

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

by

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I would like to dedicate this writing to my family. They have supported and encouraged me to advance my studies for the last nine years. My parents were both educators and constantly encouraged us to think, dialogue, question, and learn everything you are afforded the opportunity to learn. I want to thank my children that supported me during “my time for me.” Finally, I can think of one person that was the reason I started this journey. Thank you from the depth of my heart. I am better because I knew you.

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ABSTRACT

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Independent schools provide a unique environment from other educational systems. By circumventing state and federal funding, they are able to cultivate autonomy for curriculum choices, management decisions, and independence not known in public schools. The educational leaders of independent schools may require different leadership skills than other school settings due to these additional possibilities and responsibilities. Through a phenomenological lens, the study uncovered skills utilized by four experienced independent school heads. The study used full-range leadership theory to further interpret the lived experiences of the school heads. The purpose of the inquiry is two-fold. First, according to the review of literature, most independent school leaders felt unprepared to lead when they accepted their first leadership position. Graduate level leadership programs tend to prepare leaders for the majority of positions in public schools. The preparation of independent school leaders could impact the sustainability of these schools. The second reason for the inquiry is the lack of research that has taken place in independent school leadership. This study uses qualitative methods of interviews to gain a rich description through a phenomenological lens of the journey of an independent school leader as well as insight into the skills needed to lead an independent school. Emerging themes such as constancy of purpose, relational approach,

personality, and decision making that drove the ability to perform many of the transformational leadership skills.

Keywords: Full-range leadership, transformational leadership, independent schools, head of school, constancy of purpose, relational approach, educational leadership, experienced school leadership

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Public schools in the United States educate the vast majority of students. Another small population of American school children attend private schools. In 2017, approximately 10.2% of total enrolled students attended a private school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). One type of private school is an independent school. Independent schools were some of the first educational institutions to be established during the colonization of the Americas by trading companies and religious institutions. Some of these schools still operate, continuing their historical traditions of freedom in governance and mission.

Independent schools provide a unique environment from other educational systems. Public school policy decisions are often driven by federal policy, state legislature, elected officials, and local constituents. By circumventing state and federal funding, independent schools can cultivate autonomy for curriculum choices, management decisions, and independence not known in public schools. The policies that establish decisions in the independent school are designed and implemented by school leaders motivated by the goals of the school as well as by market forces to attract paying students. The head of school and typically a group of trustees are entrusted to form the governance of the individual school.

Many similarities exist in the leadership processes of public and private schools, including: hiring, communication, finance, staff development, and instructional and curriculum development. However, the freedom to make decisions without the support,

guidance, and control by local, state, and federal influences is the defining difference between a public school leader and an independent school leader. Therefore, the educational leaders of independent schools may require different leadership skills than other school settings due to different possibilities and responsibilities. Through a phenomenological lens, I plan to uncover skills needed to lead independent schools by exploring the experiences of an independent school leader.

The principle research questions will focus on what leadership skills are needed to lead independent schools by exploring the experience of an independent school leader. I will use the widely researched and defined behaviors of full-range leadership theory because they fit well with the missions of independent schools and would therefore be a valuable lens to interpret my data. Through my research, I will build a conceptual framework that examines the skills fundamental to leadership and the experience of an independent school leader.

Operationalizing Terms

For purposes of the research review it is important to define an independent school, a public charter school, and a parochial school. Independent schools are defined by The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) as:

non-profit private schools that are independent in philosophy: each is driven by a unique mission. They are also independent in the way they are managed and financed: each is governed by an independent board of trustees and each is primarily supported through tuition payments and charitable contributions. They are accountable to their communities and are accredited by state-approved

accrediting bodies. (National Association of Independent Schools about section, n.d.)

According to Robey and Helfenbein (2018) a strong leadership authority exists in schools that are not beholden to a central office (p. 306). It is possible that additional responsibilities and therefore leadership skills stem from the unique authority in independent school headships.

Public charter schools emerged from the desire for increased school choice over the last several decades. A public charter school is defined by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools as:

Charter schools are public, tuition-free schools that are open to all students. Often operated independently from the traditional school district, charter schools provide high-quality instruction from teachers who have the autonomy to design a classroom that fits their students' needs. They are led by dynamic principals who have the flexibility to create a school culture that fosters student performance and parent satisfaction. (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools about section, n.d.)

According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (as cited in Robey & Helfenbein, 2018) charter schools are approximately 6% of all schools across the United States (p. 305). Public charter schools maintain governing independence from a local school district.

A parochial school is a private school that is affiliated with a religious organization. Catholic schools, Evangelical Christian Schools, Jewish schools, and Islamic schools are types of parochial schools. For the purposes of the literature review,

the following definition will be used for parochial schools: a private school funded by sources other than public funds with a religious affiliation. Authors Robey and Helfenbein (2018) stated “Catholic schools tend to have a strong sense of religious identity and their mission of social justice is often borne as such, often reaching beyond the schools and into the local community” (p. 306). García-Tuñón, Cistone, and Reio (2016) described Jesuit education characteristics as “care and concern for others and reliance on a spirit of community” (p. 620). The connection of a parochial school to the community it serves was a key element in the review of research.

Background and Context

Independent schools exist in many ways true to their name, independent of government oversight. They operate on the outside of the larger public educational sphere. As a result, educational research set in private school settings, particularly independent school settings, is limited. Harvey (2015) found fee-paying schools or private schools in the United Kingdom are “under-researched almost to the point of invisibility” (p. 1). However, independent schools, unlike public schools, are without the constraints of policy decisions made within the context of a political process and therefore can possess the culture, autonomy, and innovative missions to foster opportunities for improvement. They are an ideal environment for testing new practice with potential for applicability to all learning environments.

Independent schools are experiencing challenges in enrollment and financial instability, with increased competition with other schools. Private school enrollment for children in grades one to eight decreased in the last half century (Murnane, Reardon, Mbekeani, & Lamb, 2018). However, nonsectarian private schools experienced growth

from 4% in 1965 to 18% in 2013 (Murnane et al., 2018, p. 2). Despite nonsectarian schools experiencing long-term growth over half a century, independent schools experienced financial, enrollment, and competition challenges in the last decade resulting from the 2008 recession and other factors (Juhel, 2016, p. 589). One of the individuals responsible for leading independent schools through recent economic uncertainty and growing competition in education is the head of school. Leaders of independent schools are often closely connected with the daily management of their schools, accessible to all constituencies, maintain productive board-head relationships, and vision for the future of the school.

Independent schools are facing leadership changes. Kane and Barbaro (2016) said headship transitions are occurring in as many as two-thirds of all U.S. independent schools during the last 10-year period (p. 616). This shift is due to current heads reaching retirement age, lower job persistence rates, and growing competition between schools for leadership. The period of headship transition for independent schools will require newly hired heads to possess a good understanding of the leadership skills needed to lead an independent school, particularly since the recession or what Juhel (2016) referred to as the “new normal” (p. 588). Many new independent school leaders noted the lack of preparation they felt for their job (Boerema, 2011; Irvine & Brundrett, 2016; Juhel, 2016). Juhel (2016) found experienced school heads reflected on their transition by stating they felt “unprepared or inadequately prepared to assume the responsibilities they were given on July 1 of the year they were appointed” (p. 600). Knowledge and practice of the leadership skills that are most effective in an independent school environment can influence the transitions of headships, support formative experiences in these skills, and

foster school sustainability. The preparation of independent school leaders could impact the sustainability of these schools, many of which are navigating more than a decade of financial instability and increased competition from other schools.

Theoretical Foundations to the Study

The theoretical groundings in educational leadership research are fundamental to legitimizing methods, understanding problems, creating standards, and shaping future intellectual inquiries and new knowledge in the field (Wang, 2018). Despite the importance of theory in empirical research, Wang found theory in the field of educational leadership research to be less explicit. Wang studied the dominant framing concepts in educational leadership research, the interconnections among them, and the evolution of the theoretical groundings of the field using 1,328 articles that were published in four educational leadership research journals: *Educational Administration Quarterly (EAQ)*, *Journal of Educational Administration (JEA)*, *Educational Management Administration & Leadership (EMAL)*, and *Journal of School Leadership (JSL)*.

Wang (2018) stated although there were 295 framing theories in the examined research articles, only a small number of theories demonstrated a large influence on the majority of educational leadership research both in frequency and high centrality, a measure of how many times a concept co-occurs with others in the network. Wang found the top five framing concepts by frequency were: distributed leadership, instructional leadership, trust, transformational leadership, and organizational theory. The top five framing concepts by centrality measures were: trust, instructional leadership, transformational leadership, distributed leadership, and social capital theory. I also found

many examples of these educational leadership theories in my review of empirical research.

Wang (2018) stated “after decades of theory development, some of the dominant leadership conceptualizations (e.g., transformational leadership and distributed leadership) remained as mainstream in this field, as evidenced by these concepts’ high reference frequency and high centrality. The field has also developed its own leadership conceptualizations, such as instructional leadership and teacher leadership” (p. 354). The author also suggested theoretical gaps in the educational leadership areas of decision making, politics and policy, and economics. Wang found that the field of educational leadership has experienced smaller changes in theoretical knowledge accumulation rather than revolutions of theoretical groundings. The evidence of the theories intersecting with one another and co-occurring is proof of the theoretical evolution. Therefore using multiple theories to explain research data might help to integrate concepts and create cohesion in findings.

Full-Range Leadership Theory

This study will examine the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are needed to lead independent schools by exploring the lived experience of independent school leaders. Heads of schools face many challenges in independent schools, securing the need for leadership preparation, support, and development. Full-range leadership theory involves constructs of both transactional leadership and transformational leadership behaviors. The constructs are comprehensive enough to facilitate multiple lenses of interpretation of the lived experience of an independent school leader during varied duties that are managerial, transformational, instructional, and relational in nature.

Transactional Leadership Theory

Transactional leadership theory was conceptualized by Bass in 1981 “as reward (contingent rewards) and aversive influence (management-by-exception)” (Antonkis & House, 2014, p. 746). Bass credited House’s (1971) path-goal theory for influencing his transactional leadership theory (Antonkis & House, 2014, p. 746). Transactional leadership is further clarified as involving four constructs: contingent reward leadership, management-by-exception (active), and management-by-exception (passive), and laissez-faire leadership.

Contingent reward leadership focuses on giving recognition or rewards based on meeting some goal or expectation. The reward is contingent upon completion of the goal or expectation. Contingent rewards are often used in teacher and student relationships in education. For example, when a student meets an expectation, a teacher might congratulate a student on a job well-done; if a class works hard and has good behavior, they might earn an extra recess. Often contingent rewards are thought of as extrinsic motivators rather than intrinsic motivators. Pay for performance is the typical example of contingent rewards. There are many empirical studies on contingent rewards related to job satisfaction, follower satisfaction, leadership effectiveness, and commitment to change (Anderson & Sun, 2017). Contingent rewards are extrinsic motivators and may not motivate employees and especially teachers who are driven often by higher-order causes.

Management-by-exception (active) is the active vigilance of a leader over followers to ensure goals are met. Management-by-exception (active) is a corrective transaction and usually as effective in leadership as contingent reward or transformative

leadership behaviors. Corrective actions are taken to prevent serious difficulties.

Management-by-exception (active) is considered a necessary behavior to maintain safety and often used in military operations and training (Arenas, Connelly, & Williams, 2017).

Management-by-exception behaviors that are active are handled immediately or as soon as possible after the deviation from the standard. The larger the institution and number of followers makes management-by-exception (active) a more difficult task for leaders supervising individual actions.

Management-by-exception (passive) is the corrective transactions occurring after something goes wrong. Management-by-exception (passive) is a passive action that is usually too late and the situation is out of control before the leader intervenes. Anderson and Sun (2017) found “research on the two MBE dimensions is rare” (p. 79). The authors cited a meta-analysis by Wang, Oh, Courtright, and Colbert (2011) that found management-by-exception (passive) was more strongly negatively related to organizational-level performance (as cited in Anderson & Sun, 2017). Overuse of either of these two transactional behaviors by leaders are often interpreted by followers as micromanaging behaviors and in general create a negative workplace culture.

Laissez-faire leadership is the avoidance or absence of leadership responsibilities (Avolio & Bass, 2001). It is considered to be an inactive form of leadership; there are no transactions in laissez-faire leadership. It is important to remember that a leader can display behaviors from both transactional and transformational leadership, including behaviors that abdicate responsibility. Leadership behaviors are on a continuum. A poor performing leader tends to use laissez-faire leadership, management-by-exception

(passive), and management-by-exception (active) behaviors more often than transformational behaviors.

Transactional leadership behaviors are used by school leaders. Many of these behaviors exist for the safety of students, logistics of the school, and keeping the business of the school running each day. Transactional behavior places emphasis on a transaction that occurs and is often rewarded: a school leader sets expectations and expresses the conditions or rewards that occur if the requirements are fulfilled. Avolio and Bass (2001) stated “since the 1980’s, research has supported the idea that transformational leadership is more effective than transactional leadership in generating extra effort, commitment, and satisfaction of those led” (p. 1). Transactional leadership is a foundation for transformational leadership. Therefore, it is imperative to examine transformational leadership theory as the other component on the educational leadership continuum.

Transformational Leadership Theory

Bernard Bass is credited for developing transformational theory in the 1980s. Bass credited James Burns’s book *Leadership* (1978) on political leadership as the main source for his early ideas informing transformational theory (Miner, 2005, p. 362). Bass began pilot studies on his concept of transformational leaders in the early 1980s and in 1985 published his first formal theoretical presentation of transformational leadership in *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations*. According to Bass (1999), “the transformational leader inspires, intellectually stimulates, and is individually considerate of them” (p. 9). Curtis (2018) found the transformational leader also possesses emotional competence to be able to emotionally connect and engage their followers (p. 2). There are four dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational

motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration (Witges & Scanlan, 2014, p. 67).

Idealized influence is the construct that educational leaders possess charisma to engage their staff and students, articulate the vision of the school, and engage others in their mission. House's (1976) charismatic theory influenced Bass's transformational theory (Miner, 2005). Change can occur quickly in an independent school, without the restrictions placed upon the system by federal and state mandates. Therefore, the leaders in independent schools have a unique opportunity to implement improvements and idealize their influence within the context of their school.

Inspirational motivation provided by educational leaders attracts others to buy into their vision. Buy-in is not only important for transformation related to the organization's mission and goals, but also valuable to constantly reaffirm the parent's decision in the school. This is particularly important in the context of an independent school where families are paying tuition to educate their children, have many other educational options, and are functioning in a decade of financial uncertainty. Juhel (2016) stated the importance of a headmaster's responsibility to "keep the vision alive" (p. 595). When the mission of the school is kept alive, families continue to receive confirmation in their decision to enroll their children in an independent school.

Intellectually stimulating environments encourage followers to think creatively and innovate. The importance of intellectual stimulation is an accessible concept for educators. Administrators, teacher leaders, and teachers place tremendous value on learning. Educational leaders should be responsible for creating environments where

innovation, shared learning, and distributed leadership empower teachers for personal growth, and as a result, generate a sense of pride and ownership of the environment.

Individually considerate leaders place effort and attention on developing the potential of their followers. Transformational leaders are able to listen and give consideration to all constituents. Juhel (2016) stated that 15 of the 16 heads of independent schools interviewed for the author's research found they needed to be visible, accessible, and responsive to many constituent groups, regardless of the size of the school (p. 594). Individual consideration can also be productive in promoting staff to their full potential (Witges & Scanlan, 2014). Transformational leaders inspire constituents into personal relationships with the school's mission, raising their level of commitment, motivation, and production.

Transformational leadership theory was consistently mentioned in my examination of the literature on educational leadership in private school settings and all school settings. The constructs of transformational leadership theory align with the missions of independent schools and would therefore be a valuable lens to inform my dissertation study. Miner (2005) stated "transformational leadership theory is evaluated as the most important of the theories considered....one of the most widely researched and discussed" of the leadership theories (p. 381). Transformational leadership theory continues to be one of the dominant educational leadership theories in educational leadership research.

Full-Range Leadership Theory

Juhel (2015) stated transactional leadership often contrasts with transformational leadership (p. 26). However, Curtis (2018) argued that rather than contrast with one

another, “effective leaders sometimes combine both transformational and transactional approaches as situations demand” (p. 2). Research suggests that leaders often use the foundations of many leadership styles to produce transformative results (Witges & Scanlan, 2014). Out of the two theories evolved another theory called full-range leadership theory. Bernard Bass’s research and work continued to evolve his earlier leadership theories: transactional and transformational.

Avolio and Bass proposed full-range leadership theory (FRLT) in 1991.

Oberfield (2014) stated about full-range leadership:

This theory expects that followers will perform better when managers establish patterns of transactional leadership: rational, organized approaches for reward and punishing follower behavior. However, according to the theory, transactional leadership has limited potential; to achieve higher levels of success, leaders must adopt transformational leadership that inspires followers and generates high levels of commitment to organization goals. (p. 408)

The full-range leadership theory provides leaders the framework for understanding how their transactional leadership behaviors can set the groundwork for transformational leadership practices. The full-range leadership theory is rooted in theoretical perspectives of transactional leadership, transformational leadership, and laissez-faire leadership.

There are nine distinct factors in the theory: five transformational leadership factors, three transactional leadership factors, and one nontransactional laissez-faire leadership factor. These factors should be considered as the behaviors that are exhibited by leaders.

The most widely used instrument to assess these nine factors in full-range leadership theory is the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) and the second is the Transformational Leadership Inventory. The five transformational leadership factors are: idealized influence (attributed), idealized influence (behavior), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. The transactional leadership factors are: contingent reward leadership, management-by-exception (active), and management-by-exception (passive). Finally, laissez-faire leadership is defined as “the absence of a transaction of sorts ... in which the leader avoids making decisions, abdicates responsibility, and does not use their authority” (Antonakis, Avolio, & Sivasubramaniam, 2003, p. 265). Leadership behavior often moves between these factors lending to a continuum of leadership behaviors.

This study is concerned with identifying the skills used by an independent school leader as well as identifying the lived experience of an independent school leader. An emerging theme that drives the ability to perform many transformational behaviors is a system of support inputs to the leader and outputs from the leader. The support inputs and outputs to leaders are synonymous to Avolio’s (2011) reference to the term boosters during leadership development for full-range leadership functioning. Avolio (2011) stated:

Boosters are needed to reinforce what has been learned and to provide support during crucial transition periods. These boosters can help to keep leaders more accountable as well as to further address the immunities that keep systems and people from changing. In the follow-up boosters, change typically occurs after people have had a chance to reflect on what they were taught in foundation

workshops and especially where they are receiving reinforcements for trying new ways of leading. (p. 141)

Boosters are even more valuable to a new set of independent school leaders for supportive input and development during the last two challenging school years.

Another mechanism for independent school leaders to support personal learning and transformational leadership skills is transformational learning. Jack Mezirow introduced transformative learning in 1978. Transformative learning recognizes that having an experience is not enough to effect a transformation (Merriam, 2004). Mezirow intended to create a frame of reference or a meaning perspective for recognizing a “critical dimension of learning in adulthood that enables us to recognize and reassess the structure of assumptions and expectations which frame our thinking, feeling and acting” (as cited in Illeris, 2009, p. 90). The resulting learning that occurs transforms problematic frames of references including mindsets, habits of mind, and meaning perspectives (Illeris, 2009, p. 92). Transformational learning involves elements of critical reflection and participation in dialectical discourse. Critical reflection includes self-reflection on existing assumptions. However, self-reflection alone does not transform learning. The participation in a conversation about the assumptions serves to disorient one’s restlessness and opens the possibility for new actions.

According to Boerema (2011), “challenge serves to hold a mirror for the leader to see him or herself by introducing contradictory ideas and questioning tacit assumptions” (p. 555). Boerema (2011) stated new independent school leaders met challenge with supportive relationships that offered “professional and practical advice, help with prioritizing, giving a reality check, giving performance feedback, and help in reframing

or refocusing situations” (p. 563). Many new administrators lack confidence in their decisions. Supportive frameworks in the form of mentorships helped to address those challenges. It was important to new administrators that support was from heads who had experienced similar challenges. Boerema found support came from various sources including mentorships, affirmation, collegiality, information, and feedback (pp. 555-559). Supportive networks are particularly valuable in small schools where new administrators were secluded in their leadership role. Independent schools are smaller in size and networking scope than a public school district. Transformational learning can serve to develop new school leaders by both challenging assumptions and supporting learning for transformation.

Research Questions

As headships transition in many schools across the country, it will be imperative to prepare future leaders for leadership skills that are specific to independent schools. Factors such as increased competition with other schools, increased economic uncertainty, and evolving models of educating students emerge are further barriers to the survival of independent schools. Leaders will need to be effective immediately upon hiring. The small amount of existing research set in independent schools makes preparing and even understanding what skills are needed by these school leaders challenging. The principle research questions that will guide my study are:

- What are the leadership skills needed to lead independent schools?
- What is the experience of an independent school leader?

Significance of Research

The results of the research study could be valuable to independent schools hiring a new school head. During the period of many headship retirements for U.S. independent schools, knowledge specific to leading independent schools could be beneficial for the schools in transition, both in hiring and sustainability. Many independent schools use search consultants from firms in the hiring process. The skills required to be an independent school leader would be valuable to firms and their consultants that work to place candidates into head of school positions.

The results of the research could benefit independent school leaders by contributing specific knowledge about the independent school environment. Although graduate schools of education train future leaders in leadership skills based mainly on a public school model, the results could add to a knowledge base that is specific to the unique environment. Research on topics related to independent schools is minimal, which leads me to conclude my question might fall into the category Clark referred to as, “knowledge void” (as cited in Stage & Manning, 2003, p. 15). Clearly, the void exists in my review of the research. Juhel (2016) stated “data from this study reflect certain aspects of independent school leadership that heads believe withstand the test of time and circumstances, especially in a region where, arguably, they might have been more immune to the effects of the 2008 recession” (p. 602). Juhel suggested expanding the research set in geographic locations outside of New York. The metro-Detroit area was significantly impacted by the economic recession of 2008. Independent schools in varied areas are impacted differently by financial crises. It is worthwhile to explore the leadership and management skills of heads of schools in different areas because financial

challenges might vary significantly requiring different leadership skills (Juhel, 2016, p. 603).

Finally, the results of the research could be valuable to the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS). NAIS collects and publishes data on member schools. NAIS provides a network of support, continuing education, and professional development for members promoting the sustainability of independent schools.

Conclusion

Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) stated “Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school” (p. 5). Examining and improving leadership practices in school settings remains valuable to the overall mission of schools. A common theme in the minimal research set in independent school settings was leaders learned their skill set on the job rather than in leadership development or training (Boerema, 2011; Irvine & Brundrett, 2016; Juhel, 2016). The research suggests this may be because the majority of independent school leaders begin as teachers and move through the middle leadership positions before they are a head of school (Juhel, 2016). The independent school environment requires knowledgeable leaders in the areas of transformational leadership skills, management skills, relational skills, and instructional leadership skills. Interpreting the skills and knowledge through lenses of the full-range leadership theory could provide valuable information for leadership training specific to independent school leaders who are new or seeking professional development. The full-range leadership theory can provide the conceptual framework to understand behavioral attributes valuable to leaders attempting to navigate the challenging school environment of today.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Independent schools exist in many ways true to their name, independent of other schools. They operate on the outside of the larger public educational sphere. As a result, educational research set in private school settings, particularly independent school settings, is limited. Harvey (2015) found fee-paying schools or private schools in the United Kingdom are “under-researched almost to the point of invisibility” (p. 1). However, independent schools possess the culture, autonomy, and innovative missions to foster opportunities for improvement. They are an ideal environment for testing new practice with potential for applicability to all learning environments. The research questions that guided my study were:

- What are the leadership skills needed to lead independent schools?
- What is the experience of an independent school leader?

Professional Standards for Educational Leaders

The National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) created the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders in 1996 to provide guidance to educational leaders in a changing and challenging new world for educators. Global economies, evolving technology, political changes and the resulting control shifts, high levels of student accountability for student achievement, funding cuts, global health pandemic, and increasing competition between schools are some of the challenges school leaders are faced with each school year. The knowledge that evolved in the field of educational leadership from empirical research guided the creation of the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders. The Professional Standards apply to all levels of

educational leaders including teacher leaders, department leaders, principals and heads of school, and district-level leadership. The Standards are also meant to guide leadership preparation programs as they define the leadership skills needed in the current school environment and nurture and develop aspiring school leaders.

The NPBEA (2015) defined the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders as interdependent domains and values:

1. Mission, vision, and core values
2. Ethics and professional norms
3. Equity and cultural responsiveness
4. Curriculum, instruction and assessment
5. Community of care and support for students
6. Professional capacity of school personnel
7. Professional community for teachers and staff
8. Meaningful engagement of families and community
9. Operations and management
10. School improvement

(pp. 3-4)

The Standards are meant to model the domains that need to be addressed in schools by educational leaders. The NPBEA further breaks the Standards into clusters related to students' academic and social emotional learning (Standards 4 and 5), relational (Standards 6, 7, 8, 9), and transformational (Standards 1, 2, 3). Standard 10 impacts all other clusters. The professional skills needed by educational leaders in the domains of students' academic and social emotional learning, relational domains, and

transformational domains provide paths to impact teaching and student learning. It is important to recognize that leadership exists in organizational contexts that may have influence over leadership practice.

Organizational Contexts

School leaders are widely recognized as influential for a number of outcomes in the schools and districts they lead. Existing research found significant relationships between educational leadership and student learning outcomes. Some of the domains influenced by educational leadership are: student performance, teacher retention and development, school achievement, community engagement, parent involvement, school improvement, and school culture (Burkman, Garrett, & Posner, 2019). School leadership must exist in a number of organizational contexts. Educational leaders learn to solve problems and anticipate the future all within their educational context. Some of these organizational contexts could influence school leaders' decisions about their skills and practices needed for their organization. The contexts could impact the effectiveness of a school leader. The organizational contexts that must be considered when examining school leadership are: organization size, relational approach, personality of members, constancy of purpose, and level of decision making.

Organization Size

The size of a school or district is an important context that might influence school leadership and the behaviors and skills used by school leaders. It is valuable to examine the relationship between leadership practices and the school size for many reasons. Demographics of independent schools are typically smaller communities of students and teachers. Smaller schools put the educational leaders' actions in close proximity to the

community members. Larger schools may require multiple levels of leadership and therefore the practices of many school leaders could influence students and faculty. Schools and district sizes vary widely. Therefore, in preparing educational leaders for the schools they will lead, it is valuable to understand the relationship between the size of the school and the most effective leadership behaviors and practices. While educational leadership styles might differ with the organization size, it is also possible that organization size might impact the effectiveness of a leader.

Burkman et al. (2019) examined the relationship of organization size and leadership practices in school districts. The purpose of the study was to “identify and benchmark the leadership practices of principals and superintendents and secondly to investigate the extent to which organizational size, among many possible demographic and institutional factors, has a significant influence on how secondary educational leaders behave” (Burkman et al., 2019, p. 14). If different leadership skills and behaviors are required for different size schools and districts, educational leadership training programs should adequately prepare our future educational leaders with this knowledge. School leaders moving between different size organizations could also benefit from the understanding of the contextual differences.

Burkman et al. (2019) used the Leadership Practices Inventory by Kouzes and Posner (2017) to identify when school leaders used five leadership practices: model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. The researchers used ANOVA to compare the average score for each of the five leadership practices for superintendents in the study by district size. The results revealed no statistically significant differences in the five leadership practices as defined

by the Leadership Practices Inventory based upon the size of their Texas districts. The sample size was small and included 66 superintendents in part one of the study.

Part two of the study used a database generated from an online version of the Leadership Practices Inventory. The sample size was 646 respondents. The database also provided access to the direct reporters and supervisors of the school leaders. The researchers used ANOVA and again the results were no statistically significant differences for any of the five leadership practices based upon the size of the organization. There were some significant differences found by researchers of the direct reporters. Burkman et al. (2019) found direct reporters:

... view their principals engaging more in these leadership behaviors than do principals themselves. Second, the size of the school system does appear to influence the inspire and enable leadership behaviors of school leaders as viewed by their direct reports; and possibly as well both model and encourage leadership behaviors. (p. 18)

The researchers noted that the perspective of the managers of the school leaders also revealed no statistically significant differences in leadership practices based upon the size of the school system. Burkman et al. concluded from these studies that the size of a school does not significantly impact the chosen leadership behaviors by a school leader. The authors concluded that school size did not need to be a significant consideration in preparation programs for future school leaders.

The article "Perspectives of Urban School Principals from Nontraditional Contexts: A Study of Urban Public Charter and Private School Leaders" examined principal perceptions of their key responsibilities related to school administration in

urban public charter and Catholic schools. The researchers collected data from principals in three urban cities in America. First, Robey and Helfenbein (2018) collected quantitative data to discover “principals’ perceptions of school tasks, skills, authority, schools, students, and self” (p. 307). The researchers used the MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Challenges for School Leadership to measure key school features (Robey & Helfenbein, 2018). Next, researchers collected qualitative data through interviews with seven principals to expand survey responses and gain greater understanding.

Robey and Helfenbein (2018) found public charter and Catholic school principals felt their training prepared them well for their leadership position (p. 308). The finding was counter to other research that found independent school leaders were largely unprepared (Boerema, 2011; Irvine & Brundrett, 2016; Juhel, 2016). Possible explanations for differing results could be the intent to hire leaders who possess strong instructional skills, which is the experience of many professional educators that had extensive formative experiences in teaching and middle leadership roles prior to senior leadership positions. Robey and Helfenbein stated the challenging areas for principals were related to meeting the financial needs of the school, reaching out and engaging families, addressing the needs of diverse learners, and maintaining an adequate and effective teaching staff. Another interesting result from survey responses was the overall agreement on the lack of importance for leaders to use technology for improving instruction. Interviews further clarified the lack of importance attributed to technology to improve instruction when a principal stated that technology was thought of as a tool, rather than an end (Robey & Helfenbein, 2018, p. 315). Interviews revealed that all skills

relating to instructional leadership were important. Robey and Helfenbein (2018) stated “Of special importance is that a principal has a good deal of teaching experience so as to give that person the skills to serve as an instructional leader” (p. 315). A school leader possessing instructional leadership skills in a small school organization might be valuable as often there are less middle leadership positions such as teacher leaders and central offices in smaller schools. The researchers found very little discrepancies between the responses of public charter and Catholic school principals. The finding was contrary to their prediction that differences would exist because of the significant variation in the mission statement of a public charter school and a Catholic school. One distinction in the leadership skills between public charter and Catholic school principals pertained to implementing the Common Core. Catholic schools are not bound to the implementation of Common Core academic standards, and reported it was of low level of importance (Robey & Helfenbein, 2018).

Juhel (2016) found none of the heads of independent schools that he interviewed described themselves as instructional leaders (p. 602). The responsibilities of curriculum, instruction, and teacher evaluation were managed by middle leadership positions including teacher leaders, department heads, and deans of students (Juhel, 2016, p. 602). Irvine and Brundrett (2016) concurred and referred to middle leadership as the “dominant practitioner” (p. 89). According to their research, “this theme is not widely acknowledged in the literature, probably because most research is concerned with senior leadership where subject-specific expertise is of less importance” (Irvine & Brundrett, 2016, pp. 89-90). It is evident from the review of research that instructional leadership

skills, although meaningful in certain school environments, is secondary in independent school leadership to transformational, managerial, and relational leadership skills.

Researchers Thomas and Lacey (2016) claimed charter school founder-administrator leaders spent considerable time in the role of leader as educator. If the leader felt their skills in instruction and curriculum were undeveloped, the “expectation is for qualified teachers to take control of the instructional component, thus moving the academic and instructional issues further down an administrator’s list of immediate responsibilities” (Thomas & Lacey, 2016, p. 1597). Another participant in the phenomenological study reported the most important role of a charter school leader was to be an instructional leader. Thomas and Lacey (2016) stated charter school leaders “saw values and vision as a direct path to respect and learning. And they saw their role as providing the opportunity to create an environment where students and teachers thrive” (p. 1607). An additional finding from the data was the importance of building faculty relationships for purposes of maintaining team collaboration and trusting certain duties and responsibilities to teachers.

The size of a school is an organizational context that is worth considering. Organization size and the resulting impact to employee participation, middle leadership, administrative processes, and the level of bureaucratic processes lends itself to different leadership approaches. However, research seems to be conflicted regarding the impact demographics and size actually have with regard to some universal approaches to leadership. In particular, it is evident that transformational leadership approaches seem to transcend school size and are valuable in many school contexts.

Relational Approach

School leadership exists as a relationship between a leader and the many individuals in the organization. Stakeholders at a school include the students, families, teachers, school staff, and community the school serves. This dynamic relationship adds complexity to the job of a school leader. Amanchuwu, Stanley, and Ololube (2015) stated “The quantity and quality of interaction in an organization tends to influence the style of organizational management with the main issue being that employees must work together to accomplish tasks” (p. 11). For schools to be effective, the relational interactions between leaders and stakeholders are important. Particularly important is the relationship between teachers and school leader. Bolman (1990) stated “administrators are leaders only to the extent that others grant them cooperation and characterize them as leaders” (p. 29). Schools can operate as closed or open systems. Fullan (2014) described the role of a principal being a system player, “Large-scale success will occur only when system members begin to act from a shared, coherent mind-set. The only way to develop a shared mind-set is through purposeful and continuous interaction and learning over a period of time” (p. 104). Leaders are responsible for sharing information, creating open communication pathways, interpreting complex data for stakeholders, and managing information in a manner that empowers others to act on behalf of the mission and goals of the school.

Juhel (2016) found relationship-building practices were important for successful independent school leaders. The personal skills of integrity and professional values form the foundation for the relational skills school leaders use in solving complex problems and engaging the community. Juhel stated the interviews with long-serving heads

showed that the leader possessed unconditional understanding of the constituents they serve. Fifteen of the 16 heads reported the challenge and absolute necessity for connecting and building relationships with the constituents of the school. A particularly important constituent in an independent school is the board of trustees. “Independent schools are led by self-perpetuating boards who hold the school in trust” (Baker, Campbell, & Ostroff, 2016, p. 575). The boards are responsible for hiring the head of school. The head of school or administrative team hires all other teachers and staff. The board also serves as the strategic and financial accountability for the school. Juhel (2016) found heads “commented on the trustee relationships they have to manage in order to operate the school effectively and move it forward” (p. 594). The researcher stated that five of the 16 heads upon reflection would have focused more on relationship-building with the board of trustees upon their hiring (Juhel, 2016).

While Juhel (2016) studied experienced heads of schools, another article “Challenging and Supporting New Leader Development” examined new school leaders. Boerema (2011) sought to understand the types of support new leaders needed to overcome challenges they faced in their new positions. Boerema conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with eight school administrators with fewer than three years of experience in senior leadership positions. The setting for the interviews took place in independent schools located in Canada. Similar to independent schools in the United States, Canadian independent schools operate under their own authority (Boerema, 2011, p. 560). Boerema noted that many of the skills new administrators required were learned on the job. Lack of leadership preparation was discussed by all

researchers that collected data from independent school leaders (Boerema, 2011; Irvine & Brundrett, 2016; Juhel, 2016).

According to Boerema (2011), “challenge serves to hold a mirror for the leader to see him or herself by introducing contradictory ideas and questioning tacit assumptions” (p. 555). Boerema (2011) stated new independent school leaders met challenge with supportive relationships that offered “professional and practical advice, help with prioritizing, giving a reality check, giving performance feedback, and help in reframing or refocusing situations” (p. 563). Many new administrators lack confidence in their decisions. Supportive frameworks in the form of mentorships helped to address challenges. It was important to new administrators that the support was from heads who had experienced similar challenges. Boerema found support came from various sources including mentorships, affirmation, collegiality, information, and feedback (pp. 555-559). Supportive relational networks are particularly valuable in small schools where new administrators were isolated in their leadership role. Independent schools are often smaller in size and networking scope than a public school district. By understanding how challenge and support develop new school leaders, the author added to the literature focused on the value of relationship, mentorship and self-reflection for school leaders.

García-Tuñón et al. (2016) examined the factors that contributed to a successful and long-serving Jesuit high school leader. The article “Successful and Sustained Leadership: A Case Study of a Jesuit High School President” presented the findings of their single-case study. The authors utilized Bolman and Deal’s (2013) four leadership frameworks (structural, human resource, political, and symbolic) to determine the factors that contributed to the leader’s success. Bolman and Deal (2013) defined the four

leadership frames as “rooted in managerial wisdom and social science knowledge” (p. 21). The structural lens examines the design of an organization including the roles of employees, goals, and policies. The human resource lens seeks to understand an organization's human strengths, desires, and fears. The political lens looks at how organizations relate to other organizations in competition and power. Finally, the symbolic frame focuses on meaning, ritual, story, and culture (Bolman & Deal, 2013, pp. 21-22). García-Tuñón et al. conducted seven interviews for qualitative data collection. Quantitative data was collected from surveys administered to 110 members of the school community. The researchers utilized Bolman and Deal’s (1991) Leadership Orientations (Self) Survey and the Leadership Orientations (Other) Survey to collect quantitative data (García-Tuñón et al., 2016).

The researchers concluded from the surveys and interviews that the long-serving Jesuit leader frequently used all four frames (structural, human resource, political, and symbolic) in his successful career as a school leader (García-Tuñón et al., 2016). García-Tuñón et al. (2016) stated the leader’s ability to use “all four frames classified him as a unique and successful leader” (p. 618). The authors found the leader’s unique ability to access all four frames added to the leader’s longevity in the position. Four specific leadership qualities were identified in the single-case study: being a visionary, goal oriented, accessible, and adroit (García-Tuñón et al., 2016, p. 619). The long-serving school leader was driven to secure relationships with stakeholders who supported the leader’s vision for growth and success of the organization. Juhel’s (2016) research supported the theme of importance placed on securing the relationships necessary for school advancement. García-Tuñón et al. (2016) concluded the specific leadership

qualities of the Jesuit leader were also identified by both the Jesuit Secondary Educational Association and Bolman and Deal as imperative for leadership. A significant limitation of the study was that the researchers did not include data from students, alumni, and parents. As they represent major stakeholders in the school community, the omission limits the scope of the study.

The article “Scaffolding Leadership for Learning in School Education: Insights from a Factor Analysis of Research Conducted in Australian Independent Schools” presented findings from a study on leadership for learning (LfL) and its impact on student learning. LfL was a leadership program designed to prepare and support new educational leaders and extend instructional leaders in current administration positions. The researchers examined the extent to which the community orientation of schools supported LfL. The premise of the study was that school leaders who built capacity in their teachers and community enhance student learning. The article emphasized the process was most effective when the notion of *community* included a wider network than teachers alone. Authors Marsh, Waniganayake, and Gibson (2014) recognized the important role leaders have for improving learning in schools. The definition of LfL for purposes of the research was “a liberating process in which whole-school communities actively engage in purposeful interactions that nurture relationships focused on improving learning” (Marsh et al., 2014, p. 474). The authors noted many themes when examining LfL as a collective pursuit in a school. A key theme was the importance of the relational nature of leadership. Leadership, as an organizational behavior, connected constituents and fostered “community capacity, to do the ‘right things’, in order to improve student

learning” (Marsh et al., 2014, p. 476). The relationships that leaders fostered developed teacher practices and as a result improved teaching and learning.

The researchers emailed the LfL School Survey to teachers in seven independent schools in Sydney, Australia. The survey contained 93 items, which were rated using a Likert scale, four categorical and two open-ended responses (Marsh et al., 2014, p. 478). The resulting data was from 293 responses. The authors used factor analysis to reduce the number of variables in the data set simultaneously preserving a large fraction of the information (Marsh et al., 2014, p. 479). Two factors emerged from the analysis that authors wanted to highlight as important for LfL underpinnings: authoritative leadership and enhancing team effectiveness. Authoritative leaders, within the context of LfL, possessed a high degree of responsiveness, high expectations, and utilized distributed leadership by involving stakeholders in the process of improvement. Marsh et al. (2014) stated “school principals as authoritative leaders can make an important contribution to student learning through both personal characteristics and specific leadership activities” (pp. 482-483). Finally, researchers identified school team effectiveness as consistent with the understanding of LfL as an inclusive, community-wide effort. The school teams are led by “authoritative leaders who support individual and team learning by providing learning and leadership opportunities and honest feedback so that individuals are held accountable for their contribution to improving the team and student learning” (Marsh et al., 2014, p. 483). The relational approach to leadership created authentic opportunities to connect with stakeholders and ensure learning takes place in the organization.

The article “New Opportunities for Principal Leadership: Shaping School Climates for Enhanced Teacher Development” explored the strategies used by principals

in public, independent, and Catholic schools to support teacher development and build school climate for teacher learning. The author noted there is over 100 years of research to support building a healthy school climate for teacher learning (Drago-Severson, 2012). Educators know that when teachers thrive in a school environment and continually improve practice, students benefit. In the current era of challenging educational demands placed on schools, teachers, and principals, the concept of a school climate that supports teacher learning, is even more valuable. The author sought to understand how principals “meet the adaptive challenge of shaping growth-enhancing climates that support adult learning and development...as they work simultaneously to manage the competing demands of the modern principalship” (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 3). Drago-Severson (2012) described the characteristics of a healthy climate supportive of teacher learning as:

One where collegiality exists, experimentation is welcome, high expectations are evident, trust and confidence are established, real support can be found, reaching out to the knowledge bases is the norm, appreciation and recognition are part of the fabric of the culture, caring celebration and humor are palpable, involvement in decision making is part of day-to-day life, protection of what’s important is real, traditions are established and honored, and open communication is valued.

(p. 5)

To accomplish the goal of improving teaching, principals must move between multiple roles to meet the differing needs of teachers.

The researcher interviewed 25 principals with at least five years of experience. The school leaders were recognized as having created school cultures that supported teacher learning. The sources of data were in-depth, semi-structured qualitative

interviews, field notes taken from school visits, and school documents. Documents from the school included mission statements, financial statements to determine the demographics of the populations served, principals' memos, and self-study reports were used for the grounded theory approach (Drago-Severson, 2012). There were many common practices utilized by the school principals in all of the school types. An important result from the research is that "school type emerged as more important than financial resource level in terms of how principals described the ways they shape climate" (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 36). Public school principals accomplished a healthy school climate for teacher development by relying on managerial approaches. Drago-Severson (2012) stated "much like Catholic school principals, independent school leaders in this sample relied heavily on visionary leadership in cultivating a climate of teacher development" (p. 27). Catholic school leaders connected teachers with the religious mission of the school to foster the school climate, while independent school leaders connected with the shared educational values of the teachers in the school. The researcher collected data from diverse educational backgrounds, school locations, gender, race, ethnicity, school type, and student populations.

Personality of Members

Historical examinations of leadership have deep roots. Bernard Bass claimed our interest in the relationship between leader and follower has a history of over 5000 years (Bass, 1981). Literature and ancient philosophers presented the relationship between leaders and those they lead. Humphreys and Einstein (2003) stated in "Chinese classical works, leaders such as Confucius and Asoka encouraged those in power to become moral forces for the good of followers and their development" (p.87). Takala (1997) found the

roots of leadership theory, particularly charismatic leadership, to be drawn from many of Plato's ideas of managerial communication. The author stated, "From the viewpoint of leadership theme, Plato presented remarkable considerations in the following: Polis (The Republic), Politikos (The Statesman), and Nomoi (Laws) which remained the last work of Plato" (Takala, 1997, p. 9). The concept of leaders having certain traits without the consideration of action and contextual awareness dominated early leadership theories. Brown and Reilly (2009) stated about early leadership theories: "the notion that personal qualities and characteristics were the key determinants of leadership effectiveness" (p. 921). Our knowledge of the fundamental human relationship between leaders and followers has evolved over time. However, there still exists an interest in the role of a leader's personality. In particular, research considers the relationship of leader personality and transformational leadership skills, widely considered an effective leadership approach.

Transformational leadership was a common attribute of successful leaders in many research articles. Transformational leaders align the interests of an organization with its members. Wang, Wilhite, and Martino (2016) stated transformational leaders "mobilize his or her followers toward reform by an appeal to values and emotions that transcend the basic needs of the individual" (p. 469). In the article, "Understanding the Relationship Between School Leaders' Social and Emotional Competence and Their Transformational Leadership: The Importance of Self-Other Agreement" Wang et al. reported the correlation of emotional competence and transformational leadership as a function of the self-other agreement. The self-other agreement compares one's own rating in a given area with other people's rating of the same individual (Wang et al.,

2016). Essentially, it examines how accurately one can identify their personal behaviors. Other articles reviewed also identified the importance of self-reflection and self-awareness for educational leadership (Irvine & Brundrett, 2016; Juhel, 2016).

The participants in the study included 20 school administrators who took a self-administered survey to assess emotional competence and a survey to assess transformational leadership components. The study took place in a public school district in Pennsylvania. Two measurement instruments were used. Emotional competence was measured by using 33 items from the Widener Emotional Learning Scale (WELS) (Wang et al., 2016, p. 472). The researchers used 28 items from the Survey of Transformational Leadership (STL) to measure the following five transformational leadership components: idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and empowerment (Wang et al., 2016, p. 475). The researchers administered a 360-version of the WELS assessment and a 360-version of the STL assessment to 284 teachers and administrators' support staff of the administrator to whom they reported. Finally, researchers examined the consistency of self-other agreement classification between the responses on measures (WELS and STL) from the administrators and support staff.

There were many overlapping components of emotional competence and transformational leadership. Wang et al. (2016) found a strong consistency “in the extent to which the school leaders’ self-perceptions and those of their subordinates either agree or disagree for both emotional competence and transformational leadership skills” (p. 483). The results of the study add to the growing empirical research on the connection between the emotional competence of a leader and their transformational leadership skills

(Gardner & Stough, 2002; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Juhel, 2016; Leithwood & Beatty, 2007, 2009). While the study took place in a public school district, the review of empirical evidence supports transformational leadership skills are effective for successful leadership practice in different school settings. Wang et al. (2016) suggested:

... further development of emotional competence for leaders can potentially exert a positive influence in a number [of] spheres within which the school leader is likely to function both inside and outside the education setting, focusing on emotional competence, as opposed to transformational education per se, would appear to be a low-risk intervention in terms of the potential for positive behavioral change. (p. 485)

Further review of literature would be valuable to explore the correlation of emotional competence and transformational leadership skills in independent school settings.

Brown and Reilly (2009) examined the possible relationship between elements of personality and transformational leadership behaviors. Brown and Reilly (2009) stated “researchers have sought a more complete understanding of the leadership process by directing their attention beyond the observable behaviors of leaders to leader’s dispositional qualities and characteristics in an effort to expand and enlarge their understanding of the social influence process” (p. 917). The study examined the differences in elements of personality as measured by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and transformational leadership qualities as measured by the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). The study was conducted at a large North American telecommunications manufacturing facility. The researchers collected data from 408 managers and supervisors in the form of the MBTI Form K and the self-report of

transformational leadership behaviors (MLQ Leader form). Data was also collected from 2425 followers in the form of the MLQ Rater form.

Brown and Reilly (2009) found “the results clearly indicate a strong link between follower perceptions of a leader’s use of transformational leadership style and the organizationally desirable outcomes measured by the MLQ” (p. 926). Also, consistent with previous research was the outcome of leaders rating themselves as having more transformational behaviors than their followers rating the leaders (Brown & Reilly, 2009). The results found that self-reported transformational leadership behaviors were related to MBTI dimensions of extraversion and intuition. However, the follower data did not show significant relationships between any MBTI dimensions and transformational leadership behaviors. One of the limitations of the study for educational leadership research is the setting was in a manufacturing facility which might have unique contextual circumstances to educational settings.

Irvine and Brundrett (2016) provided another perspective on educational leadership skills in the article “Middle Leadership and its Challenges: A Case Study in the Secondary Independent Sector.” The focus of the research was unique to the other reviewed articles as the researchers examined middle leadership rather than senior leadership. The research was conducted in independent schools in the United Kingdom. Independent schools in the United Kingdom are similar to the United States as both are fee-paying. Independent schools in the United Kingdom educate approximately 6.5% of the student population in the United Kingdom (Irvine & Brundrett, 2016, p. 87). The researchers conducted 25 semi-structured middle leader interviews. All participants

continued to maintain teaching responsibilities, while assuming leadership responsibilities over colleagues and other school staff.

The researchers categorized the results into two categories: factors that challenged the middle leader and factors that enabled the middle leader. In identifying the factors that challenge and enable the middle leaders of independent schools, the researchers also predicted the skill set needed to overcome the challenges. According to Irvine and Brundrett (2016), a challenging factor of middle leadership was moving from managing children to managing adults (p. 88). Their previous preparation for instruction and management of a classroom had not prepared them for adult management or leadership. Many of the skills were learned on the job. Lack of leadership preparation was consistently reported from studies set in independent schools. The concept that leaders learned on the job agreed with the findings of Juhel's (2016) research reported in the article "Leading and Managing Today's Independent School: A Qualitative Analysis of the Skills and Practices of Experienced Heads of Independent Schools in the New York Metropolitan Area." The author stated independent school leaders learned many of the skills needed to be a school leader in the "school of hard knocks" (Juhel, 2016, p. 600).

It was also clear to Irvine and Brundrett (2016) that middle leaders still emphasized their professional relationship with their students, despite the specific interest in their leadership of adults (p. 88). The results of the study found that clear objectives, self-reflection, self-awareness, building trust and rapport, and seeking mentorship and advice were factors that supported middle leaders (Irvine & Brundrett, 2016, p. 90). The researchers advocated for the development of middle leadership skills in preparation for senior leadership opportunities. Juhel (2016) stated the majority of experienced heads

shared similar backgrounds of middle leadership positions prior to headship (p. 593). Irvine and Brundrett predicted the smaller environment of the independent school supported collaboration between the leaders in their study. Teacher leaders were already accustomed to assuming responsibilities outside of instruction and management of students. Irvine and Brundrett (2016) stated “Middle leadership in an independent school appears to be similar in nature to that in other educational contexts, any differences being nuanced rather than significant” (p. 91). However, it is important to note that middle leadership positions typically have instructional and curricular responsibilities, while senior leadership tends to require more overarching responsibilities.

The article “Five Years On: Leadership Challenges of an Experienced CEO” examined the leadership evolution of an Australian independent school CEO (head of school) over a five year time period. The researchers acknowledged that the environment of a private school “generates challenges for CEO principals specific to that context and different to those found in the public or government school sector” (Sarros & Sarros, 2011, p. 235). A strategic leadership framework was used to examine the experiences of the principal. The study was “based on a conceptual framework that has been theoretically informed through the research on CEO, transformational, and strategic leadership” (Sarros & Sarros, 2011, p. 239). The researchers utilized an ethnographic approach for collecting data from a daily diary during the five years the author, and subject of the study, was the CEO of the largest private girls’ school in Australia. The data entries were triangulated through respondent validation from staff and school council members. The data was then categorized as either transformational or instructional leadership strategies.

Sarros and Sarros (2011) found that the subject used transformational leadership strategies during the first three months to support change and innovation in the school. Transformational leadership strategies were used to make connections with stakeholders, facilitate buy-in for strategies increasing the fiscal management and stability, consolidate school culture, and promote school vision. The researchers found the focus shifted to more instructional strategies during the latter part of her tenure. Sarros and Sarros (2011) stated “a more consultative and intellectually stimulating approach may be more prominent in experienced leader behaviour, and is more likely to be associated with innovative outcomes” (p. 236). The CEO focused energy on increasing the performance standards of the school after she had secured staff commitment to the vision. Overall, it was evident from the study that the private school leader accessed many leadership strategies during her tenure, including relational, transformational, and instructional. The researchers found “the greater the use of all types of transformational leadership, the greater the likelihood of enhanced task performance and an innovative workplace occurring (Sarros & Sarros, 2011, p. 252). Other observations of skills included: strong communication, multitasking, staff predictions, board management, financial competence, and steadfastness of principles and vision (Sarros & Sarros, 2011). There is a strong relationship between relational skills and educational leadership. The relationships that exist between leaders and followers are vital to supporting the mission of schools.

Constancy of Purpose

Deming (1985) stated “To prepare children to manage our country, our industry, our agriculture, our services and our government. They will do the work of the future. I

wonder if anything is more important than children and their education” (p. 1). The educational leader of a school is responsible for the decisions that support the mission of the school. In 1986, Deming published a list of management points for leaders. The 14 Points for Management were meant for leaders to gain greater understanding of practices in Deming’s management system. Deming (1986) stated “The 14 points apply anywhere, to small organizations as well as to large ones, to the service industry as well as to manufacturing” (p. 23). The first point stated “Create constancy of purpose toward improvement of product and service, with the aim to become competitive and to stay in business, and to provide jobs” (Deming, 1986, p. 23). An educational leader creates constancy of purpose by developing, advocating, and sharing the mission and vision of a school with all stakeholders.

The points, and their interrelated nature, were further clarified and expanded to education in Deming’s last book, *The New Economics for Industry, Government, Education* (1994) and included the System of Profound Knowledge as a way to expand his management system. Deming (1994) described the lens of profound knowledge as necessary for a system to better understand itself and most importantly, to transform to a system of optimization. He defined profound knowledge as four parts: appreciation for a system, knowledge about variation, theory of knowledge and psychology (Deming, 1994, p. 93). All four parts of profound knowledge work together toward the optimization of a school. The understanding of a school system as interdependent parts working together must be the basis of actions taken by a school leader. Closely related to the concept of constancy of purpose is transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is

measured by the degree to which a school leader communicates, develops, encourages, and builds upon the mission of a school (Urlick & Bowers, 2014).

As discussed in chapter one, transformational leadership theory is considered one of the most widely used educational leadership theories. Many principles of constancy of purpose and transformational leadership are similar. The overall concept of influencing and motivating stakeholders in the mission of the school is a model of constancy of purpose. Constancy of purpose requires a school head to communicate and live the mission of the school. In turn, they influence and motivate students, faculty, staff, families, and the board to live the school mission.

Hauserman and Stick (2013) studied the characteristics and behaviors that teachers want from their leaders. The research took place in 77 Canadian public schools. The quantitative portion of the study utilized teacher ratings of their principals' transformational leadership qualities on the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). The MLQ is the most widely used instrument to assess nine factors composed of five transformational leadership factors, three transactional leadership factors, and one nontransactional laissez-faire leadership factor. The five transformational leadership factors are: idealized influence (attributed), idealized influence (behavior), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. The transactional leadership factors are: contingent reward leadership, management-by-exception (active), and management-by-exception (passive). Finally, laissez-faire leadership is defined as "the absence of a transaction of sorts ... in which the leader avoids making decisions, abdicates responsibility, and does not use their authority" (Antonakis et al., 2003, p. 265).

Leaders use transformational approaches for different decisions and the factors are determined by their leadership involvement.

Based on the MLQ teacher responses, principals were categorized into two groups: principals with high transformational qualities and principals with low transformational qualities (Hauserman & Stick, 2013, pp. 191-192). Ten teachers were selected for interviews in the qualitative portion of the study. The researchers interviewed five teachers with principals rated as high transformational leadership qualities and five teachers with principals rated as low transformational leadership qualities. The interviews determined which of the four dimensions of transformational leadership (idealized influence, individualized concern, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation characteristics) teachers valued the most in their principals (Hauserman & Stick, 2013, p. 192).

The researchers found teachers with highly transformational principals were enthusiastically supportive of their principals and shared many positive attributes of their principals. Hauserman and Stick (2013) described the behaviors teachers identified with transformational leadership: visibility, rapport with teachers and students, accountability, high expectations, building leadership capacity in staff, promoting teamwork, celebrating successes, used humor appropriately, trusting staff to take risks, sharing collaborative vision, and creativity with solutions (p. 196). Teachers who identified their principals with low transformational leadership qualities reported: professional growth lacked modeling, decreased receptivity to change or for new ideas, less focused on intellectual stimulation, lacked reflective practice, and less emphasis on problem solving (Hauserman & Stick, 2013, p. 195). Identifying desirable principalship attributes and skills from the

perspective of a teacher is a valuable frame of reference. The teacher frame of reference also provides feedback for leaders to become self-aware, reflect, and improve practice.

A key communication skill identified by the study was the headmaster's role in managing the brand of the school (Juhel, 2016, p. 595). The author suggested communication became an even more important skill for heads of independent schools after the 2008 recession. The recession impacted many independent schools by "a shrinking pool of applicants not only in the general population but also in the 'full-pay' segment and within demographic groups from which independent schools have historically drawn" (Juhel, 2016, p. 589). Juhel (2016) stated heads of school are responsible for communicating the school's story and vision to multiple stakeholders. The constant communication served to reaffirm the choice of school for families. Juhel reported the priority placed on communication aided heads when they needed support for long-term vision and projects. The heads identified being able to communicate in multiple paths, "verbal and in writing, formal and informal, and individual and in small groups" (Juhel, 2016, p. 595) as a necessary leadership skill in independent schools.

Level of Decision Making

Leaders of schools may use many different models and techniques to determine decisions that impact the school community. Educational leaders can make decisions alone and without any input from stakeholders. Leaders can also seek input from followers and make decisions with the information. The extent to which leaders involve their followers in decisions can be examined on a continuum. Some decisions might be made with input from followers and other decisions may be made solely by a leader despite the overall impact to an organization or school. Vroom & Yetton (1973) stated

“It is the interpersonal or social aspects of decision-making that are of most direct relevance to processes of leadership. The leader not only makes decisions but also designs, regulates, and selects social systems that make decisions” (p. 5). It is the unique intersection of leadership approaches and decision-making that makes organizational transitions of power worthy of examination.

One model to examine decision-making in organizations is the transactional leadership model. Transactional leadership theory was conceptualized by Bass in 1981 “as reward (contingent rewards) and aversive influence (management-by-exception)” (Antonakis & House, 2014, p. 746). Bass credited House’s (1971) path-goal theory for influencing his transactional leadership theory (Antonakis & House, 2014, p. 746). Transactional leadership is further clarified as involving four constructs: contingent reward leadership, management-by-exception (active), and management-by-exception (passive), and laissez-faire leadership.

Contingent reward leadership focuses on giving recognition or rewards based on meeting some goal or expectation. The reward is contingent upon completion of the goal or expectation. Contingent rewards are often used in teacher and student relationships in education. For example, when a student meets an expectation, a teacher might congratulate a student on a job well-done; if a class works hard and has good behavior, they might earn an extra recess. Often contingent rewards are thought of as extrinsic motivators rather than intrinsic motivators. Pay for performance is the typical example of contingent rewards. There are many empirical studies on contingent rewards related to job satisfaction, follower satisfaction, leadership effectiveness, and commitment to change (Anderson & Sun, 2017). Contingent rewards are extrinsic motivators and may

not motivate employees and especially teachers who are driven often by higher-order causes.

Management-by-exception (active) is the active vigilance of a leader over followers to ensure goals are met. Management-by-exception (active) is a corrective transaction and usually as effective in leadership as contingent reward or transformative leadership behaviors. Corrective actions are taken to prevent serious difficulties. Management-by-exception (active) is considered a necessary behavior to maintain safety and often used in military operations and training (Arenas, Connelly, & Williams, 2017). Management-by-exception behaviors that are active are handled immediately or as soon as possible after the deviation from the standard. The larger the institution and number of followers makes management-by-exception (active) a more difficult task for leaders supervising individual actions.

Management-by-exception (passive) is the corrective transactions occurring after something goes wrong. Management-by-exception (passive) is a passive action that is usually too late and the situation is out of control before the leader intervenes. Anderson and Sun (2017) found “research on the two MBE dimensions is rare” (p. 79). The authors cited a meta-analysis by Gang Wang, Oh, Courtright, and Colbert (2011) that found management-by-exception (passive) was more strongly negatively related to organizational-level performance (as cited in Anderson & Sun, 2017). Overuse of either of these two transactional behaviors by leaders are often interpreted by followers as micromanaging behaviors and in general create a negative workplace culture.

Laissez-faire leadership is the avoidance or absence of leadership responsibilities (Avolio & Bass, 2001). It is considered to be an inactive form of leadership; there are no

transactions in laissez-faire leadership. It is important to remember that a leader can display behaviors from both transactional and transformational leadership, including behaviors that abdicate responsibility. Leadership behaviors are on a continuum. A poor performing leader tends to use laissez-faire leadership, management-by-exception (passive), and management-by-exception (active) behaviors more often than transformational behaviors.

Transactional leadership behaviors are used by school leaders. Many of these behaviors exist for the safety of students, logistics of the school, and keeping the business of the school running each day. Transactional behavior places emphasis on a transaction that occurs and is often rewarded: a school leader sets expectations and expresses the conditions or rewards that occur if the requirements are fulfilled. Avolio and Bass (2001) stated “since the 1980’s, research has supported the idea that transformational leadership is more effective than transactional leadership in generating extra effort, commitment, and satisfaction of those led” (p. 1). Transactional leadership is a foundation for transformational leadership. Therefore, it is imperative to examine transformational leadership as the other component on the educational leadership continuum.

Transformational leadership model represents an open system approach to leadership and decision-making. Leaders involve followers, create constancy of purpose within the organization, and inspire followers to a shared understanding. It is with this buy-in from followers, a leader approaches decision-making differently. Education is a people-centered field and humanity must prevail for educational leaders with regard to decision-making (Wang, 2019). Leaders using transformational leadership decision-

making approaches are dedicated to long-term thinking about a school's future and the success of the school.

Torres, Bulkley, and Kim (2020) examined Denver's portfolio management model (PMM) and the impact of shared leadership for learning in different school contexts within the district. A portfolio management model differs from a traditional school district model that has centralized oversight and distributes the oversight to different schools depending on the type of school context. Within Denver's portfolio of schools, there are traditional public schools with centralized district oversight, semiautonomous schools known as *innovation* schools that gained autonomy from some state and district policies, and charter schools with charter management organization oversight (Torres et al., 2020). Torres et al. (2020) stated "Alongside initiatives that emphasize teacher leadership focused on instruction, PMMs emphasize school-based autonomy, theoretically giving educators in schools (including teachers) the potential to exert greater control over various kinds of decision making" (p. 2). Of interest to research on private school leadership, is the stand-alone charter school leaders that also have a similar level of autonomy in decision-making. Leaders of autonomous schools must create systems and are involved in decision-making that is often without the input of a central office or larger organizational support (Torres et al., 2020).

The researchers interviewed 53 school leaders, teacher leaders, and teachers in eight schools in the Denver district. The researchers also collected teacher surveys in 48 schools. Torres et al. (2020) found that schools varied substantially in shared decision making, but innovation schools had higher than average scores than other school models" (p. 1). The study found that the innovation schools shared a common vision with

teachers. The other types of schools that were beholden to a centralized oversight had “lower reported levels of shared decision-making” (Torres et al., 2020, p. 1). The importance of connecting the mission and vision of a school to the teachers maximizes potential for teacher buy-in and ultimately supports constancy of purpose in the school.

Thomas and Lacey (2016) published the results of a qualitative study that examined the dual leadership role of charter school leaders that were both founders of the charter and lead administrators. The charter schools were independent operations, similar to a small business, rather than run by a charter management organization that operates multiple schools. The researchers sought to examine the day-to-day experiences of this unique role of founder-administrator school leaders in the phenomenological study. Data was collected from four founder-administrators in the form of in-depth interviews. Interview data was analyzed for themes and two core categories emerged: leaders as managers and leaders as educators. Charter school “administrators must be qualified to generate, manage, and balance the business and financial services and academic programming interchangeable so as not to put the organization at risk for school failure” (Thomas & Lacey, 2016, p. 1597). Two limitations of the study were the limited geographical location and the small number of interviewees.

The responsibilities of leaders as managers were: real estate decisions, creating a board of directors, recruitment of students, compliance to state and federal mandates, fundraising, accounting, hiring teachers and staff, and substitute teaching. Thomas and Lacey (2016) stated “how a leader manages the school is contingent upon experience and skill level, and an ability to secure the money needed to operate the system” (p. 1612). It is interesting to note the researchers reported that charter school founders-administrators

did not feel prepared for the endeavor of starting a school. The participants felt they learned on the job and not from training or personal educational background. This concept of learning on the job was consistent with many studies that occurred in autonomous school contexts.

Juhel (2016) published the results of a study on independent school heads in the article “Leading and Managing Today’s Independent School: A Qualitative Analysis of the Skills and Practices of Experienced Heads of Independent Schools in the New York Metropolitan Area.” The researcher interviewed 16 heads of school with experience of at least 10 years or more in the same school. All of the schools were members of the New York State Association of Independent Schools. Juhel (2016) interviewed the heads of school to determine the “leadership and management practices they found most effective in helping them fulfill these responsibilities” (p. 593). Another interview question focused on identifying experiences that served as the foundations for the required leadership skills. Finally, interview questions sought to understand the effects of the 2008 recession on leadership practice (Juhel, 2016).

Juhel (2016) grouped the results of the interviews into four skill categories: team management skills, relational skills, board management skills, and communication skills. The study found nearly all participants believed a major responsibility was overseeing the daily operations (Juhel, 2016, p. 594). Despite having an administrative team, heads reported their role was still heavily focused on operations and management. Some of the operational and managerial skills identified were viewed as fundamental to all independent schools, despite different student population sizes, endowments, and grade levels. Managerial tasks that were found to be valuable to successful and sustained

independent school leadership included: delegating tasks, terminating people, being predictable, being transparent about processes, setting aside one's personal biases, listening, and building an effective administrative team (Juhel, 2016, p. 596). As responsibilities have increased for school leaders over the last decades, school leaders are seeking support and open system approaches to engage all stakeholders in their decisions.

Conclusion

It is important to consider school contexts because the educational leader adjusts their leadership to meet the needs of the students and teachers of the school (Urick & Bowers, 2014). A common theme in the minimal research in independent school settings indicated leaders learned their skill set on the job rather than in leadership development or training. The exact reason for the lack of preparation was unclear from the review of literature. Did leaders lack the leadership skills necessary to lead independent schools or were they unprepared to lead any type of school? The independent school environment may require knowledgeable leaders in the areas of transformational leadership skills, management skills, relational skills, and instructional leadership skills that are different from other school contexts. Sarros and Sarros (2011) found "specialist training in financial and strategic skills is an overlooked but critical aspect of the school principal's role, and that more research and development in these skills is long overdue" (p. 254). Interpreting the skills and knowledge through lenses of the full-range leadership theory could provide valuable information for leadership training specific to independent school leaders seeking professional development.

The research states that the size (number of students, staff, and faculty) of an organization does not have a significant impact on the leadership practices of school

leaders. However, the size of a school may impact the level of autonomy surrounding decision-making that a leader might have within the context of their school. The NPBEA (2015) Professional Standards for Educational Leaders addressing decision-making in schools are: (a) Standard 4, modeling curriculum, instruction and assessment; and (b) Standard 9, modeling operations and management. The research states more autonomous schools that are not beholden to a centralized office have greater decision-making power to make school choices. Skills related to management were also important for leadership in all schools, with independent school leaders stating it was central to their daily responsibilities (Juhel, 2016). More research is necessary to determine if a relationship exists between the size of a school and the level of autonomy of school leaders.

Independent schools are by definition autonomous schools and I believe my research will support that independent school leaders require advanced decision-making skills, due to the additional responsibilities and authority each leader possesses.

It is evident from the literature that some leadership skills are universally effective in all school contexts. Leaders practicing constancy of purpose and transformational leadership skills were evident in public, charter, and private schools. A leader's ability to focus on vision, self-reflection, and articulation of mission impacts all school communities. The review of research cited the importance of leaders possessing relational skills. The relationship between public school leaders and boards of education and private school heads and boards of trustees impact the effectiveness of a school leader. The NPBEA (2015) stated about the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, "The Standards recognize the central importance of human relationships not

only in leadership work but in teacher and student learning” (p. 3). The field of education is driven by relationships with students, teachers, leaders, and community.

The NPBEA (2015) Standards that address relational leadership skills are: (a) Standard 5, modeling community of care and support for students; (b) Standard 8, modeling meaningful engagement of families and community; and (c) Standard 7, modeling professional community for teachers and staff. The NPBEA Standards that address constancy of purpose are: (a) Standard 1, modeling mission, vision, and core values; (b) Standard 2, modeling ethics and professional norms; (c) Standard 3, modeling equity and cultural responsiveness; and (d) Standard 10, modeling school improvement. The research review suggested that relational skills and constancy of purpose are essential to effective leadership in all school types.

Finally, the research review examined how personality might impact leadership behaviors or influence one’s leadership approach. Research supports the concept that self-awareness and self-reflection practices are important for transformational leadership and educational leaders (Irvine & Brundrett, 2016; Juhel, 2016; Wang et al., 2016). There is a strong relationship between emotional competence and transformational leadership behaviors. The NPBEA Standards do not adequately cover the area of emotional competence or personality of leaders. Perhaps, in the current era of self-care interest and mental health awareness, the future Standards will address the need for leaders to gain emotional competence and develop their personal awareness and reflection. Research involving the intersection of the social science fields and educational leadership fields could contribute to the evolving literature on these topics.

The majority of research on educational leadership has taken place in public school settings. As the majority of students in the United States attend public schools, research set in public schools is paramount. There is a gap in the research literature on the leadership skill set needed to manage and lead independent schools. I plan to explore and uncover the leadership behaviors and skills needed for independent school leaders.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Overview

Through a phenomenological lens, the study examined the skills utilized by independent school leaders and the lived experience of the leaders. As headships transition in many schools across the country, it will be imperative to prepare future leaders for leadership skills that are specific to independent schools. Factors such as increased competition with other schools, increased economic uncertainty, increased headship turnover, and evolving models of educating students emerge as further barriers to the survival of independent schools. Leaders will need to be effective immediately upon hiring. The small amount of existing research set in independent schools makes preparing and even understanding what skills are needed by these school leaders challenging. This study used qualitative methods of interviews to gain a rich description of the journey of an independent school leader as well as insight into the skills needed to lead and manage an independent school. The research questions were: what are the leadership skills needed to lead independent schools and what is the experience of independent school leaders?

Research Design

Phenomenological Approach

Phenomenology is a method aimed at recording a lived experience by focusing on the perspective of a participant. The researcher collects data from participants and develops a descriptive essence of the experience (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenology has two branches: interpretive method and descriptive. The researcher arranges an interview,

collects data, and interprets the personal experience by developing themes and codes. During interviews and data analysis, philosophical and epistemological assumptions are considered to acknowledge the influence of researcher biases with regard to personal experience, race, gender, and/or ethnicity. Creswell (2007) found that phenomenology ends with a descriptive passage that discusses the essence of the experience for individuals incorporating what and how they have experienced phenomena.

Philosophical Assumptions

Philosophically, van Manen (1960) described phenomenology as the study of the lived experiences of a person, or the concept of the phenomenon. Epistemologically, phenomenology has different modes of consciousness such as love, hate, desire, present, and wonder (Husserl, 1967). Phenomenology has become popular in social and health sciences, where human experiences are a major contribution to collect data for research. In qualitative research, van Manen (1960) stated researchers use the phenomenological method to identify the phenomenon of human experience as an object. Moustakas (1994) described philosophical assumption as the development of descriptions of the essences of experiences, not explanations or analyses. Historically, there are two main types of phenomenology: descriptive phenomenology developed by Edmund Husserl and interpretive phenomenology developed by Martin Heidegger (Connelly, 2010).

Phenomenological research is a direct interaction between a researcher and a participant. The researcher interrogates and uncovers the truth by developing broad and open-ended questions. Interviews with the participants are transcribed and individual experiences examined through the researcher's developed codes. Husserl (1970)

explained that in the phenomenological approach, the researcher needs to suspend all judgments about what is real, and this suspension is called *epoche* or *bracketing*.

Husserl (1970) described the process of reduction in two phases: phenomenological and transcendental. Phenomenological reduction is an experience of what is remembered and transcendental reduction is a condition of experience (Creswell, 2007). Another type of reduction is eidetic which focuses on the properties and essential nature or essence of an object and acts of consciousness (Husserl, 1967). The researcher focuses on the experience of the participants and brackets their own imagistic intuition.

Interpretive phenomenology is meant to describe, understand, and interpret participants' experiences. Reed and Ground (1997) stated that *dasein* [being-in-the-world] as a situation in which things occurred. Descriptive phenomenology describes intentional consciousness. Researchers use the descriptive phenomenology method with brackets to capture the essence of the phenomenon. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) described descriptive phenomenology as a correlation of the *noema* [the what] and the *noesis* [the how] of experience.

In qualitative research, phenomenology gives an opportunity for participants to express their lived experience, and sometimes researchers include their bias, as a personal experience, to collect data. Phenomenology is a method of giving a voice to the real lived experience of participants. Researchers use phenomenology to study the experience of a special group.

Dissertation Approach

I used a hermeneutic phenomenology framework and methodology to study the lived experiences of independent school leaders. My goal was to uncover the skills used

by these leaders in the context of independent schools. Due to the relatively small population of independent school leaders, I aimed to collect data from semi-structured in-depth interviews with three to five participants. The data collection process was collaborative and allowed for my better understanding of independent school leadership through the participants. Hermeneutic phenomenology supports an interpretive paradigm to understand my participants' behaviors and the meaning of that behavior. Ultimately, it provided a method for capturing the essence of independent school leadership.

Researcher Role

The purpose of this study was to gain knowledge about the skills and lived experience of an independent school leader. A phenomenological approach is best suited to questions that seek to describe the experiences of people as they relate to a specific phenomenon. These questions do not seek to test a theory or confirm a hypothesis, rather describe and interpret an experience in order to draw conclusions (Flowerday & Schraw, 2000 p. 635). While this approach recognizes that a researcher's own experiences and perspectives will impact his/her perception, it is designed for researchers to "keep suspended everything they know and think about the phenomenon in question" (Sadala & Adorno, 2002, p. 291). Phenomenological research questions seek to tell others' stories, from their perspectives, to capture a collective reality instead of building an absolute or universal truth.

I used multiple lenses to interpret the data collected including the themes emerging from the literature review, the theoretical framework, and a phenomenological approach to the research in an effort to describe the phenomenon of independent school leadership and the skills associated with headship. Phenomenology as a philosophy for

this study is appropriate because I have experience as an independent school leader that informs my interpretation of the participant's experience. Authors Savin-Baden and Major (2013) stated "Many phenomenologists share the belief that a researcher's experience cannot be untangled from the participant experience; so researchers should consider and bracket their experiences" (p. 26). My intention was to uncover the essence of the phenomenon of independent school leadership. I utilized a hermeneutic phenomenological research approach, remaining open to new concepts to emerge during the exploration. The themes that emerged from the data and the review of literature became important for interpretation and ultimately reflection.

Participants

I invited approximately ten current and former independent school leaders with over five years of experience to participate in my study. I used the NAIS directory of schools, focusing on identifying schools and heads of schools in Michigan and the Midwest region. In addition, I used snowball sampling to connect with additional participants through recommendations through people engaged in the field. I contacted potential participants via email and present the invited leaders with information about the study, potential time commitment for the interviews, and potential interview dates and time. All participants were provided with an informed consent form. This created four participants for the study.

Participant One

Participant One was a lively and enthusiastic retired head of school. He spent 40 years in education. He became a music teacher and later added a master's degree in educational administration. He began a Ph.D. program at the university where he was

employed. Later, he felt it wasn't a fit for him and he left the program. Participant One started his career as a teacher, assistant principal, and athletic director in public schools. Of his assistant principalship in the public school system, the participant stated *"I hated it. They hated me and I left after one year."* During a position directing a music organization, he visited an independent school with a group of students. The school took notice of his leadership with students and offered him a position as the director of admissions. He declined, and they followed with a head of school offer which he accepted and began his 25 year career as head of school in multiple independent schools.

Participant Two

Participant Two presented as an experienced school head with substantial knowledge of leadership qualities. She was transitioning to another head of school position and despite her professional time being scarce and valuable, her interview was forthright and intelligent. She has both a music performance and English literature background, followed by a master's degree and terminal degree in musicology. The participant has spent the last 36 years in education with 34 years in leadership roles including as an assistant head of school and the last 18 years as head of school in two different schools. Of her unusual path from the performing arts to independent school leadership, she stated *"I think the best kept secret honestly around leadership in a lot of ways is especially the arts and the role of performance and also the focus or whatever it takes to do something at a very high level. And you know, just with performance, if you really think about it, it's make it or break it every time you step on stage. There's a lot of high stakes on one hand and a lot of preparation on the other."* She currently serves in her third independent school leadership position.

Participant Three

Participant Three was engaging and authentic during the interview. He decided to become a teacher after endeavoring a career as a professional athlete. His love for teaching the sport and reading books fostered the idea he might be a teacher. His self-described uneventful high school experience in a large public school district had not prepared him for his transition in higher academia upon his arrival as a freshman to a top ranked university. He described understanding he knew there had to be a better way to learn even at that young age. According to the participant, after enrolling in a community college, *“Being a student there and an athlete changed my life. That’s the first time I actually became a student and it was because I had the attention of adults.”* The later addition of a master’s degree from a renowned school for teachers contributed to the most *“significant educational experience”* for the current head of school. Participant Three taught and coached in independent schools. He has held leadership roles for 25 years in independent schools including: residential director, academic dean, dean of students, dean of faculty, head of upper school, and head of school.

Participant Four

Participant Four had the longest spanning educational career of the participants. Although retired, her genuine love for the field of education, students, and teachers was palpable in her interview responses. Participant Four holds both undergraduate and master’s degrees in education. She spent her early career in the classroom with additional time in supportive roles that focused on reading and learning disabilities. The participant spent her first three years in public schools as a teacher. Followed by supportive roles for student learning in an independent school for an additional nine

years. She completed her career in education serving as an independent school leader for 35 years.

Data Collection Instruments

I obtained IRB approval through Oakland University to conduct the study. The data collection methods for this study consisted of one or two in-depth semi-structured interviews for each participant. The interview protocol was created with semi-structured questions that attempted to solicit the lived experience of their leadership. The goal for the interview was to reconstruct details and gather stories from their experience using a collaborative approach to evoke as complete a description of the essence of being an independent school leader as possible. I wanted to gain a full description of the participants' thoughts, feelings, images, sensations, and memories along with a description of the situation in which the experience occurred. I developed the questions myself. The questions were reviewed with my dissertation committee and with people who are knowledgeable to give me feedback. If needed, I used the follow-up interview to clarify ideas and questions, but mostly with the goal of meaning making of the previous stories and experiences (Seidman, 2019). The interview protocol can be found in Appendix C (p. 111).

Demographic Questions

1. How long have you been a school leader in independent schools?
2. Were you in a public school leadership position?
3. How long have you been in your current position?
4. Tell me about your educational experience. (Did you get any training or degree work in Educational Administration?)

Questions

1. Can you describe your career path to your current position as a school leader?
2. Tell me about the activities you do/did as a private school leader.
3. Can you describe your leadership skills and practices that you use/used as a private school leader?
4. What leadership challenges have you faced? Can you give me a specific example? Did you talk to anyone about what was going on?
5. Tell me about how you continue to improve in your duties as a school leader.
6. What do you think are defining characteristics of private school leadership?
7. Can you tell me an experience/story that you think really gets at what being a private school leader is like?
8. If you could improve your leadership practice or skills, what areas would you improve and why?
9. How would you advise new heads in independent schools?
10. Is there anything else you feel is important to understanding the experience of independent school leaders?

Data Collection Procedures

The participants received the interview protocol including the questions prior to the first interview. The participant interviews took place virtually and were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The first interviews were approximately one hour long and the follow-up interview (if needed) was approximately 30 minutes long. During the transcription, I attempted to be thoughtful about including punctuation that reflected voice inflection and added clarity. I provided the participants with a copy of the

transcript for review and to ensure that I accurately represented the experience of independent school leadership for this leader. The interviews were conducted on Zoom. The audio of the interviews were recorded via Zoom with another backup audio recorder. The files were stored on my password protected computer in a password protected file. The estimated time of completion for each participant was two months.

Analysis

I familiarized myself with the data by reading it over in its entirety. Since the study was targeting the specific lived experience of an independent school leader, I used deductive coding with a set of a priori codes that were based on the NPBEA (2015) Professional Standards for Educational Leaders. I examined significant statements from the interview transcripts of the independent school leaders. I grouped those significant statements into larger emergent a priori codes. Phenomenology allows for data into a single structure or many structures. The results communicate the experience of the participant. I made notes on possible inferences from data in the margins of the transcripts. I also made notes of words in context that were emergent. I looked for words in context that relate to the categories already established as the dimensions of full-range leadership theory. Table 3.1 summarizes the set of a priori codes with emergent themes and subthemes for this study. Each additional interview provided an opportunity to examine common connections among the interview transcripts of independent school leaders. I also examined the connections to the literature on the subject, further triangulating the emergent themes.

As I read and highlight keywords and phrases that were interesting, it was important to understand the lens with which I found myself interacting with the data. I

am an independent school leader and have experiences that are similar to the phenomenon I am attempting to understand. I bracketed my personal experiences from the experiences of my participants. Seidman (2019) stated “The reason an interviewer spends so much time talking to participants is to find out what their experience is and the meaning they make of it, and then to make connections among the experiences of people who share the same structure” (p. 135). Phenomenology allows for the researcher to write rich descriptions based on the participant’s experience of the phenomenon. The results communicated independent school leadership phenomena and the skills used by the leaders.

Table 3.1 Summary of A Priori Codes and Themes

A priori Codes with Themes and Subthemes

Standard (a priori themes)	Contextual Theme	Subtheme
Standard 1: Mission, vision, core values	Constancy of purpose	transformational leadership; religious leader; complete engagement; inclusive; vision building; connection; connection to the mission; creativity
	Relational approach	inclusive; community; meaningful engagement; transformational leadership; difference public and independent school; decision making; understanding; intuition, accessible; skill sets; religious/spiritual leader
	Level of decision making	autonomy; freedom to make choices; creativity
Standard 2: Ethics and professional norms	Constancy of purpose	responsibility to educate stakeholders; responsibility to students; decision making
	Relational approach	leadership skills; communication; empathy
	Personality	“It’s just who I am.”
Standard 3: Equity and cultural responsiveness	Constancy of purpose	societal pressures and changes; empathy; responsibilities; headship turnover
Standard 4: Curriculum, instruction, and assessment	Constancy of purpose	distributed leadership; team building; public and independent schools
	Level of decision making	autonomy; quickly change curriculum and instruction course
Standard 5: Community of care and support for students	Level of decision making	do what is right for students; responsibility; autonomy; “the flexibility and ability to make it work”
	Personality	courage
Standard 6: Professional capacity of school personnel	Constancy of purpose	improvement; self-examination; mentorship; changing with the times; curriculum
	Level of decision making	distributed leadership; hiring to complement your skill set; teams; letting people go

Table 3.1 - Continued

Standard (a priori themes)	Contextual Theme	Subtheme
Standard 7: Professional community for teachers and staff	Relational skills	team building, school improvement; curriculum
Standard 8: Meaningful engagement of community and families	Constancy of purpose	different communities have different needs; economic drivers in community
	Relational skills	visibility for enrollment and endowment
Standard 9: Operations and management	Constancy of purpose	financial; endowment; fund raising; enrollment; oath to institution; doing what is right for the school; daily activities
	Relational skills	visibility; community representation; committees
Standard 10: School Improvement	Constancy of purpose	increasing enrollment; improving curriculum; financial
	Personality	fit to school's needs
Leadership Skills	Constancy of purpose	commitment; difficult decisions; weighing the options; school improvement; mission driven; communication skills; strategic planning; building capacity within faculty; overcoming challenges
	Personality	creativity; problem solver; intuition; courage; loyalty; charismatic leadership; personal drive; communication skills; matching the needs of school to leader; self-care

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to gain knowledge about the skills and lived experience of four independent school leaders. The interview protocol is located in Appendix C (p. 111). The interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim. I added punctuation for clarity. I provided the participant with a copy of the transcript for review and to ensure that I had accurately represented the experience of independent school leadership for this leader. Participants could decide to make corrections or clarify their responses.

I utilized multiple lenses to interpret the interview data including the themes emerging from the literature review, the theoretical framework, and a phenomenological approach to the research in an effort to describe the phenomenon of independent school leadership and the skills associated with headship. My intention was to uncover the essence of the phenomenon of independent school leadership. I utilized a hermeneutic phenomenological research approach, remaining open to new concepts to emerge during the exploration. The themes that emerged from the data and the review of literature became important for interpretation and ultimately reflection.

As described in chapter three, the study focused on four participants that all were experienced leaders of independent schools. Each participant had either previously served or were currently serving as a head of school. Two of the participants served as teachers in public schools. One of the participants also served in leadership roles in the public school system before transitioning to leadership roles in independent schools.

Two participants spent their entire educational careers in independent schools. All participants had educational leadership experience for between 25 to 35 years.

Four themes that emerged during the coding process of the recorded interview data of the lived experiences of being an independent school leader were:

- constancy of purpose
- relational
- personality
- level of decision making

These themes and the related subthemes connect to the review of literature on educational leadership and full-range leadership theory.

Theme One: Constancy of Purpose

“I thought about the school, every day. We lived on campus. We walked the grounds after hours.” (Participant One)

Deming’s (1986) first point of his 14 points for Management was to create constancy of purpose toward improvement of product or service. The theme was present in all participant responses. All participants talked about the responsibility and commitment to the overall mission and vision of the school they lead. Most participants described connection to mission and the constancy of purpose as the bedrock of their decisions, especially the most challenging aspects of independent school leadership. Despite having difficult conversations or making difficult decisions regarding students, parents, and faculty, independent school leaders understood that as Participant Three stated, *“my obligation is to the school.”* An educational leader creates constancy of purpose by developing, advocating, and sharing the mission and vision of a school with

all stakeholders. This took place in the form of advancement, school improvement, and transformational leadership.

Advancement

All participants described the importance of advancing the school in their daily work. Whether the goal of advancement is increasing enrollment, endowment, or strategic planning, the head of the school is responsible for advancing the school. Participant Four stated, *“I think independent school leadership requires a great deal more attention to fundraising, and sustainability, keeping their population.”* This quote reveals that independent school leaders are uniquely responsible for the furtherance of their schools. Participant Two reflected on the role of advancement in her last headship. She stated:

I felt like I spent 75% or 80% of my day in advancement. I felt like I was always in campaign mode. And, little by little, throughout the course of my career, I mean really, I spend more time in finance and advancement than I really do, in many ways, with the kids or with teaching and learning, which is really a bummer. I mean you know it's one of the reasons I'm really excited about this new job.

She also felt understanding families in the community one serves was critical toward school advancement. She expanded on that concept by stating about economic foundations of communities, *“What economically are the drivers within that community? Is it real estate, is it tech, is it universities and research, because each one of those brings different opportunities but different attitudes toward education.”* Understanding the

economic foundations of the community serving the school helped to target advancement efforts directly to those drivers and demographics.

All participants expressed the notion that advancing the school through financial security was a priority. Participant Three also shared the sentiment that being with students was often overshadowed by the duties of advancement and operations and that genuine feeling of yearning to be with students. He stated about his daily schedule:

Two hours should be spent making phone calls and writing letters, an hour and a half should be spent having a lunch, another hour and a half, two hours doing administrative stuff with the team and whatever. I don't know. My days are really different and then I think there are times when my days are just with kids because I need to do that and the school needs me to do that.

Despite the pressures of fundraising and advancement for their schools, the leaders learned how to be visible in their professional and community circles.

Most participants seemed to view fundraising as a necessary part of their position but perhaps there was a feeling that it didn't come easily. However, Participant One was verbally the most enthusiastic about his financial pursuits for the schools he led. He shared about the transformation he underwent to gain comfort in asking for donations and endowment for his schools. He stated of his success, "*I was there 15 years and I took their endowment from 32 million to 92 million and I took their enrollment from 660 to 990. That's what I do.*" When questioned further about fundraising he shared:

In fundraising, I worked on those kind of people who had a great experience at their school and I learned that fundraising really wasn't hard. That, if I come up to you, and say 'I've got kids at our school that are long on brains and short on

cash and there's one special kid I want you to help. And I'd like you to give a gift to create a scholarship that she will always be able to go there and the cost of that is \$100,000' and then you do not say another word for the longest 14 seconds of your life.

When you read this quote it is clear that fundraising and advancement were at the forefront of his leadership skills and necessary for meeting the long term goals of the school. He certainly set the scene of his experience leading two independent schools to improved financial health.

School Improvement

Constancy of purpose for school improvement was at the forefront of all the participants' stories. They were hired by a board to make changes in the school. Two participants spoke openly about the dynamic of the transition from one head to the following head and how “*who you follow matters,*” as Participant One shared. Participant Three continued to explain that boards generally tend to hire the opposite skills of their previous head of school. In his example of this practice, he stated he always followed “*stuffy ivy league guys*” and he expressed clear understanding of his skills and the importance of matching the needs of the school with the new leader's capabilities. Participant Two also discussed the changing needs of a school and how a head must not only have one set of skills they offer a school but must develop and adapt to the changing needs of a school. She said:

I don't think if you're just doing the job well that it's the kind of thing that you can just put on autopilot. I mean depending on who you surround yourself with and their skill sets, there are things that become repetitive and easier for sure, but you

know society keeps changing and also the needs of the school, if you're honest about them, change.

Participant One used feedback from families that left the school after his first year to guide his school improvement plans for 10 years.

It seemed the most attention given by a head to curriculum and instruction was at the beginning of a headship. Participant Two made immediate curriculum and instruction changes at the beginning of her 18 year headship. She shared that at the first faculty meeting as the new head of school, she caused a stir when she asked each teacher for their class syllabus. When walking on campus the next morning, a teacher asked her if her ears were ringing last night. The teachers weren't previously required to write them. She shared, *"within that first year, it became very clear what I was going to need to do and I needed a dean of faculty to come in and help me with the teaching and learning."*

Participant Three shared about school improvement and making immediate improvement as a new head:

And I came back the first faculty meeting [and] I said I know new heads aren't supposed to make big changes, but I'm not a new head. This is going to change. Here's what I experienced; I think it's great. I want us to consider it. You are the academic leaders of the school but I'm telling you, we cannot do this. Why are we teaching in 1950s model and we changed it. I mean, the next year we opened up with a completely different model that would have taken years at any other kind of institution. So, I think as an independent school leader, to be able to affect that kind of change, but also, to do it quickly and to do it together.

This statement suggests that although the head of school was reluctant to make immediate changes to curriculum and instruction, he made the decision to enact changes quickly for the benefit of the school. The freedom and ability to make changes quickly in independent schools was a consistent theme in the review of literature, as well as interview data.

Curriculum and instruction are key components to school improvement and therefore constancy of purpose. Participant Four seemed to be mostly connected to curriculum and instruction improvement. She shared it was daily work for her during her leadership:

Daily working with teachers, supporting them, helping them understand what is going on with students in their class, listening to them describe what difficulty they are having, what students are having difficulty and then finding strategies for getting through that blocked moment. Whether it is in teaching or in learning, it is all the same to me.

Her desire to teach and be involved in both student and faculty development was clear and remained at the forefront of her educational leadership career spanning many decades.

Transformational Leadership

One important part of the theme of constancy of purpose is transformational leadership. Transformational leaders are able to create intellectually stimulating environments, “keep the vision alive” (Juhel, 2016, p. 595), consider all constituents, inspire and motivate, and influence their schools. Participant Two shared the importance of living the mission:

Independent school leaders really have to be able to live under mission and understand how important it is to move a mission forward. It's like a Hippocratic Oath. I think that an independent school leader is really taking a look at that mission of the school and trying to figure out how it not only resonates for them personally, but what it means for the community at large and that's probably the one thing that differentiates independent schools from public schools, charter schools. The same comments would apply for a religious school leader.

I found this particularly fitting because all the participants discussed aspects of their positions to being similar to a religious leader. Independent school leaders are hired to transform their schools. Participant One stated that after he left his first head of school position his former assistant commented to him, “*well, we've had an evangelist and now we probably need a pastor.*” His charisma and stories were still engaging 20 years after his retirement from education. Participant Three stated, “*I'm at my best when I am in front of people and I'm that sort of spiritual leader. You know I think our schools need that more than other schools.*” He understood his strongest approach to leadership was to inspire, influence, and transform.

Constancy of purpose was the most important theme that emerged from the interviews. School leaders were driven to connect to the mission of their schools and carry out decisions and actions that supported this mission. The areas of leadership that were most influenced by this connection to their purpose were: advancement, school improvement, and transformational leadership.

Theme Two: Relational Approach

“I saw an exercise once that asked a head of school to rank five groups in order: board, parents, students, faculty, alumni.” (Participant One)

Independent school leaders are responsible for purposeful and continuous interactions with the stakeholders of the school system. These relational interactions between the head, board, parents, students, faculty and alumni present unique challenges that require constant attention of school heads. At the same time, the fostering of these relationships within an open system, can be powerful drivers for school heads to accomplish goals. As Participant One stated his mode of accomplishing plans was to *“Ask people to do things in the best possible way and it seemed to work.”* And these school heads asked many things of many people. The areas of school headship that required the highest level of relational skills were board of trustees, community, and challenges.

Board of Trustees

Independent schools are run by a board of trustees holding the school in trust. They are responsible for hiring the head of school. Participant Three stated about the expectations of an independent school leader:

So, I think that's one of the distinguishing factors of being an independent school leader...is just managing the board. It is a nonprofit...the board has one employee. An independent school head has to lead their institution.... So, at the end of the day, I serve at the pleasure of the board, so if I don't lead them well then I'm going to get into trouble. So, balancing paying attention to them, paying attention to the school.

The “balance” Participant Three speaks of is easier said than done. The head of school understands the systems of the school, child development, and faculty. Communicating the educational elements to a board can be challenging. Participant One so keenly stated, *“You’ve got to know who you are dancing with.”* He shared the importance of a board’s supportive role in the success of a school head. The head of school is the only employee of the board and the head implements the policies that are set by the board. The relationship between a board and head is critical to school sustainability.

Community

Communities are at the heart of independent school leadership. Whether connecting to the school community, greater community setting, or professional community, independent school leaders form relationships with many community members. Consideration for and connection to students were expressed by all participants to be at their core value system. The most experienced educational leader, Participant Four shared, *“I’ve always stayed number one very close to students. Never letting myself get too far away from interacting, supporting, and learning about children and their development and their learning process.”* Participant Two was transitioning to a new headship and was looking forward to the possibility of spending more time with students at the new school. She asked to teach a class during her first year but ultimately was advised against it due to concerns for her schedule. Participant One shared the importance of the open system for relationship driven leadership at independent schools:

The independent school is much more inclusive, the public school is not. It's more of a hierarchy and...it's more dictatorial.... I believe the independent school has

to be much more inclusive and get more people involved and dealing with success.

Involving all stakeholders in the success of the organization is a hallmark of transformational leadership.

Challenges

Challenges accompany human interactions. All four participants shared that the humanness of their positions must remain at the forefront of their decisions.

Understanding the humanness of their relational interactions, helped leaders to gain perspective and reconciliation for their actions. Participant Three explained the challenges of being *everything* for the stakeholders in independent schools. He stated:

We're not career administrators. There is an expectation, and I think it's a fair one and I don't think it's an unrealistic one, but it's sometimes a challenge, we have to be everything. We have to be a priest, we have to be a poet, we have to be a pedagogue, we have to be a psychologist. The pastoral part of this job is significant. But then we also have to be, you know, be the leading pedagogue and latest most current methodology. And then when a kid dies, we have to stand up and eulogize. So, I think there is more of an expectation that I see every kid and every faculty member walk by. A superintendent does not see everybody. So, there is an expectation that I am present in everybody's lives and it's accessible and available, but I can't be.

Careful consideration and balancing the needs of stakeholders presented considerable challenge to the heads. They coped with this tremendous responsibility by support from family members and professional colleagues.

Two of the four participants mentioned the role of their spouses and families in providing the support they needed to meet the demands of headship. Participant One and his family lived on campus at a boarding school. He spoke of walking the campus at night with his family and that his family was integrated into the school. Participant Two stated, *“Your whole family is really on board and understands the sacrifice that's going to be made. Not all my peers have had that kind of support.”* This familial support helped the female head to overcome significant obstacles. She described some of the challenges:

They're different challenges in different phases of my career. So honestly, you know, being female has always been a challenge.... You know when you are raising money my male counterparts were on the golf course or in a deer stand. That's probably not a place I'm going to be on a Friday afternoon. You know earlier in my career just even having a seat at the table was a pretty big deal and then really being heard and valued for whatever I was bringing to the table. I felt like I always had to over perform like I had to figure out the problem, solve the problem, and deliver it before it was even served up. You know, I was driven and I'm extremely competitive mainly with myself and you know, but, and unfortunately, I'm a workaholic. I mean I am, and it's cost me a lot.

This statement reflects the considerable challenge the school head faced during her career and the personal sacrifice to lead her schools. Participant Three also shared the feeling of connection to a boarding school when his life was immersed in the campus culture of the school. He shared he leaned heavily on his colleagues at other boarding schools for support. He stated:

I think mostly it was collegiality. We're part of [an] eight school association and particularly the head of [another school] and I were very close and still are, and you know, being able to get on the phone and talk with him and other heads of schools and to be able to scream and yell, cry.

The statement was a testament to the great personal cost of headship and supports the notion that supportive networks are necessary to successful and long headships.

Participant Four shared her greatest challenges during her headship. She stated:

In my opinion leadership challenges are always people: people's own personal development, whether it is teachers or students or parents or the world.

Generally, the challenges that I remember are mostly you know reactionary people reacting and then you having to challenge yourself through that and give guidance as well as stand your ground, hold up to your principles. Holding your principles is as critical almost as the people issues.

She expressed that courage was gained in her headship as she acquired experience and self-reflection. Participant Three also found ways to navigate the challenges with experience and wisdom. He shared about his learning to manage and balance the relational challenges he experiences:

I don't worry about the wrong things. I don't get wrapped up in worrying about things that maybe I worried about 20 years ago.... Yeah this is gonna be a hard conversation with whoever and yes, we're going to treat you humanely and we're going to value you for your humanness. But the institution needs to do this. And I am much better at just not worrying so much about that and it's what we get paid to do.... I don't carry it home with me like I used to.

The participants spent time joining and leading professional committees and organizations to advance their school's presence in the community, increase knowledge, mentor other leaders, and access supportive colleagues. Participant Three shared:

And I knew right away that the board hired me to do this. I need to get out in the community and establish the school like a viable, important institution, that's not in an ivory tower, on top of the hill.

Many of the participants joined professional organizations that supported their learning. Collegiality provided support to the school heads, both personally and professionally.

Participant Two stated:

You can't think about things as being one and done, you know it's this very sort of repetitive kind of thing. I think for me personally it's understanding sort of what I have needed to either remain fresh or interested or having the resources to know where to go. So, there were a couple of associations that played really largely in my peer set and which was a really great way for me to learn.

She continued that professional organizations provided reassurance and support knowing they were all experiencing similar challenges and learning together how to overcome such difficulties. She shared, “*you could see sort of what they were doing and at the same time, you know it was comforting to see that everyone sort of had this same cyclical kind of needs or challenges.*” The message *you are not alone* provided pathways of relational support for the school heads during challenges.

Theme Three: Personality

"You know, again, I'm always wary of saying there's a skill and it's just who I am." (Participant Three)

A theme that emerged from the data was the personality of an independent school leader plays a role in their leadership skills. Upon reflecting on her long headships, Participant Two shared the role that personality and perhaps the development of those skills play in leadership. She stated:

So, most likely, you know you'll find leaders will have a sweet spot. There's something that they're very good at and it's kind of their go to place. I think when you start out in these jobs often times you don't even know what that is and it's just a skill that you continue to develop it or it comes very naturally to you. And then all of a sudden you realize like wow, yeah, I guess it's true, like my career has kind of been based on these two or three principles because these are things I do well.

Arguably, there are many things independent school leaders do well. In this study, the subthemes of creativity, drive, and courage were important underlying factors to the lived experiences of these leaders.

Creativity

Two of the participants in this study had musical backgrounds. When questioned about their experiences and skills as independent school leaders, they spoke of the importance that creativity has played into their leadership. Participant Two stated:

I mean there's no way you can have vision without being creative, I don't think. You know and seeing things that other folks don't or seeing opportunities or

possibilities that perhaps aren't obvious to others, you know, and that's where the magic and the fun comes, right.

Participant Two continued to share the importance of committing to the vision and mission during the headship of her schools and creative problem solving was a route for school improvement. Participant One shared, *"If they need one idea, I have 100 ideas. There are lots of ways to solve things, so I would say that my creativity level is extremely high."* Participant Four reflected on the importance of student performances as a way to connect with families and showcase the school. Performances also were a way to affirm the parent's decision for enrollment. She shared that she loved the process of contributing to performances and working with both students and teachers fostering the vision for performances.

Three of the participants had English literature backgrounds. Two of the four participants were English teachers before moving into leadership positions. It is important to consider the training that English teachers would have received in writing and perhaps these skills translated well to leadership roles that involve advanced communication skills, both written and verbal. Participant One stated about communication, *"So how you do it and what you say and so forth are wonderfully important skill sets."* Participant Three warned me about his proclivity for language at the beginning of the interview sharing, *"Remember I'm an English teacher, so I will probably get wordy."* All the participants in this study were generous with their stories and thoughtful about their experiences.

Drive

All four participants shared stories of the reasons they became a school head and what was required for sustainability in this role. They overcame diverse challenges in the process and spoke honestly about the sacrifice to themselves and family. The participants shared a common drive that motivated them through circumstances, obstacles, and challenges. Participant Three was candid about his personal drive, *“I was always Ferris Bueller. I was student council president, I was always doing that, even as a kid.”* He shared his experience of growing up without significant financial resources, putting himself through school, and that an improved salary from teaching was a factor in his decision to become a head. He shared that his goals of having a family and having to give up his lucrative summer job during his early years of teaching to attend graduate school influenced his decision to move toward headship. He stated, *“I knew I had to position myself to be in a position to both serve my schools and make some more money.”* Participant One also knew from early in his career that he wanted to shift his roles within the educational system. He stated, *“I knew that I wanted to not be a band director all my life.”* He found leadership roles first in public schools and transitioned into independent schools.

The personal expectation to become their best in the head of school position also influenced the participants. Participant Two shared how her performance background and the focus required to perform at a high level was training for her headship experiences. She also talked about how being a female in the headship position, challenged her even more. She felt she often had to prove herself to others. After an almost 20-year headship at one school, she was preparing for a new tenure at another

school. Despite the notable shift in location, type of independent school, and concern for what she referred to “*the school being a really heavy lift,*” she stated, “*But you know, it’s uh, I’ll learn a lot.*” Participant One found himself having to explain to faculty his drive to make the school the best it could be. He shared the feedback he received from a long term faculty member, “*saying ‘what’s this thing about being the world’s best? We are very good, that’s enough.’ And that’s where I thought no, I think you ought to strive, you may never be the world’s best, but you ought to strive.*” This statement reflects the drive of a school leader to develop the school beyond the vision of other stakeholders.

Participant Four shared that she viewed herself still as a teacher of teachers. She expressed that she had not strayed far from her earlier career years in education except the audience became mostly adults that she worked to educate rather than young students. She stated, “*We weren’t educated to manage buildings. We were educated to manage education and learning. And that’s what education is. If learning doesn’t go on, it’s not education.*” She continued to explain that her additional educational background in neurological development and maturation of children pushed her to seek leadership roles where she felt her expertise could have more influence rather than in teacher roles.

Courage

The courage that all four participants possessed in their roles as school heads was tangible. Participant One stated, “*I read people pretty well. I was courageous too.*” All the participants shared many stories of leadership that reflect tremendous courage.

Participant Three shared a story about being the head of school during a time when many schools were dealing with issues of faculty misconduct from past and present. He stated, “*We were in the thick of it with everyone else out there before most other schools with*

sexual misconduct and coming to terms with our own history with sexual misconduct, abuse.” He continued to share that he travelled all over the country to meet with former students, men and women, and would spend time with each to apologize on behalf of his institution. The courage he possessed to listen, console, and apologize on behalf of the school for incidents before his headship was astounding.

The participants also were courageous when sharing how they would improve their leadership practice. When Participant Two was asked about reflecting on improvements she would make to her leadership practice, she stated:

Wisdom, I mean, listen more and talk less, not sweat the little stuff, and yet also, there were times when I was like I don't think this is good for the institution but I can, I can handle it, I can take this on, and it will be okay, and in hindsight, I really wish I would have spoken up because it was such a drag or it was such a heavy lift that it took away from other things and so I'm not invincible. I can't do it all.

The self-awareness and courage to know when they *can't do it all* was a familiar message. Participant Three and Participant Four both told stories that seemed to be reflective of experience or perhaps life changes that made it necessary for them to make decisions to care for family and not try to be everything for everyone in their schools. Sharing responsibility and leadership became imperative for their professional longevity.

The theme of personality emerged as a strong component to the stories of the participants' headships. Within the personality theme, concepts of creativity, drive, and courage were evident. Leaders used their creative backgrounds to find solutions and solve problems. They all possessed drive to accomplish for themselves and their schools.

Finally, they used personal courage to persevere through the many personal and professional challenges they faced every year of headship.

Theme Four: Level of Decision Making

“We were wide open, and so we were able to do other things.” (Participant One)

Emerging from the data was the theme of decision making skills. Independent school leaders are the sole employees of the board of trustees. Boards are challenged to hire a school head that can accomplish the needs of the school both in present and for the future. Therefore, independent school heads are generally granted tremendous autonomy to make decisions in the best interest of the educational institution. The leaders used supportive teams to accomplish the goals of the school, autonomy to make decisions, and the competence of their own skills and that of their team to lead their schools into the future.

Team

The participants talked about creating teams that supported and complemented their personal leadership skills. They also asked their faculty to assist in endeavors such as increasing enrollment. Participant One shared during his first years as school head he needed to significantly increase enrollment. He stated:

I asked every faculty member to invent one way to get somebody to campus once a year. And whether it was at the dress rehearsal of the play, could you invite a junior high that is a feeder school, potential feeder school, could you have a YMCA team play at halftime of the varsity basketball game. Whatever you can do.

His efforts involved everyone in the process of advancement and fostered financial stability for the school.

The distribution of leadership was also important. Participants were aware of their own skills and looked to surround themselves with a team that complimented their set of knowledge and skills. Participant Two described the skills needed to lead independent schools. She stated:

a self-starter, creativity, curiosity, lifelong learner, finance and endowment. It's like running a little city, you know, so you, you have to be curious and really vulnerable and honest about what you don't know and if you can't be an expert in everything, so you need to surround yourself with people that know more than you do in very specific areas and try to learn as much as you can.

This sentiment was echoed by Participant Three when he shared one of his skills was “*creating a team that complements me.*” He continued to say how important it was to “*not pretend that I know everything [and] to allow people to do their jobs and to be acknowledged and to take that spotlight.*” Participant Four explained that she distributed her vision for progressive education by building capacity in her teachers. She was in a school with exceptional autonomy and focused her efforts on improving teaching and learning by supporting teachers and educating parents on pedagogy and rationale. She described her work with teachers as being the main focus of her daily work.

Autonomy

By circumventing state and federal funding, independent schools have autonomy for many decisions including curriculum choices and management decisions. Participant One stated about independent schools, “*The flexibility and the ability to make it work. If*

you're good at that you are in an institution that enables that.” He expressed that he was able to be “*in loco parentis*” with students and that autonomy helped him make decisions that were in the best interest of students. He shared a story about asking 22 students not to return after his first year as head of school. The autonomy to make decisions that were in the best interest of the school he served, even in challenging situations, allowed him to carry out his school improvement goals. Participant Four shared stories of how the vision she fostered for the school was built upon her foundation of knowledge in neuropsychology and child development in her early years as a school head. However, in later years of headship, she gained knowledge of leadership theory and practices from outside of the educational sphere. She worked to gain financial knowledge and management practices in other fields through reading and joining organizations that supported leadership in other organizational contexts. The autonomy to make decisions cultivates a strong connection between school head and the mission of the independent school.

Competence

All the participants talked about their own competence in many areas of school leadership. They were able to verbalize their leadership strengths and the skills that were necessary to head an independent school. They were also aware that those skills were not necessarily transferable to any independent school. Participant One shared how the responsibility of school improvement dictated the first few years of one of his headships. He stated, “*They needed to be waking up. They needed to do things and how can we do this, and so that was where my strength fit the school.*” He was able to increase enrollment and further the advancement of his institution. As time progressed in the

participants' headships, their role at the school changed. Participant Two shared about this transition to different leadership roles in her long term position as head of school.

She stated:

I think there's different phases, depending on how long you are at the school. And the first phase, probably you're more likely to be very heavily invested in teaching and learning and understanding actually what the school is doing so that you can figure out what it needs. And then you know, then it's enacting or making sure that you're, you know, giving what it needs.

Participant One shared advice for new heads. He stated, “*Who you follow is more important than you would realize. But who you follow or what the school's situation is compared to what your skill set is and what you bring, that's really important.*” This quote reveals the contextual nature of the independent school to the head of school's skill set. This sentiment was echoed by all participants. Participant Two revealed:

Often times leaders are hired because of where and how they've excelled and so they've come into a new position and they tried to do the same thing and it doesn't work. It's a different environment. They're hired for those skills because they have those skills but that skill set, while the skill set applies to what they did, might not work or be relevant in that new place.

Participant Three suggested that new heads understand exactly what the board is expecting from their head of school and to be certain they possess the skill set to meet the board's vision for the school.

Participant Four shared her typical daily activities as a head including mentoring students, teachers, and families. She discussed one of the most important skill she used

in her leadership role was decision making. She shared, *“Balanced decision making based on what is best for the student and then what is best for the system. Balancing all of that. Decision making is absolutely critical to leadership skills.”* This statement reflects the challenge that school heads face when making crucial decisions involving the many stakeholders of the school.

Understanding the complexity of most decisions a head of school makes each school year is daunting. Each decision impacts many if not all stakeholders within the school community. The school head is charged with navigating those decisions. They accomplish this work by building a team to distribute expertise, taking advantage of autonomy for streamlined and effective decision making, and their personal and team competence. The leaders in this study presented as emotionally competent leaders that understood their abilities and how to best use them.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Independent schools educate a small population of students in the United States. The research set in these unique educational systems is limited. The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the leadership skills and effective practices for the leaders of independent schools. Themes emerged including constancy of purpose, relational approach, personality, and decision making by exploring the essence of the experiences of independent school leaders. During the current challenges in education, skilled and supported educational leaders are needed more than ever to lead independent schools into a future of relevancy and sustainability. This study contributes to the possibility of creating supportive networks to sustain independent school heads and preparing future leaders.

Discussion of Findings

The semi-structured interviews with four experienced independent school heads revealed the essence of independent school leadership. Four themes emerged from the interview data that were key to the experience of school heads: constancy of purpose, relational approach, personality, and decision making skills.

Constancy of purpose and the related subthemes of advancement, school improvement, and transformational leadership were evident in all the participants' stories. They had gained leadership skills and experiences that emphasized the importance of constancy of purpose to their headship. The participants emphasized how important it was to understand the board's mission and vision for their school. Their daily experiences were to carry out that mission and vision through their actions. They

accomplished this by focusing on advancing, improving, and transforming the independent school. Their role in advancing the school, particularly in fundraising, is relatively unique to K-12 educational institutions.

The relational approach to leadership was a prominent theme from their lived experiences. Within the relational approach to leadership were emergent subthemes that were most impacted by the leader's relational skills: board of trustees, community, and challenges. The data supported the importance of a positive working relationship between a school head and the board of trustees. The study participants felt strongly that new heads must understand the board goals for a new headship and be certain their skill set matched with these clear goals. Relationships were important to secure funding for the school. The participants felt they spent a great deal of their attention to school advancement and that included creating relationships in the communities that serve the school and relationships for financial security. The participants shared the constant daily activity of helping students, faculty, and families. They also connected to larger communities for collegiality, support, and knowledge acquisition. The importance of their role as a problem solver for the stakeholders was evident. Challenges that faced the school heads during their tenure were met with balancing the impact to school, students, faculty, families, board members, and alumni. This required a delicate balance of relational skills to problem solve while considering all constituents.

The personality of the participants in this study was a theme that could not be ignored. The subthemes that emerged within the personality context were: creativity, drive, and courage. The participants were creative and came from backgrounds rich in the humanities and performance. The stories they shared were evidence that they

continued to use creative skills in their daily work, problem solving, and advancement of their schools. All the participants were driven. They were ambitious in the pursuit of personal advancement, school advancement, and knowledge acquisition. Finally, the independent school leaders shared stories of the courage that they possessed. The school heads used courage to inspire, learn, listen, and self-examine. The participants were all very experienced in their leadership roles, and therefore found the courage to understand that leadership isn't accomplished alone.

The participants of this study shared their leadership experiences that relied on complex decision making skills. Four subthemes emerged in the context of decision making: team, autonomy, and competence. The school leaders expressed the need to build teams that complimented their skill sets. They had learned to navigate the autonomy afforded by the context of an independent school to make decisions in the best interest of students and quickly improve instruction and curriculum. Finally, their extensive leadership experience was evidence of their level of competence making difficult decisions driven by their commitment to constancy of purpose. When challenged outside of their skill set or by unfamiliar challenges, they accessed expertise from their team, colleagues, and professional organizations.

Implications of Findings

This study explored the lived experiences of four independent school leaders in an effort to better understand the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are needed to lead independent schools. Although the context of research set in independent schools is minimal, there is considerable research on educational leadership. Full-range leadership theory and The National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA)

Professional Standards for Educational Leaders were chosen as lenses to interpret the experiences of the heads of school.

Full-range Leadership Theory

Full-range leadership theory includes the constructs of both transactional leadership and transformational leadership behaviors. It is important to remember that leadership behaviors are on a continuum and that leaders often use both transactional and transformational behaviors to accomplish the many tasks, responsibilities, and goals that are needed to run a school. I felt the constructs of full-range leadership theory were broad enough to facilitate many ways of interpreting the lived experiences of the participants.

Transactional behaviors place emphasis on a transaction that occurs and is often rewarded. I did not see evidence of many transactional leadership behaviors. Participant Three mentioned that the duties and responsibilities of an independent school head can depend on the size of the school. He inferred that leaders of smaller schools would be much more involved in the daily operations of a school. I interpreted that to mean larger schools might require the delegation of the transactional duties to a team or distributed to other middle level leaders. However, there were difficult decisions that participants spoke of that required transactional leadership. In one such scenario, Participant One shared that during his first tenure as a school head he was “*responsible for straightening out the school*” and he made the difficult decision to not invite 22 students to return after his first year due to behavioral concerns. He stated he made many difficult decisions that were in an effort to improve the school culture and reputation in the community. Participant One stated that once he was able to accomplish that goal he could focus on

financial security and advancement. This statement suggests that while the leader began with behaviors that were more focused on transactions, he could move into transformational behaviors in the later years of his headship. Full-range leadership provides the framework for understanding how leaders using transactional behaviors set the groundwork for transformational leadership practices. These transformational behaviors were creating curriculum opportunities for students, increasing enrollment and endowment, and creating a school culture that fostered involvement of all stakeholders. It is important to remember that the participants were experienced heads that had numerous long tenures at schools at the time of the interviews. On the continuum of leadership, there were many examples of the school heads using transformational leadership behaviors during their leadership.

Transformational Leadership

There are four dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration (Witges & Scanlan, 2014). All four constructs were represented in the lived experiences of the participants. This is consistent with the use of transformational leadership theory in educational leadership research and my review of the literature for this study.

Transformational leadership remains one of the most widely used theoretical foundations for educational leadership research.

All of the leaders used their influence for creating financial stability at their schools by increasing enrollment, donations, and endowments. They worked to inspire the stakeholders of the institution to contribute to the vision and mission of the school. The leaders looked to colleagues, professional organizations that were both in and out of

their fields for their intellectual stimulation and professional support. This supportive network helped them to overcome challenges both professionally and personally, at times. The participants used individual consideration both to empower their leadership teams and faculty, build rapport, encourage professional development, and create successful school climates for innovation and improvement.

An interesting finding of the study is the connection of independent school leader to spiritual leader. The research set in the context of Catholic schools or religious schools certainly discussed the importance of the spiritual leader to connect stakeholders to the religious mission of the school. However, the independent school leaders compared themselves to spiritual leaders using inspiration to comfort, sustain communities in challenging times, and foster the mission of the school. This finding suggests that the concept of inspiration and spirituality is important to consider in many school contexts as a method for achieving transformation in a school.

Professional Standards for Educational Leaders

As was discussed at the beginning of chapter two, the NPBEA created the Professional Standards to provide guidance to educational leaders. The Standards were important to consider when analyzing the responses as they were developed from empirical research on educational leadership. They model the domains that educational leaders must address in schools. The Standards provided a priori codes to begin examining the interview transcripts.

There was evidence of the leaders focusing on students' academic learning, particularly with Participant Four, but most of their experiences related to relational and transformational skill sets. The minimal research set in independent schools supports the

finding that independent school heads are not instructional leaders, and that middle leadership is mainly responsible for practice (Irvine & Brundrett, 2016; Juhel, 2016). This was supported by the participants' statements regarding wanting to spend more time in classrooms and meeting with students but felt the requirements of other duties didn't allow for that allocation of time.

Most of the participants' experiences were relational and transformational in nature. Skills related to these behaviors helped them to retain long leadership tenures at their schools and make real change at their institutions. The literature supports this statement. Large scale school improvement can effectively be accomplished by using relational and transformational skills. There was evidence that they had made significant improvements to their schools. The interview data suggests they accomplished school improvement through creativity, vision building within stakeholders, and constancy of purpose.

Limitations of the Research

The goal of this study was to understand the phenomena under investigation from the perspectives of independent school leaders. One limitation is lack of data from each participant. Adding more interviews with various independent school heads would add depth and complexity to the phenomenon of independent school leadership (Yilmaz, 2013). The additional interviews would have allowed for building greater reliability within the coding process and discovering or confirming emerging themes. I would have been able to test the emerging themes with additional participant experiences. Internal validity was demonstrated by including quotes from the participants and allowing a detailed story to emerge in their own words. It did give strength to the findings, but

additional participants would have contributed to denser descriptions and therefore greater internal validity.

While not a limitation, it should be kept in mind, that all the participants had extensive experience in independent schools and the common themes could have emerged as a consequence of their longevity in independent schools. It would be worth considering if more might have been learned if less experienced leaders were interviewed or heads that were previously independent school leaders and left the independent school context.

Directions for Future Research

Phenomenological studies aim to describe a phenomenon and not to make assumptions across other contexts. Therefore, this study aimed to tell the story of experienced independent school leaders. However, with the large numbers of independent school headship transitions occurring, this data might inform how we train, support, and ensure the success of new and existing school heads. Further studies on independent school leaders that left the field might be value to formulate ways that schools can support school heads. Support inputs to independent school leaders maintains their ability to do their best and gain leadership skills over their tenure. This element of support certainly warrants greater research.

Leaders are evolving and learning as they progress in their journey. They are not *born* to leadership but learning the skills necessary to achieve competency and effectiveness in their positions. Therefore, studies which contribute knowledge to facilitating greater support networks for new leaders could be valuable for the long term

retention and achievement of all leaders. Participant Two shared this insight for the future of headship:

Right now, there's a huge shift between the pandemic and George Floyd and everything else that's happened in our society, I mean heads from my generation they're just getting out, I mean they just don't want to deal with it anymore, and quite frankly I don't blame them. It's a rough time to be in school leadership in independent schools and so I think it's going to be really important, you know just as a profession, how we come out of this pandemic and how we choose to lead communities.

Although the strategy for this phenomenological study was to articulate individual perceptions, greater numbers of participants would affirm perceptions for truth and seek variation in the experience. The results of a more in-depth study of independent school leadership might be transferable within similar contexts.

There is a need to better understand the role of decision making and how a leader can learn or improve decision making skills. Wang (2018) found a gap in educational leadership research in the areas of decision making. However, it was a very important skill to the participants of this study. Perhaps with even greater challenges that have faced independent schools and all schools during the last years of the pandemic, decision making skills became even more important as leaders were forced to make decisions in uncharted waters. There is significant learning that can be facilitated in this research area.

Finally, I believe there is more to learn about independent school leadership and personality. The role of personality and leadership was prevalent during my research

review. However, I did not see any research that explored that intersection set in the context of independent schools. I learned that many of the participants of this study considered the question of skill versus as Participant Three stated, *“just who I am.”* It is possible an exploration of identity rather than personality and independent school leadership might further the understanding of successful independent school leadership. I believe greater understanding of personality and school leadership warrants further exploration to aid in the identification of prospective school heads and hiring processes.

Conclusion

The participants of this study were four experienced independent school heads. They possessed creativity, engaging personalities, and drive. They were team players and found supportive colleagues to support their learning and provide support when needed. The participants were masterful at building and maintaining relationships with the stakeholders of their schools, and as a result, were successful in the areas of school improvement and advancement. They believed in the mission and were driven to connect to the mission of their schools and in particular independent schools. Although most of them had experiences in other school contexts, they all had stayed in independent schools until retirement or were planning to retire in their current independent schools. There was constancy of purpose in their decisions and daily actions.

This study added to the minimal research on relational leadership skills, transformational leadership skills, and constancy of purpose for independent school leaders. It provided a greater understanding of the commitment that independent school leaders make to their schools, often at the sacrifice to themselves and family. This knowledge can help support them in these leadership roles as we learn more from future

research on how best to support school heads. By understanding the skills needed to lead independent schools, we can prepare future leaders to continue the tradition of leading one of the oldest school types in the United States, independent schools.

APPENDIX A
IRB EXEMPTION LETTER



Institutional Review Board

Date: February 25, 2022

Study #: IRB-FY2022-208

Study Title: Educational Leadership in Independent Schools

Submission Type: Initial

IRB Decision: Exempt

Research Team:

Tracy Moen

Julia Smith

Based on applicable federal regulations, the above referenced study has been determined to be Exempt, with the following categories:

Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).

Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation.

Letter and Consent Document:

This letter along with the IRB approved (date-stamped) consent document can be found in Cayuse in the [Submission Details](#) page under [Letters](#) and [Attachments](#), respectively.

The IRB date stamped consent document must be downloaded and used in consenting participants.

Permission from Research Sites:

Please note the following:

- This IRB exemption determination letter means that this research has met one or more of the federal criteria for exemption per 45 CFR 46.104- Exempt Research.
- Before the research is initiated, permission to conduct research at a given site must be obtained from all research locations listed in the IRB submission. You must keep copies of all such permission letters for your files.
- It is the responsibility of each researcher to follow all applicable policies and procedures of any outside institution where the research will be conducted.

Modifications:

Any changes to this exempt project must be reviewed by the IRB prior to initiation by submitting a MODIFICATION request. Do not collect data while the changes are being reviewed. Data collected during this time cannot be used in research.

Record Retention:

Exempt projects will be retained by the IRB office for three years after the last action on the project.

You are approved to start the research. Please retain a copy of this notification for your records.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office.

Thank you.

The Oakland University IRB

APPENDIX B
INFORMATION SHEET

Information Sheet for Exempt Research Educational Leadership in Independent Schools

Introduction

You are being asked to be in a research study that is being done by Tracy Moen under the direction of Julia Smith, Professor, Department of Educational Leadership, the faculty advisor for this project.

Your decision to participate in this study is voluntary. You can choose to stop your participation at any time or skip any part of the study if you are not comfortable. Your decision will not affect your present or future relationship with Oakland University, the researcher, or the Department of Educational Leadership.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this research study is to learn about the skills and experiences of independent school leaders.

Who can participate in this study?

You are being asked to participate in the study because you are a current or previous independent school leader with at least five years of experience.

Where will this study take place?

This study will take place online via Zoom or at a time and place that you choose.

What do I have to do?

You will be asked to participate in two interviews. The interviews will be recorded for purpose of transcribing. You will be presented with the transcriptions.

How long will I be in the study?

The first interview will be approximately one hour long and the follow-up interview will be approximately 30 minutes long. The estimated time of completion for your participation is two months.

Are there any risks to me?

For this study, the potential risks are minimal. Although your identity will be concealed throughout the entire process, there may be a risk that someone who is not part of this research may accidentally see your personal information. I will try to make sure that this does not happen by keeping your interview recording and transcriptions in a password protected computer in a password protected file. All recordings will be destroyed after they are transcribed. You will be provided a copy of the transcripts to check that the masking information adequately protects your identity. When the results of this research are published or presented at conferences, no information will be included that personally identifies you.

Are there any benefits to me?

Although there may be no direct benefits to you, the results of this study may benefit others in the future by adding to the research and literature about independent school leadership.

Will I receive anything for participating?

You will not receive anything for participating in this study.

What if I want to stop participating in this study?

If you want to stop participating in this study, you should contact the researcher.

Who do I contact if I have questions about this study?

Tracy Moen, temoen@oakland.edu, [REDACTED]

Or, the faculty advisor for the study, Julia Smith, j15smith@oakland.edu, [REDACTED]

For questions regarding your rights as a participant in human subject research, you may contact the Oakland University Institutional Review Board, 248-370-4898.

FOR IRB USE ONLY

This form was approved by the Oakland University Institutional Review Board on 02/25/2022 under Cayuse # 2022-208.

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol for School Leaders

Project: An investigation of independent school leadership experience and skills.

Time of interview: _____

Place: _____

Date: _____

Interviewee: _____

Interview procedure

You are being asked to participate in a research study investigating the skills and experience of independent school leaders. Such information is critical to understanding the development and support of this group of leaders. In this pursuit, I am conducting conversational interviews with independent school leaders. You will be asked to respond to several open-ended questions. You may choose not to answer any or all of the questions. The procedure will involve audio recording the online interview, and the recording will be transcribed verbatim. Interviews will likely be about an hour long. Participation is confidential and all identifying information will be removed from resulting materials. A second interview approximately 30 minutes long will be scheduled as a follow up to our first interview and to clarify any responses or ideas.

Informed consent

Please sign the informed consent form signaling your willingness to participate.

Demographic Questions

1. How long have you been a school leader in independent schools?
2. Were you in a public school leadership position?
3. How long have you been in your current position?
4. Tell me about your educational experience. (Did you get any training or degree work in Educational Administration?)

Questions

5. Can you describe your career path to your current position as a school leader?
6. Tell me about the activities you do/did as a private school leader.
7. Can you describe your leadership skills and practices that you use/used as a private school leader?
8. What leadership challenges have you faced? Can you give me a specific example? Did you talk to anyone about what was going on?
9. Tell me about how you continue to improve in your duties as a school leader.
10. What do you think are defining characteristics of private school leadership?
11. Can you tell me an experience/story that you think really gets at what being a private school leader is like?

Closing

Thank you for participating in this interview. I may contact you in the future for the purpose of follow up interviews. I want to assure you of the confidentiality of your responses. If you have any questions, please contact me at temoen@oakland.edu.

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