

USING AUTOETHNOGRAPHY TO RE-FRAME SCHOOL TURNAROUND: PRAXIS
THROUGH THE EYES OF A CHICANO LEADER IN TEXAS SCHOOLS

by

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DEDICATION

This one goes out to my father. When I started this journey, he looked forward to the day I could say I was finished. Dad, I believe the day has arrived.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
ABSTRACT	x
CHAPTER	
I. THE JOURNEY.....	1
A Closer Look.....	3
My Parents	3
School for Me	4
Crossing Paths.....	6
Life and Work Experiences	7
Educator Experience	9
Identity	10
Coming Together	14
Problem Statement	15
Purpose of the Study	16
Research Questions	18
Theoretical Framework.....	18
Definition of Main Terms	19
Why School Leadership?	20
School Leadership.....	21
Qualities of School Leadership.....	21
Career Stages Theory	21
Turnaround Schools	22
Summary	22
II. LITERATURE REVIEW	24
Educational Reform	24
Why was This an Important Measure for Public Education?	25
What Happened With the Passage of NCLB and Continued With ESSA?	26
Why is This Important?	27
Leadership Theory	27
Category 1 – Qualities of School Leadership	29
Category 2 – Systems.....	29
Category 3 – Principal as a Leader	30
Career Theory	32
Policy: Texas Education Agency	34
Principal Certification.....	34

School Accountability.....	34
Summary	35
III. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH.....	36
Overview of Research Approach	36
Participant	37
Setting	38
Life Timeline	38
Autoethnography.....	39
Data Collection	40
Pláticas	40
Sense-Making With Drawings.....	41
Critical Self-Reflection	41
Researcher Credibility	42
Data Analysis	45
Implications.....	47
Contributions.....	48
Ethical Considerations	48
IV. SCHOOL TURNAROUND.....	49
Participant and Researcher Profile.....	50
Timeline	51
Low-Performing Campuses	51
Participant Stories	53
Schools in Turmoil: A Practitioner’s Viewpoint	53
Leadership Theory as Related to a Practitioner’s Viewpoint	55
School Policy as Related to a Practitioner’s Viewpoint	56
Findings: Practitioner’s Viewpoint.....	57
Life Experience: School Turnaround – The Vision.....	58
Leadership Theory: The Vision	60
Policy: The Vision	60
Analysis of the Vision.....	60
Findings: The Vision.....	60
School Turnaround: The Events Which Influence.....	61
Leader for the Teacher: Human Resources.....	61
Leadership Theory: Human Resources	63
Policy: Human Resources	63
Student-Centered Stewardship.....	63
Leadership Theory: The Events Which Influence	66
Policy: The Events Which Influence	66
Analysis of the Events Which Influence.....	67
Findings of the Events Which Influence.....	68
School Turnaround: Accountability Paradigm	69
Leadership Theory: Accountability Paradigm	73
Policy: Accountability Paradigm	76

Analysis: Accountability Paradigm	76
Findings of School Turnaround: Accountability Paradigm	77
School Turnaround: Beyond Test Scores	78
First Day of School: Seventh-Grade English Class	78
Leadership Theory: Beyond Test Scores	81
Findings of Beyond Test Scores	82
A Final Note – For Now	83
Conclusion	84
V. LOOKING AHEAD – ONE CHICANO SCHOOL LEADER’S VIEW OF SCHOOL TURNAROUND.....	86
Where Does This Study fit in?.....	86
The Study Itself.....	87
Moving Forward	89
Implications.....	90
Recommendations.....	90
Number 1	90
Number 2	91
Number 3	91
Closing Remarks.....	92
APPENDIX SECTION.....	93
REFERENCES	105

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1. Percent of Persons 25 Years Old and Over Who Completed High School or College.	26

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1. Leadership Factors.....	28
Figure 2. Analytical Framework for Autoethnography.	47
Figure 3. Screenshot of Timeline I Created as the Participant.	51
Figure 4. Low-Performing Rating.....	54
Figure 5. The Shield.....	62
Figure 6. The Instructional Process.	64
Figure 7. The Growth.....	65
Figure 8. School Turnaround: Accountability Paradigm.....	69

ABSTRACT

This study was an autoethnography of the turnaround efforts of a Chicano leader in four low-performing schools in Texas. The U.S. Government and the State of Texas both impose sanctions on schools that fail to meet minimum standards on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) exams. The focus in the research was on how life experience, educational theory, and educational law/policy informed the praxis of a Chicano school turnaround leader. This study involved the use of critical reflection that was guided by the following research questions: What does school turnaround mean to a Chicano administrator working in schools that are facing accountability sanctions? How is a Chicano administrator's understanding of the conditions involved in school turnaround influenced by life experience, theory, and policy? Where is the space for negotiation and reform of a Chicano administrator's school turnaround plan? The initial process started with the creation of a timeline to identify critical or pivotal points in the life of the participant. Through an analysis of the timeline, a series of three stories were written that provided discourse to the life experience of the participant/researcher. The literature review provided an analysis of the educational theory and educational law/policy that influenced the work of this campus leader using a three circle Venn diagram to represent the intersection of the life experiences of the campus leader, educational theory, and educational law/policy. The intersection area of the three circles framed the praxis the campus leader used in turning around low-performing schools. The findings from this analysis provided the following themes: campus leadership's point of view has a great impact on the school; the vision for a school is driven by the campus leader; the campus leader provides protection for those individuals who serve as advocates and promote the growth of their students; a plan of action with a strong foundation, but not one so rigid there is no room for change, should

provide guidance in a school turnaround initiative; and school turnaround should have its roots in providing, promoting, and cultivating a culture of academia. Implications and recommendations of this study serve to provoke discussion among educators and scholars to use autoethnography as way to make sense of life experiences as a driving force in shaping an educational leader's turnaround paradigm and focus.

I. THE JOURNEY

From a young age, my life consisted of church, school, and helping at the cleaners my parents owned and operated. In fact, I spent the majority of my life until I was 18 years old in one of those organizations. As a boy, I was expected to work hard, be a good Catholic, and try my best at school. My parents wanted their children to have a better life than the one they knew. I know this is not unique to my parents. As an educator, I talk to many parents who want their child(ren) to have a better life than the one they know. What makes me reflect on my own journey is the pathway I took to become a school leader and the journey has been surreal.

When I was a kid, my parents always encouraged me to do well in school. Thinking back, school was something I had to do. I guess I never really thought of school as a pathway to work or a career. Why would I? All of my family members worked in jobs or careers where school was nothing more than a place to learn how to read, learn to write, and learn mathematical skills. Those were my thoughts in the early years, from the time I entered school until I entered the third grade. Once I entered the third grade I started learning about different career pathways and what would need to happen to become a lawyer or doctor, for example. At that time, I also saw my older brother start taking classes at Austin Community College. Education started to take on a new meaning to me.

As I got older I learned about more careers and what needed to happen to move into those careers. I enjoyed playing sports and always had great relationships with most of my coaches. I knew I wanted to teach and coach someday, but becoming an educator would have to wait. I thought the road to success meant making and having a lot of money. So, in high school I was on a pathway that would lead me into engineering or becoming a certified public accountant.

In college, I changed majors once from engineering to business so I could follow the pathway to becoming a certified public accountant. Right out of college, I started working with a local check cashing customer service business, then took a minor role in the field of accounting, and then went on to work with Dell Computers. I was miserable. I would run into one of my former coaches about a year later. We spoke about what I was up to and how things were going for me. In our conversation, he brought up the idea of me becoming an educator and coach. To be honest, I had not given the idea any thought at this point in my career because I was going down another path. That same summer I did a little research and matriculated into the Alternative Certification Program at Southwest Texas University and started making my way to becoming an educator.

As a classroom teacher, I enjoyed working with my students. I was doing well and felt as though I was giving back to the community in which I grew up. However, the bureaucracy in schools was everywhere. Halfway during my fifth year of teaching and coaching, I would witness an injustice that I thought was unacceptable and I decided I had had enough.

In schools, some changes are easier to manage than others. Some of the changes are highly political, and others go unnoticed. In my fifth year, a change finally happened that called me to action—A good man and great educator lost his position. The move allowed the current administration to make a move that was easy and made some stakeholders happy. No grounds were given for such a move but the move was still made. At this time I knew I could either live with the decision or work on getting the credentials to become a school administrator so I could work to try to make sure this did not happen to anyone under my supervision.

A Closer Look

My Parents

I knew at an early age that I was being raised by parents who never finished school. Both of them always shared their school experiences with me. My father had a sixth-grade education. His school experience was common to the times; he was punished for speaking Spanish and schoolwork consisted of coloring activities. What he did know well was math. He would tell me of a mathematics teacher who took a particular interest in my father's ability to do mathematics, especially because what he did know he knew from just listening to the lectures his teacher was giving in class. As my father told the story of why he knew mathematics better than all the other subjects, he would say that most days, including in his mathematics teacher's class, he was told to face the wall and not be a disruption to others. After performing well on an assignment, his math teacher asked my father how he knew the material so well. My father told him he was listening to the instruction the teacher was giving to the class. My father said in his mathematics class he was no longer directed to color and face the wall. The teacher gave my father a new seat and explained that my father needed to pay attention. Reading and writing were never skills my father was made to learn or master.

My mother finished school through the eighth grade. She was sad she had to make an early exit because of a lost book that was never returned. Up until that point she tells of liking school and doing well with her studies. When my mother's father took her to enroll the following fall, Longer ISD sent over a bill for the book that had not been returned to the library at the Longer school she was attending. Without the book or the money to pay for the book, my mother would not be allowed to enroll. My mother explained to me that prior to her return to Austin, she asked a friend of hers to turn in the book to the library at the school she had attended. The book

never made it to the library. The only regret my mother has ever shared about this situation is that she never had an opportunity to finish school. Today, this practice would not be tolerated.

The Texas Education Agency (TEA, n.d.-b) states the following:

Every child in Texas has the right to a free public education. A child may attend school in the school district in which he lives or enroll in other options, such as charter schools.

To enroll your child in school, you will need to locate a school, provide residency documentation, and get your child all state required immunizations or provide a valid exemption from the immunization requirements. (para. 1–2)

I wish I could say that my mother’s story is unique, but unfortunately there are many stories in our history of such cases where access was denied to people of color. Though there are many gatekeepers that can allow or hinder an opportunity to obtaining an education, in this day and age, many of the barriers to enrolling in school have been lifted. What my parents expected of their children, they learned from others.

My father worked for a man who had a son who was my father’s age. While my father was working a manual labor job in a dry cleaners, the owner’s son was away at college on a sports scholarship. My father and this man’s son were the same age yet were on two completely different paths. My father realized that being highly successful in school could not only mean a better life, it could mean a life that did not require you to break your back on a daily basis. My mother supported my father in this belief. However, the details of how to be a better student were not known. The only thing my parents could tell their children was to do well in school and listen to teachers.

School for Me

I did just that. In elementary school I completed my assignments as fast and as accurately as I could. The quality of my work was not really of concern. I do remember as a first grader that I would struggle at times to read. My father had a solution. I had to read the newspaper every day

after school and explain to him what I had read. Now, at that time I did not understand that he could not read. All I knew is that whatever I read to him, he knew the details. I would find out later that he would have my brother debrief him or he would have watched the local news to determine if I was reading with accuracy. The only other time I struggled was for about 2 days when we were learning fractions. I went home and explained the issue to my father, and he had a solution to my problem. He pulled out a tape measure and started explaining what all the marks meant and how to relate them in a broader sense. Other than these two times, academics came easy to me in elementary school.

Because I had good standardized testing scores, I was recruited to attend the Magnet Program at Kind Junior High School. I remember I really did not want to go there for junior high school. I wanted to go to Maroon Junior High School like my sister and my brother. I clearly remember my brother telling my father that it would be a mistake if he did not make me try it out if I could get into the Magnet Program. I heard my brother telling my father that he had made a horrible mistake by not going through the early college program at August High School when he was a senior because the hours would have interfered with football practice. My brother spoke of a different path he could have taken had he been made to go through the program his senior year. My brother assured my father he would read my application to ensure I put forth a real effort and did not try to weasel my way out of getting accepted. The rest is history. The academic struggle became real, and I no longer could just get by because schoolwork came natural to me.

For the first time, I was having to work at doing well in school. I was also surprised at how far behind I was compared to my peers in English language arts. Luckily, when I was in the sixth grade, Mr. Green gave me mathematics work that challenged me academically. Well, the school work was harder than the work my other sixth-grade peers were working on in class.

Mathematically I was in a good place. In reading and writing, I was years behind. I was so competitive that I would not allow this to be an issue. I attended tutorials during my lunch period, I asked for extra help in the mornings, and I also found time to get help after school. Kind Junior High School was the first experience I had where all the other students in my classes were on top of their academic game. When the first grading period came to an end and my father got my first report card, he was pleased and then sat me down to explain. This is what he had to say, “From now on you can have one B in English. You have shown me that you can do it, and I do not expect anything else.” Being that he was a man of his word, I did not want to know what two Bs would mean, so I continued to work hard at maintaining this standard until the end of the first semester of my senior year. It took three and half school years for me to catch up to my peers in writing. I engaged in countless hours of tutorials and homework to make sure my writing skills were not going to be a setback for me.

Crossing Paths

My parents and I had very different school experiences. They both went to school and their parents wanted them to go to school, but school was not an endeavor where they received a lot of support. At the age of 12, my father was a full-time dishwasher at the state school and my mother went right to work after she could no longer attend school. The support and structure my parents were providing to me had lasting effects and helped me through school.

From a technical perspective, my parents did not have the academic skills to help me with my studies in school. I remember at an early age, my parents showed me how to count and taught me the alphabet. As my academic knowledge grew, my parents supported my educational journey. The expectations for me at school were to behave, stay out of trouble, and to try my best with all my assignments. These expectations were always reinforced. My father made it a point

to attend all school functions and support my teachers with all my academic endeavors. I remember being one of very few seniors who showed their parents around the school at open house my senior year. Though I did not appreciate having to show my parents around the school at the time, I now understand the impact and the purpose of being made to do that for my parents.

Reflecting on the experiences of my parents as they were students is at times frustrating and enlightening. Attending school and performing well became cornerstones of my identity, but this was missing from their experiences. For one reason or another, my parents were not afforded this opportunity. For these reasons, I have come to believe that being a good student is a vital characteristic of the school turnaround framework. For me, being a good student meant I was well behaved and completed all my assignments. As a campus leader, I see a good student as someone who is willing to try their best, learns that taking the initiative to challenge their stakeholders to push them to their full potential is required, and treats others as they would want to be treated.

Life and Work Experiences

Other experiences also played a major role in the formation of the ideologies I bring to the school leadership platform I employ. To deny one would leave the others fragile and fractured. My parents are only one factor that has influenced how I lead a campus. The other factors that have contributed to my leadership paradigm are the years I spent playing sports, the experiences I had in other industries outside of education, my time as a classroom teacher, the formal education I have completed to become an educator at all levels, and my identity.

I started playing organized sports at a young age, 6 years old to be exact. The first sport I played was tackle football. I also played some basketball and baseball in elementary school. In

junior high school I was a thrower on the track and field team, and in high school I also wrestled. I was recruited to play college football and wrestle. As a boy I used to go with my parents to see my brother play football, which sparked my interest in organized sports. Sports played a vital role in my education. I often speculate about whether I would have graduated from high school had I not played sports. By the time I was a junior in high school, I was already aware that I could get a graduate equivalent degree and move on from high school. Playing sports provided me with purpose and taught me the importance of goal setting. Though most of my academic endeavors came easy, being competitive in sports was much harder. In the positions I played I was considered undersized. Setting goals and working toward those goals was a skill that manifested within me. The work it took to be competitive took time. Through goal setting I was able to overcome the physical attributes I was born with and continue to move forward. The years of playing sports ended, but the lessons learned and how to use those skills in other areas of my life stayed with me.

I had multiple jobs prior to becoming an educator. Store clerk, money teller, and laborer are a few of the jobs I worked prior to becoming an educator. The work was hard, but usually easy. I met many people from all walks of life and learned how to deal with people and not to take everything so personally. The money I made helped me pay bills and gave me spending money, but the work was not satisfying. I often remember thinking that if this was the only work I could find I would do it, but I wanted to have a career that would be satisfying to me. Finishing school would provide options. I also picked up skills and knowledge that would later be useful and enlightening as a school leader.

Educator Experience

As a teacher and coach, I worked with students who were and still are underrepresented in various areas of our society. I also worked with students who had academic gaps. Teaching students with a wide spectrum of abilities was challenging. I had to skillfully use instructional strategies that scaffolded student learning and provided other students with enrichment opportunities. Learning how to do this took years and a lot of patience. By going through this process I was able to bring ideas to help teachers once I became an administrator.

My educational leadership training at Texas State University was enlightening. In the master's degree program I was able to connect terminology and theory with practice. I was able to reflect on myself and what factors influenced me as an educator. There were two components to the program. One was to understand what was involved in being a campus administrator and the other was to help future school administrators take a look at the beliefs and ideals we brought to leadership, and reflect on how these would influence how we would lead as an educator. One struggle I had was with the teachings and beliefs of many of the professors, especially because many of my professors had minimal public school administration experience or lacked successful turnaround school experience, but I kept myself focused by understanding I needed the information and the credentials the university had to offer. Both the master's degree program and the PhD program provided guidance and reinforced my identity.

I had parents who grew up in a much different time than the one we are in today. My parents often talked about the struggle of being descendants of Mexicans and the challenges they faced because of who they were. Ironically, my father used Mexican because that was the term he knew. He was a proud American and knew he had the things he had because of the American way—The land of opportunity and working hard to make a life for yourself and your family. The

discriminatory acts my parents endured in school were not the ones I knew in school. Yet, my parents always made sure we knew where we came from and what that should mean for us. However, my father always guided us under the premise that we do not ever let anyone hold us down or back, we make our own way, and we know we win some and we lose some in life.

Identity

The part of Austin in which I grew up was predominantly Mexican American, Hispanic, Chicano, or Mexican depending on how you decided to frame it for the day. I remember the term Chicano being used around the neighborhood, but I do not remember my father, mother, or siblings ever identifying themselves with this term. Mainly the term was used by my peers and myself to identify ourselves. As a younger student I did not always give it a lot of thought, because for the most part, everyone in the neighborhood was the same. I did play football in one of the African American neighborhoods and most of my teammates were African American. The difference in race was there but we were kids and did not really think about those things unless we played one of the teams from the affluent part of town. My reality at the time is that Mexican Americans were the majority in most of the schools I attended. This would change as I entered the seventh grade.

Attending a magnet school brought people together from all over Austin. From my elementary school there were only two of us attending the magnet program, and the other student was not Hispanic. In fact, his dad was a professor at Southwest Texas State University at the time. I always remember the student denied being from East Austin and I used to shake my head when I would hear him deny this fact. From what I remember, there were students from other neighborhood schools in East Austin but not many. I actually only knew of one other student who was from the Mexican part of East Austin in the magnet program. I do remember having a

lot of White students in my classes who were bused in from Northwest Hills, and our neighborhood students came from a small attendance zone around the school. I always thought it was odd that this was happening. I actually found out in my 30s that the students from Northwest Hills were given an option—either go to Kind Junior High School for seventh and eighth grade and then attend Autumn High School, their neighborhood high school, or go to their neighborhood middle school, Margo, and then attend Juanston¹ for high school. Junior high school was very eye opening. Coming from East Austin, having an accent, using a lot of slang, and having blue collar parents did not exactly make me the fan favorite of the junior high school. I had little interaction with the neighborhood students at the time because most of my classes were associated with the magnet program or honors classes and those classes had students who were either in the magnet program or students who were being bused in from Northwest Hills. Regardless, I knew I was different and that was okay. I also remember I was not going to let my differences be a reason to shut down, get depressed, or be reluctant to stay at the magnet program. On the contrary, I became highly motivated to show that I could hold my own with students who had a strong elementary education and highly-schooled parents. What I can also say about my junior high school years is that the person I would become both as an individual and as an educator would be shaped by those experiences.

I became a loner with a close knit group of friends, which is who I am today as a person. As an educator, I look for students who are not fitting in or who are having a hard time making friends. The time frame that shaped me to be like this was short, no more than three and half weeks of the start of junior high school, but I knew after that time I was not going to let students

¹ Kind Junior High School and Juanston High School were located in East Austin, a part of Austin, TX, that was predominantly minority before it was gentrified in the 21st century. Margo Middle School and Autumn High School were in Northwest Hills, which is an affluent part of Austin, TX.

in junior high or ever fake a friendship with me. The timeframe is very distinct because the football season started after the first 3.5 weeks of the start of school. Playing football provided my peers with a different perspective about me, but by this point I knew the score. Even the other Chicano students did not befriend me during the first few weeks of junior high school. As time would pass, some of the other Chicano students would later find out our parents knew one another or their parents had friendships with some of my relatives. Again, by this time I believed their true colors had already been shown, and I stuck to myself. I had acquaintances, but I had one person I called a friend, and he shared two things in common with me. One, he was Hispanic, and two, he had roots and lived in East Austin. At that time I felt the things my father had told me for years about the divide between races was in my face and true. I already knew who I was and what I was about, but the start of my junior high school years solidified those thoughts.

In high school, the campus demographics changed. I followed the next step in the magnet program by attending the Science Academy, which was housed at Lion Being Jack High School. By this time I was still closed off to others, but I still had a circle of friends. Though the differences in neighborhoods or race were not as amplified, the classes I was taking still had the same make up as they did in junior high school. I remember always being guarded in high school and never forgetting who I was or where I came from.

I then went on to Cornell University where race and ethnicity seemed to be frequent talking points among minorities on campus. Going into college I was playing football and had an instant group of men who became my friends at the university. I remember thinking that many of the other Hispanic students, as this was the first time I was around Hispanics from other Latin American countries, had such strong convictions about identity. I had them too, but I did not feel

the need to parade them around or showcase my differences. MEChA was a group on campus that was always trying to recruit Chicanos, but their journey did not resonate with me. I would listen to members talk, and I remember feeling like they had to leave their homes, their comfort zones, and even their families to find themselves and what it meant to be Chicano. I did not need them for that purpose, and as I saw it at the time, we were all on the same campus going to the same school. I know my thoughts on the matter did not go over very well with members of MEChA, but that is the thing, I did not care about their views then. Maybe I was misinformed or the representatives for the organization could not explain their point well enough to me.

The foundations for my identity were primarily built in my home by my family, in my church, and growing up in East Austin. The next time I would really have light shed on the issue would be in my first job as an educator. The same battles still raged on as when I was a student, as I had become a teacher and coach at the same junior high school I attended as a student. The same battle was there, but this time there was a new generation of teachers in the program who thought they were entitled to something. They gave students sympathy because of their situations as opposed to their academic skills, which widened the academic gap. I knew this would be a 1-year stop for me, and I would move on. More because I wanted to coach at the high school level. Again, I went where I thought I could help students from a background more similar to mine, so I found a school where I felt I could help both in the classroom and on the field. Though the issue of identity went on, it would not be a primary focal point for me again until I enrolled in the master's degree program at Texas State University.

Though my identity continued to take shape, enrolling at Texas State University did bring some perspective to the social injustice that still plague our schools today. The program also made it clear that not everyone can practice what they teach. I guess some of the professors who

teach in the graduate program feel like they can make a difference if they help future educational leaders. Though social injustice is important practice for educational leaders to know, it always felt rehearsed or ingenuine. I will never deny who I am or what I am—Chicano, Mexican American, Hispanic, or Latino, they all fit—but I know the professors whose work resonated the most with me were those professors who had spent years working in public schools or doing community work right in their backyards. I will not knock the work of those who research abroad, but another country's solutions, history, or problems are not like those in Texas public schools. There may be similarities and some things that are applicable, but the travesties, trials, and history of this country have shaped the people who live here.

Coming Together

The intersections of all these experiences have influenced and shaped the leadership paradigm I use as a school leader and the kinds of schools in which I choose to work. As a campus leader, I have focused on schools that are considered low performing by state accountability standards. In Texas, the current turnaround plans for school improvement have six pathways from which to choose, but essentially the six options can be broken into three options: use the Effective Schools Framework (ESF) as a guide for school improvement, restart a school, or close the school down (TEA, 2020a). Though research is limited on the initiatives Latino administrators use to plan for school turnaround, there is some information on the topic. Educators talk about closing the academic gap, but policies like No Child Left Behind (NCLB), now the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), are condemned or there are deficit views on the policy for having punitive or unrealistic measures. Researchers like Reyes and Garcia (2014) framed a dismissal view on public policy in their study about turning a school around. The current study will be an analysis of the tenets I use as a turnaround leader.

Throughout my career, I have been part of leadership teams as an administrator, of four schools that have been rated Academically Unacceptable, Improvement Required, or rated an F campus. For the purpose of this study, I use the terms low performing, Academically Unacceptable, Improvement Required, or rated an F campus interchangeably. Currently, campuses that fail to score 60 points or more receive an F rating and face sanctions based on student performance. The question remains, how did I get to a point where turning around low-performing schools in four different districts have been part of my 13-year administrative career? Part of the answer to this question is easy—I purposefully look for schools that have been rated low performing based on outcomes of the previous testing cycle. The second answer to this question requires more investigation into the school turnaround framework I have implemented in each school where accountability is an issue, which led to the need for this study.

Problem Statement

For decades, the demographics of the State of Texas have been changing to be a Hispanic majority state. “Our population projections suggest the Hispanic population will likely surpass the non-Hispanic White population in size by 2022” (You et al., 2019, p. 4). Data from the 2000–2001 and 2001–2002 Academic Excellence Indicator System reports for the State of Texas (TEA, 2022a, 2022b) show the population of students shifted to a Hispanic majority in 2001 for the public schools that the TEA oversees. Historically, Hispanics have had the largest gaps in their academic success and the lowest completion rates at all levels of schooling. Hispanic students are identified and classified by race, country of origin, language, socioeconomic status, disabilities, and culture (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). The melting pot of the Hispanic population is itself diverse and multifaceted. Administrators need to take time and make the known unknown by drilling down into the mechanisms at work in their schools and their leadership

paradigms. This process requires a further investigation into what factors administrators can use to simplify school turnaround.

Purpose of the Study

In order to navigate macro and micro political systems (both inside and outside the school system), economic structures, and social capital, a person has to have an analytical approach to their thinking. If a school system fails to nurture individuals who can analyze and act upon analysis, the system creates a group of people with homogeneous thinking or worse—a group of people who settle for confinement. The limits and boundaries of school expectations on students should be pushed and elevated to foster student success or risk underperformance, not only in school, but also in students' future life.

Since 2002, when NCLB was passed, turnaround initiatives and efforts have become synonymous with “rapid and significant improvement in the achievement of low performing schools” (Peck & Reitzug, 2014, p. 9). In 2010, the American Institutes for Research reported to the U.S. Department of Education that of the 1,037 elementary schools identified as low performing, only 47 showed dramatic and sustained achievement gains in subsequent years (Aladjem et al., 2010, p. 67). State and federal governments, policymakers, school leaders, and research organizations have honed in on strategies and factors that help low-performing schools change directions and help students find and maintain academic success (Aladjem et al., 2010; Herman et al., 2008; Huberman et al., 2011; Kowal & Ableidinger, 2011; Thompson et al., 2011). Policymakers and educational leaders have also tried to use school turnaround initiatives as a method for school reform to improve low-performing schools (Fullan, 2006; Leithwood et al., 2010; Murphy, 2008; Peck & Reitzug, 2014).

Turnaround initiatives are focused on “a way to improve rapidly and at scale the large number of struggling American schools” (Peck & Reitzug, 2014, p. 28). A way to achieve this is through building educator capacity. Mintrop (2003, p. 156) explained that there is a strong relationship between teachers’ motivation and commitment and the positive working conditions fostered by their instructional leaders and colleagues. Therefore, in addition to constantly nurturing the development of teachers’ pedagogy, administrators must have a strong capacity in their leadership abilities. Administrators benefit from having rational goals and using open systems (Bruggencate et al., 2012, p. 718). School turnaround efforts can also benefit from strong principal preparation programs. Administrators will be better prepared when taught in exemplary leadership programs (Reyes-Guerra et al., 2016, p. 414). Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2004) advocated for mentoring programs to be part of aspiring principals’ preparation to help and support the development of their leadership disposition. Supporting leadership development may increase the likelihood that school turnaround efforts will prove to be effective. Furthermore, the demand to prepare principals for turning around low-performing schools is complicated by research focus; studies have focused on leadership models and practices as opposed to leadership behaviors (Hitt & Player, 2019, p. 97).

Although the current research on turnaround schools has a focus in many areas, few studies have addressed the factors which influence a principal’s leadership paradigm when implementing a leadership strategy and school improvement policy to turn around low-performing schools. In this study, I used autoethnography to explore the turnaround efforts of a Chicano school leader who has been part of the administrative teams that have turned around four different secondary schools. I used the autoethnographic approach to analyze my life and work experiences that have influenced the development of the tenets I use in my approach to

turning around low-performing schools. This plan involved taking a deeper look at my school turnaround paradigm through an analysis of significant and pivotal points in a career that spans over 22 years as an educator and over 45 years as a person. Specifically, I analyzed the 13 years I have spent as an administrator by investigating the changes in methods used, perspectives, and ideologies as a school leader during the different stages of my career. The first stage is the transition stage, the second is the establishment stage, and the last stage is the later career stage (Arar, 2017).

It was my goal for this study to contribute to the conversation among educators, encourage self-reflection into one's leadership, and provide a space for school leaders to start their own journey on challenging the deficit views of school turnaround. To address a gap in knowledge, I posed the following questions.

Research Questions

1. What does school turnaround mean to a Chicano administrator working in schools that are facing accountability sanctions?
2. How is a Chicano administrator's understanding of the conditions involved in school turnaround influenced by life experience, theory, and policy?
3. Where is the space for negotiation and reform of a Chicano administrator's school turnaround plan?

Theoretical Framework

I used funds of knowledge as the foundational premise to inform and guide the process and procedures I used to put context to the data collected in this study. Gonzalez et al. (2005) wrote that a funds of knowledge study can be accomplished through "ethnographic research methods [involving] participant observation, interviews, life-history narratives, and reflection on

field notes. These helped [them] uncover the multidimensionality of student experience” (p. 7). This theory is designed to enable teachers to build a context based on the gained knowledge from studying the cultures of their students to engage their students in the classroom. In the application of this theory, the funds of knowledge categories obtained can include language(s), family beliefs and customs, family outings, household responsibilities, instructional activities, and family professions (Jenkins & Rojas, 2020, p. 1685). I reframed these funds of knowledge in this study to analyze how life experiences, education, work, and career influenced the tenets I used as a Chicano school leader in school turnaround efforts.

In reframing the funds of knowledge to apply to school leadership, my intention was to shape my own working knowledge as a school leader. Research, theory, policy, and practice exist in the field of school turnaround efforts. Through the use of autoethnography, I tried to capture my leadership paradigm in ways which make the leadership of a school personal, engaging, and to amplify my motivation to lead from a socially conscious perspective.

Autoethnography enables a researcher to try to make meaning and explore the pivotal points of their own reality that resonate from their own lived experiences (Mendez, 2013). In writing about the self, “actors involved can represent professional practices more fully and bring about ethical action” (Denshire, 2014, pp. 845–846).

The speed at which school life happens does not always provide the space to encompass the self-reflective work that can improve student success and student agency. As I am a lifelong learner, this process provided me a tool with which to analyze theory and praxis.

Definition of Main Terms

Funds of knowledge – The knowledge gained through life experience, family history, cultural assets, identity, education, and settings (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992). This

theoretical framework captures and provides context in which these factors influence educational leadership theory and practice. Shifting our perspective may lead us to rethink our skill sets (Macias, 2014, p. 14).

Why School Leadership?

I still remember the night I decided I would leave the work I loved most, which was being a classroom teacher and coach. On a Friday night in October, our campus coordinator and head football coach announced that he wished he could have done more for the team, but this would be his last season as the head football coach. A great guy, a person who was good for students and only wanted the best for everyone involved was out. Later that night, as we were in the football office back at school, we briefly discussed some of the politics involved in his decision. By that point in our meeting, I had already made the decision hours ago to become an administrator and one of the tenets I would use as an administrator was to make sure the individual educators who were good for students would have an advocate in the front office. Two years later I would attend Texas State University as a graduate student in the College of Education with a major in educational leadership. Below is what Texas State University advises students to expect:

Our program prepares educational leaders for PK-12 public and private schools. We emphasize the development of skills in instructional leadership, cultural competency, reflective practice, and organizational leadership in order to advance strong school communities and meaningful learning for all. Signature focus areas for our programs are 1) leadership skills for systematic and continuous school improvement, 2) designing & analyzing collaborative campus and district level reform efforts that are effective for diverse student populations, 3) situating school and district based leaders within larger community and societal contexts, and 4) engaging school and community assets as the foundation for improvement efforts. (Texas State University, n.d., para. 1)

One thing I can say about my experience at Texas State University is that the lives of the students in the Texas State University master's degree program were always a focal point of our studies. The curriculum and instruction all students were provided typically came back to focus

on how it applied to the lives of students, how students got to this point in life, and how using this new lens to analyze our life experiences would shape and form who the students would become as school leaders. The other thing the Educational Leadership program provided was academic language, theory, and research to support the views many of the students were already using in their current positions. Making the familiar unfamiliar became a common practice.

School Leadership

Qualities of School Leadership

Leithwood et al. (2020) provided a repertoire of practices used by successful school leaders. Each practice of a successful school leader belongs in one of the following: setting direction, building relationships, developing relationships, guiding the school to meet expectations, and improving instruction. According to Bush and Glover (2014), a thorough understanding of leadership theory is important for two reasons: first, leadership theory provides understanding and interpretation, and second, leadership theory gives guidance and adds depth and breadth to leadership practice (pp. 564–565).

Career Stages Theory

There is a widely accepted belief that educational leadership is the second most important indicator of student success in schools, and the student's teacher(s) being the first indicator. As the body of research on educational leadership continues to grow and the pressure to find strategies for turning around low-performing schools mounts, there may be a benefit from analyzing educational leaders who have had successful turnaround ventures. One way to initiate this process is through self-reflection in an attempt to understand educational leadership "both as a cognitive and behavioral phenomenon" (Houchens & Keedy, 2009, p. 58) so the approach to solving problems can be explored.

According to Oplatka (2004), the career stages of a principal can be classified by the following: the induction stage, the establishment stage, the maintenance versus renewal stage, and the disenchantment stage. “Yet the division of the principal’s career into definable stages provides insight into the difficulties of conceptualizing a leadership style which is claimed to be relevant for every principal over any period of time” (Oplatka, 2004, p. 53). Heffernan (2018) described how caution should be given when theory and practice alone are influenced by the throes of accountability and career development ignored.

Turnaround Schools

The U.S. Department of Education (2019) defines a low-performing school as one in the lowest-performing 5% of schools in each state. The TEA (n.d.-c) defines a low-performing school or district as one that earns a D or F through the State Accountability System and a campus identified for Comprehensive, Targeted, and Additional Targeted Support under ESSA. School turnaround efforts are universally defined as the implementation of focused leadership and instructional strategies that produce rapid results on standardized testing exams.

Summary

The doctoral program at Texas State University is aligned with the master’s degree program. The most beneficial portions of the doctoral program in school improvement were the courses where we embarked on community work and the models of inquiry course. These courses framed school turnaround in a way that meant more to me than having student test scores meet a minimum standard.

As the focus in my research was personal and close to what I believe in, I have found that my interest in my own academic journey has been revitalized. As I read about and researched the qualities of successful school leadership, career stages theory, and turnaround schools, I found

myself interested in whether through my autoethnography I would validate what these stereotypes of school leadership are claiming about the work I have embarked on since 2006. The research on best practice in educational leadership seems very much straightforward, as Fullan, Leithwood, and Bass have studied the qualities of successful educational leadership practice. However, after decades of practice and accountability, those in the field of education (P-20), as institutions filled with practitioners, researchers, and philosophers, still see low-performing schools, and worse, a significant academic gap still exists among students in poverty and minorities.

In my career as a campus leader, I have been part of school leadership teams that have turned around four low-performing campuses in various settings and levels. The strategies and ideologies I use as an educational leader have been influenced by my life experiences. I believe in the work I am doing as a public educator. I am a product of the public education system in Texas. Some may call my journey up to this point in my life luck, the benefits of hard work, or coincidence. I believe the successful school turnaround initiatives I have had in my career have been the result of the deliberate use of a simple system consisting of providing students with a safe school, advocating that teachers provide social and emotional learning, ensuring relevant and rigorous curriculum are implemented, and ensuring teachers use instructional strategies that engage students in their learning. This simple system is influenced by dynamic and personal life factors such as my own school experiences and family history that have shaped the educational leadership choices I make when taking on a school turnaround venture.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

For decades, the injustices dealt to minorities in the United States have been a topic of debate because of the lack of access to education, generational wealth, and access to information. The necessary political, social, and economic turnarounds have been inspired by grassroots efforts from those willing to fight to those willing to push for the emancipation of slaves to those who continue to pursue equality for all. There is not one facet of our society that has not been affected by this reality. This chapter covers the ESSA and school turnaround policy provided by the TEA, leadership theory studied by Fullan (2008a) and Leithwood et al. (2020) and career theory as reported by Oplatka (2004).

Educational Reform

For many individuals, education is the pathway to financial, social, and political freedom. The educational landscape has many components and systems working simultaneously together to produce an independent thinker who can contribute to society. As the position of the United States has grown in the world, so has the importance placed on schooling for individuals. State and local governments are tasked with the governance of their schools. The federal government supports state and local governments by providing guidance and financial assistance.

The U.S. Department of Education was created in 1867 (U.S. Department of Education, 2021, para. 1) and has been tasked with helping states and local governments implement laws for generations. In the beginning, the U.S. Department of Education was tasked with providing support to help improve local economies (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). As time went on, there was a shift in the laws the federal government was enacting. Significant events, like World War II, Sputnik, the Civil Rights Movement, gender equality, and the rehabilitation of disabled individuals, all played major roles in creating new legislation that placed emphasis on

educating all U.S. citizens (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). The U.S. Department of Education’s mission is “to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access” (U.S. Department of Education, 2021, para. 10).

Today, the U.S. Department of Education has been tasked with closing the achievement gaps among different racial and ethnic groups or those individuals living in poverty. This responsibility has also been passed down to the state and local level. In Texas, as is the case across the United States, school leaders are held accountable for the education of their students. In 2012, the Obama Administration recognized that the standards set by NCLB during the Bush Administration did not allow for enough flexibility, so school leaders were granted the ability to implement comprehensive plans designed to close achievement gaps (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). In December of 2015, President Obama signed the ESSA, which provided school leaders with a law to guide their efforts with student success (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Why was This an Important Measure for Public Education?

The general answer is that “NCLB put in place measures that exposed achievement gaps among traditionally underserved students and their peers and spurred an important national dialogue on education improvement” (U.S. Department of Education, n.d., para. 11). Historical data for the United States display that the achievement gap existed and was there for many years before NCLB, and the information was there for anyone who wished to look up these facts for themselves. Table 1 illustrates the achievement gaps between different White, Black, and Hispanic racial groups and highlights that for 3 decades prior to enacting NCLB, minority populations were behind their White counterparts (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021).

Table 1. Percent of Persons 25 Years Old and Over Who Completed High School or College.

Year	All races	White	Black	Hispanic origin
Completed 4 years of high school or more				
1990	77.6	79.1	66.2	50.8
1980	68.6	70.5	51.2	45.3
1970	55.2	57.4	33.7	(NA)
Completed 4 years of college or more				
1990	21.3	22.0	11.3	9.2
1980	17.0	17.8	7.9	7.9
1970	11.0	11.6	4.5	(NA)

What Happened With the Passage of NCLB and Continued With ESSA?

Schools became accountable to all their students, and educators could no longer dismiss or stay indifferent to their failures to teach all children. Testing in the State of Texas became important to not only the students and their families, but also to the educators working with them. Sanctions were set in place for schools not meeting sufficient passing standards. This became an initiative that would allow the federal government to keep up with its mission statement.

Since 2006, the sanctions placed on schools have changed. Today, the following can be expected for Texas schools not meeting minimum accountability standards:

After a campus has been identified as unacceptable for two consecutive years, the campus must develop and submit a turnaround plan to the agency explaining the campus’ systemic approach to producing significant and sustainable gains in achievement and a *Met Standard* rating within two years. (TEA, 2020b, para. 1)

The TEA (2020a) provides six strategies to help low-performing schools with five of them being models for turnaround: school improvement, school action-restart (district managed), school action-restart (partner managed), school action-new school (district managed), school action-new

school (partner managed), and school action-reassign. The school improvement model uses the ESF to guide plans for improvement. School action-restart models involve hiring new leadership, faculty, and staff with a new strategic plan for curriculum and instruction or partnering with an operator who has a proven track record of success. The school action-new school model launches a new school in a new building or existing building with a leader or operator who has successfully launched a new school. The last strategy, school action-reassign, closes the school and sends the students of that school to an A or B campus or a new campus.

Why is This Important?

In the context of schooling, an individual's opportunities to gain freedom can be given and can also be taken away. "The actual fallout that occurs when a school receives a designation of academically unacceptable remains hidden and the lived experiences of the students who attend those schools go unnoticed" (Pazey, 2020, p. 1902). What does this mean? Schools across the nation have become experiments to provide a fast track to repair the disparities created by the majority of people and a capitalist economy. The five models for turnaround can be called whatever an individual or organization would like them to be called. Each has pillars or cornerstones for the characteristics that inform educators and set forth a framework for school improvement. The fact remains that all the turnaround measures listed and their characteristics amount to a smokescreen, and these initiatives fail to humanize education for students and realize the need for students to embark on a journey to academic freedom.

Leadership Theory

Leadership is important to a school, as leadership has an indirect impact on student success. The most influential factor affecting student success, regardless of setting, is their parents. Parents who are actively involved with their children's education have a greater impact

on student success than any other variable. “Specifically, children whose parents are more involved in their education have higher levels of academic performance than children whose parents are involved to a lesser degree” (Topor et al., 2010, p. 184). In general, parents are not employees of the district. The second most influential factor is the teachers, as they spend the greatest amount of time with students on a day-to-day basis within the school setting. “Many factors contribute to a student’s academic performance, including individual characteristics and family and neighborhood experiences. But research suggests that, among school-related factors, teachers matter most” (Opper, 2014, p. 1). Teachers spend the majority of their time directly teaching students. So how and where does leadership influence student success?

Principals affect teacher morale, school systems, human capital, teacher pedagogical development, and often which instructional resources are available to teachers. The principal’s ability to influence a teacher can be determined by the following categories: (a) the qualities of school leadership a principal uses to lead, (b) the systems implemented at a school by the principal, and (c) how the principal as a leader presents themselves to the faculty and staff (see Figure 1). The three categories serve as anchors to support school turnaround.

Category 1 Qualities of School Leadership	Category 2 Systems	Category 3 Principal as a Leader
Leithwood Model	Fullan’s Model Six Secrets of Change	Transformational Leadership
		Situational Leadership

Figure 1. Leadership Factors.

Category 1 – Qualities of School Leadership

The first category reflects the theories related to the qualities of school leadership. According to Leithwood et al. (2020), most leadership theories have four general categories in common: “building vision and setting directions; understanding and developing people; redesigning the [organization]; and managing the teaching and learning [program]” (p. 20). In all, Leithwood et al. provided seven claims regarding school leadership. The first claim is that leadership is important to school improvement efforts because of the leader’s influence on teaching and learning. The second claim is there are four basic leadership practices (i.e., set directions, build relationships and develop people, develop the organization to support desired practices, and improve the instructional program) that most successful educational leaders use in their practice. The third claim focuses on the application of the four practices in Claim 2. The fourth claim describes how school leadership affects all stakeholders and school operations to improve teaching and learning. The fifth claim relates to the power of distributed leadership. The sixth claim gives guidance for knowing which patterns of distribution are more effective. The last claim is that there is a high proportion of variation of leadership resources and practices.

Category 2 – Systems

Fullan (2008a) wrote about leadership and how organizations can succeed and manage all the requirements, obstacles, and distractions in the 21st century. The space for a principal to create and maintain organizational balance and positive movement was given by Fullan through his six secrets (Fullan, 2008a, 2008b). Secret 1 - Love your employees: build trusting and meaningful relationships with employees to foster professional growth and leadership capacity. Secret 2 - Connect peers with purpose: support a culture of learning where peers share with one another and other professionals to improve student outcomes. Secret 3 - Capacity building

prevails: use strategies that develop educator pedagogy and reinforces calculated risk taking in learning. Secret 4 - Learning is the work: in addition to professional development, job embedded professional development where educators are receiving real-time mentoring and coaching to improve their practice. Secret 5 - Transparency rules: data should be used as a driving change for macro and micro systemic changes, opportunities for discourse, and an invitation for professional growth. Secret 6 - Systems learn: leadership should be distributive and cultivated within an organization along with being reflective and open to change when needed.

Category 3 – Principal as a Leader

Finally, the manner in which a leader moves within themselves is important. The ideals and goals set by the principal for themselves help shape who the principal tries to be as the leader of a school. There are two theories to consider, transformational and situational leadership. Bass (1985) identified and formed the following four tenets of transformational leadership. Idealized influence, “Transformational leaders behave in ways that allow them to serve as role models for their followers” (Bass & Riggio, 2005, p. 6). Inspirational motivation, “Transformational leaders behave in ways that motivate and inspire those around them by providing meaning and challenge to their followers’ work” (Bass & Riggio, 2005, p. 6). Intellectual stimulation, “Transformational leaders stimulate their followers’ efforts to be innovative and creative by questioning assumptions, reframing problems, and approaching old situations in new ways” (Bass & Riggio, 2005, p. 7). Individualized consideration, “Transformational leaders pay special attention to each individual follower’s needs for achievement and growth by acting as a coach or mentor” (Bass & Riggio, 2005, p. 7). The tenets of transformational leadership are idealistic and provide guidance for principals as they take on the role of the campus leader. “When transformational leadership works well, it has the potential to engage all stakeholders in the achievement of educational

objectives” (Bush & Glover, 2014, p. 558). According to Hermanns and Berliner (2021), transformational leadership theory has the potential to support the transformation of a school to one that prepares students to be critical thinkers in a democracy (p. 13).

The three theories regarding leadership all provide working knowledge to frame the work of my leadership practice. At a macro level, the qualities of school leadership give perspective and serve as a guide on setting goals for school turnaround. Fullan’s (2008a) Six Secrets of Change are strategies I used to help achieve the goals set by using the qualities of school leadership on school turnaround initiatives. On a micro level, the tenets of transformational leadership given by Bass provide perspective on how a leader should present to others. Each of these theories serves as a source that informs the tenets of my leadership when working on school turnaround.

As a final thought, situations influence leadership style. A crisis such as a threat to campus safety or other potentially dangerous situations requires fast decision-making procedures and following standard safety protocols. In cases such as these, a directive or authoritarian leadership style would be used, because the situation requires quick action with little or no time available for input from stakeholders. Crisis situations tend to be rare and the authoritative leadership style should only be used in an emergency.

Leading individuals, on the other hand, requires a leader to know and use different leadership styles. For example, the experience, educational level, and effectiveness of the teacher should influence the leadership style the principal uses to help develop the employee. A struggling, new, or novice teacher may require a more direct approach with clear guidelines and targets. A teacher who has students who are successful or making positive gains may require a

more democratic or a more hands-off leadership style. The leadership style needed for this teacher would be a leader who is more a colleague than supervisor.

In either case, monitoring must continue to be one activity the principal uses to foster the continued success of students, faculty, and staff. Consequently, leadership is a much more complicated process than what I have described in the two paragraphs above. Leadership is multifaceted. As a practitioner of school leadership and a principal, I need to be reflective of their leadership practices, analytical of situations, prepared to coordinate the implementation of leadership in all situations, have a thorough working knowledge of standard operating procedures, and make a commitment to lifelong learning.

Career Theory

As I have moved through my administrative career, I have been very selective when it comes to the schools in which I choose to apply and work. The context of these decisions has been intentional and with a focus on certain characteristics of schools. The 14 propositions on career theory given by Donald Super shed some light on the schools I have decided to lead in my career. The propositions are as follows:

People have different abilities and characteristics (proposition 1) which in turn allows them to be qualified for different occupations (proposition 2). Occupations require different abilities and within occupations different abilities (proposition 3). Time and situations influence change in people (proposition 4), and in turn, people go through different career stages - exploratory and establishment -, and the cycle can restart when situations warrant career change (proposition 5). Life experience influences career (proposition 6). A person's ability to deal with the demands of a career is directly related to a career maturity (proposition 7 and 8). Development happens as skills get better and by trial and error (proposition 9 - 11). Self-concepts and work drive career and life satisfactions (proposition 12 - 13). Career and work are only two facets of personality organization, life-style, home, and culture also have influence (proposition 14). (Patton & McMahan, 2014, pp. 68–70)

In my administrative career, I have been very selective in the schools I have applied to and worked for the last 22 years. Super's career theory provides information on the positions I have taken in my career.

Oplatka (2004) also reported that principals go through three stages in their careers. The cycle reflects a principal's journey through the induction stage, the established or mid-career stage, and the disenchantment stage. Policy can drive the cycle principals go through during their career and how principals negotiate their careers.

In the accountability era of school improvement, Heffernan (2018) described the shift principals have made from management to educational leader, and explained that this shift has resulted in a divergence of the career path principals take when their principalship has the added constraints and influence of stringent accountability standards. Heffernan described how veteran principals who were in the position or education prior to the accountability era use more than testing outcomes to measure successful ventures in school improvement, and she attributed their view to a different set of influences and expectations bestowed on principals prior to the accountability era.

The career path of a principal in the State of Texas is also dictated by Texas Education Code (TEC) and policy. For a person to become a principal in Texas, they must have a foundation that is rooted in the classroom as a teacher, where they would have already embarked on a career filled with its own challenges and journey through some or all of the career stages.

Policy: Texas Education Agency

Principal Certification

In the State of Texas, there are five requirements to obtain a principal certification that can be found on the TEA (n.d.-a) website. The requirements state that a person must hold a master's degree from an institution that is accredited by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board or the U.S. Department of Education Database for Accredited Colleges and Universities, hold a valid classroom teaching certificate, have 2 years of creditable teaching experience as a classroom teacher, successfully complete an approved principal educator preparation program, and successfully complete the required exam.

School Accountability

Public and charter schools and districts in Texas are rated every year. The rating is designed to grade a campus and district on an alpha scale from A–F. In addition to an overall rating, campuses and districts are graded in three domains. The *2021 Accountability Manual* states the following with regard to the A–F system:

The overall design of the accountability system evaluates performance according to three domains:

Student Achievement evaluates performance across all subjects for all students, on both general and alternate assessments, College, Career, and Military Readiness (CCMR) indicators, and graduation rates.

School Progress measures district and campus outcomes in two areas: the number of students that grew at least one year academically (or are on track) as measured by STAAR results and the achievement of all students relative to districts or campuses with similar economically disadvantaged percentages. School Progress: Part A: Academic Growth is not calculated for 2021 (see Chapter 3). [In non-COVID-19 years this measure is calculated].

Closing the Gaps uses disaggregated data to demonstrate differentials among racial/ethnic groups, socioeconomic background and other factors. The indicators included in this domain, as well as the domain's construction, align the state accountability system with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). (TEA, 2021a, pp. 3–4)

Summary

School leaders in the 21st century are tasked with closing achievement gaps not only between racial and ethnic groups and students from different socioeconomic groups, but also with providing students with 21st century skills. As the pressure has mounted from parents, businesses, and local communities for schools to provide students with the skills to thrive in a global economy, policymakers at the federal, state, and local levels have passed legislation or mandates that require schools to constantly improve to meet minimum standards or have sanctions placed on them. Schools that are labeled low performing and have sanctions placed on them tend to serve predominately minority–majority students or have a high percentage of their student body living in poverty. Leaders of schools that have been deemed as low performing require turnaround plans that will help them overcome the challenges of meeting academic minimum standards. Often leadership change, either with new administrators being hired to replace current administrators, or adopting policy and procedures will initiate the kind of change needed to meet minimum academic standards.

This chapter reviewed the literature required in policy when a school is labeled low performing, the theories used by school administrators to lead schools, and what principal preparatory programs use to prepare future school administrators.

III. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Overview of Research Approach

The desegregation of schools is an ongoing struggle that has been addressed by policy and facilitated by the U.S. Federal Government; resistance to the change caused by the desegregation of schools has been well documented. In 1956, the National Guard was sent into Tennessee to facilitate and help keep the peace in desegregating schools. A year later in 1957, paratroopers were sent to Little Rock, Arkansas, to help protect Black students at Central High School. Documented incidents of needed force with regard to the desegregation of schools can be found for years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling.

Years later, after the passing of *Brown v. Board of Education*, my father used to talk about the Austin ISD desegregating schools. When my sister was entering junior high school in the early 1970s, my father recalled going down to the school to ensure her safety and the safety of others. His account of the situation was one without any violence, but he did say cops and people protesting could be seen at the school. As a solution to federal mandates imposed on the Austin ISD, the Austin ISD started busing Black students to other schools within the district. As the push for equality grew, so did the busing efforts of the Austin ISD. My sister and brother saw students bused into their schools. A decade later, in the 1980s, by the time I entered school I was being bused to different campuses. By the time the federal mandates were finally lifted in 1986, I was riding a school bus from our home in East Austin to a school 9.5 miles away at the edge of town in North Austin. Ironically, when this mandate was lifted my parents were given a choice—I could continue to attend Gray Elementary but they would have to take me or I could go to my neighborhood school that was about 10 city blocks away or three-quarters of a mile from my home. I went back to my community school.

Today, there are many schools in Texas, not only schools in the Austin ISD, that are trying to recover from the many years of social injustices dealt to minority students and students living in poverty. As federal, state, and local governments have tried to fix generational social injustice, one solution was to fast track equality for students. One remedy requires students to get tested to measure their aptitude, and the collective success of students within a school determines a school's success.

This study was an autoethnography designed to gather evidence from my point of view to help answer the research questions related to the tenets leaders can use in fostering a school turnaround plan in low-performing schools. My personal stories about pivotal incidents, circumstances, and situations that have informed my leadership practices were the evidence I analyzed. It was my belief that autoethnography would serve as the catalyst to shed light on the characteristics and underpinnings that go untold and unnoticed in accepted educational leadership theory of turnaround initiatives and practices.

Autoethnography serves as a method to explore culture as a phenomenon in the places where it is experienced, develop an understanding of lived experiences, and help deliver interpretations of the cross sections of reality and truth (Mendez, 2013). Autoethnography allows a researcher to write and analyze their past personal stories as a means to help inform others (Ellis et al., 2011).

Participant

This research spanned my lifetime and career as a Chicano school leader and through it I analyzed how my life experience, education, and policy influenced the decision-making process and leadership characteristics I have used to lead low-performing schools. I was the sole participant in this study. I am a 45-year-old Chicano who grew up on the East Side of Austin,

TX. The schools I attended, except one, were all in East Austin and all were located East of Interstate Highway 35. I went on to attend Cornell University where I received a bachelor's degree in 1999. Later, I would attend Texas State University and earn a master's degree in 2009. Currently, I am attending Texas State University where I am working on completing a PhD as a member of Cohort 2011.

Setting

In May of 2022, I completed 22 years of educator experience. With the exception of three school years, the campuses where I worked have met one of the following characteristics:

- The school was low performing as deemed by the TEA based on state testing outcomes
- The school was headed to being rated low performing by the TEA as this label had not been created but was coming in the future

All the schools were a minority-majority. The locations of the schools were all different. Some of the schools were located in urban areas, some in rural areas, and some in suburban areas.

Life Timeline

I used a life timeline to describe my life using the following categories: date, school policy, school level, academic journey, position, educator and work experience, pivotal points or information to note, and consciousness. This information helped me document the details and events that have influenced my leadership style. These categories helped to build the narrative and guided me to explore past events and how these events shaped and molded my leadership of low-performing schools.

Autoethnography

“We propose that understanding human behavior begins with knowledge of self and then moves us toward understanding others. This process enhances the student self-awareness of values, attitudes, and actions as they relate to school leadership” (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2011, p. 150). My focus in this autoethnography was to collect information so analysis could be done within the six tenets given by Adams et al. (2014). By writing my stories to analyze practice, I conducted an inquiry to see whether the qualities of successful leaders and career theory support or oppose the tenets of their theories as they related to my principalship in turnaround schools. “The role of storyteller is a part of the process that works to position the student as a creator of knowledge and not a consumer of schooling” (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2011, p. 157).

Autoethnography allowed me to foreground my personal experience in the research and writing; illustrate the sense-making processes; use and show reflexivity; illustrate insider knowledge of cultural phenomenon/experience; describe and critique cultural norms, experiences, and practices; and seek responses from audiences (Adams et al., 2014, p. 26). In using autoethnography, my goals were to identify the following:

- What and how experiences have contributed to my turnaround leadership work
- Where stories and storytelling intersect to demonstrate the power, craftsmanship, and responsibilities of turnaround leadership
- Connections or relationships among theory, experience, and practice

Through the use of autoethnography, I made connections among educational reform, policy, leadership theory, and career theory combined with life experience, education, and practice. The intersection points are where influence and impact were sought as these intersection points framed my experience and praxis as a Chicano school leader leading school turnaround efforts.

Data Collection

I gathered data for the timeline and my personal stories in two phases. In the first phase I created a timeline using Google Sheets. The time periods represented school years or eras of relevancy to the work that has influenced my leadership praxis. Within this timeline, I provided demographic and performance information related to schools, both as a student and educator; along with policy at the federal, state, and local levels; script pertaining to the time period; and the conscious levels pertaining to my leadership.

The second phase of the data set involved in-depth written stories in which I went into further detail about the notes written in the timeline. In writing those stories, the plan was to have informal conversations with people who knew and have worked with me, which informed my perspective. “Further, informal conversations can offer researchers unique insights into identities, experiences, and cultures” (Adams et al., 2014, p. 52). This informed the autoethnography and provided a space to identify convergence or divergence with perceptions of the story when analyzed.

Pláticas

I used *pláticas* with family members as a form of fact checking me and journaling of me growing up.

When engaged in *plática*, we learned you have to pay attention to the story, to the form of the story, to the environment surrounding the story; you have to pay attention to the question, to the form of the question, and to context” (F. Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013, p. 160)

The tenets of using *pláticas* as a data collection and witnessing tool include relationship building, pedagogy, and community building. As I reflected on conversations I had with family members and remembered the facts and details of our conversations, this form of dynamic-critical member

check supported the process and reinforced details to stories, experiences, and critical moments in our history.

Sense-Making With Drawings

As part of the sense-making process of information, I used drawings to convey a clearer picture of the culminating factors emerging and blending at specific points in time and specific interests. “Researchers can [visualize] project designs, sketch or make close observational drawings during fieldwork, make analytic/interpretive drawings, and include images for representation” (Hurdley, 2019, Defining Drawing in Research). The drawings in my text enabled me to engage with the three areas of focus in a deeper and more dynamic way: life experience, educational theory, and educational policy/law. “Educational visual ethnographers should be cognizant that words can never be replaced and that images must be accompanied by a robust conversation between the researcher and the researched” (Barrantes-Elizondo, 2019, p. 12). In this autoethnography, which incorporated self-critical reflection, drawings served as a vessel to process, digest, and analyze the information presented. As a kinesthetic learner, this genre also assisted in implementing the dynamic-critical analysis M. A. Guajardo et al. (2016) emphasized in their pedagogical work for making sense of moving parts of the research.

Critical Self-Reflection

Self. When a person reflects and shares a story in public, he or she begins to organize values, work, purpose, and relationships in a public manner. The more we practice this story-making process, the more we give clarity to our roles as public people. The movement from a private person to a public educator and leader is a learned process that requires scaffolding for educators and emerging leaders. (F. Guajardo et al., 2013, p. 74)

I used critical self-reflection to process the information gathered from life experience, educational theory, and educational policy/theory.

This reflective process provides opportunities to facilitate and stimulate self-discovery for students in their practice as educators, as leaders, and as more self-actualized people. The

process helps create spaces for individuals to move from self-reflection to the process of authentic critical reflection and self-discovery. (M. Guajardo et al., 2011, p. 155)

The critical self-reflection process guided the development of an awareness of the praxis used in school turnaround. “It is one of the roads we have to follow if we are to deepen our awareness of our world, of facts, of the demands of human consciousness to develop our capacity for epistemological curiosity” (Freire, 1998, p. 55). I used the critical self-reflection process to capture and frame my natural curiosity that was formed from the intersection of life experience, educational theory, and educational policy/law. “It’s precisely because ingenuous curiosity does not automatically become critical that one of the essential tasks of progressive educational praxis is the promotion of a curiosity that is critical, bold, and adventurous” (Freire, 1998, p. 38).

The sense making process of the critical self-reflection ideology helped refine the areas that are known and shed light on the areas that were not known. Developing self-awareness, which has been influenced by values, beliefs, and attitudes, is an essential factor when trying to understand other people (F. Guajardo et al., 2013, p. 71) within a school environment.

My security does not rest on the false supposition that I know everything or that I am the “greatest.” On the contrary, it rests on the conviction that there are some things I know and some things I do not know. My security is grounded on the knowledge, which experience itself confirms, that I am unfinished. (Freire, 1998, p. 120)

Researcher Credibility

My undergraduate studies have three areas of focus: agricultural business management and marketing, mathematics, and teacher certification. The master’s degree program I attended had a focus on educational leadership and was my first real venture into a program that opened my eyes to qualitative research. The focus of my undergraduate work was primarily on trends or algorithms to forecast or determine outcomes and solutions. I still remember my first reaction when I looked at my first autoethnographic study, “Hold on, this is research?” I was very puzzled and frankly put off to the idea. It was the first time I had my understanding and ideology of

research challenged. I was already on the fence about qualitative research, but autoethnography was hard for me to digest the first time I was exposed to it. However, as time went on and my depth of knowledge in the social sciences, I started to gain some understanding of qualitative research. As I completed my first semester of the doctoral program at Texas State University, I was comfortable with both quantitative and qualitative studies.

In fact, at this point in my life, I would argue that I personally see more value in qualitative studies as these studies pertain to my work as an educator. In my times as an educator, the numbers have failed to put substance to the faces in the classrooms, the hard work that may or may not go into the construction of a lesson, and so on. As I became a veteran of the profession, as I continued down my academic journey, and as I worked to turnaround campuses, the stories of the individuals in the schools in which I worked became valuable pieces of data to inform my work as an educator. As the dissertation process unfolded and started to take form, I decided that autoethnography would be the most appropriate way to conduct my study. Pratt (2015) was a visual person who used the writing process to try to capture the emotions and essence of a particular moment like a movie coming together (p. 833). Pratt's description of finding her voice resonates with the process I experienced in this study.

As my methodology unfolded and the work in this study moved forward, I had three areas to contend with as it pertained to validity. As Pratt (2015) wrote, finding my voice, negotiating university policies and procedures, and member-checking are important factors in ensuring the validity of an autoethnography. I found voice as the mechanisms of the writing process transitioned the thoughts from my head to writing out a timeline and stories.

My quest for the holy grail of answers was over; I came out of the Congress finally knowing that the next step was simply to start writing and to not be overly concerned that I still felt like I did not know what I was doing. (Pratt, 2015, p. 832)

For me the autoethnographic process was organic. The member-check list or in this case a peer-check list was a natural part of the process. Pratt (2015) wrote the following about her response to Pathak's four ethics, which are accountability, context, truthfulness, and community to consider when conducting autoethnography: "With these ethical principals guiding my direction, I still felt that a form of member-checking was needed to be able to articulate that what I was saying and presenting was legitimate, reliable, and valid" (p. 831). The peer-checking process in this study included the following people and components:

- I have collaborated with Dr. Grijalva over the years and shared my experiences during my tenure as a campus leader where I implemented and shaped my current perspective of turning around schools. Dr. Grijalva has over 16 years in the field of education and 10 of those years in leadership roles. He is also an individual with whom I am in constant conversation about my work as a campus leader and my work as a researcher. He is a member of my dissertation committee, a seasoned school leader, and a reader of this dissertation as a committee member.
- I was part of a three-person writing group made up of two doctoral students and one current PhD who is also one of our dissertation committee members. After a few months we had a fourth member join who was also part of the doctoral program at Texas State University. Six months later we joined another three-person writing group and grew to a six-member writing group of doctoral students at Texas State University. Each member is a current or past assistant principals or principal. Collectively, we have over 50 years of campus leadership experience.
- My dissertation co-chairs are both school and community leaders who have employed autoethnography as a method for research in their practice and research.

- For this study, I visited family members and engaged in *pláticas*. I used literature to support dates, events, and policies that informed my work. The *pláticas* helped with processing and placing events in a chronological order and supported my recollection of events.
- I used public databases found on the internet that the State of Texas uses to report STAAR testing results and campus information to verify data when applicable.
- My wife, an educator with 15 years of experience as a teacher and counselor, has read this dissertation and served as a sounding board for this process.

Finally, my research proposal was reviewed by the Texas State University Office of Research Integrity and Compliance (RIC) and it was found that it did not meet the definition of human subjects research. Therefore, there was no need for IRB approval.

Data Analysis

To address the following research questions, I conducted a data analysis according to the methods written in this section:

1. What does school turnaround mean to a Chicano administrator working in schools that are facing accountability sanctions?
2. How is a Chicano administrator's understanding of the conditions involved in school turnaround influenced by life experience, theory, and policy?
3. Where is the space for negotiation and reform of a Chicano administrator's school turnaround plan?

I used an analysis of the autoethnography to explore the cross sections and intersections of my life stories in combination with leadership theories and policy to frame the praxis I used in navigating the macro and micro political systems, economic structures, and social capital of my

turnaround efforts in low-performing schools. The model for analysis is given in Figure 2, and I used this model to analyze the storytelling of life experience, theory, and policy as they intersected to frame the tenets for my turnaround praxis in low-performing schools.

Figure 2 represents a way to map the three areas that affect the praxis I use for school turnaround. The life experience encompasses my upbringing, education, family life, athletic venture, work history, and career. In this circle, I identified the stories that framed my leadership praxis. The theory circle housed the theories that made up the qualities of school leadership and career theories to which I subscribed. The policy circle held all the policies and laws that drove school turnaround. The three intersections were all the areas that were common to the other two circles or affect the characteristics of the other two circles. In essence, these served as the driving forces to what shaped the leadership paradigm I used in my school leadership ideologies. The area where all three circles intersected was where the aspects for the actual school turnaround work were happening.

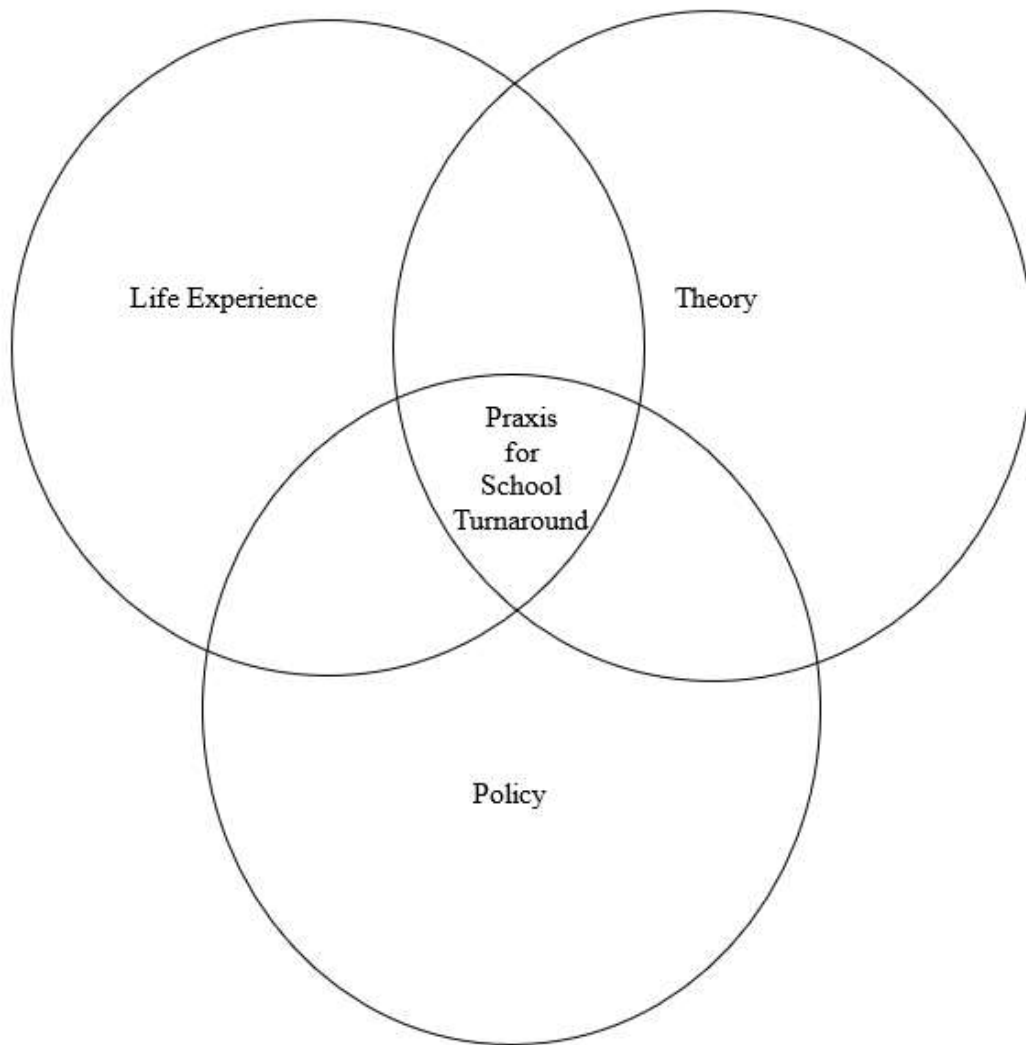


Figure 2. Analytical Framework for Autoethnography.

Implications

Schools are in the business of people, both the people inside the school and those outside the school. The macro and micro politics that govern schools are not always as obvious or as apparent as they seem on the surface. Add to this the complications brought on by implementing best practice and the vices associated with school effectiveness. How school leaders address these factors often leads to successful or unsuccessful ventures, especially as their efforts are applied to turning around low-performing schools. I designed my research to inform and

challenge school leaders to be reflective in their practice and make their work personal—for school leaders to take the time to define what they intend their work to mean.

Contributions

It was my hope that this work would inspire conversations among educators and school leaders, provoke future research to inquire into the behaviors of school leaders versus their learned programming, and spark educational leaders to take on the challenge required of them, which is to provide an equitable and a fair education to all students.

Ethical Considerations

The stories I wrote are very personal and many have not been shared with but a few others in my life. As I am a public-school educator, I used pseudonyms in textual representation of any identifiable information referencing anyone by name and the organizations/institutions in which they serve if applicable. Anyone who participated in informal conversations was notified of the research being conducted and the analysis of our conversations, and I obtained consent from each person who had their story shared as part of this research. At any time, anyone who shared in conversation with me could have removed themselves from the study.

IV. SCHOOL TURNAROUND

In this chapter, I present the findings from the stories and a timeline I created as the participant—as well as the researcher—and the world that created the necessary experiences for the included memories and experiences to manifest. Though my research partners never make it these pages, their lived experiences are present throughout the text. This work is never a solo venture, it is work that manifests and is lived in homes, with families, at school, and in communities. I wrote about my life experiences that have influenced my work as a school turnaround leader. The goal was to ignite conversation surrounding the thought process administrators use to inform their work in schools that are facing sanctions from state and federal governments. I used autoethnography as a method to retrospectively and selectively write about the stories that encapsulate my lived experiences (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 276) of serving as a turnaround leader. The goal was to use storytelling to gain insight into the life experiences that influenced an administrator's school turnaround paradigm. I used a timeline to highlight and organize events and critical moments of interest in my life and career experiences.

There are also external factors that influence the leadership paradigm of all school administrators. I analyzed educational theory, specifically educational leadership theory, and educational policy and law to find cross sections for this study. I used these cross sections to identify where life experience, educational theory, and educational policy converged and informed the practices I implemented as a school leader leading low-performing schools. By using the analytical framework tool as means to make sense of these three factors, I hoped that a formal praxis for school turnaround leadership would start to emerge and be able to serve a starting point for future research.

My intention within this body of research was also to spark conversation among administrators so they will seek and find the time and space to reflect, dialogue, and analyze their leadership practice when working to turnaround a school that has been deemed low performing. Results reflect what school turnaround means to a campus leader working to turn around a low-performing campus. Three questions guided the study:

1. What does school turnaround mean to a Chicano administrator working in schools that are facing accountability sanctions?
2. How is a Chicano administrator's understanding of the conditions involved in school turnaround influenced by life experience, theory, and policy?
3. Where is the space for negotiation and reform of a Chicano administrator's school turnaround plan?

Participant and Researcher Profile

I served as both the researcher and participant in the study. I am a Hispanic man who grew up on the East Side of Austin, Texas. I come from a working-class family, and my parents owned a small-scale dry cleaning shop. I graduated from high school in 1995 and earned a master's degree in 1999. I hold a Standard Texas Teacher Certificate with credentials in the following areas: Secondary Mathematics (Grades 6–12), Principal (EC–12), and Superintendent (EC–12). I am completing my 23rd year as an educator, during which I have spent 9 years as a classroom teacher and coach and 14 as a campus leader.

During this time, I took on four school turnaround initiatives. All of the campuses had the following characteristics: rated low performing by the State of Texas, a minority–majority school, and over 50% of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch. I have served as a middle school assistant principal, the principal of a secondary campus Grades 6–12, held the

positions of associate principal and principal at a comprehensive high school, and was a middle school principal. The campuses have been located or were part of the following: a major urban school district, a small rural school district, in a suburb of a major metropolitan area, or a mid-sized school district.

Timeline

I created a timeline to serve as a starting point and to frame pivotal points in the trajectory of this study. I developed the timeline as an Excel document with seven titles. Only some of the data from the timeline were used. The two portions of the timeline used in this study can be found in Appendix A and B.

Date	School/Title	School Level	Ed. Academic Degree	Position	Duties & Work Experience	Other Places or Institutions in Past	Comments
1974	White	HS	Ed. Ed. Program				
1977		HS	Ed. Ed. Program				
1979		HS	Ed. Ed. Program				
1979	White Intermediate School	HS	Ed. Ed. Program				
1980	White Training Improvement	HS	Ed. Ed. Program				
1981		Elementary	Master's Elementary				
1982		Elementary	Ed. Ed. Program				
1983		Elementary	Ed. Ed. Program				
1984	The One Stop Parent	Elementary	Master's Elementary				
1985		Elementary	Ed. Ed. Program				
1986	TEALD Training Improvement	Elementary	Ed. Ed. Program				
1987		Elementary	Master's Elementary				
1988		Elementary	Master's Elementary				
1989	White High School	HS	Ed. Ed. Program				
1990	TEALD Training Improvement	Senior High School	Ed. Ed. Program				
1991		High School	Ed. Ed. Program				
1992		High School	Ed. Ed. Program				
1993		High School	Ed. Ed. Program				
1994		High School	Ed. Ed. Program				
1995		High School	Ed. Ed. Program				
1996	University of Texas	Graduate	Ed. Ed. Program				
1997	TEALD Training Improvement	University of Texas	Ed. Ed. Program				
1998	TEALD Training Improvement	University of Texas	Ed. Ed. Program				
1999		University of Texas	Ed. Ed. Program				
2000		University of Texas	Ed. Ed. Program				
2001	The Child Care Bureau	University of Texas	Ed. Ed. Program				

Figure 3. Screenshot of Timeline I Created as the Participant.

Low-Performing Campuses

The timeline shows the following campus information: they were predominately minority; over 50% of the students were from low socioeconomic households; and the campuses were facing or were headed toward having sanctions placed on them from the State of Texas, the federal government, or both. This portion of the timeline is presented in Appendix A.

My lived experiences had an influence on the schools in which I would choose to work. “Career decision-making is unique to each individual. It represents the processing of information constantly being received from the system by a combination of conscious and unconscious processes” (Patton & McMahon, 2014, pp. 265–266). In Appendix B, I present the portion of the timeline that reflects my own personal journey, who I was taught by, and the demographics of the staff and students in the schools for which I could find the information in Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) reports. What is interesting is that in my formative years, through the sixth grade, I primarily had minority teachers. Though I never thought this to be odd, this fact was pointed out to me by a colleague. His interpretation was that this was not common, and unlike his experience, most minorities do not often have this kind of experience when they are in school. My interpretation is that I was lucky to have hidden factors that played a part in influencing my academic journey as a child.

Appendix C contains information about the school policies that were passed and implemented in my time as a student and educator. These policies are important because they had a direct impact on me as a student and educator.

I also think it is important to note that in my experience as an educator, low-performing schools were always seen as a challenge with high stakes. What does this mean? Well, in my time in working in low-performing schools, those who succeeded in turning around such schools were often looked highly upon by central administration and other educators, whereas those who failed to turn around such a school often found it difficult to find another principal position. I always struggled to understand why turning around a low-performing school was so hard. The way I saw it, I grew up in an area with very similar conditions and did well. There was not anything unique about me. I do not have some hidden genius or uncanny skill set. A student-

centered approach was enacted where I was expected to do well in school, and I had people in my life who cared enough to push me and not let me slack off.

The analyses that follow in each section of this chapter emerged as a result of finding the intersection of life experience (stories), school theory, and school policy and law (see Figure 2).

Participant Stories

The following data are presented as I wrote them when I reflected on framing school turnaround and how my life experiences influenced my turnaround initiatives. Only names have been changed to pseudonyms. The data are presented in raw form as I wrote the stories. Each story is then followed by a discussion of the educational theory and educational policy/law that coincides with the story presented. These are the intersections of all three areas from Figure 2. I wrote the section titled A Final Note once all the data were compiled.

Schools in Turmoil: A Practitioner's Viewpoint

Figure 4 is a picture I drew to represent how low-performing schools function when I first go into them.

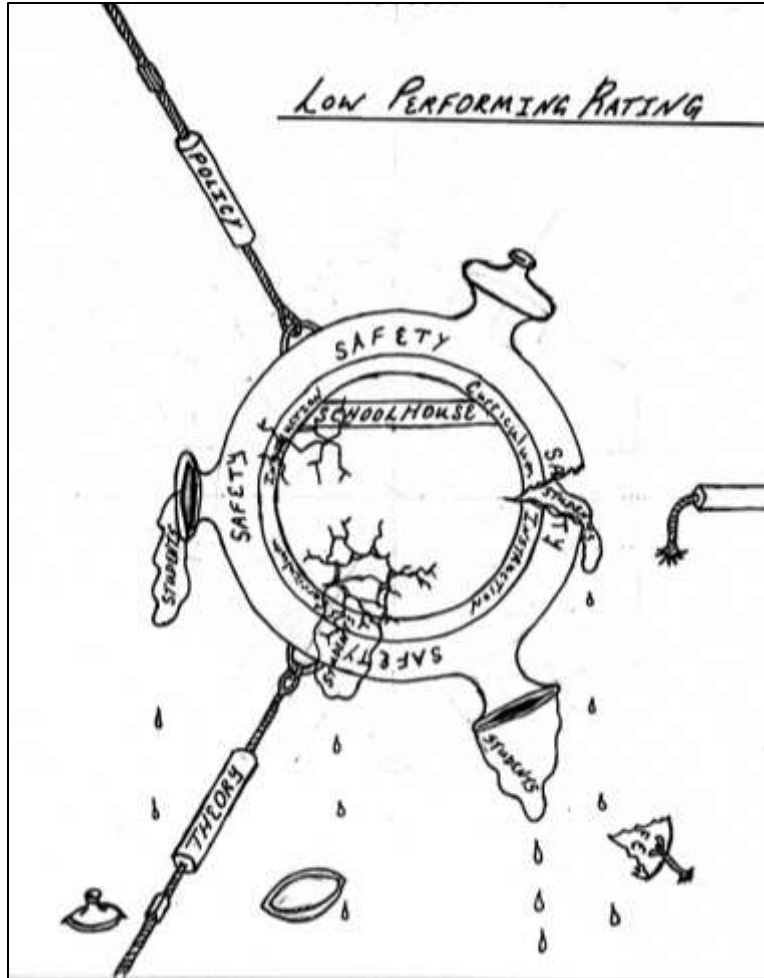


Figure 4. Low-Performing Rating.

The following data are presented as I wrote them about low-performing schools to explain Figure 4.

The picture I drew depicts what the low performing schools that I have worked in as an administrator felt and look like when I join the administrative team. There are three driving forces which act as the main supports for the school. Educational Theory, Educational Policy (Law, School Board Policy, Etc.), and Campus Leadership.

Educational theory is used as a driver of best practice, but the practices and strategies are only implemented at a superficial level or not at all. Buy in is low from teachers, understanding is missing, and fidelity is almost non-existent.

Policy is as a driver for school operations, but policy is not implemented with fidelity and is mostly void of sound and culturally responsive theory. Only components or the parts which are easy to implement and obvious at the surface prevail and exist.

Campus leadership is detached from the school's reality. Even systems which are common practice are hardly used as a checks and balance by prior campus administrative teams. Often, teachers are allowed to close their classroom doors and proceed as they see fit with little to no dialogue with the other professionals on campus about their students, curriculum, or instruction. Systems are very loosely put together or non-existent. This creates a school which is fractured and broken. I used water to represent the students. Students leave the school in no better shape than when they entered the school, in fact, some students leave worse off than when they entered the school.

The vessel that is used to represent the schoolhouse has cracks and pieces broken off. This represents the concerns with systems, structures, routines, and procedures which should support teaching and learning. As is shown in the picture, only two supports are holding the structure in place. The two structures are so firmly in place as foundation pieces that prior administrative teams believe these two structures are strong enough to hold the vessel in place without the other support of campus leadership.

Safety is still a foundational element, as this topic is front and center for the operations of all schools. The next layer is curriculum and instruction. But as the picture shows, these two layers are insulators and not supports.

The picture shows structural faults on every structure of the vessel and students leaving from all openings. The entry and exit point which still has a top on it, represents the gatekeepers which need to be breached in order for students to leave the schoolhouse prepared for the next level. This port of entry remains closed as not many students leave ready for the next step or phase of their life after they leave the schoolhouse.

Nothing else is on the drawing, because the prior campus administration has a narrow scope and purpose of what else should be going on within the structure of the schoolhouse. What the prior administration believes should take place is already written in policy with initiatives like showing that students have College, Career, and Military Readiness.

Leadership Theory as Related to a Practitioner's Viewpoint

Educational theory indicates the problem with low-performing schools lies with the person who implements a practice and why a practice is or is not working. Hermanns and Berliner (2021) wrote that there are schools in which leaders are doing innovative work that can be interpreted to support democratic education, but these instances are rare. They went on to say that when a problem in K–12 education is identified and a solution given (as in it “works”), the solution is often not transferable, even when implementation is done with near fidelity. The

failure often occurs because there is a lack of follow up with the following questions: “effective for whom, and in what context” (Hermanns & Berliner, 2021, p. 8).

School Policy as Related to a Practitioner’s Viewpoint

The U.S. Government and the Texas Government give very definite guidelines for a school that is rated low performing.

Federal Government. The ESSA of 2015 (U.S. Department of Education, 2015) defines how a school comes to be determined as in need of comprehensive support and improvement activities or targeted support and improvement activities (formerly known as school improvement). At a minimum, the lowest 5% of performing schools in a state will need to have an improvement plan in place. The ESSA contains requirements for schools to recruit qualified teachers, principals, and instructional personnel. The ESSA also stipulates that schools should retain qualified educators. Professional development is a component that is often mentioned as a factor in school improvement, and the strategies that will be used should be evidence-based and proven to improve student performance. The ESSA also provides guidance for states to set up their state accountability systems.

Texas Government. A school is designated as a school that needs improvement when the school earns a D or F rating through the state accountability system (TEA, n.d.-c). Once a school has been identified as in need of school improvement or turnaround, the school’s leaders will write a Targeted Intervention Plan (TIP) and work with their regional Education Service Center to identify and target two to three essential actions to improve student performance. When school leaders write a TIP, they use the ESF Self-Assessment tool to help identify needs (TEA, 2021b). The ESF Self-Assessment tool and the TIP development align to the ESF (TEA, 2021b). The ESF (TEA, 2021c) lists the following five levers:

Lever 1: Strong School Leadership and Planning. Effective campus instructional leaders with clear roles and responsibilities develop, implement, and monitor focused improvement plans that address the causes of low performance.

Strategic Staffing: Campus leadership retains effective, well-supported teachers by strategically recruiting, selecting, assigning and inducting teachers so that all students have access to high-quality educators.

Positive School Culture: Positive school culture requires compelling and aligned vision, mission, goals and values, explicit behavioral expectations and management system, proactive and responsive student support services, and involved families and community.

High-Quality Instructional Materials and Assessments: All students engage daily with TEKS-aligned, high-quality instructional materials, and assessments that support learning at appropriate levels of rigor.

Effective Instruction: Campus leaders provide teachers with job-embedded professional development and access to time and data needed to reflect, adjust, and deliver instruction that meets the needs of all students. (pp. 3–8)

Findings: Practitioner's Viewpoint

In looking at the analysis tool (see Figure 2), my focus was to find where life experience, educational theory, and educational law/policy intersected to provide the praxis for school turnaround as it applied to a practitioner's viewpoint. When looking at the viewpoint of a practitioner, the tool shows where the breakdown is happening in the three driving forces in a school that is rated as low performing. The problem is often with the campus leadership. Educational theory places the fault with those individuals who do not ask questions to seek solutions that will work for their local context. For example, one of the tenets of transformational leadership is "Intellectual stimulation: 'Transformational leaders stimulate their followers' efforts to be innovative and creative by questioning assumptions, reframing problems, and approaching old situations in new ways'" (Bass & Riggio, 2005, p. 7). At the policy level, schools with a low-performing rating are those that fail to meet the standards for achievement on standardized testing. Again, the assertion can be made that this failure goes back to the campus

leadership, as campus leaders are writing and monitoring improvement plans. When campus leaders write improvement plans, they may not know what they do not know. Shah et al. (2023)

[explored] the ways in which leaders are continuously negotiating levels and directions of harm, in which it is helpful for leaders within a system to conceive of themselves as engaging in harm and oppression even as they aim to dismantle harm and oppression. (p. 208)

Campus leaders drive what is checked and how. The efforts of campus leaders should include the space for them to be reflective on their own practices.

Life Experience: School Turnaround – The Vision

The following narrative presents my critical reflection on a series of my life experiences.

This is a culmination of life events that have informed my vision as a campus leader.

When I walk into a school and start a venture in school turnaround all the factors listed above frame what School Turnaround means to me. The effort, time, and energy which I spend in helping a low-performing campus go beyond STAAR scores. Yes, these scores are important. If you do not take care of state and federal accountability, then the movement and grassroots work which needs to happen is stalled and negotiated by someone or something else. But I have reframed my thinking about all standardized testing and achievement tests. These exams should be the floor and not the ceiling when our students are showing what they have learned. Quality instruction will prevail, and students win. Get the right people working in your school or get the people there working right.

From an administrative point of view, if you plan to take a student-centered approach, then you must know that this mindset is driven by working with the faculty and staff as a campus leader. Remember, as a campus administrator, you are responsible for the entire student body, faculty, and staff. Teachers are responsible for the teaching and learning of students. The guidance an administrator gives to the faculty and staff is the only responsible way to foster a culture which is student-centered. I remember in one of the master's degree classes I took, Miguel Guajardo stated, "Give me 5 soldiers, and I can change the culture of any campus." At the time, I was a teacher and was curious and wanted to understand this statement on a deeper level. The conversation never came up directly in our conversations as a class or in individual meetings. However, in my quest to understand this statement; my work in turning around the first campus I was in that was low-performing, and through leading a second campus out of low-performing status, the message became clear. Find people to believe the work is worth the time and effort. Get people to believe in students. Support your colleagues in their pursuit of excellence and students will follow.

During one of my first meetings as the incoming principal of a low-performing school, and prior to my official start date as the campus principal, I asked the faculty and staff to give real consideration about returning in August. In that meeting with the current faculty and staff and when interviewing candidates for vacancies, I made the following statements and asked that people reconsider their employment for the coming school year or think about these statements before accepting a position with us. These statements encapsulate the position I expect the faculty and staff to work from when walking through the doors in August.

- Have an open heart for students.
- Have an open mind.
- Meet or exceed the expectations you set for others.
- Try your best.

The last one tends to be the hardest one for individuals to handle or meet. Hardest, because I expect the best the faculty and staff can bring to the campus every day. Examples of what I mean, turning in lesson plans, working with students when students are in turmoil, reflect on their own work, etc. I pose the four statements because the work we are doing will go beyond standardized and aptitude testing.

My turnaround mindset is rooted in having students develop and learn how to be critical and free thinkers. Students who learn and grasp this concept commit to having a strong voice and know how to be heard. Our priority as educators is to send students out into the next phase of their life knowing they are prepared. Our focus as educators is to help students develop awareness and agency.

The most important thing for students to know, “Ask questions:”

- When something sounds too good to be true.
- When something causes you to get an uneasy feeling because it just does not sound or seem right.
- When there is a need to hear the other side of the story.
- When you think or believe you are wearing blinders and do not realize there is another side of the story.
- When you have a question.

As a concluding statement, as a group of educators, we will also partner with students’ parents to ensure all the adults are on the same page or working to get to that point.

This is the vision.

Leadership Theory: The Vision

Vision is a key component of effective leadership, but the effectiveness of a clear vision remains mixed, even when the vision is clearly articulated (Bush & Glover, 2014, p. 555).

Policy: The Vision

“The board shall adopt a vision statement and comprehensive goals for the district and the superintendent and monitor progress toward those goals” (TEC, 2009, Sec. 11.1511). The ESF (TEA, 2021c) Lever 3: Positive School Culture also requires that stakeholders create and continually refine the campus vision (p. 3).

Analysis of the Vision

In looking at the analysis tool (see Figure 2), my focus was to find where life experience, educational theory, and educational law/policy intersected to provide the praxis for school turnaround as it applied to vision. Vision is a component of my entry plan into a low-performing school. Educational theory indicates vision is important but not necessarily why it is important, and educational policy mandates that a district’s governing body have a vision for the district and the district’s superintendent that drives the goals for the district. Educational policy therefore drives what is most important in terms of monitoring.

Findings: The Vision

Schools in general have three anchors that support teaching and learning. Educational theory, educational policy/law, and the leadership team or leader serve as the anchors that hold the mechanism, which is the school, steady. Educational policy/law tends to be the most stable of the three anchors, as educational policy/law has a low frequency of change. Though educational theory has a wider range to draw from, there is still a manageable body of research to pull from when deciding which theory will be used to influence the teaching and learning of a school.

Educational theory itself usually has a foundation based in vetted practices. The real unknown is what the school leader or the school leadership team brings with them to a school they will lead. “When transformational leadership works well, it has the potential to engage all stakeholders in the achievement of educational objectives” (Bush & Glover, 2014, p. 558).

The last anchor I listed, life experience, has the most profound impact on teaching and learning. The four low-performing schools in which I worked had educational theory and educational law/policy in place, but the educational leadership was fractured. The educational leaders decided what was important, what would be checked, and many times who got to lead and who did not get to lead in a school. In all, Leithwood et al. (2020) provided seven claims regarding school leadership. The first claim is that leadership is important to school improvement efforts because of the leader’s influence on teaching and learning. Often, educational law/policy and educational theory are the driving forces of school turnaround versus the educational leader or educational leadership team serving as the change agent. The vision and mission of the school hinges on the educational leader or educational leadership team.

School Turnaround: The Events Which Influence

The following story describes how my life experience influenced school turnaround. The story is presented and filtered through my lens.

Leader for the Teacher: Human Resources

Figure 5 represents a calling to serve and protect quality people in the organization and how leadership should act as a shield for those individuals.



Figure 5. The Shield.

The following text is provided as it was written and filtered by me as the participant:

In my 4th year as an educator, I also realized that I needed to make a move into the administrative ranks. Tommy Preston is a great guy with a great story. An African American, who was a teen father, a man who defied the odds, who graduated with a degree from the University of Cameron Oregon, and was a young head coach at the time who was working at a high school which was chasing a dream from years past. The high school in general was also chasing a shadow of itself which it had not seen for at least a decade or more. While his impact on my leadership philosophy is both simple and short, the impact was great.

Within a year of Coach Preston's arrival, the football program had a great challenge in front of it. The season prior to his arrival, Ronald High School had made it to the Texas football semi-finals in the state playoffs. The academic program was headed towards being placed on state sanctions with recent and past testing results. In essence, you had two programs [an academic program and an athletic program] at the high school which were headed in the same direction, and this direction did not have a positive outlook to it.

High School Football in Texas is big business, and a lot of hopes and dreams get shattered and realized by all parties involved each year. For some, playing high school football will be one of the highlights of their life. For others, high school football is a means to a brighter future and a pathway to access a post-secondary education. With the stakes this high for the high school football program, we had a group of parents who did not agree with the direction in which Coach Preston was taking the football program, and they raised many concerns.

The pressure was mounting, and Coach Preston knew that some battles are not worth the fight, so in his 3rd year, he decided to step down from his position as the Head Coach and Campus Coordinator at Ronald High School. A good man, who was good for the students at Ronald High School was pressured to surrender his position, because the

real change and academic improvement which needed to happen was missing from the campus, so a quicker and easier change was set into motion.

On the same night that Coach Preston informed us that he was in his last season as the Head Coach at Ronald High School, I made a decision to become a high school administrator. I knew I could continue to teach and coach with no problem. I could chalk up his experience to the natural consequences of being in a highly political position, or I could do something about it.

Leadership Influence: Human Resources

I decided that instead of complaining about the series of events that happened to Coach Preston, I would go back to school, get a master's degree, and made myself this promise, "I would advocate and fight for people who are great for students on any staff I might one day lead."

Leadership Theory: Human Resources

Fullan (2008a) stated capacity building prevails. Secret 3 is about improving a school through recruiting, selecting, and investing in employees.

Policy: Human Resources

At both the federal level with the ESSA and the state level with the ESF, the recruitment and retainment of highly-qualified individuals are priorities (TEA, 2021c; TEC, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Student-Centered Stewardship

The comic strip in Figure 6 represents how I envisioned the majority of my elementary education.

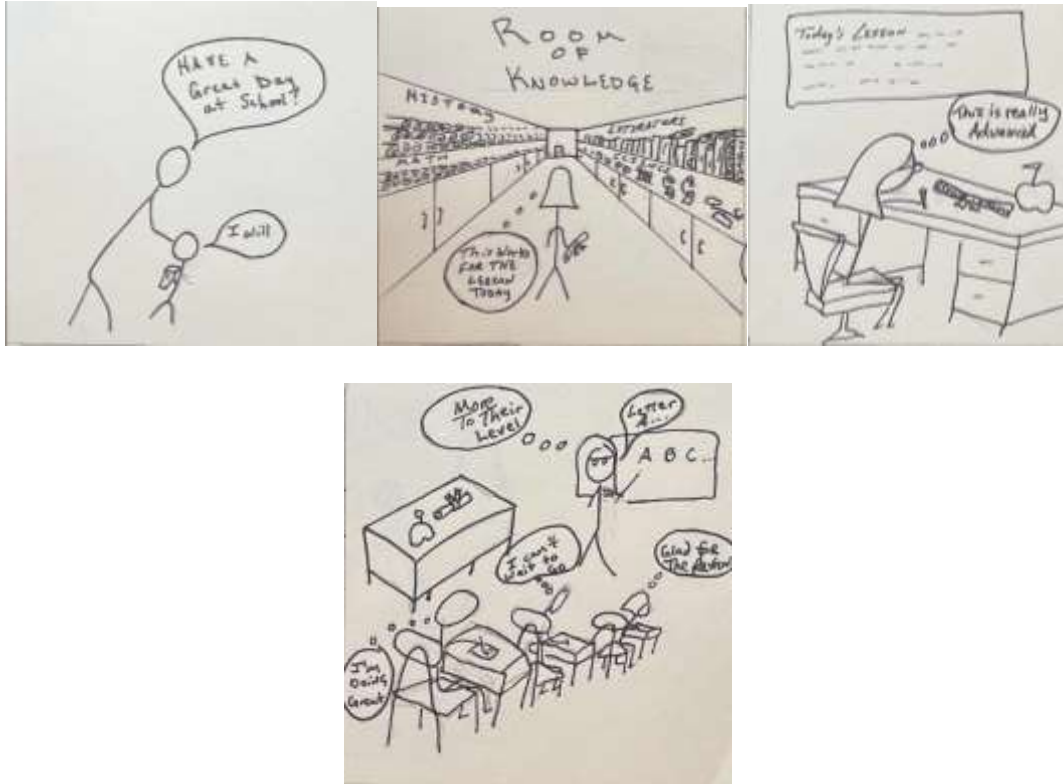


Figure 6. The Instructional Process.

The following text is provided as it was written and filtered by me as the participant:

My mother and father would make it clear that in their life going to school was not a venture either of them finished.

My father would often say that by the age of 12 he was working full time as a dishwasher for the State School. Most of the stories he told about his time in school revolved around not being allowed to speak Spanish or the consequences he was given as a disciplinary measure. He would also mention that his classwork often consisted of coloring activities well into the 5th and 6th grades when he was in class. Then finally that he just stopped going to school, because he was doing well working, so he did not see the need to go to school. What caused him to value education was his time working in a laundry as a teenager and young man. He saw one of his boss' sons go to and from college. This was eye opening to him, and he realized that while he may have missed his opportunity, he was going to be sure that his children understood the value of having an education.

My mother stopped attending school when she could not pay for a library book which her friend never returned for her. In general, she said she liked school and really wished she would have finished. She used to say the same thing about being in school and not being allowed to speak Spanish while at school. She was also supportive of me, and she would do what she could to make sure we had what we needed for school.

Another thing my parents had in common, which I found interesting, is that they each had to use English equivalents for their names. My dad had to use Joseph instead of Jose, and my mother had to use Mary instead of Maria. Both would talk about how this was something that happened to them in school, and while not a major thing, they both spoke of this well after they were out of school, and they both used the English equivalents of their names as adults.

My brother also took an active role in my educational journey. While the influence he added was only brief and at one major junction in my life, the impact was probably the most influential factor in reaching my full potential. When I was being recruited to go to the Magnet Program, I really wanted to follow my friends and go to my neighborhood school. When he found out that my father was going to let me make this move, my brother stepped in. Little did I know at the time, but he missed out on a great opportunity when he was in school. My brother did not want me to make the same mistake. After he and my father spent some time talking about this opportunity, my father insisted that I apply and give it my best effort.

Figure 7 represents how the adults in schools must advocate for students, because while at school, the faculty and staff provide most of what students need to thrive in the first phase of life after high school.



Figure 7. The Growth.

The following text is provided as it was written and filtered by me as the participant:

Leadership Influence: Student-Centered Stewardship

As a school leader I look for the educators who are willing to advocate for students. People who work in the school should be one of the catalysts to expose and to help students find the kind of success school can bring to them later in life. While my parents expected their children to be successful, the finite details of how this was to be done were things they did not know. As a leader, I have not come across a parent who did not want the same for their own children, but often many parents do not understand the work it takes for their children to find this kind of success. Therefore, as educators, we shoulder the pressure to serve as advocates for all students.

Leadership Theory: The Events Which Influence

Leithwood et al. (2020) wrote about seven claims regarding school leadership. The following claims align to the teachers teaching at a faculty.

Claim 1. School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning.

Claim 2. Almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices . . . build relationships and develop people . . . stimulate growth in professional capacities for individual staff members . . . improve the instructional program . . . leaders staff the instructional program, provide instructional support, monitor student learning and school improvement progress, and buffer staff from distractions to their instructional work.

Claim 3. The ways in which leaders apply these leadership practices – not the practices themselves – demonstrate responsiveness to, rather than dictation by, the contexts in which they work.

Claim 4. School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully by improving the status of significant key classroom and school conditions by encouraging parent/child interactions in the home that further enhance student success at school. (pp. 5–12)

Policy: The Events Which Influence

The ESF (TEA, 2021c) Lever 3: Positive School Culture also requires schools to administer regular campus climate surveys to include students, staff, and families for their responses regarding student and staff experiences around key climate indicators (p. 3).

Analysis of the Events Which Influence

In looking at the analysis tool (see Figure 2), my focus was to find where life experience, educational theory, and educational law/policy intersected to provide the praxis for school turnaround as it applied to the events which influence. This section included three drawings (see Figures 5–7) to illustrate my view of how my life experiences influenced my leadership decisions. The shield represents how campus leadership must be a protector of those individuals who work for the better good of students. Tied to the work the faculty and staff are doing is ensuring they are providing students with the academic tools they need to succeed in the next phase of their academic journey or life. In an educator's pursuit in forging the academic tools needed by students to find success, the educator serves as the catalyst for the growth and development of the students. The educator is guided by the campus leader to serve as the educator's advocate and defender, to influence the educator's understanding of selecting and imparting quality curriculum and instruction, and to provide the educator with the tools to serve as a mentor and advocate for students. Social justice leaders can change instructional expectations by ensuring the school has a shift toward student-centered schooling, where systems/structures, culture/climate, and instruction are focused on the students and their needs (Amiot et al., 2020, p. 212). Educational theory and educational policy support all three of these initiatives.

To me, each of these factors plays a key role in the development and preparation of a turnaround paradigm.

Findings of the Events Which Influence

The educational leader or educational leadership team must exude what is important in a school turnaround effort. First, the educational leader or educational leadership team must take care of the adults who are good for students. Teachers and other staff members typically spend a much greater amount of time in contact with students. Therefore, a teacher's impact is much more profound on the day-to-day of schooling for students than the leadership team ever will have the time to do for students. The takeaway here is that educational leaders of a low-performing school should take care of the people in the school who will take care of students' best interests and hold students' best interests in the highest regard.

Second point of interest—Teachers need to be the champions of their students. In general, educators always love a supportive parent, especially when parents support their child's education by backing up the teacher and working with their child. However, where do teachers stand when a parent does not support their child or does not know how to support their child? Who comes to the rescue? The answer is that typically a teacher, staff member, or another campus professional fills the void or provides the extra support. "Many factors contribute to a student's academic performance, including individual characteristics and family and neighborhood experiences. But research suggests that, among school-related factors, teachers matter most" (Opper, 2014, p. 1). The educational leadership team is responsible for pushing back on deficit thinking and providing the faculty and staff with mechanisms that will support students as they prepare for the next step in their journey.

The knowledge that underpins the "crossing over" required of me to diminish the distance between me and the perverse reality of the exploited is the knowledge grounded in an ethical code that will not permit the exploitation of men and women by other men and women. (Freire, 1998, p. 123)

School Turnaround: Accountability Paradigm

Figure 8 represents my vision of what a school turnaround initiative should look like when completed. Students leave ready for the world at large, and because options were available, they are ready for the next phase of their life.



Figure 8. School Turnaround: Accountability Paradigm.

In my experience, I hold onto a set of non-negotiables that are expected from faculty and staff. These non-negotiables are designed to develop hope and faith in students that their minds are being prepared to handle the demands life can bring upon them. As a school leader, I shoulder this burden in the periphery of everything I do. To accomplish this, the non-negotiables can be categorized into seven parts. One part is a foundation piece and the other six are pillars for turning around a low-performing school and moving beyond test scores as the metric to measure the school's accomplishments.

The six pillars sit on a base foundation that starts with safety. Fear is never a component that is conducive to learning, so at the most basic level is safety. The six pillars are the curriculum used; the instructional strategies implemented; the social emotional program available to all students, parents, faculty, and staff; the systems that do and do not get put into

motion; what is celebrated; and how decisions are made. These six pillars are at the core of the accountability paradigm I use when leading a turnaround effort.

There are many times when curriculum becomes a topic of interest. As an example, I can recall a time when I was in my first principalship that an English teacher and I had a colorful discussion regarding the classics. One point I made to her was that as a student myself, I never enjoyed reading many of the classics that were presented to me in school. I read them because I knew my grades would suffer if I did not, but as I explained to her, was that the best way to select reading material, through fear that if the material is not read, then grades will suffer and playing time will be affected? Or is the purpose of the material she was using to increase an authentic interest in reading with a critical eye? I also posed this question to her: Were the classics the only way to teach the skills necessary for her class or would contemporary material do the trick? It took a few more conversations and a willingness to try something different, but by the next school year, the English department she led had a mixture of classics and contemporary works for students to read. She was not forced or mandated to use a certain list of reading material, but she was asked to think about why the reading list she was using was so important. When student engagement and student interest are not at the top of the list of reasons, it is time to reconsider our practice. As I wrote my accountability paradigm, this is what I had to say on the matter:

What we teach students is important. The resources and materials used to convey knowledge can hinder and expand a student's understanding of a topic . . . The curriculum is a vital component which should capture the personal interest of students.

In addition, how the materials are taught is important. Students learn in different ways and teachers need to find what instructional strategy will work best for their students.

When evaluating an instructional program, I seek to answer the following questions: How versed are the instructional leaders on campus? What kind of instruction is being used in the

classrooms? Traditional versus cooperative learning strategies? What tools can the instructional leaders offer teachers? The effectiveness of the delivery of the material is a crucial component for student engagement. On a few occasions I have had to team teach with teachers or teach a lesson to demonstrate how questioning techniques combined with hands-on activities can drive student participation. As I grew in my own understanding of instructional activities, I developed my skills as a coach and mentor when working with teachers.

Another pillar of support is the social-emotional program. For me, the social-emotional program extends beyond discipline. Yes, a deep dive is done with discipline measures, but this has always been a surface-level problem that has been correctable by using restorative practices and communicating with parents. When I think of the social-emotional program, I also consider the strategies in place within the school for students who fall through the cracks. The students who have been left to their own vices to select courses and programs of study for themselves. The student who was at one time a high-performing student who no longer is managing the demands life has thrown at them and cannot devote the time to completing tasks such as homework or does not see the benefit of completing an application for entry into a program to which they are entitled such as the pre-advanced placement program. I know this sounds out there, but I have come across both issues as reasons why a student could no longer be part of the pre-advanced placement program. I have found students in this position need not only a teacher who is understanding, but one who can build solid relationships with students. The teacher who can identify when students need a different level of support to help them continue their pursuit of excellence. The list is much longer when thinking about the reasons why students have been excluded from programs in a school, but again I come back to what I wrote when thinking about

school turnaround: “I work from the perspective that all students come to school with a good foundation on building relationships.” How is this all accounted for in a school?

Systems is a vital pillar in the school turnaround paradigm I use when going in as the campus leader. What I journaled about systems, I wrote the following:

Systems help organizations with organizing within the organization, provide routines, and provide procedures for the organization . . . Schools are responsible for many individuals and tasks daily, and to maintain an environment which is conducive to student learning, a systemic way of thinking makes for an effective and efficient way of operating the school.

Systems are a part of the checks and balances I use in schools. Even in the next pillar, celebrations.

I will start the discussion about celebrations with what I wrote and filtered as the participant for this study:

I do not assume that all students are celebrated. I grew up playing sports. I learned early that winners and champions are celebrated often. However, not everyone competes. Think about the student who comes to school every day and follows all the rules. There is also the student who hardly ever misses school. I am not saying you have a parade for these students, but I do believe that this level of success is something to celebrate, even if the sign of gratitude is something small. The same goes for the faculty and staff in showing appreciation for them.

I can recall both major and minor mishaps when recognizing students. Two examples. In one instance a student who was overlooked to be recognized had to advocate for themselves, even with systems in place to do my best to make sure this did not happen. The reward was simple. I try to celebrate students who come to school and follow the rules. A snack and a drink for all students, and the chance for them to win a bigger prize happens in every grading period. This one time I had a young man confront me in the middle of the high school hallway and he made it known to me that he was left out. Here I stood as the principal of the school, being scolded by a student I had left off the list. He had his attendance record with him and demanded that I check his records to ensure he had not been in any trouble. I complied and made things right with him.

He was happy, but in the big picture, our system needed to be checked. The other story I will tell you was a more drastic mistake and one that sits with me until this day. A lot of times we experience those once in a lifetime moments, like high school graduation or competing for a state championship, which are significant moments in my opinion. At commencement it has been customary for our program to recognize the top 10 graduating seniors. This part of the program is rehearsed, I go over it with the counselor reading names, and often I sit down a few times with the counselor reading the names to make sure we have accounted for all the top 10 graduating seniors. To me this is a big deal, and those seniors should be celebrated. One year a senior was left off because the counselor reading names overlooked one name. Though every effort was made to correct this mishap, the opportunity was missed, and as the campus principal I feel I failed the student. I wish it had not happened. But it did happen on my watch. Even with all the preparations done before time, it happened. I felt horrible then and still do now.

The last pillar in my school turnaround paradigm is the decision-making process. I believe building the capacity and leadership qualities of individuals is important. In my last venture as a building principal, I was fortunate to get help and was able to hire an assistant principal. I wanted to go in house, so I was very selective in choosing the assistant principal and grooming her to help lead the campus. She was instrumental in solidifying teams to help move the school forward and in identifying other campus leaders.

Leadership Theory: Accountability Paradigm

Fullan's (2008a) change theory works from the perspective of the following five assumptions: theory is meant to apply to large-scale reform; the set has to be understood as synergistic; the six secrets are heavily nuanced – in that a lot of thought and application must happen to appreciate their use; they are motivationally embedded; and each of the six secrets

represents a tension or dilemma (Fullan, 2008a, Introduction section). The assumptions serve as a foundation to ensure the Six Secrets of Change Theory travel well from one organization to another. Fullan used these five assumptions to give context to the idea or his intention for a theory of action. “Good theories are critical because they give you a handle on the underlying reason (really the underlying thinking) behind actions and their consequences” (Using a Good Theory section).

The Six Secrets of Change provide the following tenets for leadership.

Secret 1: Love your employees. This secret includes more than employees, it refers to all stakeholders. Investing in employees to relation to high quality purpose. It also asks that leaders treat stakeholders equally. Secret 1 is consider the foundation secret (Fullan, 2008a, Secret One section).

Secret 2: Connect peers with purpose. This secret requires purposeful peer interaction. Secret 2 serves as the social and intellectual glue, where teachers learn from one another (Fullan, 2008a, Secret Two section).

Secret 3: Capacity building prevails. Leaders play a primary role in the recruitment of employees, the selection of employees, and investing in employees (Fullan, 2008a, Secret Three section).

Secret 4: Learning is the work. A balance must exist between consistency and innovation. There needs to be precision for consistence performance (what is known) combined with new learning for improvement. Learning on the job is a key component to building capacity (Fullan, 2008a, Secret Four section).

Secret 5: Transparency rules. Data should be used as means to grow and not humiliate. Transparency creates aspirational goals and builds capacity. Find trends by using multiple years

of data. Data is a way to target help to improve performance. Use data to be open about results and open about successful practices (Fullan, 2008a, Secret Five section).

Secret 6: Systems learn. The systems which are implemented should work toward developing many leaders working together. Leaders “are led by people who approach complexity with a combination of humility and faith that effectiveness can be maximized under the circumstances” (Fullan, 2008a, Secret One section).

Fullan (2008a) also provided guidelines for keeping the secrets. The first is seize the synergy. This requires working on one secret while working on multiple secrets at once. The secrets already have accountability built into them. The second is to define your own traveling theory. Leaders need to develop and refine good theory. Good theories are succinct and action based. The third is share a secret, keep a secret. The best way to keep secrets is to share them. Find balance between guidance and listening. The fourth is understanding the world is the only oyster you have. “The world is not yours for the taking, but it is yours for the making” (Fullan, 2008a, The World Is the Only Oyster You Have section). “Context is everything” (Fullan, 2008a, The World Is the Only Oyster You Have section). Where in society does the organization you lead, fit? The fifth one is to stay on the far side of complexity. Do not search for silver bullets. The newest trend or strategy will not repair a complex organization. Recognize a complex issue, but do not let those complex issues defeat you. The last one is happiness is not what some of us think. Your work has to go beyond capitalistic ideals. Happiness is rooted in leadership. Unlock the secrets for yourself while manifesting the conditions for others to find happiness at work.

Policy: Accountability Paradigm

The ESF (TEA, 2021c) has the following levers for school improvement: strong school leadership and planning, strategic staffing, positive school culture, high-quality instructional materials and assessments, and effective instruction.

Analysis: Accountability Paradigm

In looking at the analysis tool (see Figure 2), my focus was to find where life experience, educational theory, and educational law/policy intersect to provide the praxis for school turnaround as it applies to the accountability paradigm. In the section where the stories began, the first drawing depicted the imagine I saw when entering a low-performing school. According to Lee and Lee (2020), the goals of a principal in a school facing sanctions due to English language arts and math scores on high-stakes testing require more emphasis to basic skills and less emphasis on academic excellence and personal growth (p. 877). This is an example of educational policy driving action at a low-performing school.

The accountability paradigm in Figure 8 displays what accountability and a school that has been turned around look like to me. Fullan (2008a) described change theory as an organic process that has solid tenets, but those tenets are not so rigid that the theory does not evolve and learn. Fullan described what a good theory should do and not do. The relationship between leader and stakeholders should manifest in such a way that everyone involved has an opportunity to grow and find the intrinsic motivation that brings joy to the work they are doing. Educational policy for school turnaround requires that schools work from the ESF. Life experience and educational theory as they pertain to the improvement of low-performing schools extend beyond a rating. Though the educational policy associated with school turnaround and low-performing schools is only required for those schools with state or federal sanctions placed on them, the ESF

aligns to a foundation rooted in best practice and continued growth. Each area—life experience, educational theory, and educational policy/law—provides a path to success, though the manner in which that path is paved is up to the campus leadership to determine.

Findings of School Turnaround: Accountability Paradigm

It is impossible for a cube to be a sum of two cubes, a fourth power to be a sum of two fourth powers, or in general for any number that is a power greater than the second to be the sum of two like powers. I have discovered a truly remarkable proof [of this theorem], but this margin is too small to contain it. (Britannica, n.d.)

Much like Fermont's Last Theorem, the plan for a successful school turnaround venture is simple, yet very complicated. Let us use the analogy of building a structure as the plan for turning around a low-performing school. The structure has a foundation or base, columns for support, and then all the smaller details like walls, floors, and other details.

The base of the structure, which is the foundation to build upon, is safety (see Figure 8). What is meant by safety? The campus leader follows best practice in keeping all stakeholders in the building safe from danger and harm. At the most basic level, the practices invoked for safety should keep all those in the building in a good place knowing that everyone is there for the protection of everyone, and all the stakeholders are working together.

The columns are the underlying supports that serve as pillars to fortify the overall structure or plan. The following six pillars represent the major areas of focus: curriculum, instruction, social-emotional program, systems, celebrations, and decision-making process. The manipulation, implementation, and finesse a campus educational leader uses in putting a plan in motion to foster the kind of change required to turn around a low-performing campus is very taxing work. But the work is doable. In Secret 3: Capacity Building Prevails, the campus leaders should implement strategies that develop educator pedagogy and reinforces calculated risk taking in learning for the teachers (Fullan, 2008a, 2008b). In Secret 4: Learning Is The Work, campus

leaders should provide job-embedded training where educators are receiving real-time mentoring and coaching while teaching to improve their practice in addition to professional development activities (Fullan, 2008a, 2008b).

The final aspect to keep in mind is that just like the expectation is that students have a love for learning that transfers to life-long learning, the plan for school turnaround must continuously evolve and change as the low-performing school transforms into a place where great things are happening for students. Fullan (2008a) wrote about leadership and how organizations can succeed and manage all the requirements, obstacles, and distractions in the 21st century. The space for a principal to create and maintain organizational balance and positive movement was given by Fullan through his six secrets (Fullan, 2008a, 2008b).

School Turnaround: Beyond Test Scores

First Day of School: Seventh-Grade English Class

The following text is provided as it was written and filtered by me as the participant:

One of the most profound events in my life was coming to the realization that I was behind in a subject. I will never forget the first day I walked into my 7th Grade English class at Kind Junior High School. Prior to attending Kind Junior High School, school was easy, and I did well. On that first day of class this is what happened.

First, I walked into class late. The teacher asked me if I was in the right class, so I stepped out, verified the room number listed on my schedule, and re-entered the class to let the teacher know I was in the right class. She took my schedule and asked me for my student ID number. I told her I did not know it, and until that morning, I did not even know I had one. So, she directed me to sit in an open chair towards the back of the furthest row to her right. She went onto tell me that I needed to break down the sentence she had on the board by diagramming it. I sat down in the seat I was told to sit in. I had an idea of what needed to be done, but I remember the only thing I diagrammed was the noun and verb. As I looked around the class, I thought all the other students knew what to do and were working hard. Worst feeling in the world. The teacher sat in her stool at the front of the classroom and everyone else was working. Uncharted waters for me. I had never really been in a position where I could not do at least all the work, even if I did not really understand the material.

Anyway. After a few minutes, which also seemed like an eternity, the teacher started to go over the sentence and asked for the class to make corrections as necessary.

While I sat and waited for the teacher to do whatever it was that came next after I completed what I could of the task she asked for the class to do, I remember thinking during that moment of eternity that I was going to fail the class. What a way to start the year? F on the first assignment. At the time, I was too nervous to ask her any questions. But one thing was crystal clear, I was behind and did not know where to turn. For a 12-year-old, who was yearning to play football, this was brutal. All I could think about was that I was going to be sent back to Maroon Junior High School, my home campus, and because Texas had a strict No Pass No Play law, my 7th grade football career was over before it even started. Yet, the anxiety I felt was premature and a couple of weeks later my English teacher held me after class and spoke to me.

Our conversation was simple and one-sided. She explained that I needed tutoring, and she was available. And that is where I started my journey to catch up. I would plan out my day with checking in with her to see if she was available during lunch or after school. I worked on her assignments, and she provided me with support. That year I scrapped by with mostly low Bs. I spent hours at home working on rewrites of essays and papers. Countless hours to read one chapter of the books she assigned the class. I wish I could tell you that this was the only year it took for me to catch up, but this year turned into three years. Every year I would arrange times for me to meet with my English teacher to catch up and pull off a B.

As an adult, I developed a complex. To this day, I proofread all my emails, regardless of length to verify that there are no errors that I can identify. The process is brutal and mentally fatiguing.

As I have ventured back and pondered on why this happened, I came to a very upsetting conclusion. You see, when I was in elementary school, I was always one of the youngest students in class. I never realized that I was older for my grade, since I had a September birthday. I was never retained, but a lot my classmates were at some point in elementary. In the 6th grade I remember that three of us would work on Science and Social Studies on our own. We were to read the textbook and answer the questions at the end of the section we were assigned. My teacher at the time spent her time working with students who needed more time to learn how to read. I remember asking her at one point, why we could not ask her questions about the information we were reading. She was very dramatic and to the point in her response, "I don't have time to help you, because I have to work with all the other students who struggle to read." Point noted. If I sat quietly and tried my best, I would receive some made up grade, as my work was never graded. I was a kid trying to teach myself. The only classes that challenged me in the 4th, 5th, and 6th grades were my mathematics classes. So, as I was reflecting on this as an adult, I came to a conclusion that hit me in the face like a brick, I spent years in schools where I was not challenged when I should have been in school. The work was easy. I could complete it fast.

The problem came to the surface when I entered a school where students were on grade level in their classes, reading was an activity which was promoted and monitored, and many of my peers had parents who were not only well educated but were versed in what schools should be doing for their children. When I first came to this realization, I

used to get very emotional about it. I felt cheated. There were educators who probably took credit for my success, who really should have been discredited for not taking my abilities to the next level.

While I know that my writing skills are at an acceptable level now, I still live with the anxiety that I might make a mistake or a grammatical error that all will see.

Leadership Influence

As a campus administrator, a product of the public educational system, and an employee who works in public schools, I firmly believe that location should not hinder a student from reaching their maximum potential. Whether a school resides in the poorest neighborhood or the most affluent neighborhood in Texas, the education students receive in either school should be equal.

The adults working in any school:

- Drive expectations for themselves and students.
- Are trained to both intervene and enrichment student learning. If they are not trained to make this process happen, then they or their administrator should be able to identify they need extra support.
- Control access to information.
- Have the responsibility to teach all students, every day, and with the same conviction they would want their own child to be taught.
- Need to make their work personal.
- Should find a way to engage students with relevant and rigorous material.
- Expect the best from all students.

School Turnaround Influence

My school turnaround paradigm has been influenced by the events that led up to and happened to that 12-year-old 7th grade student that first day of school in 1988. I realized quickly once I became an educator that my classmates and I in East Austin were dealt a severe injustice. As I began to see the other side of the politics which try to hide in the shadows of the public at large, my understanding that educator's really do hold the key was solidified.

You see, this is the thing. I grew up in a family which was led by a self-made man. He raised all his children to be the master of their own domain. The problem with this line of thinking is that in the educational realm, your own domain becomes limited by those that are trying to teach you. My parents and siblings did what they could to help, however, I had the following dynamics at play. My father and mother each had a very limited education. My sister would often tell me the work I was doing in the 7th grade was harder than what she could remember doing and didn't know how. My brother was chasing his own career and dreams, so he was rarely around to provide the kind of intense work it requires to help a student negotiate the educational spaces.

Now, what I have found is that this is the case for many minorities, those in poverty, the working class, and often those in rural areas. Even educators struggle at times to find the correct resources to thoroughly teach even the information they know well, much less a parent who finds themselves in one of those groups. I know this is a gross generalization, but all too often this is the case because schools are organizations which are made up of many complicated systems. So, at 12 years of age, I had no idea I had been grossly underserved.

What does this do for me as an agent of school turnaround? As an administrator going into a school which is low performing the transformation extends beyond just test scores. The goal is to create a culture of academia, where all students understand that they are the voice for change, and the adults are there to serve them. I believe that a school is on its way to being turned around when the following events can be seen or heard around the campus. The adults and students see standardized testing as more of a nuisance than barrier. In essence, the students are confident that the adults taught them at a level which makes them feel insulted that they had to sit down and take an inferior test. Furthermore, the discourse of the teachers no longer sees standardized testing as their students' ceiling but the floor for them to walk on. Teachers' Tier 1 instruction is solid and good which implements what is best for their students' learning. Students are critical and free thinkers, who know they have the right and a voice to question all practices. Students know that their voice will be heard, especially when they feel they are being dealt a disservice like not receiving a challenging classroom experience. Teachers know they have the support from their campus leader, and the resources they need are available to move all students. The halls may look different and the classrooms too, but the results are still the same, students are achieving at levels and challenging themselves beyond what the State of Texas has set as the minimum bar in standardized testing, like taking AP courses and enrolling in dual credit courses. Students have options when they graduate: going to college, straight to the workforce, or a combination of both. Teachers know they are working hard to provide those options. The school is inclusive. You can see all student groups represented in all programs. All adults know how to affectively interact with all students by using getting to know their students and expecting them to perform to their full potential.

Leadership Theory: Beyond Test Scores

Lee and Lee (2020) provided an overall trend showing a shift in principals' goals for the institutions they were leading (p. 876). Their results showed a significant increase in areas such as the pursuit of academic excellence and a focus on basic skills whereas goals that honed in on personal growth and vocational skills became insignificant:

While there was a nationwide increasing emphasis on academic excellence across schools, low-performing schools were subject to the threats of sanctions and interventions under NCLB policy . . . [while] the same policy may have had selective and differential influences on school principals' strategic priorities. (Lee & Lee, 2020, p. 877)

Opper (2014) stated test scores alone should not be the only measure of a teacher's effectiveness, because test scores do not account for all factors that affect testing outcomes. "Even with these caveats, research shows high value-added teachers also influence longer-term outcomes, such as graduation, college attendance, and earnings" (Opper, 2014, p. 1).

Findings of Beyond Test Scores

One of the biggest complaints that is often heard in low-performing schools is that standardized testing is unfair, not a true measure of a student's ability, is only one test on one day, and the list goes on. This is a problem because this line of thinking is detrimental and dangerous for students. The rhetoric needs to shift but stay focused. Standardized testing should not be seen as the ceiling that limits students, but the floor on which students walk. Students have to believe and know they have been taught so well that when they leave a test setting after taking a standardized test they feel insulted that they had to sit and take such an inferior test of their aptitude. Teachers also must know they have engaged their students with rigorous and relevant content that provided students with the critical thinking skills to go beyond the standardized test. According to Hermanns and Berliner (2021), transformational leadership theory has the potential to support the transformation of a school to one that prepares students to be critical thinkers in a democracy (p. 13).

In essence, a culture of academia has to be created that molds and builds free-thinking students. "When transformational leadership works well, it has the potential to engage all stakeholders in the achievement of educational objectives" (Bush & Glover, 2014, p. 558). Schools need to be transformed into settings where students have the academic freedom to make choices that empower them to grow. Heffernan (2018) described how veteran principals who were in the position or the field of education prior to the accountability era use more than testing

outcomes to measure successful ventures in school improvement, and she attributed their view to a different set of influences and expectations bestowed on principals prior to the accountability era.

A Final Note – For Now

Unfortunately, I must say I have never stayed at one place long enough to see a complete turnaround happen, but I have been close or on my way in two of the four ventures. Taking care of the State of Texas accountability mandates was the easy part, but this does not define school turnaround for me.

Systems were in place to develop the academic skills of students. For example, writing across the curriculum was a venture teachers across the entire campus committed to implementing in every classroom. This is not a new concept, but a commitment was made to have students engage in academic writing about their learning experiences. In turn, a method to help teachers implement this process was developed by a team of teachers and farmed out to other teachers by the teachers on the committee.

Routines and procedures were also in place to develop the leadership on campus. As a group, our PLCs were used to dialogue and learn from one another. Topics not only included data, but the curriculum and instruction used in classrooms to impart knowledge. The PLC process was used to bring the voices of the teachers to the group. The discussions also focused on challenges the campus was facing, and then those challenges were processed and plans were made to overcome the challenges during this time. This was also a time to discuss or take part in professional development opportunities. The most important aspect of the PLC that I found beneficial was for this time to be used to cultivate the space for the faculty to check in and take a moment to reflect on the practices being implemented inside and outside the classroom.

Of all the pillars I described above, the decision-making process was by far the hardest to implement. What made this a difficult process? It was getting people to get out of their comfort zone and prepare to lead. This was also when the most difficult conversations came up.

Conclusion

“When we focus on assets, strengths and solutions, then there is hope” (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, pp. 33–34). In the realm of school turnaround, typically and most often this nomenclature is applied to schools that have failed to meet the minimum standards set by the State of Texas and U.S. Government on state accountability exams. Far too often schools facing government sanctions are villainized with terms like Academically Unacceptable, Improvement Required, or given a grade of D or F. What often happens is that school leaders are ill prepared to lead such ventures. Adversity in a school setting, such as an angry parent or students fighting, is not often under the guise of a watchdog like the TEA. So where do school leaders turn?

Often, leaders turn to rhetoric of best practice, policy, or law instead of authentic discourse. Schools are a microcosm of the greater community the school serves. M. A. Guajardo et al. (2016) wrote, “Pedagogies that are community-centered value people and tend to identify and build the agency they bring with them” (p. 5). In essence, school turnaround ventures can be addressed by forming a team of leaders who share and discuss solutions to the underlying problems that created the challenging state in which a low-performing school has landed.

When a deeper dive is taken into my life experience, it becomes clear that the issues revolve around the human systems and how people implement educational theory and educational policy/law. The praxis for school turnaround flows toward a school leader’s viewpoint, vision, how human resource matters are addressed, and the management of student-centered stewardship. The campus leader’s agency is developed through life experiences. This

matters. Why does life experience matter? It matters because as people and humans, we share our life experiences through stories. A school leader who is working toward a successful school turnaround venture will be tested, but forging the tools to deliver success comes from a school leader's ability to harness, capture, and implement the value of their life experiences. "The stories matter because they help us see possibilities and hope beneath layers of despair. They help us find courage when we are frightened. And stories help us find agency when we feel powerless" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 19).

Educational policy/law and educational theory exist. Figure 4 shows both educational policy/law and educational theory, but it is the campus leadership that is detached. Educational theory and educational policy/law are controlling attributes that neither guide nor lead. In the accountability paradigm (see Figure 8), educational theory and educational policy/law are tucked away in the briefcase being carried by the school leader.

The symbolism in both figures shows the power of human involvement. On one hand you have a broken system where campus leadership is stuck in the vices of what is written in black and white. On the other hand, educational theory and educational policy/law are but one tool in the vast toolbox a school leader uses to lead. Fullan (2008a) wrote that learning is the work. "Learning how to learn within the context of relationships is at the core of leadership and the construction of necessary conditions that nurture this development in an inviting and dignified manner" (M. A. Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 25).

V. LOOKING AHEAD – ONE CHICANO SCHOOL LEADER’S VIEW OF SCHOOL TURNAROUND

Where Does This Study fit in?

On July 1, 2022, the U.S. Census Bureau released population projections for the State of Texas. According to the data, 30,029,572 Texans were projected to live in Texas (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). Of this population, 40.2% were Hispanic and 40.3% were White (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.-a). Why does this matter, and why is this fact important to school turnaround?

The first factor is that at the time this dissertation was written, speculation among mass media outlets was that sometime in the year 2022 the Hispanic population would and did surpass the White population in Texas. The Texas public-school system saw the shift happen 2 decades ago around the turn of the 21st century. As of the 2020 U.S. Census data, Hispanics still have some of the widest disparities in educational attainment compared to White Texans and trail all other racial and ethnicity groups, except the some other race alone category, when comparing the percentage 25 years or older who have a high school diploma or equivalent and who hold a bachelor’s degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.-b).

The second factor is that the U.S. Government has a federal law that designates that the lowest 5% of performing schools in every state will have sanctions placed on them and those schools that fall within this percentage should have a plan to improve their academic standing.

The third factor is that low-performing schools tend to have a higher percentage of the student body that falls into one or both of the following categories: economically disadvantaged or belong to a minority group. When I looked at the Texas Schools Report Card website for the 2021–2022 school year, this statement proved to be accurate with the vast majority of the schools for which I pulled a report card.

In applying some deductive reasoning, the following conclusion is clear—Texas has a problem. Others have forecasted this before me. In the mid-1990s, Murdock et al. (2002) attempted to answer questions regarding the growing Texas population and disparities in education, income level, and other areas when *The Texas Challenge: Population Change and the Future of Texas* was published (p. 1).

According to the Office of the Texas Governor, Texas has the ninth largest economy in the world (Office of the Texas Governor, 2023) and the second largest population in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.-a). Texas was projected to be a minority–majority state at some point in the year 2022. Again, the largest minority population in the State of Texas is also the ethnic group with the greatest educational gaps (excluding the stand alone racial group; U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.-b).

Implications for this study are that low-performing schools can be seen as the microcosm of greater social concerns on the rise in coming years for the State of Texas.

The Study Itself

This study was an autoethnographic study in which I analyzed the turnaround work done by me, a Chicano school leader, in four low-performing Texas schools. The four low-performing schools had the following characteristics: a Hispanic majority and great than 50% of the student body being labeled economically disadvantaged. The schools were also in one of the following types of communities: rural, inner city, or suburban. The study was guided by three questions:

1. What does school turnaround mean to a Chicano administrator working in schools that are facing accountability sanctions?
2. How is a Chicano administrator’s understanding of the conditions involved in school turnaround influenced by life experience, theory, and policy?

3. Where is the space for negotiation and reform of a Chicano administrator's school turnaround plan?

I began the data collection process by creating a timeline of events that categorized pivotal points of interest in my life starting from my birth to the year 2023. By analyzing the timeline, I wrote three stories that I then used in combination with the timeline to frame the work done to turn around low-performing schools. Life experience, leadership theory, and leadership law/policy were the basis of knowledge that composed the points of interest for this study. The analytical framework I used to analyze these three data sets revealed the intersection of the three bodies of knowledge. I used critical self-reflection to process the intersection of life experience, educational theory, and educational law/policy. The practice of critical self-reflection is a practice I used to develop a deeper understanding and awareness of the praxis used in turning around low-performing schools. "It is one of the roads we have to follow if we are to deepen our awareness of our world, of facts, of the demands of human consciousness to develop our capacity for epistemological curiosity" (Freire, 1998, p. 55).

Regarding researcher credibility, I had three areas to contend with as it pertained to validity. As Pratt wrote (2015), finding my voice, negotiating university policies and procedures, and member-checking are important cogs in ensuring the validity of an autoethnography. Finding voice happened as the mechanisms of the writing process transitioned the thoughts from my head to writing out a timeline and stories. The peer-check list (member-check list) included the following: Dr. Grijalva, a seasoned school leader; member of a writing group with six members who brought 50 years of collective experience in education; dissertation co-chairs who are both school and community leaders who have employed autoethnography for research and practice; family members and literature to support dates, events, and policies; I used public databases

found online that the State of Texas uses to report results to verify data when applicable; and my wife, an educator with 15 years of experience as a teacher and counselor read this dissertation and served as a sounding board for this study. Finally, my research proposal was reviewed by the Texas State University Office of Research Integrity and Compliance (RIC).

Moving Forward

School improvement is a loaded term. In PK-12 circles, a school improvement venture usually indicates the school failed to meet accountability standards set by the State of Texas for the previous year or failed to meet federal standards. Depending on the size of the school, school leaders can game the accountability system by manipulating students in programs and masking student dropouts, hiding the failure of the school to improve all students. For example, students in the special education program can have an Admission, Review, and Dismissal committee exempt them from passing any of the five end-of-course exams needed for graduation in the State of Texas. This is not to say this may not be necessary in some cases, but there are students out there who would have graduated without an exemption to the rules with the right training and supports in place. Or what about the high school that earned an A or B rating from the State of Texas but had a graduating class that was smaller by 20% or more than when the graduating class started their ninth-grade year? Would this school not be a candidate for school improvement? The simple answer is yes.

School improvement should be about student, faculty, and staff growth. The outlook should focus on providing students with options for the next level of their academic journey or the next phase of their life. It should include open dialogue among students and teachers, students creating their knowledge, and students building the capacity to freely exchange ideas with peers and teachers. The plan should include parents taking an active role in planning their

student's future with the intention that the student will take over this process when the teacher, parent, and student can mutually agree that the shift is ready to be made. The debate about which resources, instructional materials, and instructional strategies to use in class should be negotiated by the factors in every student's individual plan. The next turnaround paradigm should be headed in this direction. The learning has to be as personal as possible to the student.

Implications

My intention and hope were that this study would serve as a means to provoke discussion among educators and scholars about how they can use life experience as one of the driving forces in shaping an educational leader's turnaround paradigm and focus. Training and education alone can lead to false hope and a misunderstanding of what it takes to move a low-performing school out from under a watchdog's keen eye to being a leader among the pack.

Recommendations

Number 1

Autoethnography has a focus on one participant and is structured so the researcher also serves as the participant. Future researchers could find other educational leaders who have participated in the successful turnaround of a low-performing school and break up each topic in this study into individual foci. For example, participants can document one profound moment in their life that served as a driving force in their conviction to turn around a low-performing school. In this way, multiple views can be analyzed to find common themes among those educational leaders who work at turning around a low-performing school to enhance the body of knowledge surrounding the impact of life experience on school turnaround.

Number 2

The body of knowledge provided by educational theory is plentiful and covers a wide range of topics, from leadership to curriculum and instruction. Career theory also has a range of topics from job choice to attitudes toward the job. Future research could be conducted to examine the cross sections between educational leadership theory and career theory. For example, researchers could study the cross section created by taking the tenets of the transformational leadership paradigm and Oplatka's (2004) career theory where a principal's career is described in three stages. The intersection of these two theories can be used to study the life cycle of a principal embarking on the venture to turn around a low-performing school.

Number 3

Every year the schools that are going to be rated as low performing are known well in advance of the start of the school year. Educational law/policy at the state and federal levels create a pool of schools to choose from every year even if the specific schools are not known until after testing has been completed and the results released in June. As a reminder, at a minimum, the lowest 5% of performing schools across the state will have sanctions placed on them and labeled low performing. With this being said, cohorts can be developed where educational leaders participate in ongoing professional development to document what motivates them. The space can be provided for educational leaders to dialogue, support, and brainstorm what is working for their school and how to shift gears if needed, and to provide a place to build community among educational leaders and educational leadership teams living and surviving in the same professional space.

Closing Remarks

I started this chapter with a discussion of the conditions the State of Texas is facing with a changing population and the standing of the state's economic power. I made the assertion that turning around a low-performing school in Texas could serve as a microcosm of the greater challenge facing the State of Texas. The work required to foster change is complicated and demanding. The path to changing a low-performing school can serve as a roadmap to improving the larger systems that are failing and facing larger problems.

The essence of this study was to provide insight into the intersections where life experience, educational leadership training, and educational law and policy affected how a Chicano leader (i.e., me) implements change in a low-performing school.

Schools are in the accountability era. Future research is needed to examine the cross section of the application of life experience, educational theory, and educational policy/law of a low-performing school campus leader. Further research could focus on expanding the knowledge base of the praxis of a school turnaround campus leader. Every year, policy and law mandate that a minimum number of schools across the State of Texas will be deemed low performing based on the results of state accountability testing. As practitioners, we know that every year there will be school districts, school campuses, and campus leadership teams that will be tasked with turning around a low-performing school, so there is a benefit in growing this knowledge.

APPENDIX SECTION

APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT TIMELINE 2000–2022

Table A1 is a portion of the timeline I created that represents the events and information that influenced my journey when working on turning a school around. The information also provides perspective on the schools I decided to apply to, accepted an offer for employment from, and where I felt turnaround work would be maximized. The following represents the space for negotiation of a turnaround initiative.

The timeline shows demographic data for students and teachers while I was an educator. The student and staff percentages came from AEIS reports.

Table A1. Participant Timeline: 2000 – 2022 School Accountability & Demographic Information.

School Year	Accountability Rating	Position	School Profile: Student	School Profile: Staff
2000 - 2001	Acceptable	Mathematics Teacher	Kind JHS Student Information 25.3% African American 32.1% Hispanic 37.1% White 5.4% Asian 0.1% Native American	Kind JHS Staff Information 87.7% African American 14.2% Hispanic 63.6% White 2.0% Asian/Pacific Islander 1.4% Native American
2001 - 2002	Acceptable	Mathematics Teacher	Ronald High School Student Information 43.0% African American 52.9% Hispanic 3.5% White 0.4% Asian/Pac. Islander 0.2% Native American	Ronald High School Staff Information 22.5% African American 14.6% Hispanic 62.9% White

School Year	Accountability Rating	Position	School Profile: Student	School Profile: Staff
2002 - 2003	No Rating	Mathematics Teacher	Ronald High School Student Information 39.9% African American 56.3% Hispanic 3.0% White 0.6% Asian/Pac. Islander 0.2% Native American	Ronald High School Staff Information 17.4% African American 17.2% Hispanic 65.4% White
2003 - 2004	Academically Acceptable	Mathematics Teacher	Ronald HS Student Information 37.4% African American 58.8% Hispanic 3.3% White 0.1% Native American 0.4% Asian/Pac. Islander	Ronald HS Staff Information 15.7% African American 16.6% Hispanic 67.7% White
2004 - 2005	Academically Acceptable	Mathematics Teacher	Ronald HS Student Information 32.6% African American 63.5% Hispanic 3.0% White 0.1% Native American 0.9% Asian/Pac. Islander	Ronald HS Staff Information 15.6% African American 15.6% Hispanic 67.7% White 1.0% Asian/Pacific Islander
2005 - 2006	Academically Unacceptable	Mathematics Teacher	Ronald HS Student Information 33.9% African American 63.4% Hispanic 2.0% White 0.7% Asian/Pac. Islander	Ronald HS Staff Information 22.6% African American 20.3% Hispanic 54.4% White 2.7% Asian/Pacific Islander
2006 - 2007	Academically Acceptable	Mathematics Teacher	Cougar High School Student Information 26.3% African American 35.7% Hispanic 24.2% White 0.3% Native American 13.6% Asian/Pac. Islander	Cougar High School Staff Information 6.0% African American 11.3% Hispanic 81.0% White 1.7% Asian/Pacific Islander
2007 - 2008	Academically Acceptable	Mathematics Teacher	Cougar HS Student Information 27.8% African American 35.7% Hispanic 21.5% White 0.2% Native American 14.7% Asian/Pac. Islander	Cougar High School Staff Information 7.6% African American 16.8% Hispanic 73.3% White 2.3% Asian/Pacific Islander

School Year	Accountability Rating	Position	School Profile: Student	School Profile: Staff
2008 - 2009	Not Rated: Other	Mathematics Teacher	Acting Learning Center Student Information 23.4% African American 64.1% Hispanic 12.0% White 0.5% Native American	Acting Learning Center Staff Information 26.7% African American 13.3% Hispanic 53.3% White 3.3% Asian/Pacific Islander
2009 - 2010	Academically Acceptable Previous Year Academically Unacceptable	Assistant Principal	Maroon Middle School Student Information 10.5% African American 87.3% Hispanic 0.7% White 1.5% Asian/Pac. Islander	Maroon Middle School Staff Information 8.5% African American 30.7% Hispanic 57.6% White 3.2% Asian/Pacific Islander
2010 - 2011	Academically Acceptable	Assistant Principal	Maroon MS Student Information 7.6% African American 88.1% Hispanic 1.9% White 0.8% American Indian 1.1% Asian 0.2% Pacific Islander 0.5% Two or More Races	Maroon MS Staff Information 7.1% African American 29.2% Hispanic 60.2% White 1.8% Asian 1.8% Two or More Races
2011 - 2012	Academically Acceptable	Assistant Principal	Maroon MS Student Information 8.1% African American 87.4% Hispanic 1.2% White 0.7% American Indian 2.5% Asian 0.2% Pacific Islander	Maroon MS Staff Information 8.3% African American 31.0% Hispanic 56.8% White 1.8% Asian 2.1% Two or more races

School Year	Accountability Rating	Position	School Profile: Student	School Profile: Staff
2012 - 2013	Middle School Met Standard Previous school year Academically Unacceptable High School Met Standard	Principal	Sypress Secondary Campus High School Student Information 1.3% African American 71.0% Hispanic 27.1% White 0.6% Two or More Races Middle School Student Information 69.4% Hispanic 28.4% White 1.5% American Indian 0.7% Two or More Races	Sypress Secondary Campus High School Staff Information 20.4% Hispanic 79.6% White Middle School Staff information 3.7% Hispanic 96.3% White
2013 - 2014	Met Standard	Principal	Sypress Secondary Campus High School Student Information 0.6% African American 72.3% Hispanic 25.3% White 0.6% American Indian 1.2% Two or More Races Middle School Student Information 68.2% Hispanic 28.5% White 0.7% American Indian 2.6% Two or More Races	Sypress Secondary Campus High School Staff Information 23.6% Hispanic 76.4% White Middle School Staff Information 9.3% Hispanic 90.7% White
2014 - 2015	Middle School Improvement Required High School Met Standard	Principal	Sypress Secondary Campus High School Student Information 0.6% African American 71.7% Hispanic 26.5% White 0.6% American Indian 0.6% Two or More Races Middle School Student Information 65.2% Hispanic 31.9% White 2.9% Two or More Races	Sypress Secondary Campus High School Staff Information 33.9% Hispanic 66.1% White Middle School Staff Information 14.4% Hispanic 85.6% White

School Year	Accountability Rating	Position	School Profile: Student	School Profile: Staff
2015 - 2016	Met Standard	Principal	<p>Sypress Secondary Campus</p> <p>High School Student Information 0.6% African American 71.0% Hispanic 27.3% White 0.6% American Indian 0.6% Two or More Races</p> <p>Middle School Student Information 67.7% Hispanic 29.0% White 2.4% Two or More Races</p>	<p>Sypress Secondary Campus</p> <p>High School Staff Information 43.0% Hispanic 50.8% White 6.2% Asian</p> <p>Middle School Staff Information 31.9% Hispanic 68.1% White</p>
2016 - 2017	Sypress Secondary Campuses Met Standard	Principal Fall Semester	<p>Sypress Secondary Campus</p> <p>High School Student Information 0.5% African American 75.1% Hispanic 23.3% White 0.5% American Indian 0.5% Two or More Races</p> <p>Sypress Middle School Student Information 0.9% African American 72.2% Hispanic 25.9% White 0.9% American Indian</p>	<p>Sypress Secondary Campus</p> <p>High School Staff Information 44.6% Hispanic 55.4% White</p> <p>Sypress Middle School Staff information 11.3% African American 40.8% Hispanic 47.9% White</p>
2016 - 2017	Met Standard Previous Year Rating Improvement Required	Associate Principal Spring Semester	<p>Lunge HS Student Information 4.9% African American 70.3% Hispanic 22.7% White 0.5% American Indian 0.6% Asian 1.1% Two or More Races</p>	<p>Lunge HS Staff Information 2.8% African American 25.7% Hispanic 70.2% White 1.0% Asian</p>

School Year	Accountability Rating	Position	School Profile: Student	School Profile: Staff
2017 - 2018	Met Standard	Principal	Lunge HS Student Information 5.0% African American 71.1% Hispanic 22.0% White 0.4% American Indian 0.4% Asian 0.1% Pacific Islander 1.0% Two or More Races	Lunge HS Staff Information 3.3% African American 32.1% Hispanic 63.4% White 1.3% Asian
2018 - 2019	C Rating	Principal	Lunge HS Student Information 4.3% African American 74.0% Hispanic 19.6% White 0.4% American Indian 0.4% Asian 0.2% Pacific Islander 1.2% Two or More Races	Lunge HS Staff Information 4.2% African American 29.6% Hispanic 63.1% White 2.1% Asian 1.1% Two or More Races
2019 - 2020	No Rated	Principal Fall Semester	Lunge HS Student Information 3.1% African American 76.6% Hispanic 17.6% White 0.3% American Indian 0.3% Asian 1.4% Two or More Races	Lunge HS Staff Information 4.1% African American 25.5% Hispanic 68.3% White 1.0% Asian 1.0% Two or more races
2020 - 2021	Not Rated Previous Rating F Rated	Principal	Jack JHS Student Information 1.0% African American 52.1% Hispanic 44.5% White 0.3% American Indian 0.3% Asian 1.7% Two or More Races	Jack JHS Staff Information 8.6% Hispanic 91.4% White

School Year	Accountability Rating	Position	School Profile: Student	School Profile: Staff
2021 - 2022	B Rating	Principal	Jack JHS Student Information 0.7% African American 48.9% Hispanic 48.6% White 0.4% American Indian 0.4% Asian 1.1% Two or More Races	Jack JHS Staff Information 3.3% African American 4.6% Hispanic 87.8% White 4.3% Two or More Races
2022 - 2023	Not Rated	Assistant Principal	Long Water High School	

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT TIMELINE: 1976–2023

The information in Table B1 displays date ranges, what kind of education happened during that time, and the ethnicities of the teachers I had during my academic career. The teacher ethnicity data came from surveying historical events, relationships with faculty, and my memory. The staff and student percentages came from AEIS reports. The information charts data from when I was in school.

Table B1. Participant Timeline: 1976 – 2023 Personal Educational Journey, Teacher Demographic Information, and School Demographic Information.

Date	School Level	My Academic Journey
1976 - 1979	NA	Life Functions
1979 - 1980	NA	Home School - Parent Led My father used to make me count pennies at an early age My father also introduced me to skip counting My mother taught me the ABCs Daycare Remember playing, counting, arts & crafts, and being read to while in daycare Teachers were Hispanic
1981 - 1982	Elementary	Sandwich Elementary Neighborhood School Pre-K Hispanic Teacher
1982 - 1983	Elementary	Sandwich Elementary Kindergarten Hispanic Teacher In the Bilingual Program I am not sure why I was in it, but I remember the academic work being in English and Spanish.
1983 - 1984	Elementary	Alldan Elementary Busing in Austin ISD 1st Grade African American Teacher
1984 - 1985	Elementary	Alldan Elementary 2nd Grade Hispanic Teacher
1985 - 1986	Elementary	Alldan Elementary 3rd Grade Hispanic Teacher
1986 - 1987	Elementary	Gray Elementary Busing in Austin ISD 4th Grade White Teacher In Advanced Mathematics Class

Date	School Level	My Academic Journey
1987 - 1988	Elementary	Sandwich Elementary Busing in Austin ISD Ended and I returned to my home campus 5th Grade White Teacher
1988 - 1989	Elementary	Sandwich Elementary 6th Grade Hispanic Teacher In Advanced Mathematics Class
1989 - 1990	Junior High School	Kind Junior High School 7th Grade Hispanic Spanish & Elective Teacher African American Math, SS, & Band Teacher White PE, ELAR, & Science Teacher
1990 - 1991	Junior High School	1990 - Summer School at Huston-Tillotson College Texas Prefreshman Engineering Program Program housed at Huston-Tillotson College now Huston-Tillotson University Summer Program - Inaugural Year for the program, 1st cohort of students, and my first year in the program. One of two JHS allowed in the program. Courses taught primarily by minority Professors, Graduate Assistants, and recent graduates of Air Force Academy. Kind Junior High School 8th Grade Hispanic Spanish Teacher African American Math & Band Teacher White PE, ELAR, Science, & Elective Teacher Do Not Remember Ethnicity of SS Teacher Applied to the Science Academy housed at LBC HS. I remember telling my father that if I did not get selected I would not apply for the Liberal Arts Academy, because in the magnet program circles of JHS students that program was not viewed as a strong academic program. I explained that I would be better off at Austin HS. I got accepted to the Science Academy, so this became a moot point.
1991 - 1992	High School	1991 - Summer School at Huston-Tillotson College Texas Pre-Freshman Engineering Program Summer Program - Year 2 of the program. Courses taught primarily by minority Professors, Graduate Assistants, and recent graduates of Air Force Academy. LBC High School 9th Grade African American Athletics White Math, ELAR, SS, Science, Elective, Athletics, Spanish Teacher Foreign Born Elective Teacher

Date	School Level	My Academic Journey
1992 - 1993	High School	<p>1992 - Summer School at Huston-Tillotson College Texas Pre-Freshman Engineering Program Summer Program - Year 3 of the program. Courses taught primarily by minority Professors, Graduate Assistants, and recent graduates of Air Force Academy. Graduated from the program</p> <p>LBC High School 10th Grade Hispanic Math & Spanish Teachers African American Athletics Teachers White ELAR, Science, Electives, & Athletics Teachers</p>
1993 - 1994	High School	<p>1993 - Summer School at Ronald HS White Health Teacher</p> <p>LBC High School 11th Grade African American Athletics Teachers White ELAR, Science, Math, SS, Athletics, Fine Arts, & Computer Science Teacher</p> <p>LBC 1993 - 1994 Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) Report Student Information 50.8% African American 13.5% Hispanic 31.7% White 3.9% Other Staff Information 5.4% African American 9.2% Hispanic 74.3% White 1.1% Other</p>

Date	School Level	My Academic Journey
1994 - 1995	High School	1994 - Summer School at Ronald HS White Economics and Government Teachers
	Undergraduate Student	LBC High School High School Diploma 1995 12th Grade 1st Semester Hispanic SS Teacher African American Athletics Teachers White ELAR, Science, Math, Spanish, Elective, & Athletics Teachers 2nd Semester White ELAR, Science, Math, & Spanish LBC 1994 - 1995 Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) Report Student Information 49.0% African American 15.9% Hispanic 30.9% White 3.9% Asian/Pac. Islander 0.2% Native American Staff Information 15.9% African American 4.7% Hispanic 78.3% White 1.1% Asian/Pac. Islander
1995 - 1999	Undergraduate Student	1995 - Attend a Summer Session at Cornell Cornell University Primarily White and Foreign-Born Professors 1 African American Professor While I Attended Summer '99 Graduate
1997	Undergraduate Student	Austin Community College Spring Semester White Professors Spent the spring semester of '97 at ACC
1999	Undergraduate Student	Ithaca College One Course either Spring of '99 - White Professor
2000 - 2003	Post-Graduate	Southwest Texas State University Alternative Certification Program Primarily White Professors from both the education and math departments. A couple of foreign-born professors
2006 - 2009	Graduate - Master's Degree Student	Texas State University - San Marcos Professors from varied ethnicities
2011 - 2023	Graduate - PhD Student	Texas State University - San Marcos Professors from varied ethnicities

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT TIMELINE: 1976–2023

Table C1 lists the key initiatives passed by the Texas Legislature and U.S. Department of Education while I have been alive. Each of these laws has directly affected Texas Public Schools.

Table C1. Participant Timeline: 1976 – 2023 Personal Educational Journey & Teacher Demographic Information, and School Demographic Information.

Date	School Policy
1979	Texas Assessment Begins
1980	TABS Testing Implemented
1984	No Pass No Play Passed
1986	TEAMS Testing Implemented Hispanic Serving Institutions is coined
1990	TAAS Testing Implemented
1997	TEKS Adopted
1998	TEKS Implemented
2001	No Child Left Behind
2003	Transition from TAAS to TAKS
2004	TELPAS Testing Implemented
2011	STAAR Testing Implemented
2015	Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) 60x30TX

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