study principals’ ability to make meaning out of accountability pressures. The research questions for this study focused on how the

principal made meaning out of the accountability pressures that he or she faced daily. Constructivism influenced my interpretation of the study, allowing me to examine how reality was constructed by each participant and what frame of reference that each principal was using to evaluate accountability pressures.

Research Method: Case Study

I used a case study as the method to study principals' understanding of multiple accountability pressures through their own collaborative autobiography. Butt and Raymond (1989) found in their research that case studies of collaborative autobiography can be effective because "individual case studies, collections of case studies, and the identification of collective commonalities [can inform] school improvement efforts" (p. 405). Often the researcher participated in collaborative autobiography. I did not participate in the collaborative autobiography because I was not a campus administrator during the study, although I was present for all group sessions. Using a case study as the research method was effective because the study gave insight into the pressures that administrators face and improved understanding of how campus principals "evolve, develop, and change their practical knowledge, and how they perceive this experience" (Raymond, 1989, p. 405). Collaborative autobiography and case study research both fit within the constructivist framework in that both allowed "more cooperative and collaborative endeavors which grounded proposed changes within teachers' [or administrators] as well as outsiders' personal expertise, teaching styles, and working realities" (Butt & Townsend, 1990, p. 266).

Choosing case study as the research method was very appropriate for the topic of multiple accountability pressures, since it was a complex topic with multiple interrelated

variables, and thus a holistic view of the topic was needed. Patton (2002) argues that well-constructed case studies are holistic in that the “whole phenomenon under study is understood as a complex system that is more than the sum of its parts; focus on complex interdependencies and system dynamics that cannot meaningfully be reduced to a few discrete variables and linear, cause-effect relationships” (p. 41). Merriam (1998) maintains that “anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon [because] it offers insights and illuminates meanings that expand its readers’ experiences” (p. 41). Yin (2003) concludes that “the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events – such as individual life cycles, organizational and managerial processes, neighborhood change, international relations, and the maturation of industries” (p. 2).

The case study as a research method “comprises an all-encompassing method — covering the logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis” (Yin, 2003, p. 14). The case study is different from other qualitative research techniques in that each case is a “bounded system” (Merriam, 1998, Stake, 2003). This study on accountability pressures was carried out within the boundaries of the lived experiences of the administrators who participated in the study. The study was also bounded by the amount of time the administrators participated in the collaborative autobiography (from January to May), which was purposefully chosen since high-stakes accountability testing occurred during this time frame. Stake (2003) categorizes this research as a collective case study, as the researcher was “jointly studying a number of cases in order to investigate a phenomenon” (p. 138).

Participants

Participants for this study included five administrators from public schools in Central Texas. The participants were students in the Education Ph.D. program at Texas State University-San Marcos. The principals were recruited from a Ph.D. problems course focused on using collaborative autobiography. The study utilized purposeful sampling to determine the participants. Patton (2002) noted that purposeful sampling “focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (p. 230). The researcher used homogeneous samples, in order to “describe a particular subgroup in depth” (Patton, 2002, p. 230). The group of administrators invited to participate in this study were chosen because they were motivated administrators who were focusing on their own professional development as students in an Education Ph.D. program.

This study created a small-group atmosphere, similar to focus groups, in which the participants shared major issues relative to dealing with accountability and school leadership. Patton (2002) noted that focus groups are often used in homogenous sampling because these groups bring “together people of similar backgrounds and experiences to participate in a group interview about major issues that affect them” (p. 236).

Data Gathering

The study had three primary data collection procedures: reviewing reflective writings of participating administrators, observing participants engaging in collaborative dialogue based on their written reflections, and individual interviews with participants on their individual and collaborative inquiry.

I attended each of five class sessions as an observer. During the first session, the instructor provided readings on accountability pressures and guidelines for reflective writing and collaborative dialogue. In four subsequent sessions, the administrators shared reflective writing and engaged in collaborative dialogue on the following topics:

1. The context of the principals' leadership positions and their leadership platforms
2. Accountability pressures they faced, how they coped with those pressures, and how their pressures and coping strategies affected the level of congruence between their leadership behaviors and leadership platforms
3. Their personal and professional history and how that history affected their current professional situation, especially in relation to accountability pressures
4. Their desired professional future, in particular their future in terms of accountability pressures and how they would address them, and how they could better align their leadership behaviors and with their leadership platforms.

During each session, the participants and I listened while each administrator shared his or her reflective writing piece, then the participants responded to and provided feedback on the writing. I digitally recorded all sessions, including the sharing of reflections and conversations among participants. The class participants were also asked during the fifth session to make recommendations to principal preparation programs, school district leaders, and policymakers.

Each participant took part in two individual phone interviews. Control was a major issue that I managed during the interviews. As Patton (2002) explains, control is facilitated by “(1) knowing what you want to find out, (2) asking focused questions to get relevant answers, (3) listening attentively to assess the quality and relevance of responses,

and (4) giving appropriate verbal and nonverbal feedback to the person being interviewed” (p. 375-376).

The first interview was conducted mid-way through the study with each participant in the study. The second interview was conducted at the end of the study. I crafted the first interview to focus on critical questions involving accountability pressures based on the participant’s reflective writing piece and the class discussion. The interview was digitally recorded and transcribed. Transcripts of the first interview were reviewed prior to the second interview.

The data from the first interview and group sessions informed the second interview. I ensured that “sufficient time was available...for data clarification, elaboration, and evaluation” before the second interview occurred (Patton, 2002, p. 384). The second interview clarified, verified, and expanded upon data gathered in the first interview and the transcriptions of class discussions. Checking back for clarification of the interviewee’s thoughts was an important step because “guessing the meaning of a response is unacceptable;...areas of vagueness and uncertainty simply become missing data” (Patton, 2002, p. 384).

Data Analysis

Rossmann and Rallis (2003) described data analysis as the process of “bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data” (p. 278). Once I collected the participants’ reflective writings and transcribed the group discussions and individual interviews, the raw data were pulled together to create a case record. Patton (2003) notes that the case record includes all of the information “needed for subsequent analysis, but it is organized at a level beyond that of the raw case data” (p. 449).

Rossmann and Rallis (2003) recommend that the researcher become immersed in the data and let the data incubate, which helps the researcher gain insight into themes in the data. I used the research questions guiding the study to organize the data through thick description (Rossmann & Rallis, 2003). Thick description made analysis and interpretation possible by detailing “physical surroundings, time and place, actions, events, words, and people on the scene” (Rossmann & Rallis, 2003, p. 275). The data were “compressed and linked together in a narrative that conveys the meaning the researcher has derived from the phenomenon” (Merriam, 1998, p. 179).

The researcher then generated categories and themes. A category represented “a *phenomenon*, that is, a problem, an issue, an event, or a happening that is defined as being significant to respondents” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 124). Merriam (1998) noted that “devising categories is largely an intuitive process, but it is also systematic and informed by the study’s purpose, the investigator’s orientation and knowledge, and the meanings made explicit by the participants themselves” (p. 179). I used inductive analysis, through which indigenous categories are identified, and deductive analysis, through which categories are developed through the literature (Rossmann & Rallis, 2003). Patton (2002) notes that analyst-constructed categories may emerge, which requires “identifying and making explicit patterns that appear to exist but remain unperceived by the people studied” (p. 459).

After generating categories, I conducted “thematic analysis” (Rossmann & Rallis, 2003, p. 282). Themes are “abstract (and often fuzzy) constructs that link not only expressions found in texts but also expressions found in images, sounds and objects” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 87). I followed Ryan and Bernard’s (2003) suggestion to

review data for repetition to determine themes because “the more the same concept occurs in text, the more likely it is a theme” (p. 89). I also searched for indigenous typologies (i.e., local terms), metaphors and analogies, transitions (shifts in topics), similarities and differences across texts, linguistic connectors indicating causal relations, and examined data from a theoretical perspective to determine themes (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). A matrix was created that displayed summaries of data for each participant. The matrix included data from open coding (based on the specific area addressed) and, later, axial coding (based on the major themes identified) for the autobiography, the four group sessions, and the two interviews. The matrices and original data were analyzed, first to identify themes cutting across the perceptions of individual participants, and then to identify themes cutting across the group.

At the conclusion of data analysis, a case study narrative was created. This included “a readable, descriptive picture of or story about a person...making accessible to the reader all of the information necessary to understand the case in all its uniqueness” (Patton, 2002, p. 450). Once the case study narrative had been written, I engaged in the process of “making comparisons and considering causes, consequences, and relationships” (Patton, 2002, p. 479). Throughout the data analysis, I attempted to embrace the mindset of qualitative inquiry which “involves portraying a *holistic picture* of what the phenomenon, setting, or program is like and struggling to understand the fundamental nature of a particular set of activities and people *in a specific context*” (Patton, 2002, p. 480).

Analysis in this study included a case study of the participants’ dialogue, collaboration, interpretations, conclusions, and recommendations for the future. The

results of the study alternate between stories of each individual engaged in autobiography and the story of the group's journey through the collaborative autobiography process.

Ethical Considerations

Assuring Protection of Human Subjects

The researcher met with the participants to discuss the study and the risks and benefits of participation in the study. The researcher provided a resume of her qualifications. Written permission to participate in the study was given by the principals who chose to participate (see Appendix A).

Participants were notified that they could withdraw from the study at any time and still remain in the course. The researcher also informed the participants that if a participant chooses to drop out of the study, I would leave the classroom while that participant was sharing his or her reflections. Those who choose not to participate in the study would not share print versions of their reflections with me or be interviewed by me. I would also destroy any copies of the reflective writing of any participant who chose to drop out of the study after the study was underway. Any oral comments made by a participant who chose not to participate or dropped out of the study would be deleted from the transcripts of group discussions. Recordings and transcripts of any interviews with a participant who chose to drop out of the study would be destroyed. Fortunately, all five administrators who signed up for the course decided to participate in the study and none of the participants dropped out of the study.

Interviews were conducted in a manner that provided privacy for the participants. Summaries of participants' autobiographies were made available to the participants for their review. All information gathered was stored in a locked file cabinet in my home and

all interview recordings and written materials with names or other identifiable information were destroyed after completion of the dissertation and any other publications based on the dissertation study. I provided confidentiality and anonymity for all participants, schools, school districts, and communities by using pseudonyms and deleting from the dissertation any information participants revealed during the sharing of their reflective writings or interviews that might identify them to nonparticipants.

The study was beneficial to the participants in that it allowed them to articulate their experiences with accountability. By introducing the concept of multiple accountability pressures, the administrators were able to understand whether and/or how these pressures are in conflict with one another. Administrators had the opportunity to see commonalities with what other administrators were experiencing through the class discussions and to develop strategies for dealing with accountability pressures. No physical, psychological, social, or legal harm resulting from the study was reported by any of the participants. As documented in Chapters 4 and 5, all personal and professional effects of participation in the study reported by the participants were positive.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARIES OF ADMINISTRATORS' AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

Five administrators participated in this research study. The group included two principals (one male and one female) and three assistant principals (one male and two females). The principals were in charge of an elementary school and a middle school. Two of the assistant principals worked at the high school level and one worked at an elementary school. Three of the participants were Anglo, one participant was Hispanic, and one was African-American. The administrators ranged in age from late thirties to mid-forties. The participants had years of experience in education ranged from a low of nine years to a high of 19 years.

Thomas

Thomas is in his late thirties and has twelve years of experience in education. Before working in education, he spent five years working with individuals with mental retardation through the Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation. After getting a Bachelors of Science degree with a specialization in special education, he taught fifth grade for six years. Then he became an assistant principal for four years and has served as an elementary school principal for three years.

Thomas works for a small school district located within a large metropolitan city. The district serves 4600 students at five campuses. The student population of the district

is mainly Anglo (over 60%), and 34% of students are Hispanic. About 17% of students in the district are economically disadvantaged. Thomas' district is considered to be property wealthy, and thus sends about 56 cents from every dollar back to the state for redistribution to property poor districts. This can be attributed to one of the historic enclaves within the school district where the average home price is \$495,000. But because the school district lines also include part of the larger metropolitan area, families who live in multi-family housing subsidized by the government are also part of the students served by the district.

Oxford Elementary sits at the center of the community. The 90 year old campus started as the only school in the small district and served all grade levels for almost 30 years. The campus serves 850 students in grades 1-5. The majority of students are Anglo (over 60%). Hispanic students make up 32% of the campus and Asian/ Pacific Island students are 5% of the student population. Only 17% of the students on the campus are economically disadvantaged and these students live in a subsidized housing in the neighborhood. Oxford is surrounded by large historic homes, leading many who visit to "often mistakenly assume all students served...come from wealthy families and are White."

The teachers and staff at Oxford Elementary tend to be representative of the student population, with about 25% of the staff being persons of color. One major difference from many districts in metropolitan areas is that over half of the teachers at Oxford have advanced degrees and almost 25% of the staff has over twenty years of experience in education. Many of the teachers on campus are bilingual since the campus has a twelve year history of providing Spanish immersion and bilingual classes. Many

teachers take on informal and formal leadership roles both on grade level teams and throughout the school. This is a result of not only having a highly educated and dedicated staff, but also of frequent turnover of principals since the late 1990's. Thomas had to take extra time and effort to build relationships with his staff, which was somewhat doubtful of how long he might stay when he arrived three years ago. Thomas noted, "In hindsight, I imagine the teachers were kicking the tires on the Buick as they thought to themselves, 'Here we go again, another new principal.'"

Because Thomas worked in a smaller school district, he was able to also build relationships with other principals and central office staff. Thomas shared that because the district leadership team was so small they were able to sit down at a conference table and "have meaningful conversations, participate in book studies, and work towards something much more than a vehicle for carrying out an agenda that was passed down."

While Thomas enjoyed the opportunity to work in a small district with a smaller district leadership team, the position also provided many challenges. One significant area of stress for Thomas was pressure from parents. Thomas noted that some parents "place an inordinate strain on working through areas of concern by imposing ultimatums, or applying pressure through networks of power and influence and sometimes even legal recourse." Thomas shared that changes in special education identification was a source of conflict with parents. For example, a parent requested that his child be tested for special education services before the child had received extra help through Response to Intervention (RTI). When Thomas explained that the child needed to go through the RTI process, the parent followed up with a lawsuit. Thomas' own internal conflict with this situation was apparent when he shared that "the parent [was] coming in and saying, 'I

want this now,’ and [I’m] holding the fort, and that [was] taken away from [me] because they have a legal recourse and [I] succumb to that, and it’s not [me].” Thomas noted that these “mixed messages to administrators are hard to balance at times when one system says you must follow these specific steps, and the next breath you are making concessions because of trying to avoid litigation.”

This parent pressure was often linked to the political pressure that Thomas faced because of the “dichotomy in education between the collective whole and the individual child.” This pressure was applied when Thomas assigned students to grade level teachers. Parents often came to Thomas with a sense of entitlement, saying that their children should or should not be assigned to a certain teacher because of the level of support that they provide to the school district or the length of time living in the school district. Thomas felt that it was a “slippery slope to walk down” and that he often made the adjustment just to relieve the pressure that the parent then placed on the teacher by constantly looking for things done wrong. Thomas summarized this ongoing parent-led political pressure:

Our community is supportive, but is also very active and much of the pressure I face day to day politically deals with high expectations from a very well educated parent population who work selflessly to raise money to support the school, and an intolerance for any perceived mediocrity in the staff serving their children.

One source of parent-led political pressure for Thomas was in determining the school’s belief about which students should be admitted to the Spanish immersion program.

Thomas often heard from parents and teachers that a screening process should be in place rather than the lottery system used. Thomas was surprised by this, inquiring, “Is language

a right or a privilege? Is it enrichment or is that just part of a good experience for kids regardless if you have a disability?” He continued to question how principals deal with these types of issues asking, “How do you navigate these political waters while doing the right thing?” Thomas’ ability to not only think about these tough questions but to voice them publicly has led to his growth as a school leader.

A market accountability pressure for Thomas was competition for students. Parents who move into the area often tour Oxford Elementary to determine whether a public school meets the high standards they expect or whether to enroll their children in private school.

This marketing pressure to compete against an entity that may have smaller class ratios, no state standardized testing, and other social benefits to a parent, puts a public school at a disadvantage unless we continue to raise the bar of quality programs, enrichment activities, and the overall positive experience for our students.

Thomas also felt pressure from unhappy parents who choose to move their children from Oxford to private school, as these parents often shared their experience with others, which in turn caused other parents to be doubtful of the education provided by public school.

This market pressure often went hand in hand with the accountability pressure placed on Thomas by state and federal regulations. Thomas shared that a school does not want to be on the “ugly list”, referring to a state accountability rating of unacceptable or even, in his school’s case, acceptable. But complaints to Thomas also begin when “teachers spend too much time on activities that resemble standardized test preparation

instead of authentic learning experiences.” Thomas felt that navigating between happy parents and high test scores was seen as

a tight walk to be on as I recognize that if any one category the state system identifies as an accountable subgroup does not do well on the test, then the additional pressure to create a system that ensures all students are successful will be further explored, thus perpetuating a pendulum swing in favor of private options for parents.

This ongoing dilemma for Thomas of how to satisfy the wealthy, educated parents in his school while also meeting the needs of his economically disadvantaged students was apparent.

Many of these pressures competed for Thomas’ time and attention. Thomas found that “decisions become complex when multiple pressures and competing interests are at stake.” Thomas expanded on this perception:

Within the battlefield for who has power, voice and authority to act, competing systems are at play, and those of us in the trenches must internalize the moral accountability as we fulfill bureaucratic, political, and marketing forces and pressures that surround us.

This feeling of being constantly surrounded by pressures led Thomas to realize that principals “operate under the hidden pressures that politically and professionally we are scrutinized” by communities and the state because of the influential role of being a school leader.

These recurring pressures placed a great deal of stress on Thomas. Thomas used collaboration with teachers, parents, and other administrators to make important decisions as one way to deal with many of these pressures.

I can just make a decision – here’s what it’s going to be and everybody do it – or we can talk through all these things and try to know that the more we are all sitting around the same table talking this out, the better the end results going to be and we’re going to like what we get.

Collaboration might be less efficient than making the decision alone, but it helped Thomas to look at who the decision would impact and who could be left out. Because the district was so small, many issues were viewed as systemic and thus impacting all campuses. The district leadership team, including Thomas, was willing to sit down together and collaborate on solutions. Thomas felt that he was “not going to be the voice that comes out every time, but if I’m heard, I’m okay.”

Thomas said that part of the school leaders’ role in negotiating pressures is to be willing to take risks. He shared that “it’s not always through following rules that you get to where you get...sometimes you’ve got to break some rules.” This is necessitated by the fact that the principal is in a mid-management role in which “you’re stuck between two worlds who don’t always see each other” and so the principal has to determine when to go against the grain and when to appease others.

The effects of multiple accountability pressures were apparent to Thomas. He discussed the difficulty of the principal role:

We work in metaphorical silos where the people that we serve and work alongside with cannot understand our jobs, and the leaders who we work for do not

necessarily want to hear the problems you are encountering as this may too be a sign of an ineffective leader.

Thomas' district had started using learning walks as a way to bring administrators together to visit classrooms and discuss ways to increase the effectiveness of the education the district provides. Thomas noted: "Sometimes you feel pressure from being vulnerable for a minute – but then you get over that [because] you work with supportive people who are here to offer good ideas or constructive criticism." The team of administrators on the learning walks often included the superintendent and assistant superintendent. Their presence on campuses for the walks helped Thomas feel that the accountability pressures he was facing were real, because "it is kind of easy to make decisions when you're from afar, but it is more difficult when you are up close."

This pressure to do what is right for students was apparent when Thomas discussed the state accountability system. Thomas believed:

The vast amount of scrutiny placed on schools and school leaders with accountability data can often lead to a sense of abandoning what is right, for what is right now in terms of instruction [because] a school leader feels that no matter how much a child grows in a year, if they do not fulfill an arbitrary measure of success defined by the state, they have failed as school leaders.

Thomas explained, "This type of pressure often lasts well beyond the school day and can be the type of situations that cause a lack of sleep or severe anxiety." This combination of feeling alone as the principal and lead decision-maker on a school campus and the fear of failure in the eyes of the central office and state takes its toll on campus principals.

Thomas' early experiences in life shaped how he reacted to the pressures of being a campus principal. After the divorce of his parents in elementary school, Thomas became rebellious. A negative relationship with a male science teacher left Thomas with "an unpalatable distaste and contempt for dominating men." As the role of the principal is often "traditionally deemed as an authoritative and conservative perspective," Thomas found himself "responding rebelliously to mandates and directives that clearly seem to focus on obedience and conformity whether they are state, federal, or local directives." Thus, Thomas often cringed when discussions of students turned to percentages, as he felt that many administrators "have replaced a child, a name, an identity and a genuine humanness with a system of unfamiliarity and its sorting mechanism."

Thomas' strong ethic of doing what is best for students also stemmed from his childhood. Growing up with a single working mother, Thomas' two older sisters often "played the role of leader, nurturer, caregiver and provider." Thomas felt that "through the reshaping of specific gender roles on a daily basis in my single parent family, an ethic of care imparted a strong desire to give back to others." His sisters' devotion to him had a "strong role in my desire to become an effective father, teacher, [and] principal."

As a result of his participation in the collaborative autobiography, Thomas was able to identify a plan to deal with accountability pressures in the future. He believed that "part of the reflective component that had come about was a better understanding of the role experience played in the pressures that affects one the most." By looking at accountability pressures through the collaborative autobiography process, he realized that "the vast amount of pressures seem equal when they are new, but ... development of

systems to automatically take care of procedural and bureaucratic items helps support the neutralizing of some of the pressures that come with the position.”

Thomas felt that participating in the reflective writing process and group discussion was beneficial in providing perspective on accountability pressures. He noted, “We must be aware of their existence, but maintain a balanced perspective on the actual pressures and how small of an impact they are compared to moral pressures.” Thomas also felt that he had a tendency to focus in on the pressure immediately at hand and not examine the larger picture. Through understanding the pressures, Thomas felt that he could now “recognize the pressures that [he] cannot change, and comply with them with as little exerted effort as possible” in order to “prioritize those pressure that have true substance to student learning and the operation of the schoolhouse.”

Through the collaborative autobiography process, Thomas was able to find a group of colleagues where he could safely share his concerns confidentially, without fear of reprisal. The process also allowed Thomas the chance to slow down – “you’re always in such a go, go, go” – to take time for peer dialogue. The process gave Thomas the chance “just to hear – wow – I’m not alone – or here’s somebody who’s going to give me honest feedback in regard to this.” This sense of connection with the other participants and ability to speak frankly and honestly led Thomas to joke that the sessions were like group therapy.

Thomas also thought that the process could be used in the future as a springboard for self-guided professional development; the process could help administrators to determine how to prioritize pressures and then allow them to “internally hold themselves accountable for it as a positive pressure.” When faced with a pressure such as market

pressure, you could tell yourself that “you weren’t going to let the market pressure override your moral and ethical beliefs.” Thomas’ ability to reflect on his feelings and the pressures he was experiencing made him an active participant in the group sessions.

Rebecca

Rebecca is in her mid-forties with over 20 years of experience in education. During the study, Rebecca worked as a middle school principal, a position she had held for six years. Previous positions included work as a high school teacher and basketball/track coach for five years. She also served as high school assistant principal for three years and a middle school assistant principal for five years.

Rebecca worked in a medium-sized school district located in a growing bedroom community close to a large city. The district serves students who live in the two small but growing towns. Rebecca noted that a large discrepancy in wealth exists between the two towns, writing that one town has “very expensive homes” and the other has “homes without running water.” One town, which included low-income housing, has homes with a median value of \$148,000. The other town has homes with a median value of \$185,000. The district includes almost 14,000 students, served at 22 campuses. Almost 45% of students served by the district are economically disadvantaged. The student population is 57% Hispanic and 37% Anglo. The school district was rated academically acceptable when the study was conducted.

Rebecca’s campus, built in the 1990’s, serves 750 students in grades six, seven and eight. Hispanic students make up over 60% of the campus, Anglo students 32%, and African-American students 8%. Forty-eight percent of the students are economically disadvantaged, and the campus has a 20% mobility rate. Rebecca shared that the town in

which her school is located “has more minority and poor people than the other town.” Rebecca noted that before she became principal, the campus had frequent turnover of administrators.

Because of the location of Marie Middle School in a lower-socioeconomic area, its administrators had struggled with teacher turnover. Over 70% of teachers had fewer than five years of teaching experience. Sixty-five percent of the teachers were females. The school struggled with representing the diversity of the student population with teachers, with only seven percent of teachers being persons of color. Rebecca had been working hard during her six years at the middle school to change the reputation of the school and to make teachers more eager to work and stay at the school, which had been previously seen as a troubled school with many deviant students. Rebecca spent the majority of her time acting as the instructional leader at the school to model best practices such as collaboration with teachers and differentiation with students. She saw herself as the lead teacher. She liked “to be in classrooms a whole lot and see what teachers are doing and see what kids are doing, and help in the classroom.” She had tried to create “a positive working environment on the campus so that teachers feel empowered to teach and learn.” Rebecca had also created strong relationships with the district curriculum coordinators who visited her campus weekly and provided constructive and supportive feedback on her work as an instructional leader.

Because Rebecca had been so focused on changing the reputation of her campus as well as the academic rigor, her relationships with other administrators in the district had struggled. The lack of a strong district leadership team was due to a new superintendent who had spent one year in the district. The superintendent had been

streamlining positions and reassigning duties, leading to many day to day changes in how things were managed in the district.

Rebecca felt that her relationship with central office was almost non-existent, receiving a visit from the superintendent or assistant superintendent only once or twice a year. Rebecca saw this as a lack of interest in her school, stating “It frustrates me that I do not receive feedback from central office, so I am not really sure if I am doing a good job.” Rebecca felt that the only feedback she did receive was from teachers, students and parents at the school, but questioned, “Is this feedback sincere or is it given to me based on what these groups need from me?” Taking time to reflect on what was happening and what it meant was one strategy that Rebecca often used to deal with accountability pressures.

Professional accountability pressure was the one that pressed on Rebecca the most. Rebecca shared that she struggled with making connections to other principals, often because of the types of questions she wanted to raise with this group. She wondered:

Are we really about all students learning? Are our behaviors oppressive to our students? Are we setting up our students for the status quo or are we developing our students to influence, lead, and cause change? I really want to look at these questions, but by looking at them I am exposing us and not all of us want to be exposed. Several of the principals that I work with are close to retirement and they just do not want to go there at this time in their careers.

Feeling a lack of connection to other administrators in the district, Rebecca created a meeting time with other middle school principals in the district with the goal of providing

a learning environment. Although initially unsuccessful, a change in leadership at another middle school led to a more willing partner and Rebecca seemed hopeful that this group might be the outlet for her to discuss the issues involved in being an administrator at a middle school.

One bureaucratic accountability pressure for Rebecca was the state accountability rating. Rebecca felt more harshly judged by teachers, parents, and central office staff in relation to the school rating of academically acceptable. Rebecca feared that not pressing her staff to become an exemplary rated school “would come across as you have low expectations – that you don’t have the drive to want to go out and get it.” She also wondered about where that initial change occurs in schools that place test scores above learning:

Where do we make that change where we say that the test is more important than the kid? Where the test is more important than the learning? Where does that shift happen? Where does it shift where it becomes the driving force? What causes a person to change and say that the test is it, as opposed to what is best for kids?

Where did we lose sight of that?

Rebecca felt that parents and community members wrongly based their perspective of the school on the accountability rating. After a prospective parent inquired about the current accountability rating, Rebecca said, “You have to be careful how much stock you put in the accountability system [because] it doesn’t tell you everything that goes on in the school.”

A related bureaucratic accountability pressure that Rebecca faced was state and district mandates. Many of these mandates stemmed from the districts’ goal of reaching

an exemplary accountability rating. Rebecca shared that, as she received mandates from central office, she had to go back to her campus and talk with the campus community about how to implement these changes. This was a frustration for Rebecca who said, “To be honest, this brings a ton of stress on me” Rebecca noted that she was unable to discuss these mandates openly with the other principals in the district. Rebecca shared an example of a new curriculum model that would be implemented in the district at the middle school level. Rebecca decided to roll out the model to all departments on her campus, while other principals only rolled out the model to two departments. Rebecca’s frustration was apparent when “the other principals were angry with me because our campus was implementing in all departments.” This push caused conflicts between the teachers on her campus and others, but Rebecca justified this by noting, “I do not want to set our teachers up for not being accepted by other teachers, but I want us to do what is right for students and to follow the rules.” Rebecca felt that the pressures she experience were something that every principal experienced in dealing with bureaucratic pressure since “these pressures are present in all relationships that are hierarchical.”

Rebecca shared multiple ways that she dealt with the pressures. One strategy was questioning the status quo. Rebecca’s effort to create collaboration between the middle school principals was one example of this. Another example was Rebecca’s practice of continually reflecting and asking questions. Because of the push from her district to become an exemplary campus, Rebecca wondered what the expense would be for her school to become an exemplary campus:

What really is important? I know that it all is, but what will be the cost? This is something that I do not really discuss with anyone. I do not want people [to] think

that I do not think that we can become an exemplary campus. I assume that other principals feel this way too but none of us can really discuss it. Would we be weak if we discussed it?

Rebecca's concern about voicing this particular topic was apparent.

Another way that Rebecca dealt with the pressure to become an exemplary rated school was to reframe the pressures she experienced. Rebecca realized that the receiver of the mandate, rather than the giver, interpreted what type of accountability it was. For example, the central office may perceive a mandate as professional accountability, but the principal may receive it as bureaucratic accountability. Rebecca explained this:

Trying to reframe my relationship with central office means is it maybe not so bureaucratic as opposed to...they are trying to be professional in the expectations that are handed down to them, and even though I see it as mandates – these heavy-handed things – maybe they really aren't, and I need to reframe how I am thinking about and using those.

Rebecca shared that this cycle continues: "And so then I take it and interpret it, and I try to deliver it professionally, but it is viewed as coming down bureaucratic to the next level." This realization allowed Rebecca to ask herself about the type of pressure that she placed on her teachers and how the teachers perceived the pressure. Rebecca worried: "I don't want to burn a good teacher out by putting too much pressure on them." After providing professional development for English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers on her campus based on TAKS data, Rebecca saw that, although she had framed it as being professional development, the dynamics of the session made it become bureaucratic because of the focus on analyzing data and discussing how to meet mandates.

Another strategy Rebecca used to negotiate accountability pressures was filtering. She felt that it was important to determine which information should be given to teachers in order to reduce the amount of pressure that they experienced. For example, she shared a bureaucratic mandate she received from central office of documenting every bullying incident that occurred in the classroom and on campus and sending the documentation back to central office. Feeling that this was an unreasonable mandate, she told her assistant principal that only bullying incidents that were referred to the office would be written up and sent to central office. Rebecca described “having to make those decisions of what am I going to pass to [teachers] that’s going to make their job easier – and what am I not going to send to them.”

Rebecca generally internalized the effects of dealing with accountability pressures. She disliked many of the managerial tasks expected of her as the campus principal, since many of these were bureaucratic in nature. Rebecca shared the dread of having to tell students that they would not be promoted to the next grade level because they had failed the TAKS test. She expressed frustration over an incident of a teacher attempting to get ESL students removed from her roster since the teacher thought the students might not pass the TAKS test. The teacher announced her resignation after Rebecca refused to move the students. The teacher felt that “if the [students] were off her roster someone else could be dealing with it and she wouldn’t have to worry, so she could focus on the bubble ones that are still out there struggling in the classroom.”

Rebecca used her graduate classes as an outlet for dealing with accountability pressures, noting that she saw a disconnect between what she learned at the university and what was happening at her school. Rebecca often tried to talk about these issues

either with classmates or her assistant principal in order to deal with the accountability pressures she faced.

Many of the decisions that Rebecca made in her school were influenced by her early life experiences. Many family members (including her mother and father) were teachers. Although Rebecca initially shied away from education in college because her parents were teachers, eventually she realized that teaching was her calling. Experiences such as being covered in chalk after working problems in ninth grade math class led Rebecca to believe today that “the messier a teacher is after the class, the more I think happened in the class.” Rebecca also learned early on that following the rules was of utmost importance, as her parents always warned “people are watching you – wherever you go – whatever you do.” Rebecca’s focus on putting children’s needs first also stemmed from her early life. Even today Rebecca believes that “my mom still holds me accountable to that piece of it – [of] putting the kids first – [of] wanting the kids to be first.” Rebecca’s role as an administrator was also shaped by the invisibility and inaccessibility of administrators in the schools where she grew up. She reminisced: “I never saw [the principal] in the classrooms. I always wondered – what are those people doing? I make myself visible so that people don’t wonder what I’m doing.”

Rebecca found that the collaborative autobiography process allowed her to voice how she wanted to change her response to accountability pressures. She reflected, “I really think that this process has helped me to identify and reflect on my actions and thoughts before beginning to engage in certain conversations.” For example, Rebecca shared that a candidate for the local school board came by her home to ask for her vote before the upcoming school board election. Her awareness of the potential political

pressure that might come from her superintendent led Rebecca to share that “having contact with this person or even having this person believe that I would vote for him places my relationship with him in an awkward position.” She declined to speak with the candidate knowing that this type of situation can “become very political and I do not want to get involved in this type of dynamics.”

Rebecca felt that participating in the collaborative autobiography was beneficial in dealing with accountability pressures. She thought that this “is a process of helping me be able to reflect more on my practice and what I am doing.” The reflective writing piece provided her an opportunity “to organize my thoughts and develop my own voice in my writings [in order to become] a more confident writer.” The group discussion allowed Rebecca to break through the code of silence often shared by administrators. Rebecca believed that “as administrators, we are supposed to be super humans that do not share the stresses of the job. We share war stories, not our feelings and reflections to the pressures. It is nice to know that there are other administrators out there that are feeling the same pressures as me.” Rebecca also felt that being able to name the pressures allowed her to deal with them, explaining:

I believe that we are all struggling with different pressures in our job but that by naming or placing these pressures into categories, we can better define the pressure and decide how we can change or reframe these pressures to make our jobs more satisfying or more manageable.

Through the process, Rebecca realized that “communication and relationships can make a huge difference in how people perceive different accountability pressures.” Rebecca felt she could “identify and reflect on my actions and thoughts before beginning to engage in

certain conversations.” Rebecca’s ability to ask meaningful reflective questions that often cut to the heart of a topic provided other participants in the group sessions with a great sounding board for the topic of accountability pressures.

Debbie

Debbie is in her late thirties, and she has sixteen years of experience in education. She explored many roles during her first nine years in education, including middle and high school teacher, department chair, and campus lead teacher. These experiences led her to become an assistant principal for five years and the director of human resources for two years.

Debbie works in a small school district that serves a rural community. The median household income for the community is \$28,000, compared with \$50,000 for the state of Texas. The school district has about 1,700 students and serves predominately Hispanic students, which make up over 90% of the student population. Almost 85% of the student population is economically disadvantaged. The school district was rated academically acceptable during the year of the study.

Debbie had moved to this school district during the middle of the school year and had only been working as the assistant principal at the high school for six weeks when the study began. The high school includes grades 9-12 and serves 500 students. At the time of the study, the high school had not met adequate yearly progress (AYP) in math for two years, so the school was in Stage 3 of school improvement under No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

The campus had dealt with frequent administrator and teacher turnover when Debbie arrived. Debbie shared that during the year before her arrival, ten administrators

had been there to fill the three administrative positions. Teachers at the high school stayed an average of four years. Over 60% of the faculty and staff had five or less years of experience. The principal had tried to represent the student body by having almost 50% males and 50% females on staff, with 60% of the staff Hispanic. The campus also struggled with keeping qualified science instructors, having an average of 32 students in many science classes.

Debbie immediately faced political accountability pressure when trying to build relationships with teachers and administrators on her campus and at the central office. Debbie expressed disbelief at the superintendent's communication with teachers as she "regularly reprimands them for not doing a good enough job. Her message, one that is vocalized consistently and repeatedly, is that if you are not happy here, you should leave, and that if you are not doing a good job, you will be relieved of your duties." Debbie found this climate of blame to be very discouraging and that "until Central Office begins offering true and focused support to the district's schools in a collective effort to achieve some shared vision, they should stop complaining." The principal shared the superintendent's view that the teachers needed improvement, and she shared this view at weekly faculty meetings. Debbie noticed how morale continued to drop after the principal told the teachers that "they have bad attitudes, and then proceeded to say that she is even seeing this attitude exhibited by some of the better teachers. You could feel the resentment in the air. Which teachers were the 'better' teachers?"

Debbie's struggle with political accountability pressure was also apparent in her dissatisfaction with the narrowness of her role as assistant principal. The principal had clearly stated that Debbie's only responsibility was discipline. Yet within the first month

on job, Debbie received a formal letter of reprimand for handling discipline issues. The principal had not spoken to Debbie about any of the situations mentioned in the letter, which included many false accusations. The principal was also not interested in broadening Debbie's role, even in light of the school's academic difficulties. Debbie was visibly frustrated that she saw teachers "who are not providing quality learning experiences for our students. We have teachers who do not plan for class, who do not incorporate classroom management techniques, and who are not, in the slightest sense, students of their own craft." Lack of communication was an ongoing problem with Debbie's principal, as the principal was rarely on campus and seemed to be a "ghost that periodically materializes." The other administrators in the group asked Debbie what teachers on campus did when they needed questions answered like "Can I leave early?" Debbie responded that "those questions aren't getting answered. People come to me for support. I have been told that I have no authority to answer those kinds of questions."

Debbie found that bureaucratic pressures were often present in her role, often in the form of the state accountability system. Debbie shared that "one such dilemma involves the federal and state-mandated assessment system, which includes the TAKS test. To be completely accurate, the whole of the pressure is actually the mandated system combined with our response to it." At the high school, the principal had chosen for teachers to "focus almost solely on teaching [students] information that will be on The Test." Debbie shared that "this bureaucratic pressure, the Texas Accountability System, and the way we have chosen to respond to it, are truly at odds with moral and professional accountabilities."

Debbie's campus decided to provide intervention for struggling students but waited until the week before the test to provide that intervention. Teachers were given one day's notice about the "bubble kids" who needed remediation. The principal's decision to provide this intervention meant that "there was no plan in place for what learning experiences the teachers would provide for the selected students, nor was there a plan for the students who would be uprooted from their classrooms to create space." This last minute decision "caused much inconvenience and disruption campus-wide, all for the sake of 'cramming' for The Test, and we did not even do that well." Debbie had determined that "this entity that offers 'education' to the public is an entity that is often molded not by the people who comprise it but by the people who reside outside it." Debbie believed that "if schooling were truly defined by those inside the building it could become personal and engaging, and there's just a battle, sometimes, between those two things."

Moral accountability pressures were an area that Debbie also faced repeatedly. Debbie was very concerned about the rate of absenteeism at her school. Upon raising this concern, Debbie was told that the superintendent had worked out a program with a local judge. Debbie found that when students were filed on for truancy, students had to pay \$20 to the court "and beyond that, there is not accountability standard for the student – no additional fees, no community service requirement, no accountability whatsoever" including no action taken by the superintendent or principal.

Debbie continued to face moral issues when she found out that a student on campus had a warrant for his arrest for involvement in a methamphetamine lab. Upon investigating, Debbie learned that the student received a text message from another

student warning him to leave campus before the police arrived. Debbie later learned that a member of the police force had leaked the information about the upcoming arrest, because he was related to the student with the warrant. Debbie was fearful of sharing too much information, noting “the corruption there is pretty bad and it’s scary because that’s the kind of deep cultural issue that keeps our kids from feeling that they are accountable for their behavior, on a really big scale.”

Debbie recognized that “each day is a series of decisions. When one of those decisions becomes a choice between compliance and my own principles and what I know is best for students, I respond with a very particular mindset: I do not compromise my values or my belief system.” In her current situation she found that her moral and professional accountability “trump everything” and “they’re almost always contradicting what is being asked of me.” She further explained that: “Were I not steadfast with my beliefs ... it would have cost me dearly; peace of mind is priceless.”

Dealing with all of the accountability pressures was difficult for Debbie. She found she often used her graduate courses as a way to negotiate pressures. Debbie believed that her master’s degree program helped her to understand what it meant to be an excellent teacher, while the doctoral program helped her understand how to be a great administrator. Conversations in the graduate courses led to expansion and growth of her beliefs.

At times she was optimistic and questioned how things could get better. During a discussion the collaborative autobiography group was having about the pressure of the TAKS test at her school, Debbie said, “It’s always easier to say we have all of these mandates and we can’t do what we want, but I think a great question is ‘Why can’t we?’

and ‘What are we going to do about it?’ Another strategy that Debbie used was maintaining hope that things would get better at her school, or that she would find a role that fit her better. This occurred during the end of the study when Debbie was transferred from the high school to an intermediate school. Debbie shared that she could “feel some peace again, less burdened by the bureaucratic and political monsters which have been invading my space.”

Debbie was deeply affected by the accountability pressures that she faced. She stated: “Too many times over the years I had been disillusioned by the ‘system’, and the prospect of persisting within the field was often far less than appealing.” The difficulties of her role often led Debbie to be critical of the education system and find that “hope fades, overshadowed by disheartening observations of students’ unengaged, teachers’ demoralized, and administrators leading without moral purpose.” This view stemmed from having a “working environment [that] was one of the worst [of her] fifteen years in this business. That certainly has something to do with my disgruntledness.” Her struggles at the high school prompted this thought:

The system of leadership at my campus and throughout the district has caused my moral and professional accountabilities to collide, and they are clashing hard. My head hurts, my heart hurts, and I am trying to figure out how best to maneuver through this.

Debbie shared a story about the political pressures she faced during her time as a head coach at a previous school. The athletic director told Debbie to play a specific athlete because the parents were wealthy and donated money to the athletic program. Debbie did not play the student because of lack of effort and absences by the student, and

consequently lost the head coaching job at the end of the year. As she began looking for new positions, Debbie “did not want to be involved in public education if this was the general mentality.” This idea of leaving education was one that Debbie raised again after her experience at the high school. She shared: “I’ve thought about getting out of public education. Sometimes the pressure against you is so strong, and when you see things that are sad – over and over again – at least for me there’s been times when I just want to get out.”

Debbie’s work as an administrator was profoundly influenced by her life history. Debbie believed that “the great expectations that I have for education really stem from the childhood that I had.” Every interaction she has with a child is influenced by her parents’ teachings. Debbie shared an anecdote about a time as a baby when she crawled across a large room to get to her mother and proceeded to bite her mother on the leg. Her mom, who was surprised by Debbie’s focus and determination, picked her up and gave her a hug. She related this story to her current philosophy of education: “The way that I respond to situations and the kind of school that I would like to create – I think it is all a function of the experiences I had as a child.” Her parents’ open-mindedness and unconditional love reflect in her own belief that all children deserve to have those same qualities provided by the school, while also setting boundaries to make sure children are safe and healthy. She believed that her parents helped create the mindset that students should have the space for “true experimentation, discovery, and creation.”

Debbie struggled with identifying experiences that led her to be a teacher. She noted, “There are no specific moments or people that I can recall being of direct influence on my initial entry into the teaching profession” but that perhaps her interactions with her

own teachers helped steer her into becoming a teacher. Debbie believed that her early experiences in life led her to believe that empathy should be the goal of all schools, because “empathy implies working together and genuinely caring about each other, each a necessary criterion for achieving success as an organization.” Debbie thought that “a lifetime of recognizing empathy as well as recognizing, all too often, when it was missing” led her to her path as a teacher and an administrator. She asserted that this need for empathy continued in her role as campus administrator:

Campus administrators get wrapped up so tightly in the bureaucratic stronghold that there is not much time for ‘relationship stuff.’ Well, one thing I have learned to be true in this life is that you have time for the things which matter to you the most. This mattered and continues to matter, to me. Consequently, there has been plenty of time for it, and rightly so, for relationship building is truly the essence of our work.

Thus, Debbie’s upbringing had a significant influence on her experience as an administrator.

Debbie believed that the collaborative autobiography process helped her realize changes that she wanted to make in her own life. Her frustrations with her work situation often made her forget that “there are good effective schools out there.” By reflecting with the other administrators, Debbie came to the “realization that there are other educational leaders who really want a better system and who are currently implementing ideas to test their impact.” She went on to share that she wanted to find these schools and “visit them, ask questions, and get to know the leaders, their vision and daily purpose.” This belief in hope for creating a better school also led Debbie to plan to pursue a position as principal.

Debbie found her involvement in the collaborative autobiography project to be extremely beneficial. She noticed that writing her autobiography helped her “reflect on what you’re going through, helps you see it more clearly, as you get caught up in the day to day.” The writing also helped her “step back a little from the pressures and look at them a little more objectively instead of just living in the middle of them and being frustrated by them.” The reflective writing allowed her to find “the ‘why’ behind the ‘what’ and then ponder and figure out new ‘how’s’” to deal with her situation.

The group discussions were comforting because Debbie felt that “in my current environment, I don’t have anyone to talk to, so it feels very lonely” and she was able to lean on group members for support. Not only was the process of sharing ideas and discussing them with peers valuable for Debbie, she thought the friendships created with other administrators during the collaborative autobiography process was extremely important since she felt that she struggled with making connections with other administrators. Debbie admitted: “I don’t reach out and contact other administrators and try to build relationships. And that’s something that the collaborative showed me is really important.”

Sharing her writing during the group meetings was also useful because “having to say things out loud – it makes you even more aware of what it is that you were thinking.” Because some of the topics shared during group meetings were controversial, and many points of view were represented, Debbie noted:

People may not agree with everything everybody else says, but it’s not really about that. It’s about feeling like – wow – they’re working hard, and they care,

and they're going through struggles too. And here's how they're dealing with it. It puts ideas out there on the table.

Debbie found the group discussion meaningful in that “having to own it – in the sense that you have public accountability for it – knowing that people are listening and they're going to have questions” allows a “deeper understanding of your own feelings and situations.” Listening to the other group members helped Debbie to see that “having other people share starts to make you recognize your own environment better.”

The collaborative autobiography process also helped Debbie look objectively at the situation she was in. Debbie believed that “this has really helped me step back a little, and actually try to look at the issues instead of the frustrations.” She also wondered how she could continue to apply these skills in the future, noting “I just wonder how it can become – and maybe for some people it is – I wish it was something I did on my own. What's going to push me to keep thinking this way?”

Sal

Sal is in his mid-forties and he has twenty years of experience in education. Sal worked as a middle and high school teacher for eight years as an English as a Second Language teacher because of his proficiency in Spanish. Of his twelve years as an assistant principal, Sal has spent five years at the middle school level and seven years at the high school level.

Sal works in a large school district located in an urban community of almost two million people. The school district was the third largest employer for the community. The district included over 80,000 students who are served at 120 campuses. Over 60% of students are economically disadvantaged. Students in the district are predominately

Hispanic (60%) with the other 40% consisting mainly of Anglo students (26%) and African-American students (12%). Thirty percent of students are limited English proficient.

The high school includes over 1400 students, who are 80% Hispanic, 12% African-American, and 4% Anglo. Over 80% of the students at the high school are economically disadvantaged. Sal noted that the high school, which was built in the early 1950's, serves a large number of older apartment complexes that have "families who have been [there] all their lives and are considered to be low socioeconomic." The high school also serves many students who are natives of other countries, including Mexico, Honduras, and El Salvador. The high school has a 30% mobility rate, compared with a district rate of 23%. The campus has struggled in its efforts to return to a rating of academically acceptable after receiving an unacceptable rating a few years ago.

Although the school serves mainly low socioeconomic families, it had been able to retain teachers because of the academic programs at the school as well as the climate and culture. The high school groups students into four areas of academic interest to form smaller learning communities. The students take classes from a core group of teachers assigned to each learning community. Forty percent of teachers have more than eleven years of teaching experience, while forty percent of teachers had less than five years of teaching experience. Teachers at the school are mainly Anglo (64%), with the rest being either Hispanic (24%) or African American (12%).

Bureaucratic accountability pressure was the one that Sal dealt with the most. He saw this pressure coming "in many forms such as teacher evaluations, non-professional staff evaluations, and other types of administrative duties that are mandated by the state

or federal government, district, and campus.” Sal provided an anecdote about one teacher evaluation in which a longtime teacher stated that she was so disappointed with the evaluation by Sal that she would not be returning the following year. Sal felt hurt by the teacher’s comments because she accused him of being biased based on a previous student complaint. When asked by another member of the collaborative autobiography group whether Sal had asked himself if he had possessed some bias towards the teacher, Sal elaborated that the teacher’s main complaint was that she did not receive a rating of “exceeds expectations” in every area of the evaluation. Another incident involving teacher evaluation arose when Sal’s principal asked him to go and observe a teacher and be “nit-picky” about the teacher’s methods. Sal refused, feeling that he needed to stay firm to his principles concerning teacher evaluation. Thus, for Sal, evaluating teachers became not only a bureaucratic pressure, but also a political pressure.

Another area of bureaucratic pressure for Sal was his role as the leader of his department as well as the leader of an academic learning community. Although Sal evaluated the teachers in his academic learning community, he did not evaluate the teachers in his department. Issues often arose when a teacher in his department had a problem with a student, but the teacher and student were not in his learning community. This required Sal to talk to “the administrator who oversees that academy where the teacher belongs [who] will answer that situation in collaboration with me.” Although this system created conflict for Sal in terms of his role, he felt that “if I really am an instructional leader, then I think I can participate and lead and be that resource and the support for any content area.”

Sal shared frustration over the bureaucratic pressure placed on him by the TAKS test. He felt that schools had lost sight of “the big picture of what we are here for” and ended up talking about “we need X number of kids to graduate.” He thought that for many school leaders, “the outside pressures, even the pressures within, caused you to change your belief system.” Sal noted that on his campus “we do talk about percentages and numbers and subgroups” but that having those conversations at least allowed him to get the chance “of identifying the kids and what kinds of interventions you are going to put forth.”

Sal’s role as the campus Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) coordinator was a bureaucratic pressure. Sal disliked the bureaucracy surrounding the 300 students at his campus who were considered Limited English Proficient. Sal felt that “if the student has already passed their TAKS, that should be enough” and that the student should not need to take the TELPAS exam because “in the end it is really hurting the student” by having a “bunch of bureaucracy there.” He also thought it unfair that the duty had been solely designated to him: “I don’t feel that it should be only one person that oversees TELPAS. It is huge. It’s becoming more and more of a pressure for accountability purposes.”

Political accountability also affected Sal. The high school’s attendance rate had been dropping, and the delinquent students could often be found “hanging out at all times of the day” at local coffee shops and businesses. Sal shared: “We do get some pressure from the area businesses like Starbucks and Exxon that are located very close to our school.” The district was also placing pressure on the school because of the attendance rate. The district set a goal for the high school to raise the attendance rate by 3%. Sal

worked daily to call parents of absentee students. Sal said, “That in itself is a huge task. We do feel that pressure daily.”

Sal also struggled with professional accountability. Sal found at times that doing what he believed was best for his campus was often at odds with district mandates. Sal shared: “I find myself at times questioning some of the practices and systems at the campus where I work. I do this because I too have the strong belief of doing what is right and not simply following the status quo.” For example, the district provided a specific scope and sequence for the department that Sal chaired. The teachers in the department felt that the scope and sequence would not work for their students. Sal had the teachers collaborate to “develop common lesson plans, assessments, and activities” that did not follow the district scope and sequence. Although Sal felt that he was expected to “ensure that each learning community follows the district’s plan,” he supported the changes made by his teachers because “it is what is best for our students.” Sal believed that there has to be “room for creativity and I’m not going to expect you to do the same thing that I do.”

Sal believed that the accountability pressures were physically and mentally draining. He noted that there were “times when I don’t have time to eat because of my work ethic and responsibilities to the staff.” Sal expressed concern about the district requirement that he do ten classroom observations a week and provide feedback to the teachers. Sal felt that that would be realistic if he did not have so many other duties to attend to. Sal shared: “I’m always in a hurry. I want to make sure that things that I need to do get done.” Sal thought that “the pressures of doing what I want to do” were in conflict with “the pressures of really wanting to do a great job with everything.” This worry was especially pressing after two teachers on Sal’s campus had heart attacks. He

noted: “I think that a lot of times we get caught in the hustle and bustle of the work and too often we forget about our health.”

Dealing with the number of pressures facing him was also difficult. “There’s too many things coming at you...coming at me where maybe I’m not as proficient. I don’t feel that I do justice to some of the things.” Sal also disliked the fact that he received little feedback from his principal on how he dealt with situations at school, and that the majority of feedback came when something got “messed up.” Sal also felt like his campus was under a microscope by the district because of the struggle to achieve an academically acceptable accountability rating. Sal lamented, “When we have visitors constantly...those kinds of pressures are daily...everybody feels like I feel...being pressured...being under the microscope.”

Sal was able to negotiate many of the accountability pressures through professional development and collaboration. Sal found that “the way I alleviate these pressures is by pacing myself and also by collaborating with my colleagues for support.” One such pressure was maintaining the school’s academically acceptable accountability rating. Much of the pressure came from how students scored on the TAKS test. Sal believed that “TAKS is a beast in of itself.” He found that by collaborating with other administrators, teachers, and instructional specialists at the school he was able to work towards dealing with that pressure.

Sal also found that the principal provided a means through which to deal with accountability pressures. His principal would “push us in a direction that is going to help us in the long run as professionals and leaders” but at the same time he was protecting us.

His principal took time to discuss examples of problems the school was facing as well as giving Sal a “different perspective on how one would do things.”

Sal used the doctoral program as a means to dealing with accountability pressures. The program allowed Sal to “see things differently, in the sense that I am more able to see the big picture.” The coursework also allowed him to “reflect on things in a way that is able to be to my advantage.”

Sal’s family was one of the greatest influences in his decision to become a teacher and later an administrator. Sal grew up in a family of thirteen children. Sal’s parents worked hard to provide for the family. Sal’s parents always emphasized being respectful to teachers. Even though Sal’s parents had not attended college, they encouraged all of their children to work to earn a better living by earning a college degree. One of Sal’s older brother’s became a teacher, demonstrating the commitment and skills necessary to pursue a career in education. After Sal began teaching, he would often use his brother as a sounding board to talk about issues in education.

After nine years of being a classroom teacher, Sal talked to an old friend from high school who had just become a middle school principal. Sal’s friend convinced him to pursue a Master’s degree in educational administration in order to become an assistant principal at the middle school. Sal remembered that his own middle school principal was never seen in the classrooms, so he wanted to be visible in classrooms to show his support to teachers and students. Sal noted that his friend’s “mentoring, dedication, values, morals, work ethic, and character had an everlasting influence in my career as an administrator.” Sal’s friend taught him to find balance between his work life and family life, even if it meant going against the status quo.

Sal found that he was able to identify two main areas of improvement through the collaborative autobiography process. He wanted to improve his leadership skills, noting “my role is more critical than I ever imagined.” This newfound awareness led him to realize that “I am seen as the person who will make strategic and critical decisions that impact student and teacher performance.” He also believed the collaboration was key to finding success as a leader. He perceived that “I need to have more conversations about concerns with the staff before they reach a certain point that will be hard to recover.”

Sal believed that participating in the collaborative autobiography process was helpful in dealing with accountability pressures. The process gave him “an opportunity to really look within myself, as to what kind of job I am doing, why am I in it, and how is it benefitting other people.” Taking time to reflect on his current administrative position allowed him to “figure out in what other ways [he could be] more of an agent for the campus” and “spark some urgency” regarding areas that he felt needed change instead of just reacting “because the principal has brought it to my attention.”

Sal also found the group sessions to be initially challenging. He tended to be the “quiet guy” in the early sessions, which he attributed to the fact that English was his second language. But as he became more comfortable, participation in class discussions provided a venue for Sal to “articulate my opinions and experiences.” Sal thought the group discussions were valuable, “because we get to hear from our colleagues and also learn and kind of reflect on that also.” The process also helped Sal grow as a writer as he found his voice in the reflective writing.

Veronica

Veronica is in her mid-forties, and she has nine years of experience in education. Before becoming an educator, she spent nine years working in business. Veronica worked as a high school teacher for six years before becoming an elementary assistant principal.

Veronica works in a large school district that is located in an urban community of almost two million people. The school district is the third largest employer for the community. The district includes over 80,000 students who are served at 120 campuses. Over 60% of students are economically disadvantaged. Students in the district are predominately Hispanic (60%) with the other 40% consisting mainly of Anglo students (26%) and African-American students (12%). Thirty percent of students are limited English proficient.

Veronica had been working for three years as the assistant principal at a Pre-K through 5 elementary school with about 300 students. Seventy-five percent of students at the campus are Hispanic and 25% are African-American. Over 96% of the students at the campus are economically disadvantaged. The campus has a 25% mobility rate. The campus has 18 teachers, three professional support staff, and two full-time administrators.

The school was built in the early 1900's and is located in an area close to the downtown of a major city. The area had "once been blighted, plagued with poverty, drugs, and crime." Veronica noted that this area "is currently being transformed into an eclectic mix of modern green homes, art galleries, and quaint eateries." Washington Elementary's teaching staff represents the diversity of the students. Over 48% of the faculty and staff are Hispanic, 36% are White, and 16% are Black.

Many of the families whose children attend Washington Elementary have had “a bad experience with school and so they have their level of resentment.” Despite this resentment, the school had built trust with the families. Veronica noted that the general sentiment of parents was that “maybe I don’t have a lot of education but you’re the school and I want my kid to have more education than I had.” Thus Veronica was very aware of the population that her school served: “We have kids in first grade whose parents can’t help them with their homework. And I’m not saying that in a demeaning sense. I’m just saying that is the reality.”

Washington had struggled with keeping experienced teachers on staff, with 75% of the staff having less than five years of teaching experience. The majority of teachers on staff had been with the district for only three years. At each grade level Veronica dealt with “teacher superstars and teacher slackers.” Her policy was “teachers and staff members who cut corners or produce shabby work are held accountable and potentially written up because the message is clear: Educate these kids as future leaders of tomorrow.”

Veronica felt that she had built a positive relationship with central office and her principal. She found that each of these relationships took time and effort. Veronica shared, “Like companies who must market themselves to clients and benefactors, schools, too, must work to maintain positive relationships with the central office.” She felt this was especially true in light of a new district superintendent and the “added uncertainty of a changing of the guard in our district office.” Veronica’s relationship with the principal was one of mutual respect, a relationship allowing them to “have a transparent exchange regarding our feelings about situations that we must address at our school.”

Veronica felt that bureaucratic accountability pressures weighed on her the most. She shared that bureaucratic pressures are just part of being an administrator and that “if I were to ignore them, I probably wouldn’t have a job.” As an administrator, she needed to ensure that policies and procedures were implemented, which led her at times to tell teachers, “I didn’t make this rule, I am simply the messenger.” Veronica spent most of her day at her desk “documenting, whether it’s student discipline, whether it’s gathering paperwork to have a student considered for dyslexia testing or special ed testing, or looking at data.” She felt that she wanted “to complete the required documents for specific bureaucratic pressures, but more than anything I fear being responsible for a kid missing out on some important service because I did not properly do my job.”

Testing was another source of bureaucratic pressure for Veronica. As the campus TAKS coordinator, Veronica was responsible for making sure that all procedures were followed. She noted that the testing had a large impact on the campus.

Before the Christmas break, the TAKS drill and kill slowly makes its arrival.

From this point on, it seems that students are solely assessed for the purpose of passing the TAKS. It is at times heartbreaking to see how our kids must succumb to the accountability pressures of endless testing. Not only must they prepare for the TAKS, but local benchmark tests, weekly assessments, and the TAKS released test. All the testing required for our students really hampers our ability to facilitate a love for learning.

This focus was apparent not only in the classroom, but also in teacher meetings where “educators spend countless hours...to create strategies solely designed to improve the

percentages of students who pass the TAKS test.” Thus preparing for the TAKS test was an all-consuming task at Washington Elementary.

Along with the focus on testing, Veronica struggled with the district’s goal of having Washington Elementary become a recognized campus. She queried, “What’s wrong with being an academically acceptable campus? But then there is this fear, if we pull back from [trying to be recognized], we could also go unacceptable or be shut down. It’s just a tightrope that we walk daily.” In her district, “so much of an administrator’s worth is connected to the Texas Education Agency’s rating of the school.” Veronica felt “the pressure to be a part of that system” that focused on getting a high accountability rating because speaking against it could mean the loss of her job. During the collaborative autobiography process, Veronica did feel comfortable questioning how and why the system was created that placed these bureaucratic pressures on her. Veronica believed that these “systems are created and maintained and expanded” in order to provide job security for the people within the system “because the more work that they create for somebody else to do, then it justifies their existence.”

Veronica struggled with how to deal with the market pressures that her school presented. Student enrollment over the previous ten years had continually dropped because “people of color who had owned homes in the area have been forced out [due to] their inability to cover the rising taxes brought on by the increased property values.” Veronica shared that families moving into the area were sending their children to private schools. During early conversations with other administrators in the group, Veronica did not see this lack of enrollment in her school as a type of market pressure, but instead thought, “You don’t think our school is good enough for your kids?” Later in the

collaborative autobiography process, Veronica shared that because her school was under-enrolled, the budget had been reduced causing the school to lose a math coach and a full-time staff member.

Moral accountability pressure was another pressure that Veronica faced. Veronica felt that she had to deal with gender and ethnicity issues as an African-American female administrator on her campus. She noted that she struggled with finding a balance with the teachers on her campus of being an ally and friend, but also an administrator. Veronica found that many teachers lacked respect for authority and work ethic. She aptly summarized this thought:

I always wonder...have I crossed that line of cordiality with teachers to where they think, why are you telling me that? When really it's my job to express to teachers...hey, you need to step up with afternoon duty...you need to do this or you need to do that.

She wondered if her principal, who was Hispanic, and she were both White, whether teachers and parents would respond differently to them.

The moral pressures that Veronica placed on herself were also apparent in her work to help struggling students. During a meeting with a parent and teacher about a struggling student, Veronica worried about how to respond to an accurate accusation that a teacher had neglected to refer the student for testing for a learning disability. She shared: "As an administrator, I could not side with the family and turn my back on my colleague. And morally, I could not defend the teacher knowing the family's position was informed and accurate." Veronica responded by presenting plausible solutions, without siding with the teacher or the family. She wanted "to be respected and liked as a leader,

but I refuse to lose my soul in the process. There are morals and values that I must cling to in order to be at peace with God and myself.”

Veronica struggled with negotiating accountability pressures, which often placed a great deal of stress on her. She found that it was necessary to “work overtime to learn the best ways to address the many challenges presented on a daily basis.” Veronica found that creating systems helped reduce her stress, such as creating a binder for all of her TELPAS and TAKS materials. She believed that trying to keep the pressures in perspective also helped her:

No matter how stressed I get about it, these pressures are going to be here and I need to deal with them the best way that I can. And what I don’t get done this ten hours, I’ll start over tomorrow on the ten hours. I think I stress, stress, stress and realize that doesn’t change anything.

Veronica did find it was useful to know how to navigate the system in her school district, so that as pressures were placed on her, she could ask someone else how to deal with the problem, which then in turn would help reduce her own level of stress. She believed, “By forming relationships with knowledgeable, astute, and positive colleagues, I have found that I am better able to navigate this ever-winding educational maze.”

Veronica’s upbringing by her mother and father, who were both educators, greatly impacted her choices in life. She grew up seeing that educators “were respected and admired in our family and community.” Veronica found that her parents “were extremely focused and astute regarding me and my siblings and our school activities.” Veronica initially shied away from becoming a teacher, trying to “chart my own path” in a direction different than her parents. But as she became a teacher, Veronica found that she

could “go to [her parents] for counsel and often they have experienced the same dilemma multiple times.” Veronica also learned tidbits of advice from her parents and coworkers as she began teaching high school. For example, upon starting her first year at the high school, another teacher encouraged Veronica to take five reams of paper and store it away in her classroom, knowing that paper would be in short supply later in the semester. Veronica found that the “high school teachers taught me how to be a teacher and how to learn how to be successful as an educator.” She was able to continue using these colleagues as a sounding board as she became an administrator.

Veronica also used her interactions with the high school assistant principal to help mold her actions as an administrator, using the assistant principal as a “negative exemplar.” The assistant principal frequently threatened teachers that any infractions would be recorded on the state appraisal form along with a note in the teacher’s personnel file. Veronica realized that this was not a great model for her to follow, sharing “I prefer not to use such strangleholds to remind teachers of certain responsibilities.”

Veronica described how the collaborative autobiography process helped her change her viewpoint about accountability pressures. Her plan for dealing with future accountability pressures included “working toward a more creative and interactive learning setting that is not stifled by the demands of a standardized test driven system.” This included her resolution to “stop caving to accountability measures by simply choosing to focus less on them.” Her frustration with awareness stemmed from the fact that as an assistant principal, “I don’t have the final say in this particular paradigm shift, so rather than merely spin my wheels, it certainly goes on the top of my list of things to do when I become principal.”

Veronica felt that participation in the collaborative autobiography process was beneficial in dealing with accountability pressures. She found the writing process to be therapeutic in that she could “take a few minutes and really process my thoughts and put them on paper.” Veronica liked “the fact that [all the administrators] work at different schools [which] seemed to give us the freedom needed to open up and honestly assess our experiences.” Because she did not work daily with the other administrators in the group, Veronica did not “have to fear that somebody is going to take what we say and run with it.” The risk of reprisal was minimal since “these people don’t know the people I report to.” Veronica felt that the piece of the collaborative autobiography process “that really resounded with me is the collaborative piece with other administrators — listening to their stories and understanding the need to talk more to administrators.”

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS FOR RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study looked at eight research questions that focused on school administrators' perceptions of accountability pressures and the use of collaborative autobiography to reflect on and address those pressures. To review, the eight research questions are:

- 1) What accountability pressures do participating school administrators face and what are the sources of those pressures?
- 2) In what ways, if any, do the school administrators perceive accountability pressures to be in conflict with one another?
- 3) How do the school administrators negotiate accountability pressures and conflicts?
- 4) What are the effects of accountability pressures and conflicts on the school administrators?
- 5) To what extent, if any, are the school administrators' life histories reflected in the way they negotiate accountability pressures and conflicts and how they are affected by those pressures and conflicts?

- 6) What strategies do the school administrators develop as part of their collaborative autobiographies to better negotiate accountability pressures and conflicts in the future?
- 7) What, if any, benefits do the school administrators perceive they receive from their participation in collaborative autobiography?
- 8) What do participants recommend that central office leaders, principal preparation programs, and policy makers do to assist school administrators in dealing with accountability pressures?

This section will provide an in depth look at the themes that cut across the participants' reflections relative to each research question. The themes are shared below under headings corresponding to the research questions.

Types of Accountability Pressures and Sources

Multiple themes concerning accountability pressures and their sources evolved from the analysis of the participants' reflective writing, individual interviews, and the transcripts of group sessions. All of the administrators dealt with at least four of the five accountability pressures as described by Firestone and Shipps (2005). The first theme emerging from the data, thus, was that of multiple accountability pressures. Participant perceptions of these different pressures are described below.

Bureaucratic Accountability Pressures

The school administrators agreed that bureaucratic pressures affected them daily, including pressures to implement central office, district, and state mandates. These pressures ranged from how to utilize a defunct site-based decision-making team to how to deal with a curriculum scope and sequence that does not reflect the needs of the students.

Many of the administrators felt that they were playing some kind of bureaucratic game to meet all of the required mandates. Thomas shared his view about the educational bureaucracy:

Many ideas in education grew from a logical, child-centered vision, and rather than being initiated and implemented on the basis of a moral purpose and an ethic of doing what is best for kids, evolved into a tangled web of systemic bureaucracy whose reflection is quite different than the original vision. The function of the schoolhouse rests at the heart of political debate, competing self-interest and a lack of unified purpose in this country, and because of this vast reach of public education, the approach to reformation from federal to state to local tends to be built on complex legalities, codes, rules, exemptions and prescriptions for success.

Rebecca, Sal, Debbie, and Veronica echoed David's concerns about how bureaucratic mandates impact schools daily. Sal and Veronica found the pressure of the TAKS test to be driving many of the choices about instruction on their campuses. Sal noted, "TAKS is a beast in and of itself. I know we're kind of created in that system. And so we all work together towards a common goal of achieving success on the TAKS test because schools do not want to end up on the bad list." This idea of a "bad list" was discussed by group members who felt pressure to move up to the next ranking of the state accountability system, whether that meant moving up from unacceptable to acceptable, acceptable to recognized, or recognized to exemplary. The administrators felt that the inability to keep the campus moving up in the ratings would land your campus on the "bad list" at the district level. Rebecca shared, "I would love for us to have an exemplary school, but I was not sure at what expense that would come to us."

Market Accountability Pressures

Market accountability pressure was experienced by all of the administrators. Thomas and Veronica both faced pressures that parents might choose private schools over the public school. The communities that Thomas and Veronica worked in both had a number of wealthy families who could choose to move their children to private schools and often did so. Thomas believed that, “Parents who are not happy with a particular teacher, curriculum philosophy, or other decision can often demand a change, or sometimes quietly un-enroll over a concern that was never mentioned.” The administrators also discussed whether the recession impacted the choice that many wealthier families were making to keep their children in public schools.

All of the administrators faced pressure from the changes made by the Texas legislature to reduce funding to public schools. Sal and Veronica, who worked at Title 1 schools, found that their district was planning to make major cutbacks. This district was impacted not only by state funding cutbacks, but also by Chapter 41, which requires property wealthy districts to give tax revenue to property poor districts. Sal was helping his principal deal with the fact that the school was going to lose five teachers and two staff members. Veronica found that the loss of staff members such as a full time math coach was making it “a lot harder to do the job that we need to do.” Thomas’ district, which was also a property wealthy district, also struggled with managing to deal with state funding cutbacks. Since Thomas’ district was small, the district was able to reduce the overall number of staff through attrition and retirement instead of laying off staff members. But having to think about laying off teachers was impacting Thomas: “I’ve got several colleagues that are friends in other districts and they’re laying people off.”

Thomas felt that many people see reducing staff as “that’s just a position” rather than seeing the “human side of that,” that it is a person who is being affected. Rebecca’s viewpoint about the changes to funding in her school district was similar to Thomas. She found that “having to make personnel decisions based on funding is really, really hard.” She had to cut three interventionist teachers from her staff, which was a “big stressor on me.” She had also been informed that even though her enrollment numbers would be increasing by almost 100 students, she would not be receiving another assistant principal to manage the 850 students on her campus, when the district policy had been to provide two assistant principals to campuses over 800. She found it difficult to plan quality learning experiences for her students and staff members because now she had to “try to figure out how we’re going to do all those things —with less and less money.”

Political Accountability Pressures

Four out of the five administrators discussed experiences with political accountability pressure. Many shared an urge to speak out politically about the negative effects of the current accountability system, but such beliefs were generally not voiced for fear of losing one’s job or being cut off completely from the education system. Rebecca stated, “We have these concerns, we express them, but then it always goes back to you gotta have a job.” Thomas expressed concern about how politicians create an illusion that they are “fixing” education through the accountability system. Thomas’ view is that politicians think, “I’m going to raise the bar so high [that] you’ll never attain it, and then I have justification to do other things.” Debbie also had concerns that politicians are making too many decisions about the education system. She felt that educators do not

stand up for just policies. Debbie stated, “We have so many people making decisions for us, but we don’t go out and...argue [for] what we believe in.”

The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) was at the heart of many discussions about the Texas accountability system. Thomas even joked about having a new type of Boston Tea Party in which all of the TAKS answer documents would be thrown into a lake to boycott the test. Many felt that, because the TAKS test is the driving force in every school district, even an administrator who comes in with a plan to challenge the system is unable to bring about change because pressure to conform to the status quo causes the administrator to change his or her belief system. Veronica believed that politicians do not “realize how the drone of repetitive instructional strategies rendered for the purpose of passing state mandated tests could be mind numbing for students who are worried about such hindrances as incarcerated parents or providing care for younger siblings.” Thomas shared this thought with the group: “So you play the game and turn in the bubbles and you count the sheets and you pull the kids out from under the desk who are terrified.” The overall sense among the administrators was that, although they felt that major change needed to occur, too much political pressure existed to stand up against the system.

The administrators also dealt with political pressure in the form of pressure from the community and parents. For David, these implications came in the form of budgeting for programs such as English as a Second Language and the Gifted and Talented program. He found that taking a particular path with budgeting decisions would have led to “political sabotage,” by parents who felt that the program was not equally supported. For Rebecca, the political pressure came in the form of a reputation among the parents:

“We don’t want our kids at that school [because we do not know] what type of influence it is going to have on our kid.” Rebecca found that building relationships with the families and living in the community helped to change that reputation and build trust, because she knew that she was “held accountable in the community to whatever” she was doing.

Professional and Moral Accountability Pressures

All of the administrators faced professional accountability pressure, which was often seen as both an external and internal pressure. All of the administrators felt a sense of external professional accountability pressure from staff and central office which imposed the expectation that they should be the experts of their craft. Rebecca felt that professional accountability pressure affected her more than the other pressures: “I want to do a good job. I want my teachers, students, parents, community and central office to appreciate the work that I do.” The administrators also struggled with the internal expectation to be both instructional leaders and school managers. Thomas and Rebecca stated the belief that both areas should be equally strong, but Thomas wondered the cost of balancing the two areas.

Sal found that his principal was pushing him “in a direction that is going to help me in the long run as a professional and as a leader [by showing me that] these are the things that leaders do, and let’s talk about it and see how you would handle this situation.” This external pressure helped Sal gain “expertise [and] a different perspective on how one would do things.” Sal also experienced professional accountability pressure from the staff: “The staff also contributes to the professional accountability pressure

because their expectations are for me to be able to provide support and knowledge to create a vision in order to improve teaching and learning.”

Since all of the administrators were enrolled in a doctoral program, it was reasonable to conclude that professional development was a high priority for them, and to see how professional accountability could place a great deal of self-induced pressure on them. Thus, the professional accountability that these administrators felt was caused both by an internal need to meet the demands of their profession and an external pressure to excel.

All of the administrators mentioned the impact of moral accountability pressures. Veronica felt that “moral accountability plays a big part of my decision making process” when deciding how to deal with student academic and behavioral problems. Veronica questioned: “Am I making the right decision for students? Am I being fully compassionate to parents if I were in this same situation?” Debbie stated, “Professional and moral accountability always lead the way, and I have never regretted where they lead.”

Rebecca also found that moral accountability pulling on her when making decisions about students. During a meeting with teachers to discuss student data, the teachers shared, “This kid doesn’t count [for TAKS accountability purposes]. We don’t need to worry about this kid. This can be our one kid that we miss.” Distressed, Rebecca responded: “I was like...what if that were your child? You’re sitting here in a meeting, and this is my child and you’re telling me that my child doesn’t count. I can’t do that. That could be my kid.” Thomas also felt the strong pull of moral accountability:

Even if a school leader knows they want [something] different, the system can penetrate core beliefs and challenge the focus of moral obligations. Reaffirming moral commitments is the easiest way to produce better decisions, and most of the other competing pressures do not weigh as heavily as...moral pressures.

Complexity of Role

A theme concerning the complexity of the administrator's role was present across the perceptions of all five participants in their discussions of accountability. The many "hats" that the administrators were expected to wear everyday was time-consuming and exhausting for the participants. These roles included observing teachers through the formal teacher appraisal system and through walk-throughs, attempting to measure student engagement in learning, providing non-stop communication to teachers and parents throughout the school day, and finding the right balance of communication with the superintendent and central office. The pressure of wearing so many hats led many of the administrators to delegate tasks to other people, which in turn led many of the principals to exert pressure on others to make sure the tasks were completed. This pressure led some of the administrators in the group to feel that their expectations for staff were too high, while others felt that their awareness of this pressure made them lower their expectations.

Conflict between Accountability Pressures

The administrators in this study felt that moral or professional accountability pressures were most likely to be in conflict with another pressure, whether it be bureaucratic, market, or political pressure. Sal found that the way the bureaucracy had structured his campus led to frustration: "I see it one way but then I can't do it that way

because the bureaucracy is saying you have to do it this way even though perhaps my way would be more efficient or better.”

The administrators often discussed this constant conflict between what is mandated for schools and what is actually good for schools. Rebecca believed that “these conflicts could be because of central office factors, state requirements or other policies and procedures that we were expected to follow or develop that we did not necessarily agree with or believe are best for students.” Rebecca commented, “Morally I have an obligation for every child on my campus,” and then went on to say that her obligation was often in conflict with the bureaucratic notion of reviewing data and viewing students as subgroups rather than individuals. She also saw conflict in trying to achieve an exemplary rating for her school, wondering whether the bureaucratic gain was worth the moral loss.

Debbie also found bureaucratic pressures to achieve a high passing rate on a standardized test to be in conflict with her moral and professional obligations. She stated, “Morally and professionally, I know that if a student can pass the TAKS test that doesn’t necessarily mean that they’re learning at a high level. It doesn’t mean they are gaining the skills that they can apply and transfer outside of school...outside of the test.”

Veronica also experienced a similar conflict because of the TAKS “drill and kill” at her school, where all of the instruction was focused on passing the test. She said, “I would speak out against it if my child were in this class. I speak out against it at my school. Why can’t we take this information from this prepackaged curriculum and stretch it?” Veronica’s internal debate centered on her belief that meeting the state and district requirements was in conflict with her internal moral beliefs. She thought that morally

“we’re not doing everything we can to create readers, mathematicians, scientists, because we’re so busy trying to teach kids TAKS strategies to pass the test.”

Thomas also struggled with bureaucratic accountability conflicting with his professional sensibilities. Thomas wrote, “I must also accept that as long as schools are considered the other, less valuable profession, political jockeying and mandates will continue to drive the agendas of the schoolhouse.” Thomas also found that on the “market side...you can’t abandon the things that are interesting and engaging and exciting...that are worthwhile for kids” and focus just on preparing students for the test because of the “implications for market and politics, and even if you don’t completely understand all the nuances, people understand the label” given to schools under the Texas accountability system. This was also a moral conflict for Thomas, who self-assessed his conflict: “Sometimes I just talk out of both sides of my mouth. Don’t let this be your focus but let’s not screw this up.”

The administrators often described the pressures as overlapping because they usually are dealing with more than one pressure at a time. Sal stated that he felt like he was dealing with so many pressures at once that he never became proficient at managing any of them. Rebecca worried about burning out her teachers because of the pressure she placed on them to be successful. Although she intended to instill a sense of moral and professional responsibility in her teachers to help every child be successful, she realized that teachers often saw it as a bureaucratic pressure. Thomas believed that his situation was somewhat different because he had:

a more diverse population than the other group members, and as much as it may be viewed as an asset to have a strong parent base and a vast amount of educated

parents, it also creates additional conflicts between political, moral, and marketing pressures.

Thomas thought that the role of the school administrator is such that administrators will always have to deal with multiple pressures because they are public figures who are politically and professionally scrutinized.

How Administrators Negotiated Accountability Pressures

Administrators found many ways to negotiate the accountability pressures they faced. One topic that was heavily written about and discussed was school climate. Many of the administrators' responses dealt with the climate at their schools being positive or negative (and sometimes both) depending on how they (or the administrator in charge) perceived the pressure.

Rebecca discussed the positive community support that she has at her school, as well as her belief in empowering teachers to help create a caring school community as the basis for a positive school climate. Rebecca also wrote about how important it was that she had a positive school climate, and that she worried about talking to teachers on her campus about the goal of becoming an exemplary rated campus because of the pressure that this would place on teachers. This "code of silence" regarding the school's test-based rating is something that administrators tended to use as a way to negotiate pressures.

Thomas also discussed the positive climate on his campus, noting that he and his district believed that individuals have immeasurable potential and focused on making sure stakeholders were heavily involved in campus planning and decision-making. Thomas noted that by seeing "our superintendent, our assistant superintendents in a classroom with kids" showed that the decisions made had a large impact on people and

provided a “huge way to negotiate those pressures.” But Thomas also shared the difficulty he faces in building a positive school, as he became one of a long list of principals leading his campus when he took the role two years ago. Thomas wrote, “A climate of uncertainty has been engrained through so much leadership change and a sense of stability takes years to cultivate.” Thomas also explained that at least one of the previous principals had shared with him what a struggle it had been to manage all of the pressures that seemed to be inherent with leading that campus.

Sal also found that the positive climate on his campus contributed to his ability to negotiate accountability pressures. Sal noted that “the school’s climate is one in which every member of the community strives to be the very best and be mindful of being respectful with one another.” Sal found that the positive climate in his school helped to encourage collaboration between students and teachers, teachers and administrators, and among the administrators. Veronica’s collaboration with her principal was also essential to negotiating accountability pressures. She noted: “While we are both driven to work hard, we share many laughs that keep us upbeat as we work in the best interest of students and families.”

In contrast with the other administrators, Debbie consistently described her campus atmosphere in a negative light. Because of the principal’s inability to build morale and a climate of collaboration, this impacted negatively on the campus. Debbie shared: “When the leadership is not modeling that kind of behavior and when the adults on a campus aren’t working as a team and doing their own learning, I think all of that is a really poor example of what education should be.” The lack of team atmosphere on the campus was discouraging for Debbie: “I don’t think we are working together for

anything, and that's tough for me." This negative climate made it more difficult for Debbie to negotiate pressures on her campus.

All of the administrators used decision-making and the creation of goals as a way to negotiate pressures. A common theme that arose in the autobiographies and group discussions was that students' needs came first. This concept is one that is generally touted by administrators and even politicians. Thomas noted that the pressures surrounding administrators could influence even this relatively simple concept. He wrote, "To say that we want to do what is best for kids leaves room for others to interpret which kids, who is of more importance and who is not, as resources are competed for..." and how even to define the meaning of "best."

The current focus on having district and school goals and of using data-based, systemic decision-making allows administrators to justify many of the decisions that must be made daily to negotiate pressures. Rebecca found that creating systems in her school allowed her to make daily decisions about how to negotiate pressures. She noted: "It takes time to build [systems] and develop those into who you are and how you really work. Because I feel like we have some good systems in place, we are able to make greater gains because of our systems." However, Thomas wrote, "It is easy to articulate how a school leader will base all decisions when the decisions do not have multiple layers and are isolated. Decisions become complex when multiple pressures and competing interests are at stake."

All of the administrators used their participation in the doctoral program as a means of negotiating accountability pressures. Rebecca, Thomas, Veronica, and Debbie wrote about the disconnect they found between what was mandated by bureaucracy, what

they were learning in graduate school, and what they believed was right for students.

Rebecca wrote:

I have a disconnect between what I am learning at [graduate] school and what we are doing here at school. This struggle is not really on what we are doing but more on what we are not doing. Are we really about all students learning? Are we setting up our students for the status quo....

Thomas echoed Rebecca's sentiment in his writing: "When we say all learners will be successful, but then place students with high needs in the classes of teachers who have the least amount of experience and professional standing, a disconnect exists."

Veronica also found that the doctoral program provided her many "aha moments" about topics such as marginalizing students, but then she would go to her "school setting or the district where I see policies that directly conflict with those things [for which] I just had an aha moment." Veronica queried:

How do I take this new knowledge that I'm learning and transfer it to my school setting to make my school a better place, without alienating people who may say...just because you're in the Ph.D. program or just because you read the research...you think you know more?

Debbie also struggled with the disconnect between what was happening in her school and what she was learning in school. Debbie believed, "It's always easier to say we have all these mandates and we can't do what we want, but I think the question is...Why can't we? What are we going to do about it?"

Each administrator also chose some ways of dealing with the accountability pressures that reflected their personalities. Rebecca shared with the group that having a

great sense of humor helped her deal with the multiple pressures coming at her. Thomas made time to spend in classes with students to help deal with the pressure.

Effects of Accountability Pressures and Conflicts on Administrators

All of the administrators felt the effects of accountability pressures. The participants connected many negative effects to the Texas accountability system; they always saw the impact of this pressure in a negative light. Debbie noted that in many schools like hers, receiving the highest rating possible is the gold standard that is valued by administrators and community members alike. Rebecca also felt the pressure to move her campus up from a rating of recognized to a rating of exemplary, but wondered what the cost of that would be for her students, her teachers, and herself. Veronica thought that the worth of an administrator in her district often was equated with the rating the school received. Thomas also felt the pressure of the public rating, writing that although he tries “not to overly mention the “T” word [TAKS], my teachers and I do not want to have publicized scores that are less than flattering.”

The mixed messages that the administrators received from their central office about making learning meaningful but also having high test scores left many of the administrators frustrated and bewildered. Veronica wrote, “It is possible that a student enrolled in a school deemed academically unacceptable could go through most of the year never having read any significant or classical literature” because these students are “bombarded with sterile reading passages, worksheets similar to the style and construction of the TAKS test, and instruction centered on strategies to pass the assessments.” Veronica regretted that, even though her campus was academically

acceptable, the TAKS drill and kill began by December each year because of the fear on her campus of becoming academically unacceptable.

Debbie wrote that her campus focused almost solely on teaching students the information that was given on the TAKS test. Debbie's campus principal even decided to have TAKS remediation for struggling students the week before the actual test, in hopes that they might be able to help students with "cramming for The Test." But Debbie noted that, since no prior notice was given to the teachers for instructional planning or how teachers would find a space to meet with these struggling students, the plan was a complete waste of time. Although Debbie believed that the accountability system created a mindset of fear in many teachers and administrators, she also believed that many teachers and administrators used it as an excuse. Debbie wrote, "Educators often complain about the TAKS test and all of the testing accountability pressures, saying that they do not have time anymore to really teach, and this becomes the readily available excuse when kids fail."

In juxtaposition to Debbie's situation, Thomas noted that because his campus served a large percentage of students who come from highly educated families, he actually got calls from parents if his teachers were spending too much time on test prep.

Thomas wondered:

We realize that our kids are going to be part of this testing accountability system, but does it become the focus so much that it consumes you or do you do the things right, and you have to trust that the results, and the learning, and the experiences, and the qualitative side of what the kids get from you is going to far outweigh the blue ribbon or the gold star or whatever it is.

This was an ongoing struggle for the administrators in the group.

One of the questions that arose in writings regarded who benefits from the accountability system. Thomas' pondered on this topic:

I often wonder who benefits from this ordeal? Certainly the testing manufacturers, the agencies employing the thousands of people who score exams and read the individual writings, the delivery services who transport so many boxes of materials to the twelve hundred districts across Texas, the politicians who can boast that schools have improved under their watch and, finally, the private schools benefit as they are under no such testing scrutiny and do not have to devote a large portion of their year to test days as well as benchmark tests to ensure the official test is mastered.

Thomas aptly summed up the feeling of many of the administrators in the group by writing, "The pressures leave each of us feeling like a pawn in a game that we do not know all of the rules for and...the completion of the game may already be determined."

The assistant principals in the group noticed that the campus principal often took the brunt of the accountability pressures. Rosalind shared that she had shied away from looking for a principal position because of the pressure and blame put upon principals. She had heard principals in her district share stories about how a principal does really well at a school "and then a district official will send you to a low performing school, and if you can't pull that school up, then that just goes to show you're not a good principal." You "raised this school, but then [central office] thinks you're this superhuman. And you can't do it in all situations." Veronica termed this "career suicide" because if you did not

accept the principalship of the low performing school, then “you’d get a black mark by your name.”

Life History Themes

During Phase II of the collaborative autobiography project, the administrators reflected on their life history in order to make connections with how they currently handle accountability pressures. All of the administrators described their journey of first becoming a teacher and then an administrator. The administrators all felt that family and friends were influential in their decision to become educators. As Thomas said, “The home environment creates the foundation for all learning and mine is no exception.”

Many of the administrators reflected back on the messages given to them by their families. Thomas found that when analyzing “these constant reminders of my unconditioned care” by his mother and sisters growing up “no doubt have had strong roles in my desire to become an effective father, teacher, and principal.” Sal’s parents emphasized the importance of education, even though they had little formal education. Sal’s parents also instilled in him the work ethic, morals, values and character that would later lead to a principal recognizing Sal as a teacher leader and helping him become an administrator. Veronica saw as a child that her parents’ choice of a career in education was one that “commanded respect” and she was “proud to proclaim that my mom and dad were teachers” because it meant they were “smart and responsible.” Debbie’s parents’ constant encouragement and openness to allow Debbie to become an individual helped her see the “imperativeness of continuous learning and improvement” which led her to become a teacher and an administrator.

Many of the administrators felt that their upbringing led them to be able to make the difficult decisions that are often required as administrators. Rebecca found that ethical and moral accountability were driving forces in her decisions. She struggled with “pinpointing a time in my life that this was stressed to me by my parents” but felt that it might have been attributed to her “stage in life, raising young kids or it may be the way that I was raised.” Sal found that administrators he worked on early in his career helped inspire him to “not back down on what I believed in even if it meant others would not be in agreement.”

The administrators found that reflecting on their life history was helpful. Thomas found that “this project and its reflective nature also helped me to get a better perspective on how my lifeline has affected the kind of leader I hope to be and the reason that is.” Debbie found that until she wrote about her experiences as a child, “I didn’t quite get the connection between the kind of life and environment I was raised in as to how I now respond to things.” Sal thought that looking at his life history helped him ask, “How did you get to this point in your life?” It allowed him to “trace back from the beginning of who our influences were and we worked into who we have become.”

Plans for Negotiating Accountability Pressures in the Future

During Phase IV of the collaborative autobiography project, the “preferred future phase,” the administrators shared a wide range of ideas on how they would deal with accountability pressures in the future. Debbie’s belief that effective organizations continually innovate was reflected in the thoughts of many of the administrators. Thomas believed that focusing his energy on instructional innovations would help diminish the pressures he experienced. Sal decided that he would try to be more proactive about

pressures now that he was more aware of them. Sal felt that he could reduce bureaucratic accountability pressure in the future by monitoring students' grades more closely in order to have "critical conversations" with students, parents and teachers which would reduce failure rates.

Many of the administrators felt that awareness about the pressures and prioritization was key to dealing with them in the future. Debbie and Thomas both wrote that the reflection they did through their autobiographical writings was a key piece for them in planning how to deal with multiple types of accountability pressure. Thomas planned to determine which pressures he already was dealing with and which pressures he could or could not change in order to prioritize his efforts to address the pressures. Veronica also mentioned prioritizing the day to limit the amount of time spent on pressures. She felt limited in her ability to do this as an assistant principal because she did not "have the final say in this particular paradigm shift, so rather than merely spin my wheels, it certainly goes on the top of my list of things to do when I become a principal." Rebecca felt that by being able to name and categorize the pressures that she was able to reframe the pressures for herself.

Thomas shared an interesting metaphor with the group about how to perceive accountability pressures in the future; "...small wheels turn big wheels and big wheels turn small wheels" and so "you operate from your beliefs and then you get the results that confirm you're doing the right thing." Then Thomas questioned the group, "Can you do the right thing and satisfy the others without compromising? Because that's how you can really prove to a whole system, gosh, we had it wrong." Veronica felt that in order to address the "system problems of accountability pressures," teachers, students and parents

will need to stand up for education because “civil disobedience is needed to bring light to this blaring strain to our educational system.”

Thomas also advocated that school leaders should have professional development throughout their careers, beginning with the use of formalized principal induction programs. Brenda agreed with Thomas, noting that she hoped that her future included the opportunity to work in central office and supervise principals. She wanted to get principals to “work in small professional communities with each other...being able to take questions, reflect on their practice, see how it works, and then being able to come back and share with other principals in small safe groups.”

Benefits of Collaborative Autobiography

All of the administrators provided positive feedback about the collaborative autobiography process. Administrators reflected on the autobiographical writing they did, the group sessions they attended, and how collaborative autobiography would continue affecting them when the class was over.

The reflective writing component of collaborative autobiography was important to all of the administrators. The writing helped Rebecca and Sal find their voice. Veronica found reflective writing was helpful to her because of its similarity to journaling. Debbie also found the reflective writing component to be effective in that she was able to find “the ‘why’ behind the ‘what’ and then ponder and figure out new ‘how’s.” Veronica believed that reflective writing helped her to “organize my thoughts around those things that I do view as pressures that I deal with on a daily basis.” Thomas found that the “true value in my reflection is I’m really having to probe where I was at that time.” Thomas related this to one of his favorite sayings that “a man never walks in a river twice. The

man's not the same and the river's not the same. You're always moving, shifting, and growing."

The collaborative sessions in which the administrators shared their writing and reflected on each other's problems was greatly appreciated by all of the administrators. The on-going joke after each session ended was, "What am I going to do until my next therapy session next month?" One administrator even queried whether the researcher was really getting a degree in counseling instead of education. Debbie wrote, "As I am struggling through one of the toughest semesters of my professional career, it has been a relief to share my struggles with others and to hear about their own difficulties and concerns." This feeling of hope that Debbie found was one that Rebecca also shared because she felt that she could not talk with other principals in her district about the pressures that she was facing, and thus the group sharing not only gave her time to connect with other administrators, but also allowed her to understand what they were thinking and feeling. Thomas concurred with Rebecca on why the group sessions were beneficial:

The unexpected bi-product of writing about and sharing these experiences has been the connection and togetherness we shared as school leaders each facing our own unique challenges and opportunities. Rarely do school leaders have the opportunity to share what they are truly feeling to a non-judgmental peer about the pressures they are feeling and how they have handled it. I believe each of us has realized the importance of an outside peer relationship and the need to be able to share your thoughts without reprisal and political concern.

Sal found that the process helped him “open up my mind, in a sense, that I can see things differently now.” It allowed him to “really articulate what you really want to say and why.”

Many of the participants believed that their experience with collaborative autobiography would continue to impact them after they left the group. Debbie discussed her plans for her future: “...my thoughts of wanting to really seek out the principalship for next year have a lot to do with our discussions here.” Veronica felt that the collaborative aspect of the project helped her see the necessity of spending time collaborating with other administrators and really “listening to what they have to say.” Thomas felt that the process of reflection needed to continue on after the study because “you don’t always have a clear idea if your decision or your role in it was the right one until you are reflective about it.” Rebecca felt that she could take the process of reflective writing and collegial dialogue she had learned about in the collaborative autobiography project back to her campus:

On my campus, I would like to use this reflective process in working with my assistant principal and my instructional strategist. I know that I am part of the accountability pressures that these two individuals encounter, but I think by developing a time to reflect on the pressures that we deal with in our jobs, we can better work together. I want to do an outstanding job as the principal on my campus, but I know that to do this I must be reflective about my practice. By reflecting with others, I know that I can learn from others and others can learn from me.

Administrators' Recommendations for Principal Preparation Programs, School District Leaders, and Policy Makers

The administrators were given the opportunity during the last group session to provide recommendations to three separate groups: school district leaders, principal leadership programs, and policy makers. The recommendations were based on the administrators' experiences during the collaborative autobiography and the insights they gained.

Recommendations for Principal Preparation Programs

During the discussion of principal preparation programs, the administrators initially focused on what should happen during pre-service coursework. The administrators felt that creating small learning communities (such as cohorts) were essential to allowing aspiring administrators to feel comfortable sharing their learning and discussing anticipated pressures.

The administrators had five specific suggestions about types of learning activities that should occur during coursework. The first was spending time addressing the skill set that an assistant principal needs. Debbie spent time discussing discipline, which was one the main areas she was assigned as an assistant principal. Debbie shared: "Most of the kids misbehave because they haven't found a place in the school that is comfortable for them. I've seen administrators back kids into corners – literally. They yell – they're negative." Debbie felt that all administrators (but especially assistant principals) needed more training in managing discipline issues. All three of the assistant principals also discussed the need to have systems in place to deal with accountability testing and documentation for special programs (such as special education).

The second area was ensuring that new administrators are culturally responsible. Thomas felt that he often reviews resumes of new teachers who share that they are English as a Second Language certified, but have no experience dealing with these types of students. Thomas shared, “They are not prepared to teach those children, but they are certified to do it.” The administrators felt that because of the diversity in schools today, new administrators needed to be well versed in cultural issues.

The third area raised was providing time during coursework to address the accountability pressures that administrators face today. Debbie shared that her view of accountability pressure during her master’s program focused strictly on testing, as she recalled during her collaborative autobiography reflection. Debbie suggested having principals visit graduate classes to talk about the types of pressures they are facing and allow aspiring administrators to ask, “How do you manage those pressures?”

A fourth area addressed was that of building relationships between administrators and teachers. Rebecca believed that new administrators needed to know how to develop positive and supportive relationships with teachers, as well as to know how to facilitate coaching on a campus. Because as Rebecca found, sometimes there are “good teachers that I can’t stand, but they are good for kids. [It is important to] be able to separate my personal opinion of them and what they do for kids from each other.”

The last area discussed was to provide job embedded praxis, where the aspiring administrators would have the opportunity to go back and forth between learning theory and trying things out in the real world. Sal thought that visiting multiple campuses and “having conversations with the teachers, the administrators, and the instructional coaches” would give aspiring administrators an idea of “what you are going to be facing”

and how you will deal with those pressures. Rebecca agreed, noting that many aspiring administrators complete the internship on their own campuses, but that “if you go to another campus and they don’t know you, then how does the dialogue change and what you can learn not being under the umbrella of [your own] principal.”

The administrators also provided recommendations for supporting new administrators who had just completed certification. The first suggestion was to provide ongoing professional development to new administrators. The administrators recommended having induction programs for the first year or two that the new administrator was in either an assistant principal or principal role. The university and the school district could jointly provide the induction program. The administrators also felt that having a network of other school administrators was essential. This could come in the form of a principal center, which is often created by a university but coordinated by principals who plan professional development based on the needs of the members. This network could also be a type of learning community within which school administrators would reflect on the pressures they are facing and on how to manage those pressures. The administrators also felt that having tools to help new administrators learn about handling different scenarios was also a key component. These tools have different names depending on the school district, but can include problem-based learning, a 360° profile, or simulations. The administrators felt that aspiring and new administrators need a comprehensive program of professional development in order to be successful.

Recommendations for School District Leaders

The administrators provided recommendations for school district leaders that focused on how district leaders could effect change to address multiple accountability

pressures. The first recommendation was for school leadership to stay grounded and remember why they are in education, or as Rebecca put it, “Don’t forget your roots.” The first recommendation was related to the second, that district leaders need to always remember that students are the center of the organization, and that every decision should be based on what is best for students. If this was to be the case, Thomas thought that districts needed to rename the “central office”, and instead see the school as the center of the organization. Thomas noted, “If we truly believe what happens in the schoolhouse is the most important work in a district, then the principalship should be the most elevated position beside the superintendent.” Thus by flattening the organization, the central office would support campuses by collaborating with campus leadership. Central office should also be creating a budget with campus principals that reflects the priorities within the district. The administrators also felt that the district leadership should reduce, absorb, and buffer bureaucratic accountability for campuses. As Thomas shared, “You don’t want to worry about...did the federal reports get done and did the compliance things get taken care of.”

Another key recommendation by the administrators was making sure the district provides professional modeling and feedback. This means that the district models the types of behaviors that they would like their principals to show. For example, Thomas shared that his superintendent sent an internal survey on how he handled a specific issue to campus leaders. This type of feedback goes against the usual flow of having campuses complete surveys on the campus principal that is then given to central office. Veronica felt that turning the feedback around “would make [the central office] a whole lot more

accountable to schools.” The administrators suggested that part of this feedback be based on whether teachers were spending too much time on test preparation and benchmarks.

The administrators also recommended giving students a voice on the school board by placing a student on the board as a non-voting member. Thomas shared that his district had recently included “some students on our strategic planning [committee] and some of those big ‘ahas’ came about from that kid just giving us a little insight into what they thought of things.”

Recommendations for Policy Makers

Recommendations for the Texas Education Agency were also created. The administrators felt that the organization needed to reevaluate its purpose and mission. Thomas noted that the leadership of TEA has become “so insular at the top, your bottom tiers have educators, the top is attorneys and policy makers.” The administrators also believed that TEA had moved from being an organization that focused on leadership development and empowerment of schools to a focus on compliance and accountability, a focus that should be reevaluated. The administrators felt that TEA should take a more active role in the state accountability testing and change the purpose of the test. This would include going back to the original intent of the TAKS test, which was to give the test in the fall. The group felt that the test could become a formative assessment by then giving the test again in the spring to show growth. TEA should also work on providing more immediate feedback to students on whether or not they passed the state test. Members of TEA should also take a more active role by helping schools do the training required for the TAKS test and also help administer the test.

The administrators created a long list of recommendations for policymakers in general, which started with being more accessible to school leaders. Rebecca shared, “I feel like policy makers are outside my realm but I have questions for them.” Policy makers also need to study their own actions and become aware of the impact of their policies. Rebecca wondered whether policy makers ever analyze the impact of decisions such as sanctions against schools and whether or not they even work. She questioned: “Are we putting schools into sanctions and in effect moving students to similar if not worse situations? And what does the research say about closing of these schools, giving sanctions to these schools?”

The administrators thought that policy makers’ power needed to have checks and balances in order to protect educators. One example of a balance could be adding a student to the Board of Education. Another could be requiring all policy makers (including the governor) to work in a school for at least three months.

The administrators also felt that policy makers need to revamp many of the systems currently in place. This includes the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and curriculum based on the TEKS. Another system in need of reevaluation was the student assessment system. The administrators felt that moving to formative assessments would allow policy makers to move back to the original intent of the assessment system that was to assess students’ growth in learning. The results could then be used as informative rather than punitive. Many of the administrators thought policy makers should make testing a local district decision, allowing districts to decide whether to opt out of testing. The group also felt that the teacher appraisal system should be revamped to provide more options. All of the changes to these systems should be made in

conjunction and collaboration with educators in school districts. Veronica shared, “Policy makers need to collaborate with educators about these modifications.”

Funding was another area listed as needing to be revamped. The administrators recommended that the funding system become more equitable by funding public education on a per-student basis and by using a state income tax rather than property tax as the funding source. Rebecca felt that “even though we say [education funding] is an equitable system, it’s not. It’s a system that still deprives kids.” Thomas ended the conversation about funding by asking, “Is equal funding moral? Who deserves more? Who deserves less?” The administrators realized that creating a “bucket list” for education was easier than contemplating on the actual implementation of the items on that list.

Summary

This chapter focuses on looking at each research question in the study. Within each research question, themes that arose across all five administrators’ perceptions of the five accountability pressures were reviewed. Parallels between administrators’ experiences were found. This chapter also provided recommendations from the administrators for ways to improve principal preparation programs. The administrators also provided recommendations for school district leaders and policy makers.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

This case study focused on administrators' use of collaborative autobiography to reflect on and share their experiences with multiple accountability pressures. The study addressed a gap in the literature regarding how administrators experience, interpret, and respond to multiple types of accountability pressures. The research questions included the following:

1. What accountability pressures do participating school administrators face and what are the sources of those pressures?
2. In what ways, if any, do the school administrators perceive accountability pressures to be in conflict with one another?
3. How do the school administrators negotiate accountability pressures and conflicts?
4. What are the effects of accountability pressures and conflicts on the school administrators?
5. To what extent, if any, are the school administrators' life histories reflected in the way they negotiate accountability pressures and conflicts and how they are affected by those pressures and conflicts?

6. What strategies do the school administrators develop as part of their collaborative autobiographies to better negotiate accountability pressures and conflicts in the future?
7. What, if any, benefits do the school administrators perceive they receive from their participation in collaborative autobiography?
8. What do participants recommend that central office leaders, principal preparation programs, and policy makers do to assist school administrators in dealing with accountability pressures?

Five administrators from elementary, middle, and high schools were participants in the study. All five participants were enrolled in an Education Ph.D. program and volunteered to participate in the study as part of an elective course. During the course, the principals shared reflective writing and engaged in collaborative dialogue on the following topics:

1. The context of the principals' leadership positions and their leadership platforms
2. Accountability pressures they faced, how they coped with those pressures, and how their pressures and coping strategies affected the level of congruence between their leadership behaviors and leadership platforms
3. Their personal and professional history and how that history had affected their current professional situation, especially in relation to accountability pressures
4. Their desired professional future, in particular their future in terms of accountability pressures and how they would address them, and how they could better align their leadership behaviors and with their leadership platforms.

The researcher attended and recorded each group session, and interviewed each participant twice, once during the process of the group sessions, and once after completion of the group sessions. Using transcripts of the group sessions, the interviews, and the participants' reflective writing, the researcher then analyzed the data to look for themes within each individual participants' perceptions as well as themes cutting across the perceptions all of five participants.

Chapter four provides a profile of each administrator, including insight into each participants' perceptions of accountability pressures. Thomas worked as a principal at an elementary school in a small public school district within a large metropolitan city. Thomas experienced many sources of pressure. Political pressure, which was often exerted by parents, was frequently mentioned. Market pressure was also placed on Thomas because many parents could afford to send their children to private schools if they were unhappy at the public school. All of the pressures led Thomas to often feel that he was alone as he tried to make the right decisions in the eyes of students, parents, teachers, and central office.

Rebecca worked as a principal at a middle school of a medium-sized school district located in a bedroom community close to a large city. During her six years at the school, Rebecca had focused on raising the reputation of the campus, which was often seen in a negative light by many in the community. Rebecca felt that professional accountability pressure was one that she struggled with the most, and she felt that none of the principals in her district were willing to have the kind of conversations that would allow them to look deeper at the practices on their campuses. Rebecca also struggled with bureaucratic accountability pressure, especially in relation to the state accountability

rating. To manage the pressures, Rebecca used strategies such as questioning the status quo and reframing the pressures she was experiencing.

Debbie served as an assistant principal of a small high school in a rural community. Debbie moved into the position mid-year and was faced quickly with political accountability pressure. The superintendent and principal had created a climate of blame in which both the teachers and Debbie needed improvement. The principal also told Debbie that her only job requirement was to handle discipline, which was in conflict with Debbie's own professional beliefs and the teachers' requests for help with academic programs. Debbie also struggled with bureaucratic accountability pressures, including the principal's belief that achieving a good rating from the state accountability system should be the campus' main purpose. Debbie used her coursework in the doctoral program as a way to deal with pressures, by taking time to have conversations with educators who believed in the future of the educational system.

Sal worked as an assistant principal at a high school in a large urban school district. The high school had grouped the campus into four smaller learning communities. Sal was responsible for one of these four learning communities. Sal struggled most with bureaucratic accountability pressure. These pressures often stemmed from the state and district requirements, including those surrounding teacher evaluation, which was impacted by how Sal's duties on the campus were prescribed by the district. Sal found that professional accountability pressure impacted him because he was often at odds with district mandates. Sal used his doctoral program coursework as a means for dealing with the accountability pressures.

Veronica worked as an assistant principal of a small elementary school in a large urban district. The area served by Veronica's campus was being transformed from one of urban decay to regrowth and renewal. Along with the regrowth came market accountability pressures that Veronica struggled to deal with, as many of the families moving into the neighborhood chose to send their children to private schools because of the reputation of the elementary school. Bureaucratic accountability pressures, including preparation for state and district tests, weighed on Veronica the most. Veronica also struggled with the related pressure to achieve a higher rating from the state accountability system. Veronica found that forming relationships with other administrators in the district that could help her navigate the system was beneficial in dealing with accountability pressures.

Chapter five reports group themes relative to each research question. All of the administrators experienced bureaucratic accountability pressure in the form of central office, district, state, and national mandates. Market accountability was another source of pressure. This pressure stemmed from families who could afford to send their children to private schools, thus placing pressure on campuses. This pressure also took the form of reduced funding to public schools. Most of the administrators dealt with political accountability pressure. This pressure stemmed from parents and community members, central office, and the Texas Education Agency. The administrators felt that it was difficult to speak up for fear of retribution. Professional accountability pressures also impacted the administrators. The administrators experienced the internal pressure of wanting to be the best they could be, while also dealing with external pressure of the expectations of others. Moral accountability pressure was also experienced by the

administrators, who found that this pressure impacted many of the decisions of doing what was best for students.

The administrators found conflict between and among the accountability pressures. Moral and/or professional accountability pressures were most likely to be in conflict with either market, bureaucratic, or political accountability pressures. This conflict was often seen between the mandates required of schools and what participants believed to be best for their campuses.

The administrators found many ways to negotiate accountability pressures. The participants found that putting students' needs first and creating a positive campus climate were helpful in managing pressures. Participation in the classes in the doctoral program was another successful way of negotiating pressures. The administrators also each found ways to negotiate pressure based on their personalities.

All of the participants experienced negative effects of accountability pressures. The administrators portrayed the Texas accountability system in a negative light because of the pressure to achieve better ratings for their schools and the inconsistency between this pressure and what was best for students. The participants also wondered about the cost of trying to achieve the highest rating under the Texas accountability system.

The administrators took time to explore their life history and its relation to how they negotiated accountability pressures. Many of the participants were able to reflect back to significant individuals, such as family members or mentors, who helped set the standard for what they believed was the right professional or moral judgment to make in their current school settings. Many also found that spending time reflecting on their life history allowed them to make connections that they did not realize existed.

The administrators planned how they would deal with accountability pressures in the future. Innovation was a theme cutting across the participants' thinking about how they would address the future. This innovation, according to the administrators, would occur both within the learning organization as well as within the administrators themselves. Awareness and prioritization of pressures was another strategy shared for dealing with pressures. Participating in professional development was seen as another key to helping administrators negotiate pressures.

All of the participants found the collaborative autobiography process to be beneficial. The reflective writing piece gave the administrators a voice with which to share their experiences. Many of the administrators found that the collaborative group sessions could be seen as a sort of "professional therapy", since they could voice their biggest struggles and receive affirmation and advice from other administrators.

The last part of the study focused on the participants' recommendations for principal preparation programs, school district leaders, and policy makers. Suggestions for principal preparation programs focused on the learning activities that should be included during coursework, such as addressing the skill set of the assistant principal and making sure school leaders are culturally responsible. The administrators recommended that school districts flatten the organization and place students at the center of the district, while also giving students a voice among district leaders. Districts also should provide professional modeling and feedback at all levels of leadership. The participants felt that policy makers, including the Texas Education Agency, also needed to make changes, starting with moving from a focus on compliance and accountability to one of leadership development and empowerment of schools. The administrators also felt that policy

makers needed to revamp many of the systems currently in place such as the student assessment system and the teacher evaluation system.

Interpretations

Accountability pressures surround school administrators daily. This study provided five administrators the opportunity to write about the five types of accountability pressures focused on in this study and reflect in a group setting on these pressures, as well as to share their perceptions of these pressures during interviews with the researcher. This section will analyze the meaning of the findings presented in the last chapter under two headings, accountability pressures and collaborative autobiography.

Accountability Pressures

Participants initially struggled with naming the types of accountability pressures they were facing. This was due to at least two factors. First, prior to their participation in the study the administrators had done little reflection on the different types of accountability pressures they dealt with on a daily basis. Second, as participants compared their own experiences with the different types of accountability pressures described in the literature and shared by the researcher, the administrators found it difficult to classify the pressures that affected their own professional lives. For example, Debbie asked the group after listening to Rebecca's reflection about the pressure to be an exemplary school: "How would you label it...the pressure of not being able to talk about exemplary but at what expense?" Rebecca responded, "I struggled with it because I didn't know what to name it. Could I put it under moral and ethical? But I struggled because is it political?" This difficulty classifying different types of accountability pressures

indicates there is considerably more overlap and interaction among accountability pressures than is reported in much of the literature.

The administrators all reported bureaucratic, political, professional, moral, and market accountability pressures. The intense bureaucratic and political accountability pressures discussed by the administrators is consistent with research reporting that 85% of principals believe that local, state, and federal mandates take up too much of their time and that 47% of principals leave the field because of frustrations in dealing with political and bureaucratic pressures (Farkas, Johnson, Duffet, Foleno, & Foley, 2001).

Regarding specific accountability pressures, the participants' focus on the bureaucratic and political pressure produced by high-stakes testing was no surprise given the extensive body of literature documenting the effects of this type of accountability on principals, schools and teachers (Fike, 2008; McQuillan & Salomon-Fernandez, 2008; Murillo & Flores, 2002; Nelson et al., 2007; Stetcher, 2002; Thomas, 2005). The state accountability test, accompanied by its negative effects, clearly was the greatest source of accountability pressure for the administrators in this study. The pressure to receive a recognized or exemplary rating was not discussed by the participants in their own school districts, while the autobiography provided them a safe haven in which to talk about the implications of being on the "bad list" – schools that are "acceptable" or unacceptable. Even though this was an ongoing concern, none of the administrators broached the topic of what would happen if their school dropped to a lower accountability rating. None of the administrators needed to warn each other about the consequences of this type of failure, since they were familiar with research such as the study by McGhee and Nelson

(2005) that documented the downfall of administrators who did not get the best test scores and accountability rating.

The teacher evaluation process was another specific source of pressure continuously discussed. The administrators felt that teacher evaluation should be a meaningful and helpful process, but felt that evaluations were based on an overly bureaucratic process that provided administrators little leeway in determining a course of action to deal with ineffective teachers. The lack of support from the central office also impeded administrators, as they had to consider the political implications of trying to remove a teacher. This parallels the finding of Farkas et al. (2001) that 67% of principals in their study believed they needed more autonomy and freedom in removing ineffective teachers from the classroom.

Another specific pressure that was an ongoing topic in the participants' reflective writing and discussion was pressure from parents. This pressure seems to have had two primary sources; first, trying to meet parents concerns while doing what was best for the students, and, second, dealing with parents who perceived they deserved special attention because of their privileged status or their promotion of a special interest. Surprisingly, this political pressure exerted by parents is a topic that has not been thoroughly researched or documented in relation to administrator pressure.

The participants viewed some accountability pressures as interwoven (e.g., bureaucratic and political, moral and professional), a view that is not emphasized in the literature. Pressures were often seen as interrelated. For example, many of the administrators believed that their moral compass pulling them towards reducing the amount of time teachers spent preparing students for the state test was interwoven with

their internal professional accountability calling for them to provide an enriching and engaging curriculum.

The administrators also believed that some types of pressures were in conflict. Some of these conflicts clearly threatened not only the administrators' ability to carry out their leadership responsibilities but also the well being of students. The need to provide an engaging curriculum was often in conflict with district requirements to require teachers to use test preparation materials. This bureaucratic requirement conflicted with the administrators' own professional judgment. Another example was the political pressures placed on Thomas from some parents to include only some types of students in Spanish immersion, when in his moral and professional view all types of students should be included. As Firestone and Shipps (2005) conclude, administrators often absorb tangible and intangible consequences when resisting political or bureaucratic pressures for the sake of students' well being.

An especially interesting view of conflicting accountability pressures expressed by participants was that one educator's professional or moral accountability might be another educator's political or bureaucratic accountability. A good example of this view was Rebecca's fear that teacher professional development – which Rebecca considered a necessary component of professional accountability – was viewed by teachers as bureaucratic accountability. Research analyzing teachers' versus administrators' perceptions of accountability pressures is lacking in the literature.

Each of the administrators had to find ways to deal with the accountability pressures. Many of the administrators in the group did this collaboratively and strategically on their campuses. The administrators' use of goal creation and data-based,

systemic decision-making was a strategy used to respond to pressures. Building a school climate to reflect a focus on student needs was another strategy. Pont, Nusche, and Hopkins' (2008) research supports this finding. Pont et al. (2008) concluded that administrators build learning communities by "shared commitment to challenging learning goals; collective responsibility for student performance; continuous improvement; decisions based on high quality and timely data; and staff, student, and community engagement" (p. 17).

Elmore (2008) shared that "capacity is the fund of skill and knowledge that the organization can bring to bear in responding to external pressure" (p. 43). In this same sense, each participant had a different level of capacity in negotiating pressures. The two principals in the study showed a different capacity for understanding how to negotiate pressures than the assistant principals, perhaps because of the depth and breadth of the principals' role. A conversation between the participants provides insight into this difference in capacity. Veronica said, "I like being an AP. My principal says she's in a pressure cooker. Principal pressure is different – right?" Thomas responded, "It feels very different once the keys are handed to you." "The buck stops with you, truly," stated Rebecca. A case study on Finnish principals supports this idea of an increased sense of responsibility as a principal, finding that principals experience a "shortage of time, increased pressure, expanded scope, and accumulating senses of overload" (Hargreaves, Halasz, and Pont, 2008, p. 89).

The administrators all found various ways to negotiate accountability pressures, but all shared that conversations during their doctoral coursework was one of the most utilized ways. Participation in this type of professional development was extremely

beneficial for all of the participants. This finding that the participants used conversations with others to reduce stress is supported by Allison's (1997) study of principals that used conversations as a coping strategy. Allison (1997) also found that principals with doctoral degrees reported higher usage of coping strategies, such as participating in a support group of principals.

Stress was the biggest effect of dealing with accountability pressures. Wylie and Hodgen's (2005) study of principals supports this, finding that 40% of principals reported their stress level to be high or extremely high. Each of the administrators dealt with the stress differently, whether that meant spending more time in classrooms, spending more time on paperwork, or taking time to call a peer and discuss the problems of the day.

The three assistant principals in the study found that the principals often shouldered most of the burden in dealing with accountability pressures. This may stem from the fact that principals delineate specific tasks and responsibilities to assistant principals (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Thus many principals essentially shelter assistant principals from having to experience accountability pressures at the same level or depth as they do.

Collaborative Autobiography

Collaborative autobiography stems from the tradition of autoethnography. Autoethnography is a qualitative genre that can be broken into multiple types, one of which allows the writer the "capacity to engage first person voice, and to embrace the conflict of writing against oneself as he or she finds himself/herself entrenched in the complications of their positions" (Hughes, 2008, p. 77). Using collaborative autobiography as a means to gather information from the administrators was essential in

this study. The collaborative autobiography process allowed the researcher insight into the administrators' reflections on their current reality, historical information on their personal and professional lives, and their preferred future.

The administrators found reflecting on their current reality through collaborative autobiography to be very beneficial. The process of writing and sharing reflective writing provided much needed time for participants to clarify their thinking about accountability pressures. Cord and Clements (2010) found that "through diarizing and debriefing, a practitioner may discover a new knowledge which can inform their practice" (p. 1). The development of new knowledge was shared by the administrators in the group sessions as they reevaluated the methods and practices they used on their campuses.

The participants found that naming different types of accountability pressures was valuable. De Lawter and Sosin's (2000) work on collective reflection found that it "holds the potential to create a new language for speaking about new and shared understandings grounded in experience" (p. 7). Their research also found that collective reflection led to "encounter with another's ideas, where the act of active listening is an engagement with the personal knowledge of 'the other' to construct meaning" (De Lawter & Sosian, 2000, p. 4).

This construction of meaning was prevalent throughout the group sessions. The administrators, researcher, and the professor all became active participants in asking the types of questions that helped construct meaning. Questions such as "How do we change that?", "How do you frame conversations with teachers?", "What is your goal?", "How is your community so aware of what education should be?" are examples of the educators' use of effective questioning. The conversations around these types of questions led the

administrators in the group to see the sessions as “therapy”, since they were able to talk freely about their struggles and triumphs without fear of this information getting back to their campus. Because of this anonymity, the administrators were able to empathize and support one another at a level that perhaps could not have been achieved if the administrators had all been working together in the same district.

The trust built between the administrators as a result of the group sessions has been documented as an effective means of helping administrators reflect on their practice (Dana, Tricarico, & Quinn 2009). The administrators were also able to see parallels between the different experiences they shared. This sense that all of the administrators had a common set of experiences provided a link from the onset of the group. Thomas shared about the group reflections: “I think there is a lot of internal nodding of heads – I know what you’re talking about.”

Although the term “social justice” was never used during the reflective writing or group sessions, many of the administrators encouraged each other to use a leadership style reflective of the social justice mindset. Principals who “advocate, lead, and keep at the center of their practice and vision issues of race, class, gender, disability” and other marginalizing conditions practice social justice leadership (Theoharis, 2008, pg. 5). As the administrators discussed issues that conflicted with their moral viewpoint, other group members would provide encouragement. For example, Thomas shared that he struggled with a teacher who refused to participate in professional development for dealing with students with autism in order to ensure that this type of student would not be placed in her classroom. The group empathized with this problem. Debbie shared about the

corruption and lack of leadership in her school district. Thomas asked, “Whose interests are being served by the system that operates that way?”

The administrators found that spending time writing about and discussing their life history was helpful in understanding their responses to accountability pressures. Use of autobiographical writing has been shown to be especially helpful to adult learners. Karpiak’s(2000) study on autobiographical writing showed that the adult learners “were able to put things in perspective, to balance their positive and negative experiences” (pg. 42). Writing allowed learners to “look at their life through a rear view mirror, to reckon with their past” (Karpiak, 2000, 44). Veronica’s thoughts echoed this idea: “The life history paper really spoke to why did you become a teacher and what were the influences; and based on those influences, how do you handle your job.”

Participants also found this aspect of reflecting on the past to be very emotional. For example, during the reading of her paper of her life history, Debbie became very emotional when she started to share a letter from her mom about her childhood. She handed her paper to the researcher, noting that it would be easier if someone else could read it out loud. She shared during her interview with the researcher that she had used the letter from her mom in a previous autobiographical writing assignment for graduate school. Debbie said, “As much as it meant to me then, I didn’t quite get the connection between the kind of life and environment I was raised in and how I now respond to things.”

Many of the administrators found reflecting on their past and current reality easier than contemplating their preferred future. Principals are expected to be “educational visionaries, instructional and curriculum leaders, assessment experts, disciplinarians,

community builders, public relations and communications experts, budget analysts, facility managers, special programs administrators, as well as guardians of various legal, contractual, and policy mandates and initiatives” (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005, pg. 3). Envisioning how to change one’s own behaviors and environment when mired in the day-to-day tasks of being an administrator can be difficult.

One of the common threads among the administrators’ preferred futures was taking time to continue reflecting, whether through conversations with other administrators or writing in a journal. The administrators realized that the reflective writing pieces and conversations about the writing were an effective tool to manage accountability pressures. A second strategy for the future was building relationships. This strategy focused on finding other administrators with which to share the challenges and pressures of the job. Johnson, Rochkind, and Doble (2008) found that “the loneliness of the job may be one reason why so many [principals] had thought-provoking comments on the need to be able to network and consult with others in the same boat” (pg. 12). A third strategy was trying to minimize the pressures, or minimize the amount of time spent on the pressures. This strategy was seen as both creating a mindset of how the administrator would react to a pressure, as well as having systems in place to ensure that time during the day was focused on ensuring that student learning was occurring.

The administrators enjoyed the opportunity to share their recommendations for principal preparation programs, school district leaders, and policy makers. Creating networks of administrators was one of the themes raised by the participants during the discussion of recommendations for principal preparation programs. This could be

achieved through cohorts of learners during the coursework, or through an administrative support network during the initial years in the new role. Because of the collaborative autobiography process, the participants saw how beneficial and essential it was for a group of administrators to share their joys and challenges.

One of the main recommendations for school district leaders focused on flattening the organization. This concern of the central office having power over campus leadership was ongoing during many of the group discussions. Many of the administrators felt that the central office sits at the tip of the hierarchy of the school district, leaving them with little autonomy and freedom to make decisions at the campus level.

Getting back in touch with what is happening in schools was the theme of the recommendations for TEA leaders and other policymakers. Policymakers' detachment from what is happening daily in schools was seen as a serious flaw. One participant said that policymakers are "outside my realm." These informal norms led the administrators to feel that policymakers would continue to make unsound policies, even if their voices were heard.

The collaborative autobiography process was cyclical, moving back and forth from individual reflective writing to reflective group dialogue. Initially many of the administrators felt that writing about accountability pressures was difficult, because in the midst of their busy routines it was difficult to sit back and reflect. Veronica shared, "I'm sure I have been thinking about the things in that first paper for a long time, but I've just been moving so quickly, I had not had a chance to actually just sit down and think about them and the chance to write about them." The administrators felt great relief on being

able to share their first reflections with the group and be affirmed, which helped build confidence to write the other reflective papers.

Conclusions

1. Although it was difficult for participants to classify different accountability pressures and their sources because of overlap and interaction among those pressures, efforts to do so helped the administrators to reflect deeply on those pressures and their causes, something they had not done previously. The most stressful specific accountability pressures came from dealing with high stakes testing, teacher evaluation, and parents.
2. Administrators often found that accountability pressures were interwoven and that they often dealt with more than one pressure at a time. These entwined pressures might be in conflict with each other, or they could work together to provide the administrator with a solid sense of what action to take. For example, professional and moral accountability pressures were aligned, but they conflicted with the bureaucratic pressures that the administrator faced.
3. Administrators found multiple ways to negotiate pressures. This included attempting to maintain a positive school climate, and using goal creation and data-based decision-making as effective tools in managing pressures. All participants realized that being part of a doctoral program was an especially beneficial tool, since it provided new ideas for dealing with pressures and an outlet to share the joys and frustrations of handling pressures.
4. Participants shared that many negative effects of accountability pressures stemmed from the Texas accountability system. This included the mixed

messages that the administrators received from central office and community members about the importance of the school accountability rating versus the learning experiences of students. The administrators questioned whether accountability needed to be the main focus of education because of the negative impact on students, teachers, and administrators.

5. Participants found the writing of their life histories to be quite emotional experiences. They were surprised to realize how much some relationships and experiences from their earlier lives, even childhood, affected the way they reacted to accountability pressures in the present. They found that writing about and discussing the connections between their life histories and their reaction to accountability pressures was helpful in reflecting on how they could better deal with accountability pressures in the future.
6. Participants believed that they could better negotiate pressures in the future by changing how they perceived and understood those pressures. The administrators believed this new understanding and awareness of pressures would change their external and internal reaction, whether speaking out against an unfair pressure or quietly believing that their moral compass was leading the way to the right decision.
7. Collaborative autobiography was a successful method for allowing the participants to write and share about their experiences. Administrators need time to reflect on their practice, whether that reflection is in written or verbal form. The participants found that they needed other administrators who listened and understood their experiences because they were often isolated on their campuses.

This collaboration created a bond of trust and friendship among the participants.

The administrators confirmed that the attitudinal change discussed in conclusion six above resulted from their participation in the collaborative autobiography.

8. Building relationships was a key theme raised during participants' discussion of recommendations for principals' professional development. Participants felt that aspiring and new school administrators need a better understanding of the pressures they will face from experienced administrators. Thus, novice administrators need time to build relationships with one another and with experienced administrators who can act as mentors. This focus on relationship building was also seen in participants' recommendations that novice administrators need to know how to build relationships with teachers. Participants also felt that central office administrators need to understand and see the pressures effecting campus level administrators and model effective strategies for dealing with the pressures through collaboration. Participants believed that policymakers should build relationships with campus-level administrators in order to see the impact of accountability pressures, many of which stem from policy decisions involving testing and funding.

Recommendations

Recommendations for School Administrators' Professional Development

Elmore (2008) notes, "Accountability policy will not improve performance without a substantial investment in human capital aimed at the practice of school improvement in a diverse population of school leaders" (p. 39). Types of professional development for *pre-service* administrators should include cohorts of learners who have the opportunity to

talk to practicing principals about the types of accountability pressures they are experiencing. Pre-service administrators should also have a mentor principal to provide support as they move into their internship, where they have a chance to put their learning into action. Pre-service administrators also can benefit from problem-based learning which “simulates complex real-world problems and dilemmas, promotes the blending of theoretical and practical knowledge, improves problem-solving capacity, and helps enhance candidates’ self-concepts as future school leaders” (Davis, et al., 2005, p. 9).

Professional development for *in-service* principals should include a safe forum for administrators to share their experiences with accountability pressures. Along with time to discuss these pressures, principals need strategies to deal with the pressures.

Collaborative autobiography is one effective strategy to assist administrators in dealing with pressures. Groups of administrators from within a school district or across multiple districts could meet monthly to share a short piece of reflective writing about the pressures they are experiencing. Group members could rotate serving as the facilitator, perhaps even suggesting a focus for the reflective writing each month. These small groups of six to eight administrators would be able to use each other as sounding boards between the monthly meetings, or even plan times to visit fellow administrators’ campuses to see how strategies for reducing accountability pressure are implemented.

Recommendations for Central Office Administrators

The central office has an important role in helping campus administrators deal with accountability pressures. Central office administrator must take time to build relationships with campus level administrators. Another recommendation is that campus administrators be provided the necessary support staff. The central office needs to

provide assistance to campus administrators to help them meet accountability standards, reduce unnecessary pressures associated with accountability, and cope with the stress that results from the pressures of accountability. Collaborating with campus administrators to establish mutually acceptable expectations will promote coordination and cooperation. The central office can also work to reduce bureaucratic tasks for campus administrators. Finally, the central office can help build networks of campus administrators within or across districts who can guide and mentor each other.

Recommendations for Policy Makers

Policy makers need to look at the needs of students at the campus level. One way to achieve this is to build relationships with campus level administrators in order to gather first hand knowledge of the impact of the sanctions and policies that are currently in place. Policy makers need to recognize the consequences of decreased funding in schools, and to learn how campus administrators work creatively with the resources they have to provide the best education possible for students. Finally, policy makers at the national and state levels need to change accountability standards, processes, and effects so they better reflect what we know about students' learning needs, effective pedagogy, and sound educational assessment.

Recommendations for Further Research

Several recommendations for further research are provided in this section. The first is research on the impact of accountability-related pressures and stress on decision-making in schools. A study comparing teachers' and campus administrators' perceptions of accountability pressures would also be insightful. A different study could compare central office administrators' and campus administrators' perceptions of accountability

pressures.

The collaborative autobiography process could be conducted with separate groups of administrators from elementary, middle, and high schools, and the effects of the process on administrators from different school levels compared. The collaborative autobiography process could also be carried out with a group of administrators from high-performing campuses and a group of administrators from low-performing campuses to determine if the accountability pressures facing the groups are different, and if the collaborative autobiography process plays out differently in schools with different levels of student achievement. Finally, a study on the effects of collaborative autobiography could involve administrators and teachers from the same school working together to address issues of accountability pressures and related stress.

Reflections on My Experiences with the Research Process

This research study has been one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences of my life. During my graduate coursework, I found myself gravitating towards qualitative research as I came to realize that looking at people through numbers alone never really resonated with my idea of how to best represent people's experiences. I did not realize until I was in the middle of my research the huge amount of data produced by a qualitative study, data that needs to be carefully combed through for meaning. This feeling of being in a vortex filled with swirling pages of data was at times overwhelming. At times, it was also comforting knowing that I could go to the exact place in the papers and transcripts to confirm findings because of my familiarity with the documents.

Having the opportunity to hear and learn about the work of five administrators was

eye opening. The diversity of the administrators was a huge strength of this study, including the different ethnicities represented, the varying levels of expertise, and the inclusion of both assistant principals and principals. One challenge during the group sessions was the tendency of the two principals to dominate the conversations. Although all of the participants were peers in this setting, the three assistant principals in the group seemed comfortable letting the principals take the lead. Another challenge was the difference in the depth of thought that each administrator put into the process. One of the administrators seemed to struggle getting thoughts down on paper and delving deeply into the meaning behind the struggles shared. However, all of the administrators were honest and candid in sharing real life examples of the pressures they faced daily. This honest sharing provided great insight to me as a researcher.

I found that conducting qualitative research has been impactful on me as a person. Because of my role in the study, it was difficult to distance myself from the participants. When one participant worried about the security of her job, I worried for her. When another shared stress about dealing with parents, I commiserated. I am unsure if this is characteristic of qualitative research in general, or specific to the nature of my study. I also found myself wanting to find out how the participants were doing, even months after the study had finished. Had the administrators taken action on their ideas of how they could change their leadership roles? Had they found new ways to deal with accountability pressures? This never-ending cycle of thoughts seemed to be a constant throughout the writing of my dissertation. Thus, the qualitative research process was very rewarding, but also left me feeling that there were more questions to be answered by future research.

Concluding Thoughts

Accountability is everywhere in today's society and is pervasive in education. Campus administrators must daily manage market, political, bureaucratic, moral, and professional accountability pressures at various levels. These administrators are similar to the chief executive officers position in major businesses, as they can be responsible for hundreds if not thousands of students.

This study explored whether the use of collaborative autobiography with campus administrators provided a successful means of dealing with accountability pressures. Participants found that reflective writing, collaboration, and dialogue concerning the pressures they were experiencing was very beneficial. Thus, collaborative autobiography as a professional development tool for administrators should be considered as a strategy for dealing with accountability pressures and other challenges of school leadership.

Administrators need time to build relationships with other administrators, who can serve as sounding boards, advice givers, and providers of moral support. Because of the specific nature of the pressure that campus administrators deal with, it is important for administrators at this level of leadership to engage in dialogue and mutual assistance.

Participation in collaborative autobiography gave the administrators a sense of hope. They felt, if they could develop successful strategies for dealing with accountability pressures, that there was hope for the future of education, and specifically for the campus administrator. School districts continuously look for effective strategies to recruit and retain quality campus administrators. This study showed that reflective writing, collegial dialogue, and building professional networks are key strategies in dealing with accountability pressures, strategies that can be implemented in any school district.

APPENDIX A

Research Participant Consent Form
Texas Principals' Experiences with Multiple Accountability Pressures
IRB Application # 2009M9621
Julie Diehl, M.Ed., Texas State University-San Marcos

Request for Participation:

Julie Diehl, a graduate student researcher at Texas State University-San Marcos, is conducting research on principals' experiences with multiple accountability pressures. Julie is a Ph.D. student in Education at Texas State University-San Marcos. You are invited to participate in this study because you are a certified Texas principal.

Purpose of Study:

This study has five objectives:

- 1) Identify what accountability pressures are facing Texas principals and the sources of the pressures
- 2) Determine if the accountability pressures are in conflict with each other
- 3) Examine how principals negotiate accountability pressures
- 4) Examine the perceived impact of accountability pressures on principals' interactions with others and self
- 5) Explore whether the participants perceive the process of reflective writing and sharing improves their ability to deal with the pressures of accountability.

Research Method:

The research study has two main components: reviewing reflective writings of principals in ED 7378 who choose to participate in the course and individual interviews with participants.

The researcher will attend each class meeting of ED 7378 as an observer. During the first class session, the instructor, Dr. Stephen Gordon, will provide readings on accountability pressures. The principals in the course will then periodically share a reflective writing assignment on accountability pressures with the class. The topics for the four writing assignments will include the following:

- 1) A reflective piece on the context of your leadership position and on your leadership platform

- 2) A reflective piece on accountability pressures you face, how you cope with those pressures, and how these pressures and coping strategies affect the level of congruence between your leadership behaviors and your leadership platform
- 3) A reflective piece on your personal and professional history and how that history has affected your current professional situation, especially in relation to accountability pressures
- 4) A reflective piece on your desired professional future, in particular your future in terms of accountability pressures and how you will address them, and how you can better align your leadership behaviors and your leadership platform.

After the introductory class, each class meeting will follow the same format. The researcher will observe while each participant shares his or her the reflective writing piece with the class. The researcher will receive a copy of each piece of reflective writing. The class participants will then be given the opportunity to respond to and provide feedback on the writing. The researcher will digitally record all conversation between the class participants about the writing. The class participants will also have the opportunity to discuss how the concepts and experiences could be generalized to a larger population of school principals. Students who volunteer for the study will share their reflective writing first. The researcher will then leave the classroom, after which those students who have chosen not to participate in the study will share their reflective writing. Those who choose not to participate in the study will share neither oral nor print versions of their reflections with the researcher.

Each participant will take part in two individual interviews, which can occur face-to-face or over the phone. The interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed. Each interview will last for approximately an hour.

The first interview will be conducted in February or March with each participant in the study. The second interview will be conducted in May at the end of the course. The researcher will craft the first interview to focus on critical questions involving accountability pressures based on the participant's reflective writing piece and the class discussion. The questions will be determined by the scope of the writing and the discussion. The questions will focus on the five types of accountability pressures which are central to the study – political, bureaucratic, professional, moral, and market accountability. A sample question that might be used on the interview would be the following: How do you deal with conflicting pressure of meeting the requirements of the Texas accountability system while also meeting your own of professional accountability?

After the initial interview, the researcher will take time to review any notes taken during the session and ensure that the entire interview was recorded. The researcher will also record observations about the interview, including where the interview occurred and how the interviewee reacted. A transcript of the first interview will be reviewed prior to the second interview.

The results of the first interview will inform the second interview. The second interview will review conclusions made by the researcher in the first interview and ask questions that arose out of data analysis from the first interview. The second interview will be used to clarify, verify, and expand upon data gathered in the first interview and

through the transcriptions of class discussions. You will receive a written summary, in checklist format, of my interpretations of your responses. I will then ask you to respond by checking off whether you consider each interpretation to be accurate or not.

Duration of Research Participation:

The research will last from January through May of 2010.

Confidentiality:

Your real name will not be used at any point of information collection, or in the written case report; instead, you and any other person and place names involved in your case will be given pseudonyms that will be used in all verbal and written records and reports.

Method of Recording Interview:

All interviews will be recorded with a digital voice recorder. All information gathered will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home. All interview recordings and written materials with names or other identifiable information will be destroyed after completion of the researcher's dissertation.

Right of Refusal/Right to Withdraw:

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in any portion of this study. You may withdraw at any time without any negative repercussions to yourself or your district. Participation, non-participation, or withdrawal from the study will not affect your grade in the class or your relationship with Texas State University.

Explanation of Risks:

There are no physical risks associated with this study. There is a chance that some of the questions the researcher will ask you may make you feel uncomfortable. You may refuse to answer any of the questions, and you may take a break at any time during the study. You may stop your participation in this study at any time.

Benefits:

You will not directly benefit from participating in this study. A benefit to education and to legislators who make decisions about accountability is likely.

Contact Person Concerning Rights or Injuries:

Dr. Stephen Gordon will be supervising the research and can be contacted with any questions or concerns about the research. Dr. Gordon can be contacted at sg07@txstate.edu or 512-245-2441.

Questions about the research and research participants' rights should be directed to the chair of the Texas State University Institutional Review Board – Dr. Jon Lasser (512-245-3413 or lasser@txstate.edu) or to Ms. Becky Northcut, Compliance Specialist (512-245-2102).

Copy of Research Study:

A summary of the findings will be provided to you upon completion of the study. Please contact the researcher, Julie Diehl, at diehlrj@sbcglobal.net for a document with the in-depth findings from the study.

Copy of Consent Form:

You will receive a copy of this consent form for your records.

YES

☐

I give permission to participate in this study.

☐

I give permission to be digitally recorded during the interviews.

☐

I give permission to be quoted anonymously in the findings of the research study.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

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