This book does exactly what its title suggests: it takes the theoretical and conceptual nature of leadership and positions it in the real world of school governance – where teachers, administrators and community stakeholders grapple with issues of change, diversity, influence, motivation, policy, and law.

Organized around the widely accepted Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards, Theory into Practice: Case Stories for School Leaders offers a rich combination of literature on educational leadership, real-life school-based situations, and a framework for decision-making.

Designed for both practicing and aspirng school leaders, this book provides the perfect complement to coursework and clinical experiences by offering case stories at all levels: from teacher leader, to building leader, to district leader. The case story format enables readers to experience a wide range of school-based issues from a variety of perspectives. Through this construct, the authors present a strong case for reflective leadership and thoughtful decision-making.

Given the current climate of standards, standardization, and hyper-accountability in education, this book reminds readers that education – and educational leadership – remains an intensely human experience.
Theory into Practice
Sense Publishers is delighted to announce the new book series: Constructing Knowledge: Curriculum Studies in Action. We would like to invite you to submit to the series. For more information about this series or contributions, contact the Editor Brad Porfilio (porfilio16@aol.com) or Michel Lokhorst (michel.lokhorst@sensepublishers.com). We look forward to hearing from you.

CONSTRUCTING KNOWLEDGE: CURRICULUM STUDIES IN ACTION
Volume 3

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Scope
“Curriculum” is an expansive term; it encompasses vast aspects of teaching and learning. Curriculum can be defined as broadly as “The content of schooling in all its forms” (English, p. 4) and as narrowly as a lesson plan.

Complicating matters is the fact that curricula are often organized to fit particular time frames. The incompatible and overlapping notions that curriculum involves everything that is taught and learned in a particular setting and that this learning occurs in a limited time frame reveal the nuanced complexities of curriculum studies.

“Constructing Knowledge” provides a forum for systematic reflection on the substance (subject matter, courses, programs of study), purposes, and practices used for bringing about learning in educational settings. Of concern are such fundamental issues as: What should be studied? Why? By whom? In what ways? And in what settings? Reflection upon such issues involves an inter-play among the major components of education: subject matter; learning; teaching; and the larger social, political, and economic contexts; as well as the immediate instructional situation. Historical and autobiographical analyses are central in understanding the contemporary realities of schooling and envisioning how to (re)shape schools to meet the intellectual and social needs of all societal members. Curriculum is a social construction that results from a set of decisions; it is written and enacted, and both facets undergo constant change as contexts evolve.

This series aims to extend the professional conversation about curriculum in contemporary educational settings. Curriculum is a designed experience intended to promote learning. Because it is socially constructed, curriculum is subject to all the pressures and complications of the diverse communities that comprise schools and other social contexts in which citizens gain self-understanding.
Theory into Practice

Case Stories for School Leaders

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DEDICATION

For Jeffrey, Jacob, Jonathan, & Jennie – JG
For Todd & Amy – DG
For Kate – TR

Teaching, learning, and leading are all acts of love.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1. Connecting Theory to Practice</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2. Standard 1: Visions of Learning</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3. Standard 2: School Culture</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4. Standard 3: Management of Organization, Operations, and Resources</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5. Standard 4: Collaboration with Families and Communities</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6. Standard 5: Acting with Integrity, Fairness, and Ethics</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 7. Standard 6: Interacting in and with the Larger Context</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afterword: Leading in the World</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

If it is true (as we believe it is) that leaders shape the cultures of institutions and also that institutional cultures influence the identities of those within them, we must first express gratitude to innumerable educators who led us to love learning and leading. This book is a tribute to the principles that school leaders embody as well as the courage they inspire.

We are also grateful to those whose experiences contributed directly to this volume. Victoria Hankey, a dedicated teacher who leads through actions and words, wrote case story 4T. Teresa Lawrence, an accomplished educator and leader who stretches the boundaries of the field with energy and integrity, created case stories 2D and 6D. The stories shared by Victoria and Teresa, like all the stories in this book, are based on actual events: real people in real places struggled to understand and resolve the dilemmas you will read. These struggles, as well as the physical, psychological, and emotional energy it takes to lead institutions dedicated to human development, are honored here.
FOREWORD

Like any text, this work can be read in many different ways. With the least generosity of spirit, it may be read (dismissed) as just another example of an anachronistic leftist plea. But, I hope it will be read generously as an example and invitation for educators, as educators, to take back the discourses currently mediating much policy making, planning, and assessment in the field of public schooling as discourses constantly in need of grounding in an authentic vision of education. Of course, this is something in which all of us can, and need, to participate wherever we think our political affiliations lie.

Standards, accountability, effective learning, professionalism, and efficient organization are just some of the terms forming the “professional” lingua franca of educational leadership as it is currently practiced. But, how should we understand these terms? What are their unsaid biases and how much room do they leave for genuine intellectual and spiritual participation? This is a particularly important question at a time when professional language itself feels like it is either being deliberately co-opted to steer us along paths far removed from a genuine interest in education or simply to be drawing us, by its own unaccounted volition, into a river of educational forgetfulness.

But, it is in education that we are primarily interested. This book reminds us of that and goes some way in showing the importance of the struggle to take on educational and leadership discourses not simply as adversaries but, more importantly, as realms of unfinished business inviting constant clarification while we entertain them as sites of possibility. For example, the book reminds us that when we try to sustain a vision of education, the concept of standards should play a role quite different from standardization; that what counts as just and fair leadership might not simply be a matter of universal principle but also a matter of qualities of being with others; that what counts as effective learning might have little to do with education until “effective” is understood in humanistic and ethical ways; that what counts as professionalism might not simply be a matter of co-opting the values and meanings this term signifies when used for practices other than education, and; that what counts as efficient organization might not simply be a matter of increasing the production of some kind of commodity.

Educating involves learning – but it is much more than just learning. Educational learning must be humane and it must result in more of the humane. Perhaps it is a sign of our times that this aspect of education – how we become more human as part of our learning – is something we are prone to forget when our focus becomes preoccupied with operationalization. Hence, professional educators, if the phrase means anything, must see their work as representing education and not some rationalistic or bureaucratized reduction of it. To do this, I would argue that educators must become the caretakers (in a more phenomenologically and ontologically sensitive way) of discourses around education allowing epistemological concerns to take a back seat to ontological ones. For so long we have focused on such things as what is to be known (think of
the standards movement); how quickly and effectively it can be known (think of
the phrase “best practices”); how it can be shown, by measurement, that
knowledge is being mastered (think of the standardized testing industry). But,
such epistemologically orientated emphases are typically at the expense of the
existential. That is, confronting what it means to be educated, what it means to be
a teacher, and what it means to teach being.

This isn’t the place to flesh out such particular ways of thinking about education
but only to point out that the ways of participating in the unfinished business of
educational discourses are necessarily multiple and varied and this book is a
welcome and much needed foray into that very business. I am honored to write the
foreword to this work.

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Madison, WI 53711-1997
I suppose leadership at one time meant muscles; but today it means getting along with people. Indira Gandhi

Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other. John F. Kennedy

Leadership is often mistakenly perceived as the exercise of power. Neophyte leaders may share comedian Tina Fey’s (2011) misconceptions about the nature of the role: “Contrary to what I believed as a little girl, being the boss almost never involves marching around, waving your arms, and chanting, ‘I am the boss! I am the boss!’” (p. 5). In reality, leaders who adopt a stance of singular righteousness may find themselves in exactly the situation Fey describes – “leading” a solitary parade accompanied only by their own declarations.

True leadership in any endeavor implies interrelations among people: leadership requires followership. In the field of education, where critical thinking is valued and fostered, blind obedience is neither desired nor likely. This reality complicates the lives of school leaders, since they cannot rely on issuing orders as a primary strategy for implementing policy or effecting change. Educational leadership is an inherently moral, principled undertaking; therefore, it is fundamentally – and purposefully – grounded in the construction of strong, positive relationships.

This introductory chapter is divided into three parts. Part 1, entitled School Leaders, Neoliberalism, and the State of Public Education, provides a broad context for the aspiring school leader. The challenges – and changes – in public education cannot be viewed in isolation. They are part of a neoliberal ideology that has been in the making for well over 30 years. Today’s challenges are merely the fruits of that ideology. The authors argue that fundamental changes in society, particularly in relation to the free market, have redefined the very concepts of funding, purpose, and choice in public education.

Part 2 of this chapter, Leading, Following, and Building Relationships, discusses, from theoretical and practical perspectives, the importance of relationships as a condition for change and school improvement. While relationships, per se, do not constitute a specific leadership standard, the notion of relationships is embedded across the standards. The ability to work well with (and by that, we mean earn the respect and commitment of) staff, students, parents, and other stakeholders is critical to the effectiveness of a school leader.

Part 3 of this chapter, Critical Analysis, discusses two additional aspects of effective leadership: the notion that school leaders must be lifelong learners – constantly assessing and reassessing situations and decisions. This is coupled with
the need to develop and adhere to a leadership platform based on set of guiding beliefs about the purposes and role of education.

PART 1: SCHOOL LEADERS, NEOLIBERALISM, AND THE STATE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

Before engaging in the details of this text (which focuses on administrative decision-making and standards for school leaders), it is critically important to step back and assess the state of public education today. Though the future can never be predicted with certainty, a close look will reveal the challenges that educators (both administrators and teachers) are facing today and will face in the near future. In fact, the trajectory of change is identifiable; one merely needs to look back a few decades, and then take a snapshot of the present, in order to determine the direction of public education. Virtually all decisions made by school leaders are (and will be) affected in some way by the effects of neoliberalism (an ideology which sees schools as “markets”).

Perhaps the most significant force affecting all aspects of American life in the past 30 years has been the ideology of neoliberalism (and the related implementation of neoliberal policies). In recent years, the authors of this text have worked closely with aspiring school leaders as well as experienced school administrators. We have been struck by how few have heard of neoliberalism – and how even fewer know the meaning of the term. To survive as a school leader today and in the future, we believe that knowledge and understanding of neoliberalism is a critical first step.

In 1980, free marketeer Milton Friedman wrote, “The establishment of the school system in the United States is an island of socialism in a free market sea” (McLeod, 2006). It is important to note that public education, as presented by Friedman, is considered at odds with the free enterprise system. Since that point in time, public education – along with virtually every social activity – has been affected (often dramatically) by neoliberal policies. What is neoliberalism? According to David Harvey (2005), neoliberalism

is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. The role of the state is to… guarantee… the proper functioning of markets… [and] if markets do not exist (in areas such as… education, health care, social security and environmental pollution) then they must be created, by the state if necessary. (p. 159)

Harvey elaborates on the overall goal (as well as the means) of neoliberalism which, he notes, “seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market. This requires technologies of information creation and capacities to accumulate, store, transfer, analyze, and use massive databases to guide decisions in the global marketplace” (p. 160).
It is impossible to separate the transformation that has occurred in public education since 1980 from the economic policies during that same period. Taubman (2009) and others have pointed out that the abiding wisdom in the last few decades is that “what is good for business is good for the world and that democracy and freedom mean free markets and the freedom to choose among consumer goods” (p. 96). What has emerged from this ideology is a set of policies which support deregulation, privatization, spending cuts, and inflation reduction (Bakan, 2004).

From the definition of neoliberalism (everything should be market-driven), to its means of operation (information accumulation and analysis), to its related policies (deregulation and privatization), an aspiring school leader can begin to see the connection between that ideology and the current state of public education. School vouchers and charter schools, along with the mandates of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and Race to the Top (RTT) legislative initiatives, are all designed to offer choice. However, each example of choice draws dollars away from public education and, in essence, moves those dollars to entities over which the public has no control. Organizations such as the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), working with individual state legislatures, are drafting templates for laws which are designed to funnel tax dollars from public schools to private and/or “for profit” institutions. These private and “for profit” institutions are now receiving taxpayer support but no public oversight. Such legislation is growing exponentially with the intent of developing a market-driven education system marked by privatization and standardization.

WHY STANDARDS?

Standards, like many aspects of teaching, learning, and leading, are more complicated than they seem. Definitions and applications of standards vary; however, in general, standards function as targets or aspirations.

In this era of positivist hyper-accountability, it is important to distinguish between standards and standardization. Standards represent characteristics of significant achievement that professionals in a field should strive to attain. Standardization, on the other hand, implies common, uniform achievement – an objective that stands in opposition to the excellence signified by a standard. Standardization is associated with baseline or minimum competency goals. Standards, in contrast, epitomize ideals that may never be accomplished. In this sense, they represent continuous improvement.

In education, standards are multilayered and interrelated. Standards exist for students, for teachers, and for administrators. Moreover, teachers are evaluated, at least in part, on the basis of how students progress in terms of their assigned standards; likewise, administrators are assessed on the basis of how teachers and students perform with respect to particular standards. While this book is organized around the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards for School Leaders Standards (Figure 1), the complications and interconnections embodied by standards are key considerations throughout.
CHAPTER 1

Despite lofty aims, no set of standards is perfect. Like all aspects of teaching, learning, and leading, standards represent sets of decisions made by people. Therefore, standards necessarily embody assumptions, biases and preconceptions that the creators of the standards may not be fully aware of. This makes it necessary for educational leaders to adopt a critical stance with respect to the language of standards, as well as the tools and processes relating to the implementation of standards-based activities, curricula, and assessments. Standards may appear sensible and admirable because they align with our own worldview; this is a condition of which we should remain skeptical and wary. When reading standards and considering how they affect practice, leaders must continuously reflect on whose interests are served, whose interests are hindered, whose perspectives are present, and whose perspectives are absent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard 1: An education leader promotes the success of every student by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Functions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Collaboratively develop and implement a shared vision and mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Collect and use data to identify goals, assess organizational effectiveness, and promote organizational learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Create and implement plans to achieve goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>D. Promote continuous and sustainable improvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>E. Monitor and evaluate progress and revise plans</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Standard 2: An education leader promotes the success of every student by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Functions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Nurture and sustain a culture of collaboration, trust, learning, and high expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Create a comprehensive, rigorous, and coherent curricular program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Create a personalized and motivating learning environment for students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Supervise instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Develop assessment and accountability systems to monitor student progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Develop the instructional and leadership capacity of staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Maximize time spent on quality instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Promote the use of the most effective and appropriate technologies to support teaching and learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Monitor and evaluate the impact of the instructional program</td>
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</table>

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<tr>
<th>Standard 3: An education leader promotes the success of every student by ensuring management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Functions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Monitor and evaluate the management and operational systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Obtain, allocate, align, and efficiently utilize human, fiscal, and technological resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Promote and protect the welfare and safety of students and staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Develop the capacity for distributed leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Ensure teacher and organizational time is focused to support quality instruction and student learning</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Figure 1. ISLLC Standards 2008.
**Standard 4:** An education leader promotes the success of every student by collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

*Functions:*
A. Collect and analyze data and information pertinent to the educational environment
B. Promote understanding, appreciation, and use of the community’s diverse cultural, social, and intellectual resources
C. Build and sustain positive relationships with families and caregivers
D. Build and sustain productive relationships with community partners

**Standard 5:** An education leader promotes the success of every student by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

*Functions:*
A. Ensure a system of accountability for every student’s academic and social success
B. Model principles of self-awareness, reflective practice, transparency, and ethical behavior
C. Safeguard the values of democracy, equity, and diversity
D. Consider and evaluate the potential moral and legal consequences of decision-making
E. Promote social justice and ensure that individual student needs inform all aspects of schooling

**Standard 6:** An education leader promotes the success of every student by understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural contexts.

*Functions:*
A. Advocate for children, families, and caregivers
B. Act to influence local, district, state, and national decisions affecting student learning
C. Assess, analyze, and anticipate emerging trends and initiatives in order to adapt leadership strategies (Council of Chief State School Officers, pp. 14-15)

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*Figure 1. (Contd.). ISLLC Standards 2008.*

The ISLLC Standards were developed in consultation with National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO); furthermore, they were subject to numerous rounds of revision based on open forums intended to promote and incorporate public comments from all stakeholders. According to the NPBEA, the development of the new policy standards is based on the following principles:

1. Reflect the centrality of student learning;
2. Acknowledge the changing role of the school leader;
3. Recognize the collaborative nature of school leadership;
4. Improve the quality of the profession;
5. Inform performance-based systems of assessment and evaluation for school leaders;
6. Demonstrate integration and coherence; and
7. Advance access, opportunity, and empowerment for all members of the school community. (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008, p. 8)
CHAPTER 1

It is evident that the stated intent of the standards is to benefit students, the educational profession, and society. As with any propositions that promise excellence, equity, and empowerment, these standards are both unassailable and unattainable. From a teaching-learning perspective, these problems offer fascinating challenges: What do standards mean in practice? How can they be fostered and assessed in everyday institutions devoted to teaching and learning? Using case story analysis, this book attempts to address these questions.

PART 2: LEADING, FOLLOWING, AND BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Educational institutions, historically, have been charged to achieve numerous, sometimes conflicting, goals. Expectations of stakeholders in society vary with respect to the purposes of schooling, especially when public funds are involved. The tensions around these issues are not easily resolved; indeed, they represent ongoing social debates between relatively extreme points of view. Figure 2 provides a few examples of these debates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools should:</th>
<th>Develop students to be citizens who question authority and actively seek to transform society.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop students to be law-abiding citizens who respect authority and will maintain existing social norms.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on curriculum that represents accepted notions of knowledge and skills.</td>
<td>Focus on curriculum that challenges existing notions of knowledge and skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasize practical academics and vocational skills that will enable learners to be productive earners.</td>
<td>Emphasize a comprehensive, liberal arts education that endeavors to cultivate scholarly dispositions.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Figure 2. Conflicting Purposes of Schools.

Educational leaders must be cognizant of these competing goals, as well as thoughtful about how their own practices relate to the larger social contexts in which they function. It may seem as though daily obligations have little to do with laws, policies, and cultural production; however, all political change has local effects — and all local actions have the potential to influence society. Naturally, educational leaders hope to enact positive change in accordance with their visions. But how can they do this?

FROM PAPER TO PEOPLE

Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things. Peter Drucker

Educational institutions, like societies, consist of people. And, while allegiance to the ideals of justice and reason are critical to the integrity of a leader, real organizational change requires dedication to building relationships with people “...based on a common commitment to the notion that ideas are more important
than personalities” (Reeves, 2009 p. 3). Historically, the field of educational administration has sought to balance practical knowledge, professional knowledge, and academic knowledge (Berry & Beach, 2009). These categories, however, are not divisible. Their boundaries are blurred and their contents are intertwined. In fact, academics often claim that nothing is as practical as a good theory.

Berry and Beach (2009) describe three constructs that have shaped the development of educational administration as a field:

1. Educational administration evolved out of a need to operate schools under a set of practical and applied administrative skills.
2. The bureaucratization of educational organizations during the 19th and 20th centuries required specialized professional knowledge in order to become, and to succeed as, an educational leader.
3. The academic, scientific, and theory basis for educational administration provided educational leaders with advanced tools, conceptual frameworks, and contemporary and theoretical knowledge required to lead educational organizations. (p. 1)

As theoretical knowledge has become a more valued aspect of educational leadership, conceptual frameworks have become more valued, as well. Conceptual frameworks attempt to explain the diversity of human experiences and understandings in ways that are grounded in, and expand on, established research. Drawing on a wealth of scholarship, DeVore and Martin (2008) elaborate on these ideas and trace the shift from ethics of justice (based on external, static principles) to an ethic of care (based on relationships):

Contrasting with the ethics of justice is feminist moral theory which is grounded in the perspective of human relationships and an ethic of care (Walker, 2003). As explained by Beck and Murphy (1997), “Scholars in this camp stress the importance of developing acute moral perception, or understanding persons and context, and of cultivating virtues” (p. 33), thus, this view embraces feminist moral theory by emphasizing “caring for individuals as unique persons” (Furman, 2003, p. 3). Decision-making practices, linked with an ethic of care, are focused on relationships and the “absolute regard for the dignity and intrinsic value of each person…” (Furman, p. 3)

Proponents of feminist moral theory espouse an ethic of care and relationship-building (Beck, 1994; Noddings, 1993; Walker, 2003). Beck determined that the expectations of political leaders, teachers, and parents have created “divergent perspectives on educational purposes and on the role of administrators in fulfilling these purposes” (p. 58) which may be addressed through an ethic of care. Beck posited that “an ethic of care has the potential to provide a solid foundation” (p. 58) to meet the challenges facing administrators. (Conceptual Underpinning, para. 2).
CHAPTER 1

It is essential for leaders to appreciate the importance of relationship-building from a scholarly, theoretical perspective. More notable, however, is the impact that this approach can have on the quality of the learning community. Although effects may be difficult to quantify, knowledge and awareness of this perspective are invaluable.

LEADERSHIP: TRANSFORMATIONAL, MORAL, DISTRIBUTED

It is better to lead from behind and to put others in front, especially when you celebrate victory when nice things occur. You take the front line when there is danger. Then people will appreciate your leadership. Nelson Mandela

In addition to a scholarly perspective, it is important for current and aspiring leaders to understand the importance of relationships from a practical perspective. Leithwood and Poplin (1992), borrowing from Saranson (1990), state “the predictable failure of education reform rests, in large measure, on existing power relationships in schools: relationships among teachers and administrators, parents and school staffs, students and teachers” (p. 8). Instead of power derived from title or position, Leithwood and Poplin suggest relationships where power is derived from consent.

(This) form of power (is) manifested through other people, not over other people. Such power arises, for example, when teachers are helped to find greater meaning in their work, to meet higher-level needs through their work, and to develop enhanced instructional capacities. Facilitative power arises also as school staff members learn how to make the most of their collective capacities in solving school problems. This form of power is limited, practically speaking, and substantially enhances the productivity of the school on behalf of its students. (p. 9)

Such a concept is consistent with the idea of transformational leadership where the first goal is “…helping staff members develop and maintain a collaborative, professional school culture” (p. 9). This type of culture is captured by ISLLC Standard 2, which will be discussed in chapter four.

The idea that real power is derived from consent can also be found in other literature that addresses educational leadership. Sergiovanni (2003) suggests that the real power of a leader can be measured by the commitment of followers to an idea or vision, also known as a moral purpose. In discussing followership, he states that

Followers are people committed to purposes, a cause, a vision of what the school is and can become, beliefs about teaching and learning, values and standards to which they adhere, and convictions…In other words, followership requires an emotional commitment to a set of ideas. Once in place, an idea structure constitutes the basis of a leadership practice based on professional and moral authority. (p. 71)
While Sergiovanni acknowledges that other sources of power, i.e., “bureaucratic”, “psychological”, and “technical-rational” (pp. 36–37) have their place, he posits that “moral authority” will result in a community of teachers whose “…performance is expansive and sustained” (pp. 36–37). This concept of moral authority led to what Sergiovanni calls moral leadership.

Distributed leadership is different from either moral or transformational leadership, but continues to build upon the themes of relationships and consent wherein teachers are viewed as willing followers rather than obedient subordinates. Spillane (2005) explains:

A distributed perspective frames leadership practice in a particular way; leadership practice is viewed as a product of the interactions of school leaders, followers (emphasis added), and their situation. This point is especially important, and one that is frequently glossed over in discussions of distributed leadership. Rather than viewing leadership practice as a product of a leader’s knowledge and skill, the distributed perspective defines it as the interactions between people and their situation. These interactions, rather than any particular action, are critical in understanding leadership practice. (p. 144)

The importance of effective interactions and, implicitly, the building of effective relationships, are critical to this concept of leadership.

Whether discussing transformational, moral, or distributed leadership, this point should be made: focusing on relationships and building a community of followers (based on a commitment to ideas) are essential to the practice of effective school leadership.

PART 3: CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The first people had questions, and they were free. The second people had answers, and they became enslaved. Wind Eagle, American Indian Chief

Leadership has no template. The dispositions that result in effective leadership strategies are neither linear nor precise. Leaders enact sets of behaviors that range from improvisation to allegiance while modeling integrity of purpose. How are these contradictions possible? And what do they mean for educational leaders?

The answers lie in questions.

Authentic, high-quality leadership is characterized by continuous analysis. A good leader, then, can be described as one who is dedicated to the ideal of continuous becoming. This concept, suitably framed in the field of education, requires commitment to the ongoing examination of one’s actions, decisions, and assumptions. In short, it requires a commitment to being a lifelong learner – in the scholarly sense of the term. In addition to the obligation to maintain a critical disposition, this approach requires a responsibility to engage with (as both consumer and producer) emerging ideas in the field relating to research, policy, and practice.
A critical framework should not be confused with “critique” or “criticism.” It is, in fact, far more nuanced because consideration must be given to multilayered contexts and their interrelations. Furthermore, a critical analytical framework is not intended to generate an “answer key” or solution table. Rather, it is proposed as a means of conducting deliberations in order to connect experiences, uncover assumptions, untangle beliefs, reveal biases, and identify relevant information. Critical to this framework is the ability to ask the “right” questions before seeking the “right” answers.

What does this mean, in practice? First, as you use the framework, begin to think about and collect relevant information about the case story. Just as importantly, note what additional information, not found in the story, would be useful and significant. Make note of your preliminary assumptions and responses, but do not simply accept them. Consider alternative perspectives, and reflect on the foundations of your initial assumptions and responses. Second, make connections to research and scholarship in the field. Seek guidance from established sources, as well as emerging scholars and new research. Appreciate the shifting context of the field of education as an opportunity to model the professional disposition of lifelong learning. Third, as you encounter dilemmas in your practice, imagine the case story framework and evaluate your leadership processes in that context.

A-PIE: A CASE STORY ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

A-PIE is an acronym for Assess, Plan, Implement, and Evaluate. The A-PIE framework was designed by the authors of this book to help readers thoroughly and consistently analyze the case stories presented. It can also be applied to “real world” dilemmas.

When applying A-PIE to case stories, the focus should be on the steps “A” and “P”, but consideration must also be given to steps “I” and “E” as they are integral to the successful application of the framework. Because others may have information and perspectives that can help inform the process, we suggest that the A-PIE framework be applied to each story in collaboration with a partner or partners. In “real world” settings, those partners could include: teachers, students, parents, board of education members, peers, supervisors, and community members. Such collaboration will increase their commitment to addressing the dilemma.

Moving methodically through the A-PIE process enables school leaders to listen, question, evaluate, and learn. This will enhance the success of their plans and the validity of their decisions. Most importantly, it will support a leadership approach based on collaboration and continuous improvement.
CONNECTING THEORY TO PRACTICE

A – Assess. Gather and assess the information presented in the case story and other information that may be pertinent. It is important to ask the right questions. For example, if the story involves a legal issue, what federal or state laws or regulations pertain to the situation? Or, if the story involves a funding issue, what literature regarding school finance is relevant? In other words, look inside and outside the story for additional information. Use questions to develop a clear understanding of the problems and possible causes.

P – Plan. Using the information that has been gathered, develop a variety of short- and long-term actions that could be implemented to address the problem. A short-term plan might involve a decision that takes just a few minutes to arrive at; a long-term plan could involve numerous committees and multi-year phases. Once again, asking the right questions is key. For example:

- What are the pros and cons of each action, including possible unintended consequences?
- What resources are needed?
- Who will be affected? What stakeholders will benefit, and how? What stakeholders will suffer, and how?

After careful deliberation, choose the actions to be taken and use them to develop a plan for addressing the problem. Next, ask more questions such as,

- How will we define success?
- How will the results or success of the plan be evaluated, both short- and long-term?
- What evidence will be used and how will this evidence be generated?
- When will evaluation take place and who will be involved?
- Prior to implementation, will the plan be shared with others? If so, how and when?

I – Implement. Implement and monitor the plan. Here, be sure to assign responsibility for guiding and directing the implementation of the plan to one or more individuals.

E – Evaluate. Following the steps in the plan, conduct formative and summative evaluations of the plan. Is the execution of the plan having the intended consequences? Have any unintended consequences manifested? If so, does the plan need to be modified?

Figure 3. A-PIE Steps.

CONNECTING CASE STORY ANALYSIS TO A LEADERSHIP PLATFORM

Case stories, and the results of their analyses, are not meant to remain encapsulated in an academic forum. The purpose of the endeavor is to inform practice and enhance the ongoing development of professional leadership knowledge, skills, and dispositions. A concrete way to approach this is to connect case story analysis to a leadership platform.

Developing a leadership platform enables school leaders to consider philosophical questions that influence their actions and decisions. Platforms identify and reflect deeply held values, understandings, and beliefs about leaders themselves, about education, and about the role of leadership. The development of a platform enables practitioners to merge experiences, theory, and practice by making connections between daily decisions and the larger social context that influences, and is influenced by, actors within organizations.
Leadership platforms in the field of education generally explore perspectives related to the following:

- Purpose of education
- Role of the teacher
- Role of the administrator
- Nature of the learner

When addressing these concepts, leaders should make connections to theories and to scholars who reflect the development of their beliefs, as well as consider personal and professional experiences that have influenced them. Often developed within templates specified by educational administration programs, platforms constitute an embodiment of values and mental models. Not meant to be static, they necessarily represent a point in time with respect to the dynamic process of leadership development.

DeVore and Martin (2008), referencing others in the literature, explain how personal leadership platforms can be used to address challenging situations – specifically, the tensions present in managing dilemmas:

Beck and Murphy (1997) argued that leaders are challenged to “look within themselves, at their own values, beliefs, commitments, biases, and assumptions to assist them in managing dilemmas…” (p. 191). Other researchers suggested that leaders need to develop a platform in which to articulate their belief system (Covey, 1990; Kahn, 1990; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1983).

In responding to the case stories, it important to integrate the A-PIE framework through a personal leadership platform, strengthening the connection between how leaders think, what they believe, and how they act.

The apparent polarization between seeking internal guidance and referring to an external document such as a platform can be reconciled, in part, by engaging with case stories. This can be accomplished by associating case story analysis to the leadership platform, thereby strengthening and extending connections between theory and practice.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is intended to complicate and animate standards to enable leaders to enhance their practice in ways that link to established theoretical perspectives. In planning this text, we wanted to recognize and validate the fact that leaders emerge at all levels of an organization, regardless of their titles. Furthermore, similar administrative titles can involve different responsibilities in different organizations. Finally, we acknowledge that authority, responsibility, and resource allocation vary tremendously across and within educational institutions.

Therefore, we decided to explore the application and implementation of ISLLC Standards through case stories that address multiple levels of leadership. Each standard is illustrated through three case stories: Teacher Leader, Building Leader,
and District Leader. These terms are intentionally vague. Teacher leaders might be full-time or part-time positions and could include department chairs, library or learning center directors, school counselors, coaches, music/art directors, technology liaisons, and reassigned district level positions. Building leaders might include principals, assistant principals, deans, headmasters, and professional development specialists. District leaders would, of course, include superintendents; however, they could also be assistant superintendents, human resources administrators, transportation and technology coordinators, athletic directors, special education administrators, fund raisers, and grant writers. Although the stories are conveyed from these different but overlapping perspectives, the dilemmas they raise will relate to leaders in all these positions. In addition, the multiple perspectives are meant to extend the thinking of leaders at various levels so that they will approach complicated situations with greater empathy and understanding.

We suggest, therefore, that leaders at all levels read, reflect on, and apply the A-PIE analytic framework to each of the stories. In group settings, it can be helpful to role-play the stories, since leadership is not a purely cognitive undertaking. Role-playing scenarios allows participants to connect with their own feelings, assumptions, and autobiographies in ways that isolated reading and writing cannot replicate. Consider, also, how the stories relate to daily experiences and how these experiences are echoed in the larger purposes of education. All the case stories are fictionalized versions of real events; they illustrate issues that we have not solved, but that we continue to attempt to understand. We invite you to do the same.

NOTE

1 Of course, a leadership platform is individually developed and, as such, is not entirely “external.” However, it is distanced, at least temporally, from most dilemmas faced in the field.

REFERENCES

CHAPTER 1


CHAPTER 2

STANDARD 1: VISIONS OF LEARNING

Standard 1: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.

Functions:

A. Collaboratively develop and implement a shared vision and mission
B. Collect and use data to identify goals, assess organizational effectiveness, and promote organizational learning
C. Create and implement plans to achieve goals
D. Promote continuous and sustainable improvement
E. Monitor and evaluate progress and revise plans

A vision is a representation of the possible. It is a guiding philosophy – a linguistic attempt to fuse theory and practice, the real and the ideal. Clearly, the development of a mental image that unites esoteric aspirations with authentic actualities is not easy. Northouse (2009) explains that effective leadership entails a recursive process of multiple phases. Drawing on research about leadership, he notes that “visions have five characteristics: a picture, a change, values, a map, and a challenge” (p. 88).

While the development of a vision of learning is a collaborative venture, the first phase involves establishing a personal vision. Although this may seem to be an individual task, the development of a personal vision requires dynamic interactions within various contexts, both inside and outside of educational institutions. Robbins and Alvy (2004), using the role of building principal as the representation of an individual leader, describe the contextual interrelations that affect, and are affected by, the development of a personal vision:

Roland Barth defines leadership as “making happen what you believe in” (2001, p. 446). This is accomplished through symbolic and expressive leadership behaviors. From the symbolic perspective, a principal models and focuses individual attention on what is important. From the expressive side of leadership, principals talk with teachers, help to crystallize and communicate the rationale for a vision, and generate shared discussions about what is important in the school. This focus on the meaning of a school leads to the development of a mission statement grounded in the collective
beliefs of the staff. The process creates a commitment to a common
direction and generates energy to pursue it. But it begins with a personal
leadership vision. (p. 6)

Personal visions are developed over time, after significant investments in
deliberation, contemplation, and conversation. It is essential that one’s personal
vision embodies morals, values, and beliefs that aspire to the best imaginable
future. Northouse (2009) clarifies this phase:

A competent leader will have a compelling vision that challenges people to
work toward a higher standard of excellence. A vision is a mental model of
an ideal future state. It provides a picture (all emphases in original) of a
future that is better than the present, is grounded in values, and advocates
change toward some new set of ideals. Visions function as a map to give
people direction. Visions also challenge people to commit themselves to a
greater common good. (p. 98)

Once a personal vision has been established, ideally in a shared context, that vision
must be communicated to extend throughout the learning community. As in any
exchange of ideas, sharing a vision involves potential for bonding and growth as
well as conflict and misunderstanding. Therefore, the communicative process must
be painstaking, conscientious, and committed to transparent expressive and
receptive interactions. Northouse (2009) describes the complexity of articulating
one’s vision:

First, an effective leader clearly articulates the vision to others. This requires
the leader to adapt the vision to the attitudes and values of the audience.
Second, the leader highlights the intrinsic values of the vision, emphasizing
how the vision presents ideals worth pursuing. Third, a competent leader uses
language that is motivating and uplifting to articulate the vision. Finally, the
leader uses inclusive language that enlists participation from others and
builds community. (p. 98)

Drawing on Hirsch (1996), Robbins and Arvy (2004) specify the importance of
moving effectively from a personal vision to a vision that is shared by the
educational community.

A school vision should be a descriptive statement of what the school will be
like at a specified time in the future. It uses descriptive words or phrases and
sometimes pictures to illustrate what one would expect to see, hear, and
experience in the school at that time. It engages all stakeholders in answering
such questions as:

● What kind of school do we want for our children and staff?
● What will students learn? How will they learn?
● How will students benefit from attendance at our school?
● How will their success be measured or demonstrated?
● Of all the educational innovations and research, which strategies should we seek to employ in our school?
● If parents had a choice, on what basis would they choose to send their children to our school? (Hirsch, cited in Robbins and Alvy, np)

The final phase related to visionary leadership involves implementation – moving from words to actions that reflect and inform policies and practices. Once again, Northouse (2009) links this phase to the characteristics of a vision:

A challenge for a leader is to carry out the difficult processes of implementing a vision. To implement a vision, the leader needs to be a living model (all emphases in original) of the ideals and values articulated in the vision. In addition, he or she must set high performance expectations for others, and encourage and empower others to reach their goals. (p. 98)

In practice, this phase often involves the creation of a mission statement. Hirsch (1996) offers key ideas for getting started:

A mission statement is a succinct, powerful statement on how the school will achieve its vision. The mission answers:

● What is our purpose?
● What do we care most about?
● What must we accomplish?
● What are the cornerstones of our operations? (Hirsch, cited in Robbins and Alvy, 2004, np)

A clear, concise mission statement provides a representation of the learning community to which the group aspires. It is developed in collaboration with all stakeholders and reflects the values, hopes, and dreams of all learners. But, as important as the mission and vision statements are, a vision is more than words. It is an embodiment of ideas and morals of an ideal society, and its underlying philosophies are a guide for decision making, in both macro and micro contexts. A vision presents the priorities of leaders and links those priorities to the expectations of the communities they serve.

CASE STORY 1T: TEACHER LEADER

Although they appeared to be polar opposites in every respect, principal Rick DeJesus and assistant principal Bob Saunders worked amazingly well together. Rick, only 29, was in his first year as principal after having served for a short period of time as a middle school social studies teacher and as a “teacher-on-special-assignment” (referred to as a TOSA) for curriculum development. In that capacity, Rick had conducted in-service training sessions on the latest state and national initiatives and had led teams of teachers in developing new curriculum guides. He was effective and popular. When the principal position had opened up
at Choctaw Middle School, Rick was the rumored “odds on” favorite to get the position – and the odds-makers had proven to be correct.

In contrast to Rick’s meteoric rise from 7th grade social studies teacher, to a TOSA, to a building principal, Bob Saunders had been the assistant at Choctaw for over 25 years. He was good at his job, was considered the quintessential middle manager and, most importantly, was quite happy with his position as assistant principal. While Rick, by nature, was ambitious, intellectually curious, deeply reflective, and eager to embrace new ideas, Bob saw himself as the steady, dependable administrator who, as he often reminded colleagues, “kept the ship afloat.” In reality, both types of leadership were critically important in running any organization and the fact that the two men worked so well together was, in a sense, a compliment to each.

In their first year together, Rick found Bob’s knowledge of organizational culture and his no-nonsense approach to student discipline indispensable to the effective operation of the school. And, though Rick was young enough to be Bob’s son, Bob was impressed with Rick’s enthusiasm. Moreover, their professional relationship was strengthened by the respect Rick showed for Bob’s perspective on everything from conducting assemblies to developing agendas for staff meetings.

Choctaw Middle School social worker Denise Stapleton held a unique position in terms of respect and authority. Both attributes were enhanced by her close professional relationship with the two building administrators. Denise’s first five years as Choctaw’s social worker had been a bit frustrating. She was originally hired because the school was undergoing significant demographic changes in the composition of the student body, particularly with respect to socio-economic status. The proportion of Choctaw students on the federal “Free and Reduced Lunch” program had risen from 12% to 41% within ten years; school suspensions were up, and standardized test scores were down. District leaders had determined that a social worker was needed to mediate the growing problems between and among students, teachers, social service agencies, and (at times) local police.

Unfortunately, despite the clear need for her services, Denise had felt invisible in her first years on the job. Rick’s predecessor, the now retired Tom Daley, had seemed to have no time for her. Though he claimed to have faith in her abilities, he’d rarely responded to any of her written reports and was dismissive whenever they’d met to discuss a student issue. Therefore, Denise had been excited when she learned that Rick DeJesus would be the new principal. Her hopes had risen even more when Rick singled out Denise at his first staff meeting and announced how happy he was to have a social worker in his school. He had mentioned that he would be depending on her to offer advice and direction in dealing with difficult student issues. Back on that warm day in late August, neither Denise nor Rick, nor even Bob for that matter, had realized how quickly her expertise would be tested.

The student’s name was Steven Hicks. He was an 8th grader who had entered Choctaw Middle School in grade 6. His record as a student during this time was not unusual in any way. However, things changed in late October. In an effort to build morale and strengthen connections among teachers and students, Rick suggested that the school sponsor an “Opposite Day.” A committee of teachers and
students put together the program and Rick was delighted with the results: suggestions were made to reverse the class schedule for the day, to serve lunch beginning with dessert, to make teachers carry hall passes, and to allow cross-gender attire.

When “Opposite Day” arrived, Rick was pleased to see that the entire school – teachers, students, and support staff – participated. Everyone seemed to embrace the spirit of “Opposite Day.” Perhaps the most entertaining aspect of the event was the number of boys who dressed as girls. Generally, the boys made caricatures of their perceptions of femininity, exaggerating the ways girls dress, walk, and wear make-up. But not Steven Hicks.

Steven was the talk of the school because, although he also chose to dress as a girl, he did so in the most deliberate way; that is to say, he took the time to find girls’ clothing that made it difficult for observers to identify him as a boy. And, unlike the caricatures presented by the other boys, Steven’s performance was authentic – right down to the curled hair, carefully applied make-up, stylish purse and high heels.

All of this would have been a footnote for the school year except that Steven showed up for school the next day again dressed as a girl. His homeroom teacher, feeling that Steven’s dress was “inappropriate,” sent him to the office, where he was confronted by Bob Saunders.

Bob had seen many things in his years as an assistant principal, but this situation was new. He asked Steven why he was dressed this way. The eighth grader, without hesitating, said he had always felt like a girl and that from now on he planned to look like one. He said his clothing on “Opposite Day” made him feel “right” for the first time in his life and that he never wanted to lose that feeling again. Bob asked Steven if his parents knew how he had dressed for school and Steven said that they knew – and that they didn’t care. For the first time in his career, Bob felt like he was out of his league; so he presented the situation to Rick.

Rick met with Steven and came away impressed with the student’s sense of certainty that he was a girl in a boy’s body – and that he only felt “normal” when dressed in girls’ clothing. Rick pointed out to Steven that other people – in this case, students – might be less tolerant. Did he know what he was getting into? Steven was adamant. This was his choice.

Rick’s vision of a healthy, productive and safe school environment meant that diversity – in all its forms – was to be nurtured and embraced. Rick thought back to his own days in middle school and high school and remembered them as difficult. He recalled how hard it was to fit in and was determined that Choctaw Middle would allow every student to feel the sense of belonging that he felt was essential for academic success. At the end of the meeting, Rick asked Steven to meet with the school’s social worker. That was when Denise got involved.

Denise met with Steven later that day and continued meeting with him daily for several weeks. She also arranged to have him see a therapist. Denise was moved by Steven’s descriptions of his hidden identity, how he craved girls’ clothing, and how desperately he wanted to be accepted. She even brought in some of her own garments – scarves, shoes, and accessories – to show support for Steven.
In the meantime, Steven continued to dress as a girl. As the principal, Rick wanted to support Steven. He conducted staff meetings around this topic, encouraging teachers to accept Steven’s behaviors and to ask their students to do the same.

Bob suggested that they suspend him from school until he “dressed appropriately,” but the school district’s attorney noted that there was no law prohibiting a boy from dressing as a girl; in fact, the state’s hate-crime law prevented gender discrimination.

Things were relatively quiet for awhile. But then Steven’s attire became more flamboyant. His clothing became more provocative. Regular shoes were replaced by spike heels. Dresses became shorter, and the make-up heavier. Students, particularly the boys, began to ridicule him. When a social studies teacher assigned students to work in groups, one of the students in Steven’s group refused to participate, declaring, “I’m not gonna be in the same group with that freak!” Teachers reported a growing number of students talking about Steven and commenting sarcastically on his daily appearance.

Rick decided to call a meeting with Bob and Denise to discuss the situation and develop an approach that would serve the best interests of both Steven and the rest of the school.

“Ok,” said Rick. Let’s go around the table and lay out our concerns about Steven Hicks.”

Denise started. “My heart goes out to this boy. His identity is deeply embedded in his belief that he is a girl. From what I know about this type of situation – and the therapist supports it – we cannot change him. I know that some students don’t want to be near him…but that’s their problem, not Steven’s. There was time when students with special needs were not welcomed into regular classrooms, and we now know that that wasn’t right. Aren’t we supposed to be teaching more than just academic stuff? What happened to tolerance, diversity, social justice?”

Rick turned to Bob.

Bob, deep in thought, was staring out the window of Rick’s office. He was watching a work crew apply a protective coating on the surface of the school’s asphalt parking lot.

“I don’t know,” he began slowly. “I mean, you both know where I stand on this. I thought that he should have been suspended after we warned him about the impression he was making. But we were told that our hands are tied – that he has a ‘right’ to dress as he pleases and that we might be violating the ‘hate-crime’ law. Well, what about the rights of the rest of the students? As I see it, our students have a right to an education free from distractions. That’s my problem with this whole situation. Just think of the number of meetings we’ve had because of this kid: administrative time, staff meetings, reports to the Superintendent, meetings with the therapist. I mean… come on, already. What he’s doing is ‘in your face’ defiant behavior – and it’s getting worse. Mark my words: he’s going to take it another step. It’s just a matter of time.”

Bob paused, then continued.
“We can’t suspend him for dressing like a girl? Fine. So, let’s take disciplinary action against him for being a distraction – for preventing other kids from getting an education.”

The group fell silent. Bob and Denise both turned toward Rick. Denise broke the silence.

“So,” she asked. “What are we going to do?”

CASE STORY 1B: BUILDING LEADER

Sharon White was enjoying her fourth year as principal at King Elementary School in Rockville County. King Elementary, 1 of 24 K-8 schools in the district, served a diverse and relatively poor population. When Sharon had been appointed as principal, over 70% of the students in 8th grade scored below the state benchmark for proficiency on both the math and literacy assessments. The results for students in 4th grade were similar.

However, over the past three years scores had steadily improved and now more than 80% of the 4th and 8th graders achieved proficiency on state tests. This turnaround was not accidental; it was largely the result of two variables – the appointment of Sharon White as principal and the fact that the school had been “adopted” by a local financial corporation, Niagara Capital, which provided significant additional support to the school.

Sharon had begun her career as a reading teacher in an affluent suburban district, but after a few years recognized that she wanted to return to her roots in Rockville. So, after gaining tenure in her initial position, she took a job as a reading coach in the large Rockville school district and began her studies leading to administrative certification. Five years later, at the relatively young age of 31, she was appointed principal at King Elementary.

Much had changed since Sharon had graduated from Rockville High School. Like many “rustbelt” cities around the Great Lakes, Rockville had continued to experience a loss of well-paying blue collar jobs, a loss that had led to urban flight and decay. Unemployment in the community hovered around 20%. Currently, the dwindling population of Rockville was 46% African-American, 31% Hispanic, and 22% white. Most of the students came from families who had resettled in the city after escaping civil wars, famines and natural disasters that plagued their villages in Africa and Central America. State reports indicated that students who entered the high school in 9th grade had only a 50% chance of graduating.

King Elementary served a significant number of students whose families had resettled in Rockville as well as large number of African-American and Hispanic students. Twenty-five percent of the students were English language learners and the poverty rate was near 80%. Despite these demographics, Sharon, with financial support from Niagara Capital, had been able to lead the turnaround of the school and King Elementary was being hailed as one of the bright spots in the city.

Many of the other elementary schools in the district, on the other hand, were labeled as “persistently low achieving” – a designation for schools which experienced overall poor performance on state tests for three consecutive years.
Therefore, the state was now requiring the district to take what was referred to as “corrective action.” This process included the development of a district-wide improvement plan. In some cases, principals had to be replaced and over 50% of the teachers had to be removed from the school. Failure to meet these requirements would cause the loss of millions of dollars in state aid for the district, something it certainly could not afford.

Sharon was sitting in her office one afternoon late in the school year when she received an unexpected visit from the school district superintendent, Dr. William James.

“Sharon, sorry to barge in like this, but do you have a minute?” William asked.

Although surprised by the superintendent’s visit, Sharon welcomed him. “Sure Dr. James. Please come in Can I get you a soda or cup of coffee?”

“No thanks Sharon – not right now. I’ve got something important to share with you.” He paused and leaned forward.

“You know you have done a great job here at King. Parents, teachers and students all love you, and – under your leadership – students are learning and achieving. Even the local paper, which is not very friendly toward our schools, sings your praises. You have a lot to be proud of… and I have a favor to ask.”

Noting Sharon’s quizzical expression, William lifted his chin and tapped it with his index finger, then continued speaking.

“Well, I guess it’s really not a favor. Let me explain. As you know, three of our elementary schools have been labeled “persistently low achieving” and the state has directed us to make changes. I have discussed this at length with the school board and the central office administrators and we have come to the conclusion that we have no choice. We must follow the state’s directives. We have to replace the three principals assigned to the low achieving schools and shift 50% of their teachers to other schools. These actions will require sacrifices across the board, from everyone involved. The bottom line, Sharon, is this: we want you to take over as principal of Ashland Elementary.”

Sharon’s shoulders dropped and she swallowed hard before meeting the superintendent’s steady gaze. “Dr. James,” said Sharon, “Ashland is the lowest performing school in the district.”

“I know,” said the superintendent, “but we all feel strongly that you can make a difference.”

After a few seconds – and a deep breath – Sharon responded. “Dr. James, I’m flattered that you think I can perform miracles, but my heart belongs to the students, staff and parents at King. Together, we’ve created a vision of what we wanted the school to be and I believe we have made remarkable progress toward making that vision a reality. However, we still have a long way to go. While 80% of our students are achieving proficiency, 20% are not. Our vision statement says that 90% of students will achieve proficiency within five years – that’s less than two years from now. I want to continue to build on what we’ve started. And, besides –”

Dr. James interrupted. “Sharon, this is not a request. I’m not giving you a choice. We need to put a proven leader, a difference-maker, at the helm at
Ashland, and you’re that person. All of us have supreme confidence in you. You’re bright, you know the city, you relate well to parents, you can engage with diverse populations, and you inspire teachers. Sharon, people want to work for you.”

“But, Dr. James,” said Sharon, “the problems at Ashland are so deeply embedded that they seem almost… insurmountable. The building is in terrible condition, the neighborhood is run down and crime-ridden, attendance rates are among the worst in the city; and the faculty is, perhaps, too experienced. They are too far into their careers to even think about changing. I don’t see how replacing even 50% of the teachers will make much of a difference, because those who remain will likely poison the attitudes of the new staff members.”

“Sharon, I understand your concerns – but our plan requires you to start at Ashland on July 1. Begin thinking about who you’d like as assistant principal, as well as the process you’re going to use to hire 24 new teachers – that’s exactly half the staff. Those teachers must come from voluntary transfers or displacements from other buildings. Remember, you are mandated to follow the teachers’ contract. The district’s human resources department can help you there. Also, I want you to consider the importance of engaging the entire school community in this turnaround. Sharon, I know you’re up to this. We’re all counting on you.”

With those words, William James stood, shook her hand warmly, and left.

Sitting alone in her office, Sharon White was devastated. She was proud of what she had accomplished at King and had developed close ties with the school. Sharon appreciated the vote of confidence by her administrative superiors. But the superintendent’s decision made her wonder if she would have been better off being a less effective leader. Ashland’s problems dwarfed those she had faced at King, and the economy meant that business partnerships were unlikely to emerge.

Sharon couldn’t help but ask herself: “Have my successes, somehow, set me up for failure?”

CASE STORY 1D: DISTRICT LEADER

Superintendent Emma Howard straightened her skirt and buttoned her jacket as she prepared to address Warsaw High School’s National Honor Society inductees and their proud parents. It was one of her favorite evening activities – far more enjoyable, she felt, than the ice cream socials and book fairs that the elementary schools frequently hosted. She appreciated the formality of this event and was pleased about the opportunity to celebrate the academic success of the district’s students.

The ceremony was also a welcome break from her current project, which involved an analysis of student achievement data disaggregated by subgroups. A strong believer in the power of data to inform practice, Emma had spent long hours over the past few weeks reviewing standardized test scores and grade point averages of district students, then associating these measures with a variety of factors, such as race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, disciplinary reports, special education classification, and teacher assignment. Never one to avoid hard truths, Emma had noticed some interesting and disturbing correlations.
CHAPTER 2

The two revelations that were most disquieting involved race. Although the Warsaw School District was relatively diverse with a student population that was 59% White, 35% Black, and 6% Hispanic, students classified as in need of special education were 78% Black and 15% Hispanic. This seemed to be an impossible juxtaposition of percentages; Emma had been so astonished that she had checked the data four times. Then, after requesting another set of data to ensure source accuracy, she had verified it twice more. The numbers were correct. And something was terribly wrong.

The second revelation did not concern academics, but had to do with discipline. Once again, data indicated wide discrepancies connected with race. In grades 7–12, disciplinary incidents disaggregated by race were disconcerting. More than 75% of the incidents resulting in suspensions involved Black students; just over 20% involved Hispanic students. If these figures were accurate (Emma’s administrative assistant had requested new data to verify this today), this meant that less than 5% of major disciplinary infractions were linked to students who, racially, comprised almost 60% of the school population. It seemed inexplicable. And Emma had no viable explanation.

However, she knew that it was important to get a sense of how the school reflected the community, so she planned to check local law enforcement records to see whether they had any data regarding race and arrests.

Tonight’s celebration offered exactly the kind of respite and inspiration she needed. Energized by the prospect of interacting with students, parents, and faculty who demonstrated the dedication and inclination to succeed, Emma had written an address designed to congratulate and challenge her audience. She intended to commend the students, their parents, and their teachers, for believing in the power of education. By excelling in scholarship, leadership, service, and character, these students exemplified the kind of citizens that a democracy needed in order to prevail in its mission. In a similar vein, Emma’s address challenged students to leave the world – beginning with their classrooms, their school community, and their neighborhoods – a better place than when they had arrived. Whether changes were big or small, everyone’s actions could – and did – make a difference.

Emma nodded toward the advisor of the National Honor Society (NHS), who had signaled that she’d be introduced in five minutes. She folded her notes and glanced out toward the audience, taking in the scene. Students, both present NHS members and new inductees, were seated in perfectly straight rows. She smiled to herself, noting their uncharacteristically formal attire. Some of their shirts and blouses had creases signifying that they were newly purchased. Leaning forward in pairs and small groups, they whispered incessantly, avoiding eye contact with their parents. Just past the students, parents sat expectantly, cameras in hand. A few waved tentatively at their nervous teens, none of whom waved back.

Suddenly, Emma gasped. She scanned the crowd, trying to dispel the troubling fact she had just grasped. Row by row, she examined the students – new inductees and existing members, as well as the NHS officers who sat on stage. Next, she searched the crowd, once again inspecting them methodically – one row at a time.
Finally, even though she knew what she would find, being fully aware of the demographic status of her district’s faculty, Emma looked at the teachers present. As the advisor finished introducing Emma, she stepped toward the podium. She was momentarily blinded by the stage lights, but even more dazed by her realization. This year’s National Honor Society at Warsaw High School would induct students representing almost 30% of its student body: yet every single inductee was White.

WORKS CITED