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**LEADING FORWARD, LEARNING BACKWARD: AN EXPLORATORY
STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF PRIOR LEARNING EXPERIENCE ON URBAN
SCHOOL LEADER STRATEGIC ACTION**

By

Cheryl Lynn King

A DISSERTATION

**Submitted to
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ABSTRACT

LEADING FORWARD, LEARNING BACKWARD: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF PRIOR LEARNING EXPERIENCES ON URBAN SCHOOL LEADER STRATEGIC ACTION

By

Cheryl Lynn King

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationships between school leader learning experiences and their strategic behavior. The logic of this study rests on the proposition that it is the interwoven set of prior learning experiences that most significantly influence the way that school leaders strategically think and act in their approaches to school reform. In search of explanations for school leader behavior, a few assumptions were central to achieving this purpose.

First, it was assumed that the nature and impact of leaders' learning experiences could be best understood by studying their accounts of these experiences with particular attention given to their learning content, their learning context, and their learning motivation. These data were placed in a developmental framework to allow for the gradual building of each school leader's repertoire of learning experiences over time and offered rich opportunities for observing emerging patterns and themes both individually and across the learning repertoires. Second, it was further assumed that the family, school, and work contexts would be logical reference points for understanding the impact of these learning experiences on leader perceptions, interpretations, and behavior.

Social learning theory is logically related to the purpose and assumptions guiding this study. It lends itself naturally to the concepts explored with its approach to the explanation of human behavior from the standpoint of it being “a continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental determinants (Bandura, 1977, p. 194).”

The process of the in-depth phenomenological interview was used in this study and followed closely the methodology developed by Seidman (1983) and Sullivan (1982). The process can be described generally as open but focused. Using interviews as the primary source of data offered the advantage of being able to obtain large quantities of data in a relatively short period of time with opportunities for immediate follow-up and clarification as needed. Capturing the subjective views of participants was extremely important for the purposes of this research thus confirming the choice of in-depth interviewing as the primary research method (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

Findings supported the conclusion that the deep prior learning experiences of school leaders consistently served as filters for their perceptions and interpretations of their strategic problems, factors contributing to the problems, and the subsequent courses of action they chose to take in addressing the problems.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this effort to my mother, a woman who without question has played a major role in my deep learning experiences about resilience, excellence, and above all unwavering faith in the midst of all storms. Your lessons by example have had a most profound impact on shaping the person I am today. I thank you, my mother, my mentor, my friend.

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I would like to acknowledge individuals who, were it not for their support and encouragement, this accomplishment may never have been realized.

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Special thanks to my transcriber, Lenora Billings, who listened to hours of tapes and prepared over 400 pages of transcription. That she listened and heard the story and found value in its being told were of special significance to me.

Personal gratitude to my family and friends who have sacrificed having their needs met to encourage and support the accomplishment of my goal. Particular thanks go to my husband, who listened, critiqued, drove me back and forth to campus in all types of weather, took over all household responsibilities and most importantly constantly kept me lifted in prayer. And of course my adult children, who believed in me and would not let me give up.

Humble appreciation to my leader participants who opened up their lives and allowed me to learn from them. I am deeply humbled by your trust and confidence in my ability to tell your remarkable stories. I am forever changed as a result of the time I spent with you.

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”

Phillipians 4:13

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CHAPTER I

Life is often lived forward, but understood backward. It is not until we are down the road a bit that we can appreciate the terrain we have scaled and the learning deposits that have been made along the way (Os Hillman, 2000).

OVERVIEW OF STUDY

Introduction

Human skills, appreciations, and reasoning in all their great variety, as well as human hopes, aspirations, attitudes, and values, are generally recognized to depend for their development largely on the experiences called learning (Gagné, 1971). In this study, I was interested in exploring the learning experiences of urban school leaders. Of particular interest to me, were the types of learning experiences school leaders had and the degree to which these experiences appear to influence and shape their strategic behavior.

I began with the premise that what one does is determined by what one has learned to do. My primary aim was to pinpoint markers of significant influence in the learning experiences of school leaders that may predispose them toward taking certain courses of action. I looked for the patterns and themes that emerged across the leader learning experiences in search of links to their perceptions, interpretations, and strategies for resolving issues as leaders within their organizations. In the ensuing background, conceptual framework, and review of related literature I present the assumptions that served as the basic foundation for the inquiry.

Background

After almost two decades of school reform research and implementation, among the most prominent beliefs embedded in state and national agendas for improving schools are: 1) the school, rather than the classroom, is the basic unit of reform; 2) administrative leadership is essential for school improvement; and 3) top-down decisions and expertise make a difference in school improvement (Edmonds, 1979; Cohen, 1982; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Ralph & Fennessy, 1983; Shipps, 1987; Stedman, 1987; Levine & Lezotte, 1990; Firestone, 1991; Murphy, 1992; Ogawa, 1994).

At the beginning of this new century, school restructuring continues to frame the context for school leadership. Across all parts of the developed world schools continue to be challenged, in the name of reform, to change their governance structures, open themselves to greater community influence, become more accountable, clarify their standards for content and performance and introduce related changes in their approaches to teaching and learning. The search continues for approaches to school leadership that productively respond to the complexity of the challenges schools face (Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinback, 1999).

School leaders approach the challenge of reform from many different starting points and develop quite different responses to the formidable challenges facing their organizations. The literature suggests that a considerable proportion of the variation in leaders' responses to reform seems to depend in part on differences in their experience backgrounds. The literature further suggests that experience backgrounds influence the way that leaders process information when making strategic decisions (Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996; Leithwood and Steinbach, 1998).

The distinguished organizational theorist James Thompson wrote of the role of “the variable human” in influencing organizational action (1967, p.101). He suggests that leaders vary in their experiences and that these differences cause leaders to differ in their awareness and interpretation of problems, their interpretations about causation, and even their beliefs about what they are trying to accomplish.

So then, if schools are the basic unit of school reform, and if school leaders indeed play a strategic role in the school reform process, and if, in fact, the strategic actions of the school leader are influenced by their individual learning experiences, then it naturally follows that if we want to understand why schools perform the way they do, the leader of the school and his or her learning experiences must be a central part of any explanatory theory (Leithwood et al., 1999).

At one point, organizational leaders were an integral part of major theories of organization (Barnard 1938; Selznick, 1957; Chandler, 1962). In the field of strategy, organizational leaders were once seen as central determiners of the direction of the organization. For example, the Harvard model (Learned, Christensen, and Andrews, 1961; Andrews, 1971), which served as principal guide for business policy thinkers in the 1960s and 1970s, emphasized the personal role of organizational leaders in shaping their organizations.

Leaders in charge of company destinies do not look exclusively at what an organization might do and can do. They sometimes seem heavily influenced by what they personally want to do (p. 104).

Strategy is a human construction.... (p. 107).

In the Harvard model, individuals leading organizations were seen as pivotal in understanding what happens to the enterprise. But then the focus shifted by many in the academic community to mechanistic models in which factors such as environment, technology, and size became the dominating influences facing organizations. There were imperatives facing organizations, not choices to be made.

The ecologists' perspective followed in which the environment was the determiner of organizational forms. Organizational variation was largely random, accidental, or rooted in history, not willfully achieved (Hannan and Freeman, 1977; Aldrich, 1979). In fact, these theorists saw organizations as generally dominated by external and internal constraints, and not readily available to the influences of leadership.

Despite the long tradition of a managerial perspective, even the field of strategy lost sight of strategic leaders. To some extent, this movement was probably due to the

effort to demonstrate the analytical rigor of the domain. The fuzziness and multi-dimensional nature of leader behavior was set aside.

The renewed interest in strategic leaders can be traced to John Child's (1972) influential article on "strategic choice." Child wrote:

... many available contributions to a theory of organizational structure do not incorporate the direct source of variation in formal structural arrangements, namely the strategic decisions of those who have the power of structural initiation...(1972, p.16)

In 1982, Kotter wrote *The General Managers*, in which he posited how differences in leaders' behaviors may be traceable to differences in their personal and background characteristics. In 1984, Hambrick and Mason in a more formalized theory, proposed that strategic leaders make strategic choices on the basis of their cognitions and values and that the organization becomes a reflection of its leader. In the same year, Gupta and Govindarajan (1984) conducted a systematic study of division leaders, finding that their units performed well to the extent that the leaders' experiences and personalities aligned with the critical requirements of the business. At the same time, several other influential works on strategic leaders appeared (e.g., Donaldson and Lorsch, 1983; Meindl, Ehrlich, and Dukerich, 1985; Miller, Kets deVries and Toulouse, 1982; Wagner, Pfeffer, and O'Reilly, 1984).

Since then, hundreds of academic and applied articles, books, and monographs on strategic leaders and their organizations have been written. The fields of organization theory and strategy have once again returned to a focus on strategic leaders and their influence on the fate of their organizations. As we can see, convincing evidence exists in the literature as well as everyday observation supporting the fact that organizational strategies are traceable to the leaders at the top of the organization – those who have the

responsibility for the organization's overall performance. (Finklestein and Hambrick, 1996).

Conceptual Framework

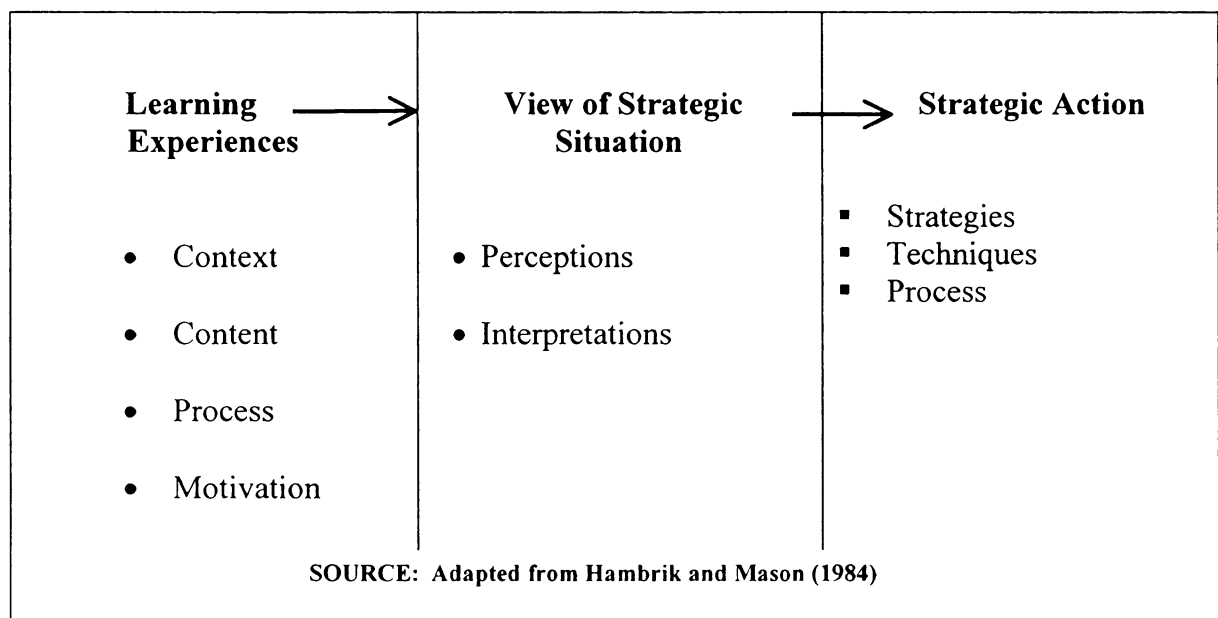
Associating the learning backgrounds of school leaders to their strategic actions is one potentially powerful way of advancing the debate on the effects of leader background experience on the health and vitality of organizations – specifically schools. In this study, particular attention was paid to the kinds of learning experiences that leaders described as having significant influence on the way they lead. Although the formal learning experiences of school leaders was part of this investigation, the researcher was most interested in the broader set of learning experiences that leaders described as playing an important role in shaping who they were and how they practiced (Useem and Karabel, 1986; D'Areni, 1990).

Cyert and March (1963) argue that to some extent, all of us exist in a web of our own personal and professional experiences. We may try to be open-minded, detached, and thorough; but we are confined greatly by what we already know and believe and by what we have experienced. Particularly in complex situations, they contend that decision-makers rely on the familiar often drawing on approaches that have worked well in the past. Further, Hitt and Tyler (1991) suggest that experiences serve to shape values and cognitive models in ways that may substantially affect decision making and behavior. If this is true, then background factors, reflective of a school leader's learning experiences, should be associated with the strategic decisions that they make.

The logic of this study rests on the proposition that it is the interwoven set of leader learning experiences that most significantly influences the way that leaders

perceive and interpret information in problem solving. These perceptions and interpretations in turn will result in leaders taking specific courses of action to bring about reform in their schools. This interwoven set of learning experiences are referred to here as the givens that the leader brings into an leadership situation (March and Simon, 1958) and are central to the conceptual framework for this study. The following model suggests a way to portray this process:

Figure 1



In this model, the learning experiences of the leader were viewed as dominant influences in shaping the way strategic problems were viewed thus influencing the courses of action taken. The focus was on the context, content, processes, and motivations for learning experiences described by school leaders. Perceptions and interpretations were then explored to determine how the leader viewed their respective strategic situations and the options available to them in resolving the problems described.

Finally, the specific strategic actions taken by the school leaders were explored in search of links to perceptions and interpretations and their learning experiences.

Learning Experiences as Determinants of Leader Behavior

The literature suggests that learning experience – or any biasing background experience, for that matter, has its greatest effect on problem-solving when the leader: 1) faces an abundance of complex ambiguous information, and 2) has to deal with the information under some urgency of some other form of pressure. It is under these conditions that leaders can be expected to scan, selectively perceive and interpret strategic information in line with their previous experiences (Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996). Another significant body of research further suggests that the schooling of top leaders is reflected in the characteristics of their organizations (e.g., Smart and Pascarella, 1986; Byrne, 1984; Cherrington, Condie, and England, 1979; Schein, 1968; Altmeyer, 1966). Moreover, evidence consistently has indicated a positive link between the education level of leaders and the amount of innovation in their organizations (Becker, 1970a; Becker, 1970b; Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971). Thus, the effects of leader education levels on organizational innovation, change, and growth are widely documented and appear to be robust and stable.

Many school leaders have spent the greater part of their careers in one primary work area, such as teaching, for example. It is reasonable to expect that a leaders work experiences provide a lens through which he or she views problems and solutions in general (Dearborn and Simon, 1958). A correspondence between work experiences and strategic decisions could occur as a result of a leader being drawn to a particular mode of thinking and acting that is typical for the particular professional area in which he or she

has been socialized and inculcated (Blau and McKinley, 1979; Mortimer and Lorence, 1979). In fact, even when individuals are operating outside their areas of work experience, there is evidence that they will still gravitate toward perceiving problems in familiar terms, generating and preferring familiar solutions (March and Simon, 1958). It was from a belief in the orienting and filtering effects of previous work experiences that Dearborn and Simon (1958) did their seminal study that ultimately led to today's widespread interest in the effects of leader background on decision making.

View of Strategic Situation

Organizational problem solving clearly represent what psychologist Walter Mischel (1977) calls a “weak situation,” one in which available stimuli are many, complex, and ambiguous. Mischel contends that in such situations, the choices of leaders vary widely and cannot be predicted by the stimuli themselves. Thus, leaders inject a great deal of themselves into such choices. Such a view is consistent with the logic of the Carnegie School of decision theory. According to Carnegie theorists, complex choices are largely determined by behavioral factors, rather than by calculations of optimal actions (March and Simon, 1958; Cyert and March, 1963). In this view, multiple and sometimes incompatible goals, a smorgasbord of options, and varying aspiration levels all serve to limit the extent to which complex decisions can be made. Instead, complex decisions are a result of human limits and biases. This is not to say that leaders are capricious but simply that they act on the basis of what they have learned, what they perceive, and what they want to do. And these can vary widely from leader to leader.

The literature suggests that in arriving at their own rendition of a strategic situation, or “construed reality” (Sutton, 1987), leaders distill and interpret available

information. Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996) argue that this occurs through a three-stage filtering process – limited field of vision, selective perception, and interpretation. This framework was modified to explore the relationship between learning experiences and the strategic actions of school leaders.

Field of Vision. The school leader's network of contacts will be used as a primary determinant of his or her field of vision (Chattopadhyay, et al., 1995). Most leaders have significant networks through which they both receive and disseminate information (Mintzberg, 1973; Kotter, 1982). However, these leader networks vary widely and can create significant differences in leaders' fields of vision. For example, a leader recruited from outside the organization will tend not to have the same internal network as a leader promoted from within (Gabarro, 1987). A leader who is actively involved in labor associations has a network different from a leader who is not (Geletkanycz, 1994). And a school leader who serves on inter and/or intra-district committees, community boards, and is actively involved in professional organizations has an expanded field of vision by virtue of those associations (Lorsch, 1989).

Selective Perception. Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996) suggest that further filtering occurs because a leader selectively perceives the stimuli within his or her field of vision. For example, when reading a consultant's report on technological trends in education, the leader's eyes may gaze on every page, but chances are, he or she will not read or comprehend every word. For one thing, their grasp of and interest in technological issues will affect how much of the report he or she "gets through." But other factors will matter as well: The leader's general regard for the author(s) of the report, whether the leader likes the editorial style and layout of the report, whether the

passages in the report are consistent with what he or she read elsewhere, and so on. The same filtering process may occur when the leader sits through a long meeting of presentations or has a conversation with colleagues. Not all of the information within the leader's field of vision will register equally: some will be vivid, meaningful, and engaging; some will slide into the leader's subconscious; and some will escape his or her attention entirely.

Starbuck and Milliken (1988) refer to this as the process of "noticing" and argue that noticing is a complex function of what is familiar and unfamiliar to the leader. On the one hand, people become relatively insensitive to familiar stimuli; on the other hand, with experience, people are able to notice the slightest perturbation in familiar stimuli. Not enough research has been done on leader "noticing" to be able to reconcile these complex phenomena. However, it is clear that leaders appear to only see a portion of what they are watching, and hear only a portion of what they are listening to. This process of selective perception will be explored in depth.

Interpretation. The third variable to be explored is the filtering process used by school leaders to interpret or attach meaning to information. Interpretation, either directly or indirectly, has been the object of most research on leader perception. Leaders have been studied for whether they interpret certain stimuli as opportunities or threats (e.g., Dutton and Jackson, 1987); for how they categorize or group stimuli (e.g., Day and Lord, 1992); for how they use available stimuli to draw conclusions or inferences (e.g., Milliken, 1990); and other interpretive processes. Starbuck and Milliken (1988) refer to this stage as "sensemaking," arguing that it has various aspects: "comprehending, understanding, explaining, extrapolating, and predicting..."

As an example of how leaders can attach their own interpretations to information, Milliken (1990) found that college leaders varied widely in drawing implications from a well-publicized and verifiable external trend, the imminent shrinking of the eighteen to twenty-two-year-old population in the United States. Some leaders saw this trend as a grave threat, others expressed little concern, and some even asserted that the trend would not occur. (Experts rated the probability of occurrence at 100 per cent.) Beyond their varying interpretations of the trend itself, the leaders differed even more widely in their judgments about how their organizations should respond to the trend.

Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996) suggest that this three-stage information filtering process is made analytically tractable by thinking of it as a strictly sequential process: field of vision, selective perception, and interpretation. However, the three stages, they contend may interact in non-sequential ways. For instance, if a leader comprehends and is engaged by a very high proportion of the information coming from a specific information source, he or she is even more likely to rely on that source in the future. In such case, selective perception affects field of vision. They suggest that other iterative links in this filtering process can be anticipated as well.

As a result of the filtering process described, a leader's ultimate perception of the strategic situation, or "construed reality" (what Weick (1969) might term "enacted environment"), may bear little correspondence to the objective "facts" (even those that could be ascertained). And more important, one leader's construed reality can be quite different from another:

In the face of the ambiguity and massive bombardment of information that typifies the top management task, no two strategists will necessarily identify the same array of

options; if they were to pick the same major options, they almost certainly would not implement them identically. (Hambrick, 1987,88).

Such a contention is useful, as far as it goes. However, fuller explanation and prediction was sought.

Strategic Action

Again, the purpose of this study is to make the case that variations in leader impact on the strategic direction of the organization can be explained by examining the variations in their learning experiences. Research recently reviewed by Leithwood, Begley, and Cousins (1990), has begun to generate the information required to explain the substantial variation in school leader's impact on reform in their organizations. One obvious explanation offered by the research describing differences in leader contributions to school reform efforts focuses on specific differences in the strategic action taken by the leaders (Hall et al., 1984; Blumberg and Greenfield, 1980; Saley, McPherson, and Baehr, 1978; Leithwood and Montgomery, 1986; Hoy and Brown, 1986; Blasé, Dedrick, and Strathe, 1986; Brady, 1985). For the purposes of this study, the specific nature and focus of the leader's strategic action were explored in search of links to the prior learning experiences described.

Exploratory Questions

Initial exploratory questions guiding this inquiry were focused on the learning experiences and problem solving processes of school leaders' as they relate to specific strategic school reform. The questions were designed to direct the inquiry and to generate possible hypotheses for future study.

The following questions represent the three primary areas of the conceptual framework and were used to explore school leader: 1) learning experiences; 2) views of strategic situations, and 3) the nature and focus of leader strategic action.

Learning Experiences: What are the dominant learning experiences of the leader?

- How does the leader describe his or her prior work experience in a learning context?
- How does the leader describe his or her family experiences in a learning context?
- How does the leader describe his or her social experience in a learning context?
- How do school leaders describe their formal education experience in the context of learning?

View of Strategic Situation: How are these experiences reflected in the leader's view of strategic situations facing the organizations?

- How are strategic situations described? Perceived? Interpreted?
- What resources does the leader rely on for help in understanding the nature and scope of the problem?
- How are others included in the process?
- How is information used to determine the appropriate course of action?
- What previous experience has the leader had with the same or similar problem?

Strategic Action: What do leaders do to address the strategic problem?

- What is the nature and focus of the strategic action taken?
- What resources does the leader rely on for help in the actual development and implementation of strategic solutions?
- How are solutions implemented?

Study Significance

This study offered the potential for important and unique insights into the genesis and development of effective school leader behavior. Understanding the content, context, and motivation for learning that results in specific leader perceptions and interpretations of their strategic situations and ultimately the strategic action that they take, has the potential for offering insight into how mindsets are influenced and ultimately changed. This has significant implications for leader preparation programs.

In addition, this study is important because it has a theoretical, predictive and explanatory focus. In seeking to explain how learning experience can be used to explain variance in school leader behavior; an attempt is made to move research in this area toward a promising and intriguing line of inquiry that breaks away from more traditional methods. “Until this basic phenomena can be understood and explained, prescription is premature” (Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996, p. 10).

A final point, regarding the significance of this study, is that it has the potential for offering practical benefit to those who are responsible for evaluating, selecting, motivating, and developing school leaders by providing a foundation upon which they might further develop their perspectives and tools. Cognitive perspectives remind us that what a leader does depends on what they know to do, and what they know to do depends on what they have learned. As VanLehn (1990) explains: “The ultimate explanation for the form and content of the human expert’s knowledge is the learning processes that they went through in obtaining it” (p. 529). Thus the best theory of effective leadership is a theory of learning. This study offered potential for advancing a theory of learning as it relates to school leadership.

CHAPTER II

RELATED LITERATURE AND RESEARCH

Introduction

Given that the researcher's purpose was to better understand the relationship between prior learning experiences of an organizational leader and their subsequent strategic behavior, four bodies of research constituted the basic framework for the literature review: strategic leadership, social learning theory, leader cognition, and leader experience background. These bodies of literature were considered in an integrative manner by investigating the following questions: What are the content and foci of contemporary research? What are the major research questions and theoretical perspectives? How have design choices changed over time? What can be learned from an analysis of this work? And finally, what does this analysis suggest as to the plausibility of the proposed study? In search of answers to these questions, the most noted works were identified and reviewed to see how the topics have been studied and how they are evolving. The ultimate goal of this process was to understand both the contributions and the limitations of what has been done and to support the need for this research.

The review began with a critical examination of the research on strategic leadership. It is followed by a concise overview of recent theoretical and experimental advances in the field of social learning theory, as an appropriate and effective foundation for this review. Because of the massive and rapid growth of the relevant literature on social learning theory, a detailed review would exceed the scope of this study. However, the theoretical approach to the explanation of leader behavior as a continuous reciprocal



interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental determinants supports the initial premise of this study and will therefore be given attention here (Bandura, 1977).

Third, in an effort to better understand how leaders' minds work, empirical studies that explore the "cognitive dimensions" of leadership were examined (Gardner, 1995). Next, the review focused on studies that examined the effects of background experiences as determinants of leader behavior. Studies that have looked at work experience, formal education, and values as explanations for leader behavior were examined.

Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the key points from each section of the review and relates these points to the study.

Strategic Leader Behavior

Much of the research on strategic leadership has concentrated on the CEO, reflecting the prevailing traditional focus on the single leader. This indicates that while a general manager focus is the purported hallmark of work on strategic leadership, in reality scholars have devoted considerably more effort to studying corporate-level leaders than unit level leaders.

One of the recurring themes in the literature on strategic leadership is that a wide set of theoretical perspectives may be relevant to understanding characteristics, behaviors, and effects of leaders on their organizations. The most commonly used theoretical perspective was upper echelons theory, which has the advantage of allowing straightforward tests of leader effects and has been instrumental in persuading researchers to focus on leadership teams, not just single leaders. Agency theory has also proved to be a prominent theoretical perspective for scholars of strategic leadership. Work by



Eisenhardt (1989a) and Walsh and Seward (1990), in particular have made this theory accessible for strategic leadership researchers. Less often employed was the “traditional leadership” perspective, perhaps a reflection of skepticism about “great man” conceptions of CEOs.

The wide array of different theoretical perspectives found, indicates that strategic leadership is a broad domain that can be studied in numerous ways. It also indicates that “this field of study is a long way from developing any paradigmatic focus, something that might bring more coherent knowledge generation” (Pfeffer, 1993). Scholars of strategic leadership continue to employ a variety of different theoretical perspectives, however significant changes in the relative importance of these theories is apparent over the last fifteen years. Agency theory and, to a lesser extent, managerial hegemony theory have emerged as major theoretical perspectives in the study of strategic leadership. There also appears to be a renewed emphasis on upper-echelons ideas in the early 1990s and an obvious decline in work on managerial fit and strategy process.

In the studies reviewed, very few empirical works were able to establish strict causality between leader behavior and organizational performance using formal statistical methods. Leadership scholars tend to focus on the effects of leaders and their behaviors. It is apparent from the literature that much more understanding of the determinants of leader characteristics and behaviors is needed in order to get at the root forces for change or intervention (Finklestein and Hambrick, 1996).

Finally, many works do not explicitly state the assumptions that underlie their view of leadership work. It was important for me to be able to uncover these underlying

perspectives in order to better understand the point of view authors adopt in a study and, by implication, the complexity and even sophistication of the collective body of research.

Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996) argue that leaders operate under considerable ambiguity, complexity, and information overload (Mintzberg, 1973; Kotter, 1982), with decision-making often involving political and social factors as well as economic ones. Top works on strategic leadership reflect these assumptions on the nature of leadership work and are classified by Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996) as follows:

Strategic Rationality: The general management task is to identify techno-economic opportunities and problems, systematically search for and weigh alternatives, and make choices that maximize firm performance.

Bounded Rationality: Organizations and individuals within them have bounded rationality. The management task is to accommodate these limitations or develop ways to minimize them (improved information flows, staffing, etc.).

Political: The general management task is to maintain the organizational coalition by acquiring, using, allocating, and channeling power (both internally and externally).

Symbolic: The general management task is to maintain the organizational coalition by creating and manipulating symbols (for both internal and external consumption).

Garbage Can: Because organizations are “garbage cans” into which problems, solutions, and people are thrown together, the general management task is either 1) futile, 2) a matter of dealing with chaos, or 3) not amenable to coherent description and analysis.



Hambrick (1986), in his earlier study of top works on strategic leadership between 1980 and 1985, used a similar classification scheme and so offers a point of comparison. The literature suggests that researchers most often held underlying assumptions that match the bounded rationality framework for defining managerial work. Closely following is the political model.

Social Learning Theory

Over the years, the various behavior theories have contributed much to our understanding of how behavior is learned and modified by direct experience (Bandura, 1977). Social learning theory acknowledges that human thought, affect, and behavior can be significantly influenced by observation, as well as by direct experience, and has fostered the development of observational paradigms for studying the power of socially mediated experience. Changes in theoretical perspectives have added new paradigms to the standard methods of research. The literature reflects a renewal of emphasis on symbolic functions that has expanded the range of techniques for analyzing thought and the mechanisms by which thought determines action (Bandura, 1977).

The capacity to use symbols provides humans with a powerful means of dealing with their environment. Through verbal and imagined symbols people process and preserve experiences in representational forms that serve as guides for future behavior (p. 13).

Arguing that complex behaviors are formed through the integration of many activities of differing origins, Bandura (1977) states that "...it is more fruitful to analyze the determinants of behavioral processes than to categorize them as learned or innate or to try to apportion relative weights to these factors" (p. 17).

Bandura (1977) emphasizes the importance of observing and modeling the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others. He states: "Learning would be

exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action." (p.22). Because it encompasses attention, memory and motivation, social learning theory spans both cognitive and behavioral frameworks.

In the next section of this chapter, I focus on how the literature treats the subject of leader cognition as a determiner of leader behavior.

Cognitive Dimensions of Leadership

One of the most rapidly growing branches of leadership research is the study of the cognitive dimensions of leadership. This research can be divided into two somewhat distinct strands. The earliest and still the dominant body of work concerns how leaders solve problems and arrive at decisions. Although such inquiry may appear to be a throwback to the behavioral paradigm that characterized leadership study after World War II, these cognitive studies take greater account of contextual influences on cognition and thus, are of interest to this researcher.

The second strand is represented by Howard Gardner's (1995) and Finklestein and Hambrick's (1996) interest in the mind of the leader and specifically how ideas develop and influence thinking. In *Leading Minds*, Gardener argues for the acknowledgement of the central role played by the leader and while he uses insights drawn from other approaches (traits, personality, etc.) he concerns himself specifically with cognition, which he defines as the mental structures activated in leaders and followers. Gardener contends that leader cognition "constitutes the missing link to the puzzle" (p.17).

Gardener's analysis proceeds in two separate streams. First, he reviews the features of human development that make possible the phenomena of leadership. Next, he considers the nature of the story making that leaders are engaged in and goes on to delineate the major kinds of stories that leaders have worked with over the years. He then applies this framework by further delineating the nature of leadership into five domains: classic scholarship, institutional (with interlocking constituencies such as schools, universities, and foundations), classic institutional (such as military, corporate business, churches), marginalized groups (such as women, minorities), and national (leaders of nations). He uses case studies as well as more general considerations of leadership processes associated with each kind of domain.

In conducting the study, Gardner (1995) relied heavily on published biographies of the individuals in each case, as well as the general histories of the period.

Autobiographical accounts were particularly valuable, according to Gardner, as well as other mediums in which the individuals told their own stories in their own words.

Gardener describes his method as one that began with some general ideas about leadership – in particular, with the notion that stories were important for all leaders and that leaders who wanted to influence wide audiences would find themselves drawn to the articulation of simple stories.

Gardener also monitored for other factors including, the kinds of families the individual leader came from, the cognitive strengths exhibited by the leaders, the role played by other supportive individuals to the leader, and the length of time it takes to develop and disseminate novel ideas. Gardner acknowledges that other factors not initially identified as important emerged during the course of the investigation. Included

among those worthy of consideration were: travel during youth, the ability to challenge figures in authority, an early focus on moral and spiritual issues, and the way that public figures apportion their time.

Gardner confronts the phenomenon of leadership from a cognitively oriented perspective by analyzing the stories of the selected leaders using such questions as: What are the ideas of the leader? How have they developed? How are they communicated, understood, and misunderstood? How do they interact with other stories? He distances himself somewhat from mainstream cognitive research, particularly information-processing studies that reduce cognitive operations to discrete steps leading from input to output (Gardner, 1995).

In contrast, the next section, will discuss more traditional lines of inquiry from the literature that are associated with the study of leader cognition.

Cognitive Models. At the heart of the literature on leader cognition is the concept that every manager is endowed (or burdened) with a cognitive model that determines whether and how new stimuli will be noticed, interpreted, and acted upon. These cognitive models have been variously referred to as cognitive maps (Axelrod, 1976; Weick and Bougon, 1986), world views (Starbuck and Hedberg, 1977; Mason and Mitroff, 1981), "mindscapes" (Maruyama, 1982).

Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996) suggest three chief elements of a leader's cognitive map that emerge from the literature. Ranging from the most basic to the most complex and interwoven, they are: 1) cognitive content; 2) cognitive structure; and 3) cognitive style. They acknowledge that these elements of cognition affect each other, even determine each other, and so the dividing lines among them are not precise. Still, they



allow a useful conceptual disentangling of some complex phenomena and for that reason will be discussed further here.

Cognitive Content. At the most basic level, Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996) describe a leader's cognitive map as consisting of the things he or she knows, assumes, and believes. A leader's cognitive content, stemming from personal and professional experiences, can include recollection of vivid events, such as an economic depression, a business bankruptcy or a dishonest customer. It can include familiarity with management tools or concepts, such as a sophisticated financial statement analysis. Cognitive content can include simple first-hand knowledge about other people, what they know, and how to reach them. For instance, a leader who is on a first-name basis with the Governor or knows a variety of influential government officials has cognitive content that others may not have. Of course, cognitive content also consists of simple facts, data, and perceptions.

March and Simon (1958) described the cognitive givens a leader brings to an administrative situation as consisting of his or her knowledge or assumptions about future events, alternatives, and consequences attached to alternatives. However, Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996) suggest that a leader's cognitive content extends well beyond what was envisioned by March and Simon. They contend that what a leader knows--or does not know--forms the basis by which new information is noticed and interpreted. They argue that a leader's existing knowledge provides a platform from which additional knowledge is sought, comprehended, and interpreted.

Cognitive content is a very basic way of considering what is in a leader's mind and implies no particular priorities or complex associations, however, researchers of managerial cognition have paid relatively little attention to it. Finkelstein and Hambrick

(1996) believe that this is a mistake, “because basic cognitive content is at the core of more sophisticated conceptions of managerial thinking, researchers have focused instead on the more elaborate and analytically intriguing areas of cognitive structure and cognitive style” (p.59).

Cognitive Structure. If cognitive content is the basic raw material for leader knowledge, then cognitive structure is how the content is arranged or connected in the leader's mind. The term "causal map" is widely used among cognition theorists (Axelrod,1976; Huff, 1990).

Isenberg (1984) referred to "terrain structures," or all individual's conceptions of where things –organizational resources, customers, competitors, sub-units, and so on – are located, either relative to each other or to some set of dimensions. A leader may cognitively differentiate between entities, considering them very dissimilar, or mentally juxtapose entities, in a belief that they are similar or even of a kind. As an illustration, Isenberg (1984) asked senior leaders in three companies to rate the overall similarity of all pair-wise combinations of the sub-units of their organizations. He then used multidimensional scaling (MDS) to reveal each executive's mental map of his or her organization. Findings indicated that the CEO considered the primary fabrication and mining operations as very similar to each other but very different from the leader committees, the overall corporation, and the corporate staff. The public affairs committee was seen by the CEO as quite distinct from any other part of the company.

Isenberg did not attempt to relate these CEOs' cognitive maps to the CEOs' backgrounds or to organizational characteristics, such as power distribution, strategy, succession patterns, and so on. However, the suggestion that these and numerous other

research avenues could be pursued through the use of such cognitive mapping of organizational characteristics is certainly implied (Huff 1990).

Another stream of research has focused on leaders' mental maps of their competitors. For instance, Gripsrud and Gronhaug (1985) found that the managers of retailing firms typically perceived only a small portion of all the other stores in their markets to be their competitors. The managers tended to see stores that were larger and geographically close to them as competitors and ignored other stores, some of which were actually direct rivals. Similarly, Reger and Huff (1993) examined how managers cognitively distinguished strategic groups in the Chicago banking market. They found that most managers agreed on the categorization of many of the banks but differed widely in their assignment of others. The authors did not speculate about the determinants of each manager's own conception of the competitive arena, but their study clearly indicates that competitor identification and assessment is open to varying interpretations. If strategic choices hinge on competitive dynamics (Porter, 1980; Chen and MacMillan, 1992) and if leaders arrive at their own highly personalized assessments of competitors (Zahra and Charles, 1993), then an understanding of how those assessments are derived would be of major practical significance.

In addition to simple associations, a leader's cognitive structure also consists of a varied set of inferences, guiding the person from one observation to another. A leader could draw interpersonal inferences: "If emotional, infer friendliness; if blunt, infer trustworthiness" (Isenberg, 1981). The leader can draw inferences about things in the organization: "Marketing managers tend to produce over-optimistic forecasts"; "middle managers are more resistant to change than any other group in the organization." And, of

course, leaders carry a host of inferences about external factors: “The Japanese never actually say no”; “small advertising agencies are more creative than large ones.”

Beyond inferences are a leader’s beliefs about causality. For instance, a leader might have strong beliefs about employee stock ownership enhancing productivity or about increased R&D spending enhancing innovation. In a classic article, Hall (1976) used patterns of resource allocation at the Saturday Evening Post to infer the causal maps of top leaders during that magazine’s death spiral. More recently, Narayanan and Fahey (1990) used content analysis of annual reports and trade journal articles to extract the causal maps of leaders at Admiral Corporation over the last fifteen years of the television manufacturer’s life. For instance, the authors used available data to construct the Admiral executives’ causal map for the years 1964 to 1966. According to the schematic, the leaders seemed preoccupied with the effects of the macro-environment on the company’s performance but did not perceive much connection between their more proximate environment – their competitors, customers, imports, and so on – and what was happening to their firm.

By this point, it should be clear that a leader’s cognitive structure is a highly personalized interpretation of reality, not necessarily aligning with objective conditions. Moreover, one’s cognitive structure can become self-fulfilling and self-reinforcing. As Weick (1983) points out, in some cases, elements of leaders’ cognitive structures are so well established and unshakable that contrary data are overlooked or, if noticed, severely discounted.

Evidence that leaders’ cognitive structures will be reflected in their strategic choices is not abundant but has been observed in some studies. Fiol (1989) used textual

analysis of CEO's letters to shareholders to investigate whether revealed beliefs about the strength of the organizational boundaries were related to the company's joint venture activity. In the ten chemical companies studied, she found that companies led by leaders who indicated a perception of strong internal boundaries (demarcations between sub-units and hierarchical layers) and weak external boundaries (imaginary dividing lines between the organizations and their environments) engaged in the most joint ventures.

Day and Lord (1992) found that the cognitive structures of leaders in machine tool companies were related to their organizations' strategies. In particular, leaders who drew the finest distinctions between different types of strategic problems (in an experimental setting) were those whose firms had the widest arrays of product or service offerings. Whether these cognitively complex leaders had chosen complex business strategies or their cognitions had been influenced by their strategies cannot be determined from the data.

Allowing more confidence about causality, Thomas, Clark, and Gioia (1993) found in their study of a large sample of hospitals that the CEO's labeling of strategic issues as controllable (in a survey questionnaire) was positively related to subsequent product or service changes actually made by the hospital. Thus, the leaders engaged in innovation and expansion endeavors to the extent that their cognitive structures contained the belief that managerial actions could surmount, seize, or exploit strategic issues faced by their hospitals.

Finally, Priem (1994) had thirty-three CEOs of manufacturing firms complete a judgement task that required them to reveal their beliefs (or cognitive structures) about the optimal alignments among strategy, structure, and environment. Then comparing

these beliefs to the classic contingency prescriptions in the organizational literature, Priem found that firms whose CEOs had beliefs that closely adhered to customary prescriptions outperformed those firms whose CEOs had beliefs that differed from the normative ideals. This study is important for its careful, direct assessment of managerial judgment and its demonstrated explicit links to organizational policies and performance. This and the other studies noted provide consistent, but still sparse, indication that executives' knowledge structures affect their strategic choices.

Cognitive Style. Cognitive style refers to how a person's mind works – how he or she gathers and processes information. Barnard (1938, p. 302) was among the first to address different types of leader thought processes, saying that "mental processes consist of two groups which I shall call 'non-logical' and 'logical'." By "logical," Barnard meant conscious thought that can be expressed in words or symbols – often called "reasoning." By "non-logical", he meant intuition, instinct, or tacit judgment. In Barnard's view, an effective leader has an abundance of both types of cognitive capabilities and can draw on either mode as the situation requires.

Leaders may differ widely in their cognitive styles and sometimes lack the "multidexterity" that Barnard envisioned. For instance, Mintzberg asked: "Why is it that some of the most creative thinkers cannot comprehend a balance sheet, and that some accountants have no sense of product development" (Mintzberg, 1976, p.49)?

Mintzberg's answer, based on a wealth of research in psychology and medicine, was that managers may differ in their cognitive styles due to biological factors, particularly in the relative strength or dominance of the two hemispheres of the brain. He contended that individuals with dominant left hemispheres -- the locus of logic, linear thinking, and

intellectual order – make good planners. Conversely those with dominant right hemispheres - the source of holistic information processing, imagination, and visual imagery – may make good managers.

Another conceptual approach to considering cognitive style (and not unrelated to the hemispheric model) draws from the work of Carl Jung, one of psychology's classic theorists (summarized in Taggart and Robey, 1981; Myers, 1982; Hurst, Rush, and White, 1989). Jung's theory identifies two dimensions of cognitive style: perception (gathering information) and judgment (processing information). Perception occurs by either sensation (physical stimuli taken in by the five senses) or intuition (discerning patterns, gaps, or relationships among stimuli). Judgment, or information processing and evaluation, occurs either through thinking (linking ideas using logic and notions of cause and effect) or feeling (basing evaluation on personal and/or group values). Jung's theory pairs each mode of perception with a mode of judgment yielding four basic cognitive styles. Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996) draw from several researchers' portrayals of the four types of cognitive style. However they go further in attaching labels to describe the archetypical manager in each cell: administrator, strategist, coach, and visionary.

For instance, the "administrator" type tends to be fact-oriented, impersonal, practical, and orderly: This person engages in a great deal of scanning, placing heavy reliance on written, formal information sources. His or her cognitive structure tends to correspond to empirical reality, comprehending what is, but not what will be or what might be. The "coach" types tend to be fact-oriented also, however, they are personal, friendly, and spontaneous. This person also engages in a great deal of scanning but heavily relies on oral informal media. His or her cognitive structure, like the "administrator" type,

corresponds to empirical reality. Visionary types tend to be possibility oriented, personal, enthusiastic, and insightful. This person engages in little scanning and relies primarily on oral, informal media. Their cognitive structure is idiosyncratic with little correspondence to empirical reality. The “strategist” type tends to be possibilities-oriented, impersonal, ingenious, and integrative. They do little scanning, rely primarily on written, formal media, and their cognitive structure is idiosyncratic with little correspondence to empirical reality.

Some of the most interesting research on Jungian types, as applied to top leaders, has been done by Nutt (1986a). In one study (Nutt, 1986a), executives were asked to indicate their readiness to accept several briefly described capital investment proposals. Those leaders with an administrator profile adopted the fewest proposals, showing a general aversion to action and also rating the proposals as highly risky; often noting the sketchiness or incompleteness of the project descriptions. Leaders, with a coaching style, were most inclined to adopt the projects and rated them as relatively low risk. The other two types, the visionary and strategy leaders, were in between the extremes.

In a later project, Nutt (1993) incorporated the idea that some leaders have flexible, decision-making styles, not always adhering to only one Jungian type. In turn, he found that leaders with multiple orientations, when faced with several hypothetical capital investment proposals that varied in how they were described, were willing to adopt more of them (and rated them less risky) than were leaders with only a single Jungian orientation.

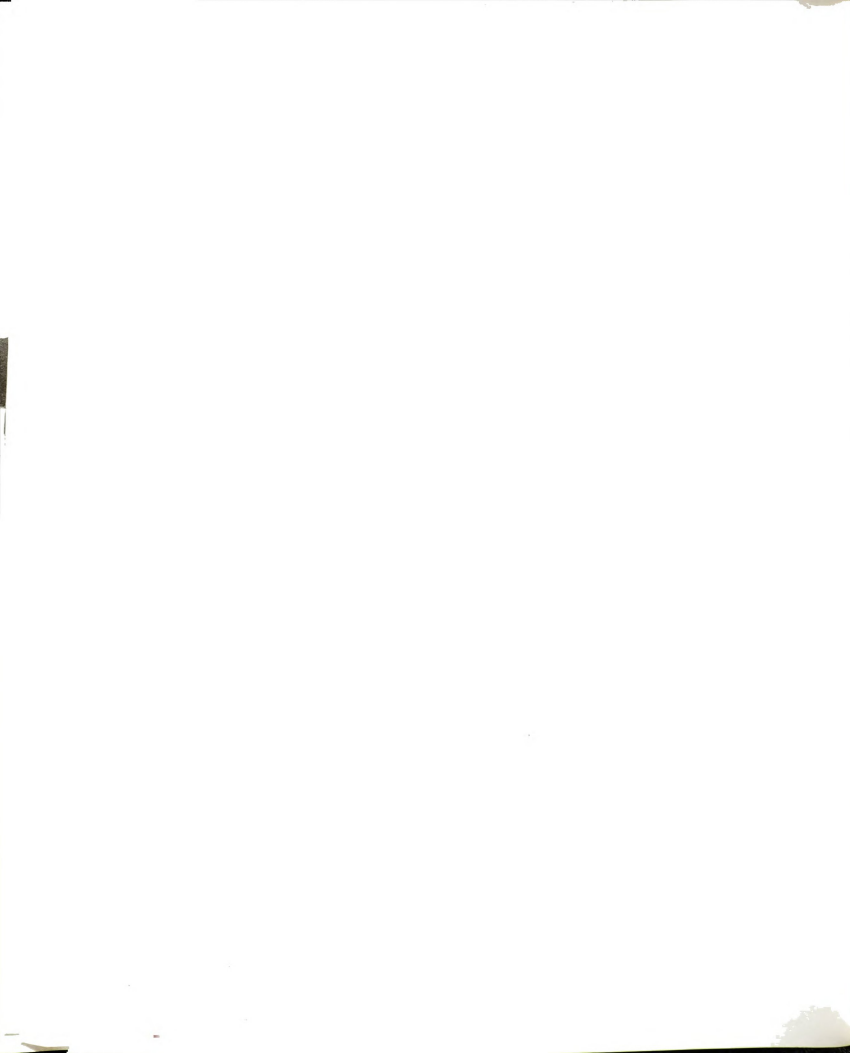
Nutt’s work is among the relatively little empirical research that has been done on cognitive styles of top leaders. However, it is reasonable to conclude from related

research that leaders may differ significantly in how they obtain and process information, greatly affecting their interpretive processes and ultimately influencing their strategic choices.

Another way of viewing cognitive style, that is described in the literature, is through the construct called “cognitive complexity,” or the individual’s ability to draw mental distinctions among objects (Schneir, 1979). Long used in organizational behavior research, cognitive complexity has been incorporated in some recent research on leaders. Hitt and Tyler (1991) found that cognitive complexity was not associated with leaders’ decision models in the evaluation of acquisition candidates. However, Wally and Baum (1994) did find that a factor comprised of cognitive complexity and amount of education was strongly positively related to the pace at which leaders evaluated acquisition candidates.

In sum, this literature strongly suggests that all three facets of leader cognition discussed – cognitive content, structure, and style – play important roles in triggering and shaping the leader’s attention to new information. The current growth in interest in managerial cognition appears to be highly warranted and should lead to important new insights as to how strategic choices are formed (Finklestein and Hambrick, 1996).

Cognitive problem-solving and decision-making. One of the leading exponents of mainstream cognitive studies of leadership is Kenneth Leithwood of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. In a piece advocating “cognitive perspectives on school leadership,” Leithwood (1995) observed that such perspectives conceptualize leaders as “problem-finders and problem-solvers with varying levels of expertise” (p. 118).



Much of the early writing related to cognitive dimensions of leadership acknowledged the role of values in problem solving and decision making, but the focus always remained squarely on the leader (Barnard, 1938; Simon, 1976). In other words, concern centered on the leader's values rather than on their origins. Because many leaders operate in complex environments characterized by competing problems, the selection of particular problems on which to concentrate becomes an opportunity to investigate the influences on leaders' choices. Peterson (1986) makes the connection between problem selection and values: "Selecting the particular arena or domain in which to identify the technical problem to solve requires an implicit or explicit set of values and beliefs about what is most important" (pp. 89-90).

In *Expert Problem Solving*, Leithwood and Steinbach (1995) review their efforts to understand how expert educational leaders problem solve. Admitting that Leithwood's (1995) original studies ignored values, they add, "It was not until we began frequently tripping over them in our data that we began to realize their central importance" (Leithwood & Steinbach, 1995, p.172). Considering both direct and indirect influences of values on problem solving, the researchers found that expert educational leaders were "much clearer about their values, and, as a consequence, could and did use them as substitutes for more problem-specific knowledge, which would have helped them but which they lacked" (p. 174).

Recently, Leithwood and Steinbach (1995) have expanded their inquiries to include not only the values espoused and used by educational leaders but the sources of these values. One recent dissertation by Raun (Leithwood & Steinbach, 1995, pp. 188-192), for instance, investigated influences on the personal and professional values of

Canadian superintendents. Although a variety of influences were identified, "the work setting was the most powerful force in the development of values-in-use" (p. 192). Work such as Raun's suggests that the normative structure of the organization may constitute an important source of organization leaders' values.

Ever since March and Simon's (1958) explication of bounded rationality; scholars have been interested in cognitive limits and biases in strategic decision-making. Recently, interest in managerial cognition has grown explosively with books (Srivastava and Associates, 1983; Sims and Gioia, 1986; Huff, 1990), extensive reviews (Walsh, 1995), special issues of major journals (e.g., *Organizational Science*, August, 1994), and a new cognition interest group in the large scholarly society, the Academy of Management, all attesting to intellectual activity in this important domain.

In recapping the review to this point, we have examined the literature on strategic leadership and found that while studies have been unable to establish strict causality between leader behavior and organizational performance using statistical measures, it does suggest that movement toward this goal may rest in studies that explore the determinants of leader behavior. Next, we considered social learning theory as a plausible theoretical framework for this study. We then reviewed work that focused on leader cognition through the lenses of Gardner (1995), Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996), and Leithwood, et al., (1995). The next section of this review will focus on research that specifically addresses leader background experiences as a basis for leader strategic action.

Leader Background Experiences as a Basis for Leader Action

Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996) contend that, to some extent, all of us – including leaders – exist in a web of our own personal and professional experiences. We may try to be open-minded, detached, and thorough; but we are confined greatly by what we already know and believe, by what we have already experienced. Particularly in complex situations, leaders rely on the familiar, often drawing on approaches that have worked well in the past (Cyert and March, 1963). Experiences serve to shape values and cognitive models in ways that may substantially affect decision-making and behavior (Hitt and Tyler, 1991). If so, then background factors, reflective of a leader's experiences, should be associated with strategic choices.

The past ten years have witnessed an explosion of research on the relationships between leader background characteristics and organizational outcomes. The vast majority of this research has pursued the general logic that observable experiences of leaders shape their coalitions and values and hence are reflected in their strategic choices. A smaller stream of research has posited the reverse causality--that certain strategic conditions give rise to particular types of leader characteristics, due to intentional or emergent alignment of leader qualities with strategic requirements. A third research focus has been essentially a hybrid of the other two, pursuing the idea that different strategic conditions favor different types of leader qualities and that the organization will perform well to the extent that its leaders have those characteristics. Research on leader background characteristics, typically focusing on demographic characteristics, has yielded numerous significant findings; some of these results, as will be discussed below, recur in multiple studies. Thus, using observable leader experiences in organizational



research appears to be a promising line of inquiry.

Various leader experiences have been examined for their associations with organizational outcomes, such as strategy and performance. However, three sets of leader background characteristics account for the vast majority of inquiries: leader tenure, functional background (teaching, marketing, finance, and so on), and formal education. This section will review and integrate the studies that have examined these three sets of leader characteristics. For each, three types of observed associations will be discussed. The first is the link to leader cognitive models and interpretations and perceptions. Such a review helps to establish the most fundamental implications of leader experiences relative to this study. However, because most studies of leader experiences have treated these factors as a "black box," there is relatively little to report here. Second, the links to organizational strategy and conduct will be summarized. This is where most upper-echelons research has focused, in line with the general concept that leaders' experiences are reflected in their strategic choices. The third set of results includes those examining the links between leader characteristics and organizational performance. In some cases, these are direct; more often, they are contingent, with the association between characteristics and performance depending on specific contextual conditions.

Functional Background

Consultants and academics long have exhorted companies to expose their managers to multiple functions, both because it would enhance their breadth of perspective in their current assignments and because such a policy would yield broader-gauged top-level leaders (Ouchi and Jaeger, 1978; Raskas and Hambrick, 1992). To be sure, some top leaders have significant experiences in multiple functions. However, many have spent

the greater part of their careers in one primary functional area such as curriculum, business, finance, or human resources.

It is reasonable to expect that a leader's functional experiences provide a lens through which he or she sees organizational problems and solutions in general (Dearborn and Simon, 1958). A correspondence between functional experiences and strategic choices could occur through at least three mechanisms. First, individuals may be drawn to financial areas that suit their personalities or aptitude (e.g., Schein, 1968). At the start of their careers, individuals in different functions already have different cognitive models. Second, with the passage of time and the accumulation of successes in a functional area, an individual becomes more and more socialized and inculcated with the mode of thinking and acting that is typical for that professional area (Blau and McKinley, 1979; Mortimer and Lorence, 1979). And third, even when individuals are operating outside their functional areas, say in eventual general management positions, they still gravitate toward perceiving problems in familiar terms, generating and preferring familiar solutions (March and Simon 1958). In fact, it was from a belief in the orienting and filtering effects of functional experiences that Dearborn and Simon (1958) did their seminal study that ultimately led to today's widespread interest in the effects of leader backgrounds on decision making.

Dearborn and Simon (1958) argued that exposure to the goals and reinforcements of a particular functional area will cause managers to attend to certain information in a complex situation and, in turn, to interpret that information in terms that suit their functional expertise. To test these ideas, Dearborn and Simon had twenty-three middle managers from a single company read a ten thousand-word business case that presented a

large number of facts with virtually no structure or interpretation. The managers were then asked to identify the major problem facing the company. As the researchers expected, the managers tended to gravitate to interpretations that mirrored their functional backgrounds. For example, sales leaders mentioned more sales-related problems than did leaders from other functional areas. However, a careful reading of the results in an appendix leads one to conclude that Dearborn and Simon's findings are only suggestive, not definitive. There were not wholesale differences between functions, although some evidence of functional bias in interpreting business problems was observed.

Almost thirty years later, Walsh (1986) conducted an elaborate replication and extension of Dearborn and Simon's study. He had 121 participants enrolled in an MBA program do two tasks: 1) read a thousand-word business case and identify the major problems faced by the company, and 2) sort cards with business terms into piles to reveal underlying cognitive structures. Walsh (1986) hypothesized that the participants' handling of these tasks would reflect their functional backgrounds, but this was not at all borne out. No discernible functional biases were revealed in either of these information-processing endeavors.

Why did Dearborn and Simon find functional biases (albeit limited nature) and Walsh observe none? Possible explanations for the differences in findings could be attributed to the fact that in the mid-1950s, there was not a pervasive concept of general management in America. All but a few companies had one general manager, the CEO. There were relatively few MBA programs, a handful of popular business magazines, very few leader seminars, and certainly no best-selling books on managing. By the mid-1980s, all managers in business were bombarded with information and insights beyond their



primary professional area. Most major companies had numerous general management and quasi-general management positions. Leader seminars abounded, books by Peters and Waterman (1982) and Iacocca (1984) had led a series of best-sellers on general management that pulled many business people beyond their parochial zones. In short, by the 1980s, managers may have been genuinely less confined by their functional backgrounds than were their predecessors in the 1950s.

It is also noteworthy that Dearborn and Simon's subjects were participants in a short company-training program, whereas Walsh's subjects were enrolled in a two-year leader MBA program.

The third point of reconciliation, seemingly minor, may be the one of greatest theoretical significance. Consider the fact that the case Walsh had his subjects read was one-thousand words long (three pages) and he gave them twenty-five minutes to study it. This would not seem to be an instance of information overload in which the manager would have to engage in mental shortcuts or fall back on the familiar. Rather, the manager could be very thorough and deliberate, quite readily assessing all available information. In comparison, Dearborn and Simon's case was ten thousand words long, and the chances of complete mastery of the material and surmounting of cognitive biases seem far lower.

Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996) suggest that functional background--or any biasing experience--has its greatest effect on interpretation and choice when the manager 1) faces an abundance of complex, ambiguous information and 2) has to deal with the information under urgency or other forms of pressure. When these conditions exist, leaders can be expected to scan, selectively perceive, and interpret strategic stimuli in line with their



functional experiences. They argue that the actual strategic situations faced by top leaders typically contain a great deal of ambiguity, information overload, and urgency and that under these conditions, leaders will manifest functional biases (as well as other types of dispositions) in their choices.

Gupta and Govindarajan (1984) measured the overall number of years general managers had spent in the specific functional area of marketing and sales, finding it to be positively related to the managers' tolerance for ambiguity. This is in line with common conceptions of marketing and sales managers having to deal with more uncontrollable factors than do managers in other, more internally oriented functional areas, such as operations or accounting.

However, Gupta and Govindarajan found no association between functional background and the manager's risk-taking propensity. Earlier, Vroom and Pahl (1971) had observed the same lack of association. And, more recent, Hitt and Tyler (1991), using elaborate cluster analysis of leaders' functional experiences, also found no strong relationships between any of the clusters and a survey measure of risk propensity. Thus, the implications of functional experiences may be limited to fewer psychological constructs than might logically be anticipated. Dearborn and Simon (1958) and Walsh (1986) indicate that even the most direct implications of functional experience are complex and depend on various moderating forces.

Inquiries into the effects of leader functional background on organizational profiles have centered on two classes of organizational strategy. The first is the company's competitive strategy in its major line of business, or its business strategy. The second is the company's diversification profile, or its corporate strategy. In each of these



streams, some recurring and intuitively reasonable patterns emerge.

Competitive strategies can take many forms, but the typologies of Miles and Snow (1978) and Porter (1980) have been instrumental in identifying some major classes of strategic profiles. Research on leader functional backgrounds and business strategy have particularly applied the Miles and Snow typology. In their study of major tobacco companies, Chaganti and Sambharya (1987) found that the top leader ranks of the company they examined (Philip Morris) differed from those of the (R.J. Reynolds) and (American Brands) companies. Specifically, Phillip Morris had proportionately more leaders with marketing and R&D backgrounds and fewer with finance backgrounds. Thomas, Litschert and Ramaswamy (1991) examined the functional backgrounds of the CEOs of computer companies and found similar results. Of the marketing, sales, and R&D companies studied, 77 percent of their CEOs had experience primarily in “output-oriented” these primary functions as compared to only 10 percent of the CEOs in the companies primarily concerned with manufacturing, accounting, finance, and administration.

Beyond the descriptive tendency for leaders to pursue competitive strategies in line with their own functional capabilities and dispositions is the possibility that they are wise to do so. There may be performance advantages in having a fit between leader functional expertise and strategy. The little bit of available evidence supports this idea. For instance, Thomas, Litschert, and Ramaswamy found that the best-performing companies had CEOs with compatible functional backgrounds and, most noteworthy of all, firms tended to perform less well when they had CEOs that did not fit their strategy.

At least two other studies have found performance advantages stemming from an



alignment of leader functional background and competitive strategy. Gupta and Govindarajan (1984) found that business units pursuing aggressive market share strategies performed better to the extent that their general managers had experience in marketing and sales. There was no such association in businesses in which operational and financial competencies are presumably more valuable.

Barbosa (1985) found further evidence that business innovation is enhanced by certain functional capabilities among top leader. In a large-scale study of the forest products industry, he found that the conversion of product innovations efforts (R&D spending and staffing levels) into actual product innovations (patents, sales from new products, and so on) was strongly related to the degree of marketing experience among the company's top leaders. He concluded that a marketing orientation among top leaders, confers more of a customer-based, creative, expansionist capability in the firm, which serves to enhance the yield from innovation efforts.

The second major research stream dealing with leader functional backgrounds and strategy has focused particularly on the company's diversification strategy. The chief line of argument has been that companies without operational connections among their business units (at the extreme, mere holding companies) would be likely to have top leaders with financial, legal, and administrative backgrounds. While companies with more substantive interdependencies would be led by leaders with experience in more "core" functions, such as marketing and sales, R&D, and operations. Song (1982) found support for this idea, observing that firms that were diversifying primarily through acquisitions were relatively likely to have CEOs with financial and legal backgrounds. While companies diversifying through internal, organic extensions were more likely to



have CEOs with core function experience in operations, R&D, and marketing and sales.

Michel and Hambrick (1992) extended these arguing that top leaders would have core function experiences in direct proportion to the amount of strategic interdependence existing among their major lines of business. Building upon Rumelt's (1974) framework, they posited that four categories of diversified firms lie on a continuum ranging from very low to very high strategic interdependence: unrelated, related in a loosely linked way, related in a tightly constrained way, and vertically integrated. They found, in line with their hypothesis, that the proportions of senior leaders with primarily core function experience were as follows: unrelated, 18%; related-linked 27%; related-constrained 35%; vertically integrated, 44%. This pattern was highly statistically significant.

Hayes and Abernathv (1981), in their influential article, "Managing Our Way to Economic Decline," were among the first to raise the idea that functional capabilities of senior leaders would significantly affect the health of companies. They envisioned a universal effect that leaders with experience in core functions will produce superior returns. So far, the most direct tests of this supposition, provide no support for it. "As yet, we know of no evidence of a generally advantageous functional profile for top leaders (Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996, p.99). Instead, the external environment and the company's chosen strategy create a context in which certain functional orientations may have distinct but conditional benefits.

Formal Education

A significant body of research suggests that the schooling of senior managers is reflected in the characteristics of their organizations. A substantial literature in developmental psychology and higher education exists regarding the effects of education



on individual values and cognitions, as well as on the types of individuals who self-select themselves into certain educational experiences (e.g., Smart and Pascarella, 1986; Byrne, 1984; Cherrington, Condie, and England, 1979; Schein, 1968; Altmeyer, 1966). However, very little research has examined association, specifically between education and leader psychological constructs. In a survey study of 106 CEOs, Wally and Baum (1994) found a very strong correlation between amount of formal education and a measure of cognitive complexity, or the ability to discern patterns and distinguish among objects. Hitt and Tyler (1991) found a weaker but still positive link. Further in line with the premise that formal education reflects an individual's cognitive ability, particularly open-mindedness, researchers have found that education is associated with receptivity to innovation (Becker, 1970a; Becker, 1970b; Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971). Moreover, evidence consistently has indicated a positive link between the education level of leaders and the amount of innovation in their organizations.

Kimberly and Evanisko (1981) were among the first to document this pattern, finding that the amount of formal education of hospital chief administrators was positively associated with the adoption of both technological and administrative innovations in hospitals. Similar positive associations between leader education levels and organization innovation have been observed in samples of commercial banks (Bantel and Jackson, 1989), forest product companies (Barbosa, 1985), and computer companies (Thomas, Litschert, and Ramaswamy, 1991). Relatedly, Norburn and Birlev (1988) found that amount of education of top leaders was positively associated with company growth in three of five industries studied. Finally, Wiersema and Bantel (1992) found that education levels of top leaders were positively associated with strategic portfolio

changes in a large sample of diversified firms. Thus, the effects of leader education levels on organizational innovation, change, and growth are widely documented.

There has been a marked, steady tendency toward increased education levels of leaders over the past thirty or forty years, and young leaders tend to be more highly educated than their older and predecessors. However, at least three of the studies cited above have used multivariate analysis, while controlling for age and they still find significant effects stemming from education (Barbosa, 1985; Bantel and Jackson, 1989; Wiersema and Bantel 1992). Another possible confounding factor – the inevitable correlation between the amount of innovation in an industry and the amount of education – can similarly be set aside because almost all studies cited have controlled for industry effects. Hence, the association between the level of education of senior leaders and the amount of innovation and change in their organizations appears to be robust and stable.

The effects of education level on organizational performance, however, are not as widely observed or clear-cut. Of course, one can conceive of growth as a performance indicator, in which case leader education levels seem to have an effect (Norburn and Bitlev 1988). However, effects on profitability and shareholder returns have barely been examined. Again, the contingency model tested by Thomas, Litschert, and Ramaswamy (1991) is instructive. They found that firms did less well to the extent that their CEOs had profiles differing from the "ideal" for their type. Thus, "some competitive and marketplace conditions call for more formal education--and concomitant open-mindedness, information processing abilities, and cognitive flexibility – than do other settings" (Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996, p. 102).

In addition to examining the organizational implications of the amount of education

of leaders, some limited research has focused on particular curricula or fields of study. The two chief premises of this line of inquiry are that: 1) individuals with certain dispositions, aptitudes, and cognitive styles tend to pursue certain compatible educational curricula, and 2) educational curricula differ in the influences they exert on individuals (Hitt and Tyler, 1991). As might be expected, there particularly had been an interest in investigating the organizational implications of having senior leaders with formal education in business administration, particularly, MBA programs. Still, just a few such studies have been conducted, with inconclusive results.

Three studies are briefly summarized here followed by a proposed possible reconciling theme. Kimberly and Evanisko, (1981), in addition to examining overall amount of education, also explored whether hospital administrators educated specifically in administration would be associated with organizational innovation. They found no such relationship: leaders educated formally in fields of administration were associated with no more or less innovation than those with formal education in other fields. (As noted above, formal education, in general, was positively associated with innovation.) Grimm and Smith (1991), on the other hand, did find that U.S. railroads that changed their strategies after deregulation were more likely to have MBAs among their senior leaders than were the railroads that did not change their strategies. Finally, in a study of high technology firms, Hambrick, Black, and Fredrickson (1992) found companies led by CEOs with MBA degrees were more profitable than those without such CEOs.

These findings can be reconciled by a line of argument set forth by Hambrick and Mason:

The analytic techniques learned in an MBA program are geared primarily to avoiding high losses or mistakes . . . business schools are not particularly well



inclined to develop innovative or risk-taking tendencies . . . people who are drawn to business schools . . . tend to be organizers and rationalizers" (1984, p.201).

In short, it is anticipated that executives' formal education in business is associated with strategies responsive to clear-cut trends in the environment but relatively conformist, tightly controlled, and yielding moderate performance levels.

Focusing on the leaders who have graduated from advanced degree programs, and comparing their strategic actions and performance to those who have not, is one potentially powerful way of advancing this debate. Attention to the overall amount of education and even the educational institutions of leaders (Useem and Karabel, 1986; D'Areni, 1990) may yield important insights into the origins of leader behavior.

Chapter Summary

In summarizing this chapter and discussing the implications for the study, several key themes of interest emerged from each section that supported the pursuit of this line of inquiry. A summary of major findings for each section of the review including implications for this study follows:

Strategic Leadership

First, leadership scholars tend to focus on the effects of leaders and their behaviors, it is apparent from the literature that much more understanding of the determinants of leader characteristics and behaviors is needed in order to get at the root forces for change or intervention. Second, in examining the literature on strategic leadership we found that studies have been unable to establish strict causality between leader behavior and organizational performance using statistical measures. Third, a recurring theme in the literature on strategic leadership is that a wide set of theoretical perspectives may be relevant to understanding characteristics, behaviors, and effects of

leaders on their organizations. Fourth, the wide array of different theoretical perspectives found, indicates that strategic leadership is a broad domain that can be studied in numerous ways. It also indicates that “this field of study is a long way from developing any paradigmatic focus, something that might bring more coherent knowledge generation” (Pfeffer, 1993).

Social Learning Theory

First, based on the premise that human thought, affect, and behavior can be significantly influenced by observation and direct experience suggests that social learning theory could be an appropriate and effective perspective for pursuing the proposed line of inquiry. Second, although studies have fostered the development of observational paradigms for studying the power of the socially mediated experience, evidence that social learning theory has been used in the specific study of leader behavior was not found by this researcher. Third, there is broad support from the literature for using social learning theory as a plausible theoretical framework for this study given its initial premise that complex behaviors are formed through the integration of many activities of differing origins, Bandura (1977) suggests that it is more beneficial to analyze the determinants of specific behavioral processes than to categorize them as learned or innate.

Leader Cognition

In summarizing the section on leader cognition several important themes emerge. First, is the acknowledgment of the central role played by the leader in an organization. Second, leader cognition represents the missing link in efforts to explain and understanding leader behavior. Third, the literature suggests that the elements of

cognition range from the most basic to the most complex and interwoven. They affect each other, even determine each other, and so the dividing lines among them are not precise. Still, they allow a useful conceptual disentangling of some complex phenomena and for that reason are important considerations in guiding this study. Fourth, evidence that leaders' cognitive structures will be reflected in their strategic choices is not abundant but has been observed in some studies. While there is relatively little empirical research that has been done on the cognitive styles of top leaders, it is reasonable to conclude from related research that leaders may differ significantly in how they obtain and process information, greatly affecting their interpretive processes and ultimately influencing their strategic choices. In sum, this literature strongly suggests that leader cognition plays an important role in triggering and shaping leader behavior.

The final section of the review focused on leader background experience as a basis for studying leader behavior. Again, the literature overwhelming supported the reasonable expectation that a leader's functional experiences and formal education provide legitimate lenses through which organizational problems and solutions in general can be viewed (Dearborn and Simon, 1958). However, studies focusing on the leader learning experiences have focused on the more quantifiable aspects of learning such as functional background, and formal education. Evidence of work that has focused on exploring the specific context, content, processes, and motivations of the learning experiences of leader's have been limited and this researcher finds no evidence that this line of inquiry has been pursued as it relates to school leaders. For that reason, the researcher found justification for this particular inquiry.



Given that the researcher's purpose was to explore the relationship between learning experience and leader strategic behavior, these four bodies of research: strategic leadership, social learning theory, leader cognition, and leader experience background constituted a solid framework of support.



CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter begins with a discussion of the methodology used and the theory guiding that methodology. Next, the method of data collection and the sampling strategy are presented followed by a description of the process used in analyzing the data and formulating conclusions. A narrative of actual field procedures used is provided and the chapter ends with a brief summary.

Theoretical Framework

The purpose in this study was to describe and explain the relationships between the learning experiences and the strategic actions of six urban school leaders. A few assumptions were central to achieving this purpose. First, it was assumed that the nature and impact of leaders' learning experiences could be best understood by studying the accounts of these experiences as they relate to the content of the learning content, the learning context, and the learning motivation in a developmental framework. This would allow for the gradual building of an individual's learning repertoire of experiences over the course of time and offer rich opportunities for observing patterns and themes that emerge.

Second, it was assumed that the family, school, and work would be the logical reference points for understanding the impact of these learning experiences on leader perceptions, interpretations, and behavior.

And third, this study was concerned primarily with meaning – how leaders make sense of their learning experiences and attribute their learning to their strategic behavior.



Social learning theory is logically related to the purpose and assumptions guiding this study. It lends itself naturally to the concepts explored in this study with its approach to the explanation of human behavior in terms of “a continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental determinants (Bandura, 1977, p. 194).”

Theories that have attempted to incorporate both personal and environmental determinants usually depict behavior as resulting from the joint influence of these two factors. In studying the determinants of leader behavior within this paradigm, the responses of individuals are analyzed under varying situational conditions. The data are then analyzed to determine how much of the variation in behavior is due to personal characteristics, how much to situational conditions, and how much to their joint effects.

Bandura (1977) suggests that because one can obtain almost any pattern of results depending upon the types of persons, behavior, and situations selected, efforts to gauge the relative importance of these factors, have not been especially informative. For example, in deciding which strategies to employ from many alternatives in addressing school reform, if there are few constraints on the leader in selecting appropriate options, one could expect that personal preferences would emerge as the predominant determinants. In contrast, if leaders are restricted in their choices of options by internal and/or external constraints, resources, etc.; their resulting behaviors can be expected to be remarkably similar however uniquely varied they might be in their cognitive and behavioral make-up. Bandura (1977, p. 175) contends that

...behavior partly determines which of the many potential environmental influences will come into play and what forms they will take; environmental influences, in turn, partly determine which behavioral repertoires are developed and activated. In this two-way influence process, the environment is influenceable, as is the behavior it regulates.

Further, as the term social learning suggests it is an ideal theory for explaining the relationships between cognition, behavior, and environment that are advanced in this study.

Method of Data Collection

The process of inquiry was inductive in that the researcher built abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, and theories from the details found in the data collected. This interest and focus was on capturing the perceptions and interpretations through face-to-face interaction with the participants in the study. As the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, I went to the natural settings of the participants to collect data for the study. Because the study was exploratory in nature it remained at the theory building level of inquiry, thus a qualitative method using in depth interviewing techniques was determined to be the appropriate method for study of the problem (Morse, 1991).

The process of the in-depth phenomenological interview was used in this study and followed closely the methodology developed by Seidman (1983) and Sullivan (1982). The process can be described generally as open but focused. Using interviews as the primary source of data offered me the advantage of being able to obtain large quantities of data in a relatively short period of time with opportunities for immediate follow-up and clarification as needed. Capturing the subjective views of participants was extremely important for the purposes of this research thus confirming the choice of in-depth interviewing as the primary research method (Marchall & Rossman, 1995). The structure and protocol for all tape-recorded interviews was based on strategy, technique, and tactic (Gorden, 1969, 1980, 1987). The audiotape was treated as the primary document and the transcription was treated as the secondary document.

The interview strategy focused on the selection of participants, the mode and frequency of contacts, and recording method. In identifying the study sample, I initially contacted eight urban school leaders that I knew professionally whose learning backgrounds I was interested in exploring based on my own observations of the differences in their individual leader styles and their varied responses to the challenges of reform in their respective organizations. During this preliminary conversation, the purpose and nature of the research study was explained in detail and prospective participants were asked to consider participation. Following this initial conversation and verbal indication of willingness to consider participation, a detailed letter providing a detailed explanation was mailed to each prospective participant along with a participant consent form and a self addressed, stamped envelope.

Upon receiving signed consent forms, this initial sample of eight urban school leaders was asked to provide an audiotaped, autobiographical chronology of their lifelong learning experiences from their early childhood to the present. They were asked to reflect, in particular, on those learning experiences that they perceived as having a significant influence in shaping them as leaders. Five of the eight participants returned tape-recorded autobiographical narratives that were prepared independently using the guide provided. One participant withdrew from the study for health reasons, and two prepared tapes as part of a preliminary interview session in which I was present.

After listening to each tape-recorded autobiographical chronology, six participants were selected based on the varied and diverse learning experiences of particular interest to the researcher and the focus of the study. I then proceeded with a series of face-to-face interviews with each participant over a six-week period of time. The



interview techniques used relied on “grand tour” questions to establish the context of the interviews with specific attention given to guiding the scope of responses by reviewing notes and referencing transcripts from previous sessions for continual verification of accuracy and interpretation of responses. Each participant was interviewed at least two times in follow up to the initial two hour autobiographical session. Each interview was approximately two to three hours in length. All interviews were audio-taped using a small inconspicuous tape recorder without a microphone. Interviews were spaced at least 2 days apart to allow time for reflection, and if possible, no longer than a week apart. Interviews were held in a place mutually agreeable upon and were generally conducted in the homes or at the participant’s place of work. The autobiographical narratives and the interviews provided the primary database for the study.

Sampling Techniques

This study attempted to describe and explain the significant learning experiences of school leaders and theorize about the relationships between those experiences and the strategic action leaders take in addressing strategic issues within their respective organizations. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967) the basic criterion governing the selection of participants in studies designed for the purposes of discovering theory is their theoretical *relevance* for furthering the development of emerging categories.

While no claim is made for generating a formal theory about the effects of learning experience on strategic action, the explanation concluded may provide the foundation for such a theory. The explanation emerged and was generated as information was collected. This process required a sampling technique consistent with its emergent



and generative nature. Glaser and Strauss' method of theoretical sampling met the study criteria and was used for the study.

The criterion for selecting the participants in the study sample was that they were in fact urban school leaders whose learning experiences and strategic behavior, I wished to understand. As the study progressed and began to generate explanations, each addition to the sample served to revise and/or extend the explanations. So the sample was built as categories emerged and relationships were sought.

Eight (8) school leaders were initially considered for participation in the study. I identified an initial sample of eight urban school leaders and asked them to provide an autobiographical, audiotaped narrative of their lifelong learning experiences. They were asked to reflect, in particular, on those learning experiences that they viewed as having had a significant influence in shaping them as leaders from their early childhood to the present. One participant withdrew from the study and for all but two of the remaining participants, autobiographical narratives were prepared independently by each subject and the researcher was not present. After listening to each tape-recorded autobiographical narrative, six participants were selected based on the varied and diverse learning experiences of particular interest to the researcher and the focus of the study. I then proceeded with a series of face-to-face interviews with each participant over a six-week period of time. The autobiographical narratives and the interviews provided the primary database for the study.

All but one participants had more than five years of experience in their current leadership position, and all had more than five years of experience in leadership positions overall. Current leadership positions represented in the sample included two high school

principals, one elementary school principal, one superintendent, one associate superintendent, and one executive director of curriculum and instruction. All but one of the selected participants were female. However, it is important to note that autobiographies were solicited from both male and female leaders and gender was not a criterion in the final selection of participants for the study. Participants ranged in age from mid-forty to age sixty with the median age being fifty-three. The formal education of participants ranged from the master's to doctorate level. One of the participants was African American, one was of Native American descent, and four were White.

All but one participants had more than five years of experience in their current leadership position, and all had more than five years of experience in leadership positions overall. Current leadership positions represented in the sample included two high school principals, one elementary school principal, one superintendent, one associate superintendent, and one executive director of curriculum and instruction. All but one of the selected participants were female. However, it is important to note that autobiographies were solicited from both male and female leaders and gender was not a criterion in the final selection of participants for the study. Participants ranged in age from mid-forty to age sixty with the mean age being fifty-three. The formal education of participants ranged from the master's to doctorate level. One of the participants was African American, one was of Native American descent, and four were White.

Interviews were conducted in both the homes and work places of the six selected participants. All of the participants lived and worked in urban school districts located within a 200 - mile radius of each other and all were located in the same mid-west state. All of the selected participants either currently serve in, or were recently (less than one

year) retired from leadership positions in urban school districts.

Study participants were leaders in urban school districts ranging in size from 5,400 to 25,133 students. Each school district serves students and families from very diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. Three of the study participants were school principals from the same urban school district. The other three participants held central office positions in three different urban school districts. All participants were leaders in school districts governed by accountability measures and funding resources from the same state.

DATA ANALYSIS

Primary strategies used to ensure reliable data analysis included the careful transcription of interviews and the use of consistent techniques for the purpose of identifying categories, themes, and relationships. These strategies will be discussed in this section.

The analytic process included profiling, identifying themes, marking transcript margins, collecting and filing theme material so that it could be easily retrieved. The process of analysis began with the first field experience and built gradually as the material was collected (Lofland, 1971).

Leader Narratives

The interviews (in transcript form) that were complete (not missing significant material), compelling in the storytelling and meaning-making, were selected for “narratives.” A narrative, as developed by Seidman (1983), is composed from the transcript of an interview series. The words of the interviewer are omitted and the participant’s story stands alone. The words are entirely those of the participant unless it

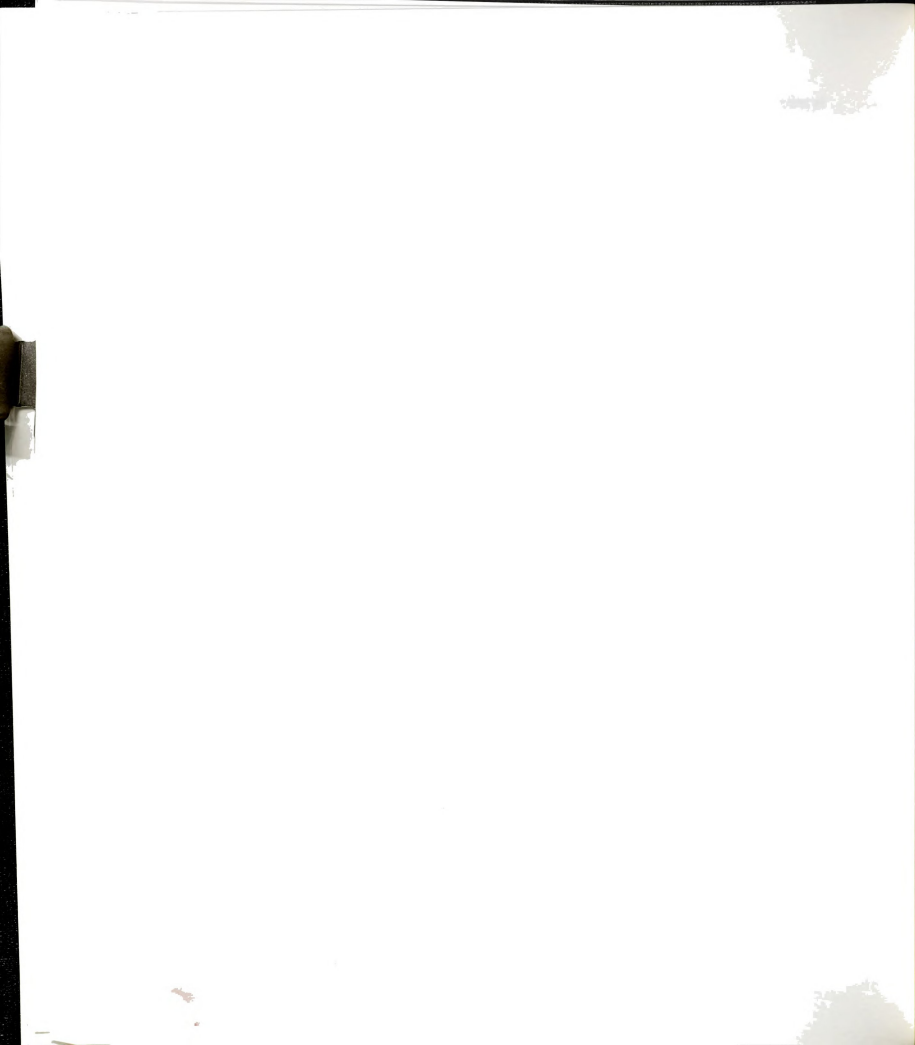


is necessary, for reasons of clarity, to add a word or phrase, which will then appear in brackets. The major steps included:

- 1) Each transcript was read individually. Sections, words, or phrases that should not be omitted from the final story were underlined.
- 2) The manuscript was then retyped, reducing it to one-half of the original transcript.
- 3) The final version of the profile was then draft.
- 4) The final draft was again reviewed checking for clarity, omissions, sense, and strength.
- 5) Final version of profile was completed and reviewed by each participant for accuracy and interpretation.

I then constructed a scaffold for unknown conclusions, I see this analytic and interpretive process as a combination of the meaning that the participant makes of his or her experience and the meaning that I, as researcher, find in the words of the participant, seen through assisting lenses of other observers and writers in related inquiries. The final form of the analysis and presentation of results was heavily reliant on the words of the participant interviewees (profiles) and in part the interpretation of the thematic material that emerged from the collection of transcripts during the ongoing process (Johnson, 1975; Lofland, 1971; Rubin, 1979; Seidman, 1983).

Specific findings are presented in chapter four followed by a summary of general findings and conclusions in chapter five. Commentary on the limitations of the study method as well as implications for further research are also included in chapter five.



Chapter IV

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

“I suggest, that it is stories of identity – narratives that help individuals think about and feel who they are, where they come from, and where they are headed – that constitute the single most powerful weapon in the leader’s arsenal.” (Gardner, 1995)

How do leaders learn to do what they do? This is the driving question that lies at the heart of this inquiry. Although research suggests that some aspects of leader behavior may be genetically based, it also suggests that many others are not; and that regardless, genes do not *determine* behavior but *influence* it, leaving a strong role for individual motivation as well as for environmental impact (Higgins, 1994; Gardner, 1975).

Leader behavior is a multifaceted phenomenon that is influenced by both natural and learned factors, my sustained interest has always been directed toward the factors that can be learned and developed. I interviewed six urban school leaders in search of information about what they identify as significant learning experiences over the course of their lives. I further inquired as to the reasons these experiences were significant for them and the circumstances involved in the learning. I then ask participants to describe their current strategic situation as leaders in urban school settings. I was particularly interested in learning about the issues they face and the resources they use in their individual attempts to address these issues. Next, I compared what they actually do to what they said they learned to do and look for relationships between the two. For the purposes of this exploratory study, I suspended all judgment as to the effectiveness of their learning or the particular strategies and behaviors they describe. My focus was on the influence of learning in determining leader behavior.

Because my analysis is placed in a developmental framework, for which there is no precedent in this population, I have taken a more phenomenological approach to this



study. Methodological research suggests that when little is known about a particular phenomenon, it is important to explore it in a relatively open manner in order to isolate relevant variables for future study and analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Semi-structured interviews allowed me the opportunity to collect consistent data while offering my study participants greater freedom and latitude to contribute unanticipated perceptions and attitudes. My intended audience includes academicians, educational leaders, and particularly those interested in methods for cultivating strong educational leaders.

The personal narratives are included in this section as background and are presented with the intention of letting the voices of the actual participants be heard. The detailed descriptions of their individual experiences offer further support for the findings, conclusions, and implications of the study. It is hoped that this study will shed new light on key factors that contribute to meaningful learning experiences from the perspective of the leader learner. It is further hoped that the study will reveal important clues as to plausible links between leaders' strategic practice and their significant prior learning experiences.

What was the purpose of the study? My purpose in this study was to examine the relationships between the significant learning experiences and the strategic practices of six urban school leaders. More specifically, by examining the content, context, and processes of their individual learning experiences, I seek to better understand and offer plausible explanations as to the origins of their views and subsequent approaches to the strategic issues they face within their respective urban school environments.

What will you find here? The first section of this chapter provides a description of the setting and process used in collecting the data. In the next section, I present the



learning portraits of seven urban school leaders in some detail, weaving in the more prominent themes as they surface for further exploration later in the chapter. The next section of this chapter presents the individual and aggregate findings that emerge from both the individual and collective set of portraits and is followed by a discussion of those findings. Section three presents data and findings relative to leaders' views of their strategic problems and the subsequent actions they take in resolving them. The chapter ends with a complete summary of the findings.

The Experience

What was it like to conduct these interviews? I liken the experience of conducting these interviews to that of a guest choir director stepping up to the podium to face a group of accomplished singers that have all eagerly assembled to sing together for the very first time with no opportunity to practice the songs before the program. With some invested but generic guidance and a few waves of my novice hands, the individual singers suddenly swell into a coherent choir, each with its own distinctive voice but firmly connected to an articulate whole. While there are variations within the tones of their voices, a single coherent melody is undeniably heard. I attempt to offer you a rendering of that remarkable concert performance. It is my hope that, though you may not be familiar with the tempo of the arrangement, you will quickly recognize the melodies and the lyrics and, more importantly, that you will, while listening to the music, hear distant echoes from the origins of the composition.

The Study Sample

I identified an initial sample of eight urban school leaders and asked them to provide an autobiographical, audiotaped narrative of their lifelong learning experiences. They were asked to reflect, in particular, on those learning experiences that they viewed

as having had a significant influence in shaping them as leaders from their early childhood to the present. One participant withdrew from the study and for all but two of the remaining participants, autobiographical narratives were prepared independently by each subject and the researcher was not present. After listening to each tape-recorded autobiographical narrative, six participants were selected based on the varied and diverse learning experiences of particular interest to the researcher and the focus of the study. I then proceeded with a series of face-to-face interviews with each participant over a six-week period of time. The autobiographical narratives and the interviews provided the primary database for the study.

All but one participants had more than five years of experience in their current leadership position, and all had more than five years of experience in leadership positions overall. Current leadership positions represented in the sample included two high school principals, one elementary school principal, one superintendent, one associate superintendent, and one executive director of curriculum and instruction. All but one of the selected participants were female. However, it is important to note that autobiographies were solicited from both male and female leaders and gender was not a criterion in the final selection of participants for the study. Participants ranged in age from mid-forty to age sixty with the median age being fifty-three. The formal education of participants ranged from the master's to doctorate level. One of the participants was African American, one was of Native American descent, and four were White.

The Setting

Interviews were conducted in both the homes and work places of the six selected participants. All of the participants lived and worked in urban centers located within a 200 - mile radius of each other and all were located in the same mid-west state. All of the selected participants either currently serve in, or are recently (less than one year) retired from, leadership positions in urban school districts.

Study participants were leaders in urban school districts ranging in size from 5,400 to 25,133 students. Each school district serves students and families from very diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. Three of the study participants were school principals from the same urban school district. The other three participants held central office positions in three different urban school districts. All participants were leaders in school districts governed by accountability measures and funding resources from the same state.

The Leader Learning Portraits

In an effort to convey the rich description and diverse learning backgrounds of the urban school leaders involved in this study, I will introduce them to you individually. Their stories are engaging and while they do not fully represent the mosaic of all possible learning experiences, just as no life captures any single pattern, their stories do express the essential elements explored in this study and will be developed more fully later in the chapter.

Although these portraits are thoroughly disguised to protect the right to privacy, each participant communicated to the researcher an appreciation for the opportunity to reflect on their personal experience and all were very willing to share the intimate details of their backgrounds in order to fully benefit from the process. Thus, after all the identifying data had been altered significantly, the vignettes were then reviewed by each participant to ensure their essential factual and interpretive accuracy. The content remains carefully unchanged. I honor their open and honest accounts and through their portraits and subsequent quotes throughout this chapter, I hope to show that the learning experiences of their respective pasts are, indeed, linked to their current leader behavior.



In seeking to understand the learning experiences that have shaped the sample participants as leaders, let me begin by sharing their individual portraits. I want to direct the reader's attention to the specific types of lessons learned, the settings and conditions in which they were learned, and the techniques and methods used to learn. Each portrait is developed chronologically so that we can see their learning repertoires building progressively over time.

Vivian: Sturdy Pillar

Vivian can be characterized as the sturdy pillar in any crisis; she is composed, focused and empathic. On many occasions, the district requests her presence as an unofficial goodwill ambassador in crisis situations – a position earned during her long tenure in this setting. More often, she assumes this role spontaneously, simply because she values extending herself beyond her own spiritual skin.

Vivian credits her parents as being the most influential figures in her early learning experience and though their formal education was limited, she has come to realize and appreciate their wisdom and the role that their early lessons have played in shaping her leader behavior.

Some things happened to me in my home that thoroughly impacted my learning and who I am today. I was born in 1939 in a small place, very small, about 3000 people. My parents were very good parents. In fact, at the time I really did not realize how wise they were. Although they did not have formal education to speak of -- Daddy [only had a] third grade education and my mother, who was educated, had [only] a ninth grade education. Education was so important in my family. I was number eight of nine children who lived. There were thirteen children who were born, but they did not [all] live. So I was number eight. . . one brother after me.

Vivian describes her father as a hard working man who worked in the sawmill and was a devoted family man. They lived in a segregated southern town that was clearly divided by the Mason-Dixie line, and though her family was living in a



time of blatant racial discrimination, she is quick to stress that these were not issues that were focused on in their home. She recalls that while her Daddy could not read and they had only two books in the home -- the Bible and a church hymn book -- he would tell them stories.

[I remember] going to school in the first grade and not having any prior experience with books, just the stories that my father told – and oh, he was a story teller. He told stories and we heard these stories over and over again.

Vivian talks about her parents and their influence over her with reverence and great respect. She credits early lessons about being independent, resilient, and self-sufficient to her father, in particular.

Daddy's point was that every tub had to stand on its own bottom ... no matter what your limitations are, no matter whether you're male or female... you don't use discrimination or what you don't have [as an excuse]. In fact, I really thought that we were well off, I really did not know we were that poor. I later saw other families and all of the books, but I still did not recognize that we were poor, because nobody talked about being poor. Daddy and Mamma never talked about it. People from his [Daddy's] job came, and he taught them; he taught them how to do their job. In fact they wanted to make him a foreman and he would not accept it. He said that he did not want the headaches but I would imagine that very few people knew that he couldn't read. . . that was his real reason. He knew he taught people on the job mentored. They would come by -- people wanting jobs -- they came by to see [Daddy] if they wanted a job at the Mill, because he could get them a job and he would teach them [how to do it] sitting on the front porch. So, that's both black and white, so our home was a place where people came to learn.

Over the course of the interviews, Vivian grapples with the emerging paradoxes in her accounts of her early learning experiences with insight, humor and perspective. She describes being raised as privileged though by all economic standards, they were poor. She describes her schools as safe places that she loved to be because she was treated as special, though in reality she was educated in a segregated school system where supplies and textbooks were outdated, hand-me-downs from the white schools.

So when they [white schools] got new books, we [black schools] received their used books. There were even names in books and some of these families we recognized. That really did not [matter] – I didn't notice it a lot, I didn't pay attention to that a lot...

My father and mother taught me that I could do anything, circumstances must not get in the way of what I can achieve. If I didn't do it well [the first time], I had to do it again. They did not tolerate anything but your best. That was their definition of success.

Evidence of Vivian's lessons in overcoming obstacles in her life continue to unfold as she talks about the experience of gradually losing her eyesight at the end of first grade. She talks about not being able to attend school for an entire year and going from one specialist to another. She was restricted to indoor play because of the negative effect of the sunlight on her eyes. Again, her account of this obstacle is met with a spirit of resilience and she credits the manner in which her condition was handled by her parents as the reason it did not become a barrier to her continued achievement.

... going blind and being out of school for a whole year my second grade year, and having to deal with that situation helped me tremendously. Because what they [parents] were teaching me was not to focus on your problem, look at solutions. So, being blind, nobody told me [I was handicapped], we made the adjustments. It was then that I learned to use my mind. I escaped through imagination and my thought processes. I learned that how you think about something will determine how you see it or how long you stay in it. I really didn't think that it was a bad situation because nobody told me it was, you know, nobody said that this is bad and you poor thing, you can't play outside. In fact, [it is because of] that experience, quite frankly, that I have such keen hearing now. I developed an excellent memory. I developed an excellent memory I really learned to use that as a tool.

Continuing along the path of significant lessons learned, Vivian's attention shifts to other significant learning experiences. As the story unfolds, specific themes related to power, authority, negotiating conflict, and loyalty emerge quickly as the topics that dominate the conversation. Vivian begins by talking about early lessons on power that were significant influences in building her foundation for later learning on the topic.

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[My parents taught me that] you don't do anything that affects [your good name]. That's what will get you places – your name, your good name. And so therefore [I learned to] cherish [my] name. That was when I learned the lesson of how important [a good name was]. I saw the power and influence in a good name. [That comes from] paying your bills regularly. And in this little town, you see, because of his [Daddy's] reputation, ... [protecting] the Johnson name was so critical. You didn't do anything that [would hurt your name] because your name is power. The name, who you are and what you stand for is the power. You don't have to position yourself to get to know the right people. If you keep your good name and do your job, then that other stuff is going to come. I believe that. I believe that to this day.

Again, early lessons about the importance of reputation and the power of a good name are the underlying themes that have shaped Vivian's views on power. As she later shares specific experiences learned as an adult, there is again evidence that suggests that those earlier lessons from home are still prominent themes embedded in her views on integrity, power, and authority.

I know I always believed that one should respect leadership and authority -- any person in a leadership position. That was ingrained. One ought to respect that you have [to negotiate] getting what you want. This is something that I always knew. If you had a difference of opinion, if I did not believe that the direction [we were going was right] or if what I had been told to do differed from my own personal beliefs, I ought always to go to the source. You know, go to the person and state my objection – but never embarrass a person, never in an open forum. If I disagree with that individual, I have to go to them privately. I believe that if a person is presented with the facts, if the person is presented with another way in that one-to-one interaction, it allows them to save face in the group. I believe that one can get one's voice heard, but there's a way in which you do that. People are reasonable, but it's how you approach them.

Early Work Experience

In listening to Vivian's account of early childhood experiences that shaped her view of life and how it was to be negotiated, it becomes clear that until about age nine the primary influences have been her parents and the place for learning these lessons was definitely her home. While her parents continue to be a dominant influence, the next phase of her learning experience expands to include early work experience outside of the



home. It is here that her relationship network expands and in some cases becomes a competing influence with what she has learned to this point.

At age nine, Vivian went to work for a white family in her town. Her eyesight, while still impaired, had stabilized and though still legally blind, she did have sight and functioned as though the impairment did not exist. She describes her experiences with the two families she worked for from age nine until she graduated from high school. These experiences were, in many cases, quite different from each other and also in stark contrast to Vivian's own family experience. As she began to speak about them in detail, evidence of competing influences began to surface with regard to her understanding of poverty, privilege, race, and class. Vivian also observed family dynamics and relationships that were different than what she had been accustomed to at home.

...when I was nine years old, I started to go to work for a doctor in the town. The father was a doctor and [they] had kids and one of the girls was about my age. You know they had these things. I believe that they showed that other other life. But I worked for them and played with their kids. In fact, they took me on my first trip. [Working in their home] was also my first introduction to a lot of books. I was just amazed at all these books – these fairy tales. They had a room. I know it looked large – it was probably not that large. They had books. I didn't realize that people had bookshelves in their homes – you know with books. I would go to work at nine o'clock to play with these little white kids and then after I fed them their lunch, I had to put them to bed, and then I had my lunch. We didn't sit down at the same table to eat lunch. But while they were asleep, if I had no other chores, then I read. I read these books. That was my first introduction to Grimm's Fairy Tales. I escaped [through books].

This juxtaposition of experiences encountered with her work family and those of her own family began to challenge Vivian's earlier notions about poverty and privilege. New opportunities afforded by her work families became anchoring experiences for her conceptions of a different way of life.

... and I used to say that when I have a home I am going to have books, so many books. I was so impressed with their built-in bookcase that when I got out of college I had to have a bookcase. I made it.



After her older sister moved away, she recommended Vivian to replace her in her job with the Alexander family. Vivian describes lessons learned, while working for this family, as also being of strong influence in shaping her learning about adult manipulation of children, information power, trust, building support networks for resources and the importance of compassion.

I was twelve or thirteen years old when I began to work for the president of the school board [family]. My job was to clean up for them after school, you know, wash dishes, vacuum, dust, all of those things. She did her own washing and did her own cooking, but those [other] things I did.

When I got ready to go to work for the school board president, my father told me something that impressed me, it stood out then, and it stands out today. He said, “When you go to work, he’s going to use you to get information . . .” think about it – a person with a third grade education who didn’t work for the school system. He said, “He’s going to use you to get information about your school, your principal, and your teachers. He’s going to use you for that. Do not tell him anything. You tell him the good. [Tell him] that you like your principal, that you like your teachers, and they are good teachers. And then he’s going to ask you what went on in the community. You know, who did what, [trying] to get information. You tell the truth, and here is the truth, but you don’t allow him to [use you for information].”

Though Vivian heeded the advice from her father and principal to be on guard against being manipulated for information by Mr. Alexander, she speaks with a certain affection and appreciation about the time they spent together in conversation. Vivian fondly recalls some of the times spent with the Alexander family and acknowledges the times that they went out of their way to make her feel special. She attributes a lot of her learning during that time to associations with them.

I learned so much in that family. Because of the amount of time [they spent with me]. But I think [they appreciated] having some young person that they could talk to – a young person who was not being flippant, that they could talk to and share some things.

Vivian grew up, then, learning early lessons about relationships, hard work, accepting responsibility and independence. Finding herself in the work world at the

tender age of nine, she learned early how to create a climate of safety, warmth, and acceptance for herself by being helpful, listening carefully, and being attentive to the needs of others. Evidence of the powerful influence that these early lessons had in shaping Vivian's identity, lie in the fact that these same learning themes reappear over and over in follow-up interview sessions.

Vivian shares freely with little inhibition the memories of lessons learned offering vivid details. During the second visit, she referenced notes that she had jotted down of things she wanted to share that she had thought about since our last session and again expressed how much she was enjoying this experience. It was almost as though she had given herself the gift of time and permission to seriously reflect on '*from whenst she came*' for the very first time.

School Experiences

Vivian's story moves forward on the momentum of several key dynamics. She has learned to adequately compensate for her own physical limitations. She has developed practical and useful skills that are valued by others. She recognizes the value in focusing on and appropriately responding to the needs of others with care and compassion. She is learning to hold herself and others closely accountable for their motives and the consequences of their actions. She now goes forward with a strong sense of the possibilities that the future holds for her and takes responsibility and accountability for her own success in school and in choosing a career path.

I loved school. That was a good place to be. People cared about you. They knew who I was. I felt safe, I felt protected, and nobody embarrassed me. I wanted to be a teacher. I always wanted to be a teacher. There was a point in my life when I wanted to be an actress . . . an actress. But the teaching, the teaching of Sunday school, the teaching of Bible, all of those things – they were always there.



The teacher that influenced me greatly -- she [later became] the high school principal, but then she was my English teacher. She taught [me] to love literature and poetry and oh, we studied Shakespeare, we communicated with pen pals from England, we had plays where we acted out this stuff, really. I was amazed when I went to college how strong I was in Literature. That was a strength because of the passion that I had for books, and for reading. They [my teachers] were conscious of my unique limitations [impaired vision]. That's the advantage in knowing your students. You know what they can do and all you have to do is give them a cushion, or under gird them so that you can get to them. Had they not done that [for me], then I would not have been able to [make it]. Surely I was not going to say, "I can't see." I'm not going to say that. [It was my English teacher] who later asked me what my plans were [after high school]. And, so when I told her that I wasn't sure, she said, "Well, I'm going to send you to college." She [English teacher] planted that seed.

As Vivian describes her school experiences, learning themes that emerge from her story are related to achieving results, improving performance, and expanding her perspectives as well as her options for the future. While specific recollection of significant learning experiences during her college years was sketchy, Vivian does describe classes with a particular elderly professor with humor and animation. In talking about a particular lecture that she remembered on how to be a successful school administrator she begins to dramatize parts of the lecture and assumes the voice tone and posture of the professor as she shares the story.

[He used to tell us] "You've have to talk to people. You must talk to people, and you have to talk to all people, even those people whose opinions are going to be different [from yours]." In fact, I make a point of talking to people who are positive people and talking to the negative people. I mean, you know what you're going to get. And from all these, you're going to come up with the truth. It's not going to be what you thought necessarily. You have to talk to people; you have to engage in conversation, I mean, real conversation [with people] to get a [broader] point of view. Know what's going on in your school. Get out of the office and talk to the janitors, the secretaries, everyone.

Vivian became very animated as she talked about her experiences with this particular professor. She acknowledges that of all the things that she learned about being a successful school administrator in college, his lessons on the importance of paying attention to relationships with people were the most valuable, practical, easy to implement, and paid immediate dividends. She describes these lessons as "seeds that



were planted," that took root, and continue to be key factors in defining her leadership style.

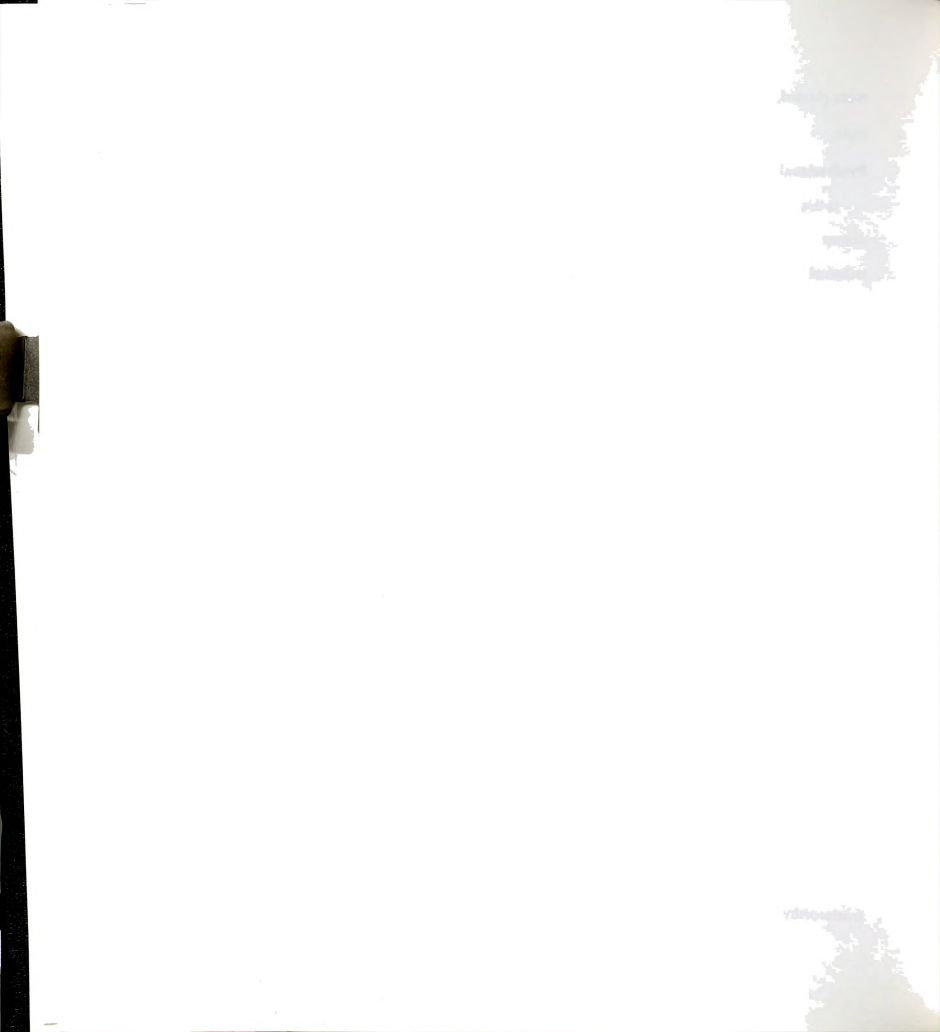
Professional Work Experience

In this section, we have an opportunity to see Vivian move into a leadership role in her school district. Particular attention will be given here to the relational, political, philosophical, and technical learning experiences that she describes as she assumes her new responsibilities as an assistant principal for a large, urban high school.

During Vivian's very first year on the job, she finds herself in the middle of a situation where learning intensifies as a result of the immediate and high stakes consequences involved. Here, she describes being placed in a situation without the technical skills need to do the job effectively and the results of that experience.

My first year on the job I was placed in a position of having to evaluate a teacher alone. You would never assign an inexperienced administrator to do this kind of thing with no guidance or direction. There was conflict like you would not believe. Here I'm green as grass. I didn't understand issues... I looked at the contract and I looked at the language and looked at what you have to do and I [began to] work with [the teacher]. Now here is a novice . . . a beginner . . . one who has no training. So, number one, you never would put a person who is inexperienced to do this kind of thing. [My goal] was to help him. [My boss' goal [was] to get rid of him. Conflict like you would not believe.

As we will see next, Vivian became well-schooled with this experience and develops specific strategies to avoid repeat occurrences. At first, she seemed reluctant to acknowledge *consciously* establishing information networks with people that could provide her with help. For some reason, she seemed uncomfortable with that kind of motivation. But as she continued to think about her communication networks, she appears to become more at ease with the idea of it being an acceptable and ethical strategy. She has learned how to develop strategic relationships with colleagues that are trustworthy, and that she can rely on to help her when she needs it.



Over the next several years, Vivian developed her ability to listen to the concerns of others and build bridges between groups of people -- particularly those with often opposing viewpoints. She continued to expand her network of strategic relationships with others in order to fill in the gaps in her experience background. Vivian's "reputation" and "good" name became known throughout the district and it was not long before she was appointed to the position of high school principal. As the first female in the district, to serve in that capacity, Vivian was assigned to one of the toughest high schools in the district. She recalls her early efforts to make strategic connections with those she felt could be of significant help to her in facing the challenges of her new position. She describes, in detail, just how she went about establishing credible information connections as she prepares to assume the of a high school principal.

I would go to those in [similar] positions and say, "Now, I want you to teach me. I want you to tell me everything that you know and that includes everything . . . meetings . . . about where people sit . . . and what's behind, what's behind the meeting. I know that things go on before a meeting takes place. And what happens after a meeting. I want you to teach me that." I went to each one of them, each principal. I was aware that I was the new kid on the block and I was the only female. I wanted to establish a link with them and I knew one of the ways in which you do it, was to seek their help. People do want to help. I mean, if you tap in and let people tell you what they know, you establish a relationship, you know, you establish a connection there. I knew that.

Vivian communicates confidence not only in her abilities to build relationships with the "right" people -- by seeking their help and support early -- but also, in her perceptions about who the "right" people are to approach. She acknowledges the political and technical gaps in her own experience background and quickly seeks to fill the voids with advice from others.

As Vivian talks about her reasons for establishing relationships with particular individuals, she talks about how she observes from a distance to determine a person's



motivation, character, and trustworthiness as initial criteria for network consideration.

Her perceptions about who to approach and for what reasons, as well as the details of how connections are to be made, should be familiar to the reader from some of the earlier learning experiences Vivian has shared. She continues to talk, in detail, about initial efforts to establish the “right” relationships.

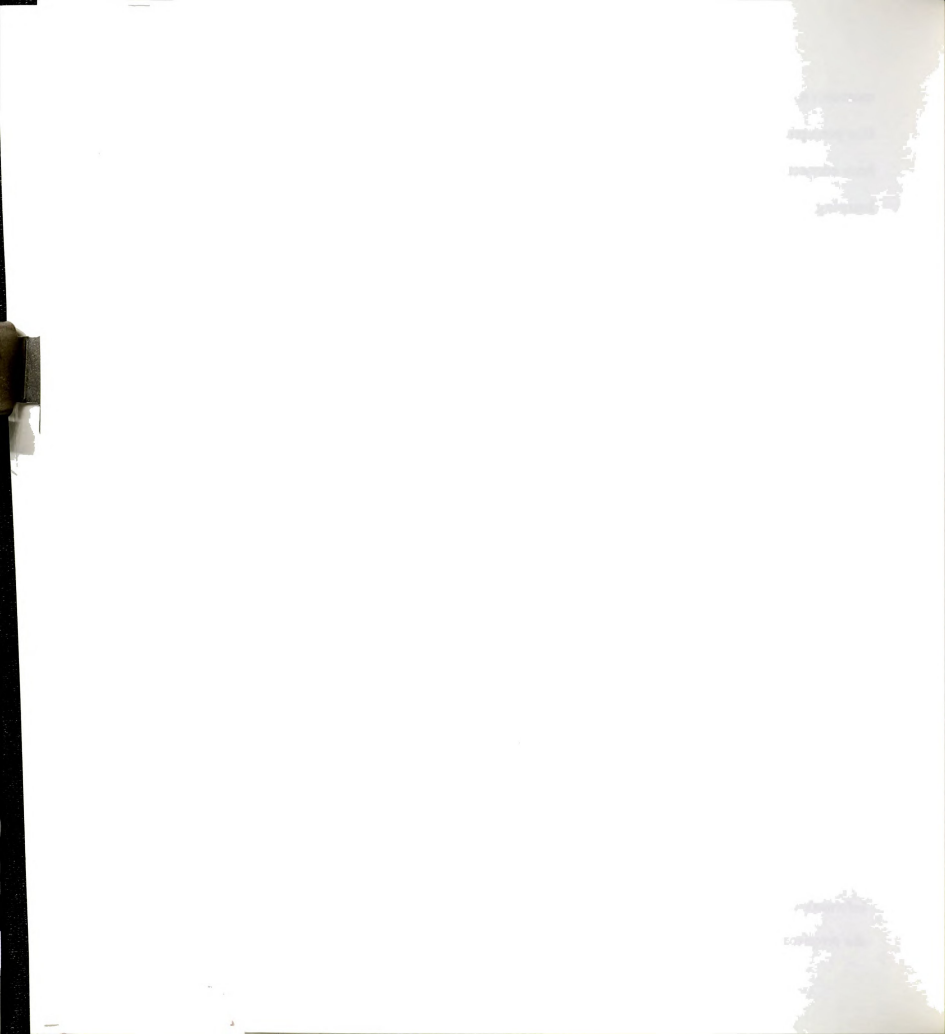
[After I visited the principals and the politician], I went to my boss [principal supervisor] and I told him what I had learned from the others up to that point. I asked what was important to him. I learned [from him] that loyalty was so very critical, it was a very critical piece – loyalty to mission, loyalty to the organization, and loyalty to the boss. I told him all the things that he had taught me [so far] such as being very accurate. It used to annoy me when he would call and tell me to be sure that when you’re talking to people, be sure that you write the information down. He really wanted you to write it down - and then he would have me read it back to him. At first that was insulting [to me], but I soon learned how correct he was. He was accurate about everything – it was his way.

Shortly after her appointment, Vivian expanded her relationship network to also include the Superintendent of the school district and recalls their first conversations.

...when I got the position, I knew it was time that I talked [with the Superintendent]. In fact, we had two or three conversations, but it was important for me to hear his expectations, [to determine if] they were realistic. It was important for me to hear the way he was thinking and he needed to hear me say that I didn’t see myself as being superwoman. The high school was [thought to be at that time] the worse place to be. No one said anything good about the school ... I mean no one. Well, that energized me even more. That made me want to do it more.

Summary

To summarize, this biographical portrait of Vivian provides compelling evidence that suggests that Vivian’s learning experiences from the past continue to propel her forward on three distinct fronts – relational, political, and philosophical. She has developed a marked capacity for establishing and sustaining strong, reciprocal relationships with people. She has carefully honed her skills of observing and reading the motivations of people. She has learned to value information as power and has become quite skilled at accessing and providing information that she perceives as valuable in helping her to accomplish her goals. She also demonstrates a strong



and uncompromising sense of loyalty to authority figures. She has learned to rely on her strong faith and her moral sense of right and wrong and she consistently operates within those perimeters when making decisions.

Jane: Bridge Builder

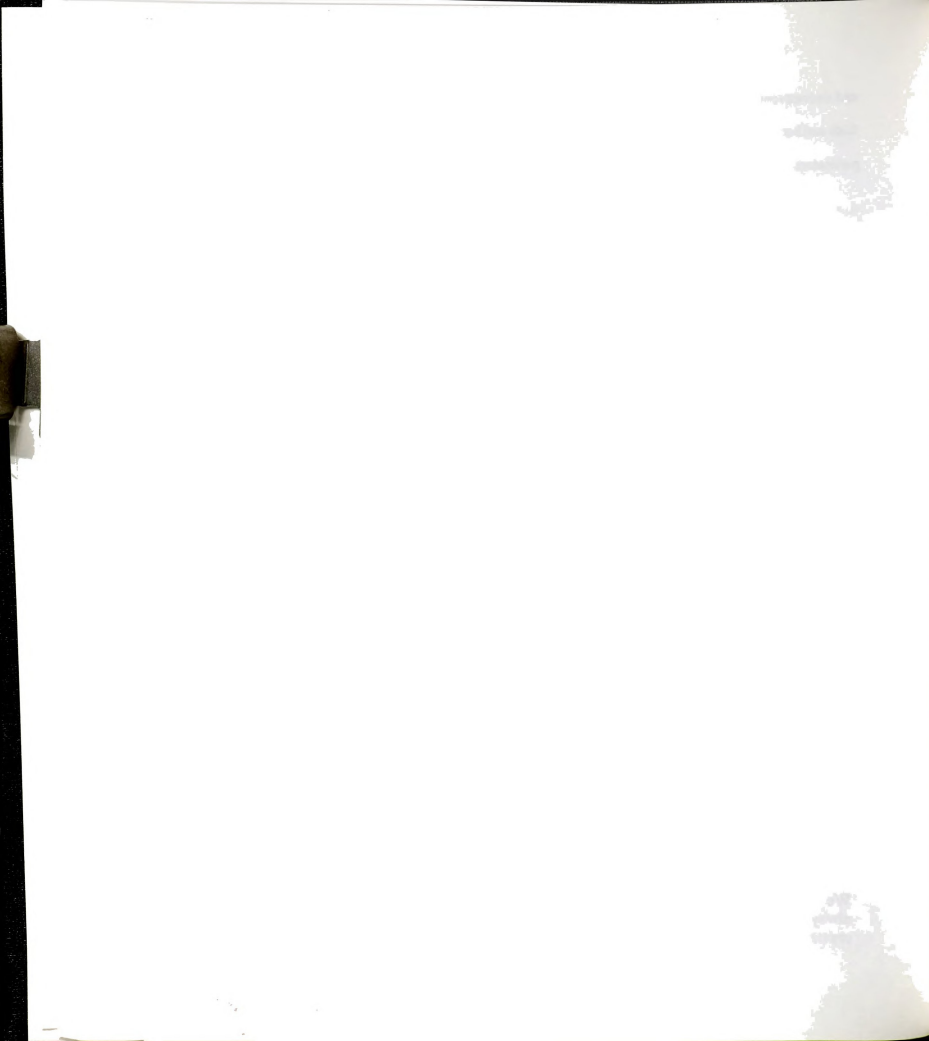
The metaphor of “bridge builder” has been used in the leadership literature to describe certain types of leaders (Jung, 1974; Pitcher, 1996). They are typically identified as those who through continuous, incremental, methodical processes formulate strategies that build upon each other reaching toward a goal and continuously adapting to the demands of an uncertain environment (Mintzberg, 1987).

Jane can be characterized as a bridge builder. Her learning experiences reveal an unquenchable thirst for the methodical accumulation of knowledge and skills that she uses to perfect, refine, shape, and solidify her actions toward a strategic end goal. The following narrative illustrates the set of learning experiences that Jane attributes to being influential in shaping her leader behavior.

Home/Family

Born in 1942 as the oldest of four girls, Jane’s early childhood experiences are described by her as stable and nurturing. Her dad, who was a mechanical engineer by profession, was most gifted in his natural teaching abilities. He used these gifts to kindle a passion for learning in Jane that has never been quenched.

My father was just a natural teacher. He created learning environments all the time. We may have been the only family in [our town] that had as a part of our dinner table a blackboard and chalk, a dictionary, and a two-volume set of the encyclopedias. They were part of our dinner and whenever in our conversation we asked a question or wanted to know something, my father would draw the thing on the chalkboard or we’d look it up [in the books]. It was always a game -- it was fun. We had lots of lively conversation around our dinner table. We were always learning, always discovering. My father was not one to tell us the answer. He was one to create a situation in which we would learn the answer by discovering it. He would



extend our learning through some kind of practical experience. He was a person who loved to find out how things worked, and he passed that interest along to us. I can remember his patience, his incredible patience in sitting with us helping us learn our math multiplication tables, or chemistry formulas or whatever it was we were struggling with [at the time]. He would devise some sort of game or some sort of interesting fun way for us to learn about it.

Jane learned early to not only love learning, but, that when she excelled at it, it brought great joy to those she loved and wanted to please. This desire to please seemed to fuel her efforts to not only do well but to thrive on being in the top ranks of achievement in all of her endeavors.

With my father particularly, I think there was an expectation that I would do well in school. But he was particularly moved --to tears, in fact -- whenever I would bring home a good report card. This went for all of my sisters. But he would be very much moved by the fact that we brought home good report cards. I'm sure that this might have been one of my motivations -- deep, dark, you know, now that I think about it as an adult and look back -- that I wanted to please my father. Part of doing that was getting good grades. So, as I perceived it, that was something that I continued to do. Somewhere along the line, the theme here is that I discovered at some point that I have the ability to bring out deep emotions in other people. Through my writing, through my words, through listening, through connecting with people in some way. . . and that is something that I thrived on, I think, and used to my advantage.

While part of Jane's motivation to achieve is attributed to a desire to please herself and others, she acknowledges that learning was not necessarily a breeze for her and that she worked hard to achieve at a high level of performance. She notes that she was encouraged and motivated by interesting ways her father and teachers devised to keep her interested -- that were fun, often illustrative, and very personal.

Probably some of the most wonderful memories that I have are of my dad helping us with homework sitting at the dining room table. I have a lot of memories of him designing that sort of a game to keep my interest and setting up [some sort] of challenge for me. He did a lot of that. He was so good at designing different ways of interpreting things so that it would be understandable to us -- finding a totally different analogy.

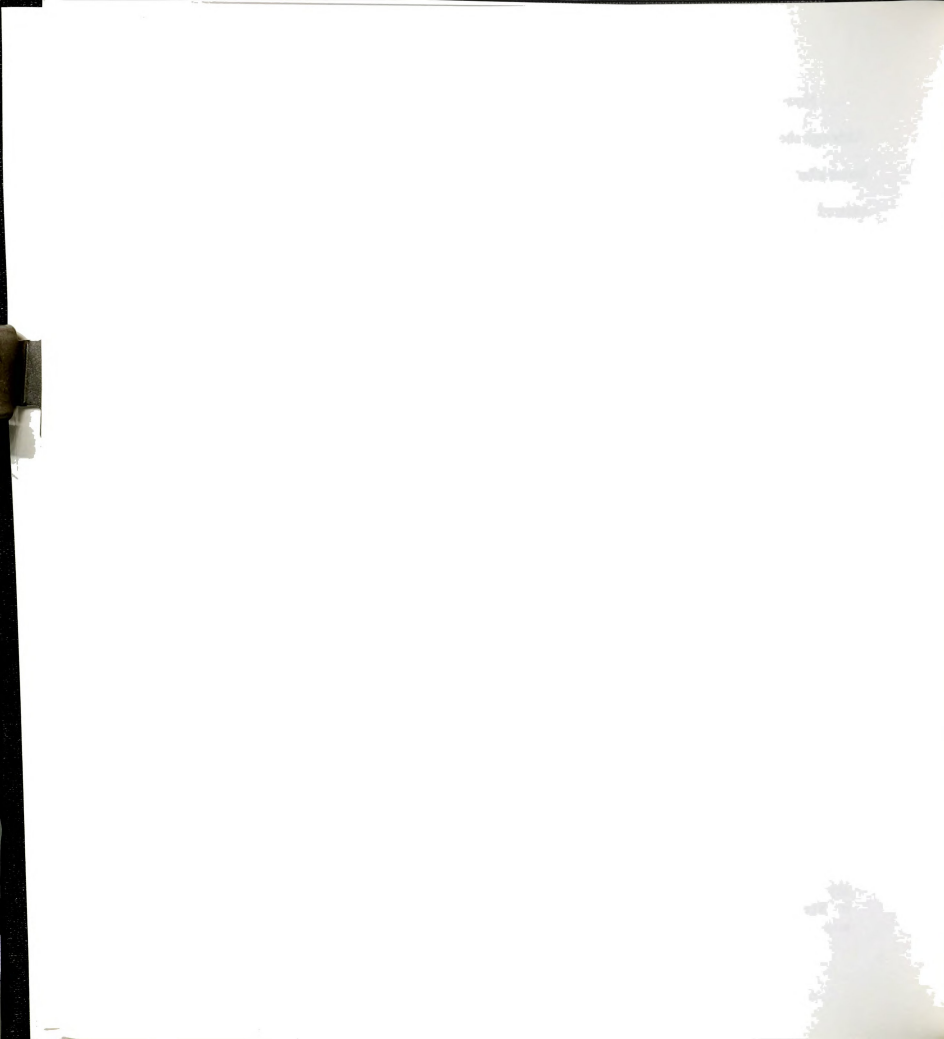


Now, Jane's mother was a teacher of the hearing impaired, by profession. Although she worked for several years prior to her children being born, she chose to stay home after Jane was born and returned to work only after the youngest of the four girls entered school. Jane recalls her mother being a woman of considerable strength and courage with a resilient spirit that certainly influenced Jane in many ways. She had overcome a lot in her life and pursued with determination a different and better way for her four girls. When describing lesson that she learned about power and authority, Jane often credits her mother as being the early teacher on such topics and refers to her mom as the power broker in the family.

I had a strong female to [teach me] how the world works. She was the power figure in the house; that does not mean that my dad was a wimp, at all, but she was the power broker; and anything [that went on] had to filter through her. If there was anything that we needed to talk to my dad about –and it's not like he wasn't approachable – it's just that that's how our family worked – [we] go through mother. Oh, I don't think [it was an expectation of my Dad's] it's just the way our family worked. It was my mother's way and I think my mother was the one who kind of determined how things worked. I think that [experience with mom as family power-broker] has probably influenced my relationship[s] with powerful women [and men]. My mom was the power broker.

Jane offers another story as an illustration of her mom's strong will and determination and the influence that it had on Jane at a very young age.

My mother was driving someplace in our old 1940 Chevy. I was in the car with her sitting in the front seat and the bridge was only wide enough for one car to cross at a time. The custom was that as you approached the bridge, if you [got there] first, you crossed, and someone else coming had to wait. Well, my mother was on the bridge and a bus came from the other direction and got on the bridge. My mother would not back down from this bus. The bus driver was not going to back up; he told mother that the bus could not be moved backwards, and she would have to back up. She just got back in her car and just sat there and waited and waited and waited until he backed up. I, of course, was horrified that my mother was facing off against this bus, this huge bus -- and the bus, of course, couldn't back up. I heard the bus driver say so, and then my mother out-waited him because she was in the right and she knew it. She was stubborn enough to know that she just wasn't going to back up and she was going to make him back up. The impression that left on me -- of my mother



being able to make a bus back up -- was just so powerful for a little girl to have. I somehow -- and this might be over-exaggerating it a bit -- but I know how powerful that felt at the time and how terrifying it was for me. I realized later that if you're in the right, you can make a big thing -- like a bus -- turn around.

To this point, we see strong parental influences in Jane's learning about stability, nurturing relationships, instruction, achievement, and power. Although there is reference to some of the influence coming from relationships outside of the home, the primary teachers are undeniably her father and her mother. She shares another example of their influence as it relates to learning about anger and conflict that she feels played a significant role in shaping her attitudes situations of conflict as an adult.

[When there was conflict at home], it would be worked out. My mother would turn into being very cold. I think this is probably important: my mother would not talk for long periods of time, and we didn't know . . . of course as a child you [think] that you've caused it . . . my sisters and I . . . whatever it was, we had caused it. If we had only been a little better at whatever it was that we felt that we had not done, she wouldn't be that way.

Jane talks about being placed in roles of leadership and responsibility -- many times before she saw herself as ready for them -- or even recognized them as leadership roles. She also recalls that these were not roles she herself chose but rather they were chosen for her sometimes as a result of simply being the eldest sibling. She describes how she negotiated one such experience in vivid detail as an indication of the impact that it had on her.

I think a lot of times I have been put in leadership positions long before I even thought of myself as a leader -- just situations that occur in families. I was the oldest child, so that just automatically puts you in situations where you have responsibilities that others don't have and expectations placed on you that are not necessarily those of your own choosing.

As you can expect, Jane rose to the challenge and by age twelve, was taking on the more mature responsibilities of child-care outside of the home. Her responsibilities included cooking and cleaning, in addition to caring for the children every Saturday from late morning until often early hours of the next morning. She describes it as a position of responsibility that she took quite seriously and for which she earned twenty-five cents an hour. It is interesting to note that



while Jane assumed the responsibilities of housework and cooking for other families but because of her increasing involvement in school and extracurricular activities, she was not expected to do them at home.

Positions of responsibility and leadership continue to find Jane and as she enters junior college she continues to pursue her interest in journalism. As editor of the college paper, she finds herself in the middle of a controversy that would be a test of her courage in standing up for what she believed to be 'right.' Interestingly enough, she associates this experience with what she learned from her mom that day in the car, on the bridge, with the bus.

I later became editor of the newspaper in junior college. I remember there being some sort of a commotion between the Board of Trustees and the Administration. I don't remember the nature of the commotion at the time but the newspaper staff was forbidden to publish on this topic. This is my one rebellious act in college. Rather than publish the story that they wanted us to publish; I chose to publish a paper with a blank space and a simple explanation as to why the editorial that I had written and intended [for the space] was not allowed to be published. That caused such a furor around the campus that it brought quite a bit of attention to the College newspaper staff. I know that there was some heat, probably the advisor who was very supportive of me, took most of it. I didn't feel too much of it. I just knew that it was a very daring . . . it might have been my incident of staring down the bus [from her earlier story]. It was scary to do but it was the right thing to do and I didn't feel that I was in the wrong place at all.

Jane's learning experiences continue to unfold as she talks in more detail about her college experience. She completed two years at the junior college in her home town before transferring to the "big ten" state university. She describes being unprepared for the shock of the heightened competition and more rigorous course work. Jane openly acknowledges that it was a miserable experience for her and attributes most of that feeling to the fact that she did not adjust well to not being at "the top of the heap."

The University turned out to be really, really hard and quite a shock. Even though I had been on the top of the pile in my schooling [to this point], I was suddenly not anymore on the top of the pile, but getting C's and B's [I found myself] in competition with some kids who were very, very well prepared. So, I was pretty miserable. The pressure of not excelling like I was used to excelling caused me some tension headaches, which were a problem for me, and I came [home] many weekends. My headaches were really just, I'm sure, because I was not on the top of the heap. So,



that was pretty much a miserable time. I really had not had a lot of experiences – maybe up to that point—with defeat.

As we think back to Jane’s earlier conversations about wanting to excel and working hard to make sure she did. She finds herself in a situation now where regardless to how hard she works, the competition is just too steep. It makes her physically ill and she seeks refuge in the comforts of familiar surroundings with friends and family quite frequently on weekends. She acknowledges that she has plays it pretty safe and does not go after anything that she does not have a strong chance of being successful. As I listened to her and watched her grapple with this issue of defeat, it was almost as if, in her reflecting, she was realizing this about herself for the first time, during the interview.

Evidence of Jane’s strength begins to surface. She is learning to draw some lines and establish clear boundaries in relationships the are not reciprocal and feel perfectly justified in doing so. Unlike the more people pleasing behaviors of earlier times, Jane is no longer willing to be in relationships that are as she calls them “uneven.”

As Jane begins to talk about how her career as a teacher evolved, further evidence of her beginning to recognize her own strengths and weaknesses continues to reveal itself. She describes a fairly consistent pattern of receiving new opportunities to try something different, opportunities to learn something new, digging in, working hard, mastering the challenge and moving on to the next opportunity -- and the cycle repeats itself. She capitalizes and thrives on each new experience by learning it thoroughly and methodically over time. She continues to add more and more knowledge and skill to her repertoire and with each new opportunity her motivation to excel is fueled and her confidence level strengthened.

I sort of drifted into being an English teacher. It was a matter of eliminating things that I didn’t want to be that led me to be what I did become. And I loved kids, so it was just a natural. I loved trying new things. There was always an opportunity to take on a role -- that I hadn’t had before and that was fun. I loved every opportunity that I had. I learned everything I could about each [new opportunity]. So,



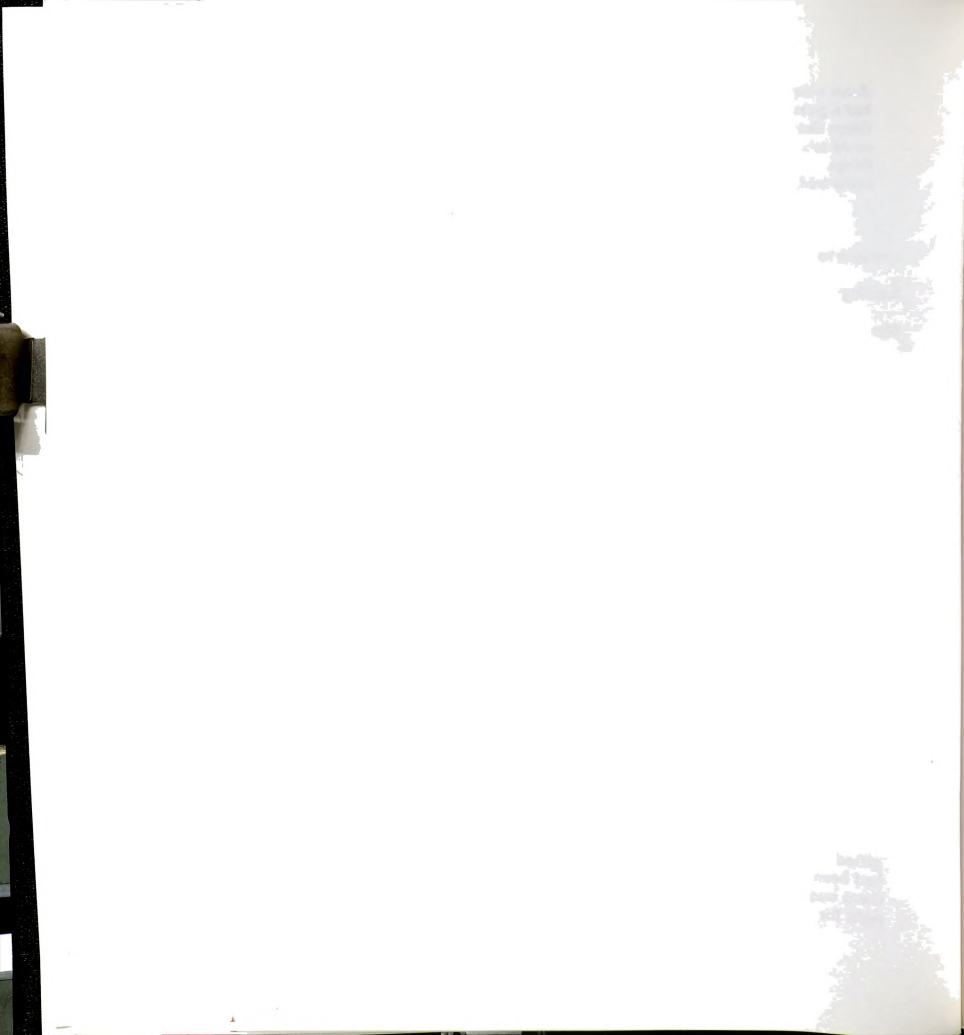
doors were opened for me, new opportunities were there; I stepped into them and I had a great time doing it. The roles kept expanding. I did discover that a lot of the things that I was good at and the things that I enjoyed were possible in teaching. I could touch other people, I could affect change in people, I could be in charge of things – I like that, I could be creative, I could do a lot of things that I enjoyed, I could read, I could write, I could encourage that in other people.

Jane continues to be involved in learning experiences of her choosing that continue to enhance and expand her technical background. She methodically builds her learning repertoire and concurrently assumes more and more leadership responsibility. She becomes interested in administration as a result of her participation in a leader training program designed for prospective leaders. Though she admits applying out of interest in the learning experiences being offered rather than her interest in becoming an administrator, the experience changed her views on administration.

I was not interested [in administrative work], but the opportunities that they were offering in terms of wonderful speakers, and the topics [they would cover] sounded very interesting. All new things that I could learn and while I was not necessarily interested in being an administrator, I would like to learn about what the program was about. I applied and was chosen, and participated in the program and [was exposed to] the most exciting [and] stimulating ideas. It changed my thinking about whether I'd like to be an administrator. The work was very stimulating and exciting and I found that my thinking changed.

Again, Jane's appetite for technical learning as a means of perfecting her and expanding her skills and perspectives is apparent. She is given apprentice opportunities in leader roles that are tailored to her particular areas of expertise and continues to be groomed. After completing her doctoral program, Jane is offered an administrative position under the direct leadership of her mentor.

I was given an opportunity to put my leadership skills [to work] with plenty of coaxing, nudging, and mentoring by one of my mentors. I would kind of oversee the gifted program, running the meetings, and things like that. And so that opportunity had been ongoing and when I finished my doctorate, finished the dissertation, and all, there was [a position] waiting for me. She [mentor] kind of created a spot: it was just right for me; I loved working with her. It was a good fit.



Jane recalls another influential mentor from her teaching days and acknowledges his influence in her relational learning experiences.

I have to give a great deal of credit to [another mentor]. He was my principal for many years. He was an absolutely outstanding man -- very, very collaborative -- long before the word collaborative was even in the dictionary, he was exemplifying collaborative leadership. I learned about that from him. He was a very kind, very upbeat, positive, encouraging, growth sort of man. He had the position, but he didn't exercise it [his power] like that; he cultivated relationships even with the most difficult people.

Summary

Jane's significant early learning experiences -- childhood through college -- are iterative and fairly balanced across technical, relational, philosophical, and political content lines. Home, family, and friends are the primary contexts for these early learning experiences.

Adult learning experiences as a teacher fall into the categories of relational, technical, and philosophical content. Later adult experiences -- as she moves into various leadership roles as a teacher -- expand to include some influential political content however, these political learning experiences are random and situation specific at this point. The primary context for these learning experiences is the work environment -- through actual work experiences and professional development opportunities.

As Jane is drawn toward administrative aspirations, her learning experiences reflect strong technical content that is learned in the context of formal, academic schooling. Relational, political, and relational content remain primarily in the work environment, however, as Jane's networks expand to include work that takes her outside of her primary work environment, so do her contexts for these types of learning content.



Processes relied on for learning content that was relational and/or political were primarily observational, dialogue, experimentation and discovery based. Processes used for technical learning were primarily reading, listening, writing, and applying. Dialogue, observation, and reading were the primary processes used for philosophical learning.

The primary motivations for learning were initially fueled by a desire to please parents and teachers and be competitive among friends and classmates. However, personal motivation, fueled by a thirst for knowledge and a competitive spirit, soon became the driving forces for Jane's learning experiences. Career advancement and credentials, although by-products, are not viewed as primary motivating factors.

Dan: Philosophical Reformer

Dan describes himself as a reflective practitioner in some ways an idealist who was drawn to the profession out of some sort of missionary zeal. His professional career spans some thirty years and most of those years have been spent on the cutting edge of educational reform. He has dedicated the majority of his professional career to exploring ways to better serve the disenfranchised student. This becomes an obvious theme throughout his narrative profile.

I always felt that there was some purpose that I had -- some reason I was in the job. [I] have been guided by that [sense of purpose] over the years. I think that's a key ingredient for an ... educational leader. You have to have a strong center of values... and they need to be... continually nurtured. I think that's what keeps us on the cutting edge where we need to be with young people. I've been fortunate to be with people who have been able to gently prod, and sometimes maybe less gently keep me moving.

Home/Family

To say that Dan comes from a long line of professional educators on both sides of his family is an understatement. He was born in 1943 in a small town as the second of four children. His



parents were both teachers. His father and one of his uncles were school superintendents. His mother was an English and Drama teacher -- though she left her profession for awhile to raise her family. Three of the four children, including Dan, are all in education with the exception of one brother, who has a Masters of Divinity and currently runs a large food bank operation for all of southwest [state]. Family discussions were a regular part of Dan's early learning experience. He learned early to respect different points of view and thrived on the lively exchanges of ideas and beliefs among his relatives. Dan talks at length about the influence that living in this family of strong willed, opinionated educators had in shaping his political ideologies and subsequently his philosophy regarding educational leadership.

We certainly have a mixture of philosophies -- from very conservative, to quite radical. My older sister's husband was a very strong AFT person. And of course, my uncle as an teacher union Executive Director. My father, was probably the most liberal of his brothers, except for the one who worked for the teacher's union. Two [were] very conservative -- Goldwater Republicans -- and the other two were liberal Democrats. So, family discussions were always very interesting. I think one of the things that I learned from that experience, growing up in the family where discussions were sometimes . . . we clearly understood people had different points of view, but there was a great deal of respect and love for each other. I think that was one of my early lessons in life is that you can certainly disagree with people without being disagreeable. We were taught to listen carefully to each other, and give each other respect. We certainly have disagreed, all of us, on a number of different things over the years, but have learned to have a great deal of respect for each other.

Growing up in a family where there was a great deal of nurturing from both of his parents, Dan talks about the particular influence of his mother in encouraging them to discover their own individual gifts and their own way of making a contribution to the world. Dan was raised in a very religious family of Methodists going back several generations. He speaks, particularly, about his mother's belief that the church needed to be active in bettering all people's lives and her very active political life as having a strong influence on him.



Some of our tradition of radical political thought, I think comes from my mother who voted for the Socialist candidate for President her first time up, followed by my tradition of voting for Eldridge Cleaver my first year, and my daughter's voting for Ralph Nader this year. So I think there's a long tradition of that kind of sense of activism. But particularly from my mother's point of view then as it passed to me, it was based on deep religious faith.

Another important influence, as I listened to Dan's story, was the position that his father held in the community as the superintendent of schools. He talks about the impact of that position on the rest of the family.

We moved in 1949 when my father took the position as Superintendent of Schools in what was then a rural area. Being [part of] a small, sort of isolated community, although close to [larger city] had a great deal of influence on me. It was one where everybody knew your parents, knew who you were. There were expectations based on that. It was clear that my father was highly revered in the community. Therefore, [we] always felt growing up that we had to be [and] were always careful about who we were, and making sure that we did the right thing, and that we brought good favor to the family, and maintained the family name. That was somewhat of a pressure, although, again, I don't think I found it as much so as perhaps a couple of my siblings.

Coupled with the strong religious and political influences of his family, in his years growing up at home, was the recurring theme of caring for and nurturing others.

My grandmother had cancer and stayed with us through the last couple of years until she passed away. My mother took care of her. It was an interesting experience and certainly a growth experience that taught me, I think, about caring and a sense of nurturing for everyone.

School Experience

Dan talks about the stability and consistency of attending the same school from first through twelfth grade and what that taught him about the advantages of small school and class sizes when it comes to caring and nurturing young people. He describes two experiences that really stand out for him as being particularly significant learning experiences during his high school years on the issue of prejudice.

Two issues occurred during my high school years and the world certainly came crashing in and made us aware of issues outside of the more provincial issues of our

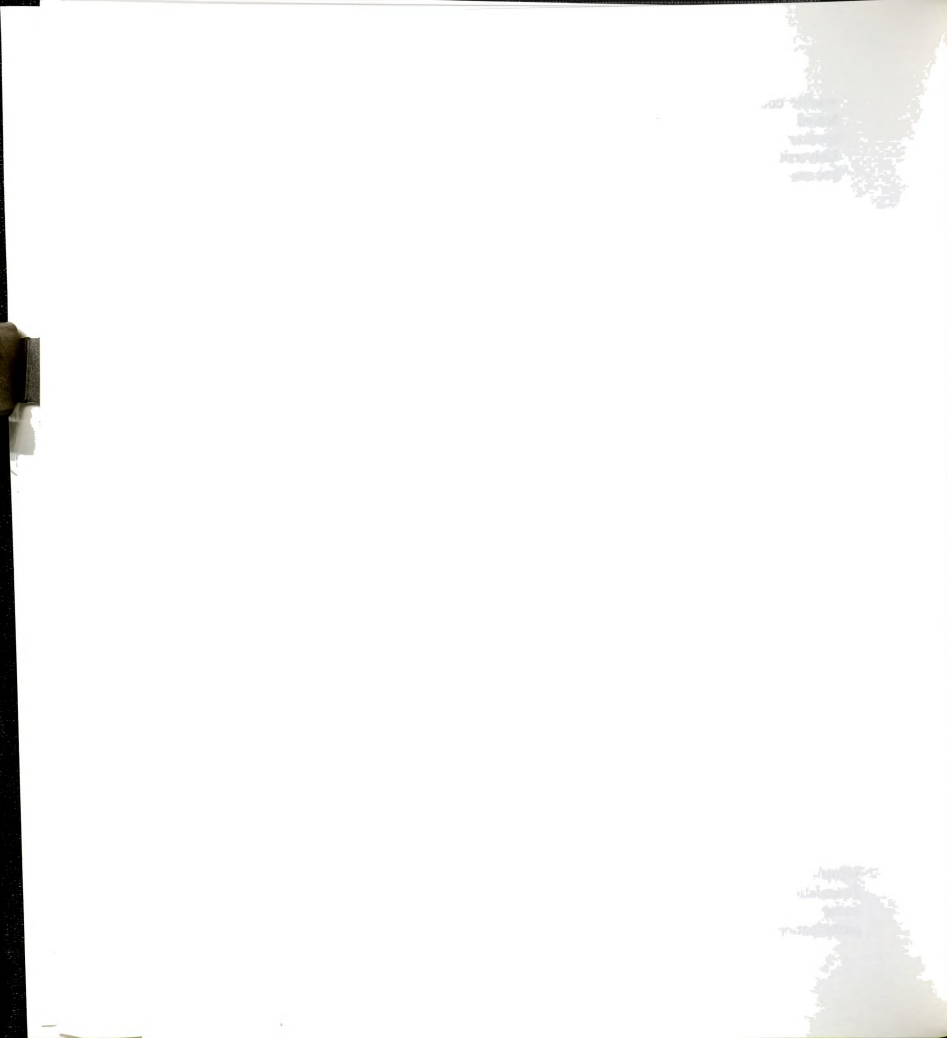


smaller community. The first was in 1959. It was my first understanding of the hatred of racism. My sister's graduating class had selected, as their commencement speaker, [name], who had just returned from Africa and was teaching at the University. He was an excellent speaker of African-American descent. When it became known that he was going to be the Commencement speaker, it caused a real stir [in the community]. My father, as superintendent, had suggested him as one of a number of candidates and the class thought that was good. At one point, there were threats to his life if he spoke, and protests at the Board of Education meeting. I remember a lot of pressure on the family. I remember how disappointed my father was -- I think really ready to resign, the night that the Board of Education rescinded the invitation to [name] to come and speak at that graduation. It was certainly a time of great tension, but certainly one of great learning. It taught me, again, the importance of standing up for what you believe and your values and being well centered.

Another sort of traumatic experience [happened] just prior to my senior year in high school. The coach, who was very well loved and respected, was arrested and charged with molesting one of the students. He was eventually convicted and sent to jail. It took me a long time to really understand that. All of us had such a loyalty to our coach, that we really did not believe that [this had occurred]. It was several years before I ever came to believe that it really happened. I began to understand that people, who were far from being perfect, ran our system. That was another, I guess, important learning lesson.

Relationships, politics, and certainly strong philosophical perspectives emerge as the dominant content themes in Dan's story to this point. The primary contexts for these learning experiences are his home, the school and his small community. First hand experience as either a participant or an inside observer in these experiences, serves as the primary method for his learning. This unique vantage point affords Dan the opportunity to think about, question, argue and resolve conflicts in ethics, values, and viewpoints. He begins, early in his life, to develop and expand his own personal perspectives on real world issues under the nurturing guidance of his family. He learns early lessons, from the experiences of those closest to him, about risk taking and courage under fire. Dan's story continues to unfold as he goes to college where he continues to build upon the foundation that has been laid to this point.

Of course there was a lot in the early 60's where we were becoming aware of a lot injustices, particularly on issues [dealing with] race and peace. The Wesley Foundation helped me in sorting through those values and, again, I think I took on some of the beliefs. Clearly those, I had been raised with, became mine -- active participation in seeking social justice. Although I admired people like I.F. Stone who



could sort of stand out there holding to their beliefs without compromise – I found myself believing more in someone like Hubert Humphrey who really could get change done [through the political process].

Dan continues to demonstrate a sincere passion for social justice issues and with this experience begins to more seriously consider divergent perspectives and methods for effecting meaningful change. He relies on the techniques of listening and discussion with peers as a preferred way of sorting through these issues. He moves from the local Junior College to the University with the idea of becoming a social worker and saving the world. He was encouraged by his mother to “pick up” a teaching certificate, just in case he couldn’t [afford to] get a master’s in social work right away. Dan describes his university experience as a positive one and recalls benefiting most from methods courses that provided hands-on opportunities for learning. He talks about his desire to work with students who were potential dropouts and looking for a student teaching position that would afford him the opportunity.

Because, again, of my interest in wanting to do social work, I looked for a place where I could work in a program that worked with students who were having difficulty. The [city offered a] Personalized Curriculum Program that was geared for students that had been identified as potential dropouts. There were a lot of new teachers in this program. I learned and I really enjoyed teaching both groups of students. It was interesting [to compare] the approaches of the two teachers. The PCP teacher put me to work on the first day. I immediately began helping students, tutoring, walking around -- the math and science were at a level I could understand, and I actually enjoyed doing that. With the Social Studies/History teacher who taught in the regular program, I think I sat for two weeks just observing and was anxious to get on with the process of teaching.

Professional Work Experiences

Dan describes his mentoring during his first years of teaching as influential in his decision to remain in education rather than pursue a career in social work.

I was very fortunate to have some outstanding people give me early mentoring in those early years of teaching. Among them was one of the consultants for the PCP program. He was the person who guided me through many years, helping me to



understand inner city youth, the value of work and academics together. I found that my need to be a social worker could be accomplished in the field of education and I felt that I, being a teacher, was a stronger role and commitment in making a difference in students' lives as actually being a social worker. In the next two years I ended up getting my masters' from [university], specializing in alternative school programs. I was fortunate to meet many people again who were sort of on the edge of educational reform as part of that program. My counselor was a gentleman who published many articles on the need to reform schools and change schools. I heard him speak many times afterwards at conventions as I sort of followed him around.

Dan's career continues to move along a path that is very consistent with his philosophical underpinnings of social justice and reform. He describes the tensions that exist as he struggles to remain loyal to his "idealistic" convictions about education as he faces the realities of the real world that confront him.

I found the school philosophically shifting. It was moving from being an open school -- where there were lots of choices for students, but no one could make a poor choice -- to what some of us characterized as a free school, where there really were very few rules and sometimes a sense of chaos or anarchy. And so after several years, I decided to look for another opportunity. My leaving the open school, was certainly a very formative part of who I am today. It was my dealing with sort of a dream that failed. I believed very strongly in the open school. I saw it [work] with my [own] children [and was] very strongly committed to all students having this kind of opportunity of loving to learn, of finding their interest. I became disillusioned with people who got bogged down in petty fights and politics. And I think it soured me for a while on change and when a change can actually be made, or whether it even should be. I think I also became suspect of reformers.

Dan was later offered an opportunity to be involved in yet another reform initiative. It was opportunity for him to start something from scratch like he had done at the open school and he really thrived on that kind of experience. Again the concept of the program was to serve students who had been suspended for anything from carrying a knife to continuous misbehavior in the regular classroom. They would have the opportunity of serving their suspension in this in-school suspension program. He accepted the position and remained there for approximately five years. He had concurrently been serving on a committee for middle school reform and had traveled to



conferences and schools in search of a model. After the in-school suspension program closed, Dan moved to middle school and became involved with that reform initiative.

Dan was encouraged to move into administration after nineteen years of teaching in the same school district. He talks about moving into yet another phase of his learning and growth as a leader. His first assignment as an administrator was to provide leadership for a program designed to service 15- 25 year old students who had dropped out of school and were returning. Recapturing dropouts -- students off the street, was a dream that Dan had for quite sometime. His program was located in an area of the city that had a lot of people on the streets, a lot of gangs and other crime areas. But Dan viewed it as another opportunity to be the social worker and the educator and it appealed to him as another chance to provide students with individualized program he believed they needed and deserved. He talks about the ease in making changes in a program like this compared to the more traditional program.

If something wasn't working, we got together on Wednesday and the staff talked about it and on Thursday we started doing things differently. It was that sort of autonomous ability and smallness that allowed us to do that, and that was a very helpful piece. I continued to struggle with this issue of providing the traditional approach that parents seemed to want, with what seems to be, in my mind, and always has been an inclination toward a more individualized and open program.

Dan was asked about the role that mentors played in his learning experiences as a school administrator.

Some of the people who were important as mentors as I first became an administrator, would continue to have talks with me, give me hints, check on me, and encourage me. I think that's a very important ingredient in any new administrator's life, or anyone seeking to be administrator. [My mentors] understood the nature of creating experiences, gently bringing people along and they were very excellent at that. As I have grown in my administrative role, I have tried to repeat that experience with some assistant principals and people that I'm working with -- looking at the kinds of experiences that new administrators need, guiding, constant review and encouragement.

As we moved toward closure of the interview, I asked Dan if there were any other significant experiences that he wished to share. He began to talk about a more recent experience that he had two summers ago when he was invited to participate in a leadership program sponsored by the Christian Johnson Foundation. Interestingly enough the theme of the program was “The Importance of Liberal Education.” Dan described the experience as a strong one and went into detail about why he felt that way. His account summarizes the content, the process, the context, and the motivations he appreciates and values in an optimum learning experience.

It was a wonderful, isolated experience of two weeks. This [experience] was committed to the study of knowledge and the origin of knowledge and how people learn and why people learn, and simply gathering information for information’s sake. I just came out of that again excited about the idea of learning. I think that sometimes we get so locked into immediate relevance that we do not see the value of knowledge simply for knowledge’s sake. So, I’ve sought to implement that again with our school programs.

Catherine: The Rule Follower

Several dominant themes emerge from Catherine’s recall of her most significant learning experiences in her early childhood and continue to weave throughout her learning experiences. They are 1) compliance with rules; 2) a focus on doing what was right; 3) fear of the consequences for negative behavior; and 4) the desire for positive feedback, rewards and acknowledgment for good behavior. The following verbatim accounts are provided as illustrations of these experiences.

I was a rule follower, I did what I was supposed to do. I always did well in school; was an outstanding . . . was a top student in my room; always got good grades; was very conscientious. I know I always was the kid in the room, if the teacher was out of the room, I know I did what I was supposed to do whether the teacher was there or not. I really internalized that and never remember ever doing anything in school that would get me into trouble. Doing what is right -- if there was an itinerary back in the sixties for how you should do it --[laugh] I did it all pretty



much by the book.

Catherine attributes much of her effort to comply with the rules and stay out of trouble to observing her brother being disciplined for non-compliance. She describes the conflict that continually existed in the home as a result of her brother rebellious nature. In contrast, she talks about being consistently rewarded for her compliant nature.

But I do know that my brother had a strong impact on my following the rules and being an obedient child. Watching Paul be in trouble so much... that I just processed . . . not only didn't I want the consequences that he had and my parents certainly believed in spanking -- that was probably the greatest consequence. I guess I felt like by not being in trouble was a reward in itself. I know that I always received a lot of positive strokes in school. My parents were always good to me and we did things together as a family. So we had a lot of things like that. My parents really didn't think they could afford to send me away to school, but they felt that I had been such a good kid, and stayed out of trouble, so they sent me.

The relationship between Catherine and her brother began to deteriorate as time went on and she admits losing respect for him as a result of his insistence on not following the rules and keep their family in continual conflict. As a result, when her brother was left home to watch Catherine, she did not respect his authority and would rebel.

The thing I always resented about [my brother] was the fact that he kept our family in turmoil. And I used to think, "Why?" When [my brother] was young -- [parents] were fighting with him. As he became older, they fought with each other about him. They didn't fight with each other, they loved and got along well with each other. But they fought over him and I used to think, you know, "Why can't you just do what you're supposed to do?"

While Catherine viewed her father as very authoritarian, she characterizes her mother as allowing much more freedom. She talks about the differences in the way things were handled by each of her parents and as a result the behavior of she and her siblings.

I didn't think they were equal. As a matter of fact we loved it when my dad worked late because we would push my mother around. You had a lot more freedom. It wasn't that we didn't want him there; it's just that things were so much . . . we were in control more -- when he was gone. She was the kind of mother that if you didn't



do it right, she'd just do it. So you didn't do it right . . . cause she would do it then. But when my dad was home, he made us do it right.

Catherine describes early responsibilities as a babysitter and her lifelong love of children. As she moved to high school, she continued to be conscientious about her studies, is actively involved in extracurricular activities, and remains compliant.

I really always had a love for children. I started babysitting quite early and was very responsible as a babysitter and knew that I wanted to do things with children because I always enjoyed being around children. I'd had an opportunity in high school to visit the Michigan School for the Deaf; a friend of mine's mother taught there. I was very impressed with that -- with the school and the opportunity to help hearing impaired kids. I decided I wanted to be a teacher of the deaf.

College Experience

Catherine went away to college and during her freshman year, took full advantage of her newly found freedom. Freedom proves to be an important theme throughout the rest of her experiences. Other than poor grades, Catherine does not experience any serious consequences for failing to follow the rules. She is on her own and enjoying not having to answer to anyone for her actions but herself.

When I went away to school, it was pretty free. Really, I just partied. I mean, I did enough to stay in school. I just wanted the social thing -- being free to just do what I wanted to do. Social just kind of took precedence. I knew, whatever I did, [my father] wasn't going to know. And I did that in my freshman year; didn't get very good grades.

Tragedy strikes in November of that year and Catherine's brother was killed in an automobile accident. He'd been home from the service for six weeks. She describes shock of this tragedy as being the most dramatic thing that has ever happened in her life.

... It really changed my life. All of a sudden it just, the realization was there that life was not a game, it was not a party, but serious things could happen.

Catherine returned to school with a changed perspective and began to seriously apply herself to her studies. She spent her junior year as an intern and student teacher at the



School for the deaf and accepted her first teaching position the following year, just prior to graduation.

Professional Work Experience: Teaching

Catherine taught high school at the school for the deaf. She described that experience as “really tough” because a lot of the students were her age. At the end of her second year of teaching, she was encouraged to apply for a position as a leadership intern with one of the major local foundations.

And it was really a big deal . . . because it was a national search and they took four people from [our state] and four from [each of] the other states and people from all over applied. We had people in the program from all over the United States. But this group of eight was there specifically for hearing impaired deaf education. We worked with, actually we worked with hearing children in deaf homes and language development and then also deaf children and deaf infants of deaf parents. We traveled a three county area and we had families that we worked with. It was very exciting. We also were very involved in a lot of the fun leadership activities: foundation activities, and special legislative kinds of things.

Catherine describes the experiences during this early part of her career as exciting and full of opportunities for creativity, risk taking, and learning. She talks about a significant mentor during this time. In fact, he is one of very few actual people that she recognizes as having a significant influence in shaping as a result of the freedom that he allowed her to have in trying new and different ideas.

I had a wonderful principal who when I would want to do something different -- I always wanted to try something different. Sometimes it worked, and sometimes it didn't, but he would always let me do it, and I appreciated that. I talked to the principal about it and he said, “Go ahead and try it.” but I always appreciated someone who would let me do some of those kinds of things. I just liked to be able to be creative and be able to do different kinds of things and see things happen and I always had a lot of ideas of how I'd like to do things.

Catherine thrived in this environment of freedom and support. She talked about how important receiving positive encouragement and continual feedback were in



motivating her to do her best and she credits these experiences as the early seeds of her deep commitment to the families of the children that she served.

I always was in a position where everybody kind of encouraged me and patted me on the back. The principal had always encouraged me and thought I did wonderful things, parents always were supportive and excited about the things I [did]. I'm still friends with many of the parents and families and children I had way back then. And we were important parts of each other's lives. I started parent groups and we all came together like family once a month, we were friends socially too. My husband came and we brought our daughter. I really felt we had an impact on the lives of these families, to impact their children. When parents have handicapped children, it's not easy and I always have had a lot of empathy and compassion for parents. I feel like, of course, that's helped me in what I do today because I see parents basically as wanting to do what's best for their children; not always able to do what's best.

Professional Work: Administrative

Catherine describes her first administrative experience in special education as being one that taught her important lessons about leadership, self-reliance, persistence, and resilience.

I started this position and I had to deal with the issue of being in the building where I'd already been a teacher, which is difficult. But I had a very difficult person to work for and that was hard. Rather than having somebody pat you on the back and say, "Go ahead and do it." There were constant restraints. I tended to be much more sensitive and I felt in the long run, God used that to toughen me up a little bit and make me not so dependent upon what other people think; to be more resilient, more persistent, to find other ways of doing things. It was a good experience in the long run; at the time it was a difficult experience.

She talks about how hard she worked to be conscientious, responsible, and to do things right. Although she received positive feedback from her coworkers, she was not receiving positive feedback from her supervisor. Here she describes the frustration of, for the first time, not being able to please the person that she reported to for six years and the impact of that experience on shaping her as a leader.

I worked constantly. I was very conscientious about having things done in a timely fashion, to be responsible, to make sure that paperwork preceded children, to try to do those kinds of things. I received a lot of positive feedback about those



things and encouragement from within my area and we had a lot of camaraderie in our area. But when it went beyond that and when I was dealing with issues that revolved around the person who I was responsible to, [it] was very difficult. Being in a position, which was so unique to me, of not being able to please or satisfy or not receiving ANY positive feedback for six years from the person I was responsible to was very discouraging. So, what I [learned here] is that if you ... you can't coerce people into doing things. The only thing you can do is provide them with an environment. And so my feeling is that when you make people feel that way, it stifles them, but if you create an environment first of all that values them as a person and then you decide what they need to have to be able to do that job. I thought, well I saw this [poor example of leadership], and I determined that the people that worked for me, there would never be a question -- they would know that they were appreciated.

Catherine moves into a position as principal of an elementary school and has been in the same school for nine years. As she talks about the significant learning experiences of this period in her career, themes of courage, determination, confidence in her own ability to know what is "right" and act accordingly surface in the midst of disappointment and trial.

I always was brought up to believe that authority figures were basically right and you did it just because, you know, my parents always said, "Well, you do it because I told you." And I really, I always kind of did. And so I guess, when I found out that maybe they weren't [always] right, I got a little more bold in what I thought. Because I thought, "I know what's right. I do know what's right."

When Catherine was questioned about what she meant by doing the "right thing", she responded with the following:

And, I guess when I think about doing the right thing, there are the broad, ethical [principles] of integrity, trustworthiness, and all of those kinds of things -- we know what the right things are. And of course for me it has to do with my own spiritual relationship with the Lord and, you know, it doesn't take much ... the Holy Spirit is pretty good at letting me know -- those are the right things. Maybe it's because of the some of the things I've seen happen. But ... again, you think there are certain things that are going to be true, that people are going to do what they're supposed to do and if you're a really good person and you really do your job well, that there are rewards for that ... and guess what? You find out, in pretty heartbreaking ways, that that's not true.

Up to this point, Catherine's accounts of her learning experiences have been dominated by actual on the job experiences. When she was asked to think about and describe other types of

learning experiences that have been influential in shaping her leadership practice, she responded with the following:

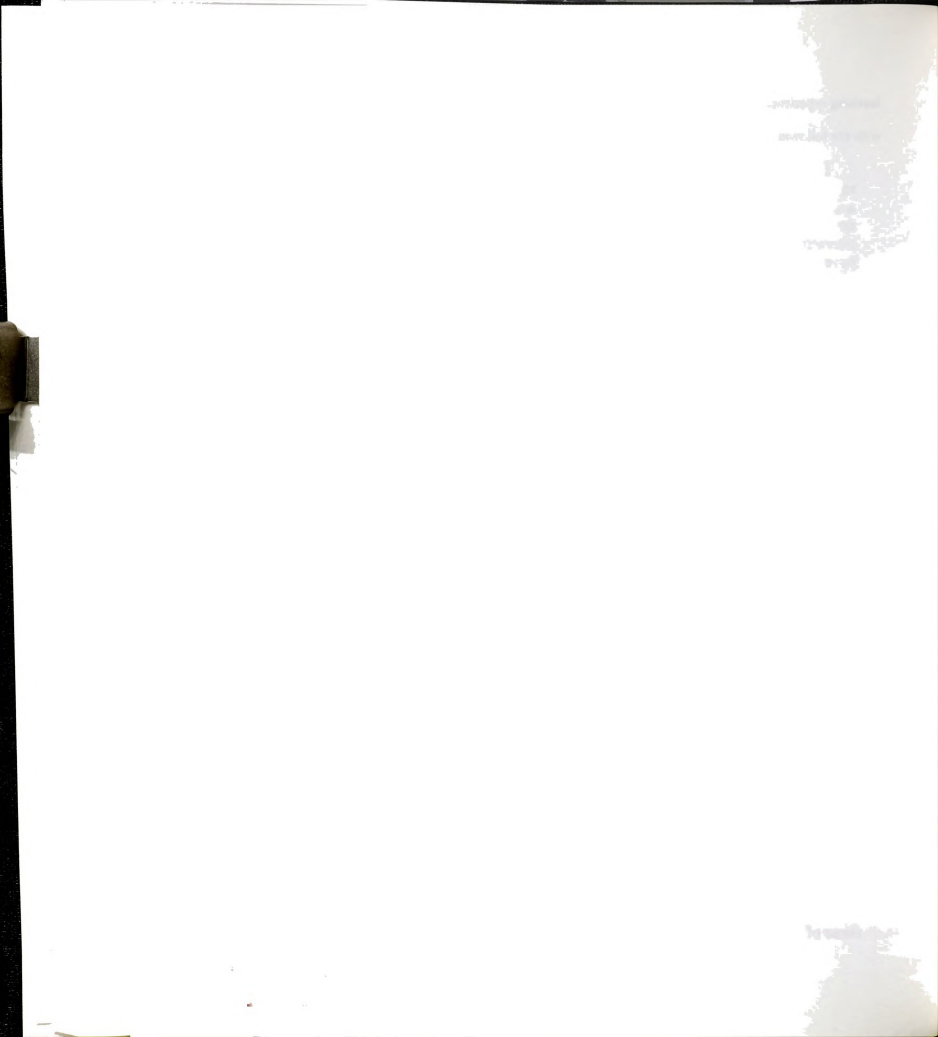
I work through a lot of things verbally, and so I know that I have a natural affinity to being with people. I, again, because of where I am spiritually, I know that people are important. And so, whatever you do, whatever you accomplish, if it doesn't have an impact on people, and really have a positive somehow on their life if you're interacting with them, then it's really not of much value. Now some people when they have a big problem they go off somewhere and they think -- I verbalize. I think out loud and sometimes by the time I'm through with the interaction, I've solved it and I've gone on to something else.

Catherine describes herself as independent thinker and problem solver. She had difficulty in attributing significant learning to anything or anyone other than actually trial and error experiences where she tested her own ideas and received support in doing so from others. She defines mentors as those who were willing to encourage her try her own ideas rather than teach her what they know.

I know the principal that I had when I first came was a key person and the reason for it was that he was so willing to let me do [things] — and some of these were crazy things. But [he was] always willing . . . and he was a very conscientious person, so it wasn't like he just let you do anything you wanted to do. But, if I went to him with an idea and I thought that it was [promising], he would let me [run with it]. I would have to say that I . . . [am pretty much independent bird] and I just would have to say that I never had anybody over me that I could, that could mentor me. I took a lot of professional development. Anything that I felt -- I never like taking classes just to take classes, but I liked taking classes and learning things that were practical and made a difference in what I was doing. I always enjoyed that -- going back into the classroom or go back into whatever you were doing the next day and trying to implement what you'd learn and trying different things. I always bought a lot of books and materials to try. I always tried to improve.

Catherine describes the principalship as being a position of isolation and talks about her efforts to establish support networks with colleagues that she respects for the purpose of sharing and professional conversation.

Being in a building leadership position, you are definitely kind of on your own. So I've tried to maintain contacts with other principals and for probably or four years . . . well, first I started off meeting with another principal weekly and now there are three of us that meet. We've invited other people and sometimes people have come,



but they haven't come consistently. Just, not, an opportunity to share information and just talk. But I find myself personally I get energized by interacting with other people so I learn a lot by talking with people . . . talking things through or bouncing ideas off of somebody. You know, a lot of times we can just cut through a lot of the stuff and you can just be very honest with me, like parents and community, and I can be back with them. Things can be resolved without all of the other stuff going on if have the kind of relationship where you really do try to focus on doing the right thing.

Summary

In summary, Catherine's most influential learning experiences have been concentrated primarily in the area of relationships. Early lessons taught in her home on following the rules, doing things right and doing the right things appear to have carried through to her leadership practice. There is also evidence that suggests that freedom to explore her own notions with regard to appropriate decisions and actions in the workplace is extremely important to Catherine. As the story of experiences unfolds, she continues to thrive on positive feedback, acknowledgment and reward, as evidence of positive results. Likewise, these themes can be traced to earlier learning experiences reported as having a significant impact on Catherine.



Gabriela: The Cultural Composite

Gabriela identifies as her my most significant learning experience in her entire life the fact that she was born into a family of polyglots – persons of many tongues – by birth, by ethnicity, and by race. She talks about not knowing what it was like to not speak or hear a language other than English. Her father spoke French to them as children, her mother spoke Italian to them. It was the way they communicated with their grandparents and so, it was perfectly normal and natural to hear languages other than English. This lead to a foundational underpinning linking diversity in all of its multiple facets to absolutely everything that is important and significant to Gabriela.

...[diversity] is the most normal thing about life I can think about. I don't see it as a problem or something you have to deal with or manage or any of those other sort of scary words when people talk about diversity.

Gabriela was born on in 1952 in a small city in the Midwest. Her father and mother were both school personnel. Her father, at the time of her birth, was a social worker for the County, and her mom – not being able to teach after announcing her pregnancy – was a full-time mom but had been a teacher. Her father was the only one of eleven who graduated from high school. She has one brother.

Gabriela's father had great aspirations for career advancement and became a counselor at Boys' Training School in the early fifties shortly after she was born. He then accepted a [position] as an elementary school principal in [another small town]. They moved [there] when she was about four years old. Her mom attended the University of Michigan and graduated with her degree in Spanish and taught junior high Spanish and World Geography. This pattern of continually moving, as a result of her father's career pursuits is a major theme of influence in Gabriela's learning experiences.



School Experience

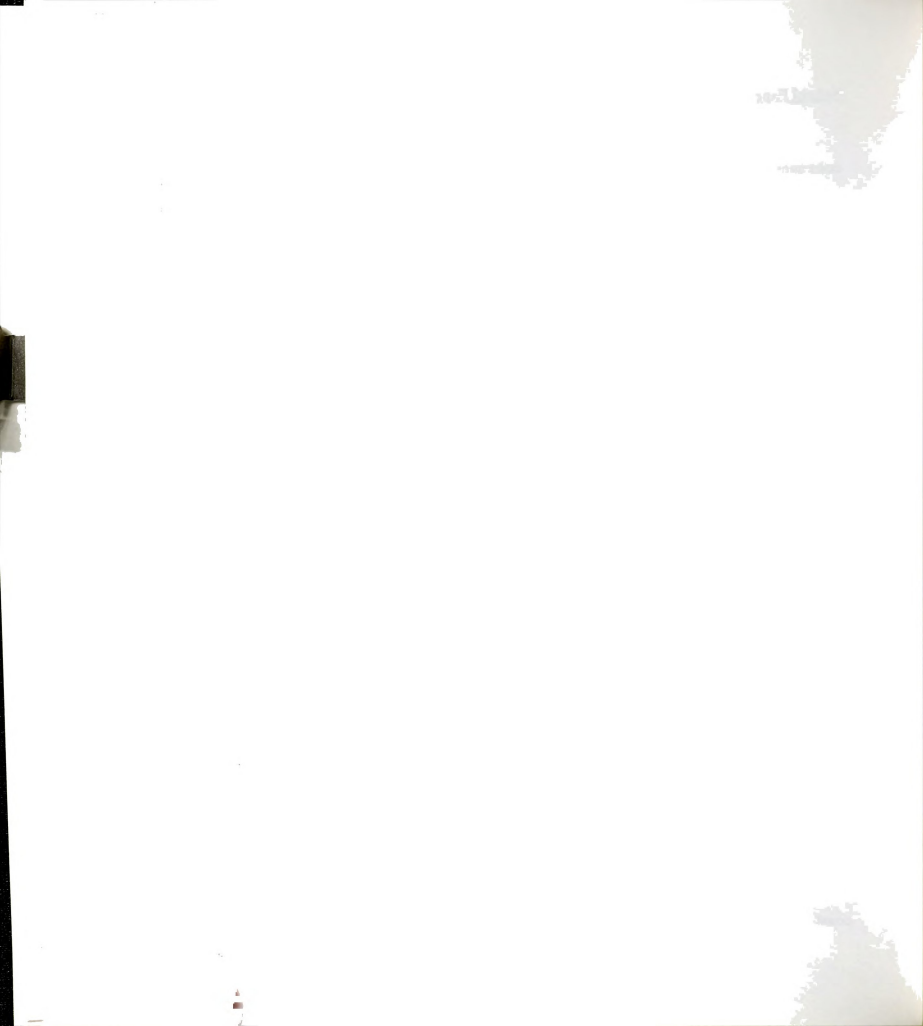
Gabriela started kindergarten in a small rural community. She describes the community as having two factions, the blue-collar workers or the farmers and the town was pretty much divided between those two social class groups. Gabriela was the daughter of the principal. She describes her kindergarten experience as being a very isolated experience and influential in teaching her to be independent.

I spent a great deal of time in that doll house kitchen . . . mostly because I had . . . I was being excluded . . . this is my recollection . . . I was being excluded from instruction because I had been blessed with a mother who was actually a teacher and had spent a great deal of time with me during my years, formative years before elementary school in teaching me how to read and write and write my name and know my numbers. And so I spent a lot of time in the doll house for knowing already what everybody else didn't evidently know. So I remember thinking, well, you know, if I already know what everybody else doesn't know and this means that my punishment or my reward for knowing what other people don't know is exclusion, than I guess being by myself is probably the path I'm going to be taking. I mean, it's sort of a lonely path.

That pattern kind of repeated itself throughout U.S. schooling for Gabriela. She talks about the fact that as she got older, she used her knowledge to really exclude herself from the norm, and really to set herself apart from her teachers and fellow students.

[I used] this "intellectual acumen" to "dis" people, to "dis" teachers, to "dis" fellow students, in Spanish as we say, "Pour las buenas or pour las malas." The good way or the bad way, I was going to set myself aside, away from everyone else, so that was sort of the underpinning of what my educational experience was like in the United States.

Shortly into the first couple of weeks of first grade, Gabriela's father joined the U.S. Foreign Service. He was recruited by the United States Information Agency to become a cultural attaché in Latin America. Gabriela's father was first assigned to the northeastern corner of Brazil, in a very remote, less developed part of northern Brazil. She describes Brazil as being divided in the middle in a place call Via San Salvador which is pretty much in the middle of the country on the coast. South of Via is where the Europeans settled so there was a predominately Caucasian



population—Europeans, Italians, Germans, Portuguese, French, Spanish, in the southern part. In the northern part, according to Gabriela, it was a very different story. There, 2% of the population were Caucasian and extremely wealthy and 98% were poor and black. Lessons about the distinctions between people based on class and racial differences are again reinforced.

... in Brazil you're never just black. There are about 200 different shades of black. People have qualified themselves by the shade of black that they are within the social structure.

Gabriela spent four years in Brazil and learned Portuguese as her first formal language. She quickly assimilates into the culture and boasts of her ability to fit in with the people.

I read Portuguese, wrote Portuguese. My mom used to take me to the market and hide kind of around the corner and let me do all of the wheeling and dealing because my Portuguese was flawless and I'm kind of dark. I mean I'm a darker caucasian and with the sun, I could pass. I always had a dark tan because I was a kid and I was outside. I could get by as one of those 200 shades of children there. . . .and spoke Portuguese and so no one knew that I wasn't a Brazilian.

Gabriela considers the four years she spent in Brazil to be the most significant learning experiences of her entire life. She describes her life, as the child of an attaché, as being one of extreme privilege.

There were maids and chauffeurs and a beautiful home on the ocean. There were secret service men, visits from presidents, opera stars, authors, etc. So, that was kind of the life that I had as a child . . . extremely privileged, high profile, traveled in circles that were influential. I, of course, didn't know that they were influential -- I was seven-eight years old, but they evidently were. So, the experience, that whole total holistic experience of living in Brazil between class worlds, I think, is what formed me . . . the person I am today. I feel as comfortable at a cocktail party with the president or Governor as I do sitting at the kitchen table . . . forget the kitchen . . . at a table on a crate with my mother-in-law who lives in a fishing village and is Mayan . . . and as uncomfortable in both places.

After four years, Gabriela's father decides not to renew his time in Brazil. She describes it as a very rough assignment for him for several reasons. Her brother almost died of amebic dysentery, and her father contracted water fluke. He came back to the

states to be operated on and lost half of his lung. But his next assignment was in Guadalajara Helisco, Mexico. They moved to Mexico when she was ten. She describes the contrast in lifestyles, people and customs.

It was metropolitan and cosmopolitan and it was like night and day from [Brazil]. Mexico and Brazil, the two places are so different. Brazil is so extroverted, people are so out there, in your face, energy, movement, bellicose, your space is violated all the time in Brazil because people are really out there. They like loud music, parties, I mean, it's a very extroverted society. And Mexico is extremely introverted. So, there was this change of social behavior for me between Brazil and Mexico.

Gabriela continued to live a privileged life in Mexico until her father decided to leave the Foreign Service as a result of philosophical difference about the way they were to interact with the people.

I mean his idea of foreign policy was that you go live with the people, you are the people. You speak the language, you eat the food, you live with the people, you marry the people, you love the people, you are the people. And that isn't what American foreign policy was like in the 50's and 60's. It was . . . you go there, you're an American, you stick with Americans, you spy on the people. Lord knows you don't marry the people, for crying out loud, because, you know, you can't bring them home. Because you don't want to bring them home because home doesn't really want those people here. And so my father had a really philosophical – huge philosophical problem – with U.S. Foreign policy and decided that it was time to leave the U.S. government.

Gabriela learns significant lessons about conflicting philosophical beliefs. And after just one year, her family decided to move back to the states and returned to their former small community in the Midwest. Her father became the Superintendent of the school district.

All of this moving apparently took its toll on Gabriela and she contracted rheumatic fever during the sixth grade. Confined to her bed for several months she describes this as a particularly rough time for her and talks about another significant learning experience.

I began to learn English by watching television. I watched baseball and I have been a fan of baseball ever since that experience. I wrote the baseball players, I watched baseball games. They used to have them on in the afternoons. I have a post card from Sandy Colfax, from Al Kayline, from Tom Tresh, I mean, I was a baseball fan. I can tell you the lineup of the '64 Tigers right now. That became a very significant learning experience for me . . . knowing the lineup of the 1964 Tigers, it is just amazing. I've always loved baseball. [This time] was rough for me. I didn't feel a part of [the community] at all; I never did. And I think my dad didn't feel a part either because he very shortly thereafter took a position with a company called International School Services, they're head hunters for international schools.

Gabriela's father took a job as the headmaster of an international school in Santiago, Chile. The family moved to Chile and were there for approximately the next two and a half years. Gabriela describes it as one of the most beautiful places in the entire world and as for her learning experiences, they became a lasting part of her life.

I mean there's just no end to the beauty of Chile. It's a wonderful place; people are really special and I still miss being there. I've never really ever gotten over having left Chile. I felt so part of that life there. I went to this international school, met people from all over the world. If you didn't speak more than 3 or 4 languages you were a real loser. If you hadn't been to Bancock and Teheran and everywhere else in the world, they wondered what had happened to you, you know. It was another very privileged life.

Gabriela describes her teachers in Chile as being people with broad and adventurous backgrounds that were experts in their fields. Her geography teacher, for example, was one of the members of the team that accompanied Hillary Clinton in her expedition to Everest. Another, was her geography teacher who was one of the members of the National Geographic Mount Arawat National Geographic expedition in search of Noah's Ark. She had U.S. History teacher who drove his motorcycle down to Santiago on the Pan Am highway. She goes on to describe other teachers that she had during this time, and the profound impression that they made on her learning. Her recollection is remarkably vivid and the experiences obviously made a lasting impression.

This was in the sixties — we're talking people who are pretty adventurous. My English teacher was one of the screenwriters for Night of the Iguana from Norway

[name]. I'll never forget him. He taught us the complete works of J.D. Salinger when I was in the seventh grade. I mean, he was one of those teachers who said, "You know, you're ready for this stuff, you're ready; make yourself ready – stretch, learn stuff, get outside yourself into another context." My biology teacher was the co-discoverer of streptomycin. I mean how could you not be influenced by these learning experiences?

Gabriela felt a sense of belonging in Chile. She describes feeling valued and appreciated for her knowledge rather than isolated and different as she felt in the U.S.

... school was difficult for me in the United States, because there wasn't much room for a kid who knew a lot in the public school. You really had to pay for what you shouldn't know – you should know it – but you shouldn't let anyone else know you know it. On the contrary, in Latin America, you were encouraged to know, you were asked to know, you were asked to show what you knew; you were rewarded for knowledge -- you were rewarded for knowledge.

Political unrest in Chile forced Gabriela and her family to again pack up and leave. At this age, however, leaving was extremely difficult for Gabriela. She had assimilated with the culture, the people, and the way of life. She had started to paint her own picture of her future and it did not include moving back to the United States.

... I had already decided she was a Chilean, she was going to college in Chile; she had already picked out the University. I already knew what I was going to do, what city I was going to live in. I really was pretty clear on who I was going to marry, too – who was also a Chileno. So, when my parents made that decision to leave, very quickly, out of Chile and I didn't really, I don't think I really understood the political ramifications of that, at the time. But we all got on a boat and we got the heck out of Santiago and came back to the United States. I was miserable. I mean, I didn't recover from that move for . . . I would say 10 years.

Gabriela's parents realized that she was having difficulty adjusting to being back in the U.S. and having to reenter a cultural context that was not familiar.

I didn't know squat about it because all my memories, the smells, and the food, and music, and proverbs, and all of those sort of, you know, social cultural elements were not American for me, they were Latin American. They were Chileano, they were Brazilian, they were Mexican, they weren't American. I could not identify with this iconography from the United States at the age of 15 and you want to talk about being isolated. I was persona non grata and I hated school. I hated high school. Hated it. I was expelled – suspended – I was forbidden to ever take another math

class in that high school because the math department teachers just, well one of the teachers just hated me so much.

Gabriela's perceptions and interpretations of her experience at age 15 were filled with feelings of anger, rejection, and isolation. She openly defied authority and became rebellious in her attitudes toward what she believed to be a totally foreign way of living.

I had to get a tutor – it was awful. I hated it. I became extremely pompous, very arrogant, I was a brat. I told people off. I was angry. I was pissed that I had to live in this really out-of-the-way place. I came from Santiago, 3 million people. You know, you go see the Russian Ballet, you go to the movie theater, you have fine wine, I mean, it's a whole other life and here I am in [small parochial community], oh my God, why did my parents do this to me. And they would not let me come to [city] to go to school – they just wanted me to deal with this.

When Gabriela was in eleventh grade, she became involved in theater. She perceived this as a life saving experience and one that offered her an opportunity to find her place in her new home. Her drama teacher nominated her for a scholarship at Northwestern University for an 8-week summer workshop—she auditioned and was accepted. The program was held at Northwestern University, north of Chicago, with 500 kids from all over the United States also 11th graders – “the top of the line.” She describes this experience as “like being back in Latin America” and blossomed. She went from being “...the most unpopular girl in high school [at home],” to being voted president of the girls' dorm of 300 girls.

...that [experience] really said to me, you know, there's more to life than what you're seeing right now and all you need to do is get out of what you're in and go find it. So, don't just sit around and be victimized; don't allow yourself to be victim. If you're a victim it's because you're making yourself a victim, and you need to get out of that and go find places that will appreciate you. So that really was incredible and taught me that, success begets success. I've never forgotten that lesson. [After being] successful at Northwestern . . . when I came back [home], it was a lot easier for me to get through school.

Gabriela identifies another “turning point” learning experience in high school that also contributed to changing her perceptions about her worth and value. She was asked by the high school coach to become the team statistician.

... best thing that anyone could have done for me in high school because it really gave me a place to vent and to get involved in what was going on in school, but in a completely different way. I wasn't a cheerleader – I was a statistician. So it was wonderful and I have always appreciated [coach] for doing that – I'll never forget the guy.

College Experience

Gabriela was initially interested in pursuing studies in the technical side of film making. She credits her positive experience at Northwestern and in high school as key in influencing this interest. After the program that she was interested in closed, and given that her father, now a professor at the local college, received free tuition, it was decided that Gabriela would attend college there. She moves into the dorm and is immediately hired as the team statistician for wrestling, basketball, baseball, and football. She describes this as “one of the most important learning experience of her life.”

Doing stats and being with men all the time and with guys all the time in those sports was one of the most important learning experiences I have ever had in my entire life. And that is, again, once again, it's that being able to bridge the genders, social class, language, race, culture, ethnicity. I am not uncomfortable being around guys, I'm not uncomfortable playing that “game.” I was able to learn about guys from a guy perspective. So, I have had great mentoring from both men and women. So, that involvement with sports at that particular level of doing stats and statistical reports and having to know the game intimately, I mean I had to learn basketball, baseball, football, and wrestling. Of course there are a lot of female statisticians now, but in 1969, I was the only one. So, that was a great learning experience; it wasn't in the classroom, but it was a great learning experience. I think we're getting a pattern of all these great learning experiences that were not in the classroom.

In addition to her work as a sports statistician, Gabriela also renewed her interest and involvement in theater, while in college. She became involved at the production end of theater and did some acting. She talks about her troupe being on tour as a result of

winning a regional competition and describes the lifelong friendships that were made as a result of that experience. So again, we see examples of the types of learning experiences perceived as influential being related to personal and emotional connections established with others.

While in college, Gabriela's involvement in the social movements of the time reflect a continuing theme from early experiences in which she learned about race, culture and class differences and the consequences of being disenfranchised. She describes with pride her involvement in the march against the war in Vietnam, the lettuce boycotts, and the Civil Rights movement.

I had posters of Malcolm X long before it was fashionable to have posters of Malcolm X by any means necessary, plastered in my dorm wall. I, you know, all of those . . . those people, they were right, they were right. I mean it wasn't about whether it was political, sometimes there are just some things you gotta fight for because they're right and they're fair. I mean it's about fairness, and it's about justice and for everybody. I think because of where I was raised, the only difference I could ever see was who had money and who didn't have money. In the United States by comparison, it looked like everybody had money, in comparison to what I had seen before.

Gabriela graduated from college with a B.A. in Speech and Theater and a secondary teaching certificate. She talks openly about some of the more tragic events that were also significant learning experiences for her and played a part in shaping who she is today.

I had a very unfortunate experience in that there was a . . . I guess now they call it date rape. I became pregnant and made a very life-changing decision to go to New York to terminate the pregnancy. I went to New York City – alone – with no one, no support and no one to know about it. Of course I couldn't possibly tell my parents, which I did not. But it was an extremely difficult decision, but one I have never regretted. As events unfolded in my life I never did have my own biological children. So, it's kind of interesting how we sort of fall into our destiny. But, anyway that was a major event.

After college, Gabriela was advised by her mother to consider a job that would allow her to use her Spanish. She had not considered that as a possibility and thought it was a great idea. She moved to the city and interviewed for a temporary position in the Department of Human Relations as a translator. She was hired. She describes the influence of her first boss and mentor.

I worked for a man by the name of [name]. You know I can hardly even talk about him without getting a little choked up – he was a significant mentor in my life. He really taught me a lot about urban life . . . about black urban life. About black history — black American history. You know I didn't know anything about black American history. I knew a lot about black history in Brazil and I knew a lot about Pan Africanism. I knew scads about that having lived PanAfricanism. But I didn't know much about American blackness, really until I met [name]. So my job was to translate for the city and I did that in text; I used to translate in the drunk tank on Monday mornings for the Mexicanos who'd get picked up at the Tango Bar or the Mustang Bar on the weekend. And that was my job and I really loved it a lot. I really loved it. I loved working for [name].

Gabriela was engaged to a gentleman from New York City; he was Greek, and his father was president of Olympic Airways. Her fiancée was tragically killed the summer before they were to be married. Gabriela identifies this as another important learning experience.

Of course, I was a basket case, I mean, the one love of my life had just been stabbed to death. I mean, I don't understand stabbing to death. I understand plane crashes and car crashes, but stabbing to death, that kind of stuff, that was incomprehensible to me. So, I went out to New York for the funeral and of course being the woman to whom he was going to be married, I had to be part of the family ritual. It was really hard. I loved [name] very deeply and he love me very deeply, but, you know, it was destiny, it just happened that way.

Professional Work: Teaching

It was after she returned from New York, that Gabriela decided to get a teaching job. She was a migrant teacher for a couple years before teaching sixth grade teacher at the brand new school elementary school. She was bumped out of that position, due to low seniority, and moved to a split position -- she taught part time at the junior high and part time at the high school center for gifted and talented students – where she taught 5th year

Spanish. She talks about making frequent trips to Mexico during her vacations in order to “charge her cultural battery.”

Gabriela talks about the significance of friendships in her learning experiences. Surprisingly, someone who was her total opposite, became her very best friend.

I was teaching as a migrant teacher at that time and I met this teacher named [name] and she said to me at the end of the year picnic, “What are you going to do for summer break.” And I said, “I’m going to the Yucatan.” She said, “Can I go with you?” And I thought, “Oh, my God, she drives a red camaro, I drive a volkswagon van; she wears a mini skirt and platform heels, I wear bib overalls and sandals, you know. I have long hair down to my back that’s in a braid all the time, and she’s got peroxide hair with blue contact lenses. How are we ever going to see eye-to-eye on things.” Well, she’s my best friend, has always been my best friend. She rubbed off a little on me, and normalized me and I rubbed off a little bit on her and gave her a sense of some risk-taking. So, that was another great learning experience for me.

After going through a marriage and a divorce, Gabriela returned to Cancun and rekindled a relationship with an old friend after twelve years – and they were married.

. . . being with [name] is the other greatest learning experience of my life. Committing yourself, turning yourself over to another human being that you trust, especially for me as an extremely independent woman, to rip my agenda and say, “You know what? What’s your agenda? How can we form one together?” This was a very significant learning experience.

Gabriela talks about her experience as the principal of a brand new school of choice and recognizes this experience as significant in her learning.

. . . total school of choice for children who speak a language other than English as well as children who come from families whose parents want them to learn another language besides English. Being a total school of choice we were responsible for all of the issues associated with choice – image, marketing, and keeping school culture alive, etc. We did not rely on neighborhood or geographic closeness to establish your school culture, but created a culture within the school [that was inclusive of] every corner of the city, and every corner of the world in the case of this [particular school]. That was the most significant thing I think. . . well definitely the most significant thing I’ve ever done in my life. I won a national educator award five years ago and have been blessed to receive honors of [distinction for my work]. That’s been great learning for me, [as well]. While a lot of this learning was very positive, I also learned a lot about jealousy that people have and how they go after you if they think you’ve got something they don’t have. And that’s been a great learning experience.

Recently, Gabriela was appointed to a central office administrative position. In talking about her experiences over the last eighteen months, she describes them as learning to live through the politics.

... the last 18 months, for me has been one of the greatest learning experiences I've ever had. I've learned a lot about, you know, politics, the organization is like living in the court of Versailles. Everyone's a pretender to the throne; there's intrigue behind every velvet curtain, or people think there is. I'm pretty much, what you see is what is get and you really can't be that way in an organization that thrives on intrigue.

In describing the political environment of her new organization, Gabriela finds the culture to again be in stark contrast to her own philosophical beliefs about power. These were lessons learned early in her experiences in Brazil, Chile, and Mexico from her parent.

I'd rather use my political markers on the advancement of an idea or an issue rather than in eliminating people from the scene. I'm not into neutralizing other people's power. I like to empower them. I mean, I like to empower them because empowerment means you get more power. I think that's a pretty simple formula. I haven't figured out how it is that people think you get more power by neutralizing other people's power or by eliminating their power. I mean, you only get more power by making other people more powerful. I mean, that's basic and I learned that in Latin America, as a kid. That's the social exchange theory 101—all Latin Americans understand the interdependence of power and how the more people with whom you are interdependent, the more power you actually end up acquiring. I don't regret anymore anything that's ever happened. It's all been part of the whole scheme of my life story and it's been a great life story. I've learned from every person with whom I've had significant contact I've come away with a bit of them in me.

Summary

Evidence that Gabriela's learning experiences have contributed significantly to her leader identity from multiple vantage points are apparent from her learning portrait. She draws from a wide pool of rich experiences to formulate her perspectives, attitudes and beliefs. Evidence exists suggesting that these perspectives, attitudes, and beliefs are

deeply rooted in her early childhood experiences both in and outside of the home and remain consistent throughout the course of her life.

From an early age, indications are that Gabriela was aware of her extraordinary intelligence and using it to make her way in the world. She loved learning and though her experiences in American schools were unpleasant for her, she thrived on her own appetite for knowledge and with the help of educated parents, was propelled forward. She describes her learning experiences in foreign schools, as particularly influential and attributes much of her value of knowledge to those experiences. Her teachers were engaging and peer group knowledge competitive.

Gabriela grew up in a multilingual environment and learned to speak several languages fluently. As she traveled with her family, another hallmark of her learning experiences can be attributed to her parents belief in the importance of complete assimilation into the customs and cultures within which they lived. She experienced first hand the class wars that existed between the very rich and the very poor and her philosophical and seeds related to social injustice, racism, and class were planted and grew.

Relationships were not always easy for Gabriela. Part of this she attributes to early feelings of isolation as a result of being separated from her peers in school. This theme continued to play out as she continually moved in and out of communities while her father served in the Foreign Service. Her resentment begins to surface, as she grew older, and tired of being uprooted from familiar and comfortable surroundings. By the time she returned to high school in the U.S., her own country felt strangely unfamiliar and her adjustment difficult.

Growing up in a very political environment, she attributes much of her sensitivity and passion for issues relative to the disenfranchised to her early learning experiences and has always identified with the role of social activists. She believes in fighting for worthy causes and believes that this is the appropriate arena for politics.

Gabriela considers herself to be a composite of all those characteristics of people that she has met throughout her life – characteristics that she liked and characteristics that she hasn't liked. Her learning profile is remarkable and I think the following verbatim quote defines who she is and illustrates the profound influence that her significant learning experiences have had on her life.

I am the composite of all those characteristics. That's what leadership is all about. It is being able to recognize characteristics in others that you also have. If you get out of the familiarity of your own life context enough you're going to have a whole menu of characteristic that you can draw upon – life events, activities, history, or whatever. You're going to have enough of a menu that you're going to be able to identify with every single person that you come in contact with and say, "Here's the characteristic, here's the life event, here's the bond that I can make with this individual." That is probably the essence of what learning is all about for me and has been for the past almost 49 years — you can learn from anywhere and from anyone. And for me, the essence of leadership is the ability, the propensity, the desire to see perspectives, to analyze perspectives, to adopt and mold perspectives that are outside the familiarity of one's own life context. That, to me, is the essence of leadership – the ability to do that and enjoy it and communicate it. I kind of think of my self as a cultural chameleon.

Mildred: The Independent Mover

Mildred was the first born of three children in her family. She was born shortly after the end of World War II to parents who were both college graduates. Her father was in the clothing industry and owned his own business, and her mother, was an English teacher by profession. At the time when Mildred's mother married her father, the expectation of her father's family was that she be a homemaker. Though Mildred suspects this might not have been enough for her mother, she nevertheless became not only a homemaker, but is described by Mildred as being a mother extraordinaire. Mildred's recollections of early learning experiences are dominated by memories of her mother and the time and attention she gave to Mildred, particularly before her other siblings were born.

Mildred described herself as being born an "extremely ugly" child. She considers this to be an important fact and instrumental in shaping her early path.

I did think it was important to share that I had been born an extremely ugly child: someone with no hair until she was three years old; someone with not only large ears in terms of size, but also in terms of protrusion because they had no cartilage. Perhaps it is because I was born so ugly that my mother spent a great deal of time with me as a younger child developing those other parts of me that she believed would be healthy for me if I were to be successful as I moved out into the world. You need to know that I didn't know that I was born ugly; I discovered that as I got a little older.

Mildred entered kindergarten reading. Her memories of these earlier times are very sketchy and she acknowledges having to use albums and scrapbooks to aid her recall of those times. When my second sister came, as I said, I think I was more independent and didn't recollect a lot of it. She describes herself, as a young child, as being very adventurous and unafraid to venture forward on her own to explore things that she was curious about. She offers several illustrations of this related to times when she moved into new situations with confidence, unaware of dangers that may exist, and had to be

rescued by her mother. She considers these early characteristics to be fairly descriptive and influential in shaping who she is today and describes the various strategies employed by her parents and teachers to teach her how to control her behavior.

Another illustration of that would be related to my second or third grade classroom. I don't know how often students at that age were sent out in the hall [for misbehavior], but I remember being removed from class in order to spend some time in the hall to determine whether or not I could control my behavior. At that point in time [misbehaving] was, in essence, defined as creating an environment where other kids were unable to learn. I did that mostly by laughing and/or talking because I was highly verbal.

Mildred talks about having to compensate for an inability to spell all the way through school but quickly acknowledges the fact that she was astute enough to know how to compensate for this weakness.

I could never understand why I was a great reader, with a fantastic memory, and still could not spell phonetically, which is how we were taught at that point in time. I don't know if there's a correlation between what one hears in music and what hears in phonetics, but I will tell you that I also have demonstrated an ability all the way through high school and college to sing in what is laughingly called a monotone voice. I am known as [one who has] the ability to give you every verse of any song ever written, but not [be able to] sing it. And I don't know whether there's a relationship between what you hear in phonics and what you hear in music and/or that relationship in terms of spelling.

In terms of other learning experiences in Mildred's childhood, she describes lessons learned about how to relate to other people, being independent, and not afraid of the unfamiliar, as standing out more than anything else.

... my mother put me in so many different environments that I learned how to communicate with a variety of people. I will also tell you that either innately or learned – and I can't tell you which—I had been independent at an early age. That independence may very well have come from the fact that I had received so much nurturing in my early years, but I didn't feel the need to please people as I got older. I was relatively precocious and don't think I ever shut up until she pushed me into

school. I think it's typical to say that throughout my life I have taken myself from that which I knew into an unknown and without fear.

Adolescence

As Mildred moved into adolescence, she describes going from being "an ugly duckling -- at least for a short period of time -- to a not-too-bad-looking' adolescent with a major fixation on boys." She recalls being verbally mature for her age as well as very self confident. Her parents recognized that she was beginning to become self conscious about her protruding ears and offered her the option of having cosmetic surgery.

I remember going away from that overwhelmed by the fact that my parents were perceptive enough to know that it had begun to bother me and that they were willing to do something to make a difference. In any case, so going into adolescence, then, my ears were fixed. They were better than they had been before. I also had a great body; and it truly was -- I was built in the places I needed to be built, small in the places in the places I needed to be small, and I had never-ending legs. In addition to that I was verbally mature for my age and relatively independent. So, I was interested in boys/men at an early age, dated them, and had already by the time I was 18 begun to define who I needed to be married to. This sounds really strange but intuitively I knew.

Mildred's describes an intuitive ability for *knowing* what is best for her, independent of what others think. A further illustration of this self-confidence is found in the way she talks about how she determined the kind of man she would eventually marry. Though she indicates her trust in her own intuition, she is also careful to check it against reality before making a final commitment.

... the man I would marry was the man most likely to bring organization and structure to my life; most likely to bring to me the psychological support I needed to move forward and most likely to allow me to be who I was. I dated my husband, from the age of 14 until we married, but never did I date only [name] until we were engaged. And I think one of the reasons for that was that in spite of the fact that I knew intuitively, I also needed to check that against reality. And so by dating a variety of people, many of whom were considered to be "the guy" to be dating, I was able to measure what [name] could bring to the marriage against what some of the other men I dated could bring to the marriage. And what I know now is that what I need is a man who will, in the end, give me the psychological support, because I believe I can to everything else myself.



Mildred describes her most influential experiences to this point as learning to trust her own intuition, learning to trust her own experience, and learning to trust her own intelligence in making important decisions. As she talks more about learning to trust her own intelligence she becomes quite analytical and reveals the insecurities that surfaced when she compared herself with others while in college.

I never doubted that I was bright, in fact, I always thought I was brighter than most, however, I never could understand until I got into college why in some discreet arenas I had more difficulty than others. What I did know is that verbally I was stronger than most. What I did know is that I could relate to more people than most -- and here I talk about people who were different in terms of ethnicity, in terms of social economic status, and in terms of ideas. It was okay to be different than me. I could -- but never chose to -- exclusively run with "the crowd." I could be there when I wanted to be, but most of the time chose not to be -- sometimes consciously, sometimes subconsciously. But in most cases I was where I chose to be based upon what fit for me. I would have to say that I probably am a person who learns best by doing. I take those experiences that I've had and transfer them either consciously or subconsciously to new experiences. I would say that I'm not fearful of new learning, which is pretty unusual. I'm generally not fearful of risk, although I would guess that's dependent upon the degree to which that risk impacts me socially, psychologically, financially...

Mildred characterizes her formal learning experiences as traditional in the respect that they included opportunities to learn and grow with students very much like herself -- white, middle class, and learning both inside and outside of the classroom those things that society thought were important for them to learn.

I would say that for most of my high school career and part of my junior high career, my focus was on building relationships. Much of that I think was due to the fact that I already had a lot of the knowledge. I didn't necessarily ever demonstrate the ability to be a four-point student -- I could have been if my parents had put pressure on me -- but they didn't. In fact both my parents say now -- as they define that period in my life -- that they felt that I had the background I needed to be successful academically to the degree that I chose to be, whenever it was that I decided to apply myself. They felt that building relationships was probably the best way to go, given I was going to do it one way or the other.

Mildred talks at length about her lifelong mission and commitment to educate the poor. She recalls her parents saying that when she was in junior high school, most of her friends were poor and recollects an experience that signals this emerging consciousness.

... When I was in junior high, most of my friends were poor. They lived right by the freeway and those were the kids that I did things with. I didn't think of it until I went to their houses. When I was freshman in high school, I had made friends with someone at school and I went to her house. I went up to her bedroom to sleep over that night and I mean, I'm glad I went to her house first, because I don't know if she would have invited me otherwise. I mean, her bedroom was this non-heated, light bulb with a string pull, you know, and two beds and linoleum on the floor. I mean it wasn't poor, poor, but I mean, it was different than my experience base. But my parents said I just did that. Maybe it was more maybe at that time just [wanting] genuine relationships.

As an involved student in high school, Mildred was a class officer every year, involved in basketball, track and a lot of the social activities. She talks about another experience in which she was involved for two summers in working in missions – one summer in California and another summer in the Chicago area.

I had an opportunity there to again get to know a variety of people; who had a variety of world and life views. It gave me the opportunity to hold those world and life views against my own.

Mildred describes her college experience as pretty social, particularly the first year. She was social committee chairperson of the dorm and that meant she planned all of the parties. She recalls doing well in the typical subjects – English and Social Studies and some of the Sciences – but remembers not doing well in French and eventually switched to Spanish. She acknowledges having fairly poor study habits, but because she could cram at the last minute and still do well, her study behavior was reinforced.

I would think that some of that was just a choice not to apply myself. I can recall in my Freshman year in college, because I was an avid reader – and still am – and could read quickly, in those courses in which I did pretty well, I sometimes did not read the book until a week before the exam. I can remember specifically in Social Studies/History class where our final grade was to be based upon papers we wrote, discussion in class and then an exam on the book. Since I didn't see any need to read

the book until the exam, I spent the week before the exam locked in a linen closet reading the book from beginning to end and I did very well in the class. So that probably reinforced, short term, some pretty poor study habits. As I moved into my junior and senior year I took my education much more seriously and ended up graduating with honors and a part of the National Honor Society.

Summary

In summary, Mildred's learning experiences propel her forward on several distinct fronts. She attributes, as being most significant, her early lessons about commitment to a mission, relating with all kinds of people from all walks of life, particularly the poor, as being instrumental in forming and shaping her later focus of interest and ultimately her life mission.

Mildred learned early to negotiate her role as a player with the "big boys" and from an early age was quite comfortable in taking risks and being independent in her efforts to navigate the world. She learned to develop her ability to communicate ideas, listen carefully to how others described their needs and took on the charge of working to meet those needs as she perceived them. Mildred also developed her ability to articulate points of view from a variety of perspectives in search of common ground and attributes much of her accomplishment as a leader to these skills and abilities.

Mildred traces her deep, philosophical underpinnings back to childhood days when she enjoyed playing with children who were from a different social class and took up the mantle of fighting for social justice. Her mother emerges as a central figure in shaping her philosophical beliefs, attitudes, and core values. She comments on early impressions made by eloquent speakers, particularly in her church community, who were effective at getting large numbers of people to be attentive to their words and as a result of the message, willing to move collectively toward a common goal.

Mildred describes her school experiences as fairly traditional and does not identify experiences of particular significance from the perspective of the content studied. However, she does appear to be keenly aware of performance differences between herself and her peers from an early age. She often referenced her accomplishments in comparison to the accomplishments of others in determining her own level of effectiveness. She is concerned with her image and how she comes across to others and relies on feedback from significant others to provide her with this information. Based on what she learns from them, Mildred does a self-initiated course correction.

She describes her life as her work and her self-image is consistently reflected in this context and often through the eyes of others. She spends a considerable amount of time scanning her environment and monitoring situations and circumstances for potential opportunities as well as threats. This ability to carefully listen, observe, and analyze people and situations emerges as a trademark of her learning experiences.



ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Again, the purpose of this study was to explore relationships between leader learning experiences, their perceptions and interpretations of their strategic situations, and their subsequent strategic action. Toward this objective, each participant was asked to describe the learning experiences that they recall as having played a significant role in shaping their leader behavior.

Interview transcriptions were read multiple times and coded for content, context, process, and motivation themes. To fairly represent the content and the context of the learning experiences reported, individual narratives were prepared for each participant using a significant amount of verbatim quotation. Narratives were coded again to verify initial learning themes. Recurring themes were then organized into the following five categories of learning: academic, relational, political, philosophical, and technical. The categories have been operationalized as follows:

- *Academic* learning experiences are defined here as experiences that are discipline specific and generally associated with the curricula of formal schooling.
- *Relational* learning experiences were people-focused and people-intensive. These experiences were described as ones in which lessons about awareness, appreciation, and respect for self and others were learned.
- *Political* learning experiences are defined as those lessons that developed the leaders' abilities to manage conflict, negotiating power, and build support for the purpose of advancing a particular idea or agenda.

- *Philosophical* learning experiences are defined as experiences that were influential in shaping the leaders' values, beliefs, and ideologies about what is right, fair, honorable, important, and worthy of consistent attention and action.
- *Technical* learning experiences are defined as those experiences that provided leaders with the academic, skills, processes, and strategies that enable them to perform specific processes and function necessary in accomplishing a particular task or goal.

Academic Learning Experiences

For the purposes of this study, academic learning experiences are defined as experience that focus on intellectual, or subject matter content that leads to improvement in human performances and has ultimate usefulness in the pursuit of the individual's vocation or profession (Gagne, 1971).

Learning experiences of significance described by leaders that fell into this category were often associated subject matter content in the humanities and was often described as influential as a result of the personal. For example, Vivian's love of literature was connected to her respect and admiration for her high school teacher. Dan's interest and fascination with social politics and philosophy can be traced to his relationships with early teachers and mentors. Gabriela's significant academic experiences in geography, history, and literature were motivated by her teachers as well as by the "lived" experiences in Brazil, Guadalajara, and Mexico. This pattern of influential academic learning being associated with significant people and contexts was consistently found among the leader participants. Interestingly, leaders did not identify academic learning experiences void of this type of association as being influential in

shaping their practice. These experiences were more frequently referred to as subjects that were undertaken to meet formal schooling requirements and details of the experiences and the processes for learning were difficult for participants to recall.

Technical Learning Experiences

Technical learning experiences were also underrepresented as being significant in shaping the strategic behavior of leader participants. Peter Senge (1990) offers one possible explanation. He suggests that we have all mastered a vast repertoire of skills through “training” the subconscious. Once learned, they become so taken for granted, that we don’t notice when we are executing them. He suggests that most of us have never given a second thought to how we mastered these skills. This was apparent in responses from participants regarding how they learned to read, write, drive a car, play an instrument, etc. While most were not able to recall the actual experience of technical learning, two participants did report technical learning experiences that were significant.

Gabriela describes as quite natural the experiences of learning multiple languages both in her home and in the many countries in which she lived growing up as a child. Again, as she described the experiences, it was obvious to me that the significance was more related to the interactions associated with the skills being learned at the time. Jane also describes learning experiences related to her learning to write for an audience. These experiences, while skill based, appeared to be again motivated by the conditions for learning the skill rather than the skill itself.

Somewhere along the line, I discovered that I had the ability to bring out deep emotions in other people through my writing, through my words, through listening, through connecting with people in some way . . . and that is something that I thrived on, I think, and used to my advantage.



This pattern was consistent in the findings for other participants as well and suggests again that technical learning associated with relationships between self and others is most often identified as influential in shaping leader behavior. When this relationship was absent from the learning experience, even though the skills were acquired and consistently used, the learning was not viewed as being particularly influential in shaping leader behavior. An illustration of this can be found in Gabriela's account of her learning to track sports statistics and Catherine's efforts to perform tasks "the right way." In both of these cases, the mastery of technical skills was reported as significant in shaping leader behavior, however, the underlying motivation for mastery appears to be primarily relational and is a recurring theme in this type of learning experience. This suggests that technical learning experiences appear to be influential in shaping leader behavior when they are motivated by factors that are relational in nature.

Relational, Political, and Philosophical Learning Experiences

Relational, political, and philosophical learning experiences were consistently described as being of predominant influence in shaping behavior of leader participants in the study. These were by far the most frequent types of learning experiences identified by leaders (see Table 4.1) and were frequently traced back to early childhood experiences in the home with one or both parents most often identified as the primary teachers. Participants described with vivid detail specific events and circumstances related to their learning to interact and communicate with others in their families, schools, churches, and communities. Though the particular dynamics of these contexts varied among participants the data suggests that these early lessons consistently appeared to be identity-defining experiences for each participant in the study.



Table 4.1 Most Frequent Categories of Significant Learning Experiences

	Vivian	Jane	Dan	Catherine	Gabriela	Mildred
Academic		X			X	
Relational	X	X	X	X	X	X
Political	X	X	X	X	X	X
Philosophical	X	X	X	X	X	X
Technical		X			X	

Recollections were vivid and at times quite emotional appearing to touch them at a deeper level of consciousness than the other categories of learning experiences shared. Whether the experiences were of a positive or negative influence evidence of their power in defining and shaping leader identities and perspectives was undeniable and remarkable.

Participants were able to describe colors, smells, tones of voice, gestures, and feelings associated with of these types of experiences and several key themes quickly emerged. First, all of the participants appeared to be affected by these experiences on a deep emotional and psychological level that was often prompted by a sense of urgency that arose forcing participants to navigate a particular challenge or dilemma. In most instances, these situations of urgency appeared to provide the context and motivation for deep learning that dramatically change the way that participants perceived themselves, their circumstances, and their relationships and interactions with others (see Table 4.2).



4.2 Contexts for Significant Learning Experiences

Context:	Home/Family					School					Work				
	Academic	Relational	Philosophical	Political	Technical	Academic	Relational	Philosophical	Political	Technical	Academic	Relational	Philosophical	Political	Technical
Vivian		X	X	X								X	X	X	X
Jane	X	X	X	X	X	X				X		X	X	X	X
Dan		X	X	X								X	X	X	X
Catherine		X	X	X								X	X	X	X
Gabriela	X	X	X	X	X	X				X				X	X
Mildred		X	X	X								X	X	X	X

Numerous examples of this phenomenon appear across the learning narratives as we think back to Vivian's vision impairment, Jane's experience with the truck on the bridge, the automobile accident that killed Catherine's only brother, and the tragic murder of Gabriela's fiancé the summer before they were to be married. While these examples were among the more dramatic of the accounts, evidence of this sense of urgency being associated with leader deep learning experiences surfaces throughout the data and appears to be precipitated by a crisis. The sense of urgency created as a result of the crisis was most often the context within which participants described significant learning and it was generally relational, political and/or philosophical in nature. Another observation was that it was generally more difficult for participants to recall specific details of significant learning experiences outside of these contexts.



The data illustrated in Table 4.3, suggests that the primary motivations for in the relational, philosophical, and political learning were often emotionally and/or psychologically driven. Motivations for academic and technical learning were most often related to personal and/or career aspirations.

4.3 Motivations for Significant Learning Experiences

Motivation:	Life challenge					Personal Interest					Employment Objective				
	Academic	Relational	Philosophical	Political	Technical	Academic	Relational	Philosophical	Political	Technical	Academic	Relational	Philosophical	Political	Technical
Vivian		X	X	X	X	X								X	X
Jane		X	X	X		X				X				X	X
Dan		X	X	X		X									
Catherine		X	X	X	X					X				X	X
Gabriela	X	X	X	X	X	X				X					X
Mildred		X	X	X	X	X				X					X



Leader Views of Strategic Situations and Subsequent Courses of Action Taken

In seeking to explore the relationships between what leaders have learned and what they actually do, I now focus my attention on their strategic behavior. The interest, here, is in exploring leader perceptions about the nature and scope of their strategic issues. Also of interest are the processes they use in analyzing problems and determining subsequent courses of action.

The four questions, guiding part of the inquiry were: first, what types of strategic issues do school leaders identify as being priority concerns? In this study, the term strategic is used to refer to issues that impact the overall organization, not just one small unit. It also implies substantive decision-making responsibility. Second, how do the leaders describe their strategic issues? The interest here was focused on how leaders described factors contributing to their problems, their view of the problem as an opportunity or a threat, and whether or not they perceived the solution to the problem as one that was within their control to make happen. The third question was what are the specific strategies used to gather information about the problem, analyze the problem, and determine the appropriate action to be taken? And the finally, what action was actually taken?

Again, narratives were used as the preferred medium for understanding and explaining the leaders' strategic situation (Straude, 1994). They seem particularly well suited to the purposes of this study as it seeks to convey "the richness and the nuances of meaning" among study participants (Carter, 1993:6; see also Bruner, 1986; Michler, 1995; Scholes, 1982). In Louis and Sutton's (1991) terms, telling a story about an event helps storytellers move from automatic to conscious processing of that event, processing

characterized by awareness, attention, and reflection. As a result, academic that is normally hidden comes into view.

As in the analysis of leader learning experiences, this analysis proceeded in several steps. Again, since the research is exploratory, I needed to let categories emerge from the data, rather than impose them a priori. First, I extracted the stories, verbatim, from the transcripts. I then created abstracts. These were literal condensations of each story, designed to make the data compact enough to work with. Next, I sorted iteratively through these abstracts, ultimately grouping similar themes together from each story to create a comprehensive set of categories for the responses (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 55-69). Each abstract was then coded. I then constructed a table of all of the coded abstracts. This process allowed me to discern a smaller number of basic types of responses. In the next section, data from interviews is presented in the following order:

- I. Leaders' views of strategic problems facing their organizations – perceptions and interpretations;
- II. Processes used in analyzing specific problems – nature and scope, identifying possible solutions; and
- III. Specific actions taken by leaders to address the problem.

Leaders' Views of Strategic Problems Facing Their Organizations

In this section, data related to leaders' views of their strategic problems is presented. Specific questions addressing (a) leaders' perceptions about the strategic problems facing their respective schools/districts; and (b) leaders' perceptions about contributing factors to their strategic problems were explored. In Table 4.4 and 4.5, the

data for each of these questions is presented. Illustrations from the interview transcripts of leaders' talk related to these questions are also provided.

All leaders in the study provided evidence of having some problem-sorting process and were quickly able to identify priority concerns. All of the strategic problems identified involved some level of strategic reform and ranged from program to community level in scope. The problems identified were classified into one of the following three categories, based on the primary nature of their talk about the concern:

- 1) technical – focus on system processes and techniques;
- 2) pedagogical – focus on teaching and learning; or
- 3) political – focus on influencing others in order to advance an idea or agenda.

Of the three principal participants in the study, two perceived their problems as having a pedagogical focus while the third principal's perceptions of the problem were technical in nature. Both of the central office leaders perceived their problems as being politically oriented. In Table 4.4 the six strategic problems are indicated and classified as being in one of the above three categories. Illustrative comments are provided as further support for category selection.

In Table 4.5, data is provided regarding factors contributing to leaders' perceptions about their strategic problems. Based on study participant descriptions of factors contributing to their perceptions, factors were coded either as opportunities, threats, or both opportunities and threats. Illustrative comments are provided as additional support for coding.

In listening to leaders talk about the problems of priority concern to them, they more frequently perceived contributing factors to the problem as threats rather than

opportunities. Twelve of the twenty-one contributing factors identified were perceived by the leaders as threats while only three factors were perceived as opportunities. Six of the contributing factors were perceived by leaders to be both opportunities and threats.

Table 4.4 Leader perceptions of strategic problems facing school/school district

LEADER PERCEPTIONS OF STRATEGIC PROBLEM	LEADER ILLUSTRATIVE COMMENT	
System Processes and Techniques: <i>Need to restructure instructional delivery for ninth grade students</i>	<p>“... looking at the ninth graders and looking at their success rate ... they were not doing well; they were not doing well anywhere. And I said, “we need to do things differently and at the time I really didn’t know exactly what [differently] was.”</p>	Vivian
Pedagogy: <i>Need new instructional delivery model</i>	<p>“We have information that says, you’re not reaching all these kids. And you’re not stretching the kids who already got it before they came in your class and you’re taking credit for it.” So we needed to find something that would be encompassing enough to allow them to honor what they had already done in the past, but continuing to go down that same road isn’t taking care of all these other kids who aren’t getting it. So, we needed something different”</p>	Jane
Personal Philosophy/Ideology: <i>Comprehensive high school reform</i>	<p>“...how very difficult it is to have comprehensive reform and do it with a big group. I struggle with the difficulty of moving a big ship and having it take a turn right or left. That does weigh me down sometimes.”</p>	Dan
System Processes and Techniques: <i>Teacher accountability for teaching curriculum</i>	<p>“There is still a lack of focus in the lower grades and it’s difficult to know how to create the sense of enough pressure to make [teachers] accountable and sensitive to what has to be covered in each content area.”</p>	Catherine
Political Influence: <i>Rallying community support for establishing a language school</i>	<p>“How was I going to get a school established for children who were historically underserved; the disenfranchised; have no voice in the language that’s spoken. How do you get through the politics, how do you marshal enough support from the general community to see that they have a need for their own school.”</p>	Gabriela
Political Influence: <i>Creating ownership and commitment to a shared vision</i>	<p>“...but again, it was always the owning piece. How do you get people to own it so they want to do it.”</p>	Mildred

Table 4.5 Factors contributing to perceptions of strategic problem

Contributing Factors	Illustrative Comment:	
O Observation of middle school team concept T Parental concerns and fears T Low freshmen test scores	<p>"We're too big. [Students] have to interact with too many people. [At the middle school] students are in this small home base, this community...and all of their teachers know them. And then you bring them to this big high school and their moving from one place. No wonder the parents have some concerns, and the fear they'll get lost. We lose them. The light came on for me ... things started to make sense. What we're doing was all wrong with regard to how we organized learning [for these students]."</p>	Vivian
O/T 50% new teaching staff T Flat test scores T Changing demographics T Veteran teachers who don't see the need to change	<p>"In the last maybe ten years our test scores have not indicated steady growth. They've been pretty much flat. We are serving some kids well. Most kids we're not doing a really good job, and some kids we're doing a terrible in serving them."</p>	Jane
T Conflicting ideologies O/T Parental expectations T Shifting philosophical allegiance T Identity crisis	<p>"We were created to be a traditional school, if we change, then do we lose our sense of who we are? I think there's allegiance to give the parents the kind of school that they want here; and they want more tightly structured, more tightly disciplined school. I think we struggle with some of the reforms-- how to make those things fit and still bring parents along. In the early, early years of the Academy, parents really bought into a particular educational philosophy; I don't know that that's there as much anymore."</p>	Dan
T Limited teacher accountability for learning mastery	<p>"We have to have a way of assessing from grade level to grade level what has to be completed before we go on to the next grade level. They're teaching the curriculum but they're not teaching it with the commitment that makes sure all the kids master it. They've taught it; and now in many ways it's up to the kids to get it. We don't have the accountability and are constantly in the situation where half of your kids are not at grade level [when they come]."</p>	Catherine
O/T Dying native traditions O/T Student assimilation into mainstream culture O/T Conflicting program philosophies	<p>"I saw the traditions of the elders; I saw the stories, the proverbs, the rearing of children sort of dissipating generation to generation as people became more and more assimilated to this environment. We had 350 kids total in two different sessions, 13 bus runs, 10 teachers. I mean we were a school within a school. And yet the school that we were housed in was a complete different [philosophy]."</p>	Gabriela
O/T Administrator perceptions	<p>"... but just what did this place called [school district] look like to them as administrators? We had them describe it by drawing a picture. And the picture is still that thing I recollect most when I think about what people thought. Because what we ended up with in the end was a murky pond with piranhas in it. [There were] creatures and murk floating over the top, and toxic waste, and cloudy skies. Way out in the distance, just a little, little, little peek of sunlight – which they hoped would be me and could get bigger. This team had so much baggage."</p>	Mildred

O= problem viewed as opportunity T= problem viewed as threat O/T= problem viewed as both

Summary of Findings

In summarizing the findings related to how urban school leaders perceive and talk about the strategic problems facing their organizations, several key findings are revealed in the data that are relative to this study. First, in analyzing the data collected relative to perceptions about the type, nature, and scope of the strategic problems, there was evidence to indicate that the problems were all associated with a need for change. Secondly, the strategic problems identified could be categorized as being either technical – focus on system processes and techniques; pedagogical – focused on teaching and learning; or political – focused on influencing others in order to advance a particular idea or agenda. Third, the data revealed that, in describing factors that contribute to their view of the strategic problem, leaders view factors contributing to the problems as threats more frequently than they view them as opportunities.

Leaders' Processes for Strategic Problem Analyses

For the purposes of this study, questions related to leaders' processes for analyzing and interpreting their strategic problems are explored using specific questions related to (a) processes used to analyze and interpret the nature and scope of the problem; and (b) processes used to determine the appropriate courses of action. In the following sections, data are presented including illustrative comments from the actual interview transcripts.

Processes Used to Analyze and Interpret Nature and Scope of Strategic Problem

In Table 4.6, the data suggests that urban school leaders in this study sample utilize a relatively limited array of strategies in analyzing and interpreting the nature and scope of their strategic problems. The data further suggests that overall leaders tend to

spend a limited amount of time in front-end analysis process before moving toward identifying solutions. I feel that it is important to note that study participants' descriptions of their analysis strategies were rather vague and more broadly referenced with little specific detail given even when questions were followed with specific probes. This was in stark contrast to the detailed descriptions provided during other parts of the interview.

The data indicates more reliance on technical sources of information in leaders' analyses of their problems. Strategies used more often included formal-written sources of information related to student performance, pedagogy, and reform. Actual observation of promising practice as well as more informal-oral strategies were also used in problem analysis, but to a lesser extent. Central office leaders appeared to rely more on internal and external sources of information in their analysis of problems, while school principals used internal data sources.

Processes Used in Determining Appropriate Courses of Action

Overall twelve processes were identified as being used by the leaders in determining appropriate courses of action to take in solving their strategic problems. These processes were grouped, in Table 4.7, according to their dominant characteristics and categorized as being relational – oriented toward the attitudes and behaviors of people; academic-based – oriented toward learning more about the particular problem; technical – oriented toward specific methods and techniques; and political – oriented toward determining levels of support for a particular idea or agenda.

Vivian, Jane, and Mildred used relational strategies to determine appropriate courses of action to take. After observing the “team” concept used in organizing students



at the feeder middle school, Vivian formed a study group of teachers and University partners. They conducted a year long process of “seed planting” discussions with interested teachers and explored ways that the concept could be implemented for freshmen at the high school level.

... we had a group of teachers who were working in partnership with [University], we called it the ninth grade study group. So, I started to talk to that group about... what if we... you know... what if... and just began to plant the seed, and you do have to plant... you have to test the market. That was one of my favorite expressions, you know, you test the market. Then we started to talk about people who would work with this group and, in fact, in fact I think it took oh, a year or two, from the time we started planting the seeds. You talk and look at people who are willing to step out there.

Jane spent considerable time meeting with staff for the purpose of listening to them talk about the work they were involved in at the time. She listened with interest as they individually met with her and talked about their various projects. She listened also for ideas that could have potential for addressing the strategic problem that had been identified. Jane believed in the importance of honoring the work that had gone on and looked for ways to make connections between where they had been and where they needed to go.

... you have to honor a person's history in knowing them; you have to respect where a person's coming from and who that person is; it's the same with a district; it's just... it has it's own culture; you have to appreciate that culture. I'm the new comer. I can't come here and say, “Now here this, we're doing it my way.” I would be stepping on their culture. I can't do that.

Mildred describes her path to action as being extremely sensitive to the attitudes and behaviors of the people in her organization as an indicator of next steps and direction. In her efforts to build trust and establish a shared vision, she uses relational strategies to determine the course of action in building a shared vision. She continually monitors the organizational climate in search of clues relative to shared mission, attitudes and



behaviors of trust. In her opinion, it is only when these are established that they can move forward and “walk together”.

Dan spoke about the daunting problem of high school reform more from a philosophical perspective. He admits that he is struggling with how to move an organization of considerable size. His solution finding strategies are primarily academic-based. As he learns more and more about high school reform and the change process, he talks openly about the tensions that exist between the various approaches to reform. Dan admits that he is still wrestling with these ideas in search of an educational philosophy that he can embrace and promote with staff. He describes his efforts to continue learning about reform and academics feeling some pressure to make a move but is still unsure of just what that move should be.

“... When I talked about what happened with older schools in reform at the high school level. I still I am not sure what it looks like at the high school level.” So we have looked at forming learning communities around our languages, for instance, as the center. You know, we might have two Spanish communities and a Latin community and a German and a French community and dividing our high school students that way. It’s working with the mechanics of how that works out [that’s the problem].

While Dan continues to ponder the merits of reform for his high school, Catherine is busy looking for ways to accomplish her goals in a very deliberate and decisive manner. In discussing the processes she uses to determine appropriate courses of action, Catherine is consistent in her reliance on student and teacher performance data to lead the way to needed action. She describes her job as being to keep things moving. She continually monitors and assesses performance looking for ways to be of better support to her teachers. She is very technical in her approach to determining what action is needed and relies heavily on objective data for indicators of what is needed and when.

4.6 Processes Used to Analyze and Interpret Nature and Scope of Strategic Problems

ANALYSIS STRATEGIES	ILLUSTRATIVE COMMENTS:	
TECHNICAL: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewed test scores Read a little of the literature Observed other programs 	<p>“... looking at the ninth graders and looking at their success rate ... they were not doing well; they were not doing well anywhere. And I said, “we need to do things differently and at the time I really didn’t know exactly what [differently] was. I did read the literature, but probably not as much as I should have. Read it some, but wasn’t relying on anything that had already been done, quite frankly.”</p>	Vivian
TECHNICAL: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducted system-wide survey Analyzed survey results Shared findings Identified Needs 	<p>“The Superintendent surveyed the whole school system, all the aspects of it and had put it in a report to the Board. He had already identified that we were kind of all over the map and there was no model for instruction... that we needed was something would unify the district. After looking at the data, [we knew] we were not serving all kids well.</p>	Jane
ACADEMIC: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learned more about reform strategies that work 	<p>When I first heard him [Fullen] at a conference – the issue was reform from bottom up or top down. He really talked about it having to be interactive – both ways – [that] really helped me, because I’d been in both situations where it was only one or the other. It seemed like when people imposed reform on people; it doesn’t work because you don’t own it. When it came simply from the bottom; it lacked a sense of direction and focus, maybe, or completeness, or someone who really could look at it objectively.</p>	Dan
TECHNICAL: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-tested students Post-tested students Analysis results 	<p>“...our first graders came to first grade and in October we took our MAT test. They were basically at later Kindergarten-First grade across the board. So that tells me our first graders were at grade level, basically, because we’re talking about an average. If it’s an average of K-8 or K-9 or 1.1, then that tells me that we ... most of our kids are there. And we were really fairly strong going into second grade. By the time we get to fourth grade, we’ve lost a year and a half. So, what’s happening in the meantime?</p>	Catherine
POLITICAL: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewed Choice legislation Assessed the growing market demand for Schools of Choice Assessed space limitations Tested the idea on others 	<p>“What I said was, “We’re too big. We’ve got 350 kids coming in and we have eight classrooms there’s not enough room – and that’s what I used. People understand size – [it means] you’re popular, they want you, you need more room, you need to grow, you can’t grow here, how can you grow? You need your own school. Here’s another thing that I used, another strategy. Limited English proficient kids are out in the home schools. Okay, the attendance area schools, the principals call me and say, “what are we going to do with these kids, they don’t speak English?” [I reply], “I’m sorry, we’re full. Call somebody.” So they squawked – limited service availability.”</p>	Gabriela
POLITICAL: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gathered input from a wide variety of internal and external sources 	<p>“I called a variety of people who had connections with people. I called representatives from business and industry. I called teachers. I called administrators. I called people in the faith community just to get a perspective of what the issues were. What I determined after I gathered the input was they were not only in contentious negotiations, but they were also in the middle of two civil rights suits. So one of the things I discovered was that they were looking for someone who had a background in diverse communities and had worked with folks all across social-economic strata.”</p>	Mildred

4.7 Processes used in determining appropriate courses of action

SOLUTION STRATEGIES	ILLUSTRATIVE COMMENTS	
RELATIONAL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conversations with principals Classroom Observation 	<p>"But I talked to principals in the Middle Schools. We started to talk about issues and somebody there mentioned their teams and asked me to come down to their room, it was a teacher. – I went down to the classroom and they were talking about the team concept there." And it was like a light bulb came on. I said, "my goodness," I said, "that's it" I mean, "that's it... we're too big. Things started to make sense ... what we're doing was all wrong with regard to how we organized learning."</p>	Vivian
RELATIONAL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read the same literature together Develop common core of academic Honor the past Encourage others to share their work Support the ideas of others 	<p>One of my staff had been working with a particular instructional model for several years and she came to me [with it]. Well, as I looked it over, [I thought], "this is the right thing, this will do it." I took that to the Superintendent and I said, you know, "What about this?" He liked the model."</p>	Jane
ACADEMIC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn more about reform strategies that work 	<p>"When I first heard [Fullen] at a conference – the issue was reform from bottom up or top down. He really talked about it having to be interactive – both ways – [that] really helped me, because I'd been in both situations where it was only one or the other. It seems like when people impose reform on people, it doesn't work because you don't own it. When it came only from the bottom; it lacked a sense of direction and focus, maybe, or completeness, or someone who really could look at it objectively."</p>	Dan
TECHNICAL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continual monitoring and assessment of student and teacher performance 	<p>"So, as a challenge to me as a leader, the challenge is how do I keep them going? How do I keep the professional development there; how do I keep them moving to where they need to be? All of those things. What do I have to put in? I'm really talking about, you know, accountability and monitoring, but also the professional development that goes with it."</p>	Catherine
POLITICAL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continually assess the political environment Stay abreast of information on available opportunities that support the agenda 	<p>"So, I talked to [name] and I said, you know, I really think we deserve to have our own place; how can we do this? [As a result of] the Choice Legislation, our district sent out a request for proposals to any school or group of staff interested in becoming a focus school. So, I thought, here's a legitimate reason. I saw this as an opportunity for us to become our own school."</p>	Gabriela
RELATIONAL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continually assess and monitor organizational climate looking for evidence of positive changes in attitudes and behaviors 	<p>"It took more than a year for them to even begin to trust that I would stay long enough to do anything with them. So part of what I had to do was, I had to be everything I said all of the time because trust was so incredibly hard [for them]."</p>	Mildred

Gabriela's strategy takes into account a variety of factors that operate both inside and outside of the organization. She relentlessly pursues resource opportunities to make her dream happen and leaves no stone unturned in looking for ways that will achieve her goals. The data suggests that because her strategic challenge involves building consensus between very diverse populations of people, she is necessarily political in her approach preferences as to what action to take and when.

Strategic Action Taken

In asking school leaders to describe specific actions taken to address the strategic problems and courses of action identified, three key findings were evident in their responses:

- 1) In cases where deliberate and specific strategic action had been taken by the leader, there appeared to be a high level of congruence between how the leader viewed the problem and their perceptions of their personal capacity and sense of urgency in affecting the solution.
- 2) High school principals appeared to be far more specific in discussing their views and analyses of strategic problems facing their organizations including appropriate courses of action that should be taken, than they were in talking about the specific strategic action they themselves had taken to affect the solution.
- 3) At least part of reason for this appeared to be related to their perceptions and interpretations about (a) internal and external constraints; (b) their personal sense of urgency and commitment in taking on the challenge; and

(c) the match between their motivations and capacities and the actual task at hand.

In Table 4.8, the types of actions reported and supporting illustrative comments are provided.

4.8 Types of Strategic Action Taken by School Leaders

Jane	"We implemented instructional process training for all employees who are in any way connected with a classroom, that would be counselors, that would be tutors, paraprofessionals, teachers, administrators, and we're making some headway in that."
Catherine	"I implemented a monitoring and accountability model and established an internal professional development program for teachers to teach teachers."
Mildred	"I'm using my voice statewide in order to impact what I need to impact here. So, we're working strategically by leveraging influence here, but then moving to making it broader so that everybody is beginning to speak with the same voice."
Gabriela	"In order to capture a greater buy-in from the greater community we offered languages to students who didn't speak a language other than English. It became a world language center. Where children whose parents wanted them to learn language other than English could also enroll. And the Communication Arts piece was my degree, my bachelor's degree's is in speech and theater, I believed that one of the most important ways for children to be able to express themselves in any language is through the dramatic arts. The proposal went to the board and was approved."
Vivian	"We started the conversation about organizing. I mean, it was just. . . and we had started to get them to see how you discuss issues, how you deal with, you know, what's good for the students . . . and that's how you stepped in."
Dan	I think one of the things, in reaction to reform is, again, how very difficult it is to have comprehensive reform and do it with a big group. I still found it so easy and so much more comfortable like at [school] where we could look and see what we wanted to do and just do it. I struggle with the difficulty of moving a big ship and having it take a turn right or left. That does weigh me down sometimes.



Summary of Findings

This segment of the inquiry focused on the perceptions, interpretations, and processes used by leaders in viewing their respective strategic situations and determining appropriate courses of action. Again, the central objective is to determine whether or not evidence exists that suggests a relationship with the prior learning experiences of these leaders. Several interesting findings were found and are presented here.

School leaders were interviewed and asked to identify and describe in detail the strategic problems they perceived as being priority concerns facing their respective organizations. Evidence provided by these interviews was used to determine the types of strategic problems encountered. Problem content is viewed as a key determinant of the academic domains in which administrators are expected to operate and are important to this study for that reason.

The scope of strategic problems described ranged from grade level restructuring to creating a shared community vision for educating all students, but all problems had several key features in common. All school leaders described strategic problems of priority concern that were reform oriented – change imperative affecting the entire organization; lacked clear definition – multiple interpretations; non-routine – outside of their experience background; and all involved complex factors that each had their own set of potentially serious consequences.

The next area of inquiry focused on the factors identified by leaders as contributing factors in shaping their view of the strategic problem. Student performance, parental pressure, charter school competition, changing demographics, conflicting ideologies, resistance to change and lack of trust among staff were the common factors



identified. Leaders perceived these factors as threats more often than opportunities and in some cases, a combination of both threat and opportunity existed.

In summarizing the process used by leaders to analyze and interpret their strategic problems, several findings were represented in the data. There was a high degree of variance in the level and depth of analysis employed by leaders. All leaders relied on information sources to analyze the nature and scope of the problem. However, there was significant variance in the types of information used across the leaders. Some relied heavily on more formal, written information that was directly relevant to the problem. Others relied on more informal, observation and oral sources of information and in some cases, leaders made assumptions, in lieu of collecting information. With the exception of one leader, all were able to provide fairly clear and comprehensive interpretations of their problems.

Responses related to processes used in determining appropriate courses of action indicated that leaders relied heavily on relational strategies. Leaders reported having numerous conversations with internal and external sources seeking input and encouraging broad participation in the process. At least one participant indicated the need to learn more in order to effect the need changes. One leader focuses strictly on student and teacher performance data in determining appropriate courses of action.

In summarizing the strategic action taken by leaders in addressing the strategic problems and courses of action they identified, two key findings were evident in their responses. First, in cases where deliberate and specific strategic action had been taken by the leader, there appeared to be a high level of congruence between how the leader viewed the problem and their perceptions of their personal capacity and sense of urgency

in affecting the solution. Second, high school principals appeared to be far more specific in discussing their views and analyses of strategic problems facing their organizations including appropriate courses of action that should be taken, than they were in talking about the specific strategic action they themselves had taken to affect the solution.

A partial explanation for this appeared to be related to their perceptions and interpretations about (a) internal and external constraints; (b) their personal sense of urgency and commitment in taking on the challenge; (c) the match between their motivations and capacities and the actual task at hand. The size and complexity of their organizations also appeared to be a factor.

Chapter Summary

To summarize this chapter, six urban school leaders were interviewed in search of information about what they consider to be significant learning experiences over the course of their lives. I further inquired as to the reasons these experiences were significant for them and the circumstances involved in the learning. I then asked participants to describe their current strategic situation as leaders in urban school settings. I was particularly interested in learning about the issues they faced and the resources they used in their individual attempts to address these issues. Next, I compared what they actually did to what they said they learned to do and looked for relationships between the two. For the purposes of this exploratory study, I suspended all judgment as to the effectiveness of their learning or the particular strategies and behaviors they described. My focus was on the influence of their prior learning in determining their actual leader behavior.

Because my analysis was placed in a developmental framework, for which there was no precedent in this population, I used a more phenomenological approach to the inquiry. Methodological research suggests that when little is known about a particular phenomenon, it is important to explore it in a relatively open manner in order to isolate relevant variables for future study and analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Semi-structured interviews allowed me the opportunity to collect consistent data while offering my study participants greater freedom and latitude to contribute unanticipated perceptions and attitudes.

The personal narratives were included in this section as background and were presented with the intention of letting the voices of each participants be heard. The detailed descriptions of their individual experiences were also intended to offer further support for the findings, conclusions, and implications of the study.

Content of Leader Learning Experiences

General findings consistently supported by the data suggest that learning experiences described by leaders as particularly influential in shaping their leader behavior are generally relational, political, philosophical, technical, and academic in nature. Relational, political, and philosophical learning experiences were identified more frequently as influential, while academic and technical learning experiences were described less frequently as being of significant influence. Learning experiences of particularly significant influence were often associated with deep emotional and/or psychological factors that had a profound impact on leader. These learning experiences were described as occurring both in isolated situations, events, personal encounters; and as a result of long term exposure to environments, family, friends, peers, teachers, and



work. Findings suggest that when learning experiences were interwoven with emotional and psychological factors the learning became deeply rooted. This finding could explain why leaders, in vivid detail, easily recalled learning experiences of this nature. Academic and technical learning experiences were found to be less often associated with emotional and psychological factors. This may explain why school leaders less frequently described these types of experiences as being particularly influential and appeared to have more difficulty in recalling the details of these experiences.

Context of Leader Learning Experiences

Academic learning was found to be more frequently associated with the formal school context. Technical learning was more frequently associated with the work context. The home and work environments were the most frequent contexts for deep learning experiences associated with political, philosophical, and relational learning content.

Deeply rooted learning experiences that were relational, philosophical, and political in content could frequently be traced to learning experiences occurring early in the life of the leader with the home being the primary context and one or both parents being the primary teachers.

Motivations for Leader Learning Experiences

Motivations for deep learning experiences were often attributed to a particular life challenge of a personal or work related nature and generally presented the leader with some type of challenge that they were highly motivated to overcome. Primary motivations for deep learning experiences appear to be more frequently associated with life circumstances and personal interest rather than for credential or employment

requirement purposes; while technical learning was more frequently associated with meeting employment requirements.

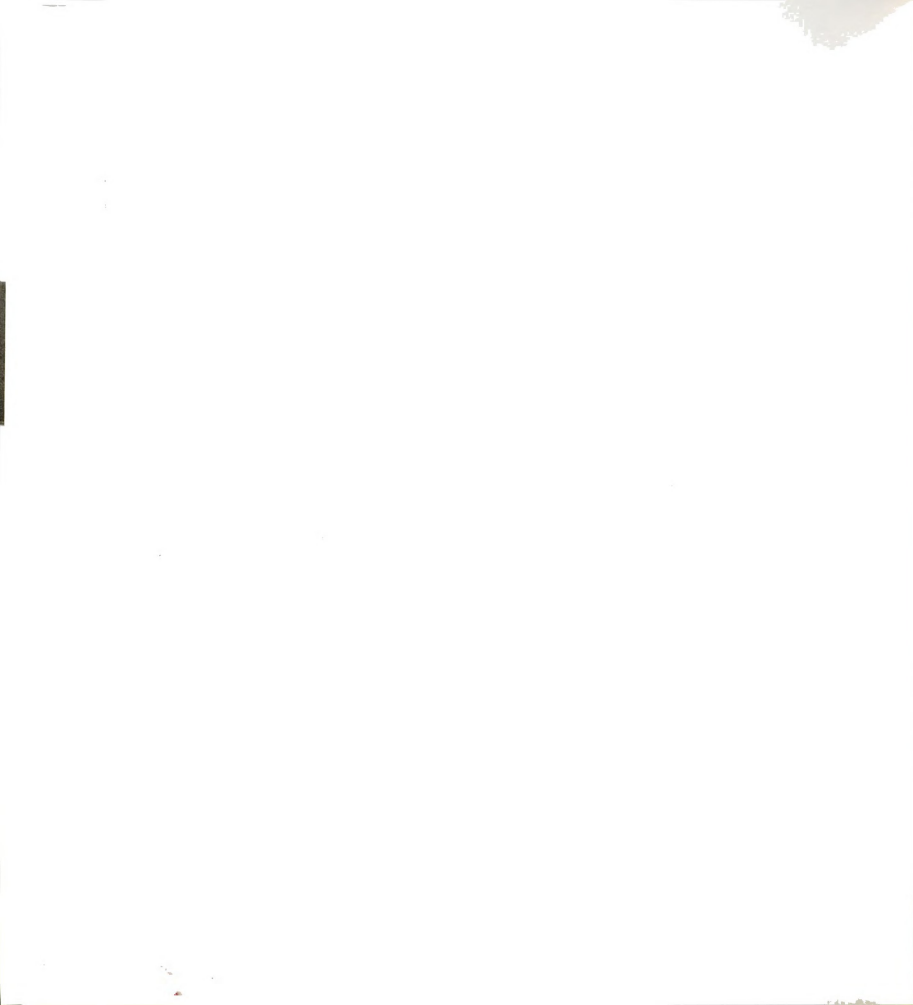
Leader Perceptions and Interpretations of Strategic Problems

Leader perceptions and interpretations of their strategic problems were generally described as being associated with improving results related to meeting student needs, staff needs, resource needs, and internal and external demands.

Leader perceptions and interpretations of strategic problems facing their organizations were generally change related in nature and were of the type requiring the mobilization of large numbers of people toward the accomplishment of either a broadly defined or narrowly defined goal or outcome. Strategic problems were perceived as being either internally defined as a result of self-initiated needs identification; or externally defined as a result of external needs identification.

Strategic problems were generally viewed as either opportunities or threats depending on the circumstances in some cases were viewed as both opportunities and threats. Whether or not a problem was perceived to be an opportunity or a threat appeared to be related to three particular factors: sense of urgency, capacity to resolve, and whether the problem was broadly or narrowly defined.

Strategic problems identified as threats were more often associated with perceptions of high levels of urgency and low capacity to resolve. Strategic problems perceived as opportunities were generally associated with low levels of urgency and high levels of capacity to resolve. When high levels of urgency and high levels of capacity existed, strategic problems were viewed as both opportunities and threats. When low



levels of urgency were coupled with low levels of capacity, problems were viewed neither as threats or opportunities.

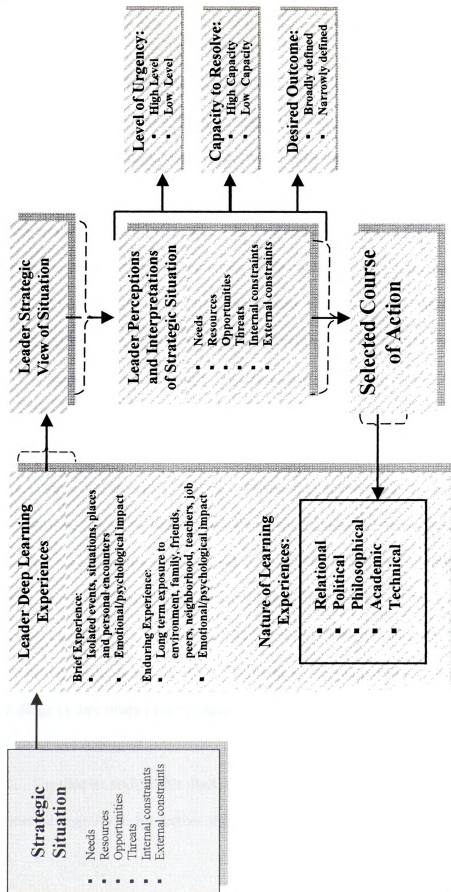
Strategic Courses of Action

When strategic problems were perceived as threats, high levels of urgency and low levels of capacity, selected courses of action were more frequently associated with strategic actions that were relational, philosophical, and/or political in nature. When strategic problems were perceived as opportunities, low levels of urgency and high levels of capacity to resolve, actions taken were more frequently academic and technical in nature. When strategic problems were perceived as both opportunities and threats, high levels of capacity and high levels of urgency, strategic courses of action taken were relational, political, philosophical, academic, and technical in nature. The data suggests that in this case, however, the primary influence in courses of action taken were political and technical in nature. The data further suggests that when strategic problems were perceived as neither threats nor opportunities, low urgency and low capacity, no specific course of action was taken.

In chapter five, general findings and conclusions will be presented.



Theoretical Framework: The Effects of Prior Learning Experiences on Leader Strategic Action



Chapter V

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

My purpose in this dissertation has been to describe and explain the relationship between significant prior learning experiences and school leader strategic behavior. The investigation was divided into three parts. The first part of the inquiry focused on describing the content, contexts, and processes of the influential learning experiences of six urban school leaders. Efforts were taken to capture the nature of the significant experiences identified as well as the contexts and conditions in which these experiences occurred. The second part of the inquiry focused on accurately describing school leader perceptions and interpretations of the strategic challenges facing their respective organizations. Here, the interest was in discovering the kinds of strategic problems school leaders identified and the factors they viewed as contributing to these problems. The third part of the inquiry focused on describing the actual processes used to determine appropriate courses of action and the specific actions taken to address the strategic issues.

The previous chapters presented a description of the problem, a review of the related literature and research, an explanation of the methodology, and a presentation and analysis of the data generated in the study. This chapter begins with a discussion of the general findings as they relate to the research questions guiding the study. The literature is then revisited and discussed as it relates to general findings and the conclusions are presented. The chapter ends with a discussion of the limitations of the study that are used to generate suggestions for further research.

General Findings

Responses to the Research Questions:

Prior to the first round of school leader interviews, a series of exploratory questions were developed to begin the exploration process. In this section, those questions are revisited and responses, suggested by the data, are given.

1. How do school leaders describe learning experiences that have been influential in shaping their strategic practice?

The data suggests that leaders' influential learning experiences fit into five broad categories that are *relational*, *political*, *philosophical*, *technical*, and *academic* in nature. Relational, political, and philosophical learning experiences that were identified as influential were often associated with emotional and/or psychological factors that were connected to the learning experience in some way. Participants often referenced situations of crisis as precursors to these experiences and described the impact of these experiences in shaping their attitudes and perceptions. Vivian learned to be a good listener and developed keen sensitivity to the needs of others as a result of her own serious vision impairment and she takes pride in being able to perceive the needs of others and respond according to those perceptions. Jane learned to navigate conflict and build bridges between differing points of view as a result of the cold war experiences between her parents. She continues to view her self as a bridge-builder and plays a key role in strategic negotiations where she is required to listen to both sides seeking common ground and reconciliation. She also discovered early that she could touch people through her writing and has worked to perfect this skill and use it to her advantage. Dan learned about social injustice and political reform as an eyewitness to the conflicts his family experienced as public servants and political activists and continues to view strategic



issues from this philosophical perspective. Catherine remains conscientious in her efforts to “do things right” and continues to seek approval from others as a result of her efforts. The data suggests strong support for the conclusion that learning experiences associated with emotional and/or psychological factors are more deeply rooted than those that do not and indeed are influential in shaping the strategic practices of these school leaders.

The findings further suggest that this deep learning can occur both in isolated situations, events, and personal encounters; and as a result of long term exposure to environments, family, friends, peers, teachers, and work. This could explain why leaders were able to recall – in vivid detail -- learning of this nature and had more difficulty in remembering other learning experiences. Thus, there is some support for the conclusion that deeply rooted learning experiences are more likely to be influential over time, than those that are not.

Context of Leader Learning Experiences

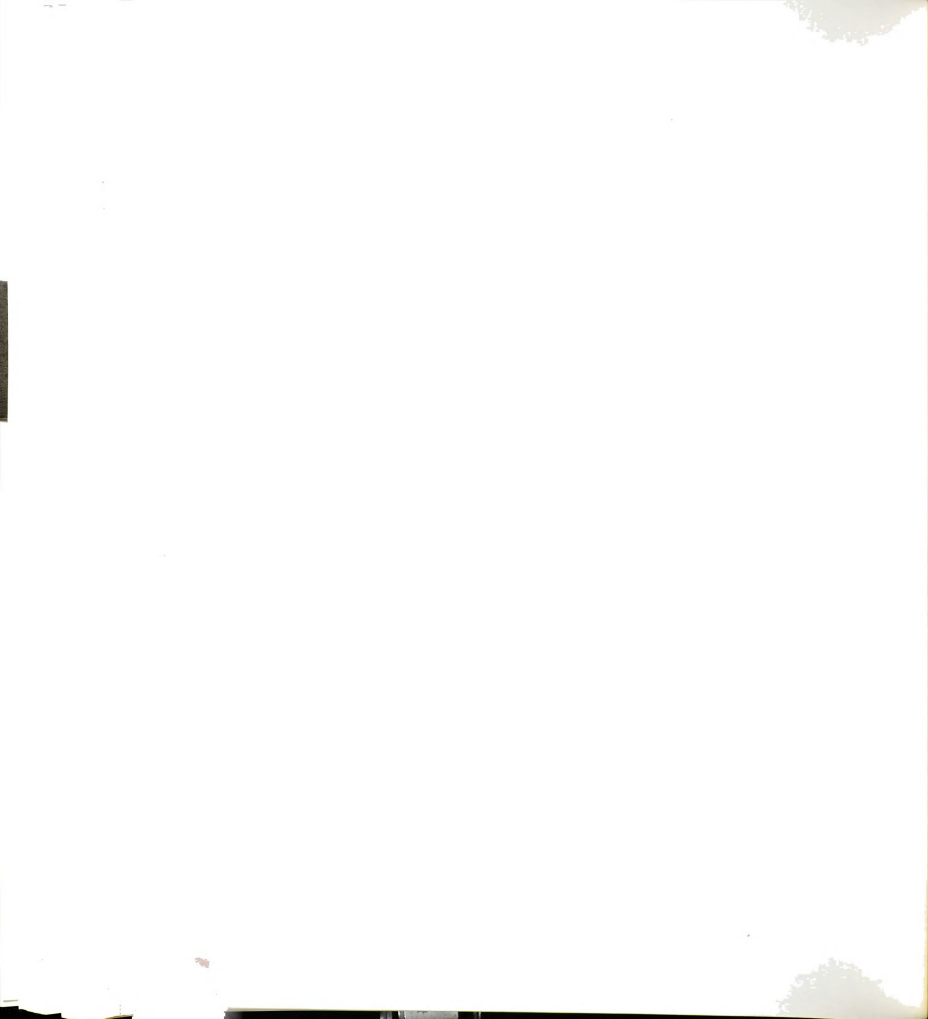
Academic learning was found to be more frequently associated with the formal school context. Technical learning was more frequently associated with the work context. The home and work environments were the most frequent contexts for deep learning associated with political, philosophical, and relational learning content.

Deeply rooted learning experiences that were relational, philosophical, and political in content could frequently be traced to learning occurring early in the life of the leader with the home being the context and one or both parents being the teachers. For example, both Gabriela and Mildred had mothers who were professional teachers. They often referred to their mothers’ early teaching in the home as being a key factor in shaping their independent styles. They entered school with advanced language and



reading skills and were frequently disengaged from the activities of the teachers and other classmates who were attempting to learn what they already knew. Further support for this finding can be found in accounts given by Jane, whose mother was a teacher by profession and whose father she describes as a “natural” teacher. Even though Vivian acknowledges the fact that her parents had limited formal education, she too, describes them as her primary teachers and attributes much of her current philosophy and ideology to their instruction in the home. Thus, there is some support for the conclusion that deep learning from early childhood in the home is reflected in school leader perceptions, attitudes, and interpretations of strategic issues facing their organizations.

Formal schooling was described as the context in which most academic learning occurred. Recollections of academic learning were sparse unless associated with emotional and/or psychological factors that appeared to be of more influence than the subject matter learned. For example, Gabriela describes academic learning in the area of history, geography, and literature as being influential. However, when she describes these experiences, she more often referenced the passion that the teachers demonstrated for the learning as the factor that was most influential in the learning. There was also reference made to the value placed on knowledge within the learning context that appeared to also be a factor in determining the level of learning influence. Likewise, Dan and Jane reference influential learning that takes place in mentoring relationships where they felt valued and supported. The conclusion suggested here is that academic learning that is associated with contexts that are emotionally charged are often deep learning experiences.



Work was the context most frequently identified as the place where technical learning occurred. Participants consistently described work as the place where they learned the skills, methods, and procedures necessary in order to carry out their responsibilities in the workplace. Again, learning associated with emotional and/or psychological factors was frequently referenced as influential in technical deep learning. For example, Gabriela, Dan, Vivian, Jane, and Catherine all described learning the fundamentals of their jobs from mentor type figures with whom they were associated with for long periods of time. These mentor figures in most cases were selected for reasons that again reflected the idiosyncratic values, philosophies, and ideologies of earlier deep philosophical, relational, and political learning experiences. Mentor practices were often emulated and provided the basis for comparing other practices. The conclusion to be drawn from this data suggests that the relational, philosophical, and political nuances underpinning many mentor relationships provide the context for potentially deep learning that will most likely be reflected in subsequent leader behavior.

Motivations for Deep Learning

The data consistently supported the conclusion that the primary motivation for deep learning was often associated with a sense of urgency felt by the participant in facing a particular challenge that they were motivated to overcome. For example, Jane describes her motivation to be “first chair” violinist and the resulting competition that was generated with her peers. Catherine describe the sense of urgency she experienced as she worked to do things right in order to avoid the punitive consequences of failure. Vivian describes a similar motivation in her efforts to navigate the world without sight. Primary motivations for deep learning were also found to be associated with idiosyncratic

perceptions about the complexity of the challenge faced and the self-perceptions of the participant as to their capacity to overcome the challenge presented. For instance, Jane eagerly responded to the challenge for “first chair” as long as her perceptions of her capacity to meet the challenge were high. However, when she did not believe she had the capacity, she was no longer motivated and in fact became frustrated and somewhat despondent. A similar illustration is found in Catherine’s account of her history of excellence in formal schooling. She was highly motivated by her desire to do what was “right” and to reap the praise that she associated with that behavior. However, when peers no longer associated high status with good grades, her sense of urgency to achieve them, likewise diminished. Similar illustrations can be found throughout the leader portraits that suggest a relationship between perceived sense of urgency and capacity as motivators for deep learning. Academic and technical learning also appear to be motivated by sense of urgency and perceived capacity as it relates to meeting credential and/or employment requirements.

2. How do these learning experiences explain the way that school leaders view and resolve strategic problems in their organizations?

Results from the interviews with school leaders suggests that certain learning experiences were deeply rooted and closely associated with how they perceived themselves, how they perceived others, how they perceived the world, and their strategic situations. As Weick (1983) points out, leader’s cognitive structure is a highly personalized interpretation of reality, not necessarily aligning with objective conditions. He further suggests that one’s cognitive structure can become self-fulfilling and self-reinforcing and in some cases, elements of leaders’ cognitive structures are so well established and unshakable that contrary data are overlooked or, if noticed, severely



discounted. Examples of these highly personalized interpretations of reality can be found in Gabriela's efforts to establish a world language school, in Dan's views about reform, in Mildred's quest to educate the poor, in Catherine's strategies for addressing curriculum accountability, in Jane's implementation of a theoretical instructional model, and in Vivian's efforts to influence her staff to bring about desired change. All accounts of these situations reflect the obvious biases and blinders of the respective leaders in this study. There is also evidence to support the conclusion that these biases and blinders have been influenced by deeply rooted prior learning. Leader perceptions and interpretations about organizational needs, resources, opportunities, threats, as well as internal and external constraints varied across the leaders and were also highly idiosyncratic and traceable to prior deep learning that was relational, political, philosophical, technical or academic in nature.

When strategic problems were perceived as threats -- high levels of urgency and low levels of capacity -- selected courses of action were more frequently associated with strategic actions that were relational, philosophical, and/or political in nature. When strategic problems were perceived to be opportunities -- low levels of urgency and high levels of capacity to resolve -- actions taken were more frequently academic and technical in nature. When strategic problems were perceived as both opportunities and threats -- high levels of capacity and high levels of urgency -- strategic courses of action taken were relational, political, philosophical, academic, and technical in nature. The data suggests that in this case, however, the primary influences in selecting courses of action were political and technical in nature. When strategic problems were perceived as

neither threats nor opportunities -- low urgency and low capacity -- the leader appeared to take no specific course of action.

3. What patterns emerge across these learning experiences that inform our thinking about characteristics of significantly influential learning experiences?

The data collected from school leaders suggests that certain characteristics distinguished influential learning from other kinds of learning experiences. First, were experiences where long term exposure to environments, people, job, family, friends, teachers, and or peers resulted in an emotional and/or psychological connection being made; second, were isolated events, situations, places, and/or personal encounters in which an emotional and/or psychological connection was made; and third, were the consistencies in reports suggesting that deep learning is often precipitated by a sense of urgency and/or self-perceptions of adequate capacity. The data suggests that these experiences were usually highly personalized and varied across the leaders.

4. What is the range and nature of variation among the learning experiences of school leaders?

Leader learning experiences covered a wide spectrum of content in remarkably different contexts. From a contextual perspective, learning experiences were markedly varied along racial, cultural, class, and economic lines and ranged, in nature and context, from those reserved exclusively for children of the privileged, to those reserved exclusively for children of the underprivileged.

From a content perspective, however, the range is less broad. Interestingly, the learning content of all participants, while different in the specific details of the experience, could be categorized as being relational, philosophical, political, academic, or technical in substance. Deep learning experiences were generally clustered into



relational, philosophical, and political categories for all participants. The range and variation of motivation for deep learning experiences were consistently related to emotional and/or psychological factors connected to the actual learning experience and personally impacted the leader in some way.

Leader perceptions and interpretations of their strategic problems were generally described as being associated with improving results related to meeting student needs, staff needs, resource needs, and internal and external demands. These perceptions and interpretations of strategic problems were generally change related in nature and were of the type requiring the mobilization of large numbers of people toward the accomplishment of either a broadly or narrowly defined goal or outcome. Different levels of motivation and types of strategic action were associated with perceptions and interpretations of strategic problems that were broadly versus narrowly defined. Problems perceived as being narrowly defined internally generally were consistent in prompting immediate and direct strategic action. Problems perceived as being broadly defined were generally externally imposed and prompted less immediate and direct intervention.

Strategic problems were generally viewed as either opportunities or threats depending on the circumstances, and in some cases were viewed as both opportunities and threats. Whether or not a problem was perceived to be an opportunity or a threat appeared to be related to three particular factors: 1) leader perceptions about the level or degree of urgency; 2) leader perceptions about their capacity to resolve the problem; and 3) leader perceptions about the problem being broad or narrow.

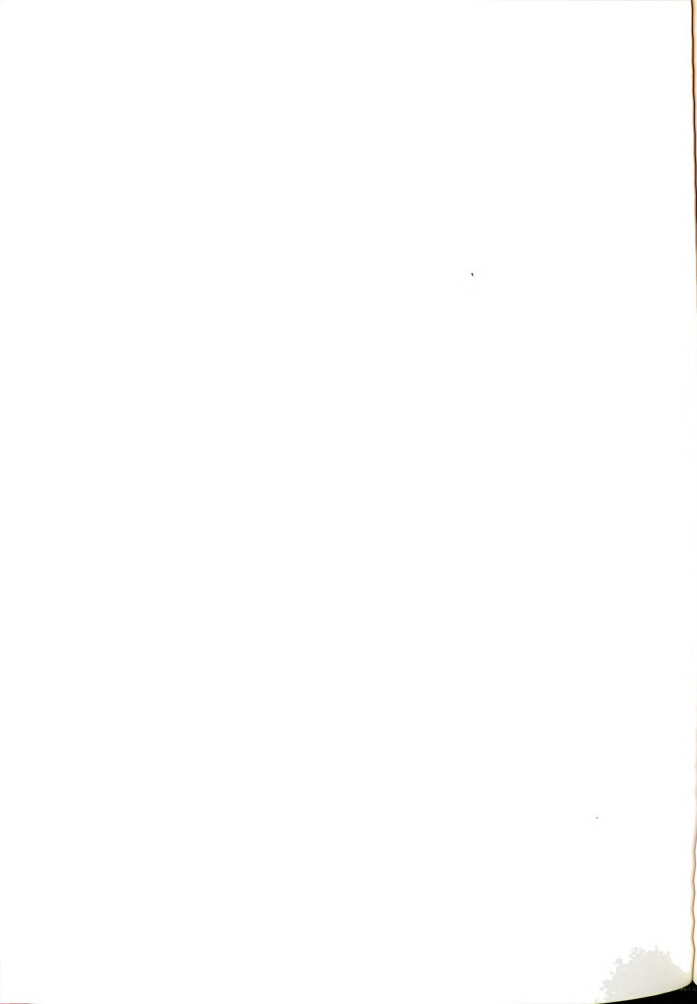
Strategic problems identified as threats were more often associated with perceptions of high levels of urgency and low capacity to resolve. Strategic problems

perceived as opportunities were generally associated with low levels of urgency and high levels of capacity to resolve. When high levels of urgency and high levels of capacity existed, strategic problems were viewed as both opportunities and threats. When low levels of urgency were coupled with low levels of capacity, problems were viewed neither as opportunities nor as threats.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the study was to explore the learning experiences of urban school leaders in search of connections between learning described as influential and leader strategic behavior. School leader learning experiences, their perspectives and interpretations of the strategic problems facing their organizations, and the strategic courses of action they have chosen to take in addressing these problems have been analyzed in terms of the relationships that exist between them. Findings support the conclusion that the deep prior learning of school leaders consistently served as a filter for their perceptions and interpretations of their strategic problems, factors contributing to the problems, and the subsequent courses of action they chose to take in addressing these problems.

Deeply rooted prior learning experiences were consistently reflected in leader perceptions and interpretations of strategic problems facing their organizations. These perceptions and interpretations significantly influenced the way that leaders analyzed and interpreted information related to the problem, and determined subsequent courses of action to be taken. Findings also support the conclusion that deeply rooted learning experiences are generally not displaced and will generally prevail and be relied upon in the absence of competing information in problem solving. It is therefore logical to conclude, that in the absence of deeply rooted academic and technical learning experience, leaders will generally rely on deeply rooted relational, political, and philosophical learning to inform their strategic decision making practices. If the experiences are varied, it is logical to expect that perceptions and interpretations as well as solutions choices will differ.



Revisiting the literature

Although the past ten years have witnessed an explosion of research on the relationships between executive background characteristics and organizational outcomes, the vast majority of this research has pursued the general logic that observable experiences of executives shape their cognitions and values and hence are reflected in their strategic choices (Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996). A smaller stream of research has posited reverse causality – that certain strategic conditions give rise to particular types of executive characteristics. A third research focus has been essentially a combination of the other two, pursuing the idea that different strategic conditions favor different types of executive qualities and that the organization will perform well to the extent that executives have those characteristics.

Various executive experiences have been examined for their associations with organizational strategy. However, three sets of executive background characteristics account for the vast majority of inquiries: executive tenure, work experience, and formal education. Results that focus on executive work experience and formal education are closely associated with the focus of this study, however this study extends this literature by directing its focus toward the actual nature of the learning experience.

Of the types of observed associations found in the literature, two broadly support the findings and conclusions of this study. The first association is the link to executive psychological constructs and perceptions. However, because most studies of executive experiences have treated psychological processes as a “black box,” there is relatively little to report here. Second, are the links between executive experience background and organizational strategy.

The literature supports a correspondence between primary work experience, psychological tendencies, and strategic choices through at least three mechanisms. First, individuals may be drawn to functional areas that suit their personalities or aptitudes (e.g., Schein, 1968). Second, with the passage of time and the accumulation of successes in a primary work area, an individual becomes more and more socialized and inculcated with the mode of thinking and acting that is typical for that professional area (Blau and McKinley, 1979; Mortimer and Lorence, 1979). And third, observed associations suggest that even when individuals are operating outside of their primary work area, they still gravitate toward perceiving problems in familiar terms, generating and preferring familiar solutions (March and Simon, 1958). In fact, it was from a belief in the orienting and filtering effects of primary work experiences that Dearborn and Simon (1958) did their seminal study that ultimately led to the widespread interest in the effects of executive backgrounds on decision making.

Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996) posit that primary work experience has its greatest effect on interpretation and choice when the manager 1) faces an abundance of complex, ambiguous information and 2) has to deal with the information under urgency or other forms of pressure. They suggest that when these conditions exist, executives can be expected to scan, selectively perceive, and interpret strategic stimuli in line with their primary work experiences. Findings in this study suggest that perceptions and interpretations extend well beyond primary work experiences and can actually be traced to deep learning experiences of early childhood that were influenced by emotional and/or psychological factors. Evidence collected in this study further suggests that these deep learning experiences may play an even more significant role in influencing the kinds of

information sought and the resources utilized in analyzing strategic school problems. I argue that this explanation is plausible given the highly personal nature of learning and the fact that deep learning does not appear to be easily displaced.

Inquiries into the effects of executive primary work experience on organizational strategy have centered on two classes of strategy – competitive strategy and diversification strategy. In each of these streams, some recurring patterns emerge. Miles and Snow (1978) and Porter (1980) have been instrumental in identifying some major classes of strategic typology that have been applied in research on executive work experience background and business strategy. Findings suggest that executives with certain work experience backgrounds do tend to pursue strategies that align with their primary work experiences (e.g., Thomas, Litschert and Ramaswamy, 1991; Chaganti and Samharaya, 1987; Gupta and Govindarajan, 1984; Barbosa, 1985).

Again, these findings offer support for the findings of this study suggesting that deep learning experiences outside of the work environment associated with relationships, politics, and philosophical underpinnings play an equally significant role in guiding the strategic choices made by school leaders when the vast majority of the problems faced are relational, philosophical, and/or political in nature rather than technical or academic.

A substantial literature in developmental psychology and higher education exists regarding the effects of education on individual values and cognition, as well as on the types of individuals who self-select themselves into certain educational experiences (e.g., Smart and Pascarella, 1986; Byrne, 1984; Cherrington, Condie, and England, 1979; Schein, 1968; Altmeyer, 1966). However, very little research has examined associations specifically between education and executive psychological constructs. Wally and Baum

(1994) found a very strong correlation between the amount of formal education and a measure of cognitive complexity, or the ability to discern patterns and distinguish among objects. Hitt and Tyler (1991) found a weaker but still positive link, thus suggesting a relationship between formal education and cognitive complexity. The effects of executive education levels on organizational innovation, change, and growth are widely documented (Becker, 1970a; Becker, 1970b; Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971; Kimberly and Evanisko, 1981; Bantel and Jackson, 1989; Barbosa, 1985; Thomas, Litschert, and Ramaswamy, 1991; Norburn and Birley, 1988; and Wiersema and Bantel, 1992). However, still absent from the literature are significant findings that suggest the specific nature of the learning experiences from this context. Findings in this study suggest that the effects of learning that takes place outside the boundaries of formal schooling offer plausible explanations for leader behavior in certain contexts and are worthy of further exploration.

In summary, a substantial literature exists that appears to support the direction of the theory being advanced in this study. General support in the literature as well as substantial empirical evidence supporting the relationship between leader background experiences and their subsequent strategic actions is robust.

Distinct similarities between the findings in these studies and the present study suggest that the theory advanced in this study is plausible. Specifically, the theory advanced in this study suggests that standing between the “objective” strategic situation and the actual strategic choices is the repertoire of school leader deep prior learning experiences. These learning experiences contains leader biases, blinders, egos, and aptitudes that serve as filters for their perceptions and interpretations of their strategic

problems as well as the strategic options available to them. I contend that it is these human factors that greatly affect what happens in schools and school districts.

Limitations of the Study

In a study of this type, numerous questions can be posed; and if I did not raise them, readers certainly would – and appropriately so. Of the many issues that have given me pause, I restrict myself here to a discussion of two principal topics.

Representativeness of Findings

According to Howard Gardner (1995, p.295), “...it is a point of logic that, given any finite number of examples, one can find an infinite number of generalizations that exist across them. It is also a point of logic that any generalization may be undone by the first counter example given.” I am aware of some of the sample biases – for example, toward ease of access and my own perceptions about what constitutes a compelling story – but no doubt, unaware of others. I recognize that each of the school leaders in this study operated in a limited set of contexts and that other leaders, operating in other contexts, might well differ in unpredictable ways. I fully expect that studies of other school leaders will undermine certain generalizations and give rise to others.

Accuracy of Recalled Learning Experiences

Finally, remembering is highly subject to reduction by a number of factors including interfering activities and the passage of time (Gagné, 1970). All kinds of remembering are not the same. Another limitation of this study is therefore concerned with the process of recall and the distinctive differences in the types and accuracy of remembered learning experiences. In undertaking a similar project of this nature,

significantly more time should be focused on exploring the learning experiences in a more in depth fashion with more specific questions developed to guide the inquiry process. As an exploratory study, hopefully the data and findings will be helpful in guiding this process.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As a result of this study, I am convinced that we need to better understand how school leaders think about their strategic environments; how they see themselves as affecting those environments; and finally, how idiosyncratic perceptions and interpretations interact with strategic environments to produce outcomes. This is an important area of study that is worthy of very focused and long-term attention.

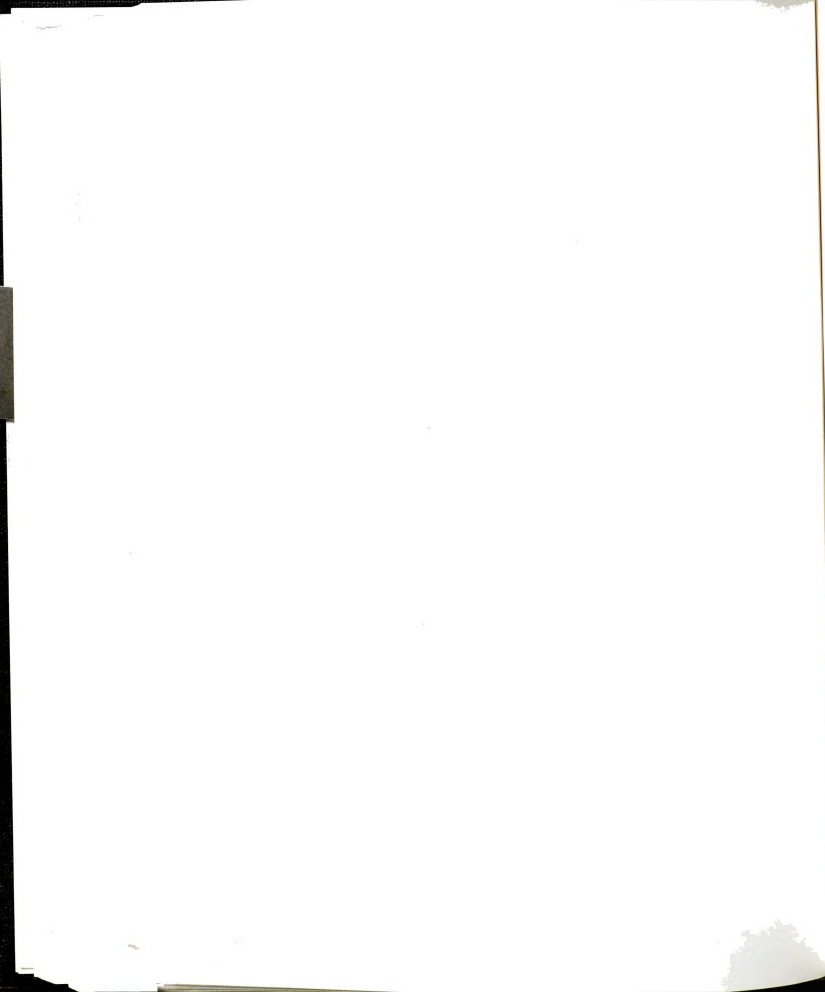
A clear focus on the particular determinants of school leader behavior – be it effective or ineffective – offers us an opportunity to understand *why* certain courses of action are taken and not others; why certain information is selected and other information ignored; and finally, why some leaders are successful in influencing others toward desired results and quite frankly, others are not. It appears that at least some of these answers can be explained by directing our research efforts toward the relationship between inputs and outputs. Evidence produced in this study certainly suggests that the two cannot be separated. Theories about why schools perform the way that they do must by necessity include the school leaders' deep learning experiences as part of any explanatory theory.

In the business management literature, the past ten years have seen a steady accumulation of evidence that the psychological and background characteristics of senior managers affect the choices they make, or at least that executive and organizational

characteristics co-vary. However, educational research in this area is thin. Future research should continue to investigate the effects of individual differences in school leader cognition on strategic views and subsequent strategic action. Further, efforts must continue to open the “black box” to better understand the role that, emotional and psychological factors play in explaining school leader behavior.

I hope that this exploratory study will spark further research interest in this critical and extremely complex pursuit. In sum, we know a great deal about *what* school leader behavior looks like; we know far too little about the reasons *why* it looks the way that it does. I contend that we cannot afford to speculate or rely on our own idiosyncratic perceptions any longer. We need further empirical study to guide our efforts in adequately preparing *individuals* to become the future leaders of our schools. I suggest that there is no one size fits all curriculum that will adequately address the very complex challenge of school leader preparation. These findings suggest that a very wholistic and highly personalized approach that addresses relational, philosophical, political, as well as academic and technical competence must be considered. Only then will we be able to increase our confidence in our abilities to adequately prepare individuals to lead our schools.

APPENDICES



APPENDIX A

APPLICATION FOR INITIAL REVIEW (and 5 yr. renewal)

APPROVAL OF A PROJECT INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS)
David E. Wright, Ph.D., Chair, Ashir Kumar, MD, Interim Chair
246 Administration Building, Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI 48824-1046
PHONE (517) 355-2180 FAX (517) 353-2976
E-Mail - UCRIHS@msu.edu
WEB SITE - <http://www.msu.edu/user/ucrihs/>

Office Hours: Mon.-Fri. (8:00 A.M.-Noon & 1:00-5:00 P.M.)

DIRECTIONS: Please complete the questions on this application using the instructions and definitions found on the attached sheets. If not attached, these materials are available at http://www.msu.edu/user/ucrihs/ucrihs_instruction_form.htm.

REQUIRED

1. <u>Responsible Project Investigator:</u> (MSU Faculty or staff supervisor)	
Name:	Dr. Phillip A. Cusick
Social Security #:	
Department:	Educational Administration
College:	Education
Mailing Address:	421 Erickson Hall
Phone:	517-355-4539
Fax:	517-353-6393
Email:	pacusick@msu.edu
I accept responsibility for conducting the proposed research in accordance with the protections of human subjects as specified by UCRIHS, including the supervision of faculty and student co-investigators.	
SIGN HERE: _____	
Note: Without signature, application can <u>not</u> be processed	

IF APPLICABLE

2. <u>Secondary Investigator:</u> (**Students <u>Must</u> Provide Student ID#**)	
Name:	Cheryl Lynn King
Student ID#: or SS#	A06500161
Department:	Educational Administration
College:	Education
Mailing Address:	915 East Court Street #105
Phone:	(810) 232-1834
Fax:	(810) 232-1834
Email:	

Additional Investigator Information

3. Name:	_____
Student ID#: or SS#	_____
4. Name:	_____
Student ID#: or SS#	_____
5. Name:	_____
Student ID#: or SS#	_____

UCRIHS Correspondence: Copies of correspondence will be sent to the primary and secondary investigators only. If you would like additional investigators to receive correspondence, please provide further address information on a separate page.

6. Title of Project: Leading Forward, Learning Backward: A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Learning Experiences of School Leaders

7. a. Have you ever received Preliminary Approval for this project? No ☐ Yes ☐
 b. Is this application a Five-Year renewal? No ☐ Yes ☐
 c. Do you have any related projects that were approved by UCRIHS? No ☐ Yes ☐

If yes, list IRB numbers

8. Funding (if any) _____
 (if applicable, MSU Contracts and Grants app. and / or acct. #) _____

9. Has this protocol been submitted to the FDA or are there plans to submit it to the FDA?
 No ☒ Yes ☐

If yes, is there an IND #? No ☐ Yes ☐ IND # _____

10. Does this project involve the use of Materials of Human Origin (e.g., human blood or tissue)?
 No ☒ Yes ☐

11. When would you prefer to begin data collection? _____ December, 2000
 Please remember you may not begin data collection without UCRIHS approval.

12. Category (Circle a, b, or c below and then specify category for a. and b. See instructions pp. 4-7)

- a. This proposal is submitted as EXEMPT from full review.
 Specify category or categories: _____
 b. This proposal is submitted for EXPEDITED review (Note: Includes all
 audio/videotaped protocols).
 Specify category or categories: _____
 c. This proposal is submitted for FULL sub-committee review. _____

13. Is this a Public Health Service funded, full review, multi-site project for which MSU is the lead
 institution? No ☒ Yes ☐
 If yes, do the other sites have a Multiple Project Assurance IRB that will also review this project?
☐ No. Please contact the UCRIHS office for further information about meeting the PHS/NIH/OPRR
 regulations. ☐ Yes. Please supply a copy of that approval letter when obtained.

14. Project Description (Abstract): Please limit your response to 200 words.

The primary aim of this study is to explore the learning experiences of school leaders. Of particular interest, to the researcher, are the context, content, processes, and outcomes of learning experiences school leaders have had and the degree to which these factors have influenced and shaped their strategic behavior. The premise is that these factors will frame each leader's learning experiences differently and thus explain variations in the nature and degree of their influence on the actual behavior of the leader. It is further proposed, that pinpointing these nuances in the different learning experiences of school leaders will help to explain how and why they characterize and resolve strategic issues in the manner in which they do. I will then look for patterns that emerge across the multiple learning experiences and analyze and report the findings.

- 15a. Procedures: Please describe all procedures you will use in collecting data from human subjects. If using pre-existing data, please describe your analyses and use of information. Investigators should carefully consult the instructions to correctly complete this question.

The process of the in-depth phenomenological interview to be used in this study will follow closely the methodology developed by Seidman (1983) and Sullivan (1982). The process can be described generally as open but focused. It is expected that each participant will be interviewed two times (with an option to schedule a third interview, if needed). Each interview will be approximately two hours in length. All interviews will be audio-taped (using a small inconspicuous tape recorder without a microphone). Interviews will be spaced at least 2 days apart to allow time for reflection, and if possible, no longer than a week apart. Interviews will be held in a place mutually agreeable to participant and interviewer.

Prior to the first visit, telephone contact will be made with each subject to schedule an initial appointment to discuss the study. Written confirmation of the agreed upon date and time of the preliminary visit. During the preliminary visit, the purpose and nature of the research will be explained, the prospective participant will be asked to fill out a brief information form, and make a decision about whether he or she is willing to be interviewed. If so, dates are set for the next two meetings.

At the first of these, participant and interviewer discuss the written consent form and both sign. This process will allow for any final uncertainties to be resolved. Each interview will open with a focus question from the interviewer. After the interview has begun, the researcher will refrain from asking questions, other than for purposes of clarification or to move the interview to another level.

Interviews will be transcribed verbatim resulting in manuscripts of approximately 60 to 90 single-spaced pages for each participant. Because of the volume of this work, it is possible that some compromise with the totally verbatim transcript might be made: for example, abbreviating interviewer statements (Rubin, 1979) and omitting management details that are unrelated or unimportant to the focus of the interview.

- 15b. Does your investigation involve incomplete disclosure of the research purpose or deception of subjects? ☒ No ☐ Yes

If yes, be sure to include copies of your debriefing procedures with the application. See the UCRIHS Instructions pg. 9 for further instructions.

- 16a. Subject Population: Describe your subject population. (e.g., high school athletes, women over 50 w/breast cancer, small business owners)

The preliminary plan for this study calls for a minimal sample size of eight (8) school leaders engaged in strategic reform initiatives in their school district. Selection of participants will ensure inclusion of persons with characteristics that seem important in the context of this study.

- 16b. The study population may include (check all categories where subjects may be included by design or incidentally):

Minors	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pregnant Women	<input type="checkbox"/>
Women of Childbearing Age	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Institutionalized Persons	<input type="checkbox"/> (<—Note: Includes prisoners)
Students	<input type="checkbox"/>
Low Income Persons	<input type="checkbox"/>
Minorities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Incompetent Persons (or those with diminished capacity)	<input type="checkbox"/>

- 16c. Expected number of subjects (including controls) 8

- 16d. How will the subjects be recruited? (Attach appropriate number of copies of recruiting advertisement, if any. See table 4 of UCRIHS instructions)

Using the purposeful sampling method (Bogdan and Biklin, 1982; Patton, 1989), eight (8) school leaders will be invited to participate in the study. Selection of participants will be based on the following criteria designed to fit the purpose of the study.

1. Participant currently holds or is recently retired from a strategic leadership position in a school or school district that is currently engaged in some form of strategic school reform.
2. Participant is recognized for his or her leadership in the successful accomplishment of at least one complex reform initiative.
3. Subjects will be personally contacted by telephone and invited to meet to discuss the proposed study and to consider participation.

- 16e. Are you associated with the subjects (e.g., they are your students, employees)? ☐ No ☒ Yes

If yes, please explain the nature of the association and what measures you are taking to protect subjects' rights, including safeguards against any coercion.

The researcher is acquainted with each of the invited participants based on working relationships established over the course of time that we worked together in the same school district. However, the researcher no longer works in the school districts of any of the participants and invites participation strictly on a voluntary basis.

- 16f. If someone will receive payment for recruiting the subjects please explain the amount of payment, who pays it and who receives it. NA

- 16g. Will the research subjects be compensated? ☒ No ☐ Yes.

If yes, provide details concerning payment, including the amount and schedule of payments and any conditions. In addition, this information must also be explained in the consent form. (See Instructions p. 10)

- 16h. Will the subjects incur additional financial costs as a result of their participation in this study?
[X] No [] Yes. If yes, please also include an explanation in the consent form.
- 16i. Will this research be conducted with subjects who reside in another country, or who reside in the U.S. but in a cultural/ethnic context different from traditional U.S. society/culture? Note: This may include ethnic groups/sub-cultures/ and other non-mainstream minorities, and would include non-English language speakers. [X] No [] Yes.
- (1) If yes, will there be any corresponding complications in your ability to minimize risks to subjects, maintain their confidentiality and/or assure their right to voluntary informed consent as individuals? [] No [] Yes.
- (2) If your answer to i-1 is yes, what are these complications and how will you resolve them?
17. How will the subjects' privacy be protected? (See Instructions pp. 10-11.)
Safeguards and procedures to ensure confidentiality in this study include:
- Changing of names and masking of school and district names and locations
 - Checking with each participant to make certain that each is comfortable with the alterations and they adequately accomplish the goal
 - No conversation with anyone outside of the study about the participants involvement in the study will occur
 - Interview transcripts and audio tapes will be securely stored and shared with no one outside of the study.
18. Risks and Benefits for subjects: (See Instructions p. 11.)
- Given the conditions of the participation agreement form, the participants may discontinue the taping of their interview at any time as well as participation in the study without penalty or risk of any kind.
- Potential benefits for individual participants could include the opportunity to be reflective about their experiences as they relate to their current practice as educational leaders. The literature on educational leadership will benefit from this study based on the anticipated findings and their potential implications for the selection, training, and preparation of future school leaders.
19. Consent Procedures (See Instructions pp. 12-16.)

Upon receipt of UCHRIS approval, Prior to the first visit, contact will be made by phone to set up an appointment to meet with prospective participants to discuss the purpose of the study. Following agreement to meet, a letter confirming the agreed upon date and time of the preliminary interview will be mailed. During this preliminary visit, the purpose and nature of the research study will be explained in detail. Expectations for participation will be outlined and time reserved for questions and answers. At the conclusion of the meeting, the prospective participant will be asked to consider participating. If the prospective participant agrees, a time and date for a follow up meeting will be scheduled to answer additional questions and to explain the consent to participate process.

At the next scheduled meeting, the researcher will answer any questions from the previous meeting and explain the written consent form process. This process will allow for any final uncertainties to be resolved. If, at that time, the prospective participant expresses willingness to participate, the consent form will be signed and subsequent interviews scheduled. The participant will be asked to prepare a taped autobiographical account before the first interview session using a prepared sheet of questions as a guide.

The researcher will provide the audio-tape and the questions. The tapes will be transcribed prior to the first interview and used as a starting point for the interviews.

CHECKLIST: Check off that you have included each of these items. If not applicable, state N/A:

- ☒ [X] Completed and signed application
- ☒ [X] The correct number of copies of the application and instruments (e.g., surveys, interview questions, questionnaires, etc.) according to the category of review (See instructions, table 4)
- ☒ [X] Consent form (or script for verbal consent), if applicable
- ☐ [NA] Advertisement, if applicable
- ☒ [X] One complete copy of the methods chapter of the research proposal (if available)

**MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY**

February 1, 2001

TO: Philip A. CUSICK
418 Erickson Hall

RE: IRB # 00-800 CATEGORY: 2-F EXPEDITED

TITLE: LEADING FORWARD, LEARNING BACKWARD: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY
INTO THE LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL LEADERS

ANNUAL APPROVAL DATE: January 4, 2001
REVISION REQUESTED: January 12, 2001
REVISION APPROVAL DATE: February 1, 2001

The University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects' (UCRIHS) review of this project is complete and I am pleased to advise that the rights and welfare of the human subjects appear to be adequately protected and methods to obtain informed consent are appropriate. Therefore, the UCRIHS APPROVED THIS PROJECT'S REVISION.

This letter approves the revised consent form. Thank you for attending to this matter at UCRIHS request.

RENEWALS: UCRIHS approval is valid for one calendar year, beginning with the approval date shown above. Projects continuing beyond one year must be renewed with the green renewal form. A maximum of four such expedited renewal are possible. Investigators wishing to continue a project beyond that time need to submit it again for a complete review.

REVISIONS: UCRIHS must review any changes in procedures involving human subjects, prior to initiation of the change. If this is done at the time of renewal, please use the green renewal form. To revise an approved protocol at any other time during the year, send your written request to the UCRIHS Chair, requesting revised approval and referencing the project's IRB# and title. Include in your request a description of the change and any revised instruments, consent forms or advertisements that are applicable.

PROBLEMS/CHANGES: Should either of the following arise during the course of the work, notify UCRIHS promptly: 1) problems (unexpected side effects, complaints, etc.) involving human subjects or 2) changes in the research environment or new information indicating greater risk to the human subjects than existed when the protocol was previously reviewed and approved.

If we can be of further assistance, please contact us at 517 355-2180 or via email: UCRIHS@pilot.msu.edu.

Sincerely,

Ashir Kumar, M.D.
Interim Chair, UCRIHS

AK: bd

cc: Cheryl Lynn King
915 East Court St. #105
Flint, MI 48903

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APPENDIX C

PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM

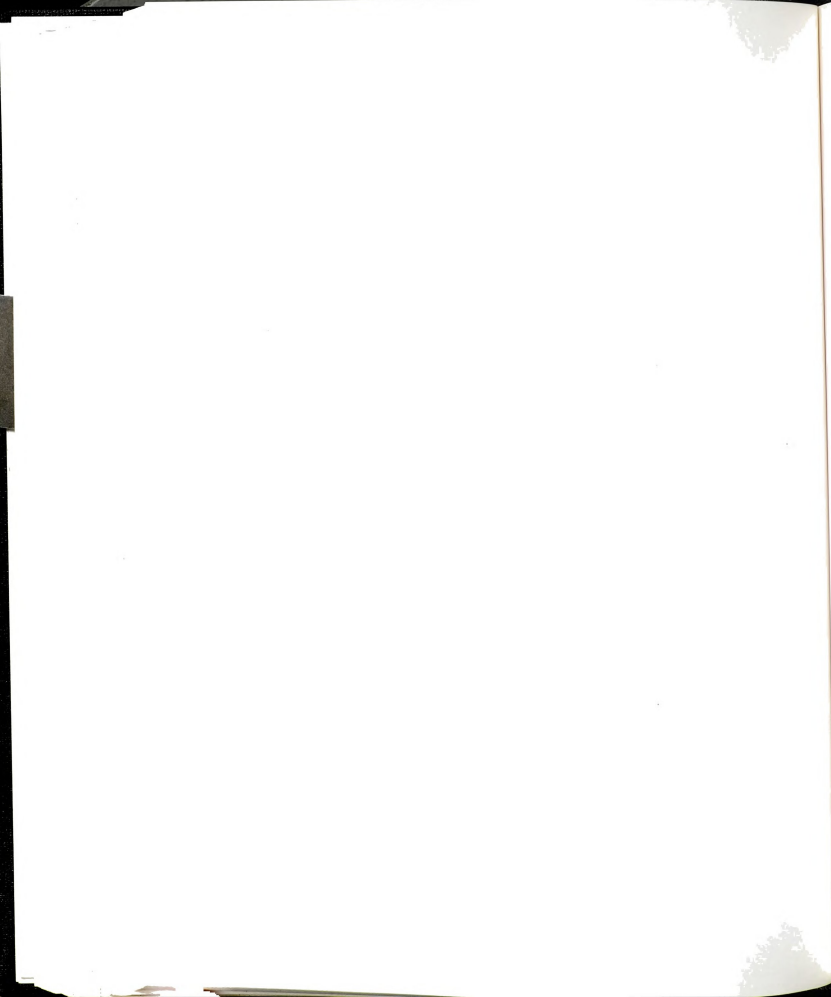
By signing this participation consent form, you agree:

- To participate in the research project entitled “Leading Forward. Learning Backward: A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Learning Experiences of School Leaders” conducted by doctoral candidate, Cheryl L. King, Michigan State University.
- To participate in three (3) two-hour interviews, over a one-month period of time (includes audiotaped autobiographical narrative). You will be asked to reflect on your lifelong learning experiences and contemplate how these experiences have influenced your practice as a school leader.
- To have your interviews audiotape recorded and that you have the right not answer any particular questions and to ask that the taping be stopped at any time during the interviews.
- That you have been informed that all data collected during these interviews will be kept confidential and that confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law.
- That your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. While it is expected that you will be involved for the duration of the study, you may choose to withdraw from this study at any time without any penalty or loss of benefit.
- That you have been informed that should you have any concerns or complaints regarding your participation in this study you may direct them to Dr. David Wright, Interim Chair, UCRIHS, 246 Administration Building, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824, (517) 355-2180.

Signature

Date

Cheryl L. King
915 East Court Street105
Flint, Michigan 48503
810.232.1834



Participant Confirmation Letter

Dear _____ :

Please accept my sincere appreciation for your commitment to participate in my research study. This study will complete the requirements of my doctoral degree in Educational Administration at Michigan State University. I admire and respect you as a school leader and am delighted to have this unique opportunity to learn about your lifelong learning experiences.

As the field of educational leadership continues to change, there is increasing interest in how to better support current and future leaders' in their preparation efforts to meet the many new and unique challenges they face in leading their schools and school districts. My research study proposes that much can be learned about how best to provide support by examining the learning experiences of current school leaders and connecting those experiences to their actual leadership practices. I am interested in learning about your personal learning experiences and how you feel they have influenced actions you have taken to lead reform efforts.

I will write a story with the information that you provide through individual interviews over the course of the next few months. You will have an opportunity to review, clarify, and expand your story and interview transcripts. When the final draft of the dissertation is written, specific measures will be taken to ensure your complete confidentiality.

Just to clarify the expectations for your participation in this study, here is what I know at this point about the details of the upcoming experience:

- The time commitment will be approximately 10-12 hours over the course of one month. Most of this time will be spent at your home or office.
- You are being asked to prepare an audio-taped autobiography prior to beginning the interviews. The primary focus will be to recount your lifelong learning experiences and a set of questions to guide your spoken narrative will be provided. A blank cassette and the question guide are included in these materials.
- I anticipate that there will be no more than three (4) two hour interviews following a preliminary meeting to explain the purpose of the study and get your written consent to participate.

Feel free to contact me for any reason at (810) 232-1834, 915 East Court St. #105, e-mail cking1950@aol If you should need to contact my dissertation chairperson, his name is Dr. Phillip Cusick, Department of Educational Administration, 419 Erickson Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan 48824.

Sincerely,

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

Autobiographical Audiotape Recording

Purpose:

- A. To establish a context and a starting point for the series of interviews over the next month by providing you with an opportunity to share in your own words an audiotaped narrative account of your life experiences with a particular focus on learning events.
- B. To reduce any initial anxiety you may have by providing you with an opportunity to privately reflect on your life experiences and create your own audiotape narrative without the researcher being present in your own unique format using the guidelines provided by the researcher to assist you in constructing your story.
- C. Given the shortness of our time together, this audiotaped narrative will be used by the researcher to develop focused follow-up questions and probes that will cue in to what you have shared on the tape and hopefully serve as an icebreaker for the face to face interviews that will follow.

Researcher's Role:

- A. Provide guidelines that will assist the participant in constructing their autobiographical narrative tape.
- B. Provide each participant with a blank audiotape for the purpose of recording their autobiographical narrative.
- C. Transcribe taped narratives and use to develop questions and probes during the face-to-face interviews.

Guidelines:

- A. Prior to the actual taping, look over the areas of interest to this researcher and begin thinking about your experiences. Jot down notes to yourself or keep a journal for several days as you think about how you will construct your story. Memories can be tricky and we don't want to miss anything.
- B. When you feel that you are ready to begin taping, find a quiet place that is comfortable and create an environment for yourself that will allow you to tell

your story with ease. Feel free to use background music if you like. It is important that this be an enjoyable experience for you.

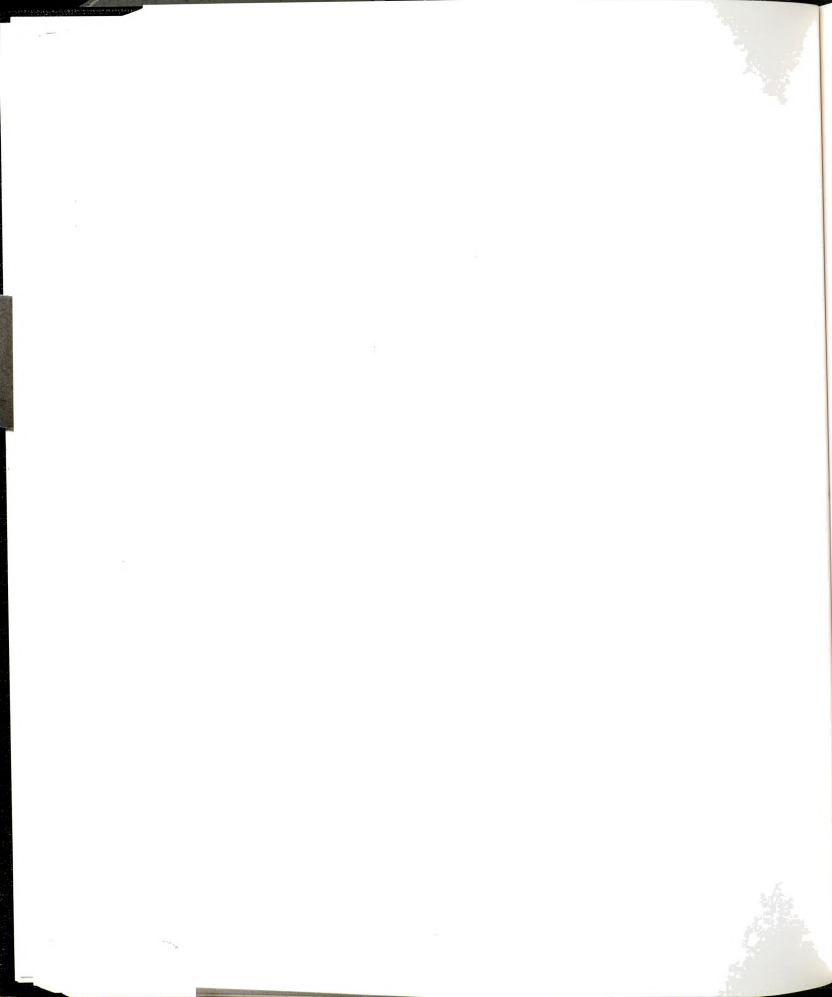
- C. When you are ready to begin taping, be sure that you have the areas of interest listed below handy along with your notes and/or journal. You will want to be sure not to miss anything and then begin to share your story using the following guidelines in order:
1. Begin by introducing yourself and talking about events surrounding your birth experience (including date, place, parents, siblings, extended family, etc.)
 2. Early childhood learning experiences
 3. Adolescent learning experiences
 4. Teenage learning experiences
 5. Young Adult learning experiences
 6. Adult learning experiences
- D. When you have finished taping, play back and listen to be sure the story is told just the way you want it. Now is the time to add anything that you may have missed.
- E. When you are comfortable with it, place the tape in the self-addressed stamped envelope and drop it in the mail to me. I will transcribe the tape when I receive it and use your story to prepare questions for our first interview. A prompt response is most appreciated.

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