EXPLORING THE LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS IN PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT SCHOOLS THROUGH A DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the Doctor of Education Degree in Educational Leadership

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the people who provided me with the encouragement and guidance to reach this milestone in my professional and personal life. To my loving parents, George and Fusako Bagwell, who instilled in me the value of hard work, perseverance, and a love for learning that continues to this day. To the members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Peggy Johnson, Dr. Robert Kladifko, and Dr. James Morris, who dedicated their time, gave me hope, and cheered me on every step of the way. To Dr. Deborah Leidner for believing in me and being the leader who inspired so many. Most of all, to my husband Michael, for his understanding, sacrifice, and patience for what seemed like an endless journey. I could not have completed this doctoral program and dissertation without his support and encouragement.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Copyright ii
Signature Page iii
Dedication iv
List of Tables viii
Abstract ix

Chapter 1: Statement of the Problem 1
   Problem Statement 4
   Purpose/Significance 9
   Research Questions 10
   Overview of Methodology 11
   Delimitations 13
   Limitations 14
   Dissertation Organization 15

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature 17
   Principal Leadership and School Effectiveness: A Historical Perspective 18
   Effective Schools Movement 19
   Instructional Leadership 20
   Transformational Leadership 29
   Transactional Leadership 35
   Shared Leadership 40
   Distributed Leadership 45
   Theoretical Conceptualizations 51
      Leadership Tasks and Functions 58
      Enacting Leadership Tasks 59
      Social Distribution of Enacting Tasks 60
      Situated Distribution of Leadership Practice 60
   Summary of Literature Review 63

Chapter 3: Methodology 66
   Research Questions 67
   Research Tradition and Design 67
   Research Site, Demographics, and Context 69
   Research Sample and Data Sources 71
      Sampling Process 72
      Sample Characteristics 74
      Rights of Participants and Ethical Considerations 75
   Data Collection Instruments and Procedures 77
      Participant Observations 77
      Interviews 78
      Focus Groups 80
   Documents and Artifacts Review 81
## Summary

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions  
Overview of the Problem 188  
Purpose Statement and Research Questions 190  
Methodology 190  
Conceptual Framework 191  
Summary of Major Findings 193  
Discussion 197  
Leadership Tasks and Functions 197  
Enacting Leadership Tasks 202  
Social Distribution of Enacting Tasks 207  
Situated Distribution of Leadership Practice 209  
Artifacts and Tools 213  
Organizational Routines 216  
Implications for Policy and Practice 218  
Recommendations for Future Research 220  
Concluding Statement 222

References 224

Appendix A: Invitation to Participate: Principal 240  
Appendix B: Human Research Subject Consent: Principal 242  
Appendix C: Invitation to Participate: Leadership Team-Teachers 246  
Appendix D: Human Research Subject Consent: Leadership Team-Teachers 248  
Appendix E: Participant Interview Guide: Principal 252  
Appendix F: Focus Group Interview Guide: Leadership Team-Teachers 256
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Dimensions of Instructional Leadership Model</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Demographic Information of Case Schools</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Participant Demographic Information for Cedro Elementary School</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Participant Demographic Information for Almendro Elementary School</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

EXPLORING THE LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS IN PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT SCHOOLS THROUGH A DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

By

Jack L. Bagwell

Doctor of Education Degree in Educational Leadership

This qualitative case study explored the leadership practices of two elementary school principals working in Program Improvement schools where there was sustained student academic growth in API (Academic Performance Index) over five consecutive years. Using a distributed leadership framework, this study explored how each principal enacted leadership tasks in their work of school improvement. The approach of ethnography informed this case study inquiry and captured the leadership experiences of case principals. Data were collected through semistructured participant interviews and focus group interviews with leadership team members and teacher representatives. Additional data were collected through observations in the school setting and document review. A case study for each principal was created, followed by a within case analysis of each case principal, and finally a cross case analysis was conducted.

Findings revealed how exploring leadership practice through a distributed leadership framework provided insights into how leadership practice was stretched over
many different people and took shape in the interactions of leaders, followers, and aspects of their situation. Additionally, aspects of the situation, organizational routines, artifacts, and tools contributed to defining and providing a focus for school leaders in their everyday work of school improvement to improve student learning and change classroom practice. Continued empirical research is needed to further build upon the conceptual understanding of leadership practice from a distributed perspective. Research efforts should focus on the “how” of leadership practice so current and future school leaders can reflect upon their own practice and how they approach their work of school improvement.
Chapter I: Statement of the Problem

The continuing struggle to close the achievement gap in this nation for all students is increasingly viewed as the most significant educational challenge facing 21st century American society (Kim & Sunderman, 2005). Concerns regarding the persistence and widening of the academic achievement gap between white and minority students, especially Hispanic and African American youth is mounting (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2009). According to Kirsch, Braun, Yamamoto, and Sun (2006), the persistence of this educational achievement gap will continue to have a direct economic, political, and social impact upon the United States if not addressed by this nation’s elementary and secondary schools.

The sense of urgency to address the achievement gap has resulted in the creation of federal and state accountability systems for schools (Daly, Der-Martirosian, Ong-Dean, Park, & Wishard-Guerra, 2011; Marks & Nance, 2007) and placed a greater emphasis and focus upon the role and leadership work of the principal to raise student academic achievement (Finnigan & Stewart, 2009). Within the context of the policy discussion on accountability, principal leadership is viewed as essential to the process of creating schools where robust teaching and learning occurs so all students can meet established performance standards and benchmarks for academic proficiency (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005).

Other researchers support examining the role and importance of principal leadership in schools today when addressing accountabilities for student academic improvement (Elmore, 2000). When pressed and forced to create educational learning environments to close the achievement gap, principals are increasingly scrutinized for
how they lead and manage their schools in the current education policy environment where accountability systems link student academic performance to sanctions, compliance monitoring, and funding (Daly et al., 2011; Dee, Jacob, Hoxby, & Ladd, 2010; Finnigan & Stewart, 2009; Johnstone, Dikkers, & Luedek, 2009). In addition, the complex educational environment of accountability continues to shift the focus and discussion on examining the effective leadership skills principals need in order to meet the demands imposed by current accountability systems (Harris, 2002).

Improving the academic achievement levels of all students today will require an entirely different perspective and approach to leadership in schools (Guskey, 2007). Principals can no longer rely on personal characteristics, heroism, or charismatic qualities as proxies for strong, focused leadership in this age of high-stakes accountability to raise student achievement (Elmore, 2004; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Timperley, 2005). Spillane (2005a) supports this perspective and has argued that principals cannot single-handedly accomplish the work of school improvement because the process of improving schools is difficult and involves the cooperation, work, and efforts of other individuals besides the principal.

Yet, despite the call by researchers in the field of educational leadership to redefine principal leadership in an era of increased accountability for improving student achievement, the heroic, attribute-driven perspective still continues to shape and influence how people think of principal leadership (Elmore, 2005; Mulford, 2008; Spillane, 2006). Consequently, principals will need to rethink and reexamine how they will lead and manage their schools in response to the new era of accountability (Harris, 2008b).
A leadership practice receiving considerable focus within the educational research community is distributed leadership. According to Woods and Gronn (2009), distributed leadership has emerged as a top contender with a number of researchers in the field of educational leadership, and the topic of distributed leadership continues to influence and impact research in this field. Among leading researchers in the field of educational leadership, distributed leadership is viewed as an alternative to an outdated leadership framework based on heroic actions, control, and a hierarchical, rigid model of leading (Gronn, 2002b; Gronn, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2007; Mayrowetz, 2008; Mulford, 2008; Spillane, 2006).

As the responsibility for accountability to improve student academic achievement in schools grows, and principals are increasingly viewed as solely responsible for this work, a more detailed examination of the actual practices, behaviors, activities, and resulting influence of principal leadership practices upon others within the school organization is called for (Harris, 2004; Spillane, 2006; Wahlstrom, Seashore Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010; Woods & Gronn, 2009).

Although extensive research has been conducted on the topic of principal leadership, qualitative case studies on the leadership practices of elementary school principals in Program Improvement schools where students are making sustained academic progress is very limited (Finnigan & Stewart, 2009). Given the critical need for effective principal leadership in Program Improvement schools in an era of high-stakes accountability, a research study to provide additional empirical knowledge about principal leadership practice in these schools is warranted. This qualitative case study examined the leadership practice of two elementary principals working in Program
Improvement schools where there was sustained student academic growth as evidenced by the annual increase in API over five consecutive years.

**Problem Statement**

The expectations for greater school accountability are a distinctive feature of the current wave of educational reform in America under the federal requirements of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (Daly, 2009). The No Child Left Behind Act was signed into law by former President George W. Bush in January of 2002, and affected more than 90,000 public schools (Dee & Jacob, 2011).

The No Child Left Behind Act stands as the most far-encompassing piece of federal legislation affecting educational policy and decision making in the United States over the last forty years (Dee & Jacob, 2011). The hallmark of this federal legislation required states to annually assess students to measure their performance in meeting state content standards, and to identify any schools and districts failing to meet proficiency targets as failing to meet Adequately Yearly Progress (AYP) (Daly, 2009; Daly et al., 2011; Dee & Jacob, 2011; Mintrop & Trujillo, 2007). NCLB was passed to ensure that 100% of students would be academically proficient by the year 2014 (Crum, Sherman, & Myra, 2009). Schools failing to meet AYP targets are designated as in need of improvement or intervention, which sets in motion a series of progressive sanctions for the school and district (Daly et al., 2011; Orr, Berg, Shore, & Meier, 2008).

Consequently, new accountability systems have been designed and mandated by various states defining acceptable levels of student performance, evaluating this performance, then providing a system of sanctions, intervention strategies, and even school closures as a consequence of failure to achieve these externally set performance
standards established by NCLB (Diamond & Spillane, 2004; Elmore, 2004; Gunzenhauser & Hyde, 2007).

Cantano and Stronge (2006) and Diamond and Spillane (2004) have claimed that the political pressure of high-stakes accountability has required administrators to improve instruction and student achievement while trying to maintain a balance in addressing operational needs simultaneously at the school site, resulting in a significant amount of overload and compromising principal effectiveness. These events indicated a continued emphasis on school reform and a need to examine how principals exercised leadership practice in schools to meet these accountability demands (Elmore, 2005).

Consequently, the role of the principal has been the focus of increased pressure, scrutiny, and evaluation as student achievement outcomes became a determiner of principal effectiveness and leadership capability, and brought to light in a highly public and transparent manner (Sanzo, Sherman, & Clayton, 2011). As the topic of principal leadership increasingly became the focus of public inquiry and discussion, researchers in the field of educational leadership have offered their perspectives on this topic as well.

According to Elmore (2004), principal leadership in America has been romanticized to the point where people have subscribed heavily to trait theories of success measured by personal characteristics and behaviors rather than on the knowledge and skill sets needed to lead effectively. Moreover, school leadership is no longer viewed as solely carried out by one person or associated with a person’s role or title within the organization, instead leadership is viewed as a construct that can be distributed by members of the organization as they interact with one another (Spillane, Camburn, & Stitziel-Pareja, 2007; Gronn, 2002a; Spillane, 2006). Cunningham and Cordeiro (2009)
further substantiated this perspective and emphasized the need for principals to have the knowledge, skill sets, and personality to effectively lead schools and improve student achievement in complex and diverse school settings affected by the establishment of accountability systems.

One important shift that is emerging from the research on leadership is that of redefining the principal’s role in transforming schools (Copland, 2003; Elmore, 2004; Mayrowetz, 2008; Timperley, 2005). The pathway to transforming schools through the model of the heroic leader operating in a hierarchical structure where expertise, knowledge, and skills are concentrated in one individual is giving way to a different model of leadership for change. Chibulka, Coursey, Nakayama, Price, and Stewart (2000) suggested this shifting view of leadership from a hierarchical, controlling approach to a shared, collaborative approach is providing opportunities for stakeholder groups to be involved in the process of curricular planning, goal setting, and budget development. Although traditional schools may have been designed as hierarchical models where the responsibility for accountability and delivery of a quality education to students rested with the principal, there exists a need for a different type of leadership and a need for more individuals to be involved with carrying out the work of school improvement (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008).

This conceptualization of leadership necessitated an examination of a different model of leadership for systemic change because there are not enough heroic visionaries to meet the demands of schools in need of transformation (Copland, 2003). In addition, Spillane (2005b) argued that principals could not single-handedly accomplish the work of school improvement because this process involved the cooperation and efforts of other
individuals using various tools and working in different contexts. Chibulka et al. (2000) suggested that these changes in roles for stakeholders and administrators would require different skill sets and tools than what was previously used to lead and manage schools. Administrators will need to be equipped to lead with skill sets to build group consensus and collaboration instead of leading by authority, compliance, or enforcement (Copland, 2003; Finnigan & Stewart, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2007).

The emergence and evolution of a new paradigm to understand, describe, and apply new knowledge and approaches to understanding leadership in schools is needed. How administrators are responding to accountability systems reflects a need to examine the definition of leadership, how leadership is enacted, and how the enactment of leadership intersects within the context of accountability systems designed to improve student achievement (Crum et al., 2009; Diamond & Spillane, 2004).

This focus upon new accountability systems under the legislation has resulted in a need for principals to develop effective leadership practices to create conditions in schools where students are able to reach high levels of academic proficiency (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2009). Harris and Spillane (2008) contended that the complexities of schooling and the existing accountability systems would require more responsive leadership skills and collaborative approaches by principals. Principals will need to apply these skills to navigate a different organizational landscape where old paradigms of leadership simply do not fit the needs of schools today in a politically charged accountability environment.

Elmore (2006) emphasized a strong, imperative for educators to study high poverty schools where the students were on the pathway to academic proficiency because
leaders in these schools were leveraging individual and organizational conditions to obtain desired student learning outcomes. A critical need exists to understand how principals enact leadership practice in a diverse school context if current researchers want to generate valuable knowledge and gain deeper insight into the impact and influence of principal leadership upon accountability systems (Guskey, 2007). The success and health of schools will be heavily dependent on the ability of educators to be successful in teaching minority students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and lead the work of school improvement (Kearney, Herrington, & Aguilar, 2012). Additionally, research would benefit immensely from a process whereby cases and situations of principal leadership practice in different contexts were examined empirically to better understand and learn how leadership was enacted in schools (Allix & Gronn, 2005).

Despite the current focus on principal leadership in schools and educational leadership in general, few studies have been conducted yielding empirical evidence supporting the examination of the impact of leadership on measurable outcomes (Kowalski, 2009; Spillane, 2004). Harris (2005) argued how there is still much to understand about the complex relationship between school leadership and the work of improving schools. Harris further asserted that there is limited empirical support for a connection between leadership and student learning outcomes, and the need to examine the impact of principal leadership upon organizational change. What empirical evidence about the leadership practice of principals that does exist is very small and predates the current standards and accountability movement in this nation (Spillane & Hunt, 2010).

As a result, the need to examine the work of school leaders in creating conditions leading to improving schools is warranted and critical to the current policy context.
Furthermore, because so few empirical studies have directly examined the leadership practices of principals working in schools targeted by accountability mandates, Finnigan and Stewart (2009) strongly urged continued empirical research in this area.

Additional research on the leadership practice of principals in this current era of high-stakes accountability for improving student achievement, especially for minority, socioeconomically disadvantaged students, is needed in order to better understand how principals enact leadership practice in these schools (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). Deeper insight and exploration of the leadership practices of principals, how principals carry out their leadership work, and why principals think and act the way they do in response to a high-stakes accountability environment will further contribute to the existing body of empirical research on principal leadership practice (Finnigan, 2012; Finnigan & Stewart, 2009; Harris, 2002; Spillane & Orlina, 2005).

**Purpose/Significance**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the leadership practice of two elementary principals working in Program Improvement schools where there was sustained student academic growth as evidenced by the annual increase in API over five consecutive years. Although there has been much attention given to principal leadership and its impact upon the school organization, several leading researchers in the field of educational leadership mark principal leadership in an era of accountability as an important policy discourse and area for further empirical research (Finnigan & Stewart, 2009).
The findings from this qualitative case study enhance and add to the empirical knowledge and existing research on principal leadership and how leadership is enacted in schools during this era of high-stakes accountability. Heck and Hallinger (2010) contended that researchers have yet to provide strong empirical evidence of the effects of leadership on student achievement and organizational change. With respect to empirical research on principal leadership and efforts to improve leadership practice, studying the day-to-day leadership practice of principals and the leadership activities they engage in will assist in developing a more integrated understanding of leadership practice (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). From a distributed perspective, this study provides a detailed portrait of how leadership practice takes shape in the interactions of leaders, followers, and their situation, and can assist school leaders to better understand and assess their own leadership practice (Spillane, 2006). Additionally, this study adds to the body of empirical work about how leadership practice is enacted in our most challenging schools.

**Research Questions**

1. What are the leadership practices of two elementary school principals working in Program Improvement schools where there is sustained student academic growth as evidenced by the annual increase in API over five consecutive years?
   - What tools or artifacts do these principals use to facilitate their leadership practice?
   - What are the principals’ perceived supports and constraints to enacting leadership tasks in these schools?
- How do the organizational routines of the school facilitate the principals’ enactment of leadership tasks in these schools?

2. How do principals, leadership team members, and grade level teachers interact in their leadership practice?

**Overview of Methodology**

This research study was grounded in the ethnographic research tradition and used a case study design. The case study design informed an empirical inquiry and exploration of the leadership practices of two elementary school principals working in Program Improvement schools where students demonstrated sustained academic improvement as evidenced by the annual increase in API over five consecutive years.

The key strength and characteristics of case study design lies in the use of multiple data sources and data gathering techniques to provide the researcher with multiple perspectives on the research topic and address the research questions (Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 2009; Schram, 2006). The case study design is a multiple technique approach to understanding and explaining the social relationships, practices, and patterns of interaction between individuals and group interactions (Creswell, 2008; Glesne, 2011). In addition, the ethnographic case study approach allowed for the exploration of the meaning of actions and events to the people the researcher was trying to understand, in addition to understanding the culture and context (Glesne, 2011; Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

This qualitative case study approach was conducted in two elementary schools located in a large urban school district. The researcher used criterion sampling as a purposive strategy to identify two elementary school principals to understand the insider
(emic) view of the leadership practices of these principals. The researcher collected additional data from grade level representatives and leadership team members through semistructured interviews, focus groups, observations, field notes, and documents review. Because the work of principal leadership involves multiple individuals, and the practice of principal leadership is the product of the interactions between the principal and other formal and informal leaders within the school (Spillane, 2007), data collection from these sources addressed the research questions and captured the interactions in order to study the dynamics of leadership practice. The data collected for this case study was organized and analyzed following the sequence of organizing and establishing familiarity with the data, generating categories, identifying themes, and coding the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

The schools were selected for their designation as Program Improvement under the Program Improvement guidelines of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) federal legislation, and the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) growth target benchmarks for student subgroups as established by the California Department of Education under NCLB guidelines. The guidelines and legislation mandates require states to administer annual student assessments linked to state content standards in order to monitor schools in their annual progress towards meeting the AYP target of 100% of students at levels of proficiency in reading and mathematics by 2013-2014 (Dee & Jacob, 2011; Johnstone et al. 2009). Once a school has been identified as Program Improvement for failing to meet AYP targets, a series of sanctions and penalties is set in motion (Daly, 2009).

After the data collection, the transcripts were read and listened to several times to identify emerging themes and potential categories. By studying the transcripts on
multiple occasions, the researcher considered possible meanings and potential connections to emerging themes and categories. Based on the work of Spillane (2006, 2007), a distributed perspective on leadership was the conceptual framework for exploring and analyzing leadership practice in the two elementary schools. The data were coded to discern themes, descriptions, and to create relational categories for the data. The researcher used Microsoft Excel software to create a coding scheme to further define identified themes and deconstruct the data for more in-depth analysis. Segments of interview text were coded to enable an analysis of interview sections on a particular theme, the relationship between themes, and themes marked as important by interview participants. In addition, the data were analyzed through a within case analysis allowing the researcher to become closely familiar with each case as a separate entity, allowing for the unique themes of each case to emerge prior to any push to generalize themes across cases (Eisenhardt, 1989).

**Delimitations**

The following are identified delimitations:

- Participation in the study was delimited to only the principal, leadership team members, grade level chairpersons, and grade level teacher representatives at two elementary schools.
- The unit of analysis was confined to only the two elementary schools identified for this study. Therefore, the conclusions and findings from this study may differ if a larger sample of cases and participants are included in a future study.
• The criterion strategy sampling method was delimited to two elementary schools identified in Program Improvement status according to No Child Left Behind guidelines.

• The researcher examined only the leadership practices of principal participants.

• Participants’ responses were responses to the interview questions developed for this study, and confined to their personal leadership practice.

Limitations

The following are identified limitations:

• The study consisted of a small sample size of two elementary school principals selected through a criterion sampling strategy.

• The geographic region of the sample size was from an urban area of Southern California and does not necessarily represent other geographic areas of the state. Each participating principal’s level of training in educational leadership programs may have affected their leadership practices.

• The study included only public schools and not private, parochial, or independent charter schools in Program Improvement status as identified under NCLB.

• The small sample size included only principals, leadership team members, grade level chairpersons, and grade level teacher representatives from two elementary schools.

• The time constraints for data collection precludes what the findings would have been had data collection been extended for a full school year instead of only one semester.
Data were not collected in the classroom setting of pedagogical practices connected to the professional development efforts, nor were data collected in the classroom setting on the interactions between teachers, students, and the content material.

**Dissertation Organization**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the leadership practices of two elementary principals working in schools designated as Program Improvement and where students demonstrated sustained academic growth as evidenced by the annual increase in API over five consecutive years. Chapter 1 of this study examined how federal, state, and local policy makers have designed and implemented accountability systems to improve student achievement, and how principals are attempting to address the significant challenges of providing leadership in an environment of high-stakes accountability.

Implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act has created a sense of urgency and need for dramatic change in how principals respond to penalties and sanctions as consequences for not meeting the federal and state proficiency targets for student academic achievement. Increased expectations for principal performance and a need to study an alternative framework for exploring the leadership practices of principals and how they enact leadership tasks in an environment of accountability is warranted.

As administrators and teachers grapple with improving student achievement in a high-stakes accountability environment, distributed leadership has taken center stage and provides a conceptual framework by which researchers can examine and analyze leadership practice in schools. Chapter 2 provides a review of current literature on the
theoretical models of leadership with a primary focus on the constructs of distributed leadership as a conceptual framework for this study. Chapter 3 provides information about the methodology, to include the research design, data collection instruments, analysis procedures, and the role of the researcher. Chapter 4 presents the findings from the data collected in detail by the researcher in an organized, logical manner. Chapter 5 interprets and discusses the findings in light of the study’s research questions, literature review, and conceptual framework, then concludes with implications for practitioners and recommendations for future research.
Chapter II: Review of the Literature

The purpose of this research study was to examine the leadership practices of elementary school principals working in Program Improvement schools where students demonstrated sustained academic growth as evidenced by the annual increase in API over five consecutive years. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there continues to be a need for further exploration and study to understand the complex relationship between school leadership and its impact upon improving student achievement. The changing dynamics of educational reform and increased accountability to improve schools has led to a tremendous amount of interest in educational leadership and the study of how school leaders respond to a rapidly changing educational and political environment (Fitzsimons, Turnbull-James, & Denyer, 2011; Gronn, 2003a).

Whereas principal leadership in the current policy context of accountability clearly matters, Finnigan and Stewart (2009) have argued that a gap exists in the literature regarding empirical research on the leadership practices of principals working in Program Improvement schools. Measuring and accounting for the impact of leadership and specifically how leaders carry out their work and affect change in schools is one of the main challenges facing the field of educational leadership today (Mulford, 2008). Effective leadership in the most challenging schools does make a difference, but what is far less certain after decades of reform efforts to improve schools, is just to what degree leadership matters and how critical the effects of leadership are to student learning (Nettles & Herrington, 2007). To gain additional insights into how principals engage in the work of improving schools and increasing student academic achievement, this study sought to understand and describe the complexities of principal leadership and the leadership practices of principals working in challenging school environments.
The chapter begins with a brief introduction of the historical perspective of principal leadership and school effectiveness. The chapter then follows with an examination and review of current literature associated with instructional, transformational, transactional, shared, and distributed forms of leadership within the field of school improvement and principal leadership. Next, the review of literature examines the theoretical, empirical, and practical conceptualization of leadership practice and school improvement. The chapter concludes with a summary of the implications for this study and how the study adds to the existing empirical literature about the leadership practice of principals in the current accountability environment.

**Principal Leadership and School Effectiveness: A Historical Perspective**

During the 1970s and the 1980s, leadership and school improvement efforts dominated the literature as both researchers and practitioners sought to address and answer how best to raise the achievement levels of socioeconomically disadvantaged students enrolled in public schools across the nation (Hallinger, 2003; Levine, 1990; Mulford et al., 2008). During this era, new conceptual models of leadership began to emerge as researchers in the field of educational leadership turned their attention and focus to school reform and school improvement efforts to overcome the effects of poverty and race (Jansen, 1995). This shift resulted in a significant research focus on educational management and leadership to further understand the deeper, impactful connections between school leadership and student learning outcomes (Hallinger, 2011b).

Emerging from this field of research was the idea of instructional leadership aligned with the correlates of the emerging effective schools movement in America (Edmonds, 1979). Ronald Edmonds and other educational researchers led the effective
schools movement largely due to their interest in examining the effectiveness of school leaders in responding to the challenges of improving the academic achievement levels of socioeconomically disadvantaged minority students in urban schools (Dantley, 1990; Edmonds, 1979; Jansen, 1995).

**Effective Schools Movement**

The driving force behind efforts to improve achievement for struggling students in the most challenging urban schools was a quest to determine what characteristics influenced or contributed to academic achievement in these schools (Heck, 1992; Purkey & Smith, 1983). Perhaps the best-known study conducted to identify and isolate these characteristics was the initial research by Ronald Edmonds, which launched the so-called Effective Schools Movement (Edmonds, 1979).

Early findings by Edmonds (1979) provided an important starting point for additional research and interest in principal leadership and its impact upon improving school performance and student achievement (Hallinger, 2011a). Studies conducted during the late 1970s and early 1980s attempted to examine and deconstruct what made schools effective, determine what role principals played in this process, and marked instructional leadership as a critical factor in school improvement efforts (May & Supovitz, 2011; Walker, 2009).

As researchers examined what was occurring in classrooms and at the school site, what began to surface from the research was that certain principal leadership practices demonstrated promising signs in affecting and improving the educational outcomes for socioeconomically disadvantaged minority students (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Edmonds, 1979; Levine, 1991; Lezotte & Bancroft, 1985). Therefore, the effective
schools movement can be viewed as the catalyst for institutionalizing the term instructional leadership in the vocabulary of educational research (Hallinger, 2011a).

**Instructional Leadership**

As noted above, instructional leadership began to emerge as an outgrowth of the earlier research of Edmonds (1979) and the effective schools movement. School reformers during the early 1980s became increasingly interested in examining how the delivery of instruction to socioeconomically disadvantaged students could be changed to raise their academic achievement levels. These reformers determined this could best be accomplished through principal leadership and creating conditions in schools for change (Spillane, Hallett, & Diamond, 2007). Therefore, principal leadership, specifically instructional leadership, has played a crucial role in effective schools and school improvement efforts (Coldren & Spillane, 2007).

As the conceptualization of instructional leadership began to evolve and gain prominence in the educational research community, greater attention and focus began to be placed upon the principal’s role in school improvement and student academic achievement (Burch, 2007). There was a greater push by researchers to examine the relationships and linkages between principal leadership and student achievement (Hallinger, 2011a).

As a result, researchers identified strong, focused principal leadership centered on curriculum and instruction as a primary characteristic of effectiveness in teaching socioeconomically disadvantaged minority students (Hallinger, 2003; Jacobson, 2011). The principal’s leadership contributed to providing a strong rationale for school effectiveness and greatly influenced the thinking about what constituted effective
principal leadership in the 1980s and early 1990s (Hallinger, 2003; Stewart, 2006).

Despite widespread and increasing interest in instructional leadership during this time, very little empirical research existed on the impact of instructional leadership on school culture and student achievement (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Murphy, 1988). Furthermore, researchers were struggling to empirically examine a differentiated approach to studying principal leadership practice in multiple ways, differing contexts, and at different levels to identify the influence of these factors upon instructional leadership and student achievement (Southworth, 2002).

Weber (1971) conducted one of the earliest studies that contributed to the empirical knowledge base about instructional leadership and school factors linked to improving student achievement. Weber undertook a case study of four urban elementary schools with high enrollments of socioeconomically disadvantaged minority students who were reading at or above grade level. Data that were collected and analyzed from student achievement test data, interviews, and observations of principals and teachers identified correlates contributing to academic success across all four schools. The seven factors were (a) strong leadership, (b) high expectations for student achievement, (c) a safe and orderly school environment, (d) a focus on acquiring basic reading skills, (e) focused instructional lessons, (f) individualization, and (g) monitoring student progress. In addition, Weber marked principal leadership around these correlates as strong contributors to student academic success.

Despite Weber’s (1971) findings, a major criticism of the research study at the time was in how the study itself was carried out. Ellis (1975) argued that the small sample size and the absence of any comparison schools on which to double-check the
conclusions and generalizations were of concern. In addition, the study did not entirely rule out the possibility that the school factors identified as related to student academic success may not have also existed to varying degrees in the unsuccessful schools.

In response to criticisms raised about Weber’s (1971) study, Ellis (1975) and the Educational Research Corporation conducted the Massachusetts Advisory Council on Education Study of Reading, but addressed methodological issues to design a stronger study by combining case study and survey techniques. In this case study to examine school improvement factors and student academic achievement success in reading achievement, 20 inner-city elementary schools in Massachusetts were selected using student achievement test data. Data were collected through structured interviews, document review, classroom observations, and questionnaires. Although findings suggested that there was no one pattern for success for all schools in the study, principal leadership around instruction distinguished the successful schools able to increase student reading achievement test scores from the nonsuccessful ones (Ellis, 1975), thus confirming Weber’s findings.

During the mid-1970s the scope of research directed at identifying school factors affecting student academic achievement expanded at a considerable rate (Edmonds, 1979; Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Rutter, 1983). Wellisch, MacQueen, Carriere, and Duck (1978) conducted a mixed methods study to identify school factors related to raising academic achievement levels for socioeconomically disadvantaged minority students in reading and mathematics. Wellisch et al. collected student achievement data in reading and mathematics, conducted interviews and observations, and distributed questionnaires.
to school principals and teachers in 22 elementary schools participating in the third year of a national evaluation of the Emergency School Aid Act.

Using hypothesis testing, Wellisch et al. (1978) examined the characteristics in relation to student academic achievement. The characteristics were (a) principal leadership of the instructional program, (b) principal leadership in communicating their vision for instruction, and (c) principal leadership in assuming responsibility for instruction. Wellisch et al. found that in schools where student academic achievement increased in reading and mathematics, the principal clearly demonstrated instructional leadership by monitoring instructional practices in classrooms, clearly communicating a vision for instruction, and exercised responsibility for decisions about instruction.

As the study of educational leadership continued to grow in the 1980s as a result of the changing context of education, models of educational leadership continued to emphasize the importance of the principal’s direct involvement in the school’s instructional program (Hill, 2002). Principals found themselves in the role of becoming curriculum and instructional leaders in order to effectively coordinate school improvement efforts to increase student achievement (Murphy & Hallinger, 1992). However, up until this time, meaningful models to examine and further understand the nuances of principal leadership and validated instruments to collect data on principal leadership were not readily available to researchers interested in studying instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2003, 2005).

To bring further clarity and establish a more exact definition of instructional leadership, Sheppard (1996) advanced a general concept of how to view instructional leadership from both a narrow and a broad definition. A narrow perspective of
instructional leadership was defined as the actions, behaviors, and practices connected to teaching and learning, while a broad perspective was defined as all leadership activities affecting student learning, in addition to the managerial responsibilities and functions of the principalship (Murphy, 1988; Sheppard, 1996). Moreover, the narrow and broad perspectives on instructional leadership further advanced the idea that principals were the primary source of instructional expertise in schools (Marks & Printy, 2003).

In their study of instructional leadership, Andrews and Soder (1987) conducted a two-year qualitative study on the relationship between principal instructional leadership, goal setting, and student achievement in 67 elementary and 20 secondary schools in the Seattle School District. Andrews and Soder concluded that achievement gains for socioeconomically disadvantaged students in reading and math were significant. The four key factors were attributed to the leadership behaviors of (a) taking action to secure and allocate personnel and resources to achieve the school’s vision, (b) establishing expectations for continuous instructional improvement, (b) engaging teachers in professional development, (c) communicating instructional goals clearly, and (d) monitoring the instructional program by maintaining a visible presence at the school.

Findings seemed to support strong principal leadership in these four domains as critical factors in addressing academic achievement for socioeconomically disadvantaged students (Andrews & Soder, 1987). In addition, this study further confirmed the significance of instructional leadership emerging from the effective schools movement, giving credence to the characteristics of effective leaders and provided specific insight into the nature of that leadership in schools serving socioeconomically disadvantaged minority students (Andrews & Soder, 1987).
Effective schools research established the connection between the principal and school success, a new role for principals who were historically expected to focus more on managing schools than serving as instructional leaders (Walker, 2009). Additionally, effective schools research served as a starting point for examining the effects of principal leadership on student achievement (Witziers, Bosker, & Krüger, 2003). Motivated by the findings from research on effective schools, researchers in the seventies and eighties turned their attention to gaining a deeper understanding of the relationship between instructional leadership and factors such as student achievement outcomes. This interest resulted in research lines of inquiry to examine the direct and indirect effects of instructional leadership on student achievement (May & Supovitz, 2011).

In the first of two early studies conducted to examine the measured effects of principal leadership practices upon school improvement, Hallinger and Heck (1998) synthesized 43 large-scale quantitative studies conducted between 1980 and 1995 through four nonexperimental research methods. These methods examined the effects of the school environment upon the leadership actions of principals and the influence of those actions upon school improvement efforts. These studies were organized into three categories: (a) direct effect studies, where principal leadership directly impacted student achievement; (b) mediated effect studies, where principal leadership was facilitated by other people or events; and (c) reciprocal effects studies, where principal leadership was determined by the degree to which the relationship between principal leadership and school environment was interactive. According to Hallinger and Heck, findings from the indirect effect model studies suggested that principal leadership had a greater impact
upon student achievement than studies using the direct effects models to analyze the relationship between principal leadership and student achievement.

Findings from this study indicated that principal leadership influenced school improvement efforts and indirectly influenced student achievement through their direct actions to impact teacher practice and school culture (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Additionally, Leithwood et al. (2004) strongly supported the indirect influence of principal leadership on student achievement in their comprehensive review of empirical research and literature in the field of educational leadership on the effects of direct and indirect principal leadership on student achievement.

Continuing with this line of inquiry, researchers began to investigate the direct and indirect principal leadership effects on students across a wide spectrum of schools serving socioeconomically disadvantaged minority students. Over time, researchers began to turn their attention and focus to identifying the leadership practices that positively impacted student achievement outcomes (Witziers et al., 2003).

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of 69 studies of school leadership practices with a sample size of 2,802 schools and approximately 1.4 million students to examine the effects of leadership practices on student achievement. Marzano et al. identified 21 categories of leadership practices correlated to increases in student achievement test scores. Although the general effects of school leadership and student achievement could be defined by specific responsibilities and practices, Leithwood and Riehl (2005) cautioned that because data from these studies were corrolational in nature, the cause and effect assumptions are needed to fully comprehend the effects of school leadership on raising student achievement.
The empirical research on instructional leadership continues to evolve and contribute to the existing body of knowledge and empirical evidence on instructional leadership. There continues to be a need to conduct further empirical research in the school setting to examine and understand the core leadership practices and behaviors connected to the conceptual underpinnings in the literature on instructional leadership and the work of school improvement (Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010).

Hallinger (2000, 2003) developed one of the most comprehensive conceptualizations of instructional leadership, which consisted of three dimensions and ten leadership practices. Of the three leadership dimensions, Hallinger (2003) found that defining and constructing the school mission framed around instructional goals was the most influential on school improvement. These dimensions and practices are delineated and categorized in Table 2.1 shown below.

Table 2.1

*Dimensions of Instructional Leadership Model*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Defining the school mission</th>
<th>Managing the instructional program</th>
<th>Promoting a positive school learning climate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership practices</td>
<td>Framing school goals</td>
<td>Coordinate and control curriculum and instruction</td>
<td>Protect instructional time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership practices</td>
<td>Communicating school goals</td>
<td>Supervise and evaluate instruction</td>
<td>Promote professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership practices</td>
<td>Monitor student progress</td>
<td>Maintain high visibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership practices</td>
<td>Provide incentives for teachers</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Hallinger’s (2000, 2003) conceptualization is strongly supported through the work of Leithwood and Riehl (2005) where their synthesis of empirical research on school leadership practices identified three core leadership practices they suggested impacts
student achievement even in the most challenging of school contexts. Core practices included: (a) establishing a vision, which consists of setting a clear direction with concrete goals, and having high expectations; (b) building capacity, which consists of providing people with support and creating links between the leader’s core values and concrete actions; and (c) influencing school culture, which is directly aligned with the school’s goals and vision.

Contemporary research on instructional leadership has been more directed at exploring and understanding the various facets and changing dimensions of educational leadership in today’s complex environment of school reform and accountability (Elmore, 2000). In one such example, Seashore Louis, Dretzke, and Wahlstrom’s (2010) five-year longitudinal mixed methods study of principal behaviors related to instructional leadership, shared leadership, and trust. Seashore Louis et al. found that the effects of principal leadership on student achievement were generally indirect, thereby affirming the importance of both shared leadership and instructional leadership as complimentary approaches rather than opposing practices to reach the goal of improving student achievement (Hallinger and Heck, 1998).

The hierarchical nature of instructional leadership as a model served principals well in the 1980s, but by the early 1990s the reform movement in education was moving quickly towards school restructuring initiatives aimed at decentralizing the authority of principals and empowering teachers to function in leadership roles (Marks & Printy, 2003). To accomplish these major school reform goals, researchers in the field of educational research began to champion transformational leadership as a model based on a problem solving, collaborative approach to organizational improvement (Hallinger,
1992; Marks & Printy, 2003). The transformational leader was one who involved others and was more ground-up in leadership perspective than top-down and controlling in efforts to bring about organizational change (Day, Harris, & Hadfield, 2001).

Additionally, the distinguishing factors between the models of instructional leadership and transformational leadership are in how the principals and teachers go about improving teaching and learning (Stewart, 2006). Instructional leaders focus their school improvement efforts on establishing measurable school goals, implementing quality curriculum, identifying effective instructional practices, and improving the school environment. On the other hand, transformational leaders concentrate their school improvement efforts on restructuring the school by improving conditions (Stewart, 2006).

Conceptualizing this model of leadership to include multiple sources of leadership within the organization rather than residing in only one individual resulted in a shift in thinking and a new direction for empirical research (Marks & Printy, 2003).

**Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership was originally conceptualized as a theory of leadership during the 1970s and 1980s (Bass, 1985, 1990; Burns, 1978; Hallinger, 2003). Leithwood (1992) suggested that the changing landscape of accountability and school reform required a shift in perspective and thinking about principal leadership. The shift was from that of principal as instructional leader to that of principal as transformational leader. Gradually, transformational leadership found an eager and receptive audience in the field of educational leadership as a credible alternative to the instructional leadership model, which was a direct outgrowth of the more prescriptive effective schools research (Bogler, 2001; Hallinger, 2003). Transformational leadership is viewed as a powerful
way of thinking about school leadership because its approaches lead to a careful examination of workplace conditions that influence and directly impact student academic achievement, rather than solely impacting instructional pedagogy (Mulford, 2008).

Burns (1978) was one of the first researchers to conceptualize transformational leadership. Burns suggested that the leader had a direct responsibility to develop the capacity of followers to execute their tasks, and to create high levels of organizational commitment to the vision and goals. Additionally, Burns believed that if leaders focused on these two efforts, then the direct results would lead to increased follower satisfaction and work productivity.

Transformational leaders develop and encourage individuals to be committed to the shared goals and purpose of the organization, be less focused on their own interests, and place the interests of the group and organization ahead of personal interests (Eyal & Roth, 2010). In order to accomplish these leadership tasks, transformational leaders intentionally concentrate on reinforcing core values, investing in collective capacity building, and encouraging high levels of personal commitment to organizational goals (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

Bass (1985) believed the roles and responsibilities of leaders and followers should be connected conceptually to maximize organizational commitment and performance. These connections yielded a level of commitment from leaders and followers to (a) do more than they were expected to do as part of their job or task function, (b) work collectively through new learning and challenging ideas, (c) pay careful attention to individual needs, and (d) take advantage of social interactions to collectively move the organization forward to achieve the goals aligned to the vision (Burns, 1978).
Bass (1985) enhanced and expanded upon the leadership theories developed by Burns (1978) by investigating the leadership behaviors of leaders in the public and private sectors (Bass, 1990). As a result, Bass (1985) and his colleagues (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999) developed a set of five behavior dimensions to conceptualize and explain transformational leadership. The five behaviors were: (a) charismatic leadership, which is exemplified when the leader serves as a role model, provides followers with a sense of purpose, and articulates a clear vision; (b) intellectual stimulation, which encourages followers to question the current problem solving status quo and advocate for alternative methods; (c) individualized consideration, which is when the leader takes a formal role as mentor or coach to support followers; (d) idealized influence, which is when leaders are trusted and respected, and they take risks without being unethical; and (e) idealized behavior, which is when leaders make decisions based on core beliefs and values based on personal ethics and moral consideration (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

As a result of their empirical research, Leithwood and Jantzi (1999, 2000a) and more recently, Leithwood et al. (2004), proposed and described three core practices of transformational school leadership. These three practices included: (a) setting direction, which occurs by creating a vision, setting high performance expectations, and developing goals; (b) developing capacity, which involves engaging people in problem solving, modeling core values and practices, and providing intellectual challenge; and (c) redesigning the organization, which is done by creating structures to support collaboration and shared decision making.

Similar to instructional leadership, researchers have continued the line of empirical inquiry and research to determine what factors, if any, directly or indirectly
impacted student achievement. To examine the direct effects of principal leadership to teacher job satisfaction and student achievement outcomes, Griffith (2004) conducted a study involving all 117 elementary schools in one suburban school district that was ethnically and socioeconomically diverse. Teachers were administered a survey to examine the direct effects of transformational leadership practice on their personal feelings of job satisfaction and on student academic achievement. The survey items represented three of the five behaviors of transformational leadership conceptualized by Bass (1985, 1990) and Burns (1978). Transformational leaders (a) were inspirational or and charismatic people who provided a clear vision and purpose, (b) delegated tasks to others in order to create new learning experiences and build capacity on an individual basis, and (c) provided opportunities for people to problem solve and creatively generate alternative solutions to problems.

Results from the data analysis added to the evidence that transformational leadership practices could be identified and categorized according to the conceptual model proposed by Bass (1985, 1990) and Burns (1978). However, transformational leadership practices were not associated directly with teacher job satisfaction or student academic performance, but only indirect effects for both job satisfaction and academic performance. Griffith (2004) concluded that perhaps transformational leadership practices more directly related to and influenced teachers and teacher practices, which then related to the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms, thereby impacting student achievement outcomes. These findings supported the earlier work and study by Hallinger and Heck (1998) regarding the indirect effects of principal leadership upon student achievement.
Valentine and Prater (2011) conducted a quantitative study in 313 public high schools in Missouri using teacher surveys and student achievement data to examine the degree of impact instructional and transformational leadership had on student achievement. The findings demonstrated that the factors of instructional leadership and curricular and instructional improvement explained variances in positively impacting student achievement scores. The three factors of transformational leadership were (a) creating a vision and group goals, (b) setting high expectations, and (c) inspiring others. Surprisingly, Valentine and Prater discovered that the relationship of the formal educational level of the principal was positively linked to student achievement, regardless of the type of school or community demographics.

In a much larger study, Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) augmented the existing empirical knowledge base of transformational leadership while at the same time expanding upon the original conceptualization of transformational leadership by Burns (1978) and Bass (1985). Leithwood and Jantzi conducted a four-year quantitative study of 2,290 teachers to test the effects of transformational leadership on teachers, their instructional practice, and student achievement. The conceptual model put forth by Leithwood and Jantzi encompassed three specific dimensions of leadership practice that connected back to similar factors identified by Leithwood et al. (2004) in their study.

The dimensions of leadership practice identified were: (a) setting direction, which involves creating a vision, establishing goals, and setting high expectations; (b) developing people, which is accomplished through intellectual challenges, individualized support, and modeling professional behavior; and (c) redesigning the organization, which is about creating a culture of collaboration and involvement. Findings supported only a
moderate effect on changes in teacher instructional practice, yet failed to explain any
direct or indirect effects of changes in student achievement gains over the study’s four
year period.

The transformational leader takes steps to put forth a compelling and strong vision
leading to increased excitement within the organization (Bass, 1985). In addition to
building a strong vision, the transformational leader can motivate and encourage people
by creating a sense of emotional attachment to the organization. The emotional
attachment to the organization then allows the transformational leader to capitalize upon
the followers’ strengths and develop their potential within the organization to build
community and trust (Thoonen, Sleegers, Oort, Peetsma, & Geijsel, 2011). To
accomplish this task, the transformational leader must align the personal values, interests,
and beliefs of people within the organization with the collective interests of the
organization, thereby becoming role models for self-sacrifice and perseverance in times
of change and uncertainty (Jung & Avolio, 2000).

Yet despite over a decade of research on the effects of transformational leadership
on school improvement efforts and student achievement, Leithwood et al. (2004) and
others (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008) concluded that transformational leadership
failed to fully capture and explain the specific elements of successful school leadership.
However, school leadership that does impact student learning includes leadership
practices and behaviors that are influenced by the organizational contexts in which these
leadership practice are enacted (Leithwood et al., 2008). In addition, Robinson, Lloyd,
and Rowe (2008) conducted a meta-analysis study of school leadership effects upon
student achievement by examining different leadership models. Robinson et al.
concluded that the effects of instructional leadership on student academic achievement were more significant than that of transformational leadership.

Despite the strong support for transformational leadership as an effective model for principal leadership, researchers such as Whittington, Coker, Goodwin, Ickes, and Murray (2009) and Burns (1978) have called for the concurrent examination of transactional and transformational leadership. At first blush, transformational and transactional leadership appear to be opposing models of leadership, but in actuality, transactional leadership is foundational to the transformational leadership model (Bass, 1985, 1990). Additionally, Whittington et al. suggested that examination of both transactional and transformational leadership models is warranted because they have contributed to the understanding of the processes of influence and leadership actions between leaders and followers in organizations.

**Transactional Leadership**

Transactional leadership and transformational leadership are often contrasted as leadership models (Burns, 1978). Transactional leadership is a leadership model that gained prominence in the 1970s, and is viewed as a product-oriented approach with a focus on the exchange that occurs between leaders and their followers in the organization (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Rewards contingent on specific targets and expected levels of commitment and performance are part of this exchange process (Hetland, Hetland, Andreassen, Pallesen, & Notelaers, 2011). Transactional leadership was conceptualized and introduced by Burns (1978) in his research on political leadership practices. In contrast to transformational leadership which seeks to motivate, empower, and encourage followers to work towards common goals, transactional leadership is characterized as a
bargaining process between the leader and follower where rewards or power are used as tools to create and influence change (Howell & Avolio, 1993; Jung & Avolio, 2000; Kezar & Eckel, 2008).

The dimensions of Burn’s (1978) conceptualized model of transactional leadership model represents a spectrum of four behavior dimensions that range from high to low leadership involvement, commitment, or interest (Avolio et al., 1999; Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1990; Dussault, Payette, & Leroux, 2008). The follower-leader exchange dynamic is described in terms of: (a) contingency reward, which is exercised by the leader through goal setting, rewards for people who achieve these goals, and compliance with rules and policies (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Berson, 2003); (b) management by exception-active, which is exercised by the leader who closely monitors the performance of people to ensure they meet performance goals (Eyal & Roth, 2011); (c) management by exception-passive, which is when the leader is not aware of problems within the organization until informed, but does not intervene unless the seriousness of the problem escalates and risks jeopardizing the ability of followers to reach their goals; and (d) laissez-faire leadership, which is the absence of leadership because the leader fails to make decisions, provide direction, or is unresponsive to people in the organization (Dussault et al., 2008).

In addition to the behavior dimensions of transactional leadership, attention should be focused on the impact of organizational context and environment upon these behavior dimensions as principals attempt to engage in the work of school improvement (Eyal & Roth, 2011). Organizational environments characterized as static, structured, and stable may be important to the effectiveness of this leadership model. According to
Bass (1985) transactional leadership is more apt to be in evidence in organizational environments where clear goals and structures are in place to define the specific work outcomes of individuals. This is in line with the leader’s expectation to maintain organizational stability through compliance and monitoring based on an exchange-type relationship (Burns, 1978; Howell & Avolio, 1993; Nguni, Sleegers, & Denessen, 2006).

Consequently, the transactional leader would be less inclined to focus on organizational change or relinquishing the status quo and risk organizational instability and loss of leader control if the organizational environment were less stable and people given additional autonomy and self-determination (De Hoogh, Den Hartog, & Koopman, 2005). Moreover, since transactional leaders are reluctant to accept any deviation from existing organizational structures and systems designed to maintain strict control and follower compliance, the organization becomes less adept at adapting to change when faced with internal and external challenges or accountabilities (Bass, 1985, 1990; Friedman, 2004; Smith & Bell, 2011). To the potential detriment to the organization, this heavy emphasis on management and internal and external control could lead to mediocrity within an organization because such an approach threatens the followers’ needs for competence, interconnectedness with others, and autonomy (Bass, 1990; Hetland et al. (2011).

Current literature and research is predominately focused on transformational leadership practices over transactional leadership practices (Hallinger, 2003); however, a thorough understanding of both leadership models is grounded in understanding the hierarchical relationship between the two models (Avolio, 1999; Bass, 1985). Transactional leaders clearly define and determine role expectations, establish clear
outcomes, direction, and expectations for task completion and goal attainment for their followers, (Avolio, 1999; Jung & Avolio, 2000). Clarification of roles strengthens and builds common expectations between the leader and followers in the organization. In addition, as followers comply with transactional agreements and expectations for performance, trust ensues and provides a foundation for relationships to develop (Avolio, 1999; Howell & Avolio, 1993; Jung & Avolio, 2000).

In their effort to understand how leaders engage in transformational and transactional leadership practices when responding to challenging mandates for accountability to student achievement results, Smith and Bell (2011) conducted a qualitative case study of four urban secondary school head teachers (principals) in England assigned to schools identified by the government as failing. Smith and Bell discovered through their semistructured interviews with the head teachers that transactional and transformational leadership practices were used for different purposes and contexts.

External accountability mandates and pressures to respond to increasing student achievement outcomes resulted in head teachers becoming more compliance driven with an emphasis on meeting accountability outcomes and focused on contingent reward and management-by-exception when dealing with teachers. In contrast, head teachers also engaged in transformational practices and maintained a focus on vision, emphasized their core personal values, and encouraged the collaboration and involvement of internal and external school community members in the work of school improvement (Smith & Bell, 2011).
Much like the findings from Smith and Bell’s (2011) study, Whittington et al. (2009) proposed that transactional leadership behaviors could facilitate the leader’s goals for the organization and support individuals at the same time through constructive and corrective sanctions. Constructive transactions are associated with connecting people and organizational performance to rewards, whereas, corrective transactions aim to bring about a change in attitude, cooperation, and behaviors, but also involve the leader communicating to these individuals what the punishments, sanctions, or consequences are for not achieving the identified organizational goals (Avolio, 1999; Jung & Avolio, 2000).

In summary, during the past 20 years, substantial research has been conducted on transformational and transactional leadership models. Transformational leaders offer a purpose to followers going beyond short-term organizational goals and focusing on higher order needs, and rely on their ability to inspire followers (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Howell & Avolio, 1993; Judge & Piccolo, 2004). In contrast, transactional leaders focus on the exchange of power, rewards, and incentives to achieve organizational goals. Understanding follower and leader roles and responsibilities are critical to success (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Eyal & Roth, 2010; Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Kezar & Eckel, 2008; Whittington et al., 2009).

However, these leadership models are problematic because there is little focus on the practice of leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Instead, the emphasis is upon the structures, heroic actions, roles, and responsibilities rather than on how leadership practice is enacted as school leaders engage in school improvement efforts (Spillane, 2006). Spillane (2006, 2007) has asserted that although knowing what school leaders do
is important, understanding how school leaders enact leadership practice provides us a clearer understanding of how school leaders improve schools.

As researchers examined and developed new leadership models, shared leadership and distributed leadership emerged as important conceptual frameworks by which to analyze and identify key attributes of leadership practice and understand how leadership is fostered in schools (Turnbull, Mann, & Creasy, 2007). Learning more about these two leadership frameworks, and what current theoretical research and empirical evidence has to say about them, can help to further practitioners’ understanding of how school leaders enact leadership practice.

**Shared Leadership**

During the mid-1990s, shared leadership was viewed as a promising model of leadership as the shift toward a more empowered workforce created a need to reexamine traditional approaches and models of leadership so organizations could achieve goals, remain competitive, and remain effective (Pearce & Conger, 2003; Pearce & Manz, 2005). By adopting a model of shared leadership, principals began to address the work of school improvement and accountability mandates for improving student achievement through teacher leaders (Printy, Marks, & Bowers, 2009).

Shared leadership was conceptualized as a shift away from the traditional role-based, hierarchical approach to leadership to a focus on collective agreement, shared responsibilities, and collective team work to achieve group or organizational goals (Conger & Pearce, 2003; Lindahl, 2008). Pearce and Manz (2005) underscored the importance of teamwork where all members of a team mutually influence one another, collectively share duties and responsibilities, and fully commit to team empowerment and
leadership development. Seashore Louis, Leithwood, et al. (2010) further added that shared leadership constituted a deliberate level of participation and influence by teachers in decision making. Much of the participation and influence is due to teachers working in teams structured to be interdisciplinary with members bringing different levels of expertise and experience with content to their collective work (Printy & Marks, 2006).

The conceptualization of shared leadership has its research roots mainly within the team-based, team-process literature (Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone, 2007; Fitzsimons et al., 2011). Examining contextual and organizational factors in which teams function is critical to fully understanding the theoretical underpinning of shared leadership (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009). According to Carson et al. (2007), organized teams are complex entities, and combined with the need to frequently redefine roles and role tasks, there is a reduced likelihood that one person possesses the knowledge, skill, and capacity to successfully lead an organization in challenging times. Carson et al. proposed that three organizational factors support the development and growth of shared leadership within the organization as team members (a) collectively understanding their specific objectives and ensure a collective focus on achieving goals, (b) provide emotional and psychological strength to one another, and (c) feel they have direct input in the decision making process leading to goal attainment.

Several large-scale empirical studies have supported the findings that principals exercising shared leadership had a positive indirect effect on student achievement (Hallinger, 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Silns & Mulford, 2002). In two qualitative case studies of shared leadership, one drawn from a nationwide sample of 24 schools, and the second a study of high school teachers and administrators
in 420 schools, Printy and Marks (2006) offered evidence that trust was a key component of facilitating, deepening, and contributing to positive interactions between teachers, fostered a climate of willingness to innovate, and demonstrated incremental improvement in personal practice. Collectively, Printy and Marks found that creating conditions for shared leadership to occur had a positive impact on instructional practice and the quality of instruction in classrooms, which was likely to have an indirect effect upon student achievement as supported by findings from subsequent studies.

For example, in one of the largest and most comprehensive mixed methods longitudinal studies on shared leadership conducted by the Wallace Foundation in nine states and 43 school districts, researchers found that a shared leadership approach to principal leadership had a moderate but significant impact on student achievement (Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). However, Seashore Louis, Leithwood, et al. (2010) found that the leadership effects on student achievement were indirect, with an indirect effect through the existence and development of a professional community serving as a pathway for teacher leadership focused on improving instruction to occur.

Clearly, empirical research points to how effective leaders influence and exercise an indirect but powerful influence upon school improvement and student achievement in this era of school reform and accountability (Hallinger, 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000b). However, studies of school leadership have indicated that the principal alone cannot provide or promote the leadership necessary to bring about or sustain the work of improving schools and raising student achievement (Crum et al., 2009; Elmore, 2000; Marzano et al., 2005; Spillane, 2006). Moreover, building and
sustaining organizational capacity is not doable if this work is limited to one or a few individuals (Elmore, 2000). Therefore, given the accountability challenges and push for school reform, the leadership work of principals will require a diverse set of skills and leadership approaches that are flexible and responsive to meet these challenges (Harris & Spillane, 2008).

Researchers have conceptualized different models for exploring principal leadership and its impact upon school improvement and student achievement such as transformational and transactional leadership, instructional leadership, and shared leadership. Today, the bureaucratic structures of traditional school systems are giving way to different models of schooling for the 21st century (Harris & Spillane, 2008). Consequently, researchers are taking a specific interest in emerging models of schooling such as networks, partnerships, and smaller learning communities (Harris & Spillane, 2008). For this reason, researchers and policy makers are calling for a closer examination of distributed forms of leadership in response to the challenges and changes confronting schools (Muijs, 2011).

While distributed leadership has received much attention and generated much interest among practitioners and researchers, it must not be confused with shared leadership. Shared leadership, a widely held conceptualization put forth by Pearce and Conger (2003), is seen as an interactive process among people working in teams or groups to lead each other to reach team, group, or organizational goals. Additionally, Cunningham and Cordeiro (2009) viewed shared leadership as a process where leadership responsibilities are shifted to rather than shared with other people.
While the concept of shared leadership and other models of leadership are not new, the conceptual framework for distributed leadership has become a powerful lens by which to analyze and examine leadership practice (Harris, 2013). A distributed perspective provides insight into leadership practice in schools where there are multiple sources of leadership and influence. Additionally, a distributed perspective provides insight into this practice and how it is a product of the interactions between leaders, followers, and their situation (Spillane et al., 2004).

With a focus on leadership at the school site, distributed leadership as defined by Spillane (2006) will serve as the theoretical frame for this study. Distributed leadership is viewed as effective in developing the capacity of people in schools to exercise leadership and is best conceptualized as a framework for analyzing leadership practice (Spillane 2005a, 2006). Leadership practice centers not just on what people do, but how they go about leadership practice and why they engage in it (Spillane et al., 2007). Understanding the “how” of school leadership is necessary if research is going to produce useful knowledge about school leadership for practitioners and researchers alike (Spillane, 2005a).

The next section will explore existing theoretical and empirical knowledge about distributed leadership and its effects on school improvement, in addition to reviewing the work of two leading researchers in the study of distributed leadership theory, Peter Gronn and James Spillane. First, the conceptual base for Gronn’s (2000; 2002b) work on distributed leadership will be reviewed followed by the examination of Spillane’s (2006) conceptualization of distributed leadership that has dominated research and practice development in this country (Fitzsimons et al., 2011).
Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership is relatively new in the field of leadership and organizational performance (Harris, 2004, 2013), and has gained the attention of researchers, practitioners, and policy makers (Spillane, 2007). The term distributed leadership has commonly been ascribed to any type of shared or collaborative leadership practice, resulting in somewhat of an unclear meaning and use of the term (Harris, 2013). Therefore, Mayrowetz (2008) argued for the need to clear up any misconceptions resulting from the use of the term distributed leadership when attempting to examine the connections between leadership practice and improving schools.

Due to a limited empirical research base, Spillane et al. (2004) have spoken to the need for empirical research of leadership practice that focuses on the “how” and “why” of leadership work. A distributed perspective of leadership provides a theoretically grounded framework by which the “how” and “why” of leadership practice can be examined, and may serve as a more accurate way of representing patterns of leadership that occur in organizations (Gronn, 2003b; Harris, 2004; Spillane, 2006; Timperley, 2005; Woods & Gronn, 2009). Moreover, the potential for additional empirical research on distributed leadership as a framework for analyzing school leadership is growing, and much remains to be explored and understood (Harris, 2004; Spillane, 2007).

A distributed perspective on leadership practice should not be viewed as a recipe or a “how to” plan for carrying out leadership, but viewed as a way to generate insights into the practice of leadership, and viewed as a framework to analyze leadership practice (Spillane, 2006). By analyzing leadership practice and developing cases of that practice, Spillane et al. (2004) concluded that a distributed perspective is useful as a tool to
facilitate changes in leadership and management actions. The distributed leadership framework maintains that there are multiple sources of influence and interactions, and how leaders and followers enact leadership within these interactions is critical (Spillane, 2006). Leadership practice is about the resulting outcomes of the interactions between leaders, followers, and aspects of their situation, which reflects a substantially different way of thinking about and analyzing leadership practice than previous scholarly work (Spillane, 2005b).

As schools and school systems change, different forms and patterns of leadership will emerge causing leaders to examine more responsive leadership approaches to deal with the changing nature of schooling (Harris, 2008a). Along these lines, any discussion of school leadership and school improvement must not only examine leadership practices and the effects of leadership, but also the sources of leadership and how leadership is enacted (Mayrowetz, 2008; Spillane, 2006; Spillane, Diamond, & Jita, 2003). Up until the early 1990s, research in the field of educational administration focused on the principal as the source of leadership in schools (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2009). Gradually during the 1990s there was a shift in emphasis from the principal as the source of leadership to a focus on the role of the teacher and others in the school assuming leadership roles in schools (Marks & Printy, 2003). Consequently, during this decade the increased attention in taking a distributed perspective on school leadership has led to its reconceptualization (Gronn, 2002a; Spillane, 2006; Spillane & Healey, 2010).

Due to the complexities of the current accountability environment, principal leadership can no longer be viewed as a key function of the principal’s work, but rather as a process influenced by the interactions between multiple people in the school (Gronn,
2002b; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001; Spillane et al., 2004; Wright, 2008). Therefore, the traditional leadership perspective where one person, generally the principal, is responsible for enacting all of the leadership responsibilities, is quickly giving way to a more distributed perspective of leadership (Spillane, 2006). From this perspective, leadership emerges and is owned by a group or network of people coming together to share their expertise and tacit knowledge (Gronn 2002b). Whereas existing leadership theories take into account the relationship between leader and follower, localizing leadership to just one individual in a hierarchy of relationships within the organization, distributed leadership as a conceptual framework takes into account the possibility of multiple sources of leadership, interdependencies, and the dynamics of role group interactions within the organization (Woods & Gronn, 2009).

Distributed leadership provides a new framework for examining leadership practice in schools and can be viewed as a unifying activity that emerges when many people working collectively are linked through social interaction and cooperation (Gronn, 2002b; Spillane, 2006). Leadership is no longer thought of as an individual, isolated act, but instead as a practice where, according to Cunningham and Cordeiro (2009) and others (Spillane & Healey, 2010), the responsibilities of the organization are shifted to others rather than only residing with one individual. Decisions emerge from collaborative discussion among the different members of the organization engaged in mutually dependent tasks (Murphy, Smylie, Mayrowetz, & Seashore Louis, 2009).

Although distributed leadership may be the latest popular topic of discussion and focus for research on educational leadership, Harris (2007) cautioned for the need to continue answering critical questions about distributed leadership through additional
empirical research. While there is evidence that patterns of distributed leadership have shown a positive relationship between distributed leadership and academic achievement, the evidence continues to emerge (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). Therefore, continued research to ascertain the effectiveness of distributed leadership practice in positively contributing to school improvement efforts and student learning is needed (Woods, Bennett, Harvey, & Wise, 2004). Additionally, a sound research base is needed to further assess the effectiveness of distributed leadership in positively enhancing school improvement and student learning outcomes (Woods et al., 2004).

Recently, a number of longitudinal studies have highlighted the strong relationship between distributed leadership and improving student achievement (Harris 2007). Three studies presented here provide empirical examples of this relationship and impact. First, Heck and Hallinger (2010) conducted a four-year longitudinal quantitative study of elementary schools to examine the effects of distributed leadership on the work of school improvement and student achievement. According to the findings, a shift towards distributed leadership practice could be linked to school improvement and growth in student academic achievement in mathematics and literacy.

The second study by Copland (2003) sought to move beyond examination of narrow role-based strategies that have historically defined school leadership, to an empirical examination of distributed leadership as a framework to think about restructuring roles and processes of school leadership. Copland demonstrated how a focus on inquiry-based approaches to school improvement created new opportunities within the organization for leadership positions to emerge, and as a result leadership was distributed. Copland examined 16 schools through a five-year longitudinal study where
the work of school improvement rested on the need for school communities to create and sustain distributed leadership systems encompassing administrators, teachers, support staff, and community members.

Findings suggested use of an inquiry process was critical to school improvement and served as a vehicle for developing and distributing leadership (Copland, 2003). Additionally, Copland (2003) confirmed that the data were too limited to suggest significant effects on student achievement; however, data collection from the third year revealed positive trends in student achievement as distributed leadership was stretched over additional members and participation increased as additional individuals took on leadership roles and encouraged others to do the same.

In the third study using a distributed leadership framework, Timperley (2005) conducted a four-year longitudinal mixed methods study in seven New Zealand elementary schools engaged in the implementation of a literacy initiative. Timperley found in this mixed methods study that there were certain distributed leadership behaviors that distinguished the higher achieving schools from the lower achieving schools. In the high gain schools, teacher leaders communicated clear expectations for teacher collaboration, implemented the literacy initiative, used disaggregated data to ascertain how teacher practice impacted student learning of literacy skills, and implemented problem-solving strategies to identify alternative teaching practices to meet student learning needs. Timperley concluded that distributed leadership is desirable only if the quality of leadership tasks contributes to improving teacher practice and results in more robust instruction.
These three studies used a distributed leadership framework and each focused on multiple sources of leadership within the school, while examining different aspects of how leadership was distributed. While Timperley (2005) focused mainly on the interactions and activities of leaders through structured team meetings in order to have a common focus across all seven schools, the other two studies attempted to examine informal sources of leadership beyond a team setting. Copland (2003) focused on multiple individuals in the 16 schools, their interactions, and their interactions with tasks and activities. Heck and Hallinger (2009, 2010) focused on the effects of changes in distributed leadership and the resulting effects in the growth in student learning. An examination of these three studies reveals that any empirical research must acknowledge and take into account the array of formally and informally designated leaders that may be involved with the work of school improvement if the existing empirical knowledge base is going to be further extended (Spillane & Healey, 2010).

In conclusion, the nature of schooling in the 21st century and the work of school improvement in the current accountability environment are rapidly changing (Woods et al., 2004). This has led to an increased interest and further empirical research to study the various aspects of distributed leadership and the interactions of formal and informal school leaders to assess its effect on school improvement and student academic achievement (Spillane et. al, 2003). Distributed leadership has the potential to distinguish itself from the more traditional models of leadership in its attempt to provide a holistic perspective on leadership practice rather than just a theory of leadership prescribing how school leaders should engage in the work of school improvement (Witziers et al., 2003).
Theoretical Conceptualizations

The first frame by which to view distributed leadership is the theoretical frame. Currently, Spillane et al. (2001, 2004) and Gronn (2000) are at the vanguard of developing theories of distributed leadership and leadership practice in school settings, although their theoretical perspectives differ (Harris, 2005; Harris & Muijs, 2005). Spillane (2006) has drawn from the theoretical underpinnings of distributed cognition to inform the concept of distributed cognition to develop a theory of distributed leadership, while Gronn (2000, 2002a) has drawn from the theoretical underpinnings of activity theory to inform his work on developing a theory of distributed leadership.

Gronn’s (2002b) conceptual description of distributed leadership is highly complex, with activity theory at the forefront of his conceptualization and examination of distributed leadership. According to activity theory, leadership is a joint phenomenon where opportunities for leadership exist in the interactions of people as they engage in leadership activities (Harris, 2005; Harris & Muijs, 2005). Moreover, Gronn (2000) and others (Woods et al., 2004) have viewed activity theory as a way to frame and describe social interactions as a process of involving relationships and interactions with people as they engage in technology, exchange ideas, and interface with communities, altering the environment and relationships in the process of achieving desired outcomes.

Moreover, Gronn (2000, 2002a) proposed that distributed leadership emerged as a result of the interactions of people in a group or groups of people acting as one connected network with a specific purpose. In this conceptualization, Gronn (2002b) has viewed leadership as a concerted action to be explored from a broader understanding of leadership practice rather than a collective of each person enacting tasks. This
perspective holds that people in a given organization are working in tandem to merge their efforts and expertise so that the collective outcome of the group is greater than the efforts or actions of one person alone.

Gronn (2002b) and Bennett, Wise, Woods, & Harvey (2003) described three patterns of collective (concerted) actions observable in the practice of distributed leadership: (a) spontaneous collaboration, where leadership is a result of the collective interactions and relationships of individuals with different skills and expertise collaborating to accomplish a task; (b) shared roles, where leadership emerges between two or more individuals as they coordinate their efforts to accomplish a task or problem solve; and (c) institutional structures, where distributed leadership practices are governed by the formal organizational structures such as grade level configurations, class and school schedules, or assigned positional roles.

Finally, Gronn’s (2000) conceptualization of distributed leadership is more of a theoretical exploration of leadership practice drawing upon a reanalysis of other studies on distributed leadership. According to Gronn (2009), leadership is best understood conceptually not as distributed or stretched over the work many people in a given organization, but should be examined as a hybrid. This conceptualization takes into account that over a period of time leadership can, and often does, become concentrated in one person, and at other times leadership is distributed among multiple people in their enactment of tasks or engagement in activities connected to organizational improvement.

In contrast, Spillane (2006) has conceptualized leadership practice from a distributed view resulting from the interactions of leaders and followers in their situation, and where organizational routines, tools, and artifacts can at times mediate the
interactions between people in their practice. Additionally, a distributed perspective is an analytic framework to examine school leadership and management involving the leader-plus aspect, and the practice aspect (Spillane, 2006: Spillane, Camburn, Pustejovsky, Stitziel-Pareja, & Lewis, 2008).

Distributed leadership is not meant to be a recipe or prescription for how school leaders should exercise leadership in schools. Distributed leadership is best conceptualized as a framework for exploring and analyzing leadership to generate additional insights into how school leaders can be more effective in their leadership practice (Spillane, 2006). A distributed perspective puts the focus squarely on leadership practice. The focus is to understand how the situational context can be a direct part of the leadership experience, and how organizational routines, artifacts, and tools can provide direct insights into the actions and thinking of school leaders (Spillane et al., 2001).

The leader-plus aspect takes into account how leadership can involve many different people, not just the person designated by formal title or role as the leader of the organization (Spillane, 2006). Leadership practice occurs in the interactions of leaders and followers, not with the specific actions of individual leaders (Spillane & Zuberi, 2009). People in formal and informal leadership roles in schools take collective responsibility for leadership in their work of school improvement. Additionally, their work is acknowledged as contributing to leadership practice in their enactment of tasks and activities (Spillane & Orlina, 2005). The focus is foremost on the practice of leadership rather than more formalized roles, titles, routines, and responsibilities. Leadership practice is always the starting point for understanding the “how” of school
leadership as it unfolds in the work of improving schools (Spillane, 2005a; Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2003).

From a distributed perspective, leadership practice is framed as the outcome of the interactions of leaders, followers, and aspects of their situation (Spillane, 2006; Spillane, 2007; Spillane & Orlina, 2005). The interactions between formal and informal leaders and followers in schools are key to understanding leadership practice from a distributed perspective. It is within the interactions of leaders, followers, and aspects of their situation that constitutes leadership practice, not solely as a result of the knowledge or specialized skill sets of people designated as formal leaders in the school (Spillane et al, 2003: Spillane & Orlina, 2005). This shift in thinking is moving away from leadership as something localized in one person, associated with a specific role or function within the school, to a deeper understanding of how the interaction of school leaders, followers, and aspects of their situation shape leadership practice (Spillane, 2006).

The work of Spillane et al. (2001, 2004), in particular, draws upon the conceptual work of Resnick (1991) and Pea (1993) on cognition. Both Resnick and Pea examined how an understanding of cognition relied upon the analysis of certain material, social, and cultural artifacts. Cognition is not defined in a narrow sense solely in terms of mental aptitude and ability, but rather as a complex process of making sense and building connections that occurs between people in a given situation, which can be directly influenced by context when these connections occur (Pea, 1993; Resnick, 1991). This work implies a social and situational distribution of cognition through the interactions of people in their situations as they come together to complete tasks or activities (Halverson & Clifford, 2006; Spillane, 2007; Spillane et al., 2003).
Spillane et al. (2004) have taken a distributed cognition perspective and overlayed it upon leadership practice. A distributed cognition perspective implies a social distribution of leadership within schools where leadership practice is stretched over leaders and followers in their collective efforts to enact tasks through their interactions (Hulpia & Devos, 2010; Spillane, 2004; Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2001).

Distributed cognition is a psychological theory of learning developed by Edwin Hutchins in the 1980s (Hutchins, 1995). Hutchins conceptualized that cognition and knowledge are shared socially with other people through the use of tools, artifacts, and objects. This distribution of cognition and knowledge allows a group of individuals to accomplish tasks or activities that they could not otherwise achieve alone. Distributed cognition thereby becomes an active process of sense making that incorporates situations, actions, and artifacts together to make a single whole (Bennett et al., 2003; Spillane et al., 2001).

The distributed leadership framework situates leadership practice in the interactions of different people, occurs at times through a complex network of people, and is directly linked to individual and group relationships within this network (Hulpia & Devos, 2010). Using illustrative case studies, Spillane (2006) argued:

A distributed perspective offers an alternative way of thinking about leadership in schools by foregrounding leadership practice and by suggesting that leadership practice is constructed in the interactions between leaders, followers, and their situations…distributed leadership offers a framework for thinking about leadership differently. As such, it enables us to think about a familiar phenomenon in new ways that come closer to approximating leadership on the ground than many of the conventional popular recipes for school leadership. (p. 26)

A distributed perspective on leadership practice is built on two key assumptions, namely that leadership practice is best understood by exploring and analyzing leadership tasks, and leadership practice is distributed over multiple leaders, followers, and their
situation or context (Spillane et al., 2004). Furthermore, a distributed perspective takes into consideration how leadership practice is generated in the multiple interactions between school leaders and followers (Spillane, 2004, 2006; Spillane et al., 2007). This social distribution of leadership where leadership functions and task enactment are stretched over the work of many people implies a level of interdependency rather than dependency, demonstrating how various leaders within the organization share responsibility (Harris, 2005). Therefore, from a distributed perspective, leadership practice occurs in the interactions of individuals and their situation, not in the actions of solely one formal leader. This perspective is congruent with Gronn’s (2000) conceptualization of conjoint agency where people take a shared responsibility for the successful outcomes of a task or activity, which is a direct result of their collaborative and joint efforts, not the result of one person’s work.

Spillane (2006) and Gronn (2002a, 2002b) have viewed distributed leadership theory as an analytical tool for understanding the context of school leadership differently, while providing researchers with a conceptual framework for understanding leadership practices apart from any practical application in the organization. Spillane (2006) and Hulpi and Devos (2010) have asserted that while this conceptual framework of leadership is not a recipe or model for leadership practice, it does offer the practitioner an alternative way of analyzing leadership practice. Distributed leadership becomes a frame for exploring leadership practice in schools and between schools to determine how leadership is distributed and leadership tasks enacted by multiple people within the school (Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2003; Spillane et al., 2004).
To frame this exploration of leadership practice in schools, Spillane et al. (2004) launched the Distributed Leadership Study. According to Harris (2005, 2008b), this study conducted in 13 Chicago public schools remains one of the largest current studies of distributed leadership. The four-year mixed methods longitudinal study was designed to make leadership practice more transparent through a deep analysis of leadership practice in schools. The findings revealed how (a) leadership practice is understood in terms of practice distributed over both situational and social contexts within schools, (b) leadership practice cannot be analyzed apart from it relation to the task, and (c) situations define leadership practice in the interactions with leaders and followers (Spillane et al., 2003, 2001, 2004).

Spillane et al. (2004) and others (Hulpia, Devos, & Van Keer, 2009) suggested that this conceptual framework provides an alternative way of examining the complexities of how principals enact leadership tasks in schools and provides insights into how principals actually enact these tasks in their work to improve schools. Looking beyond the examination of the leader, leadership roles, or even tasks, Spillane (2005, 2006; Spillane et al., 2003) and others (Spillane et al., 2001) called for continued empirical research to deeply examine the “how” of leadership practice and move beyond research focused solely on the leaders’ and teachers’ accounts of what they do in the course of their leadership work. This shift in focus would further develop a more integrated understanding of the practice of leadership instead of a narrow examination of isolated strategies.

In response to a call for additional inquiry and research on school leadership, the present study sought to explore leadership practice from a distributed perspective through
the lens of four core theoretical underpinnings conceptualized by Spillane (2004, 2006, 2007) and his colleagues (Spillane et al., 2004). The four core theoretical underpinnings are (a) leadership tasks and functions, (b) enacting leadership tasks, (c) social distribution of enacting tasks, and (d) situated distribution of leadership practice. These four core underpinnings will frame the discussion section of Chapter V.

**Leadership tasks and functions.** Because school leaders do not work solely in a reactionary mode as they address internal and external issues impacting their schools, Spillane et al. (2004) and Spillane, (2006) have suggested that examining leadership tasks and the interdependencies between leadership tasks and practices allows for a detailed analysis of how social interactions and the situation or context together to comprise, shape, and build leadership practice.

A distributed perspective on leadership practice is situated in task enactment rather than in formal roles and positions (Spillane et al., 2007; Spillane et al., 2001; Spillane et al., 2004). Therefore, a closer exploration of the tasks school leaders enact as part of their leadership practice to improve schools should be examined. School leadership practice can be viewed through the lens of leadership macro functions and leadership micro tasks (Spillane, 2006). Leadership macro functions are considered large-scale organizational tasks and micro tasks are the everyday work of leaders that is essential to understanding leadership practice (Spillane et al., 2001). More specifically, leadership micro tasks are the routines that enable school leaders to accomplish the broader goals of the organization (Diamond, 2007). For example, a leadership macro function could be crafting a school vision, and the leadership micro task would be the steps necessary for the school to operationalize that vision (Spillane et al., 2004).
Moreover, not until micro tasks are identified and analyzed as to their contribution to the enactment of macro functions, can the researcher begin to understand and analyze deeply the “how” of school leadership. A specific focus on how micro tasks and organizational routines are enacted allows leadership practice to be detached from the individual and examined as outcomes of the interactions between leaders and followers (Diamond, 2007; Spillane et al., 2007).

**Enacting leadership tasks.** Spillane et al. (2004) have suggested that the different ways in which school leaders enact tasks are important, especially when it pertains to influencing change in classroom practice. Many times there is a difference between what teachers may espouse to do in their classrooms versus what they actually commit to doing, especially when the subject is classroom practice (Spillane, et al., 2001). To fully understand leadership practice it is critical to advance beyond simply an analysis of micro tasks to a careful examination and understanding of how these micro tasks are enacted as school leaders organize their practice around school improvement efforts (Spillane et al., 2001). To explore leadership practice it is important to direct a focus on the analysis of micro tasks and how they are enacted by school leaders (Spillane et al., 2001). To truly understand how school leaders carry out these micro tasks as part of their daily work of school improvement, it is essential to analyze the enactment of leadership tasks, exploring how school leaders interact with other people in task enactment, how school leaders define these tasks, and what school leaders do to carry out these tasks (Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2003; Spillane et al., 2007).

Therefore, to gain a deeper understanding of leadership practice, it is critical to gain insight and understanding of how tasks are enacted from the practitioner’s
perspective as it unfolds in their daily practice of improving schools (Spillane, 2005; Spillane et al., 2008; Spillane et al., 2001; Spillane et al., 2004). Moreover, the work of examining how leadership tasks are enacted can provide insight into the beliefs and practices school leaders bring to their work, which could directly impact the school leaders’ practice as it is framed by aspects of their situation (Spillane, 2006).

**Social distribution of enacting tasks.** A distributed perspective provides an opportunity to examine how leadership tasks are enacted by different individuals in the school regardless of their role and position within the school (Spillane, 2005; Spillane et al., 2008; Spillane et al., 2001; Spillane et al., 2004). From a distributed perspective, the difficulty is in figuring out how leadership practice is stretched over leaders and followers in the organization as interdependencies and interactions occur between leaders and followers as practice unfolds (Spillane, 2005a, 2006; Spillane et al., 2008; Spillane et al., 2004). The critical aspect of this construct of social distribution of enacting tasks is the interconnectedness and interdependencies of multiple leaders, followers, and their use of specific tools and artifacts that constitutes leadership practice. Therefore, how people in formal positions of leadership interact socially with others in their leadership practice is of importance (Harris, 2013). Additionally, an analysis and exploration of those patterns of social interaction and influence moves us closer to further understanding the “how” of leadership practice (Harris, 2013).

**Situated distribution of leadership practice.** According to Spillane (2005a) and Spillane et al. (2004), organizational routines, artifacts, and tools are an important component of leadership practice. School leaders need to use tools, artifacts, and routines in order to carry out their work, and these components are what shape leadership practice
(Coldren & Spillane, 2007; Spillane et al., 2004). Situated distribution of leadership practice also signifies that the situation or context does constitute leadership practice. The situation or context involves leaders and followers using various tools, artifacts, organizational structures, and organizational routines in their enactment of leadership practice (Coldren & Spillane, 2007; Spillane et al., 2004).

In this context, situated distribution means that leadership activity is stretched over various situations, includes tools, routines, and artifacts, and is considered part of leadership practice that directly influences the work of school improvement (Spillane et al., 2001; Spillane et al., 2004). Moreover, Spillane (2006, 2007) and Spillane et al. (2004) suggested that while routines and tools do not necessarily make the leader’s work run smoothly or bring efficiency, they can transform the nature of the leadership activity and further school improvement efforts (Spillane et al., 2004; Spillane & Orlina, 2004).

In addition to the four core conceptual underpinnings, organizational routines are an integral, but often overlooked aspect of improving teaching and learning in schools as school leaders engage others in this work (Spillane, 2009). Organizational routines provide leaders with opportunities to practice effectively, further define leadership practice, and sustain leadership practice (Spillane, 2006). In addition, interactions between leaders and followers are only possible because organizational routines enable or constrain the interactions of these individuals as their leadership practice is constructed and created through their interactions (Spillane, 2009). Organizational routines are instrumental in defining practice by creating conditions for interactions to take place between leaders and followers (Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2008; Spillane et al., 2007).
Organizational routines are considered the fundamental units of organizational behavior where many individuals within an organization carry out repetitive patterns of recognizable independent actions. Feldman and Pentland (2003) and Pentland and Feldman (2005) argued for the importance of understanding organizational routines as critical features of an organization and how organizational routines are a source of flexibility, change, and accountability within the organization. Moreover, organizational routines are a prominent feature of a distributed perspective on principal leadership (Spillane, 2006). These routines are important to leadership practice in schools (Spillane, 2006, 2007; Spillane et al., 2007) because they guide and shape the daily work and interactions of leaders and followers. Therefore, organizational routines are viewed as an essential element of organizational learning and provide new opportunities for individuals to build their capacity. In addition, organizational routines and should be part of any empirical study attempting to explore how taking a distributed perspective on school leadership can further inform researchers in their understanding of leadership practice (Sherer & Spillane, 2011; Spillane et al., 2007; Spillane & Orlina, 2005).

Organizational routines allow leaders to establish a direct connection between leadership activities, knowledge creation and capacity building, and enable all members in the organization to become leaders. Additionally, organizational routines are critical not because they allow leadership to work efficiently or effectively, but because they contribute to defining leadership practice (Sherer & Spillane, 2011). Spillane (2006, 2007) and Spillane et al. (2004) have suggested that organizational routines are not secondary resources for school leaders. Rather, organizational routines are critical and can transform leadership practice over time as they influence and shape the interactions
of people. Additionally, Spillane (2006) has marked that both leadership and management practices are enacted through organizational routines and can be enacted independently or designed to be interdependent.

To further understand and explore empirically the role of organizational routines in changing work practice and sustaining leadership in schools, Sherer and Spillane (2011) conducted a four-year longitudinal case study of a K-8 urban school including observations, document reviews, and semistructured and structured interviews. This enabled the researchers to examine how teachers and administrators went about their work of establishing and maintaining interconnected organizational routines within the school to focus on instruction. Findings from this study supported the use of organizational routines to facilitate change in teacher practice over time. When that practice was integrated and internalized by the teacher, shifts in teaching and student learning began to occur. Sherer and Spillane concluded that the shifts and changes in teaching practice occurred when teachers enacted and sustained organizational routines designed to improve teaching and learning.

**Summary of Literature Review**

Theoretical frameworks of school leadership have evolved over the decades as a result of school reform efforts and increased political action to increase accountability for improving student achievement. In an attempt to address and resolve the demands placed upon schools and principals, various popular models of school leadership such as instructional, transactional, transformational, shared, and distributed were developed. In this chapter, a spectrum of literature on leadership in schools was reviewed and categorized into two sections. The first section encompassed recent literature on various
conceptual frameworks of contemporary school leadership that have evolved since the mid-1970s until the present. The second section of this chapter included a more in-depth exploration and analysis of a framework for distributed leadership, with a focus on two leading theorists and proponents of this framework for conceptualizing leadership and leadership practice in schools.

While many of these models did have an impact upon principal leadership and overall school improvement, relatively few of these studies sought to examine the leadership stories of school principals and how they attempted to enact leadership tasks in diverse contexts under a high-stakes accountability environment (Elmore, 2000). Gradually, this began to change and evolve as further empirical research was conducted to examine the contexts in which principals work and how, in order to be successful in moving an academic agenda, principals need to respond in different ways depending on the context of their schools (Finnigan & Stewart, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2004).

However, there is a clear indication from the literature that distributed leadership is viewed positively and offers promise as a lens by which to examine and further understand the impact of distributed leadership on the work of improving schools.

The expectations for principals in this current accountability environment continue to increase as greater pressure is placed on schools to improve student academic achievement. Since this work cannot be accomplished by the efforts of just one school leader (Elmore, 2000), a distributed perspective for examining leadership practice has emerged as a frame to explore and understand leadership practice and school improvement work. Spillane’s (2006, 2007) distributed leadership perspective was the
framework used for this study to explore and analyze the work of leadership practice and school improvement.

Additional empirical research is needed to investigate the everyday leadership practice of school leaders to generate further understanding about how they think and act to improve classroom practice and lead change within their schools (Spillane et al., 2001). A distributive perspective provides a conceptual framework by which to examine leadership practice by creating a focus and placing attention on the “how” and “why” of leadership practice rather than on the leadership behaviors of specific individuals. Furthermore, an examination of leadership practice through a distributed perspective places the focus directly on the intersection of leaders and followers as their practice is mediated by organizational routines, artifacts, and tools, shaping and influencing leadership practice within the organization.

The following chapter reviews the specific methodology utilized for this research study on the leadership practice of principals working in Program Improvement schools where there was sustained student academic growth as evidenced by the annual increase in API over five consecutive years.
Chapter III: Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and analyze the leadership practice of elementary school principals working in schools identified as Program Improvement where there was sustained student academic growth over time as evidenced by the annual increase in API over five consecutive years. Across the country, principals working in these Program Improvement schools increasingly have found themselves responsible for federal and state accountability mandates to improve student academic achievement. This has created an urgency to examine the kinds of leadership experience and skills principals need in order to accomplish this task (Cantano & Stronge, 2006; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). Moreover, given this sense of urgency to address student academic performance in schools, questions regarding the impact of leadership skills and leadership practices on the management of schools and student achievement outcomes have taken center stage within the field of educational leadership research (Datnow & Park, 2009).

Following the introduction to this chapter and the research questions, the researcher will describe and justify the rationale in selecting the research design to answer the research questions, describe the research setting and sample, and review data collection and analysis procedures. Finally, this chapter will explain the explicit role of the researcher in designing and conducting this study, while discussing any assumptions and biases on the part of the researcher that may have potentially impacted and influenced how this study was conducted. The chapter concludes with a summary.
Research Questions

In order to examine and understand the leadership practice of elementary principals working in Program Improvement schools, the following research questions guided this case study:

1. What are the leadership practices of two elementary school principals working in Program Improvement schools where there is sustained student academic growth as evidenced by the annual increase in API over five consecutive years?
   - What tools or artifacts do these principals use to facilitate their leadership practice?
   - What are the principals’ perceived supports and constraints to enacting leadership tasks in these schools?
   - How do the organizational routines of the school facilitate the principals’ enactment of leadership tasks in these schools?

2. How do principals, leadership team members, and grade level teachers interact in their leadership practice?

Research Tradition and Design

The approach of ethnography was used to inform a qualitative inquiry and exploration of the leadership practice of elementary school principals. The important characteristics and assumptions of ethnography are in the interpretation and description of cultural behaviors, the accurate reflections of the participants’ perspectives, the utilization of multiple data sources, and the identification of social patterns and norms for a culture-sharing group (Creswell, 2008; Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Schram, 2006).
Ethnography assisted the researcher to better understand and explain social relationships, beliefs, practices, and the patterns of individual and group interactions. Additionally, strong emphasis was given to investigating the relationship between culture and behavior, and how the values and beliefs shared by members of a group guided their actions and understandings of those actions (Glesne, 2011; Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

Qualitative research is well suited to the ethnographic framework and nature of the study the researcher undertook as it encouraged the understanding and interpretation of the human experience (Glesne, 2011; Schram, 2006). Moreover, to better understand the culture-sharing behaviors of a group, the researcher spent a considerable amount of time in the field observing the setting of case study participants, conducting interviews, and gathering documents about the group, in order to examine the leadership practice of the two elementary school principals (Creswell, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

The use of case study as a research design was based on the research questions presented in the introduction of this chapter. The research questions focused on the “how” and “why” and invited a process of inquiry to explore the central phenomena (Yin, 2009). In addition, there were special characteristics of the case study design that served as the basis for exploring the research questions. These special characteristics included an empirical inquiry to investigate the central phenomena of leadership practice within its bounded system, and extensive data collection involving multiple sources (Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 2009; Schram, 2006; Yin, 2009). This research study was bounded by a specific group of participants, the elementary principals and faculty members working at two Program Improvement elementary schools where there was sustained student academic growth as evidenced by the annual increase in API over five consecutive years.
By investigating these research questions, the researcher was able to emphasize the important aspects of exploration, inquiry, and understanding rather than prescription or prediction. Yin (2009) has suggested that this process frees the researcher to discover and address issues as they arise in the case study, and to understand the central phenomena and cultural group dynamics within the setting. In addition, Merriam (2009) has suggested that the key strength of case study methodology is in its use of multiple data sources and data gathering techniques to provide the researcher with multiple perspectives on the research topic.

The outcome of ethnography is to provide a detailed, holistic insight into the perspectives, actions, and beliefs of people as they interact in the context of their environment, through the collection of very detailed observations and interviews (Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Schram, 2006). The use of interviews and observations provided the researcher with data to address the research questions regarding the leadership practice of elementary principals in Program Improvement schools. Moreover, Creswell (2008) emphasized the importance of exploring the context of the participant’s culture and culture-sharing group in order to fully describe, interpret, and understand the beliefs, values, and behaviors of the culture-sharing group.

**Research Site, Demographics, and Context**

The Los Robles Unified School District\(^1\) is located in a large urban city in the state of California. The district is the largest (in terms of enrollment) public school system in California. The Los Robles Unified School District serves approximately 644,000 students in just over 900 elementary and secondary schools. In enrollment

\(^1\) Los Robles Unified School District is a pseudonym
breakdown by ethnic subgroups, 73% of students are Hispanic, 11% of students are African American, 9% percent of students are White, 2% of students are Asian American, and less than 1% are Native American and Pacific Islanders. In addition, approximately 417,000 students in the Los Robles Unified School District qualify for Title I federal funding for the subsidized free and reduced meal programs, signifying that 41% or more of the student population enrolled in those schools qualify for the free and reduced meal programs (DataQuest, 2011). Additionally, the Los Robles Unified School District has been in NCLB Program Improvement status for eight years, and the district is extremely interested in supporting principal leadership and development in its schools.

This research study investigated the leadership practice of two principals working in elementary schools in the Los Robles Unified School District identified as Program Improvement based upon the federal criteria established by the No Child Left Behind Act. At the time of data collection, the student enrollment at the case schools ranged from 752 to 771. Students qualifying for the subsidized free and reduced status meal programs sponsored by the federal government ranged from 72% to 93% of the students enrolled. The ethnic composition of each case school was predominantly Latino and represented 95% to 99% of the student enrollment. Other ethnic groups were represented at each case school, although they accounted for a fraction of the total student enrollment. Table 3.1 presents the demographic information for each case school.
Table 3.1

Demographic Information of Case Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Cedro Elementary²</th>
<th>Almendro Elementary³</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment</td>
<td>752</td>
<td>771</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic Disadvantaged</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Learners</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with Disabilities</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Sample and Data Sources

The researcher engaged in criterion sampling as a purposive strategy for data collection to further advance and deepen the understanding of the research questions. According to Patton (1990), criterion sampling selects cases that meet predetermined

² Cedro Elementary is a pseudonym
³ Almendro Elementary is a pseudonym
criteria that can be studied and analyzed. The in-depth examination of cultural groups, its members, the beliefs and values of these individuals, and how beliefs and values guide the actions of the individual and group is a central focus of ethnographic research (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The strength of purposive sampling is in the selection of information-rich cases for in-depth examination and analysis connected to the central phenomena and research questions (Patton, 1990). The researcher selected schools where there was sustained student academic growth as evidenced by the annual increase in API over five consecutive years.

**Sampling Process**

The researcher submitted the human subjects research application to the Los Robles Unified School District Committee for External Research Review and the California State University, Northridge for review and recommendations, and received approval. Upon receiving notification of approval from both organizations, the researcher proceeded to identify and select potential case study participants.

The researcher used a criterion sampling strategy to identify and select two principals who were able to provide information-rich experiences and insights about their leadership practice. The researcher began the sampling process with a review of all elementary schools in the Los Robles Unified School District identified for Program Improvement status under the federal legislation of the No Child Left Behind Act.

The selection criteria for participants included (a) those principals who had worked at the same elementary school for five or more years, (b) elementary schools in Program Improvement status for five or more years, and (c) students at these schools that
had demonstrated annual increases in API over five consecutive years as measured by the California Standards Test (CST).

Once this step was completed, the researcher met with the instructional area superintendents and asked them to suggest and identify participants who possessed a broad and varied educational experience and background in educational administration in the Los Robles Unified School District. The instructional area superintendents provided the researcher with permission to study the research sites and interact with the identified participants. The researcher explained to the instructional area superintendents and the interview participants the purpose of this research case study and the personal and professional goals for conducting the research. Moreover, the researcher explained to the instructional area superintendents and interview participants how this study would generate recommendations and conclusions for administrators and teachers interested in educational leadership. When the two case principals were identified, the researcher contacted them personally by telephone and e-mail, reviewed the research study with them, and asked them if they would like to participate.

The researcher provided each case principal with an invitation to participate form (Appendix A) and a willingness to participate in semistructured interviews consent form (Appendix B). Additionally, the researcher provided each leadership team member and grade level teacher representative from the two case schools with an invitation to participate form (Appendix C) and a willingness to consent to participate in focus group interviews form (Appendix D).
Sample Characteristics

The researcher used three sources of data for this research study of elementary principal leadership practice. The sources were (a) elementary principals, (b) leadership team members, and (c) grade level teacher representatives from each of the case schools. Participants varied in gender, ethnicity, age, and longevity of teaching or administrative experience within or outside of the school district. The researcher conducted participant interviews with the principals, conducted separate focus group interviews with leadership team members and grade level teacher representatives. The demographic information for participants in each case school is provided in Table 3.2 and Table 3.3.

Table 3.2

*Participant Demographic Information for Cedro Elementary School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years experience</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Post-graduate education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Artavia</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manuel</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lydia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eva</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beatriz</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.3

Participant Demographic Information for Almendro Elementary School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years experience</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Post-graduate education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amado</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celina</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilda</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlin</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Instructional coach</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Instructional coach</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Instructional coach</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Protecting the Rights of Participants and Ethical Considerations

To solicit the participation of the selected principals, an e-mail invitation and an adult informed consent form were created for this study as two separate documents. They were the Invitation to Participate (Appendix A) and the Adult Consent Form (Appendix B). Upon approval by the California State University, Northridge Office of Research and Sponsored Projects and the Los Robles Unified School District Committee for External Research Review, the researcher sent out the e-mail invitation to the two elementary school principals. The content of the e-mail provided a brief introduction of the researcher, explained the purpose of the research study, outlined the expectations for participation, and emphasized the confidential nature of the data collection and this study. In the e-mail the researcher requested that the principals respond either by e-mail or telephone to schedule a date and time for the semistructured interviews.
The adult informed consent form was similar to the e-mail invitation but further explained (a) the purpose of the study, (b) the specific procedures and time commitment for the interviews, (c) the potential benefits for the participant and the field of education, (d) the voluntary nature of being a participant, and (e) that there was no compensation for participation. The researcher provided the participants with detailed information concerning the confidential nature of their participation and the safeguards taken during data collection, storage, access, and retention. Furthermore, the researcher provided e-mail and telephone contact information to the participants in the event they had questions or concerns regarding the research study or data collection process.

To enlist participation and informed consent from each school’s leadership team members and grade level teacher representatives, the researcher asked the principal for the names and e-mail contact information of the leadership team members and the grade level teacher representatives. In addition, each of the case principals personally asked each leadership team and grade level representative if they were interested in participating in the research study focus group. The principals then provided the researcher with the names of the potential focus group participants. The researcher contacted these individuals via e-mail (Appendix D), invited them to a meeting to hear and ask questions about the study, and then solicited their participation in the study. Finally, the researcher obtained the written consent of leadership team members and grade level teacher representatives from each case study school prior to conducting any focus group interviews and observations (Appendix E).

The researcher works in the Los Robles Unified School District as an administrator responsible for directly supervising elementary principals. Therefore, the
researcher took steps to mitigate the effects of several potential ethical issues during the data collection and data analysis process. The researcher did not identify and select participants who were currently connected to the same professional network of administrators in the Los Robles Unified School District, or who were previously supervised and evaluated by the researcher. This was done to safeguard against any researcher bias and compromise any level of objectivity. Because participants were asked to discuss details and personal information of their leadership practice, the researcher obtained the informed consent of all participants to participate in the study, maintained the confidentiality of all participants through the use of pseudonyms, and allowed participants to withdraw their consent to participate in the study at any time.

**Data Collection Instruments and Procedures**

To address the research questions for this study, the researcher collected data from observations, semistructured interviews, focus group interviews, and document and artifact reviews to gain the insider (emic) view of the leadership practice of the two elementary school principals. Rossman and Rallis (2003) have supported the ethnographic research tradition and use of interviews, observations, and review of documents and artifacts as a way to gain an understanding of contextual situations, explore the behavior of individuals, and study the interactions of people in a specific organizational context or setting.

**Participant observations.** The primary data collection instrument in this study was participant observation. Ethnographic studies rely heavily on participant observation in order to focus on the direct interactions of the members of the cultural group and understand how their interactions shape meaning and impact values and beliefs in the
cultural setting (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The researcher conducted three participant observations at each case school, which included one faculty meeting, one leadership team meeting, and one grade level meeting. While conducting observations of the principals, grade level teacher representatives, leadership team meetings, and grade level meetings, the researcher took extensive field notes at each case school to describe the settings, school cultures, and the principal interactions with leadership team members and grade level teacher representatives in the setting.

Data collected from all observations were used to describe the setting, interactions, practices, and participants from the perspective of the principals and teachers. The researcher’s goal was to gain a deeper understanding of the details surrounding conversations and interactions of individuals in the research setting, in addition to the particular behaviors and practices that were exhibited. Glesne (2011) has offered recommendations for conducting observations during research to include focused attention on capturing and annotating as much information on the physical surroundings (space and objects), participants and what they are trying to accomplish, the situation or context (activities and events), time frames, and displays of emotion.

**Interviews.** Upon approval from the instructional area superintendents, the researcher proceeded to identify elementary school principals according to the research sample criteria discussed earlier in this chapter. The researcher scheduled a time to meet and discuss the purpose of the study and research proposal, the specific procedures involved, the time commitment for semistructured interviews, and the interview protocol. Once the participants provided their verbal consent to participate, the researcher had each
participant sign and return the adult consent form, then provided each participant with a copy. Next steps involved the scheduling of interview appointments.

The researcher conducted one individual, semistructured interview with each school principal in the winter of 2013. The questions and probes for the participants were based on the conceptual framework, literature review, and five research questions for this study (Appendix E). In addition, the interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions and probes allowing opportunities for new information and perspectives to emerge during the interview process. The semistructured interviews provided the researcher with opportunities to ask each participant a list of fully established questions, and allowed opportunities for each participant to share additional information and insights about their leadership practice (Glesne, 2011). Each interview lasted approximately two hours and was digitally recorded and transcribed using a professional transcription service. All transcriptions were converted to Microsoft Word documents by the transcription service.

The researcher carefully reread the transcriptions while listening to the digital recordings of the interview to ensure an exact transcription. These semistructured interviews connected to the researcher’s goal of exploring the principals’ leadership practice in their schools. Consequently, interview responses provided a wide spectrum of insights, experiences, and perspectives on leadership practice in schools. A follow-up member check conversation with each principal assisted to clarify and further understand emerging themes from the interviews, particularly related to the leadership practice of leadership team members and teachers. Upon request, the researcher would provide a
copy of the digital transcription of the recorded interviews to each principal so they could verify the accuracy of the recording and what was discussed during their interviews.

**Focus groups.** The researcher used focus groups as a vehicle for direct access to the perspectives and practices of leadership team members, grade level chairpersons, and grade level teacher representatives. Glesne (2011) has suggested how focus groups can be useful in determining what kinds of questions the researcher might want to pursue when conducting an individual interview. These groups served as a useful way of gaining additional insight that developed when the researcher began to analyze individual interview data. In addition, Kitzinger (1995) has suggested that focus groups can surface shared and common knowledge within a cultural group, help individuals explore and clarify their personal views and beliefs, and examine dominant cultural values.

Two separate focus group interviews were conducted for each of the two case schools. One focus group was comprised of leadership team members. The other focus group was comprised of grade level teacher representatives. Each leadership team focus group consisted of three to five people, and each focus group interview lasted approximately 90 minutes. Each grade level teacher representative focus group consisted of three to five people, and each interview lasted approximately two hours. The focus groups assisted the researcher in determining possible lines of inquiry to pursue in planning for individual principal interviews and provided a holistic understanding of the interactions, ideas, and issues that emerged from these focus groups.

The researcher developed 12 open-ended questions to encourage discussion, generate insights, and surface alternate perspectives about how case principals enacted leadership practice, and examined what tools these case principals used to facilitate their
leadership practice (Appendix F). Moreover, the researcher conducted the interviews using a digital recorder and enlisted the services of a professional transcription service to transcribe all digital recordings, which were then converted to Microsoft Word documents. At the conclusion of all principal and focus group interviews, the researcher was cognizant of the possible need for a follow up interview in the event additional data were needed to answer the research questions more thoroughly.

**Documents and artifacts review.** Documents and artifacts were a critical part of the data collection process of this study. The researcher began the data collection process with a review of agendas and minutes from grade level, faculty, and leadership team meetings, and internal memoranda. Additionally, each case principal provided the researcher with copies of instructional planning templates and access to formative periodic assessment data and administration schedules for literacy and mathematics.

The researcher collected, sorted, and categorized the documents and artifacts in order to answer the research questions and deepen the understanding of how documents and artifacts contributed to the tacit knowledge of leadership practice. To the extent possible, all documents and artifacts were digitally scanned for ease of storage and retrieval during data analysis and interpretation.

**Field notes.** During the interviews and participant observations, the researcher used field notes to systematically record impressions, insights, and emerging conjectures (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The researcher included descriptive information of the setting, actions, and interactions of people in the environment, and annotated all personal reflections, ideas, questions, and concerns based on interviews and observations (Glesne, 2011). The field notes were written immediately after the observations and interviews so
important details were not forgotten. These data were added in to the interview transcripts to provide additional context to the interviews and make the stories of the participant observations complete.

Data collection for this study took place from January 2013 through June 2013 after receiving final approval from the California State University, Northridge Office of Research and Sponsored Projects and the Los Robles Unified School District Committee for External Research Review.

**Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis is a process where large quantities of subjective, context embedded, and detailed data are collected, examined, organized, and categorized by the researcher in an effort to give meaning to the collected information by summarizing the information in a reliable and accurate manner (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The data collected for this ethnographic case study were organized and analyzed in the following sequence: (a) first, organizing and establishing familiarity with the data; (b) second, generating categories; (c) third, identifying themes; and (d) fourth, coding of the data (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008; Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

A variety of strategies were used to analyze the various sources of data previously collected. A coding system was developed based on the conceptual framework addressed in the literature review on leadership theories and the research questions. Principal and focus group interviews and observations were the primary sources of data collection for this study. In addition, observations, documents, and artifacts were collected and analyzed using the conceptual framework.
Preliminary Data Analysis

Because transcripts were used for analysis and evidence of analysis, issues of transcription quality and trustworthiness were critical (Davidson, 2009). As a preliminary first step before thematic analysis, the researcher organized the collected data, checked to determine the accuracy of transcriptions, had all field notes, transcriptions, artifacts and documents correctly labeled, and performed minor editing corrections for field notes. The researcher engaged in a process to become familiar with all of the data by first reading, then rereading the transcriptions from the principal and focus group interviews, observer field notes, and artifacts and documents to obtain an overall sense of the whole before deconstructing it into individual parts (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Moreover, the researcher took steps to review the conceptual framework of the study and began to determine the categories of the conceptual framework that became the basis for categorizing the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

The researcher used a transcription service for all principal and focus group interviews. After receiving the transcripts from the transcription service, the researcher listened to the digitally recorded interviews and used highlighting and underscoring of text to mark the intensity and feelings of the verbal responses heard during the playback of the digital recordings. Then the researcher listened to the digital recordings of all principal and focus group interviews again to recheck them for accuracy before beginning the data analysis process.

The researcher used a reflective log capture thoughts and ideas while engaged in the data collection and transcription process by noting personal reflections and feelings after each focus group and participant interview prior to data analysis. Glesne (2011)
emphasized the importance of writing as an aide to engage the researcher to think about
the data analysis process, and to think about any new questions or connections that might
come to mind through personal reflection.

This preanalysis of data was critical and conducted simultaneously with data
collection to enable the researcher to focus and shape the study as it unfolded (Glesne,
2011). Reflecting formally about the data, asking analytic questions, and writing analytic
and descriptive notes and memos throughout the study made final analysis easier and
more manageable than beginning the process at the end of data gathering (Rossman &

**Thematic Analysis**

The researcher followed the data analysis process of reading through the
transcriptions of principal and focus group interviews, field notes, and documents to
obtain a feel for the data, and to make sense of what people had stated and what had been
observed (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Creswell (2008) has suggested that thematic
analysis moves the researcher away from reporting only factual details to making an
interpretation of individuals, events, and contexts. This analytic process of making sense
of information in ethnography consisted of distilling how things appeared and worked,
then naming the critical attributes in themes in the cultural setting (Creswell, 2008).

The first step in the analytic process was to consider generating categories to
provide direction for additional data gathering (Rossman & Rallis, 2003), to see patterns
in social interactions, and to develop hunches and hypotheses (Glesne, 2011). Next, data
were coded to discern themes and categories, and then the coded pieces of information
were assigned to the categories of the conceptual framework. Creswell (2008) has
suggested the analysis of case study data through the use of (a) codes linked to topics based on the literature review, (b) codes the researcher did not anticipate, (c) codes that are outliers, and (d) codes addressing a theoretical construct in the research study.

Coding, as a system of classification (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Glesne, 2011), allowed the researcher to mark what information or data were of interest or significance, and labeled them to organize information contained in the data. Moreover, the researcher used coding to generate themes, descriptions, and to create relational categories for the data (Glesne, 2011). Upon completion of the data collection and preliminary analysis process, the researcher began a thematic data analysis and interpretation by sorting all of the responses from interview participants and focus group participants by themes.

In order to accomplish this task, the researcher merged all of the interview transcripts into one Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and selected similar themes to examine. In addition, the researcher sorted and categorized the field notes from observations and document reviews and analyzed the data to interpret events, contexts and situations, and interactions. The researcher examined themes across both case schools, synthesizing the originally coded interviews to mark trends and patterns across interview transcript data. Although both case schools were different, common themes emerged between principals, leadership team members, and grade level teacher representatives across the case schools.

Data collected from each of the case schools were analyzed through a within case and cross case analysis. Within case analysis allowed the researcher to become closely familiar with each case as a separate entity, thereby allowing for the unique themes of each case to emerge prior to any push to generalize themes across cases (Eisenhardt, 1989). The cross case analysis followed. The researcher examined both case schools,
categorized, and noted similarities and differences in each case. As patterns and trends emerged, the researcher was better able to understand the leadership practice of principals in each case school. The synthesis of the data collected from the case schools yielded a deeper understanding of the leadership practice of both case principals, and is reported in Chapter IV.

**Roles of the Researcher**

The researcher and the participants of a research study engage in a dynamic, interactive relationship through the process of qualitative study and research (Glesne, 2011; Rossman and Rallis, 2003). The researcher’s primary role in this study was that of a qualitative researcher, analyzing and interpreting the multiple perspectives that presented themselves during interviews, observations and while situated in the participants’ schools.

The researcher is a current doctoral student and former elementary principal in the Los Robles Unified School District. This unique advantage provided the researcher with the opportunity to examine and understand the complexities principals face in addressing the federal and state accountability mandates to improve student academic achievement in a high-stakes accountability environment. During the past eight years, the researcher worked at the administrative offices of the Los Robles Unified School District as a direct supervisor of elementary school principals, several of whom were working in Program Improvement schools.

The researcher’s current and past experiences working with elementary principals assigned to Program Improvement schools influenced and shaped how the researcher viewed and understood the research topic. The researcher’s past and current experiences
potentially impacted the types of questions for this study, how the researcher viewed and interpreted the leadership practice of principals, and how the data were analyzed and interpreted as themes and patterns emerged during data analysis. The researcher was aware of how past leadership experiences and the tacit knowledge of leadership practice may have influenced the researcher’s thinking and approach to the data analysis process.

Finally, the researcher believed that exploring leadership practice from a distributed perspective was an important conceptual framework for researchers and practitioners to use in their analysis of leadership practice and its impact upon school improvement. Additionally, a distributed perspective on school leadership was most aligned the researcher’s beliefs about how to approach examining school leadership. Therefore, the researcher exercised care in keeping professional and personal beliefs in check during the study.

**Strategies to Mitigate Effects of the Researcher on the Case**

Creswell (2008) has emphasized how the process of good, strong qualitative research begins with a thorough and exhaustive data collection. The researcher used multiple forms of raw data, engaged in a process of working through multiple levels of abstractions, then proceeded to form categories and themes as the data collection was analyzed. With this in mind, as the researcher began to collect data, interacted with participants, and reacted to their personal stories, the researcher realized there would potentially be a certain amount of bias in conducting this study, but at the same time knew full well that these biases could be mitigated (Creswell, 2008; Glesne, 2011).

Rossman and Rallis (2003) have suggested the need for the qualitative researcher to be constantly aware of their influence as a researcher on the setting or participants.
while the study is conducted. Therefore, as the researcher began to collect, categorize, and interpret data, the researcher did not identify case schools or any of the participants in the Los Robles Unified School District, nor did the researcher involve any principals who were formerly or currently assigned to the researcher’s professional network of schools. Furthermore, no elementary schools in the present study were selected within the same geographic service center where the researcher previously worked or currently works. To minimize any direct impact upon the collection of interview and observational data, the researcher self-regulated emotions, facial expressions, tone of language, and body language during all interviews and observations in response to answers from participants.

Qualitative research supports the researcher as an important part of the research process (Glesne, 2011). The researcher was not totally separated from the research questions or the participants in this study. The interactions between the researcher and participants were iterative as new knowledge and learning were created during the interview and observation process. Soliciting feedback from the dissertation committee members and other principals not directly connected to this research study was a step toward countering potential research bias. An additional approach involved the researcher collaborating with two principals to review the interview questions to assess them for potential bias.

In qualitative research, bias affects the validity, trustworthiness, and reliability of findings (Glesne, 2011; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Therefore, the researcher was conscious and sensitive to how biased questions or probes could directly influence a participant’s response. The researcher refrained from asking questions that could be perceived by the participant as leading, or questions that would invite a “yes” or “no”
answer. To minimize question order bias, the researcher focused on asking general questions before specific ones and unaided questions before probing questions. Moreover, the researcher avoided questions that invited or implied a cause and effect response.

Triangulation refers to the multiple approach of data collection where evidence is purposely collected from a variety of different, independent data sources in order for the researcher to be in a position to support the validity of the research study findings (Creswell, 2008; Glesne, 2011). The researcher triangulated data by conducting individual principal interviews and focus group interviews with leadership teams and grade level teacher representatives. In addition, the researcher carefully reviewed documents and artifacts such as grade level and faculty meeting notes and minutes, memoranda, bulletins, schedules, and observed participants in their work place and settings.

Finally, the researcher collected raw data such as notes, transcriptions, and digital recordings that were relatively unstructured at the onset. The researcher maintained careful records of all interview transcriptions and digital recordings, documents and artifacts collected for review, and observation field notes to document the data analysis process in detail. The researcher enhanced the data reliability process in two specific ways: (a) first, by asking each principal participant to review field notes, transcriptions, and coding schemes; and (b) second, by sharing interview transcripts and notes with each principal participant to ensure a high degree of accuracy in capturing detailed information about their interviews.
Summary

The researcher designed this study to examine the leadership practice of elementary principals working in Program Improvement schools where there was sustained student academic growth as evidenced by the annual increase in API over five consecutive years. The researcher summarized the research tradition and design of an ethnographic case study to further understand and explore the relationships, practices, and patterns of group and individual interactions (Creswell, 2008; Schram, 2006). The sample design, characteristics, and process were described, along with a description of the data collection instruments. Primary sources of data collection were personal interviews, focus group interviews, observations, and documents and artifacts review. The results of the data collection and analysis are presented in Chapter IV.
Chapter IV: Findings

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and understand the leadership practice of two elementary school principals working in Program Improvement schools where students made five consecutive years of sustained academic growth as measured by API. This exploration is warranted as principals and teachers are held accountable to improve student academic achievement under the current federal mandates of NCLB, and as principals are increasingly viewed as the individuals solely responsible for the work of school improvement (Elmore, 2004). Therefore, a more detailed examination of leadership practice and how school leaders enact leadership tasks to improve student achievement in schools is needed (Harris, 2004; Spillane, 2006; Woods & Gronn, 2009). The following research questions framed this study:

1. What are the leadership practices of two elementary school principals working in Program Improvement schools where there is sustained academic growth as measured by the annual increase in API over five consecutive years?
   - What tools or artifacts do these principals use to facilitate their leadership practice?
   - What are the principals’ perceived supports and constraints in enacting leadership tasks in these schools?
   - How do the organizational routines and tools facilitate the principals’ enactment of leadership tasks in these schools?

2. How do principals, leadership team members, and grade level representatives interact in their leadership practice?

The data collected from principal participants and focus group interviews with leadership team members and grade level representatives, observations, and document
reviews were organized around four leadership macro functions that emerged from the data collected. The leadership macro functions were (a) maintaining a focus on instructional improvement, (b) monitoring instruction in classrooms, (c) sustaining a structure to support teacher collaboration around instruction, and (d) supporting leadership development for teachers. These leadership macro functions are explored through a distributed leadership perspective (Spillane, 2007, 2006, 2004) as an outcome of the interactions between school leaders and followers, aspects of their context, and how tools and organizational routines mediate their interactions. Spillane’s (2004, 2006, 2007) distributed leadership framework documents the importance of identifying the large-scale or macro functions of leadership around which school leaders organize their practice. By first identifying the leadership macro functions, then exploring the links between the micro tasks that are executed to enact these leadership macro functions, a more complete, integrated view of leadership practice is presented and analyzed within the context of the two case schools.

After presenting a summary of the study methodology, findings related to the leadership practice of each case principal are organized around the four leadership macro functions and the micro task subthemes that emerged from the data. In addition, each case is presented in terms of how the situation contributed to leadership practice, and how organizational routines and tools shaped and defined leadership practice in the interactions of leaders, followers, and aspects of their situation.

The description of the two separate cases provides a rich context and information to better understand the leadership practices as well as the broad themes and patterns that emerged during the data collection and analysis phase of this study. First, before
presenting each case study, a brief overview is provided of the school context and the principals. Second, for each of the four leadership macro functions, the researcher portrays a wide spectrum of experiences reported by principals, leadership team members, and grade level representatives during interviews. These findings ranged from the ordinary to the insightful given their personal interactions with other participants that were interviewed for this study. Finally, a cross case analysis organized around the four leadership macro functions is presented to compare and contrast the leadership practices at the two case study sites. To ensure complete anonymity, pseudonyms are used for all geographic areas, school site and district locations, and interview participants.

**Summary of Methodology**

The researcher selected a qualitative case study approach in order to examine and understand the patterns and trends of leadership practice and understand how leadership was distributed across multiple people in each case school. To examine and understand the leadership practice of principals in these schools, data were collected through semistructured interviews with each of the two principals and focus group interviews with leadership team members and grade level representatives. Additionally, data were collected from observations of leadership team meetings, grade level teacher meetings, faculty meetings, and document reviews of meeting agendas and minutes, and instructional templates.

School leadership through a distributed leadership perspective is best understood by examining leadership tasks, how leadership practice is stretched over multiple people, and the school’s social and surrounding context (Spillane, 2006). A discussion of a distributed leadership framework begins with an examination of both the leadership
macro functions and the micro tasks necessary to execute these macro functions. After each principal and focus group interview, the data were first analyzed, then organized to determine key emerging themes of leadership macro functions and micro tasks subthemes. Descriptive codes were used in the preliminary review of transcribed data. The coding process was repeated and the researcher clarified and synthesized the data to identify general and distinct themes and subthemes that emerged from this process. Data obtained and triangulated from interviews, observations, and document reviews were included to corroborate and support the findings, conclusions, and interpretations regarding the various forms and sources of leadership practice in each case school.

Cultivating Leadership in Others: The Case of Principal Artavia

By Los Robles Unified School District standards, Cedro Elementary School is average in size with a prekindergarten to sixth grade enrollment of approximately 750 students. Cedro Elementary is one of the oldest schools in the Los Robles Unified School District. While the exterior and interior buildings may seem stark and boxy in comparison to the modern schools that have been constructed in the district over the past decade, Cedro Elementary School has some distinct architectural details and features.

During the early 20th century, the neighborhood surrounding Cedro Elementary was a gateway for many different ethnic groups. Most of these early immigrant groups have moved to other communities in the suburbs. Today, the area has a high concentration of Latino families, primarily of Mexican descent, as well as families from countries in Central America. According to the principal, Cedro Elementary enjoys a “positive perception” by the community. Many of the long-time family residents and
parents are “involved in the school” and “take extreme pride in the school,” feeling the school is a “safe-haven for their children.”

Approximately 50% of the students are living in homes where Spanish is spoken as the primary language. The challenge for these students entering school is the need for additional support in language and content acquisition as they are not yet fluent in the English language. Latinos make up approximately 99% of the student enrollment, and approximately 72% of the enrolled students participate in the federally subsidized breakfast and lunch programs according to the school’s 2012-2013 School Accountability Report Card (California Department of Education [CDE], 2013).

A product of the Los Robles Unified School District, principal Artavia has worked as a teacher, instructional coach, and assistant principal, all with the Los Robles Unified School District, for 26 years. After a six-year assignment as an assistant principal at a neighboring school, principal Artavia was assigned to Cedro Elementary, and has been at the school for six years. Since becoming principal at Cedro Elementary, the school wide API growth for students has gone from 678 in 2007 to 764 in 2012 according to the 2012-2013 School Accountability Report Card (CDE, 2013).

Under principal Artavia, the leadership team is comprised of a categorical programs coordinator, an intervention teacher, an instructional coach, and an assistant principal of special education services. The leadership team meetings are scheduled weekly and generally occur every Monday morning. The intervention teacher and instructional coach work full-time out of the classroom to provide instructional support to teachers and intervention instruction to students. The categorical programs coordinator monitors the use of categorical funding to support the instructional programs at the
school. While the assistant principal of special education services is responsible for ensuring that appropriate services are provided to all special needs students attending the school.

In addition to the leadership team, principal Artavia established the ILT (Instructional Leadership Team) as a structured way for teachers to work in grade level teams and focus on the work of school improvement. The ILT is composed of one grade level representative from kindergarten through sixth grade, and any teacher can volunteer to be an ILT lead for a given school year. The ILT meetings are scheduled weekly after school on Tuesdays. According to the principal, teachers are encouraged to volunteer as ILT team leads for their own professional growth and to develop their capacity to assume leadership responsibilities at the school.

The process of analyzing data collected from interviews, observations, and documents, revealed the emergence of four leadership macro functions around which to organize the principal’s practice. These leadership macro functions were (a) maintaining a focus on instructional improvement, (b) monitoring instruction in classrooms, (c) sustaining a structure to support teacher collaboration around instruction, and (d) supporting leadership development for teachers. Additionally, during data analysis, micro task subthemes emerged and were categorized under these four leadership macro functions, allowing for a further examination and understanding of their relationship to the work of school improvement at Cedro Elementary.

**Maintaining a Focus on Instructional Improvement**

As the newly assigned principal six years ago, principal Artavia explained he walked into Cedro Elementary knowing that the school was forced to undertake
instructional improvements with a laser-like focus to reverse the flat-lined growth of student academic growth to that of an upward trending trajectory. The idea of hitting the ground running and communicating a focus of instructional improvement to the school community was critical. This was going to prove to be a significant challenge for him due to the fact that the state and county offices of education had intervened to assist the school with improving its student academic performance.

The leadership team explained how the School Assistance and Intervention Team (SAIT)\(^4\) created a sense of urgency for the teachers to mobilize and do something to address the decline in student academic performance. Leadership team member Robert commented how the entire SAIT process “impacted teacher morale and was viewed more as something punitive and anything but supportive for teachers who were working so hard to turn the school around.” Agreeing with leadership team member Robert, principal Artavia recalled:

> When I first got here to the school, the school was targeted for SAIT, so we were under the watchful eye of the county and state. I knew I had to provide stability, a sense of focus for the teachers to get us out from under SAIT. There was no question, the priority had to be one of setting a focus, dedicating resources and support for improving instruction. I tried to make sure that my teachers understood that we could do this. And I took every opportunity I could to get this message across to them.

\(^4\) A team of education professionals authorized by the California Department of Education to intervene in schools with low student achievement and insufficient progress in closing the achievement gap and to improve those schools.
Several ILT and leadership team members spoke about the beginning days of the principal’s assignment, and the principal’s efforts to remind teachers about the focus on instruction, the need to build a mindset of moving forward even though there was the potential distraction of SAIT. Conversations were initiated during faculty meetings, during ILT meetings, and they recalled how principal Artavia took every advantage of communicating a message of instructional focus and improvement when presented with the opportunity to do so.

Additionally, document reviews demonstrated the principal’s use of tools such as school newsletters, weekly staff bulletins, and memoranda to communicate and reinforce the message of a focus on instruction in literacy and mathematics during the school year. Leadership team member Olivia spoke about how “over time we’re all coming to one vision of where we wanted to go, what we wanted the school to become. This school and the principal have worked very hard to keep a focus on improving instruction.”

Amidst the period of uncertainty during the state and county oversight, there was also the issue of the California fiscal funding crisis, which dramatically altered the level of discretionary and categorical funding provided to Cedro Elementary. “It was devastating, and as principal I had to lead through this, lead to keep a focus on the work, improving instruction.” Principal Artavia had to cope with the challenge of how to maintain a focus on instruction while the school’s budgets were being severely reduced.

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5 In response to the severe economic downturn in California, state lawmakers cut the annual funding level for K-12 public schools by $6.3 billion, triggering a dramatic reduction and loss of revenue for schools.
“Luckily,” said the principal, “we became a QEIA [Quality Education Investment Act] School.\(^6\)

The selection by the state for Cedro Elementary to participate in this newly created revenue stream for schools “came at the right time” and “helped stabilize the school, so I could focus on instruction and not worry about loss of morale, or the loss of staff,” according to principal Artavia. The principal characterized this new revenue source as “a lifesaver” and spoke to its importance on several levels, especially in providing much needed stability for the teaching personnel so displacements\(^7\) did not detract from the work or focus of instructional improvement:

We still had a lot of work that we had to do around instruction, so over the years had it not been for QEIA, we probably would not have made the gains that we’ve made because the funding has freed us up to not lose so many folks in terms of displacements. And I didn’t have to worry about the displacements being a distraction and taking us off course from our focus on improving instruction.

During an observation of the weekly Monday leadership team meeting, principal Artavia was emphatic in speaking to the importance of maintaining a focus on improving instruction, continuing with solid teaching in all classrooms, and maximizing the remaining instructional time between when the administration of the state standardized testing ended and the end of the current school year. The principal’s remarks prompted leadership team member Robert to offer a casual observation of how “most teachers are

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\(^6\) Created by the California state legislature in 2006, the Quality Education Investment Act (QEIA) is a seven-year, state funded intervention program for low achieving K-12 public schools.

\(^7\) Any teacher in the Los Robles Unified School District who is removed from their teaching assignment due to a decline in school enrollment, school closure, consolidation, or reconstitution.
listening to the message and know you are going to check to make sure they are teaching and not backing off, but you might need to be explicit with certain people who don’t get the big picture.”

Findings suggested that principal Artavia believed in the importance of keeping a focus on improving instruction and communicating that importance. So at every opportunity where there was a structured meeting such as grade level meetings, faculty meetings, parent meetings, and leadership team meetings the message was there at the forefront. The principal did not let leadership team member Robert’s question go unanswered and responded assertively:

Part of it will just be on us to make sure we get the message out that the year is not over. If I have to do this and make personal visits to classrooms, I’ll make personal visits, and just walk into the classrooms. Where’s your stuff? You’ve got seven weeks left. We are still teaching. I can make that statement at staff meeting tomorrow, just to remind folks, hey, you know what? Let’s not forget our focus. Let’s not forget we still have to teach.

This was not a one-time message to the leadership team or to the teachers, but a theme principal Artavia circled back to continually in his discussion about the importance of a sustained focus on instruction. The principal explained, “You know, interestingly, six years into this work … and my tune hasn’t changed, my message hasn’t changed yet, and isn’t going to change. I take every opportunity to communicate this message to teachers.” Additionally, members of the leadership team concurred with the principal’s unwavering focus on instruction as evidenced by how decisions, projects, ideas were all framed through the lens of asking if it will support student learning, does the data suggest
a certain course of action be taken, or will it build teacher capacity and knowledge. “So we are always reworking things. We’re never just going in one direction. We’re always revisiting our focus,” commented leadership team member Manuel.

As principal Artavia enacted the leadership macro functions of maintaining a focus on instructional improvement attention and careful thought was given as to how other people within the school could be leveraged as leaders in the work of school improvement. Data collected through interviews, observations, and document reviews revealed that as the principal enacted various leadership macro tasks, micro tasks such as organizational routines and tools emerged as subthemes. These micro tasks were enacted to carry out the leadership macro functions and allowed for the examination of their impact upon instruction and teacher practice as leadership practice was stretched over the work of multiple people in their surrounding context.

**Goal setting.** At the time of data collection, principal Artavia implemented SMART [Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely] goals, “a critical strategy to maintain the focus on instruction and get teachers involved and accountable to improvement by setting instructional goals.” SMART goals were a specific way of holding teachers accountable for the progress of their students in meeting academic performance benchmarks.

The principal was quick to acknowledge that unlike the current focus on district initiatives, “the one constant here at Cedro is that I can look back and say this is one thing that we’ve done every year, and every year we’ve gotten better at it.” The principal described how the process of using data evolved over time, and as teachers gained proficiency in the use of data to set goals for student progress, the principal believed a
gradual shift in mindset and acceptance followed. Principal Artavia described this shift in the following manner:

But when I got here six years ago, data was something that teachers just did not want to see because they were not used to seeing data at all. So teachers did not know what to make of it, how to use it appropriately, or how to do their planning using data.

Adding to the principal’s frustration was the level of apathy regarding the use of data to inform instructional decisions and monitor student progress in the past. Principal Artavia lamented:

There was really no regard as to the data sets. That was just the culture that was here, but that has changed drastically, and now teachers are very adept, not only at looking at data but analyzing and disaggregating it and really making sense of what the data tells us and where we need to go.

Several leadership team members expressed ways in which the principal had used data and the SMART goal setting process to specifically create opportunities for teachers to reflect on their own teaching practices and how teachers would use data during grade level meetings. Some of the teachers “are running with it, the data analysis with others on their grade level. They have taken a lead in some of the data discussions.” Leadership team member Manuel shared a perspective on this process noting, “it is amazing how teachers will reflect on their teaching practices. This is what the data says about it? Is this data correct? No, why not? Yes, okay. And what are you going to do now?” At which point another leadership team member put forth a more nuanced and in-depth view on data use as part of the SMART goals process:
There’s where you begin your discussions and your reflection and the work.

Sometimes the teacher will reflect. Sometimes it’s very difficult for the teacher to reflect; but those are the kind of questions that we ask. Okay, so what about this? So we try to ask these questions to promote best teaching practices basically. And of course, we see teachers beginning to ask the same questions to colleagues on their grade level, getting them to reflect, to think about their teaching.

During the focus group interview, two of the ILT members framed their understanding of why the principal was relentless in maintaining a focus on instructional improvement. Team member Beatriz explained the importance of having “all teachers come together in a collaborative way, bringing their talents and skills to the table, then working together to figure out what students are not achieving.” Adding to this line of thinking, team member Lydia commented how “coming together and pushing ourselves to become better by focusing on instruction allowed us to grow. So I think the gains were mostly because of us and because we kept focusing on instruction over the years.”

Despite principal Artavia’s enactment of SMART goal setting as an organizational routine, focus group interview data suggested that leadership team and ILT members may not have viewed this routine as a direct way to influence and change teacher practice, but rather a process solely for the purpose of data analysis. Leadership team member Robert explained the use of SMART goals “as a way to take student data and see how the students are progressing, where are they struggling. Then start the process of building the new grade level SMART goals.” ILT member Eva offered a similar perspective and suggested how “we use data to build grade level SMART goals
and discuss these goals as a staff to see where the students need to be on the next assessments. It’s all about the data.”

**Data analysis cycle.** Currently, Cedro Elementary follows the Los Robles Unified School District’s comprehensive assessment schedule where formative periodic assessments for English Language Arts, mathematics, and science are administered three times during the school year. To capitalize on an existing routine established by the district, ILT and leadership team members underscored the importance of this routine because it provided the school with a regular snapshot of student learning during the school year, and how resources and professional development could be leveraged to improve student achievement.

Findings suggested that leadership practice distributed across multiple people resulted in well-coordinated interactions between leaders and followers as they participated in formative literacy periodic assessment data analysis after each 8-week administration and scoring cycle. Leadership team members and principal Artavia stressed the importance of sequencing and “guiding teachers and ILTs” through the process of data analysis so everyone would “walk away with a common understanding” about what the data confirmed about teaching and learning between the 8-week periodic assessment administration cycles. Leadership team member Robert commented on the importance data analysis played in the school improvement work because of the “data chats” that took place between individual teachers and the principal and leadership team members. “We need to make sure teachers understand what the data is telling them about their instruction so they can prepare for the data chats, and be ready to talk about what they are going to do differently in their teaching.”
Interview data offered an understanding of how leadership practice was stretched over multiple people over time through the 8-week formative literacy periodic assessment cycle. During either a faculty meeting or grade level meeting, one of the leadership team members or principal would distribute the periodic assessment results reports by grade level, by classroom, and by whole school grades kindergarten through sixth. According to leadership team member Olivia, “We all spend time looking at the levels of performance to focus the teachers’ analysis of the data, to really look at which standards kids are not mastering,” as the first step in the data analysis process. Teachers then highlight areas on their own periodic assessment results report, “to begin identifying the standards and skills students had difficulty with” in order to identify patterns and trends for strengths and weaknesses.

What follows this step commented Principal Artavia, is a process “where within the grade level, teachers begin to share, discuss those trends and patterns to see strengths and weaknesses across the grade levels” so they could prioritize as a grade level the standards and skills to target and review during small group, in-class instruction. Finally, teachers at each grade level would make commitments to implement instructional strategies to teach the standards and skills to struggling students to bring them to benchmark proficiency. The principal described this process as one of “building collaboration, getting teachers to problem solve about instructional strategies, building their capacity with how to use data and talk about it, and really changing how teachers teach.”

Leadership team and ILT focus group interviews suggested that the benefit of the data analysis routine to teachers was more about “working collaboratively as a grade
level, drawing on the experiences of others who may have taught the same grade level to
tell you” and understanding “where the problems are in teaching, especially working with
struggling students.” This routine where teachers representing different grade levels
would gather together, problem solving around common data sets, and collectively build
and construct knowledge around improving instruction was summed up by ILT member
Lydia:

The experience on the grade level is important, especially when you talk about the
curriculum and the standards. But we contribute and learn from each other.

Learn how to find ways to solve the teaching problems, which strategies work,
and which ones don't. It’s tough dealing with getting students to benchmark, to
do well on their periodic assessments, but that’s why it’s important for us to pitch
in, help one another out, and maybe even take a leadership role.

Refining this established routine has allowed teachers to “develop more capacity
in analyzing their own data and making instructional decisions,” commented leadership
team member Manuel. The periodic assessment routine is viewed by principal Artavia as
an opportunity for teachers to “work strategically, collaboratively, and help others build
capacity in using data to reflect on instruction and see how instructional is impacting
student learning.” ILT member Beatriz commented on the importance of a dedicated
time for data analysis:

We did the cycle with the data where you teach, you assess, you look at the data,
you reteach, or move on. I think that was very empowering for many of us. I
think that really contributed to me becoming a stronger teacher leader. But in
order to build on this process you have to have a structure that supports it,
otherwise it might just go by the wayside like so many other things because there isn’t time to devote to it.

Additionally, ILT member Allen explained how the data analysis routine “brought teachers together roughly every quarter” after the formative literacy and mathematics assessments were administered to students “so we could meet with the grade levels and start analyzing the data and talking about what we need to do with students who are still struggling.” Adding to this discussion, ILT member Lydia commented how this routine created an opportunity for teachers to “examine the results and begin to talk about how much the students did or didn't improve from one assessment to another” as they planned with grade level colleagues and prepared for their individual data chats with the principal and leadership team.

However, according to leadership team member Robert, without the structure of the banked day Tuesdays\(^8\), it would be very difficult for this work to “continue to the extend and depth that is currently in place” due to the fact that the principal regularly forfeited faculty meetings so teachers could continue their work of data analysis, reflection, and conversations about instructional practices. Otherwise, without the banked day Tuesdays, the principal “would have to set aside more time to address district mandated operational issues and compliance requirements,” which would detract from maintaining a focus on instructional improvement.

**Meeting agendas.** Data collected from interviews, document reviews, and observations suggested that the ILT agenda was an important and strategic tool principal

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\(^8\) Designated Tuesdays during the instructional year where professional development time was provided for teachers to do instructional planning, review student data, and increase their understanding of effective pedagogy. Banked day Tuesdays were negotiated between the Los Robles Unified School District and the teacher bargaining unit.
Artavia used to facilitate leadership practice. The principal took full opportunity and advantage of developing the ILT agenda to ensure a focus on instruction was maintained on SMART goals, the year-end action plan template, and formative periodic assessment data. “The agenda is how I set high expectations for the meetings and what I expect of the ILT members, and the grade level teams too,” explained principal Artavia.

Findings suggested that agendas were specific tools the leadership team and the principal used to shape what was addressed during ILT meetings. In principal Artavia’s eyes, agenda setting and building capacity of the ILT teacher leaders to run effective meetings in a structured, organized fashion was “critical to keeping a focus on instruction during these meetings” and ensuring the meeting participants “address the work at hand” so the meeting ended on a productive note with a sense of group accomplishment.

Agendas provided principal Artavia with an opportunity to establish and maintain a clear focus and tone for each ILT meeting “to make sure there is consistency across the grade levels,” thereby making the work of school improvement coherent across the school. The principal explained how “setting an effective agenda, what items go on the agenda, dealing with the time constraints, that’s all critical to our work as a professional learning community.” Additionally, agendas served as tools to formally establish and maintain a “focus for what happens in these meetings,” while at the same time allowing for a certain degree of “flexibility and autonomy” for grade levels to develop their own meeting agendas.

The principal believed in providing this autonomy for the ILT members because grade levels “must develop capacity and skill around using an agenda to focus teachers at those meetings on what’s important” and this process can assist grade levels participants
to “share the responsibility of running a meeting by using an agenda to keep a strong focus.”

**Data chats.** The Los Robles Unified School District holds principals and teachers accountable for the academic improvement for all students as measured by the annual state assessments. Principal Artavia was acutely aware of the current accountability mandates and pressures placed upon principals and teachers to improve student achievement. The principal commented how “accountability is definitely something I take seriously and I understand how it affects me as an instructional leader.” According to interview and document review data, after each formative assessment cycle in literacy and mathematics, principal Artavia conducted individual data chats with all kindergarten to sixth grade teachers. In addition, findings revealed that data chats focused on the level of student academic gains and what instructional strategies the teachers used to address the learning needs of students. From the principal’s perspective, data chats became a “very critical” way for the principal to be “directly involved with the teachers in talking about their data” and “to monitor the progress of students in each class over the entire school year, which holds the teacher accountable for what they are teaching.”

Two leadership team members discussed how the data chats had a positive and deep impact upon teachers and how this routine was gradually becoming embedded in the school culture of creating accountability to student data results. Leadership team member Olivia commented, “It has been a bit of a hard road. Yeah, data done correctly is a starting point of conversation and action, but this process has had impact and changed the way teachers look at data.” Affirming Olivia’s comment, leadership team member
Robert added, “it’s hard to get teachers to take ownership for the data, ownership for their teaching practices, but it has been slowly happening here ever since we started doing these data chats.”

Principal Artavia strongly believed in the need for establishing a strong data analysis “system” for teachers and the leadership team so they could be targeted in that a data analysis “system” needed to be in place for teachers and the leadership team to periodically reflect and use data to inform and guide instructional decision making. The principal provided the following insight:

I’m here to provide teacher support so that they can teach and make sure that students are successful; so we’re on the same side. That’s why it’s important to look at data, analyze data. Everything that we do is data driven. It has to be and that’s obviously a district initiative using data. It’s important to have a system in place to do this. I want teachers to reflect on what were their strengths, what were their weakness, what are the next steps, what are the instructional strategies and resources they’re going to look to.

**Hard conversations.** Findings from interviews suggested that principal Artavia engaged leadership team members and teachers to some extent in discussions about the challenges and responsibility formal and informal leaders at Cedro Elementary had in broaching sensitive or uncomfortable conversations with colleagues, especially “when it involves their teaching practices or their relationships with students.” Principal Artavia had participated in professional development work with other principals in the district interested in honing their skills in initiating hard conversations with colleagues. The principal spoke to the importance of “getting better at having hard conversations” and
referenced the book publication, *Having Hard Conversations*, by Jennifer Abrams, noted communications consultant, as “an important tool and resource for learning about these kinds of conversations and moving forward with difficult conversations when it’s needed.”

An aspect of the situation at Cedro Elementary was a focus on hard conversations around change in teacher practice. Principal Artavia shared that his efforts to support teachers in changing their practice was at times met with resistance, despite coaching support in the classroom and professional development training. Interview data affirmed the principal’s willingness to understand and support teachers in their struggle to adapt and change teaching practice, but showed no reluctance to continue maintaining a focus on the work of school improvement by confronting resistant behavior through hard conversations.

“Making meaningful instructional changes and improvements is difficult for teachers to at times embrace and accept,” commented Principal Artavia. The principal understood the importance of identifying teachers who were resistant to the improvement efforts of implementing either instructional initiatives or improvement strategies. From the principal’s point of view, addressing the resistant behavior was a critical part of leadership practice in maintaining an instructional focus and not allowing these behaviors to derail the work of school improvement. The principal commented about how this was part of an effort to problem solve and exercise leadership:

I will trust you and give you the professional courtesy, but there is an understanding that you’re going to do what you need to do to support kids, to improve your teaching, to get better at data, to move our school forward.

Sometimes it’s difficult because of personality issues, people who might resist
and not be on board right away, there’s philosophical issues, and pedagogical differences, styles. So it all comes out sometimes publicly. And yes, there are times when I have hard conversations with people about why they are resistant. But, I see myself as open, supportive, there to help problem solve. It’s the whole notion of respect, the whole notion of transparency.

Principal Artavia underscored the need, as a principal attempting to lead during difficult times, to “have the capacity and to know how to approach situations where you may need to have that hard conversation with that teacher,” the teacher who may be resistant, or noncommittal to the work of school improvement. The principal expressed the belief that the professional development work around this book with colleagues was important because participants “were guided through a skill-based process for having those hard conversations and learning what to do and how to get better at it.” The professional development positively influenced principal Artavia in taking a proactive role “to keep the focus on student achievement, our work at the ILTs, and on the vision of the school” without shying away from difficult conversations to hold people responsible and accountable for the work of school improvement.

ILT members acknowledged the difficulties the principal faced in moving an instructional agenda, yet encountering resistant behaviors that needed to be addressed. ILT member Beatriz offered this insight and commented how “there are still individuals who tend to be domineering or over powering during some of the meetings. They tend to want to shut other people down,” adding to the frustration principal Artavia felt at times when other staff members did not “step up to the plate” and do their part to address resistant behavior or “push-back” at ILT meetings.
Principal Artavia expressed how the next level of professional development work with the ILT would be around capacity building of ILT and leadership team members to feel comfortable and confident enough to initiate hard conversations with colleagues who displayed resistant behaviors during meetings when the principal was not present to intervene. While data from principal Artavia’s interview may suggest an understanding of where the next level of work should be for ILT members, the focus group data from ILT members seemed to suggest otherwise. None of the focus group members felt “comfortable” with the idea of initiating hard conversations with colleagues, and collectively they expressed resentment against the principal for even considering that members of the ILT should “have to do something like this” or to have any professional development on having hard conversations. As ILT member Eva strongly expressed, “Our PD [professional development] should be on instruction and not all of this.”

However, principal Artavia’s commitment to maintaining a focus on instruction and the need others to engage in hard conversations when the situation was warranted was evidenced in this comment:

After six years we still have some work to do here. Having hard conversations is about bringing people back to what we are trying to do to improve instruction, to improve teaching in the classrooms, to keep the focus on students, and a big part of this is to address the excuses or barriers to change, and to help others in leadership positions here to do the same. I don't give up easily.

While both principal Artavia and the leadership team expressed a positive outlook and approach to dealing with resistance, ILT members expressed their concerns about the awkward nature of having to confront colleagues and “call people on the carpet” for their
resistant behavior or unwillingness at time to collaborate during grade level meetings.

ILT member Lydia felt initiating hard conversations “was an administrative responsibility” because as teachers, they have no formal supervisory authority over their grade level colleagues, so redirecting the resistant teacher “is where the responsibility of the principal is needed.” ILT member Eva described how this responsibility made her feel:

I’m glad you mentioned the hard conversations. This was one way to get us to try and take charge and deal with teachers that weren’t really following through on things, were being resistant, or not doing their jobs. I’ve had the hard conversations, then I wind up the bad guy. I’m tired of being the bad guy. At one point you need [the principal] to come in there and say “you know what? The rest of you need to step up. I think by not always doing that, and expecting some of us teachers to do this, it’s a missed opportunity to show leadership.

The ILT focus group interviews suggested that there was a collective sense of frustration in having to be thrust into the role of initiating hard conversations with fellow colleagues. While some of the ILT members acknowledged “a need for such conversations with certain teachers,” ILT members Lydia and Allen expressed “skepticism” about the real impact of teacher-to-teacher hard conversations in changing resistant behavior or individual teacher practice. ILT member Allen explained how these conversations could easily “backfire” and alter the dynamics of established professional working relationships at the grade level.

**Monitoring Instruction in Classrooms**

Principal Artavia has long viewed “walking classrooms and getting a sense of instruction” as an improvement strategy to support teachers in improving their practice.
If needed, “support can be provided through coaching from myself or one of the coaches here at the school so we can be right there with the teacher when she’s delivering the lesson.” As an organizational routine, conducting classroom visitations was a way for principal Artavia to maintain a focus on instructional improvement and to “see whether teachers were implementing what they agreed upon during grade level meetings in terms of strategies and practices.”

Leadership team member Manuel explained that members of the leadership team were sometimes involved with informal classroom visitations, especially if the instructional coaches were conducting demonstration lessons and would return several days later to observe teachers implementing these lessons. For the most part, findings suggested that the principal conducted formal and informal classroom visitations and provided direct feedback to teachers on their instructional delivery of lessons, the level of student engagement during instruction, or the quality of student work displayed in classrooms.

Interview data revealed principal Artavia’s extreme pride in having worked as an instructional coach and mathematics coach in varying capacities in the school district, and his willingness to use his expertise to model and demonstrate lessons during classroom visitations. The principal made repeated connections to past experiences as a teacher and how “never losing sight of the fact that I am a teacher, will always be a teacher” was a key driving force in what motivated principal Artavia to work “side-by-side” with teachers in the classroom.

Principal Artavia commented how the personal goal of conducting regular classroom visitations was to communicate a message of “seriousness about the work of
improving teaching skills” and minimizing the anxiety level of teachers so “they can be confident in the skills they are developing, and can get feedback from me about how well they are doing.” Both leadership team members and principal Artavia marked the importance of classroom visits not as a tool of compliance or, as leadership team member Olivia explained, an “I gotcha, or caught you doing something wrong,” approach, but a serious effort to use an organizational routine to provide feedback to teachers on their practice and demonstrate support for their work in the classrooms. Elaborating further on this line of thinking, the principal provided a glimpse into his theory of action about classroom visitations and why a hands-on approach was critical:

When I visit classrooms I can see what is going on across the school, how we are doing in our work, what is happening around teaching and student learning. Yes, there is a supervisory element when doing classroom observations, but if I see a teacher struggling with X, Y, and Z in the classroom, my response is to help, to give some specifics and concretes of what the teacher can do differently. If it’s a delivery of instruction issue, I will ask to come back to model, deliver a lesson, then debrief it. Maybe it’s a different way of doing things, but I am also team building and improving instruction in the process.

The aspect of time was a concern expressed by the principal in thinking about how to position teachers for the change to the district’s new teacher evaluation system and new framework and rubric to benchmark teacher practice. “We have to help them understand the rubric and not be threatened by it. That takes time too. We have to get them used to receiving feedback in a very different way than in the past.” But principal Artavia was not going to wait for these conversations to take place, which is why as an
aspect of leadership practice, interview data suggested the principal believed classroom visitations and providing feedback to teachers “to engage them in conversations and set them up for success. I have a responsibility to support them in the different ways they deliver instruction to students.”

Although principal Artavia may have viewed classroom visitations and feedback to teachers as “a top priority,” focus group findings suggested that not all ILT members were in agreement with this belief. While ILT members agreed the principal had “genuine intentions” of conducting regular classroom visitations to monitor instruction and provide support to teachers, findings pointed to a collective “disappointment and frustration” in the “lack of follow-through and, at times, consistency” in conducting regular classroom visitations because the demands of operational issues would redirect the principal’s time.

Although ILT member Lydia marked the importance of “the principal really visiting classrooms on a more regular basis to see what was happening in those classrooms,” focus group findings suggested that many teachers at the school realized how difficult it was for principal Artavia to maintain a focus on instruction at times through classroom visitations due to various “distractions.” ILT member Allen summarized the collective thinking:

I think it is the district’s fault. They have this agenda for their principals and I don’t think they [principals] have the time. You have to put yourself in those shoes. If I were a principal, I might be frustrated. They’re probably just sending him to meetings all the time, so he doesn’t really have a chance to go into the classroom as much as he would like and give the kind of support he talks about.
Despite the perceived inconsistency of principal Artavia’s attempts to regularly visit classrooms to monitor instruction and provide support to teachers according to focus group interview findings, interview data from principal Artavia seemed to suggest that when the principal conducted classroom visitations there was a focus and a purpose. According to principal Artavia, the district’s new *Framework for Instructional Improvement* would become the guiding tool to monitor instruction, determine where teachers needed support, and frame reflective conversations with teachers about their classroom practice. The use of the Framework for Instructional Improvement as a tool to monitor instruction in classrooms emerged as a key micro task the principal envisioned using over time to leverage change in teacher practice.

**Framework for Instructional Improvement.** Interview and document review data revealed the importance of the Los Robles Unified School District’s Framework for Instructional Improvement as a tool to monitor instruction, support teacher professional growth through self-reflection, and benchmark teacher practice against a performance rubric. Principal Artavia acknowledged the importance of this framework as a tool to “strengthen both the teacher and principal’s understanding of what good teaching looks like, what student engagement looks like, and what good questioning sounds like in the classroom.” The Framework was part of the district’s effort to redesign and redefine the current teacher evaluation and performance system, which the principal supported because it would “certainly help keep the focus of instruction at the heart of everything we do.” Additionally, principal Artavia explained how the former evaluation system did not “go far enough” to support principal efforts to maintain a focus on improving instruction, so “this is a far better way to go.”
According to principal Artavia the Framework for Instructional Improvement was a “strategic way to begin the conversations around good teaching” with a focus on one of the core elements of the framework: how teachers use questions to engage students in discussion and illicit more student discourse during class time. At the time of data collection, the principal did not use the framework as the primary tool for collecting evidence of teacher practice and student learning during classroom visitations. Principal Artavia expressed a desire to be “strategic in the use and roll-out of the framework” because this was something new and “many teachers are just not used to having their teaching benchmarked against a rubric.” Additionally, the principal marked the importance of moving forward slowly with the introduction of the framework by commenting, “We want to build on the professional conversations, and we certainly want to have teachers improve in their teaching, but that’s going to take time.”

**Sustaining a Structure to Support Teacher Collaboration Around Instruction**

An advocate of removing barriers of isolation between teachers and de-privatizing teacher practice is “why grade level meetings and the ILT meetings are important,” commented principal Artavia as he spoke about the need to be strategic in the scheduling of the 26 banked day professional development Tuesdays the Los Robles Unified School District provided to all elementary schools. These professional development days were provided to schools so teachers and administrators could dedicate time every Tuesday to focus on the work of school improvement. Additionally, the principal took the opportunity to use a district established organizational routine to facilitate teacher collaboration and grade level articulation around improving instruction.
Periodic assessments. Although teacher-developed assessments were used at various grade levels at Cedro Elementary, interview data suggested that the district-developed formative periodic assessments were the most important tools the principal, leadership team, and ILT members used to “engage teachers to collaborate and talk about instruction, as well as talk about how well our students are doing, and if they are struggling, what are we going to do about it?” Principal Artavia explained the process of how “we track the group of students in terms of their need and monitor them using district assessments and at other times using teacher created grade level assessments.” Several leadership team members discussed the importance of using periodic assessment data as a way of identifying student strengths, weakness, and gaps in their learning. Leadership team member Robert repeatedly emphasized the importance of examining student performance on assessments to determine individual student progress in each classroom, at the grade level, and across the school:

We started saying okay; let’s do this whole school, looking at the data, having data chats. Well, let’s narrow it down to individual grade levels. Well, you know what? Let’s go further than that; lets’ narrow it down to individual teachers. Let’s really see where the students are struggling, where they are doing well. Then we can talk about how to intervene, what’s the next step instructionally, or what the teacher needs to do in terms of changing his or her own practice. That’s when we can have those conversations.

While Principal Artavia recognized the importance of assessments and assessment data as tools to examine student performance, the unintended consequence from the teachers’ perspectives was the impact on teacher reflection about their practice. Several
ILT members provided their own insights into the principal’s use of assessments as a tool for instruction. Teachers were provided consistent and robust professional development on the use of periodic assessment data to “analyze where students are at, and start looking at what we need to do instructionally, where to focus because teachers understand they are working towards their grade level SMART goals.”

Capacity building was a line of thinking picked up by ILT member Lydia as she explained how “teachers are working with other teachers to make sense of the data, then talking about what strategies work in this or that classroom, then how can I help others get better at their practice.” In addition, the periodic assessments were a way “to focus and drive instruction in the classroom,” and “affects the decisions about how and what you need to teach as a teacher.” But beyond just informing teachers about how well students were or were not progressing in their mastery of grade level benchmarks, ILT member Beatriz explained her thinking about the link between periodic assessments and teacher practice:

We started looking at what are we doing wrong? What are the areas of weakness? What do we need to do to focus on? Like this is a tool; this does drive your instruction, the decisions about how and what you need to teach. We’ve got to teach to the standard. Really looking at whether we are teaching to the standards. Really thinking about how are we going to teach this differently?

**Instructional planning template.** Document reviews, observations, and interviews suggest that principal Artavia attempted to support teachers’ efforts to collaborate around improving instruction through the use of a goal setting and instructional planning tool. According to the principal, this tool “gets teachers to think
about the data of the students in their classrooms, at the grade level, then use the data to set goals so we have a clear picture of what we are trying to achieve” and in the process building a process of internal accountability to the work of school improvement. The principal took great, calculated effort to drive the commitment to the development and implementation of SMART goals for all teachers at the school as suggested in the findings. Additionally, the principal presented the end-of-year planning tool to the leadership team for their review and input prior to sharing the template with the ILT members. Principal Artavia exhibited a tone of confidence and optimism in how the template would be received by commenting how “last year it worked because I allowed the teachers to be creative. Several of the teachers took this and really ran with it. The teachers will now have to think more about instruction and their teaching.”

Findings seemed to suggest that the principal envisioned teachers using this tool to assess gaps in student learning as evidenced by the formative periodic assessment data, then planning short-term instructional goals to address the learning gaps. This tool would become a “cycle and a process where we are always connecting back to data, then thinking about what to do differently” to build internal accountability for the work at each grade level. The teachers “can definitely reflect on this, and it can be included as part of their own SMART goals work, so it’s not just about the ILT,” explained principal Artavia.

Interview data from focus groups revealed that teachers, including ILT members, were still in the “learning stages” of using the instructional planning template. ILT member Beatriz explained how important it was to have a tool to “bring teachers at the grade level together to talk about how students are doing, and talk about what strategies worked and didn't, and then trying to set new goals for students.”  Following this line of
thinking, leadership team member Manuel linked the importance of using the planning template “to keep teachers on track” with their planning and to ensure “the planning is based what the data is telling them about how well their students are doing or not doing, and then what are they going to do about it?”

**Instructional leadership team meetings.** Document reviews, observations, and interview data affirmed that at Cedro Elementary, the principal viewed the ILT and the leadership team, as vehicles to disseminate and coordinate the school’s instructional program and implementation of SMART goals. The ILT meetings were an opportunity to gauge buy-in and acceptance, assess progress school wide on the implementation of SMART goals, and served as a liaison with the rest of the teachers according to interview findings. The ILT was a critical conduit for communicating information and gauging the pulse of the school on implementation and monitoring of the SMART goals at each grade level. So much so, that principal Artavia emphasized, “If it’s a school wide initiative, a school wide issue, then it’s something I definitely take to ILT, which is all of my grade level reps because they are the liaisons to the other staff members.”

Focus group findings suggested that the ILT members noted an increase in the frequency and level of professional development during their meetings with principal Artavia on the use of data, which added to the sense of urgency in using data to identify areas for instructional improvement as a team. Moreover, findings seemed to suggest that the ILT meetings were instrumental in reinforcing the focus of instruction, improving student learning, and identifying and discussing strategies that could be implemented in the classroom, and to discuss possible barriers for reaching the school wide SMART goals. ILT member Allen, described how principal Artavia “uses the ILT to get ideas and
suggestions from the grade levels on what’s working, what’s keeping us from reaching the SMART goals, or what needs to be done to improve the process with SMART goals.” ILT member Lydia explained how this discussion opportunity “became a process to vet ideas and suggestions with everyone” and, as leadership team member Olivia noted, “provided an opportunity to develop leadership within the group, and also to identify people for leadership roles.”

**Supporting Leadership Development for Teachers**

Findings suggested that teachers at Cedro Elementary also enacted leadership tasks connected to building a collective understanding of school improvement efforts and their contributions as a grade level to this effort. Findings revealed that principal Artavia supported individual efforts by ILT members and other teachers to exercise leadership and support instructional improvement efforts at Cedro Elementary. As ILT member Lydia stated, “We have an equal say about our work at the grade level, so we are all strongly becoming leaders in a supportive sense, and everyone has an opportunity to take advantage of it [leadership role].”

Additionally, ILT member Eva added that the principal was very willing to “allow other teachers to take leadership roles, to take opportunities and follow through on the vision of what we are trying to do with students.” And as the school continues on its journey of building collective understanding for the work of school improvement, findings seemed to indicate that some teachers were still struggling with enacting leadership practice due to the formal roles they were asked to assume by the principal. A glimpse into this struggle was noted in ILT member Lydia’s comment:
So I think that’s something that I really, really had to deal with this year, just that whole thing about everybody needs to step in and do it. And so at times I’ve been really frustrated with it. Even the principal said this all comes from being a leader. I didn’t ask to be a leader. It’s just a natural thing. It’s about driving the focus in the right direction and doing what’s best for children.

Along the same lines, ILT member Allen shared his perspective about leadership practice and opportunities for leadership:

In terms of being able to provide leadership opportunities. If we define leadership opportunities as the opportunity to perhaps take a role, create a vision, and be able to facilitate people accomplishing whatever that vision may be. Well, do those opportunities exist at this school? Yes, all those opportunities exist. The question is maybe then how would he as a leader get people to take more advantage of opportunities that are presented to them? That’s a challenge.

When asked about building a collective understanding about the work of improving instruction and maintaining a focus on instruction at the school, Principal Artavia explained his dissatisfaction “with where the school is currently” because “we are not quite there yet, and not everybody is always on-board 100%, but we are working hard to get there.” The principal went on to further explain about “the pockets on this campus that could be more collaborative, more professional, and some individuals tend to be domineering or overpowering. They tend to shut other people down. Yeah, we still have some work to do.”

Despite principal Artavia’s efforts to develop a collective understanding for the work of school improvement and create leadership opportunities for teachers, findings
revealed a subtle undercurrent of fear or mistrust among teachers that could be hampering the principal’s efforts. ILT member Eva commented, “Administration is usually pretty supportive of people wanting to take on leadership positions. The only negative thing I see is sometimes you cannot trust him [the principal] in terms of backing you up.” Another ILT member, Allen, expressed a similar concern as he reflected on the previous comment:

[The principal] certainly wants people to take leadership roles. I think we would all agree on that one. He’s always encouraging that, but this year especially I’ve noticed that there is not a lot of support for it. A lot of people have just done things on their own. Because other people are doing their own thing at the grade levels, things don't seem quite connected, and this doesn't help to keep people focused.

**Job-embedded professional development.** Driven by current state and district accountabilities, principal Artavia explained how he sought to create conditions for teachers “to be successful in their instructional practice” and to close the achievement gap for students in their classroom through “a cognitive coaching structure” of job-embedded professional development linked to data analysis results. Findings suggested that the principal has taken a very organic approach to encouraging teachers to assume the responsibility of creating and leading professional development opportunities in response to teacher and student needs.

According to findings, the principal’s strategy to restructure professional development at Cedro Elementary and make it more “teacher generated” was borne out in principal Artavia’s own personal conviction about this work “as my philosophy that I
look at, reflect upon, and that I kind of base my actions and decisions in terms of dealing with folks on my site.” The principal went on to explain more in-depth how linking cognitive coaching to the professional development context develops teacher capacity to be reflective about their practice:

When I observe teachers in the classrooms, I am always thinking, okay, what is it that they need to be successful in the classroom? I will ask them if I can teach a lesson, model a lesson for them, then talk and debrief the lesson with them. I was a former math coach, Thinking Maps trainer, so I definitely use my skills to teach and support my teachers and build their capacity and knowledge level. If I can provide that for them, get them to reflect on their teaching, set up those supports for them, then they will be successful, and by default the students will be successful too. I believe strongly in this.

Leadership team member Olivia explained that principal Artavia’s philosophy of developing teacher skill sets and enhancing their capacity to teach better was very different than what she has experienced in the past working with different principals at other elementary school sites:

It’s the social and human capital, the connections in our social networks at this school. Giving me and other members of the leadership team the opportunity to do instructional professional development, using our skills and what we bring to the table in terms of instruction, behavior management, coaching, and all those skills. Then allowing me to become familiar with the strengths and weaknesses at that grade level by working directly with those teachers to kind of see how I could support that, so I can do the work alongside of them too.
Leadership team member Manuel drew similar conclusions and spoke of the importance and impact of professional development opportunities not just in terms of building capacity, but in terms of allowing teachers “to be innovative and creative in how they wanted to approach meeting the needs of their students as part of their own professional growth and learning.” Additionally, leadership team member Robert provided the following anecdote to emphasize one teacher’s initiative and to demonstrate principal Artavia’s commitment in supporting teachers to improve their practice and expand their learning:

The teacher wanted to link the content material to technology and make the learning process meaningful for the students. So the principal responded to the teacher’s idea with enthusiasm and support, communicating the message to the teacher that teachers were here to teach and to make sure the students are successful. And the principal is here to provide teachers with support, to set them up for success, and to build their capacity to be effective.

Leadership team member Manuel explained, “I think we have come to a place where we see professional development as tools and resources to help us teach better, to use data more effectively, to reflect on our teaching.” In addition, findings suggested that leadership team and ILT members have seen that professional development efforts have gradually shifted over time to a more needs-based approach rather than dominated by the principal’s own professional development agenda. One ILT member, Allen, spoke to the general “openness and support from the principal for teachers who want to be innovative in approaching instructional concerns, or looking at different ways of approaching PD.” However, ILT member Eva quickly cautioned that “the only negative thing I see here is
that sometimes you don't always get the back up. If you stick your neck out, are you going to get backing and support from the principal for taking a risk to do something different, or am I just going to spin my wheels and waste my time?”

**Professional development and teacher practice.** Teacher leaders and leadership team members reported that the consistent focus on improving instruction at Cedro Elementary impacted teacher practice and built teacher capacity and skill. Findings seemed to indicate that the improvement efforts at Cedro Elementary did have somewhat of an impact on teacher practice and in the way teachers viewed their own teaching. ILT member Beatriz explained how the data analysis routine, where teachers discussed “areas of strength and areas of weakness,” and brainstormed what teachers could do instructionally to address the areas of weakness, and “working together as grade level teams has had a positive impact” on teachers and grade levels.

ILT member Eva affirmed the importance of the ILT and grade level meeting routine and collaborative nature of this work, but hinted at some reservation in making the case that all teachers were carrying out the work of school improvement and intentionally changing their practice because their students did not score well on the formative periodic assessments:

I think one of the things that really helped as far as me personally being a teacher leader for the grade was the process because we were involved in analyzing data and looking at areas of weakness. Then we started looking at why is it broken? How is it broken? How can we fix it? What are the possible solutions? What strategies do we need to use? How can we target what the student’s need? And so we went through those cycles and I think that was very empowering for many
of us. I might be speaking out of turn here, and I can’t speak for the rest of the school or teachers. I don't know if other teachers are looking at this in the same way that I do. And I don't know if they are now teaching differently because I am not observing them teach in the classroom. But I do think this process really contributed to me becoming a stronger teacher leader and stronger teacher.

Additionally, findings seemed to suggest an inconsistent link between professional development efforts and change in teacher practice across all grade levels.

Leadership team member Robert offered his perspective:

Teacher practice at one grade level was directly impacted by a sustained, committed focus on improving literacy outcome for students through a tiered instructional model approach to delivery of instruction. Several years ago, the grade level teachers committed to assessing students to determine learning needs, re-distributed all of the students across the grade level based on the learning needs, established benchmarks for proficiencies, and committed to implementing specific literacy strategies to target the assessed needs. They started to commit to differentiating the instruction. That has been successful here with student results measured by data. Can we say that about all grade levels? No, but it can happen.

Finally, ILT member Beatriz offered a personal reflection that despite the fact that not every teacher’s practice may have changed over time, yet there were teachers who have contributed to the student achievement gains at Cedro Elementary:

Many of us have talked about how are we going to change our teaching so that we’re helping children be successful. That’s why I think our scores went up. We were all working together and committed to making sure that we used the data to
make decisions about how we teach and what to do as far as instruction is concerned. And about how to monitor how well the students are responding to our instruction. It definitely can be done.

**Summary**

The data for this case provided insight and examined principal Artavia’s leadership practice at Cedro Elementary School. First, findings affirmed the principal’s unwavering commitment to maintaining an instructional focus and attempts to target instructional improvement in all classrooms. Second, findings suggested that organizational routines and tools were not simply add-ons or perfunctory for principal Artavia’s leadership practice. Rather, organizational routines and tools served as aspects of the situation defining leadership practice. Moreover, aspects of the situation, coupled with organizational routines and tools, served to mediate and facilitate the interactions between leaders and followers as leadership practice was stretched across multiple people. Finally, the data revealed how principal Artavia attempted to promote a collective understanding of the work of school improvement. However, there was some disagreement about the extent to which other colleagues influenced instructional practice, or whether at times teachers were left to their interpretations of how to implement or not implement new instructional practices in their classrooms.

**Steadying the Reins of Leadership: The Case of Principal Amado**

Almendro Elementary School is located in a very densely populated area of a major urban city bisected by a major thoroughfare and two major freeways in the Los Robles Unified School District. The neighborhood is one of the city’s most architecturally diverse, and is now home to many immigrant families largely from...
Central America. Following well-established immigrant patterns over the decades, second and third generation Central American families are gradually leaving this area for the suburbs. The area is quickly becoming gentrified as other immigrant groups, college students, and working professionals attracted to urban amenities move in to this area.

As a consequence of gentrification, Almendro Elementary is in a state of gradual enrollment decline. Almendro Elementary opened as a new school in 1993 with an enrollment of approximately 1,200 students, and was designed to relieve student overcrowding for several other schools in the area. Currently, the school serves approximately 771 students in prekindergarten to fifth grade. The majority of students live within walking distance and must cross many busy, heavily travelled commercial streets in order to get to school. The school appears boxy and angular, not reflecting the architecture or brick relief characteristics of buildings constructed decades ago that surround the school.

The current student population reflects the immigrant influence over the last 20 years. Approximately 82% of the students live in homes where Spanish is the primary language spoken, and these students enter school as limited English proficient students. Approximately 87% of the students qualify for the federally subsidized meal program as reported on the school’s 2012-2013 School Accountability Report Card (CDE, 2013).

Principal Amado is a product of the Los Robles Unified School District. The principal has worked as a teacher, coordinator, and assistant principal at three different elementary schools during a career spanning 32 years at the time of data collection. Principal Amado was first assigned to Almendro Elementary 12 years ago after serving as an assistant principal in a school within the same geographic area. The principal
appeared confident, focused, and eager to talk about the challenges and achievements “of the work” to improve academic outcomes for students.

Over the last five years, the school wide API growth for students has gone from 598 in 2007 to 681 in 2012 as reported in the school’s 2012-2013 School Accountability Report Card (CDE, 2013). During interviews, the principal explained that although the current API gains may not seem as high as other similar schools, the community is severely impacted by the effects of poverty, homelessness, high unemployment among the working poor, and the disappearance of social and mental health agencies as a direct result of the state fiscal crisis spanning the last four years.

At Almendro Elementary, principal Amado’s core leadership team is comprised of the categorical programs coordinator and three instructional coaches, who work with teachers directly according to their area of content expertise in literacy, mathematics, and English Language Development (ELD). The leadership team, according to principal Amado, is known as the resource team at this school. Although the designation resource team is not a traditional one, principal Amado has chosen this designation because the team members “are resources to support our work here at Almendro.”

The resource team meetings are scheduled weekly on Monday mornings “or as weekly as possible, and sometimes this changes depending on what comes up that cannot wait until the next week,” explained principal Amado. The three instructional coaches work full time out of the classroom to provide instructional support to teachers and intervention instruction to students, especially students who have been identified as English learners (ELs). Along with the principal, the categorical programs coordinator monitors all categorical budgets aligned to support the instructional and intervention
programs at Almendro Elementary. The fifth person on the resource team is the assistant principal of special education services, who is responsible for coordinating services for students with special needs at the school. The assistant principal of special education services is an itinerant personnel\(^9\), and attends the resource team meetings when she is scheduled to be at Almendro Elementary.

In addition to the resource team, principal Amado has established a network of teachers who are “informally known as grade level chairpersons.” Citing “difficulties in getting teachers to volunteer” for grade level chair positions, principal Amado did not want to resort to “selecting people to be chairs [grade level chairpersons] if they really didn't want to it,” so a different approach was taken. According to the principal, any teacher can volunteer to be a grade level representatives and “develop their leadership skills,” but they do not hold an “official title of grade level chair,” as is the practice in many of the other schools in the district. There is one grade level representative from each of the grades from kindergarten through fifth grade, and the grade level representatives meet weekly during banked day Tuesdays. The grade level meetings provide teachers with structured opportunities “to focus on the district’s initiatives, and especially to look at how they will address the language and academic needs of the ELs.”

An analysis of interviews, observations, and documents revealed that principal Amado’s leadership practice was organized around the same four leadership macro functions as principal Artavia. Principal Amado’s leadership macro functions are presented in this section. Moreover, the data analysis process revealed micro task

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\(^9\) In the Los Robles Unified School District itinerant personnel are travelling teachers or administrators who work at more than one school site as part of their regular teaching or administrative assignment. They are generally specialists in the field of special education.
subthemes that emerged and were categorized to explore and further understand how leadership practice was enacted through the use of tools and organizational routines, and distributed across multiple people as they interacted in their work of school improvement.

**Maintaining a Focus on Instructional Improvement**

The early years of the principalship proved to be quite challenging for principal Amado. Not solely because of the state and federal accountability mandates, but according to principal Amado, “The difficulty was in getting the teachers to see the urgency for instructional improvement and the need for teacher practice to change if student learning outcomes were going to improve.” Additionally, principal Amado spoke of having inherited a school with a “vacuum of leadership” due to a number of interim principals assigned to the school resulting in the absence of any kind of formal administrative leadership. “Strong systems to support instruction or address weak teaching were just not there, and teachers didn't take instruction seriously,” which hampered principal Amado’s ability to “hit the ground running” with a solid instructional agenda. Consequently, the principal commented on how important it was to be “determined and committed” to creating a sense of urgency for instructional improvement by “taking advantage of opportunities” to leverage the message of a focus on instruction during faculty meetings, grade level meetings, and with parents.

Findings from focus group interviews suggested that leveraging the message of a focus on instruction resonated clearly with all participants, especially grade level representative Daniel:

It’s important having a principal who has an instructional focus that's going to effect change for students, but also mainly has the ability to maintain that focus
with all the other things that are being thrown at us from the district, and the budget cuts, and loss of personnel. Continuing on that path, that vision that we have set, and reminding us this work is about our students, that it takes us all coming together moving the school along. My colleagues have said how important it is to be reminded of this by the principal because it’s easy to become distracted or feel like we are not making gains in our work with students.

During a grade level professional development meeting, principal Amado was very clear and precise in communicating to the grade level teachers the importance of maintaining coherence and a focus on improving classroom practice so “student learning would change and teachers continue to improve in their teaching.” This message from the principal was reinforced several moments later by instructional coach Angela as she commented about the need to “remember it’s about having an instructional focus and the ability to maintain this focus so we [teachers] continue on this path of learning and gaining skills to improve our teaching if we want to continue making gains as a school.”

Continuing on a path of learning and improvement was a recurring message from principal Amado to the teachers at Almendro Elementary. As principal Amado enacted the leadership macro function of maintaining a focus on instructional improvement, a network of people engaged in leadership tasks grounded in their work context and mediated by organizational routines and tools as part of their school improvement efforts. In principal Amado’s words, “instructional leadership is about creating and maintaining the conditions for improving teaching and student learning.” Resource team member Marlin echoed this thought as he reflected on what the principal was trying to accomplish at the school:
I have seen how the principal has changed people’s thinking about why we have to be about instruction and improving teaching if we want to continue to improve as a school. I think leadership has a lot to do with being able to influence people to see that the only way to continue improving in the school is if all of the PD and grade level planning are connected and people keep hearing the message that this work that we are doing is important and that we have a sense of urgency about it.

**Meeting agendas.** Principal Amado and the leadership team used agendas to facilitate meetings, “remind teachers of the need to keep instruction at the forefront, and to keep the grade level on task.” Principal Amado described agenda setting as “a collaborative process” between the principal and resource team members, and in part the agenda was a tool to facilitate the weekly resource team meetings. In addition, interviews and document review of agendas seemed to indicate that the agendas drafted by the principal and resource team ensured that the instructional focus would be addressed at grade level meetings, and that agenda topics would be aligned to the professional development work teachers would engage in during their grade level meetings.

According to principal Amado, “Agendas are critical to driving the instructional focus at this school and to make sure there is coherence across all of the grade levels. That’s very important.”

Observations and document review data seemed to support the principal’s and resource team’s use of the agenda as an accountability tool to monitor and keep the grade level work and collaboration focused on agenda items. The agendas had a uniform consistency of expectations for the grade level work in terms of discussing intended learning outcomes, expectations for what the teachers would be doing with the new
learning or work in their classrooms, and what evidence of strategies, routines would be observed by the principal and coaches while visiting classrooms. A uniform “consistency of expectations and bringing about coherence to the grade level work” was critical, according to principal Amado, “especially when we are looking at grade level commitments to this work” and “agendas are a way of keeping the grade level focused.”

Maintaining a focus was underscored by a sense of urgency in principal Amado’s comment about how “we don't have any time to waste. There is no time to slack off in the work we are doing with teachers. I want to get this work done and to continue moving forward.”

Additionally, the agendas and notes from grade level meetings were posted along one wall of the professional development room creating an artifact timeline so people could see the progression of their work and learning throughout the school year. As a tool, “grade level notes memorialized the discussion of professional development work between principal, resource team, and teachers,” explained grade level representative Hilda. In addition, resource team member Angela explained how these notes portrayed a “visual and anecdotal timeline of when the professional development happened and what the teachers did during this time.” Perhaps more importantly, grade level representative Celina explained how the grade level notes did provide “a visual picture and record” of the professional development work occurring at each grade level and across the school. The grade level notes “let you know what PD each grade level is concentrating on, what the implications for teaching are because we’ve looked at the data, and what the commitments are for each grade level around the PD.”
During the weekly banked day professional development Tuesdays, teachers, grade level representatives, and the resource team met in grade level teams to “discuss the data from the periodic assessments, from DIBELS\textsuperscript{10}, or what the timelines are for administering the periodic assessments during the year.” To ensure that each grade level maintained a focus on instruction and instructional topics designed to improve teacher practice, principal Amado explained how the agenda “serves as an important tool to accomplish this purpose for the grade level representatives.” Going a step further, the principal added that the agendas also kept the grade levels “focused on the task at hand during banked days.”

Findings seemed to suggest that most of the professional development topics listed on the agendas “are set after we [the resource team] have had a chance to talk to the principal about the professional development that’s needed with the grade levels,” explained resource team member Marlin. Adding further to this discussion, resource team member Laura explained that “the principal wants to make sure that we are all focused on where the data is telling us we need to focus our PD especially for our ELs.” Speaking from the teacher perspective, grade level representative Celina mentioned that “she [principal Amado] sets the agenda, and the agenda has a clear focus. We definitely know what the professional development is going to be about. And that’s pretty much it.”

**Hard conversations.** Findings from focus group and principal interviews suggested that there are times when principal Amado engaged in hard conversations with teachers both in a one-to-one setting and group setting to address “adult agendas that take

\textsuperscript{10} The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills is a formative early literacy assessment to measure the acquisition of early literacy skills from kindergarten through sixth grade.
us away from our work and what’s best for kids,” and more importantly, as grade level representative Hilda framed it:

    The conversations with teachers are really about their teaching and why it’s not having an impact on the students. I think it's the most difficult conversation the principal has to have with some of these teachers, but doing it in such a way that doesn't alienate them, and still lets them know that the principal is there to support them. It’s not easy, but at some point the principal has to do this.

    From principal Amado’s perspective, despite efforts to create a strong focus on improving instruction in classrooms, or supporting teachers in their attempt to implement new instructional strategies, “there are times when I have to initiate conversations with teachers about what is not going on in their classrooms.” Additionally, principal Amado explained that initiating hard conversations with teachers who displayed resistant behavior, or even demonstrated a lack of willingness to implement the grade level agreements for professional development “continues to be a must.” These conversations were critical because “there are still teachers at the school who have low expectations of their students and are not getting with the program of implementing the PD work.” Principal Amado further commented that these “kinds” of conversations do not “go away” just because a principal has been at school for a long time and developed relationships with teachers. Sometimes, “those are the hardest conversations to have because you know these people very well, how they behave or how they’ll react,” according to principal Amado.

    Principal Amado explained that taking the opportunity to talk directly to teachers to discuss their resistant behavior or attitude was a way to create “greater accountability”
among teachers for their school improvement work. The principal explained how “one-to-one hard conversations are the most powerful, although it’s not comfortable for some people, it is a direct way of tackling their behavior.” Turning to the hard conversations that may be warranted in a group setting, principal Amado provided some insight into how these types of conversations were handled:

When I have the whole group together, I really make an effort to make direct eye contact with all of the teachers, almost like I’m doing a target thing. I am direct in my tone by setting my expectations about the grade level commitments to the work they said they were going to do in their PDs, then commit to doing in their classrooms. Then I tell them that we’re going to talk about this topic, whatever it happens to be, at the grade level and why there isn’t total commitment to what teachers said they were going to do in their classrooms. Then, if needs be, I talk to teachers individually.

Engaging teachers who demonstrate resistant behavior or an unwillingness to implement the grade level professional development agreements in hard conversations “is something I have to stay on top of constantly with some teachers on the staff,” explained principal Amado. Findings seemed to indicate that striving to maintain a delicate balance between addressing resistant teachers in a supporting, less threatening way, and getting them “on board” with implementing the professional development work was difficult. Principal Amado acknowledged that using the support of the instructional coaches on the resource team “can be very challenging, especially when you want to support teachers in what they are trying to do, but at the same time they also need to be accountable to their grade level work.”
From the perspective of grade level representative Hilda, the hard conversations principal Amado has with teachers at Almendro is part of the principal’s “leadership work” and “expectation that everybody has to contribute to improving the school, but if they aren’t, then the principal has to have those kind of candid conversations with people.” Findings seem to suggest that while it may be difficult for the principal to initiate hard conversations with resistant teachers, this leadership micro task is “one important way for the principal to set the tone and expectation of what teachers need to do if we are going to continue moving forward as a school.” In addition, grade level representative Celina provided the perspective that hard conversations are a potential entry point to help teachers grow professionally:

I’ve had these hard, candid conversations with the principal. I have learned so much about where I can grow, where I can do better. I know when it comes down to it if I’m frank and honest, I will grow as a professional. But that’s because we’ve had those conversations. Not everyone is so willing to open themselves up that way, and I think that’s where the disconnect comes in, people not seeing that the conversations are about learning and helping build leadership in other people.

**Monitoring Instruction In Classrooms**

Findings suggested that principal Amado’s use of classroom visitations as an organizational routine created opportunities where individual teacher practice became more transparent over time, less privatized, and “increased the accountability for what teachers should be teaching in their classrooms every day.” Principal Amado “expects the coaches to be in classrooms to observe lessons that teachers deliver and also to model
lessons for teachers, not just to be in classrooms to see whether teachers are keeping to
the grade level commitments,” explained resource team member David.

Interview data indicated that the classroom visitation routine was a way for the
principal to monitor the delivery of instruction and implementation of professional
development by teachers. However the instructional coaches on the resource team may
have played a more important role in monitoring instruction and implementing
professional development than the principal. Grade level representative Celina provided
insight into the important role the instructional coaches played in supporting principal
Amado’s efforts to keep a focus on instruction and ensure that teachers were
implementing the grade level agreements:

The principal really relies on the three instructional coaches because they have so
much content knowledge in literacy, math, and ELD [English Language
Development], just like experts. So it’s important that they are visiting
classrooms too and talking to the principal about what they see in the classroom,
and whether or not the teachers are implementing the PD. Besides, the principal
can’t be everywhere and in everyone’s classroom all the time, so the coaches are
like another pair of eyes and can help the principal out.

Adding on to grade level representative Celina’s comments about how resource
team members became “another set of eyes” for the principal, resource team member
Laura explained that “by having the coaches go into classrooms, they would be
supporting the principal in trying to maintain a focus on instruction,” and monitoring
what occurs in classrooms by “figuring out what supports teachers need to improve their
teaching and their planning.”
From principal Amado’s perspective, classroom visitations as a routine was “a direct way to monitor what they [teachers] were teaching, to see if there was a connection to what they were teaching and the PD, then see what follow-through or supports the teachers needed from the coaches.” Additionally, as part of the principal’s leadership practice, findings suggested that members of the resource team were also involved with classroom visitations because principal Amado “recognized their content and leadership experience, plus it [classroom visitations] keeps the focus on improving instruction.” Resource team member David offered the following perspective on the importance of classroom visitations as a routine:

The teachers know the principal’s expectations for what needs to happen in the classrooms as a result of our PD work, and by visiting classrooms the principal can see whether or not teachers are doing what they said they would be doing.

Focus group interview findings seemed to suggest that the routine of regular classroom visitation were an important part of principal Amado’s leadership practice and may have provided opportunities “to build leadership in others, especially the coaches.” Moreover, grade level representative Celina commented about how “teachers on the grade level make commitments to share responsibilities for our work, pulling in resources, looking how to make our teaching better.” In speaking to change in teaching practice, grade level representative Hilda provided her own assessment of the impact the routine of classroom observations had upon her own teaching practices and possibly the practice of others:

Having the principal visit our classrooms helps us [teachers] out a lot. And I think other teachers would say this too. By visiting our classrooms the principal
is able to share what has been observed in terms of the PD work, or the work we’ve been doing as a grade level. And it’s done constantly and consistently. I think that this has helped me know what is expected from me in terms of my teaching, and this helps me to redirect or lead my teaching in the classroom in a different direction depending on how it’s impacting my students.

Findings seemed to support principal Amado’s commitment to consistent and regular classroom visitations as an important way to monitor classroom instruction, provide feedback to teachers on their practice, and identify areas where additional coaching support may be needed. Despite the many day-to-day operational challenges at Almendro Elementary, principal Amado expressed the importance and priority of “getting into those classrooms to see where they [teachers] need more support and direction from the coaches. If I’m not visiting classrooms, then I’m not able to see where teachers need more support.” Thus findings suggested that classroom visitations, as an organizational routine, were the most direct way for principal Amado to support the work of the instructional coaches with teachers and communicate to all teachers a certain level of expectation for them to honor and carry out the grade level commitments around professional development efforts.

**Sustaining a Structure to Support Teacher Collaboration Around Instruction**

As noted earlier, the Los Robles Unified School District created an organizational routine for all elementary schools known as banked day Tuesdays. Banked day Tuesdays were designed to provide administrators in schools the opportunity to schedule weekly professional development for all teachers during the year. Principal Amado has taken this existing organizational routine, adapted the routine for the school’s context, and
created “opportunities for teachers to not only collaborate,” but also to “build capacity around using data and improving their teaching,” especially since much of the school improvement work at Almendro Elementary is focused on the English learner.

**Data analysis cycle.** At the time of this study, the Los Robles Unified School District’s comprehensive assessment schedule for English language arts and mathematics required schools to administer district created formative periodic assessments to elementary age students in kindergarten through sixth grade, in these two content areas, three times during the school year. As part of this organizational routine, all students took the literacy periodic assessments every seven weeks and the mathematics periodic assessment every nine weeks. An outside vendor contracted by the school district scored the periodic assessments, and the vendor electronically downloaded the assessment results for students to the school district’s assessment database, which was accessible to every teacher, administrator, and central office personnel.

Findings from interviews revealed that the literacy and mathematics periodic assessment routine were an important “gauge to measure just how well the students were doing in mastering the standards” as a result of the level of instruction students received between assessment administration. Resource team member Marlin explained that the periodic assessment results, “determine exactly where the coaches and principal need to focus their professional development planning and work with teachers between assessment cycles.” In response to the need for a well planned and coordinated professional development program, resource team member David explained how principal Amado “has created a specific cycle of inquiry around data so teachers can
begin to reflect on the outcomes of the student assessment data, then determine what next steps they will take to address those areas of need.”

Additionally, findings suggested that resource team members and principal Amado understood the “significant impact” the data analysis routine would have in “building teacher capacity to use data to inform instruction” and “potentially change teacher practice.” In the past, principal Amado commented how content instructional coaches were “trained in data analysis and were experts in helping teachers and administrators make instructional decisions based on students’ data results, but now this responsibility has shifted to the school site due to budget and program cuts.” Findings seemed to suggest that principal Amado continued the practice of using the instructional coaches to lead discussions and engage teachers in instructional planning based on the periodic assessment results because “they [the instructional coaches] are the ones who have the content knowledge and expertise, and can also help teachers understand what the data is telling them about their students.”

Interview data suggested that principal Amado did not design the current data analysis routine in use at Almendro Elementary, but adapted an existing data analysis routine previously developed by the Los Robles Unified School District. However, findings suggested that the principal and resource team members wanted to take advantage of the data analysis cycle “to build the capacity of each teacher to really be able to analyze their individual student data, then take that data and plan lessons to target student weakness areas.” Resource team member Laura added:

Without a regular process in place to bring teachers together on a regular basis to look closely at their student data, and really understand what the data is saying, it
would be very difficult to help teachers be specific in their planning and deciding where to start with interventions. The teachers would be all over the place.

Grade level representative Hilda offered her perspective on the importance of the data analysis routine when she commented:

Over time this process of analyzing data and having teachers become responsible for their own student data has gradually created opportunities for teachers to be more open about their data and look for ways across the grade level to help each other out with students who have similar needs and are struggling.

**Lesson study planning template.** Findings from interviews, observations, and document reviews suggested that principal Amado used a lesson study planning template as a tool to generate reflective conversations with teachers about their practice and to maintain a focus on improving instruction. According to grade level representative Celina, “The purpose of the template is to provide teachers with an opportunity to participate in grade level peer observations, and to give teachers the opportunity to provide feedback to other teachers they have observed teaching a lesson.”

Findings suggested that principal Amado’s strategy to improve teacher practice and build teacher knowledge was linked to the use of the lesson study planning template. “The lesson plan template is a structured way to help teachers incorporate important elements of lesson design and get them to seriously think about their planning,” commented principal Amado. Grade level representative Daniel suggested that the lesson study planning template was “really helpful for us as teachers because it helps provide a structure to plan and prepare strong lessons to teach during peer observations.”

Additionally, findings indicated that this tool was not only an important guide for
effective lesson planning during lesson study, but “the template creates opportunities for teachers to plan together, to talk about what goes into a well planned lesson, and time to talk about what should the lesson look like when kids are fully engaged,” commented principal Amado.

Document reviews revealed that the lesson study planning template guided teachers in their planning of lesson objectives, identifying student learning outcomes, and identifying specific strategies to use during lesson delivery, and what kind of evidence the teacher would collect to measure whether the students met the lesson objectives.

According to grade level representative Celina, “The lesson study template is a helpful tool when we are planning our lessons for the peer observation cycle because the template allows each teacher to focus and think about good first teaching.” Moreover, principal Amado added, “This planning template is a way to focus the teachers to think about what’s important in planning, then to be able to look for these elements when they see their partner teaching a lesson they planned together.”

Findings seemed to suggest that the lesson study planning template served another key function beyond just guiding teachers in their lesson planning with colleagues. The tool became an entry point for individual teachers to have “conversations and reflect with other teachers about their teaching, and how students respond to their teaching based on what they planned to do,” explained grade level representative Hilda. Resource team member Angela offered this perspective on the power of the lesson study planning template to influence teacher practice:

Yes, the template is an important tool for the teachers to use when planning their lessons for the lesson study observation, and it is an important tool to use to help
the teachers capture evidence during their peer observations. The template helps teachers write down what they actually saw their teaching partner do during the lesson rather than what they thought the teacher was doing. That’s because they both were involved with planning the lesson, talking about the lesson, and writing down what they would be doing during the lesson. The next step would be for them to talk about how they would teach the lesson differently to engage even more students during the lesson.

Finally, findings suggested that the lesson study planning template was also a feedback tool for the instructional coaches who led the lesson study and participated by observing the lessons the teachers taught. Resource team member Laura described the value of the lesson study planning template in this manner:

The template is an important tool for our work as coaches because we can see the thinking teachers have put into planning these lessons with their partners. And because we also observed the lessons, we can think about where the teachers might need support in the classroom, especially if they are learning new strategies and techniques to engage students.

**Lesson study design.** Findings indicate supporting teacher collaboration to improve teacher practice was the most important key leadership macro function next to the principal’s efforts to establish and sustain a focus on instruction. Observations, field notes, and interviews bore evidence that multiple individuals in the school were responsible for exercising leadership through support and guidance to improve instruction “as a collective effort because there is so much at stake, and we have to all work together to do our part.” At Almendro Elementary, grade level lesson study was the leadership
micro task. As an improvement strategy, this model of professional development involved the members of the resource team and principal working with each grade level of teachers for one day to look at current research about best practices, engage in peer observations of lessons, debrief lessons through the lens of student-teacher interactions, and discuss individual and grade level commitments to instructional practices.

Building on a prior model of professional development teachers engaged in during the federally funded Reading First\textsuperscript{11} initiative, maintaining the structure for lesson study was important to “provide continuity and continuing to build capacity even though we’ve lost so much funding because of budget cuts,” explained principal Amado. The importance of continuing the grade level lesson study work was borne out by the teacher leaders as well. Grade level representatives mentioned “having consistency and a regular way” to plan, teach, then reflect on instruction in order to improve practice and meet student learning needs. Additionally, the principal and resource team worked to make the grade level lesson study design meet teacher skill needs and to keep the focus on instructional improvement. Moreover, document reviews, observations, and field notes documented how the instructional coaches, principal, and teachers over time worked to create group norms and expectations for how the lesson study work would be conducted.

According to findings from focus group interviews, the lesson study design work in mathematics and literacy was supported and led almost exclusively by the instructional coaches. Their facilitation of the lesson study from start to finish was a strategic way for the teachers to be productive in their learning. Grade level representatives commented in

\textsuperscript{11} A federally funded program that provided assistance to states and districts to establish research-based reading programs for students enrolled in kindergarten through grade three. Federal funds also supported professional development for teachers to be effective reading teachers and skilled at program implementation.
a positive way, “We’ve never had a meeting that wasn't’ conducted and run by the coaches. The coaches run our meetings, and the lesson studies for the grade level.” The principal and instructional coaches were responsible for establishing the agenda and learning outcomes for participants; however, as demonstrated by resource team member David in a lesson study observation, opportunities were provided for the teacher participants to talk about their own learning needs and instructional challenges:

Remember our goals and outcomes for today. We will be talking about intent and purpose, recap, discuss, and reflect on the lesson we saw the partner teacher teach. We want to pay close attention to the interactions that occur during the lesson with the students. So at this point, what practice do you [teacher participants] want to refine? To improve upon?

**ELD instructional guide template.** Instructional planning for English learners and the coherent delivery of daily ELD instruction in all classrooms “is an important part of my focus on instruction,” explained principal Amado, given that ELs constitute “over 75% of the student population at our school.” When interviewed, grade level teacher representative Daniel commented how, “Much like the other teachers, I understand the importance of taking steps to address ELD as a staff and to be focused in our planning and teaching since most of the students here are ELs.” Additionally, resource team member David further explained the need to “seriously look at what is happening during ELD and how are teachers planning for it because ELs represent a significant subgroup when you look at API and AYP [Annual Yearly Progress].”

Additional findings from document reviews and interviews seemed to suggest a high degree of urgency around robust, daily ELD instruction, and constructing a tool
teachers could use to guide their planning and one the principal and resource team members could use to monitor ELD instruction as they visited classrooms. Principal Amado spoke to this sense of urgency and the need for coherent ELD planning:

It’s about instruction. What’s the outcome for students? Teachers have to focus on this question as they are planning and thinking about instruction so we can eliminate our long-term ELs and help in redesignation rates. I expect them to do this, and I expect to see the ELD instruction in classrooms. The planning with this guide is where it starts and keeps the consistency across the grade levels.

In addition, to ensure consistency for ELD lesson planning and framing teachers’ understanding of the important elements of an effective ELD lesson, principal Amado envisioned the template as a tool to monitor daily ELD implementation in all classrooms. Furthermore, this tool would be used to capture evidence of the ELD professional development efforts during classroom visitations. According to grade level representative Celina, these “look fors” communicated clear expectations of what the principal and coaches expected to see as part of a “good ELD lesson.” Principal Amado described the expectations and purpose for the template:

Basically, the template was based on functions and forms. So, identify your language function, your language forms you’re working on that week, the piece of literature that you’re going to use, and applying that skill as part of their learning how the language works. It’s also my expectation that teachers become familiar with this template, internalize it. So once we’ve established this, then when I visit classrooms I can see whether what the teachers have planned for is happening in the classroom. When I walk through classrooms, or if one of the coaches walks,
we can certainly see whether the work we are doing around ELD in grade levels is 
really happening in those classrooms.

Interview data revealed how principal Amado collaborated with a former central 
office literacy content expert to co-construct the ELD instructional guide template 
currently in use by teachers at the time of data collection. Principal Amado sought the 
assistance of the literacy content expert to “make sure we had a lesson design template 
for teachers to use during ELD planning that was solid, and had all the elements for an 
effective lesson plan.”

According to findings, “solid planning” was at the forefront of principal Amado’s 
thinking about what first steps needed to be taken to ensure EL students received 
“coherent and consistent” ELD instruction. “It’s absolutely critical, critical for us to have 
something like this [ELD instructional guide template] to scaffold teacher planning, and 
then we can talk about how is the teacher going to deliver the lesson, what strategies is 
she going to use,” And from a teacher’s perspective about the importance of an ELD 
planning guide, grade level representative Celina explained:

Teachers have to know what the critical elements are of effective ELD instruction, 
but you have to start with planning. We need to make sure everyone understands 
this and that everyone isn’t just teaching what they want to. Having something 
like this [ELD planning template] keeps teachers focused on planning what they 
are going to teach, the purpose of their lesson, and to identify the outcomes they 
are looking for when teaching.

Additionally, grade level representative Hilda offered her perspective:
The planning form keeps the grade level focused on planning. It’s certainly something that builds collaboration because we’re focused on the same thing. We use the form to backwards plan. We forward plan. We really try to take into consideration what the EL student needs are when we also plan for math and reading.

**Instructional resource team meetings.** Findings from observations and interviews suggested that the meetings between the principal and the resource team were critical to the principal’s work of “determining the instructional focus for the school, what the PD will look like during the year, and how the coaches will support teachers in the classroom after the PDs.” Principal Amado elaborated on the critical nature of the team and commented, “This team is critical and I rely on them to be the experts that they are, and I know how their strengths can be important in supporting the teachers and me in trying to improve instruction at the school.”

Additional findings suggested that as an established routine, the weekly resource team meetings with principal Amado provided opportunities to discuss (a) the professional development calendar, (b) professional development opportunities for grade levels, (c) classroom visitations and implementation of grade level agreements around professional development, and (d) the coordination of demonstration lessons for teachers needing additional support. Resource team member David described these meetings as “vital to keeping everyone’s schedule synced and keeping everyone connected to what each other is doing, especially when we’re working with different grade levels.”

Principal Amado expressed a similar sentiment, explaining that these meetings provided needed time to “revisit the instructional focus and priorities we’re working on
with grade levels, do short-term and long-term planning, touch base with where the coaches and coordinators are, and even check in on my AP [assistant principal] when she’s here.” And in a very strategic way, findings seemed to suggest that principal Amado structured part of the resource team meetings to include problem solving and brainstorming around challenges the team faced in their daily work with teachers. Resource team member Laura described these meetings as opportunities to “learn from each other because we bring a whole lot of experience and expertise to the table.” Along the same lines, resource team member David added how “important it is to hear everyone’s perspective on something, because we are all dealing with the same challenges in our work together.” When interviewed, principal Amado provided this perspective:

I bring them together and I’m always aware that they have ideas and opinions, I rely on them to be the experts that they are in their particular areas and share that, and I listen to them. They have a lot of insights about the challenges the teachers are having, and they also have answers and ideas on how to go about addressing them. I listen to their suggestions, and I realize that I don’t have all the answers. I think that you have to be able to listen and have a team that’s going to push back or, and as a leader I have to recognize their strengths and let them go with it sometimes. And I will give them assignments, as it were, to either work with a teacher or go in to try and stretch their capabilities rather than try to micromanage them.

Although findings revealed that the resource team meetings did address operational issues that arise at the school, the majority of the time was devoted to
instructional issues and how the resource team was supporting teachers in the classroom and through professional development efforts. As an organizational routine to maintain a focus on instruction, resource team member Marlin commented, “All of us have been here at least four plus years, so it’s a support team and we are committed to keeping a focus on instruction, and having a regular schedule in place to talk about these things.” At which point resource team member Angela commented by explaining how “the ability to maintain that focus with all the other things that are thrown at us, keeping that vision, keeping us moving along, that’s critical for the principal and for us when we have our resource meetings.”

Findings from observations and interviews also indicated that the focus on instruction at the resource team meetings seemed to be on just those key areas of school improvement the principal, resource team, and teachers had identified through summative and formative assessment data at the beginning of the school year. The data seemed to indicate the principal was intentional in “filtering out issues that are not really connected to what we are focusing during our PDs,” which allowed the resource team meetings to be “more productive” and team members felt as though “a lot is accomplished” when the meetings occurred. For example, resource team member Angela explained about the school-wide focus on Universal Access:

This has been an important area of focus for us this year, especially given that we have many EL students in our school. It’s very important for teachers to have a block of time during the instructional day to meet with students in small groups,

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12 A dedicated period of time during reading instruction when the teacher provides differentiated instruction to struggling students in a small group setting.
and provide differentiated instruction for them. And for some of our EL students it’s an additional amount of time to work with the teacher.

Principal Amado echoed a similar message, explaining that “our focus this year has been on the daily implementation of UA [Universal Access], and the teachers have committed to posting their daily schedules to see when it’s happening during their day.”

While the principal and resource team members set aside a weekly dedicated time to meet and plan, findings indicated that the decisions regarding the instructional focus, professional development efforts, and the monitoring of instruction resided with only the members of the resource team, with little input or participation from grade level representatives or other teachers. Focus group interviews revealed that the instructional coaches on the resource team “were responsible for developing the professional development agendas for the grade levels and the lesson study observations,” and other people are generally “not involved with the planning” that occurred during the resource team meetings. Grade level representative Hilda explained:

They [resource team and principal] have a very clear view of the vision, of where they want us to go, of what they want to accomplish at the grade level meetings. That’s part of the planning that goes on at their resource meeting, and the teachers are not really part of that at all. The coaches are a major part of the planning of what happens at our grade level meetings and how the conversations go.

**Grade level meetings.** At Almendro Elementary, interview data seemed to suggest that principal Amado took an existing organizational routine, the banked day Tuesday grade level meeting time, which was instituted by the school district, to remind and reinforce teachers of the school’s professional development efforts and focus on
instructional improvement. In addition to the weekly grade level meetings, principal Amado marked the importance of leveraging fiscal resources to schedule monthly grade level meetings to “deepen the work of the grade level” and “to formally meet in smaller groups to go over grade level planning, focus on PD that’s connected to our work around UA, for example, or ELs and ELD instruction.”

Although at Almendro Elementary there are no formally elected grade level chairpersons, findings from interviews suggested that the principal relied on a more organic process of “encouraging teachers to come together based on individual and grade level needs beyond grade level meetings to do instructional planning on their own after school” in order to encourage grade level collaboration and create additional “opportunities for the coaches to work with the teachers.” Principal Amado provided additional insight into this organic progress and the difficulties it presented:

Teachers rely on their own personal dedication and focus as a teacher, and they come together with others that have the same challenges in the classroom and try to address them as a group. We have tried, in terms of the grade levels to work with them in smaller groups rather than always working with everyone in a large group. This creates a smaller group setting and the resource team can focus on the teachers and their needs.

Additionally, when interviewed, principal Amado also hoped to increase the effectiveness of teachers around how to do more targeted planning and to design more purposeful instruction tied to the professional development efforts because the classroom visitations provided every indication that a need still existed in ensuring that UA
instruction and ELD instruction occurred daily in all classrooms, but at a more rigorous and consistent level. Resource team member David noted:

In the past, before the budget cuts, there was funding to release teachers for additional planning time or more opportunities for professional development. Now, due to the loss of funding, the principal knows how important grade level meetings have become and how we have to maximize what gets done during these meetings if we are going to continue to move forward.

Another resource team member, Marlin commented, “That focus of linking what we do on banked day Tuesday with the grade level meetings is important, important that everyone sees the big picture and how we are working towards getting there.”

Understanding the bigger picture and importance of grade level meetings was not lost on the teachers, as grade level representative Daniel pointed out by acknowledging how “grade level meetings allow us to share leadership spontaneously even though we don't have formal chairpersons because there is time to plan, time to talk, and time to work together and receive feedback from each other. Everyone has that opportunity.”

Another way that principal Amado used grade level meetings to support teacher collaboration around instruction was to structure these meetings for teachers. Structuring the grade level meetings has been “important for the principal to do,” and the principal “takes every opportunity to remind us about our focus, about what’s expected from us after PD, and the need to see evidence of the PD in classrooms,” commented grade level representative Daniel. In addition, grade level representative Celina noted:

There is a structure in place, yes, we have our banked day Tuesday, and the coaches and principal know what goes on in our grade level meetings because
they’ve had a chance to talk to us about what they expect, and when they come into classrooms they have a clear vision of what they should be seeing the teachers doing and teaching.

Although grade level meetings serve an “important purpose” for teachers in their work, findings revealed that from the grade level representatives’ viewpoint, the pressures of the current state and district accountability systems have led to a more structured and “controlled” approach to grade level meetings. Grade level representative Hilda explained, “We feel the pressure and responsibility to get our students to be proficient and the coaches plan much of our work that gets done at the grade level meetings. We’ve never had a grade level meeting that wasn't conducted and run by the coaches.” Additionally, findings indicated that since there are no formal grade level chairpersons, “the principal has coaches take on a consulting role at times, then a more active role in structuring grade level meetings, so they plan the agendas for the grade levels, and the meetings are run from that agenda.”

Findings suggested that the principal used grade level meetings as a time to approach teachers in a smaller setting to remind them to stay focused on improving teaching and learning. Principal Amado explained:

“I feel that, when I have the whole grade level together, and we were looking at UA, I sort of approach it kind of big to small, to smaller. Guys, one more time, we’re going to talk about UA. We need to do it every day, it needs to be done with fidelity, and remember it is a focus for us because our students need this type of support, especially the ELs.”
Creating opportunities for teachers to collaborate around instructional improvement through an organizational routine such as weekly grade level meetings has had a positive impact on teachers at Almendro Elementary according to interview findings. In grade level meetings, “teachers have the opportunity to look at student work, talk about the challenges of working with students who are struggling, and share ideas with colleagues” keeping the grade level dialogues focused on improving instruction. One grade level representative, Daniel, added, “Sure it can be a challenge with different people, different personalities, but grade level meetings bring us together, and we deal with why our students are struggling and how we are going to help them.” Another grade level representative, Celina, added:

I think the greatest resource that I have are my grade level colleagues. We have the opportunity to meet go the extra mile to do long-term planning, seeing what’s going on in each of our classrooms, and figuring out the common challenges or trends that we see in our own classrooms, then we plan accordingly. And I know this doesn't happen at every grade level in the school, but we make a commitment every week to come together to talk about how things are going.

**Supporting Leadership Development for Teachers**

Findings suggested teachers and grade level leaders enacted leadership tasks to address the mounting pressures of the current accountability system and respond to the challenges of getting students to levels of academic proficiency, especially the English language learners. Focus group data revealed that the principal supported efforts by teachers to exercise leadership in an organic manner; however, the resource team, and specifically the instructional coaches, have played a central role in this process. As
suggested by grade level representative Hilda, the instructional coaches “orchestrate the professional development and what happens at the grade level meetings. The coaches are a major component of what is on the agenda and how the conversations tend to go when we meet.” Adding to the conversation, grade level representative Daniel understood the difficulties the principal faced in simultaneously managing the different teacher personalities and driving an instructional agenda, while “feeling confident in knowing the principal wants to build leadership in others and get teachers to take more responsibility for their grade level professional development” as part of the collective work of school improvement.

Professional development and teacher practice. Interview data suggested that professional development efforts were at times driven by teacher needs, were aimed at developing teacher content knowledge, and designed to impact teacher practice. Principal Amado held the responsibility for “setting the focus for professional development.” Through professional development efforts, principal Amado attempted to create meaning for teachers so they would “understand how important rigorous instruction and good first teaching are for our kids,” and how professional development can “help teachers understand the importance of the work we are doing around Universal Access and ELD instruction, and what good first teaching needs to look like in all the classrooms.” Additionally, grade level representative Hilda explained how the principal attempted “to make sure that we all carry out the vision and expectation of what instruction is supposed to look like in the classroom.”

Principal Amado summarized the importance of having a structure in place such as banked day Tuesday, where professional development opportunities would take place.
“so teachers can have time to plan and use something like the ELD lesson design, and also have time to talk about strategies they are going to use and how they are going to assess the kids.” Additionally, interview findings from grade level representatives and resource team members revealed that planning and facilitating professional development opportunities for teachers required the execution of several leadership tasks, such as developing an agenda, creating a master calendar of professional development days, facilitation and development of content materials, and creating grade level commitments for professional development implementation in the classrooms.

At the time of data collection, interview findings suggested principal Amado attempted to build teacher capacity and skill by “encouraging teachers to learn from each other and see how their colleagues are teaching, especially because we are focusing on good first instruction that is rigorous,” rather than in a “top-down” manner that might create “resistance or resentment” from teachers. Grade level representatives Daniel and Celina described the principal’s efforts to encourage teachers to learn from each other as “really important because we are learning from people who have capacity and skills in different areas, and that helps us become better teachers.” Professional development opportunities driven by teacher needs were viewed positively and became a source for professional growth and impacted practice according to interview findings. Grade level representative leader Hilda explained:

The principal allows teachers to go to these conferences as a way of not becoming stagnant at our work, to participate in activities tied to our work. The principal gives teachers the opportunity to try whatever it is they are learning from the
conference to reenergize them. It’s also something new for their students instead of doing the same old thing.

Resource team member Angela’s comment, similar to Hilda’s, provides a glimpse into how teacher practice can be impacted by professional development efforts at the school:

One particular example is the Common Core rollout for K [kindergarten] and 1 [first grade] teachers last summer. We had a few teachers attend, then some of the teachers presented to their particular grade level because they were very nervous presenting to a whole group. Over time, we’ve seen the other teachers who participated in the PD from the teachers who attended the rollout take the information and use it in their classrooms.

Continuing along the same lines, resource team member David explained how the principal “always encourages teachers to take a leading role in providing professional development to the teachers because they have an area of expertise that maybe others can learn from and become stronger teachers.” This idea was further affirmed by resource team member Marlin in his comments about how “beneficial” it is for the principal to involve teachers in “leading professional development or presenting workshops, and looking for those teacher leaders and supporting them in what they want to do.”

Findings suggested that principal Amado strove to provide teachers at Almendro Elementary the opportunity to lead and participate in professional development efforts as a way to build capacity, to bring teachers to a point where they would understand the importance of the school improvement work, “and know what I am looking for in their instruction when I visit classrooms.”
**Job-embedded professional development.** According to principal and focus group interview data, principal Amado depended on the resource team to assume greater responsibility for providing in-class coaching support to teachers to improve their instructional delivery of content. Resource team member David likened this to “developing leadership capacity for us.” Adding to this discussion, resource team member Angela commented, “It’s an opportunity for me to be a resource for teachers in terms of what they need around instructional support, questions about strategies, or how to use the data better to see where students are struggling.” When asked to further explain how this was done specifically, resource team member Laura commented on the importance of using her “content knowledge and skills as an instructional coach and working with teachers to implement strategies designed to address learning needs” surfaced by the formative periodic assessments. Angela’s deeper insights are noted:

It’s my job to focus on targeting our English learners at each grade level. We look at the students’ scores from the data, we focus on targeting the students with the most needs, with gaps in skills areas. Central [the District Office] provides the coaches with training and we can bring this training back to the schools as we work with teachers. In my work with teachers at the grade level, I am going in there, the classrooms, doing preobservations. Then I meet with the teachers to talk about lessons I can model for them. Modeling lessons, modeling strategies, strategies they can implement or enhance their lessons with. Then I meet with the teachers and we do a postconference.

Consistent with the resource team member’s description of how the work of improving literacy instruction is being stretched or distributed over several or more
people was a point made by grade level representative Hilda when commenting how “coaches are a major component of our work at improving instruction.” Additionally, the coaches were viewed as “a resource, a tool, they are focused on strategy instruction, and they visit the classrooms to see if there is consistent implementation too.”

**Summary**

In summary, findings suggested that the leadership macro functions enacted by principal Amado were an attempt to impact instruction and change teacher practice. While the principal may have intended to change teacher practice and foster collective ownership of the school improvement work in a distributed fashion, interview data suggested that this work was carried out more directly by people in traditional and formal positions of leadership within the school, than by individual or groups of teachers at each grade level. Additionally, findings suggested that organizational routines and tools played a significant role in shaping how the principal, in the role of instructional leader, enacted the four leadership macro functions in the work of school improvement. Principal Amado’s leadership practice was stretched over different contexts, where specific organizational routines and tools led to creating an interconnectedness between the principal, resource team members, and to some degree teacher practice in the classroom. Finally, the findings revealed that while principal Amado and the resource team may have exercised leadership to galvanize teachers around the work of school improvement, grade level representative interviews suggested that their practice as teachers may have been more influenced by grade level colleagues than by the principal and resource team members who were recognized for their roles as leaders or content experts.
Cross Case Analysis

Data collected from the individual case studies of principal Artavia at Cedro Elementary School and principal Amado at Almendro Elementary School in the Los Robles Unified School District were presented for each principal and organized around four core underpinnings of the conceptual framework for this study. The first core underpinning pertained to the themes resulting from each case principal’s work to maintain a focus on instruction. The second core underpinning pertained to themes resulting in each case principal monitoring instruction in classrooms. The third core underpinning pertained to themes in each case principal sustaining a structure to support teacher collaboration around instruction. The fourth core underpinning pertained to supporting leadership development for teachers. In each of the cases, data collected through observations, principal and focus group interviews, and document reviews suggested how tools, routines, and aspects of their situation mediated the interactions between principals, leadership team members, and teachers.

The data were analyzed across the two cases in order to compare and contrast the leadership practice of the two case principals. Comparing and contrasting leadership practice provided further insight into the enactment of leadership practice, the distribution of leadership practice over many people, and how the tools, routines, and aspects of a given situation helped to define leadership practice in each case school.

Maintaining a Focus on Instructional Improvement

Findings from both cases suggested the principals felt a compelling need to deliver a message of urgency and focus on raising the achievement levels of students in response to state and district accountability mandates. Data suggested that both principal
Artavia and principal Amado understood the importance of continually connecting back to the message of maintaining a focus on instructional improvement and communicating this message to teachers on a consistent basis. Both principals viewed consistent, frequent communication as a strategic way to build and maintain a sense of urgency that this work was critical to the continued success each school had achieved thus far in consistently raising student achievement levels.

In addition to communicating this message at different venues, both principals Amado and Artavia were quick to seize opportunities during individual conversations with teachers and conversations with faculty to emphasize the core function and work of their schools: to improve teaching and learning. Findings suggested how the efforts of both principals to communicate this message involved the strategic use of organizational routines and tools to mediate this effort in their interactions with leaders and followers. Tools and routines seemed to figure prominently as a way to personally connect teachers, teacher leaders, leadership team members, and the principals with each other and the work of school improvement on a regular basis, across different settings.

Leadership team and grade level teacher leaders seemed to contribute to supporting the leadership work of maintaining a focus of instruction for both case principals. In both instances, case principals took existing organizational routines and tools, then managed to use them to communicate and reinforce the leadership macro function of maintaining a focus on instructional improvement. The leadership team and grade level teachers became an extension of the principal’s position of authority to remind teachers of the school’s focus and why the work of school improvement was important. Additionally, this was not a one-time message with principal Artavia at Cedro
Elementary; it was continually heard as talking points, points delivered by various teacher leaders and leadership team members designed to focus the collective energy of the school organization in the midst of what seemed to be potential district and community distractions. Principal Artavia and principal Amado seemed to have exhibited an understanding of the need to remind teachers, sometimes bluntly, yet acting proactively, of their purpose and role in the work of school improvement.

In addition, both case principals’ focus on improving instruction was directly connected to establishing existing and new organizational routines and developing tools to distribute leadership practice to build collective ownership for the work of school improvement and impacting teacher practice. Principal Artavia’s leadership practice was shaped by the organizational routines and tools used to de-privatize teacher practice, encourage collaboration, and cultivate leadership in others as leadership practice was distributed over multiple people and their context. This is consistent with the theoretical framework discussed in a previous section of this study where, from a distributed lens, leadership practice is co-constructed in the interactions of others and does not belong to only one individual. However, in contrast to principal Artavia, the role of organizational routines and tools in establishing and maintaining an interconnectedness between leadership practice and impact upon teacher practice was not consistently distributed across grade levels at Almendro Elementary.

**Goal setting.** The data indicated that only principal Artavia specifically addressed goal setting as a routine for school improvement and maintaining a focus on instruction. Principal Artavia and leadership team members indicated that over time the goal setting process assisted teachers to confront their uneasiness about using data in
reflective conversations about student academic performance and for their individual instructional planning. Over time, the goal setting routine was perfected and teachers became more at ease with using data to drive instruction and foster reflective conversations. However, grade level chairpersons were not unanimous in their agreement that the goal setting routine had a direct impact upon teacher practice across the school, but rather the routine served as an important tool for the principal to build both individual and collective teacher capacity in the use of data to establish goals for student academic performance.

Data analysis cycle. Findings from both schools suggested that principals Artavia and Amado attempted to leverage the data analysis routine as a way to maintain a school wide connection to improving instruction in classrooms. Principal Artavia believed the enactment of this routine was a way to be connected to both teachers and students, and also to address student learning needs and teacher practice. Additionally, leadership work was stretched over multiple people in a coordinated fashion as the routine of data analysis was performed in more of a sequential, linear way.

Contrast this with principal Amado where an analysis of how this leadership practice was enacted revealed a different pattern of distribution. Although the data analysis routine was a way for teachers to determine instructional next steps, leadership practice was stretched across the practice of the instructional coaches and the principal in more of a collective distribution, both working separately but interconnected in monitoring instruction in classrooms. While the instructional coaches were supporting teachers in the classroom, the principal was at the same time visiting classrooms to see evidence of the professional development efforts upon teacher practice. This illustrates
how different leaders, working separately, can come together and construct leadership practice focused on attaining a common goal.

Although leadership practice was stretched in different ways across multiple people in both case study schools, findings seemed to suggest that leadership practice was constrained. In the case of Cedro Elementary, principal Artavia and leadership team members took a more direct and leading role. They initiated this process from disaggregating and presenting the formative periodic assessment data to leading the data analysis work prior to teachers engaging in reflective discussion about planning, student learning outcomes, and teaching practices. In contrast, at Almendro Elementary, principal Amado and the instructional coaches were the individuals responsible for initiating this work prior to involving teachers in the data analysis cycle.

**Agendas.** Creating a sense of urgency for maintaining a focus on instruction is abstract in nature, yet both principal Artavia and principal Amado relied on meeting agendas as perhaps the most critical tool to focus the energy and efforts of the school on the work of improvement despite the number of internal and external [district] distractions. A review of the two cases surfaced a common theme of how the development of the agenda for grade level leaders and leadership teams allowed the principals to target instructional priorities, reinforce the importance of established routines in maintaining a focus on school improvement, and create opportunities for discourse around teacher practice and student learning. Principals Artavia and Amado saw the importance of using agendas to align meeting topics with intended outcomes and eliciting the participation of teachers during faculty and grade level meetings. Beyond the use of agendas to keep the school focused on instruction, data from observations and
interviews seemed to imply that principal Amado viewed agendas as an artifact to
document the evolution and progress of knowledge, skill set, and capacity building of the
grade level participants during the school year.

Additionally, principal Amado believed the agendas served as artifacts of how the
grade level teachers developed a more coherent instructional focus, reduced the number
of competing improvement strategies, and built a common language of instructional
improvement across grade levels. In contrast, the data suggested that principal Artavia
used agendas in two specific ways: (a) first, to tightly control the facilitation of leadership
team and grade level meetings to ensure a focus on instructional improvement; and (b)
second, to ensure SMART goals were regularly revisited and discussed by all grade
levels and individual teachers.

Data chats. Findings suggested a unique way that one case principal established
a routine to create an entry point for reflection and discussion about student academic
progress. At Cedro Elementary, Principal Artavia established the data chat routine as a
way to consistently keep formative and summative student data at the forefront of formal
conversations with individual teachers about how their teaching practices were impacting
student learning outcomes and creating internal teacher accountability to student data
outcomes. These data chats occurred between the principal and individual teachers or
between leadership team members and individual teachers. The data chat routine was
cited by principal Artavia and members of the leadership team as a critical strategy to get
teachers to focus on student formative assessment data and reflect upon their teaching
practices that impacted the data. However, there were no clear data from the ILT focus
group interview that this routine led to specific changes in individual teacher practice or
changes in how teachers prepared and planned instructional lessons to address identified student weakness areas on the formative periodic assessments.

In contrast, interview data from principal Amado and the leadership team did not suggest that there was a formal data analysis and inquiry routine in place at the school. Without a formal routine for data analysis, findings suggested it may have been difficult supporting teachings in the use of formative periodic assessment data to drive changes in their classroom practice or instructional planning through grade level conversations and personal reflection with the principal and resource team members. The findings seemed to suggest that principal Amado distributed the leadership task of sharing data and using data to drive change in teacher planning and instructional practice to the resource team members with previous coaching experiences in mathematics or literacy. Additionally, interview data revealed the principal’s belief that the content and technical expertise of these individuals better positioned them to lead this work than the principal. This finding may indicate principal Amado believed in painting the “big picture” and allowing others on the leadership team to build capacity, knowledge, and skill sets as part of their leadership practice.

**Hard conversations.** Despite creating a sense of urgency for a focus on improving instruction, data from both case schools suggests that an effort to improve teacher practice and maintain a focus on instruction was occasionally met with resistance by teachers and grade level teacher leaders. Findings strongly suggested that principals Artavia and Amado understood the importance of overcoming resistance and confronting resistant behavior by providing opportunities for people to discuss and explore issues or concerns leading to resistance, and directly confronting the resistant individual or
resistant behavior. Engaging teachers in conversations about their pedagogical practices was something both principals felt strongly about and marked as essential if they expected their students to continue improving academically. Additionally, findings seemed to imply that perhaps the increased accountability for teacher performance and student academic progress, coupled with a continued focus on instructional improvement, produced some of the resistance or resistant behavior both principals needed to address. However, each principal’s perspective and approach to addressing these behaviors differed remarkably.

According to interview data, principal Amado seemed to have taken a more global, less direct strategy to deal with teacher resistance by characterizing hard conversations as the interactions between the principal and teachers regarding the need to always maintain a focus on instructional improvement, build upon a coherent understanding of the school improvement work each teacher and each grade level was taking on as part of the collective improvement effort, and maintaining high expectations for teachers to be a part of this process.

Contrast the thinking of principal Amado about what having hard conversations entailed with the thinking of principal Artavia, and the data seems to support a more deliberate, strategic leadership practice by principal Artavia of addressing individual teacher practice, the need for practice to change, in addition to maintaining a focus on instructional improvement. In addition, findings seemed to support that part of principal Artavia’s capacity-building strategy was to use professional publications as a tool for inquiry, reflection, and capacity building for leadership team members and grade level
teacher leaders to also engage in the work of initiating hard conversation with others as part of their leadership practice.

An important contrasting difference between principal Artavia and Amado was in the level of expectation each principal had for grade level leaders to engage in hard conversations with colleagues who were resistant to change. Findings supported that principal Artavia had high expectations for grade level leaders to engage in hard conversations as part of their work and responsibility as grade level leaders. Focus group data revealed that grade level teacher leaders had a high degree of ambivalence and apprehension in assuming the leadership role of initiating hard conversations with their colleagues about pedagogical practices because the grade level teacher leaders were concerned about their peers’ perceptions of this process as being evaluative in nature, a task or responsibility they felt better assumed and carried out by their principal.

On the other hand, interview data suggested that principal Amado did not have an expectation that grade level representatives or resource team members engage their colleagues in hard conversations when encountering resistant behaviors. In fact, focus group interviews suggested that grade level teachers saw the leadership practice of initiating hard conversations as the responsibility of the principal. Additionally, findings suggested that principal Amado embraced the responsibility and obligation to address resistant behaviors as quickly as possible, yet without provoking confrontation in the process.

In summary, consistent across both cases was a calculated effort by the principals to foster a continued sense of urgency to increase student achievement by creating a school environment focused on improving instruction. The data supported evidence of
Monitoring Instruction In Classrooms

Participant interviews revealed that principal Artavia and principal Amado understood the importance of monitoring instruction in all classrooms to improve student achievement. Additional findings revealed how both principals were very clear in articulating their purposes for conducting classroom visitations, explaining how this organizational routine was considered a part of their leadership practice; however, each principal’s purpose for conducting such visitations was different.

Interview data implied that principal Artavia took every opportunity to support teachers in the classroom by conducting demonstration lessons or through cognitive coaching techniques as a way to support teachers in their pedagogical practices. Contrast this approach with that of principal Amado. The principal did not conduct demonstration lessons or model lessons for teachers, rather the principal relied on the expertise of the three instructional coaches to support teachers in this manner. Here is an example of a principal who was a mathematics instructional coach trained in cognitive coaching, then taking this past experience and directly transferring it to the context and situations as they presented themselves at Cedro Elementary. By principal Amado’s own admission, the instructional coaches were the “go-to” people at Almendro Elementary anytime there were teacher needs around pedagogy or strategy instruction.

Principals Artavia and Amado viewed classroom visitations as an essential routine and part of their leadership work to determine whether the investment in teacher
professional development resulted in any consistent change in teacher practice and if evidence could be collected on the implementation of professional development across all classrooms.

In the case of principal Artavia, the support provided to teachers was an attempt to support teachers’ ongoing efforts to adapt to change and adjust their teaching practices to better meet student learning needs. Findings seemed to support that principal Artavia was very much at ease in the classroom working directly with teachers. Again, principal Artavia, drawing on past experiences as an instructional coach, could relate to teachers in a positive way to gain their acceptance and lower their anxiety around embracing new pedagogy and instructional strategies. Therefore, for principal Artavia, classroom visitations were a key strategy to assess the content knowledge and skill level of teachers as they implemented the professional development work. In addition, classroom visitations provided the principal with opportunities to possibly intervene and directly support teachers in improving their classroom practice.

In contrast, findings did not seem to suggest that principal Amado embraced the same level of enthusiasm as principal Artavia when talking about teacher supports in the classroom. Findings indicated that principal Amado’s purpose for conducting classroom visitations was more for compliance purposes, collecting evidence around the implementation of professional development efforts at the grade levels, or teacher adherence to schedules for Universal Access and ELD instruction, than seeking out opportunities to personally work with teachers who may have been struggling to adapt and improve their teaching practices.
Both principal Artavia and principal Amado spoke about the importance of providing direct feedback to teachers after they conducted classroom observations. According to interview data, teachers at both schools commented about the inconsistencies in the quality and frequency of feedback provided to teachers after the principal visitations. Furthermore, data seemed to suggest the day-to-day operational issues and parent demands of schools located in an urban city environment severely impacted the ability of both principals to conduct regular classroom visitations as they had planned. This led to teacher criticism about the frequency of principal visitations to classrooms, but also acknowledgment of operational issues as the primary reason for inconsistencies in classroom visitations according to focus group interview data.

Data revealed that principal Artavia used the school district’s Framework for Instructional Improvement as a tool to benchmark teacher pedagogical practice using a rubric in a more specific way than principal Amado, who did not use this framework as a tool to collect and benchmark evidence of teacher practice during classroom visitations. For principal Artavia, the framework provided an entry point to discuss the evidence collected during classroom observations and to provide feedback to teachers. In contrast, the data revealed that principal Amado preferred to engage teachers in conversation during professional developments to identify the “look-fors” or evidence of key strategies or pedagogical practices that would be evident in the daily teaching and could be viewed by the principal when conducting classroom visitations.

Interview data seemed to suggest that principal Amado chose to establish the focus of the classroom visitations around the improvement strategies and pedagogical practices linked specifically to the professional development work, then provide teachers
with feedback on the level and consistency of implementation. Contrast this approach with principal Artavia who preferred to use a district-developed rubric to benchmark teacher practice, provide feedback to teachers against the rubric, and capture evidence of change in teacher practice over time.

Sustaining a Structure to Support Teacher Collaboration Around Instruction

Interview and document review data revealed that the school district contractually provided all elementary schools with 26 professional development banked day Tuesdays for the school year in which this study took place. In order to create a more active professional learning community in their schools, both principals Artavia and Amado adapted an existing organizational routine and created tools to establishing and maintaining connections to leadership practice and classroom instruction.

Periodic assessments. Document review data revealed that the formative math and literacy periodic assessments administered to students at Cedro Elementary and Almendro Elementary were developed by the district to monitor and benchmark student progress towards mastery of content state standards. Additional data suggests how both principal Artavia and Amado utilized periodic assessments as an important tool to gauge how individual teachers, grade levels, and the school overall were doing in advancing student learning.

Findings revealed that principals Artavia and Amado believed it was essential to use periodic assessments to not only track or measure student performance over time, but to help teachers reflect on their pedagogical practice and inform instructional planning for mathematics and literacy. With principal Artavia, periodic assessments were a way to cycle back and revisit the individual teacher and grade level SMART goals developed in
the early part of the new school year. Interview data suggested that principal Artavia assumed the responsibility for planning and leading the periodic assessment analysis meetings with both the leadership team and grade level teacher leaders, then expected the grade level teacher leaders to execute this task with teachers on their grade level. Moreover, findings revealed how the process of cycling back to the SMART goals provided the principal with an entry point to have hard conversations with individual teachers, if needed, and to assess and determine whether additional professional opportunities were needed for teachers to build their skill sets and capacity to analyze and use the periodic assessment as a tool for instructional planning.

In contrast, interview and focus group data revealed that principal Amado purposefully chose to have the members of the resource team leverage their skill sets as current literacy and mathematics coaches to work with teachers in analyzing the periodic assessment results in literacy and mathematics. Another difference between how principal Amado used periodic assessments was in the development and use of a data analysis and reflection protocol as part of a consistent routine to get teachers to collaborate and discuss instructional strategies and engage in lesson planning. Findings suggested that teachers exhibited a high degree of satisfaction and commitment to the process of reflection on pedagogical practice, although the data did not suggest the use of this tool in a collaborative manner lead to specific changes in teacher practice or lesson planning targeted to identified areas of student academic need.

**Instructional leadership team and grade level team meetings.** Findings from participant and focus group interviews revealed that both principals created specific structures within their schools to influence teacher collaboration and provide teachers
with opportunities to discuss how they would address the instructional needs of students in literacy and mathematics. A contrasting difference was in how each case principal chose to intentionally define the role and work of their leadership teams differently, mainly due to each case principal’s belief and about how best to carry out the work of instructional leadership at their schools and which people were best positioned to lead teachers in the work of school improvement.

In the case of principal Artavia, findings suggested that building teacher capacity for leadership and distributing leadership practice was the primary reason why the ILT and leadership team members met regularly with the principal. Interview data suggested that principal Artavia believed in the importance of providing structured opportunities for leadership team members and ILT members to meet and engage in the work of school improvement leadership practice as an integral part of his leadership practice at Cedro Elementary. Contrast this with Almendro Elementary, where there were no grade level representatives on the resource team, mainly because interview data revealed principal Amado’s belief in creating voluntary opportunities for leadership at each grade level rather than selecting a grade level chairperson who might be reluctant to serve in this capacity because no other teacher would assume the role. In addition, focus group data seemed to suggest that principal Amado took a more role-driven approach to developing leadership capacity across the school by ascribing the work of improving instruction and supporting teachers in the classroom to only resource team members because of their content knowledge and experience as instructional coaches.

Additionally, interview data suggested principal Artavia had a strong belief in distributing leadership across multiple people and across activities and tasks within the
school through the ILT structure, by orchestrating this distribution of leadership by taking a direct approach in how the ILT would function at the school. The principal expected this team to carry forward the message of maintaining a focus on instruction to teachers at each grade level, revisiting school-wide progress in meeting established SMART goals, communicating the school-wide improvement efforts, promoting teacher collaboration, and creating internal accountability to the work of school improvement. Additionally, data implied that grade level teacher leaders were delegated responsibilities by the principal and the principal’s leadership team members for leading their grade level meetings with predetermined agendas, and ensuring that the grade levels were all working towards the same goals of implementing the principal’s agenda for school improvement.

While principal Amado did not have an instructional leadership team comprised of grade level teacher leaders, data did suggest that principal Amado envisioned a more direct approach in how the resource team, composed of instructional coaches and a categorical programs coordinator, functioned at the school. Interview findings suggested that because there were no teachers at Almendro Elementary that carried out the formal role of grade level chairpersons, the resource team served as a proxy for grade level chairpersons. Compared to principal Artavia, findings seemed to suggest the distribution of leadership was more tightly bound in the hands of the principal and aligned to the execution of tasks as determined by the principal or resource team members who could perhaps be viewed with more authority. Additionally, data also suggested that while the resource team maintained a focus on instruction and regularly communicated this message to teachers, there appeared to be more emphasis on implementing the agendas
developed by principal Amado and the instructional coaches, leaving little opportunity for grade level improvement efforts.

**Planning templates.** Planning protocols figured prominently at each case school. Findings suggested that the planning protocol tools were used to keep teachers focused on the work of school improvement. In principal Artavia’s case, the planning template was a tool to specifically reinforce the principal’s vision of developing teacher capacity around use of data to set SMART goals and to reinforce the importance of instructional planning to address student learning gaps. Contrast this with principal Amado’s vision of developing teacher capacity to plan instructional lessons to target student learning needs, specifically for English Learners, but also for teachers to increase their knowledge about elements of successful lesson planning, based on a lesson study model for refining teacher practice.

Finally, in contrast to principal Artavia, principal Amado viewed the planning protocol tools as an important vehicle to de-privatize the professional culture at each grade level, to encourage teacher conversations and reflections about their practice, and identify instructional practices that generated high levels of student engagement. The intended outcomes for principal Amado were two-fold: (a) first, the tools served to create the need for certain leadership tasks at each grade level; and (b) second, the tools shaped the practice of leaders. In the words of principal Amado, “When we understand the design of these tools, they help teachers get better at planning and teaching, thinking about their practice, and whether their instruction is developing or effective, and making learning connections for kids.”
Supporting Leadership Development for Teachers

Findings revealed that creating organizational routines to support the professional development needs and work of teachers was important for both case principals. To ensure continual professional learning and growth for their teacher leaders and leadership team members, both principals created a structure and opportunities for collaboration around ideas and strategies to improve teacher practice. In principal Artavia’s case, accounts by some teacher leaders hinted that efforts to transform the way grade level teams worked were not easy despite the encouragement and support provided by the principal. Additionally, findings seemed to indicate that in the past, some teachers were somewhat “resistant” to collaborate with each other at the grade level around student assessment data, instructional practices, and student learning needs. Yet over time, interview data from grade level leaders at Cedro Elementary seemed to reveal a change in how teachers began to see the potential value in teachers coming together to exchange ideas and strategies with each other, leading to changes in classroom practice, in part due to the leadership practice of principal Artavia.

However, interview accounts suggested that principal Amado capitalized upon an existing organizational routine, the lesson study design, and attempted to make teaching practice more transparent by engaging teachers in a cycle of inquiry using data to identify students struggling to meet academic proficiency, then developing improvement strategies to address the needs of these students. In contrast, findings suggested that principal Artavia attempted to make grade level meetings more teacher-driven and less dependent on facilitation and direction from the instructional coaches or principal as a
capacity-building strategy to build collective teacher ownership of school improvement efforts.

On the other hand, findings suggested that the instructional coaches were the predominant sources of leadership at grade level lesson study design meetings at Almendro Elementary, whereas principal and teacher accounts at Cedro Elementary identified teachers as sources of instructional leadership and sources of influence on teacher practice at professional learning community meetings. Interview accounts suggested that while leadership practice may not have resided in just the principal, instructional leadership and its influence on teacher practice at Almendro Elementary School seemed to reside more in the individuals holding formal leadership roles, such as the instructional coaches, than the teachers. In the case of principal Amado, data indicated that the instructional coaches were identified as having more of an influence on teacher practice, collaboration, and self-reflection than the principal.

In contrast to principal Amado’s leadership practice, interview accounts indicated that principal Artavia was viewed as a source of instructional influence and seemed to understand the importance of developing teacher leadership, building teacher capacity for learning, and increasing the skill level of teachers through the routine of ILT and grade level meetings.

Summary

In all, the purpose of this case study research was to explore the leadership practices of elementary school principals working in schools designated as Program Improvement, and where students demonstrated sustained academic growth as measured by API over a five year period. Data from interviews, observations, and document were
used to frame an analysis of leadership practice in two elementary schools and construct rich, individual case studies of that practice, which then were organized and presented as four frames aligned with the research questions. The first frame for each case study connected to how the principal enacted the leadership task of maintaining a focus on instruction and continued to maintain this focus through the use of tools and organizational routines as this work was distributed over multiple people. The second frame for each case study examined how each principal shaped the context of monitoring instruction by constructing tools and utilizing them in ways specific to each school. The cross case analysis suggested that leadership practice was constituted by the ways the principals developed and used organizational routines and tools. These routines and tools enabled leadership practice to occur around a specific task connected to the work of school improvement, thereby creating opportunities for meaningful interactions between principal, leadership teams members, and teacher leaders. The third frame for each case study explored how the case principals created structures to build collaboration around the work of instructional improvement. The final frame for this case study examined the leadership practice of the case principals in supporting professional development for their teachers. By structuring opportunities for teachers and leadership team members to engage in the work of school improvement, findings indicated that both principals attempted to coordinate and maintain organizational routines and tools in order to arrive at similar outcomes of changing teacher practice and improving student learning.
Chapter V: Discussion and Conclusions

This chapter presents a summary of the findings connected to the research questions and conceptual framework, a discussion of the findings and their contribution to the field of educational leadership, implications for policy and practice, and recommendations for future research. The discussion synthesizes and summarizes the findings from this case study through the conceptual frame of a distributed perspective on leadership, identifying leadership macro function themes, and the leadership micro tasks common across case school as part of each case principal’s leadership practice. Recommendations for policy and practice are based on the findings of the “how” of distributed leadership and its impact upon the work of school improvement. Suggestions for future research are provided based on how distributed leadership is practiced and stretched across multiple people in the school setting, not whether distributed leadership is a better roadmap or a guaranteed prescription of leadership for improved school performance in an era of accountability.

Summary of the Study

Overview of the Problem

The expectation for greater school accountability is a distinct feature in today’s era of educational reform under the No Child Left Behind Act (Daly, 2009). In response to this federal legislation, new accountability systems have been designed by various states defining acceptable levels of student performance, evaluating this performance, then providing a system of sanctions and interventions as a consequence of failure to achieve the performance standards established by NCLB (Diamond & Spillane, 2004; Elmore, 2004; Gunzenhauser & Hyde, 2007). Due to this expectation for increased
accountability to boost student achievement, the role of the principal has been the focus of increased scrutiny, public discussion, and evaluation. Consequently, student achievement has become a proxy determiner of principal effectiveness and leadership capability in many school districts (Sanzo et al., 2011).

Currently, the existing empirical evidence on the leadership practice of principals is very small and predates the current standards and accountability movement (Spillane & Hunt, 2010). Research on principal leadership would benefit immensely from a process whereby cases and situations of leadership in different contexts were examined empirically to better understand and learn how leadership practice is enacted in schools (Allix & Gronn, 2005). The emergence and evolution of new paradigms to understand the leadership practices of principals reflects the current need to examine how leadership is enacted, and how the enactment of leadership intersects within the context of accountability systems designed to improve student achievement (Crum et al., 2009; Diamond & Spillane, 2004).

Additional research on the leadership practices of principals in an era of accountability for increasing student achievement, especially for minority, socioeconomic disadvantaged students, is needed to better understand how the practice of leadership is enacted in these schools (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). Deeper insight and exploration of the leadership practices of principals, how principals enact leadership tasks, and why principals think and act as they do in an accountability environment will further contribute to the existing body of empirical research on principal leadership and school improvement efforts (Finnigan, 2012; Finnigan & Stewart, 2009; Harris, 2002; Spillane & Orlina, 2005).
Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this case study was to explore the leadership practices of two elementary school principals in Program Improvement schools where students demonstrated sustained academic growth as evidenced by the annual increase in API over five consecutive years. Given the impact of principal leadership upon school improvement efforts (Finnigan & Stewart, 2009; Spillane et al., 2004), two elementary principals working in Program Improvement, Year 5 schools were selected to explore and analyze their leadership practice and school improvement work with leadership teams and grade level teachers. The following research questions framed this study:

1. What are the leadership practices of two elementary school principals working in Program Improvement schools where there is sustained student academic growth as evidenced by the annual increase in API over five consecutive years?
   - What tools or artifacts do these principals use to facilitate their leadership practice?
   - What are the principals’ perceived supports and constraints to enacting leadership tasks in these schools?
   - How do the organizational routines facilitate the principals’ enactment of leadership tasks in these schools?

2. How do principals, leadership team members, and grade level teachers interact in their leadership practice?

Methodology

To explore and inform an empirical inquiry of the leadership practice of the case principals, this study used a case study design grounded in the ethnographic research
tradition. A criterion sampling as a purposive strategy was used to identify two elementary school principals and understand the insider (emic) view of their leadership practice.

Data triangulation included interviews, observations, and document reviews. Data were collected from case principals, leadership team members, grade level chairpersons, and grade level representatives through semistructured interviews and focus groups. Observation data were collected from grade level meetings, leadership team meetings, faculty meetings, and school site visitations. The document review consisted of grade level and faculty meeting agendas and notes, leadership team agendas and notes, memoranda, periodic assessment schedules, and instructional templates.

Using Spillane’s (2006) conceptualization of distributed leadership as an analytical frame throughout the data collection period of the study, the data were transcribed, organized, and analyzed to identify emerging themes and possible categories. The data were then coded to discern themes and to create relational categories for these data. Finally, the data were analyzed through a within case analysis, which provided the researcher to become familiar with each case separately to allow for an analysis of the themes from each case to emerge prior to making generalizations across both cases through a cross case analysis.

Conceptual Framework

As noted above, distributed leadership as conceptualized by Spillane (2006) served as the theoretical and analytical frame for this study. A distributed perspective, according to Spillane et al. (2001), provides insight into leadership practice as an interactive process where the interactions of teachers, leaders, and the situation influence
instructional practice to bring about change within the organization. A distributed perspective on school leadership should be viewed as a way to generate insights into the practice of leadership, and viewed as a framework to explore and analyze leadership practice (Spillane, 2006; Spillane & Orlina, 2005). Spillane et al. (2004) concluded that a distributed perspective of leadership practice could serve as a tool to inform and facilitate change in leadership practice by analyzing leadership practice and developing cases of that practice.

Spillane (2006) views distributed leadership theory as an analytical tool for understanding the context of school leadership differently. While this conceptual framework of leadership is not viewed as a prescription or formula for effective leadership practice, it does offer an alternative way of thinking about leadership and leadership practice (Spillane et al., 2001). Distributed leadership becomes a frame for analyzing leadership practice in schools and between schools to determine how leadership is distributed, and to what extent, if any, the impact of that distribution has on the core purpose of schools: improving teaching and learning (Spillane, 2007; Spillane et al., 2004).

The present study examined the leadership practices of two elementary principals through a distributed perspective, which frames this practice around four core theoretical underpinnings conceptualized by Spillane (2004, 2006, 2007) and his colleagues (Spillane et al., 2004). The four core underpinnings are (a) leadership tasks and functions, (b) enacting leadership tasks, (c) social distribution of enacting tasks, and (d) situated distribution of leadership practice.
Distributed leadership offers an analytical frame by which to examine and understand leadership practice by exploring the “how” of leadership practice rather than solely exploring the leadership behaviors of people. Empirical research on how leadership practice is distributed day-to-day by school leaders will generate additional insights about how these leaders think and act to change classroom practice and improve schools (Spillane et al., 2001).

**Summary of Major Findings**

This section provides a summary of the major findings of this study. The section is organized around the main research question and the subresearch questions supporting the overarching research inquiry.

**Research question 1.** What are the leadership practices of two elementary school principals working in Program Improvement schools where there is sustained student academic growth as evidenced by the annual increase in API over five consecutive years?

Findings revealed that principal Artavia and principal Amado identified four leadership macro functions that anchored their purpose and understanding of how the work of school improvement should occur if students were to continue making achievement gains. First, an important leadership practice common and consistent with both principals was a strong commitment to maintaining a focus on instructional improvement. Second, maintaining a strong focus on instructional improvement did set the stage and create the conditions for case principals and their teachers to assume leadership responsibilities. Third, both principals were advocates for removing barriers to teacher collaboration and attempted to de-privatize teacher practice and create structures in their schools to foster collaboration around the work of school improvement.
Lastly, case principals placed a strong emphasis on monitoring instruction as a way to collect evidence of professional development implementation in classrooms and determine the degree of change in classroom practice as a result of the professional development efforts.

**Subresearch question 1a.** What tools or artifacts do these principals use to facilitate their leadership practice?

Both principal Artavia and principal Amado recognized the need to have teachers focus upon elements of strong instructional planning and lesson design. From the perspectives of leadership team members and case principals, the influence of instructional planning and lesson design tools on instructional practice was critical to maintaining instructional coherence across grade levels and a continued focus on instructional improvement. Teachers in both case schools spoke to the use of instructional planning and lesson design templates; however, they did not directly discuss or elaborate on whether or not these tools had a direct impact upon their own classroom practice.

Findings also indicated that both principals used meeting agendas as a tool for two distinct purposes. First, meeting agendas were a critical and strategic tool to control and structure the focus of each leadership team meeting and grade level meeting so there would be a consistent, recurring message communicated about the need to maintain a focus on instructional improvement. Second, both principals used the agenda to communicate to leadership team members and teachers that certain topics were high priority items for discussion and review because they directly impacted the work of school improvement or professional development efforts.
**Subresearch question 1b.** What are the principals’ perceived supports and constraints to enacting leadership tasks in these schools?

Principal Artavia and principal Amado attempted to improve and change teacher practice by making professional development work meaningful and establishing expectations for implementation of professional development efforts in each classroom. However, teacher resistance to instructional improvement efforts was noted in the findings and proved challenging at times for both principals. Case principals took steps to confront and mitigate the impact of this resistant behavior by initiating hard conversations with individual teachers and groups of teachers. A direct and intentional approach of initiating hard conversations allowed both principals to address the root of resistance, attempt to change teacher mindsets, and help teachers to see the positive aspects of collaborating as a grade level team to improve instructional practice.

The leadership teams at both case schools figured prominently in supporting each case principal’s enactment of leadership macro functions, specifically maintaining a focus on instructional improvement. Additionally, individual members of the leadership teams for each case school served as proxies for case principals based on their formal leadership roles within the school. Instructional coaches at Almendro Elementary and Cedro Elementary were directly responsible for the delivery and implementation of professional development efforts in classrooms because of their prior instructional coaching experiences and content knowledge of literacy or mathematics. In the case of Cedro Elementary, the leadership team members sometimes accompanied principal Artavia in monitoring the implementation of professional development efforts in classrooms. Whereas, with Almendro Elementary, the instructional coaches served as
proxies for principal Amado in monitoring classrooms to ensure that the grade level professional development work was implemented by teachers with fidelity.

**Subresearch question 1c.** How do the organizational routines facilitate the principals’ enactment of leadership tasks in these schools?

Organizational routines were products of practice in the interactions between leaders and followers at both case schools. Principals Artavia and Amado were able to design and implement routines to help them enact their leadership and management practice of maintaining a focus on improving instruction. Additionally, findings supported how organizational routines became an intentional way for both case principals to be regularly linked to grade level meetings, leadership team meetings, and classroom practice. Organizational routines were an important aspect of distributing leadership practice by framing and directly focusing the interactions of leaders and followers in both case schools around the work of school improvement. In addition, findings supported the case principals’ use of organizational routines to create coherence around instructional planning and professional development efforts.

**Research question 2.** How do principals, leadership team members, and grade level teachers interact in their leadership practice?

Both cases illustrated how principals can do more than play a managerial role in the work of school improvement. Findings indicated that principal Artavia and principal Amado had begun to impact classroom practice and influence the work of school improvement by providing opportunities for different people to collaborate and mutually construct leadership practice as they engaged in leadership tasks. Findings suggested that routines and structures such as ILT meetings, resource team meetings, and grade level
chairperson meetings enabled leadership practice within case schools. Additionally, findings suggested that case principals understood the importance of distributing leadership tasks across multiple people to create a culture of empowerment and ownership of the ongoing school improvement efforts. However, both case principals did differ in their decision as to what extent and to whom leadership was distributed in their schools, which may have impacted or constrained school improvement efforts. These issues will be explored in the following section.

**Discussion**

The discussion section provides an in-depth analysis and interpretation of the findings primarily through Spillane’s (2006, 2007) conceptual framework of distributed leadership. Spillane (2004, 2006, 2007) and colleagues (Spillane et al., 2004) suggested an examination of leadership practice from a distributed perspective be done through the four core theoretical underpinnings, which are (a) leadership tasks and functions, (b) enacting leadership tasks, (c) social distribution of enacting tasks, and (d) situated distribution of leadership practice. This distributed perspective offers a view of how leadership practice emerges in the enactment of leadership tasks as it is stretched over multiple people and mediated by routines, tools, and aspects of the situation.

**Leadership Tasks and Functions**

From a distributed perspective, an examination of the tasks around which school leaders organize their practice to bring about large-scale change in schools is an important starting point for discussion (Spillane et al., 2001). Leadership practice is best understood by examining the enactment of leadership tasks and how leaders approach and understand what purpose or function these tasks serve in supporting school
improvement efforts, specifically as it relates to changing teaching and learning (Spillane et al., 2004). Additionally, the literature identifies that to truly understand leadership practice, leadership micro tasks must be examined and analyzed because they contribute to the execution of the leadership macro functions (Spillane et al., 2004).

Existing empirical research points to core leadership practices with strong traction to impact teaching and learning in schools. Hallinger (2003) and Leithwood and Riehl (2005) marked the importance of establishing a clear vision, setting defined instructional goals, and building the capacity of people as several of the most influential leadership practices for principals to enact. Principal Artavia and principal Amado clearly understood the urgency and need to establish and maintain a focus on instructional improvement as a way to improve classroom practice at their schools. However, as much as both case principals discussed and emphasized the need to focus on improving instruction, findings revealed that the word “vision” or phrase “creating a vision” never surfaced in any of the case principal interviews. Perhaps the repeated emphasis about a focus on instruction or instructional improvement became an implied proxy for vision setting.

Additionally, literature on transformational leadership speaks to leaders putting forth a compelling vision, and the vision becomes the galvanizing force that builds and strengthens the group connection and purpose (Bass, 1985; Thoonen et al., 2011). Participant findings confirmed that both case principals understood the need for building a sense of urgency for response and change. Principal Artavia’s message was in direct response to accountability sanctions, while principal Amado’s message was in reaction to
a vacuum of instructional leadership and a clear vision for instructional improvement by former principals.

Ultimately, these leadership tasks draw into question the actual and visible impact upon classroom practice in order to achieve positive learning outcomes for students. According to the findings from this study, principal Artavia was the only case principal who consistently and deliberately used goal setting and data chats as a way to set a clear direction for the school improvement work, which led to creating a link between his beliefs about the best way to maintain an continual focus on instructional improvement. This finding is supported by the literature on transformational leadership which speaks to the importance of setting clear group goals for performance as well as setting a vision where goals and outcomes are linked and serve to inspire and motivate others to collectively achieve them (Griffith, 2004; Leithwood, 2006; Leithwood et al., 2004; Valentine & Prater, 2011).

Both principal Artavia and principal Amado responded to the current accountability expectations for growth in student academic achievement by communicating a clear focus on instructional improvement. Furthermore, they created structures for teachers to collaborate around instruction, monitored classroom instruction, and provided leadership development opportunities for teachers. The literature speaks to instructional leadership behaviors as encompassing high expectations for continued instructional improvement, monitoring of instructional programs to provide a visible presence, and investing in professional development to build teacher capacity and skill (Andrews & Soder, 1987; Marzano et al., 2005; May & Supovitz, 2010).
While case principals spoke about the importance of distributing leadership and building teacher capacity and pedagogical knowledge, findings suggested that leadership was still primarily connected to those individuals in the case schools that held formal leadership positions, or positions of perceived leadership, such as grade level chairpersons and coordinators. This is in contrast to the current empirical findings in the literature (Coldren & Spillane, 2007; Harris, 2013; Spillane, 2006). A distributed perspective is essential in this era of accountability to improve student achievement because school leaders cannot undertake this work alone, nor can they be successful in their efforts if they cannot engage others in leading and taking ownership of the school improvement work.

Instructional improvement efforts will be hampered if school leaders cannot engage other people directly in leadership practice to harness their expertise and tacit knowledge to carry out this work (Spillane et al., 2007; Spillane & Orlina, 2005). Therefore, in order for school leaders to improve leadership practice, they must understand how practice is distributed over multiple people in schools, is situated in a context, and mediated through their interactions with organizational routines, artifacts, and tools.

Harris (2013) cautioned that leadership practice from a distributed perspective is more than just creating leaders or formal leadership roles within schools, but developing the leadership capacity and quality of those individuals already working in schools. Therefore, if leadership practice is more broadly distributed, and if formal leaders in schools would tap into the collective will, skill sets, and leadership potential of people within these schools, then perhaps by engaging the expertise and tacit knowledge of...
others people in a meaningful way, school leaders would begin to see productive changes in classroom practice and continuous improvement in student academic achievement.

Although principal Artavia and principal Amado may have been highly focused on improving instruction or monitoring classrooms to determine the extent of professional development implementation across grade levels, findings suggested that teachers did not view formal leaders as having much of a direct impact upon their classroom practice. While people in formal leadership positions in both case schools may have thought they were exercising distributed leadership or engaging in instructional leadership around professional development efforts, teachers suggested otherwise.

Although none of the teachers equated instructional influence as an aspect of teacher leadership, including their own, findings confirmed that teachers were candid about the influence of their colleagues. Grade level colleagues had the most direct impact upon individual teacher’s classroom practice, or grade level colleagues were a direct source of tacit knowledge about content and pedagogical practices. However, findings did suggest that some teachers at Cedro Elementary did acknowledge principal Artavia’s coaching background and experience as having some influence on their classroom practice, but others expressed doubt as to how far-reaching this influence was across the school.

The leadership macro functions enacted by the case principals were interconnected to professional development efforts in both case schools. In order to have opportunities for professional development for teachers, case principals created a structure to ensure collaboration would occur between teachers on a regular basis. In encouraging teachers to focus their professional development efforts and build their
capacity to improve individual practice, principals Artavia and Amado needed to maintain a focus on improving instruction, and this was accomplished through the organizational routines of regularly scheduled leadership team, resource team, and grade level chairperson meetings coupled with the use of agenda artifacts to reinforce the focus and maintain coherence across grade levels.

**Enacting Leadership Tasks**

Spillane (2007) asserts the need to systematically study and attempt an understanding of how leadership practice is distributed by school leaders as they enact change and work to improve schools. One critical way is to examine how school leaders enact leadership tasks as part of their individual practice, and in doing so, leadership practice becomes more transparent and visible to others.

In any discussion of leadership practice, Spillane et al. (2001, 2004) have marked the importance of moving beyond solely identifying and deconstructing leadership tasks to actually examining and understanding specifically how principals go about enacting these tasks at their schools. How leadership tasks unfold and play out as part of leadership practice is critical because it is here that school leaders mark, reveal, and execute their tasks (Spillane & Orlina, 2005).

Results from the present study clearly provide examples of how principal Artavia and principal Amado enacted leadership mico-tasks in their efforts to improve student learning, impact classroom practice, and maintain a focus on improving instruction. In their course of leadership practice, school leaders find their enactment of leadership tasks mediated by tools, organizational routines, and artifacts (Spillane et al., 2001). Both case principals took advantage of existing organizational routines such as the formative
periodic assessment administration schedule, the data analysis cycles, and instructional tools such as planning templates, periodic assessments, and leadership and grade level team meetings to establish a direct link between leadership practice and classroom practice. In this instance, leadership practice results in the interactions of leaders, followers, and aspects of the situation, while routines and tools shaped and mediated that practice (Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2001).

Of the two case principals, findings suggest principal Artavia took an ordinary organizational routine of the periodic assessment data review cycle and strategically turned this into something beyond a compliance ritual. The data review cycle was designed to focus teachers on instructional practice and reinforce the work of school improvement. Principal Artavia set the expectation that teachers individually and as a grade level take responsibility for their data results, reflect upon the implications of their classroom practices, and use their data for future instructional lessons.

In contrast, there is limited evidence from the findings to suggest that principal Amado viewed or understood how an ordinary, compliance-driven routine might be used to build individual teacher ownership of the periodic data results. The data analysis work and, to a large degree, the presentation of the formative periodic assessment data were coordinated by the instructional coaches, who were members of the leadership team, and not by any of the grade level teachers. Consequently, principal Amado may have lost an opportunity to change a current practice by enacting an organizational routine that could have been powerful in establishing urgency for change in classroom practice and strengthening teacher accountability to the school improvement work at Almendro Elementary.
Again, the literature (Harris, 2013; Spillane, 2009; Spillane et al., 2008; Spillane et al., 2007) speaks strongly to how leadership practice and expertise does extend beyond one person or those in formal leadership roles. This understanding is essential according to Harris (2013) and Spillane (2007) because only targeting resources or building the capacity of those who hold formal leadership positions in schools at the expense of other potential leaders would not be the best use of limited resources. Such actions on the part of formal leaders will not likely lead to the instructional improvements they desire or are necessary to positively impact school improvement efforts.

Leaders in both case schools attempted to address key leadership macro functions such as maintaining a focus on improving instruction, monitoring classrooms, sustaining a structure for teacher collaboration, and supporting leadership development for teachers. As noted earlier, leadership practice for these macro functions may have been distributed across different people in both case schools, yet findings revealed how instructional leadership was still very much in the realm of those in formal leadership positions, especially at Almendro Elementary under the principal Amado. This seems to be in direct contrast with what current literature (Hallinger & Heck, 2009) states regarding the potential positive influence of distributed leadership upon individual performance and organizational improvement efforts. Hallinger and Heck (2009) concluded that there were direct effects of distributed leadership practice on a school’s ability to improve student academic outcomes. Additionally, meeting the accountability mandates will require people in formal leadership roles to take greater initiative in restructuring their schools to support opportunities for distributed leadership to build leadership and management practices capable of sustaining continued improvement.
Principals Amado and Artavia were both focused on enacting micro tasks through established organizational routines, use of tools, and by creating artifacts, but the majority of teachers in both case schools did not speak to the influence and impact of the principal and leadership team members in changing their classroom or individual practice. However, teachers in both case schools did describe how other colleagues at their grade levels were instrumental in sharing their tacit knowledge of instructional practice and pedagogy. For the most part, these teachers were left to their own devices to sort out and make meaning of school improvement efforts as it directly related to changes in their own classroom practice. Ironically, this was another missed opportunity by both case principals to capitalize on distributing leadership to create opportunities for people to take responsibility for not only individual performance but also for the performance of others to potentially impact school improvement efforts (Harris, 2013).

Conversely, Crum et al. (2009), Elmore (2000), Marzano et al. (2005), and Spillane et al. (2003) indicated that the principal could not provide or promote the leadership necessary to sustain the work of school improvement alone in a high-stakes accountability environment. The findings suggest a need for both case principals to examine how they could build a stronger connection between professional development efforts and teacher practice, a challenge both case principals readily admitted and noted during our classroom visitations.

Although both case principals provided opportunities for teachers to engage in professional development work, findings did not support a direct impact upon classroom practice. While case principals either established or maintained routines at both case schools to support teacher collaboration around instructional improvement, the findings
did not seem to suggest a coherent, consistent implementation of the professional development work across grade levels to markedly change teacher practice over time. Scaling up the professional development work may very well depend on the ability of both case principals to improve the capacity and skill level of teachers through a closer examination and analysis of how specific organizational routines, whether they are adapted or new, directly enable improvement in teaching and learning.

At Cedro Elementary, establishment of the ILT was a promising and critical micro task that was part of the principal’s leadership practice. Principal Artavia took a direct approach to creating a formal structure that previously did not exist, the ILT, to support opportunities for grade level representatives to work together on school improvement efforts. By creating the ILT structure, the principal established an organizational routine of weekly scheduled meetings and created a formal way to ensure grade level representatives produced the desired meeting outcomes that resulted in action steps the principal expected to see. Spillane (2007) suggests that to a greater degree leadership practice does involve coordinating and maintaining key routines in order to obtain the desired school improvement outcomes schools would want to see.

In contrast, principal Amado at Almendro Elementary consciously chose not to have formal grade level representatives nor did the principal create a formal meeting structure to support instructional improvement. Instead, principal Amado relied upon an existing banked day organizational routine for teachers to meet and organize themselves weekly and engage in the work of school improvement, and in part to address their own individual teacher needs. A cautionary note here from the literature. Leithwood et al. (2009) marked that purposeful or intentional distribution of leadership can have a positive
impact upon schools and lead to change. However, Leithwood et al. further cautioned that without direct support from formal leaders in these schools, purposeful or intentional leadership is not likely to occur spontaneously or be self-initiated.

Social Distribution of Enacting Tasks

Taking a distributed perspective of leadership practice requires a closer examination and understanding of leadership task enactment, since these tasks are executed by multiple people in formal and information leadership positions in schools (Spillane, 2007; Spillane et al., 2003). In addition, Spillane et al. (2004) argued that not only are the interactions of multiple leaders and followers in schools using artifacts and tools around a particular leadership task the enactment of leadership practice, but they also mark a critical interdependency in the leaders’ practices as they intersect around task enactment. Findings from the current study suggest two ways in which interdependency was a product of the interactions of multiple people in the enactment of leadership tasks.

Consider the first example. At Cedro Elementary, principal Artavia used the routine of the data analysis cycle to enable teachers to analyze student progress in meeting identified standards so teachers could focus their instructional interventions on students who needed this level of support. This routine involved a series of interconnected sequences, each building upon the next until the task was completed. First, the formative periodic assessments were administered to students, scored by an outside vendor, and then the results uploaded to the district’s database platform. Second, the periodic assessment data were retrieved, disseminated to each teacher, and then analyzed at grade level meetings. Third, as part of data analysis, teachers identified trends and patterns of weakness and strength in student performance, and then began identifying
strategies and planning intervention lessons for struggling students. Finally, teachers participated in professional development or problem-solving activities with their colleagues to discuss changes in instructional practice to deliver instruction differently to struggling students. This data finding is aligned to Spillane et al.’s (2004) research explaining how multiple steps in the enactment of a leadership task can depend on the execution of prior tasks that helps move the task to completion.

In the second example, the lesson study design routine at Almendro Elementary highlighted the interdependency between multiple individuals and aspects of their situation as their work was distributed across an organizational routine. During the lesson study design, grade level teachers, and instructional coaches, who were part of principal Amado’s leadership team, worked collaboratively to plan instructional lessons incorporating best practices in mathematics and literacy. The instructional coaches were respected for their content knowledge and expertise in literacy or mathematics. The principal was responsible for co-constructing the agenda with the instructional coaches to ensure that a focused outcome for the enactment of the lesson study design occurred.

The practice of planning instructional lessons, teaching these lessons to peers, and providing actionable feedback to these teachers constitutes leadership practice in the interdependencies between the interactions of leaders and followers, the agenda as a tool to focus the lesson study design, and the situation. Additionally, professional development efforts between leaders and followers were highly coordinated. All participants shared a common goal of improving practice and building capacity to address student learning needs. Additionally, participants shared a common language about this work they engaged in with the instructional coaches and leadership team members. What
might seem like each person engaging in discrete tasks that were pieced together and labeled as a lesson study design, was actually the leadership practice of many individuals stretched over their work and incorporating tools, artifacts, and aspects of their situation.

**Situated Distribution of Leadership Practice**

Several studies (Spillane, 2005; Spillane et al., 2004) identified tools and artifacts as important to the enactment of leadership tasks and critical elements to potentially influence the culture of practice in a school. Spillane et al. (2003) proposed an examination of leadership as a situated practice where the context or situation constitutes leadership practice, not merely where leadership occurs. Leadership practice in the school environment is filled with artifacts and tools used by practitioners, which define and shape that practice (Spillane et al., 2003; Spillane et al., 2001). Both case principals used tools such as instructional frameworks and planning templates as an integral, defining part of their daily practice.

For example, both principal Artavia and principal Amado developed specific tools to highlight aspects of lesson planning and lesson design that would be key to supporting students in learning content material during instruction. Principal Amado’s ELD instructional guide template guided and informed teachers in key elements of lesson planning necessary for developing a robust ELD lesson. In contrast, principal Artavia’s instructional planning template provided a structured format for lesson planning to ensure teachers designed lessons based on data results and linked to grade level SMART goals. These two tools connected to different aspects of preparation and planning, thereby resulting in different lesson planning outcomes. Therefore, the case principals did not
simply create these tools simply to put their teachers through the formalities of lesson planning, but to mark one aspect of leadership practice.

The insider information available to the researcher revealed that in some of the elementary schools in the Los Robles Unified School District, administrators and teachers used the district developed instructional tools strictly to satisfy compliance requirements or mandates. These tools were viewed more as indicators to measure student achievement levels or progress toward meeting benchmark skills, not as indicators of whether robust instruction was occurring in the classroom, or whether lessons were planned to optimally engage students during instruction.

The actions of principal Artavia more so than principal Amado encouraged, even solicited, others to take a more pronounced leadership role in the school. Findings supported signs of emerging leadership developing in teachers at Cedro Elementary and not just residing with those currently in formal role-driven, role-bound positions of leadership at the school. Findings also suggest that principal Artavia was more open and intentional in using his position as a formal leader to create opportunities and conditions supportive of distributing leadership across multiple people. Harris (2013) and Spillane (2006, 2007) have noted how aspects of the situation such as organizational routines and tools mediated in the interactions of multiple people are a central, defining aspect of practice. Situation is very much connected to practice and leadership practice takes form in these interactions (Spillane, 2006). This distribution of leadership practice across multiple people in the school is enhanced because of the potential for others to acquire expertise, undertake professional growth opportunities, and even seek formal leadership positions within the school. At Cedro Elementary, the distribution of leadership provided
a pathway for teachers to be a part of creating internal accountability and responsibility to school improvement efforts, especially when it pertained to classroom practice and instructional delivery.

From a distributed perspective, leadership is stretched across multiple people in a social context (Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2001). This perspective also takes into consideration how leadership is stretched across a situation, and how a given situation can constrain or enable leadership practice (Spillane, 2006, 2007). The meeting agendas were created and utilized by case principals as a powerful way to maintain a consistent focus on instructional improvement and influence changes in classroom practice. For principal Artavia, the meeting agendas were a strong artifact for communicating the principal’s vision, thinking, and direction and making connections to the grade level and school wide improvement. In addition, the agendas shaped the collective thinking of grade level teachers around the work of improving instruction. What is not quite clear due to the limited amount of data from the findings were whether this routine promoted or encouraged distributed leadership practice in individual teachers. Therefore, something so perceived as a simple tool was a way to examine and understand further the leadership practice of both case principals as it was stretched over multiple people in both case schools.

Despite efforts to create a sense of urgency, make professional development opportunities relevant for teachers, and provide instructional coaching support to teachers, both case principals felt the need to address teacher resistance at certain grade levels. Principal Artavia took a more direct approach not only in addressing resistant teachers in a whole group setting, but also attempting to address their behaviors individually.
Additionally, principal Artavia made a deliberate effort to empower the ILT and individual teachers across grade levels to assume a level of responsibility for initiating hard conversations with resistant teachers.

While confronting resistant behavior in others may not necessarily be considered a public or readily visible leadership task, it is nevertheless something both case principals felt was important to address. A contrast between principal Amado and principal Artavia was in the level of confidence principal Artavia had over principal Amado in enacting this leadership task. This may be due in part to the extent of professional development and actual practice of having hard conversation with other principals that was part of principal Artavia’s personal leadership work around this task.

Finally, principal Amado’s reliance upon a former model for organizing professional development work under the school district’s Reading First initiative may have been what led principal Amado to practice instructional leadership in more of a transactional fashion. According to Burns (1978) and Nguni et al., (2006), transactional leaders are less inclined to seek out and risk any deviation from the status quo, and are more likely to rely on existing structures to engage in the work of school improvement, resulting in an organization less adept at responding to internal or external challenges.

Principal Amado exemplified the transactional leader in that leadership practice may have been distributed over multiple people, but those people were members of the principal’s leadership team. Additionally, these team members had clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and expectations for task accomplishment, which is in line with research from Avolio (1999) and Jung and Avolio (2000). Avolio and Jung and Avolio marked how transactional leaders are very much concerned with expectations for performance,
task completion according to clear outcomes and directions, and clearly defined roles between leaders and followers in the organization. In contrast, principal Artavia seemed to cultivate and plan distributed leadership practices in four ways at Cedro by (a) providing teachers with opportunities to assume grade level leadership roles, (b) encouraging teachers to focus professional development efforts on their needs, (c) providing teachers with some flexibility and autonomy to structure their grade level meetings, and (d) creating the ILT structure to ensure that all grade level meetings focused on school improvement efforts. This is aligned with the literature (Harris, 2004, 2013; Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2001) which speaks to the importance of facilitating leadership opportunities for others, providing people with increased responsibility for their work, and supporting people with expertise to lead and move the school improvement work effort forward.

Thus far, the discussion has centered on the conceptual underpinnings of the distributed perspective as it relates to the situation or context and leadership practice. A final examination of how leadership practice might be stretched over multiple people or situations involving artifacts, tools, and organizational routines is presented next.

**Artifacts and tools.** Artifacts and tools constitute leadership practice, provide insight into the thinking and practice of leaders, serve to mediate practice in a given situation, and are created by leaders to enable specific practices involving multiple people (Spillane; 2007; Spillane et al., 2001; Spillane et al., 2004). In both case schools, principal Artavia and principal Amado identified key artifacts and tools that constituted their leadership practice, enabling them both primarily to maintain a focus on instructional improvement, bring teachers and leadership team members together to
collaborate around instructional improvement, and guide professional development efforts across grade levels.

Teachers and leadership team members who participated in the focus group interviews spoke to the extent that tools and artifacts influenced their classroom practice. These artifacts are tangible products and the manner in which they are leveraged depends on the situation, how they are introduced by leaders, and whether leaders view them as constraining or enabling of leadership practice (Spillane et al., 2001; Spillane et al., 2004). In the case of principal Artavia, the instructional planning template was the tool identified to guide and support instructional planning. For some of the teachers at Cedro Elementary, the instructional planning template was referenced as the only tool to support and guide their thinking about teaching and learning. In the case of principal Amado, the lesson study template and ELD instructional guide template was mentioned as a tool for planning, but in a more powerful way, teachers commented how this tool provided them with opportunities to engage in conversations about teacher practice and the impact of that practice on student learning. Additionally, for both case principals the artifacts established a level of internal accountability and brought coherence to each grade level in clarifying teacher expectations and linking teachers to the work of school improvement.

According to the literature (Spillane, 2007; Spillane et al., 2001; Spillane et al., 2004), school leaders do not conduct their work in a vacuum, but artifacts and tools mediate their leadership practice, and the product of leadership practice is the interaction of school leaders and different tools and artifacts. One key artifact that has potential for promise in further defining and enabling principal Artavia’s leadership practice was the district developed Framework for Instructional Improvement. This artifact could easily
constrain the leadership practice of a principal if the principal feels there is little opportunity to rethink how the artifact could be used to enable leadership practice. By reflecting upon how this artifact could be used to strengthen and build a common understanding across Cedro Elementary of what effective teaching and engaged student learning might look like, the artifact could well become powerful in its ability to influence teacher practice provided it is used by principal Artavia in an interactive and collaborative way.

Except for the artifacts noted above, participant and focus group interviews did not reveal other artifacts as having any notable influence on teacher practice. Perhaps school leaders may not have thought on a deeper level how powerful artifacts can be to influence teacher practice, or that the intended consequence of creating certain artifacts is to somehow impact teacher practice. Considering how each case principal was concerned about changing teacher practice to impact different outcomes for student learning, it is interesting that the findings did not confirm this to be the case.

The use of tools and artifacts by school leaders provides insights into how they influence and make connections to teachers’ practice in addition to supporting leadership as a distributed practice stretched over multiple people (Coldren & Spillane, 2007; Spillane, 2006). Additionally, tools are a critical part of how school leaders engage in leadership practice because they mediate the leader’s actions and are an important element of leadership practice (Spillane et al., 2001). One critical tool used by both case principal was the meeting agenda. The use of the agenda constituted leadership practice and was an influential tool to shape a common, consistent message of a focus on improving instruction. Furthermore, the use of agendas constitutes an important artifact
that enables leadership practice, enables the distribution of leadership across many people, can maintain a focus on instructional improvement, and most importantly, can provide insight into how leadership is practiced in schools (Spillane et al., 2004).

**Organizational routines.** Leadership practice and the work of schools are enacted to a large degree through organizational routines (Spillane, 2007). These routines are a vital means of influencing the interactions between leaders and followers in their leadership practice (Coldren & Spillane, 2007). Therefore, using a distributive perspective to study leadership practice must involve an examination of how organizational routines facilitate leadership practice stretched over multiple people (Spillane, 2006, 2007). According to the literature (Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2004), the teacher isolation and privatization of teacher practice existing in many schools provides school leaders with opportunities to create or adapt organizational routines to enable teachers to begin collaborating around instructional improvement, structure conversations around teacher practice, and encourage the dissemination of ideas and instructional strategies among teachers. Both case schools shed light and insight into how organizational routines constituted leadership practice and enabled school leaders to create opportunities to share information, to support collegial work around professional development efforts, and, to some extent, change classroom practice.

There are several similarities and differences in how both case principals enacted organizational routines as part of leadership practice. According to the literature, organizational routines are a critical piece of leadership practice, framing and providing focus for leaders and followers in their interactions in a given situation (Spillane, 2007). For both case principals, leadership practice occurred in the enactment of organizational
routines, which enabled the dissemination of information through leadership team and grade level meetings, and built capacity around data use to set goals, design lessons, and deliver instruction. These actions are congruent with the literature suggesting that well-defined organizational routines do constitute leadership practice and enable avenues for teacher collaboration, conversations around practice, and the de-privatization of classroom practice (Coldren & Spillane, 2007; Spillane et al., 2004).

On the other hand, principal Artavia and principal Amado differed in how they structured grade level meetings. Both organizational routines had similar purposes and outcomes such as regular review of periodic assessment data and teachers engaging in collaborative instructional planning. However, principal Amado exercised leadership practice in a more controlling, transactional manner with teachers and leadership team members. A transactional approach is product-oriented and product-driven where structures are created to define specific work outcomes of individuals to minimize risk-taking and decrease the level of group autonomy (Bass, 1985, 1990; Burns, 1978).

Despite principal Amado’s decision to not have teachers serve in formal roles as grade level chairpersons in order to provide for an organic, open spirit of collaboration and work at each grade level, findings characterize principal Amado’s approach as directive, controlling, and somewhat rigid mainly because the agenda planning was always controlled by the instructional coaches or resource team members. The seemingly unintended consequence of principal Amado’s leadership practice resulted in reinforcing a weak network of collaboration around specific teacher needs and challenges, resulting in teachers having to depend on external support and expertise from resource team members or instructional coaches.
Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings from the case study schools suggest several policy and practice implications for understanding the importance of the “how” in enacting leadership. This study has used empirical findings to demonstrate that studying leadership from a distributed perspective for the simple fact that one practitioner, the principal, cannot effectively lead the work of school improvement without engaging the support and cooperation of others. Therefore, improving educational leadership should be the primary concern for policymakers and people interested in advancing knowledge and understanding of how leadership practice is stretched over multiple people within the school as leaders and followers are engaged in the work of school improvement.

Currently there is a need for a more informed understanding of the practice of leadership from a distributed perspective (Spillane, 2006). Spillane (2006) marks the importance of moving beyond a narrow focus of leadership practice as defined by the person, functions, or formal roles, to an examination of the “how” of leadership practice as practice unfolds in the interactions of leaders and followers. Additionally, Spillane advocates an examination of a more diverse, multiple perspective view of leadership practice and the patterns of distribution across schools is worthwhile, especially in relation to improving student achievement outcomes.

From a practice perspective, the findings from this study may shed light on how school districts could support and develop the instructional leadership capacity of newly assigned and experienced principals alike. School districts will need to go beyond marking specific core instructional initiatives, but shift to targeted training and support for principals around the skills and competencies leaders need to actually impact
classroom practice. In an age of accountability to assessments and growth in student achievement, the demands upon the principals to bring about large-scale change at the classroom, grade level, and school wide level are immense, especially as it relates to impacting classroom practice. It is highly unlikely that principals and teachers are equipped to undertake such a challenge, especially in times where diminishing fiscal resources at the school site level has reduced the content experts and teacher coaching ranks considerably.

Given there are varying definitions and understandings of distributed leadership, simply mentioning the word distributed leadership will not guarantee a common understanding amongst researchers and practitioners. Therefore, if policymakers and researchers want to promote a deeper understanding of what it means to enact leadership practice in a distributed fashion, they can begin by examining the empirical findings for current and future research on distributed leadership, perhaps to begin identifying specific or desired leadership actions and outcomes. To understand the distribution of leadership practice in schools, one must explore evidence of actual practices, behaviors, and influences associated with core leadership practices and connected specifically to the work of school improvement (Spillane, 2007).

Practitioners and researchers should examine the connections and dynamics between the artifacts and tools school leaders create or adapt and which artifacts and tools they use in leadership practice. The choice and ultimate decision of which artifacts and tools will be used to frame and support discussions and reflections around the work of school improvement, especially change in teacher practice, between leadership and followers in various situations will be critical. Additionally, if artifacts and tools are
created internally, these resources may provide opportunities for teachers who do not hold any formal leadership roles or responsibilities to take a leadership role here. Artifacts and tools have the potential to create opportunities for leadership work, to surface new ideas and new challenges, and create opportunities for teachers to exercise leadership practice in their schools. Finally, continued empirical research in how school leaders systematically and strategically create or adapt organizational routines, artifacts, and tools are warranted if researchers and practitioners want to arrive at a deeper, comprehensive understanding of how leadership and management can impact the core purpose of schooling: teaching, and learning.

School site principals and school district personnel should examine change in teacher practice from the viewpoint of the classroom teacher. Findings from both case schools in this study suggest that teachers were very much influenced by the tacit knowledge of their colleagues, and did seek them out for guidance and support, even to the point of allowing them into the classroom to observe their teaching practice. Perhaps a more direct link could be established between leadership practice and classroom practice if school leaders engaged teachers in professional development efforts as a joint venture to mutually build upon the sources of leadership that potentially exists in each teacher, and tap into their tacit knowledge and expertise as practitioners.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

A distributed perspective is not a model for school management and leadership, but a conceptual framework for analyzing leadership practice. Empirical research should examine the following areas to guide the work of researchers and practitioners in their attempts to improve schools:
Additional qualitative case studies undertaken to determine to what degree leadership practice can be enacted in a distributed way if principals and school leaders believe in a more traditional role-driven leadership models. Is the degree to which leadership practice is enacted largely determined by the principal’s core values and beliefs about leading schools and changing classroom practice?

Future case study research could include data collection on all teachers within a school to determine the extent of leadership practice as it is distributed across multiple people in the school to further understand how aspects of the situation, organizational routines, tools, and artifacts impact teacher classroom practice.

According to Spillane (2006), research on leadership practice from a distributed perspective is still in the beginning stages. Further research to see if how school leaders enact leadership tasks across schools with different student demographics, socioeconomic status, and social capital is consistent or varies could add to the existing conceptual understanding of distributed leadership.

Additional empirical research through the lens of a distributed perspective would yield insights into whether the day-to-day practice of leadership would lead to improved teaching and an observable change in teacher practice over time.

The challenge for researchers designing empirical studies on leadership practice lies in the ability to capture and record the “how” of leadership practice (Spillane, 2006, 2007). Therefore, designing tools to aid researchers in capturing empirical evidence in different informal settings where leadership practice is enacted may deepen the understanding of how leadership is practiced and where leadership practice occurs in schools.
Concluding Statement

The current accountability and school reform movement seeks to dramatically change both teachers’ practice and the instructional practices they use. Therefore, a clear understanding of the connection between leadership and instructional improvement is critical in the discourse about leadership practice and change. The distributed perspective provides a framework to assist researchers in constructing cases to help practitioners reflect upon and engage in conversations about their own leadership practice.

Additionally, a distributed perspective can help school leaders mark facets of their practice, describe those facets, and arrive at connections that might cause them to think about the implications for change in their own practice. Future empirical research on leadership and management from a distributed perspective will contribute richly to the current knowledge and understanding of how leadership practice is enacted in the work of school improvement.

This perspective constitutes a frame to examine the dynamic, ever-changing interactions and relationships of different people within the school interacting in their situation or environment around specific leadership tasks, which is also mediated by organizational routines, tools, and artifacts (Spillane et al., 2003; Spillane et al., 2001). As school leaders reflect and think about routines, artifacts, and tools as critical levers of leadership practice, they might develop a deeper understanding of how these also enable or constrain their own leadership practice. A conceptual framework provides the researcher with a way to build a case for supporting the practitioner in interpreting, reflecting upon, and acting on their own leadership practice and is a strong example of
how researchers and practitioners can be united in their common work of improving schools.

A distributive perspective offers a way to examine leadership practice through the lens and perspective of multiple people, at all levels of the school, and to rethink how resources are allocated to support school improvement efforts. Concentrating resources and personnel to solely support the principal’s work may be misguided and not lead to maximum outcomes for organizational performance. Therefore, further research may be needed to determine how best to deploy resources and personnel to support multiple people at schools engaged in leadership work and how their capacity and expertise can be developed in a more distributed fashion.

Further study of leadership from a distributed perspective is essential in an era of accountability to improving school performance. Given the magnitude and difficulty of this challenge for schools with diminishing fiscal resources and human capital, school leaders must look to alternative ways of engaging others directly in the work of school improvement. The principal cannot undertake this task of improving schools as a lone practitioner. Principal leadership in a time of accountability demands the skill of knowing how to galvanize, mobilize, and empower others within the school to tap into their individual and collective expertise to organize for effort and instructional improvement. These improvement efforts will likely fall flat, or even fail, if the responsibility for this work is localized in one or two people in the school solely because they possess formal designated leadership titles, roles, and responsibilities.
References


*Educational Leadership*, 44(6), 9-11.


Appendix A

Invitation to Participate-Principal

Dear Potential Case Study Participant:

This letter is an invitation to participate in a case study research. My name is Jack Bagwell and I am an Ed.D. student in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department at California State University, Northridge. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Peggy Johnson on the leadership experiences of elementary school principals working in schools designated as Program Improvement under the federal legislation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB).

Why you are asked to participate in this case study?

I would like you to participate in this case study research if you meet the following criteria:

1. You are currently an elementary school principal and have been at the same school site for five or more years.
2. You are working as the principal of a Program Improvement school under NCLB.
3. Your students in grades two through five, or six, if there is a sixth grade class at the school, have made sustained academic growth as evidenced by the annual increase in API over five consecutive years.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to examine the leadership practices of elementary school principals working in Program Improvement schools where there is sustained student academic growth as evidenced by the annual increase in API over five consecutive years.

What will your involvement in this study mean?

I propose to conduct one face-to-face interview for approximately two hours, at an arranged time arranged time convenient to your schedule. The interview will be digitally recorded and the transcript sent to you for your review and edits. I intend to safeguard your confidentiality and anonymity as a participant by assigning you a pseudonym, and all references or identifying information, such as your school district and your school site, will be removed. Participation in the interview is entirely voluntary and there are no known or anticipated risks to participation in this study. You may refuse to answer any of the questions you do not wish to answer. Furthermore, you may withdraw from this research study for any reason, at any time, without any negative consequence to you, by simply notifying me of your decision to do so. If you decide to withdraw your participation from this study, all information and data that you have provided to me will be destroyed.

If you have any questions regarding this research case study, or would like additional information about participation, please do not hesitate to contact me at 818-654-3646 or
by e-mail at jack.bagwell@csun.edu. You can also contact my dissertation chairperson Dr. Peggy Johnson at 818-677-2403 or by e-mail at peggy.johnson@csun.edu.

Thank you very much for your interest and assistance in this research case study.

Sincerely,

Jack Bagwell
Ed.D. graduate student
TITLE: Leadership Practices of Elementary School Principals

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to participate. A researcher listed below will be available to answer your questions.

RESEARCH TEAM:

Principal Researcher: Jack Bagwell, Ed.D. graduate student
Department: Educational Leadership and Policies Studies
Telephone Number: 818-654-3646
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Peggy Johnson, Assistant Professor
Department: Educational Leadership and Policies Studies
Address: 18111 Nordhoff Street, Northridge, CA 91330

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine the leadership practices of elementary school principals working in Program Improvement schools where there is sustained student academic growth as evidenced by the annual increase in API over five consecutive years.

SUBJECTS

Inclusion Requirements

You are eligible to participate in this study if you meet the following criteria:

1. You are currently an elementary school principal and have been at the same school site for five or more years.
2. You are working as a principal of a school designated as Program Improvement under NCLB.
3. Your students in grades two through five, or six, if there is a sixth grade class at the school, have made sustained academic growth as evidenced by the annual increase in API over five consecutive years.

TIME COMMITMENT

This case study research will involve approximately two hours of your time. In addition, there may be a follow up debriefs lasting approximately 30 minutes each around the leadership team meeting and grade level chairpersons meeting.
PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, I ask you to do the following:

1. Answer orally a series of questions about your current leadership experiences and practices. Your responses will be digitally recorded, and then the recording will be transcribed. This will include topics such as tools or artifacts you use in your leadership work, the perceived barriers to enacting leadership, how leadership work is supported or constrained at the school, and how the work of leadership is enacted. In addition, as a participant in this study I would be observing you during faculty, leadership team, and grade level meetings.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

This study involves no more than minimal risk. There are no known harms or discomforts associated with this case study research beyond those encountered in normal daily life.

BENEFITS

Subject Benefits

Benefits to you may include a better understanding of your own leadership experiences and ability to address the challenges of sustaining student academic achievement for all students under a performance accountability system such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

Benefits to Others or Society

Benefits to society and others may include a better understanding of how principal leadership contributes to the ability of a school to respond to an external accountability system so student academic achievement continues to demonstrate growth over time.

ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION

The only alternative to participation in this study is not to participate.

COMPENSATION, COSTS AND REIMBURSEMENT

Compensation for Participation

There is no compensation for participation.

Costs

There are no costs involved for your participation in this case study research.

WITHDRAWAL OR TERMINATION FROM THE STUDY AND CONSEQUENCES

The decision whether to participate in this case study research is up to you. Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time. You may refuse to
answer any of the questions you do not wish to answer. You can refuse to participate, or withdraw from the study for any reason, at any time, and such decision without any negative consequence to you. If you decide to withdraw your participation from this study, all information and data that you have provided to me will be destroyed. If you decide to withdraw from this study you should notify the principal researcher, Jack Bagwell, as soon as possible at 818-654-3646 or at jack.bagwell@csun.edu

CONFIDENTIALITY

Subject Identifiable Data

All of the information you provide is confidential. Identifying characteristics about you will be changed so that no one reading the case study would be able to identify you. All transcriptions for the case study will be stored in a secure location. Any publication of the case study will not identify you as a participant. All references or identifying information, such as your school district and your school site, will be removed. When the results of this case study research are published or discussed at conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identify or work location.

Data Storage

All digital recordings collected during the interview will be assigned a unique code number and will be stored on a laptop with password protection. Digital recordings will be downloaded and securely stored on a password protected laptop in the researcher’s office, then erased as soon as the digital recording is transcribed. Hard copy transcripts of the digital interview will be kept on the researcher’s password protected laptop for a period of one year from the date of the interview. Only the principal researcher and the faculty advisor for this research will have access to the digital and transcription records.

Data Access

The principal researcher and the faculty advisor will have access to your study records. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies you will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law.

Data Retention

The researchers intend to keep the research data until the case study research is published and presented, then it will be destroyed.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS

If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the research team listed on the first page of this form.

If you are unable to reach a member of the research team listed on the first page of the form and have general questions, or you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact
VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

You should not sign this form unless you have read it and been given a copy of it to keep. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with California State University, Northridge. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions that you have about the study.

I agree to participate in the study.

___________________________________________________  ____________________  __________________  ____________________
Subject Signature                  Date                     Printed Name of Subject

___________________________________________________  ____________________
Researcher Signature                  Date

___________________________________________________
Printed Name of Researcher
Appendix C

Invitation to Participate-Leadership Team/Grade Level Chairperson/Grade Level Representative

Dear Potential Case Study Participant:

This letter is an invitation to participate in a case study research. My name is Jack Bagwell and I am an Ed.D. student in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department at California State University, Northridge. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Peggy Johnson on the instructional leadership experiences of elementary school principals working in schools designated as low-performing under the federal legislation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB).

Why you are asked to participate in this case study?

I would like you to participate in this case study research if you meet the following criteria:

1. You are currently an elementary school teacher.
2. You are working at a school designated as Program Improvement under NCLB.
3. Your students in grades two through five, or six, if there is a sixth grade class at the school, have made sustained academic growth as evidenced by the annual increase in API over five consecutive years.
4. You are currently serving as a member of the principal’s leadership team, or are a grade level chairperson or representative.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the instructional leadership experiences of elementary school principals working in Program Improvement schools where students are sustaining academic growth as evidenced by the annual increase in API over five consecutive years.

What will your involvement in this study mean?

I propose to conduct one face-to-face focus group interview for approximately 90 minutes, at an arranged time convenient to your schedule. The interview will be digitally recorded. I intend to safeguard your confidentiality and anonymity as a participant by assigning you a pseudonym, and all references or identifying information, such as your school district and your school site, will be removed. No information or details from the focus group interview will be shared with or discussed with the principal of the school. Participation in the interview is entirely voluntary and there are no known or anticipated risks to participating in this study. You may refuse to answer any of the questions you do not wish to answer. Furthermore, you may withdraw from this research study for any reason, at any time, without any negative consequence to you, by simply notifying me of your decision to do so. If you decide to withdraw your participation from this study, all information and data that you have provided to me will be destroyed.
If you have any questions regarding this research case study, or would like additional information about participation, please do not hesitate to contact me at 818-654-3646 or by e-mail at jack.bagwell@csun.edu. You can also contact my dissertation chairperson Dr. Peggy Johnson at 818-677-2403 or by e-mail at peggy.johnson@csun.edu.

Thank you very much for your interest and assistance in this research case study.

Sincerely,

Jack Bagwell
Ed.D. graduate student
Appendix D

California State University, Northridge

Human Research Subject-Leadership Team/Grade Level Chairpersons/Grade Level Representatives

TITLE: Leadership Practices of Elementary School Principals

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to participate. A researcher listed below will be available to answer your questions.

RESEARCH TEAM:

Principal Researcher: Jack Bagwell, Ed.D. graduate student
Department: Educational Leadership and Policies Studies
Telephone Number: 818-654-3646
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Peggy Johnson, Assistant Professor
Department: Educational Leadership and Policies Studies
Address: 18111 Nordhoff Street, Northridge, CA 91330

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the leadership practices of elementary school principals working in Program Improvement schools where there is sustained student academic growth as evidenced by the annual increase in API over five consecutive years.

SUBJECTS

Inclusion Requirements

1. You are working as a teacher of a school designated as Program Improvement under NCLB.
2. Your students in grades two through five, or six, if there is a sixth grade class at the school, have made sustained academic growth as evidenced by the annual increase in API over five consecutive years.
3. You are currently a member of the principal’s leadership team, are a grade level chairperson, or are a grade level representative at the school.

TIME COMMITMENT

This case study research will involve approximately 90 minutes of your time. There will be one 90 minute interview held at a site determined by the participants.
PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, I would ask you to do the following procedures:

1. Answer orally a series of questions about your current leadership experiences and practices as a leadership team member or as a grade level representative. Your responses will be digitally recorded, and then the recording will be transcribed.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

This study involves no more than minimal risk. There are no known harms or discomforts associated with this case study research beyond those encountered in normal daily life.

BENEFITS

Subject Benefits

Benefits to you may include a better understanding of your own leadership experiences and ability to address the challenges of sustaining student academic achievement for all students under a performance accountability system such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

Benefits to Others or Society

Benefits to society and others may include a better understanding of how principal leadership contributes to the ability of a school community to respond to an external accountability system so student academic achievement levels for all student subgroups continue to demonstrate academic growth and improvement over time.

ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION

The only alternative to participation in this study is not to participate.

COMPENSATION, COSTS AND REIMBURSEMENT

Compensation for Participation

There is no compensation for participation.

Costs

There are no costs involved for your participation in this case study research.

WITHDRAWAL OR TERMINATION FROM THE STUDY AND CONSEQUENCES

The decision whether to participate in this case study research is up to you. Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time. You may refuse to answer any of the questions you do not wish to answer. You can refuse to participate, or withdraw from the study for any reason, at any time, and such decision without any
negative consequence to you. No information or details from the focus group interview will be shared or discussed with the principal. If you decide to withdraw your participation from this study, all information and data that you have provided to me will be destroyed. If you decide to withdraw from this study you should notify the principal researcher, Jack Bagwell, as soon as possible at 818-654-3646 or at jack.bagwell@csun.edu

CONFIDENTIALITY

Subject Identifiable Data

All of the information you provide is confidential. Identifying characteristics about you will be changed so that no one reading the case study would be able to identify you. All transcriptions for the case study will be stored in a secure location. Any publication of the case study will not identify you as a participant. All references or identifying information, such as your school district and your school site, will be removed. When the results of this case study research are published or discussed at conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity or work location.

Data Storage

All digital recordings collected during the interview will be assigned a unique code number and will be stored on a laptop with password protection. Digital recordings will be downloaded and securely stored on a password protected laptop in the researcher’s office, then erased as soon as the digital recording is transcribed. Hard copy transcripts of the digital interview will be kept on the researcher’s password protected laptop for a period of one year from the date of the interview. Only the principal researcher and the faculty advisor for this case study research will have access to the digital and transcription records.

Data Access

The principal researcher and the faculty advisor named on the first page of this form will have access to your study records. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies you will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about you.

Data Retention

The researchers intend to keep the research data until the case study research is published and presented, then it will be destroyed.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS

If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the research team listed on the first page of this form.

If you are unable to reach a member of the research team listed on the first page of the form and have general questions, or you have concerns or complaints about the research
study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact Research and Sponsored Projects, 18111 Nordhoff Street, California State University, Northridge, Northridge, CA 91330-8232, or phone 818-677-2901.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

You should not sign this form unless you have read it and been given a copy of it to keep. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with California State University, Northridge. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions that you have about the study.

I agree to participate in the study.

__________________________________________________________________________
Subject Signature                                              Date
__________________________________________________________________________
Printed Name of Subject

__________________________________________________________________________
Researcher Signature                                          Date
__________________________________________________________________________
Printed Name of Researcher
Appendix E

Case Study Research on Leadership Practices of Principals

Participant Interview Guide-Principal

I. Pre-interview Session: Introduction/Background

Welcome and introduction:

Good morning. Thank you for taking the time out from your busy schedule to talk to me today about your leadership work. Before we begin the interview, I would like to review the Consent to Participate in Research form and answer any questions you might have prior to signing the form.

Purpose of the first interview:

As previously discussed, this interview is to collect information about the case study research of leadership practices of elementary school principals working in Program Improvement schools where students are making sustained academic growth over time. During the interview today, we will talk about your leadership practice and the context of your work at this school. As you know, I am interested in your leadership practice here at this school. Before we begin, I want to remind you that participation in this study is strictly voluntary. At any point during the interview, if you would like me to turn off the digital recorder, or end the interview, please tell me.

Confidentiality:

Our interview today will be digitally recorded. In addition, I will be taking notes during the interview. The digital recording will be transcribed for analysis. All of the information you provide is confidential. Identifying characteristics about you will be changed so that no one reading the case study would be able to identify you. All transcriptions for the case study will be stored in locked file cabinet housed in a secure location. Any publication of the case study will not identify you as a participant. All references or identifying information, such as your school district and your school site, will be removed. The research team identified in the Consent to Participate form will have direct access to the digital recording, transcription, and notes. When the results of this case study research are published or discussed at conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identify or work location.

Informed consent:

This consent notice summarizes some information from the Consent to Participate in Research and communicates the procedures, potential risks and discomforts for subjects, potential benefits to subjects, payment to subjects for participation, participation and withdrawal, and rights of research subjects. You may not benefit from participation in this study personally; however, findings from this study may help other elementary school principals understand how leadership contributes to the ability of a school community to respond to an external accountability system so student achievement levels
can continue to demonstrate improvement over time. Procedures in this interview are limited to semistructured personal interview sessions. You should not sign this form unless you have read it and been given a copy of it to keep. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled, and you can skip any question, or any part of any question at any time and for any reason. You are not waiving legal claims, rights, or remedies because of your participation in this interview.

**Identification and contact information of principal investigator:**

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, the details of this study, or any other concerns please contact Jack Bagwell at his mailing address: P.O. Box 8631, Calabasas, California, 91372. Or you may contact Jack Bagwell by telephone at 818-321-8764 or by e-mail at jack.bagwell@csun.edu.

**Timing:**

Our interview today will last approximately 90 minutes in length. Before we get started, do you have any questions?

**II. Interview Session**

**Grand Tour Questions:**

1. Please tell me about this school?
   a. How many years have you been a principal?
   b. Have you been a principal at other schools?
   c. If so, how does being a principal at this school compare to the other schools?

2. How is this school organized?
   a. Grade levels?

3. What is different this year at this school?
   a. Organization
   b. Personnel

**Main Questions:**

**Research Question #1: What are the leadership practices of two elementary school principals working in Program Improvement where there is sustained student academic growth as evidenced by the annual increase in API over five consecutive years?**

1. Tell me about your leadership style. How do you see yourself as a leader?

2. What would I observe you doing and saying when watching you interact with your leadership team?
3. What do you do as a principal to facilitate and develop leadership in others?

4. As principal, please describe your interaction with the leadership team.
   a. Describe a situation when you distributed a leadership task to your leadership team. How did you decide the task?
   b. Why did you decide to have them carry out this specific task?

5. Please describe your interactions with grade level representatives.
   a. Describe a situation when you distributed a leadership task to your leadership team. How did you decide the task?
   b. Why did you decide to have them carry out this specific task?

6. What are the specific school goals or improvement areas your school had been working on in the past 2-3 years? How do you plan to carry out these goals?

7. Are there other factors that you have not mentioned that influence the way you accomplish this leadership work?

Research Question #2: How do principals, leadership team members, and grade level teachers interact in their leadership practice?

1. How are other personnel at your school a part of this work?

2. What in your school facilitates and supports your enactment of leadership tasks?
   a. How does this impact the demands of your leadership work as a principal?

3. What particular school activities or meetings would you recommend I attend in order for me to develop a broader understanding and gain a deeper insight into the work of the school?

4. Who in your school has taken on a particular leadership role in facilitating the work in this area?
   a. What are the roles of those individuals who exercise leadership at this school?
   b. Please explain or describe how this person exercises leadership in their role.

Research Question #3: How do the organizational routines of the school facilitate the principal’s enactment of leadership tasks in these schools?

1. What structures are in place to facilitate the work of leadership? To facilitate enacting leadership tasks?
   a. How do you support these individuals in this work?
   b. How often do these individuals meet and what do they do when they meet?
c. Explain what artifacts or tools this person uses to facilitate this work?
d. How were these artifacts or tools created? And why?

2. How has the school been organized to help facilitate the work you are trying to accomplish here at the school connected to the school goals and areas of improvement?

Research Question #4: What tools or artifacts do these principals use to facilitate their leadership practice?

1. Explain what tools, artifacts, or resources you use to facilitate your work.

2. Explain what tools, artifacts, or resources you use to facilitate the work of your leadership team? Your grade level representatives?

Research Question #5: What are the principal's perceived supports and constraints to enacting leadership tasks in these schools?

1. What barriers exist in your school that impede or hamper your opportunities to support your work in enacting leadership tasks?
   a. Are their instances or situations where people are not able to carry out the task successfully? If so, please explain.

2. What supports your opportunities to enact leadership tasks at this school?
   a. Are their instances or situations where people are able to carry out these tasks successfully? If so, please explain.

3. Are there other factors that you have not mentioned that influence the way you accomplish this work.

4. In order to further understand the work of leadership in this school, whom else could I talk to about this?

Closing Questions

Is there anything else that I did not ask that would help me to better understand your leadership role in your school? Do you have anything else to add? If there’s anything else that you recall after our interview session, I invite you to share it by contacting me.

III. Post-Interview Session: Debriefing and Closing

Thank you for participating in today’s interview session. I appreciate your taking the time to meet with me. I also want to restate that what you have shared with me is confidential. No part of our discussion including names or other identifying information will be used in any report. Finally, I want to provide you with a chance to ask any questions that you might have about this interview. Do you have any questions at this time?
Appendix F

STUDY: Leadership Practices of Elementary School Principals

Focus Group Interview Guide: Leadership Team and Grade Level Representatives

Date: __________  Time: __________  School: __________

Participants: _______________________

I. Introduction/Background

Welcome and introduction:

Good afternoon. Thank you for taking the time to come together for this focus group discussion with us today. I will be leading today’s discussion the work of leadership at your school.

Purpose of the focus group:

I’ve invited you to this focus group so that I can learn from you about your experiences with leadership at this school. I would like to examine the leadership practices school leadership teams and grade level. This focus group is part of a research study on the leadership practices of principals in Program Improvement schools.

Confidentiality:

Any information you share with us today will be used for research/evaluation purpose only. I will be aggregating results from all focus groups and will not be attributing comments to any particular person. You will not be identified by name, school, position, or any other personally identifying information in any report or document. Your name or personally identifying information will not be used in any published or public reports.

Today’s focus group session will be digitally recorded. I will also be taking notes of the conversation. The digital recordings will be transcribed for analysis. The digitally recorded file, transcribed file, and notes will be stored securely on my password protected laptop until completion of the focus group analysis. Upon completion of analysis, all files and notes will be destroyed. Only my dissertation chairperson and I will have access to the files and notes. The files and notes will be accessed and analyzed in strict confidentiality.

Informed consent:

This consent notice communicates the procedures, potential risks and discomforts for subjects, potential benefits to subjects, payment to subjects for participation, participation and withdrawal, and rights of research subjects. Procedures in this focus group are limited to semistructured focus group sessions. Because leadership practices and your individual and team work deals with issues that are sensitive, some focus group questions may involve issues of a professional and/or personal nature, including experiences with and/or perceptions of colleagues at the school. You may feel uneasy
about answering some of these focus group questions. You may elect not to answer any of the questions with which you feel uneasy and still remain as a participant in the study. You may not benefit personally from your participation in this study. However, this focus group is part of a study on the leadership practices of elementary school principals. Thus, findings of this study may lead to improvements in principal leadership and teacher leadership in schools. Focus group participants and/or research subjects will not be paid for their participation in this focus group. Your participation in this focus group is voluntary. You are not obligated whatsoever to answer or respond to any question or to discuss anything that you are not inclined to answer or discuss. You can skip any question, or any part of any question, and will not face any penalty for answering, or not answering, any question in any way. You may ask that the digital recording be stopped at any time and/or may leave the focus group at any time for any reason without consequences of any kind.

In addition to this informed consent notice, please find an informed consent form as part of your focus group session packet. At this time, I ask you to read, review, and sign the informed consent form. If you have questions, please ask them now. If you would like to ask a question in private, please let me know.

Identification and contact information of evaluator:

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, the details of this study, or any other concerns please contact Jack Bagwell at jack.bagwell@csun.edu or at 818-654-3646.

Timing:

Today’s focus group will last approximately 90 minutes. Are there any questions before I get started?

II. Focus group

Introductory Questions on Leadership

• One at a time, please discuss what leadership mean to you? How has your leadership evolved over time, and what has contributed to this? More broadly, please reflect on how your participation as a grade level representative/leadership team member has affected your professional practice.

• Please describe how the principal builds and supports your leadership work as grade level representatives/leadership team members.

Tools and Artifacts to Facilitate Leadership Practice

• Currently, what functions or activities do you perform as a grade level representative/leadership team members? What tools or artifacts are used to facilitate leadership as grade level representatives/leadership team members?
• Who utilizes these tools and artifacts and how were they developed? How do these tools and artifacts hinder or further your leadership work as grade level representatives/leadership team members? As teachers?

Organizational Routines

• Please explain what routines are in place at the school that you think facilitate the principal’s work of leadership? How were these routines developed or agreed upon? How are these routines used by the principal to facilitate leadership? How do these routines help or hinder the principal’s leadership work?

Teacher Leadership

• What leadership opportunities exist for you as grade level representatives/leadership team members? How does the principal facilitate these opportunities for you? For other teachers?

• Given what you have observed, please provide an example of how has the principal helped to develop the grade level representatives/leadership team members to develop their leadership skills. How did/does the principal do this?

• Given what you have observed, please provide an example of how the principal has helped to develop the leadership skills of other teachers at the school. How did/does the principal go about doing this?

• If the principal does not help develop your leadership skills or encourage teacher leadership, please tell me what specifically should the principal do to encourage and support this?

• How do you see your role and responsibilities as a grade level representative/leadership team members? How has the principal of the school shaped your thinking about your role and responsibilities?

• Can you give an example of how your principal supports your work as grade level representatives/leadership team members? Please describe the interactions and discussions when this happens?

• Is teacher leadership valued at your school? How do you know that teacher leadership is/is not valued by the principal? What does the principal do that demonstrates this value? Or not demonstrate this value?

Closing Questions

Before I end today, is there anything that I missed? What else do you think I need to know about how the principal, grade level representatives/leadership team members, or even
other teachers interact and practice leadership? What have I not asked? What would you like to share?

III. Debriefing

Thank you for participating in today’s focus group session. I appreciate your taking the time and sharing your ideas with me. I also want to restate that what you have shared with me is confidential. No part of our discussion that includes names or other identifying information will be used in any published reports or documents I will be combining information gathered in the focus group with information gathered from the other data sources (e.g., documents and observations). The data from this focus group will be stored and maintained on my password protected laptop for a period of one year from the date of this focus group session, after which the data will be destroyed. Finally, I want to provide you with a chance to ask any questions that you might have about this focus group.