HUMANITY MEETS ACCOUNTABILITY:
NARRATIVES FROM SCHOOL LEADERS

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ABSTRACT

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While accountability has become a popular discourse in educational policy and practice in schools, little is known about how accountability is interpreted and practiced in school principals' daily work. School leaders' perceptions of accountability are critical to leadership practices due to how they understand and interpret accountability as guiding how leaders act, which can beget change in schools. I particularly focus on aspects of accountability revealed in the daily practices of school leaders whose voices have been marginalized in extant knowledge of accountability in research and policy. My inquiry asks three questions: (1) How do school leaders interpret and enact accountability in their day-to-day practices; (2) How do school leaders understand accountability as supporting or undermining their leadership practices; and (3) How do school leaders respond when they confront ethical dilemmas under conflicting accountability demands?

Using multiple qualitative methods including interviews, shadowing, focus groups, and artifacts, I explore leaders' understanding of accountability by examining daily practices of three principals working at urban, rural, and suburban elementary schools over the course of 2018-2019 school year. I conducted narrative analysis informed by portraiture to present my findings.

My findings first suggest that accountability for my participants can be understood as both a virtue and a control mechanism. I found that leaders' enactment of accountability could be understood as a balancing act for equity in which they push agendas and efforts that are missing or overlooked in existing educational systems. Second, my analysis highlights that

accountability, as perceived by individual leaders, needs to be interpreted within its context, that of which is flexible and complex. Third, these understandings of accountability generated constant negotiations and dilemmas for school leaders. My participants often experienced dilemmas when externally developed protocols followed by consequences conflicted with their relational ethos in schools.

My dissertation has been designed to expand literature on accountability and leadership by adding insights into how school leaders understand and enact accountability in their daily work. I intended to value my participants' experiences, bringing their embodied knowledge and humanity in constructing knowledge of accountability.

Dedicated to my parents and my husband, Kwanghyeon.
Thank you for your endless love and support.

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What I love most about being in the field of education is imagining new ways of knowing and being. This dissertation to me is part of the process where I push the boundary of what I think that I know. This "unexpected journey" of exploring accountability through the stories of Scarlett, Emily, and Bruce invited me to revisit myself, educational research, and school leaders. The moments of love, connection, and pains I experienced in three Michigan schools became engines for me to write this dissertation, realizing that I owe so many leaders and educators like my participants. I want to acknowledge three participants of this study who generously offered beautiful scenes that they had created.

I have to acknowledge the years that I lived, learned, and taught in South Korea, which shaped my lens and positionality to see "accountability" in this study. There, my family, teachers, mentors, colleagues, and students in my life taught me how to understand education, human beings, and the world differently. I applied what I learned from you to this study.

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CHAPTER I.

INVITATION: BRINGING HUMANITY IN ACCOUNTABILITY

1. Introduction

In this dissertation, I explore accountability through the narratives of three school principals. It is not strange to say we are currently living in an accountability regime. Though there is a wealth of literature on accountability in education research, this literature is primarily centered on scores, evaluations, policies, data, and numbers. You may ask, do we need another research on accountability? Well, then I want to ask back, what is accountability? This study, alternately, offers a different conception of accountability in schools, which I call the *human side of accountability*. I particularly focus on aspects of accountability revealed in the daily practices of school leaders whose voices have been marginalized in extant knowledge of accountability in research and policy. However, I argue that they are key actors in constructing and enacting accountability at the school level while leading school-wide transformations. Thus, my inquiry of this study was motivated by the question: what does accountability mean to school leaders?

2. Motivations

Since moving to the United States from South Korea in 2015, I have found "accountability" is often used in political and social life as well as in school settings. I hear questions like "who is accountable for this problem?" daily from news outlets. I realized "accountability" is a popular word in English speaking contexts, even in schools; whereas in South Korea, "accountability" is popular in academic research papers and policy documents, but not in school-based conversations with teachers and principals. In contrast, school principals I have met in Michigan have often used the term to describe their roles, the purpose of schooling,

and policy controls. For instance, in my previous research on principal autonomy, Principal

Minor at Greenwood High School[1] once told me that "I am accountable to students, teachers, and

parents. Students should be accountable, teachers need to be accountable, and everybody should

be accountable…." When I first heard this, I felt all relationships in schools seemed to be shaped

by contract-based structures in which accountability has been historically rooted (I do think

differently at the end of my dissertation). My unfamiliarity with the popularity of

"accountability" among school leaders led me to inquire: what does "accountability" mean to

them (school principals) and why do they depend on this concept in describing themselves and

their roles?

While existing literature has conceptualized accountability in educational administration,

its approaches have often relied on school reform and policy implementation (e.g., Abelmann,

Elmore, Even, Kenyon, & Marshall, 1999; Carnoy, Elmore, & Siskin, 2003). I find this approach

limiting in regards to capturing how individuals working within the system conceptualize

accountability. As school leaders' constructions of accountability are influenced by their

individual personal and professional backgrounds, school contexts, as well as current political

and social environments (Mansbridge, 2009), using school as a unit of analysis (e.g., treating the

sum of individuals as representative of the school) may not fully reveal the nature of the

intersections between accountability and individual leaders. Thus, I decided to use individuals as

a unit of analysis in this study.

In addition, despite nuanced conceptual work in examining relations between leadership

and accountability (e.g., Anderson & Cohen, 2015; Cranston, 2013; Firestone & Shipps, 2005;

Normore, 2004), empirical studies on school leaders' responses to accountability have tended to

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[1] Names are pseudonyms.

focus on certain policy contexts (e.g., Gawlik, 2015; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002; Watkins, Anthony, & Beard, 2020), thereby implying that accountability comes from a set of criteria predetermined by federal or state policies (McShane & DiPerna, 2018). I find this line of research problematic because accountability is often framed as *compliance* with exogenous policies, relying on the traditional notions of accountability based on principal-agent theory. Therefore, I argue that such approaches may limit multi-faceted aspects of accountability as it has become part of daily discourses and practices in schools (O'Kelly & Dubnick, 2019).

Indeed, studies have shown that school leaders strive to meet the diverse needs of students, teachers, and communities by addressing underlying inequalities residing in externally developed accountability systems, including high-stakes testing, monitoring, and evaluation (DeMatthews, 2016; Diamond & Spillane, 2004; Koyama, 2014). However, existing research on accountability is limited in that it does not incorporate leaders' embodied experiences of accountability depicted in their daily practices in schools. School leaders' perceptions of accountability are critical to leadership practices due to how they understand and interpret accountability as guiding how leaders act, which can beget change in schools.

Without the perspectives of school leaders, we run the risk of reifying policy-driven, system-based approaches to accountability in schooling (Greenfield, 1979; Hodgkinson, 1993). This can prevent leaders' insights—insights that are directly informed by their local contexts— from helping to develop structures of equity and support that can enable every student to thrive in school settings. If school education is about nurturing human beings through human interactions (Head & Pryiomka, 2020; Ingersolle, 2003; Labaree, 2005), we need policies that are informed by leaders and their work for accountability in local contexts. Therefore, I argue that it is critical to understand how individuals in schools—especially school leaders—think,

interpret, and make meaning of accountability in their practices to effectively and equitably recruit, develop, and support educators and leaders.

This motivated me to explore accountability through the day-to-day practices of leaders, specifically school principals. My study was guided by three research questions:

1) How do school leaders interpret and enact accountability in their day-to-day practices?

2) How do school leaders understand accountability as supporting or undermining their leadership practices?

3) How do school leaders respond when they confront ethical dilemmas under conflicting accountability demands?

3. Resisting the Fixed Definition of Accountability

In alignment with my personal experience of "accountability" in the U.S., this study frames accountability as a cultural phenomenon (Dubnick, 2014). Given the frequent use of "accountability" in daily life, its meaning has expanded in our political and social environments (Dubnick, 2014). Beyond the classical definition of accountability, which focuses on two-dimensional renderings of formal accounts to higher authorities (Bovens, 2005), I rely on a cultural approach to framing accountability because it allows me to investigate implicit and explicit norms (Anderson-Levitt, 2002; Fuller, 2007), tacit knowledge (Fuller, 2007), and active processes of meaning making (Street, 1993)—all of which guide how individuals think and act in accountability spaces. To reveal the accountability cultures of school leaders, I explore narratives from three school principals using multiple qualitative methods including shadowing, interviews, focus groups, artifacts, and reflection-based letter exchange.

My inquiry intentionally does not rely on a fixed definition of accountability. As such, I am in agreement with O'Kelly and Dubnick (2019) that framing accountability via a fixed notion

or mechanism limits researchers' ability to reveal the complex dynamics in processes of how individuals construct accountability as informed by their interactions with others, social norms, and habits in accountability contexts. Rather, following emic perspectives, I remain open to discovering a variety of meanings of accountability through the daily leadership practices of the three school principal participants. In this way, the findings of this study shed light on the *humanity* that became apparent in my analyses of the three principals' enactments of accountability. Furthermore, I analyze what accountability means to them. Therefore, my dissertation is also about theorizing accountability in the context of leadership practices in schools from the viewpoints of principals.

4. Philosophical Orientations

Policy is not a main object of inquiry in this study, but existing studies have framed policy as a critical tool to drive certain forms of accountability (Duke, Grogan, & Tucker, 2003). In schools, accountability-driven policy initiatives are influential in terms of how individuals think and act toward their practices. While most policy implementation studies have not distinguished multiple dimensions of views on policy, some scholars have noted that how researchers methodologically frame policy guides their research designs and analyses. In this section, I present my conceptualization of policy as theoretical and methodological inquiry that guides the current dissertation[2]. I first problematize the conventional view of policy as text, and then explore alternative ways of understanding policy in multiple forms. I then articulate how I frame the relations between policy and leaders using the term "policy interaction."

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[2] Some of my writing in this section is derived in part from an article (T Kim, 2020b) published in *International Journal of Leadership in Education* (May 29, 2020) <copyright Taylor & Francis>, available online: http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/13603124.2020.1770865

4.1. Problematizing the Conventional View: Policy as Text

Traditionally, most policy implementation studies have tended to define *policy as text*. This orientation considers policy to be written texts in policy documents and leads to a focus on the "fidelity" of policy implementation at the school level. In exploring school leaders' interactions with policy, I found focusing exclusively on policy as text to be problematic for two reasons. First, in the context of policy implementation research, the idea of *policy as text* can binarize policy and practice by conceptualizing them as inherently different because this orientation posits policy as an objective "thing" to be implemented by individuals. Relatedly, hierarchizing policy over practice tends to promote policy as the work of government officials who represent the positions and political philosophies of the dominant and current government's perspective. This means that policies are placed into the system by the establishment and that individuals are put in charge of education oversight to implement the current political agenda. Second, when researchers argue for coherence between the two (policy and practice), some have prioritized policy as will in documents, thereby perpetuating the view that policy is a fixed object rather than embodied practices. Such a trend may result in in the assumption that school leaders are "policy implementers" who are supposed to (re)interpret and realize policy within the bounded rules and territories, as opposed to critical thinkers or creative agents who actively engage in the policy process.

In this way, fidelity in such contexts seems to emphasize how to make practices on the ground align with policy documents' intended goals. For example, conventional policy analysis discounts what practitioners initiate and create as *policy* by narrowing the view of policy to what is written in policy documents, i.e., something "out there" (Shore & Wright, 2000, p.5).

Furthemore, leaders' resistance to or modification of *policies* by policy makers have often been understood as misrepresenting the "fidelity" of implementation (T Kim, 2020b).

Several scholars have attempted to modify this traditional view of policy by suggesting that practitioners are active agents (Anderson & Cohen, 2015; Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2017; O'Laughlin & Lindle, 2017; Watkins et al., 2020; Werts & Brewer, 2015). These alternative views on policy implementation have often relied on Lypsky's (1980, 2010) concept of street-level bureaucracy or Weick's (2009) sense-making models, which posit that school leaders have agency in interpreting external demands from reform policies and create their own strategies to deal with policies at the local level (see Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2017; O'Laughlin & Lindle, 2017; Spillane et al., 2002; Watkins et al., 2020). Notably, an extensive body of policy implementation research in education has applied the sensemaking framework focusing on practitioners' cognitive processes of making sense of existing policies (Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2017; Gawlik, 2015; Spillane et al., 2002; Watkins et al., 2020). Such research has highlighted local agents' cognitive meaning making processes of policy directives through the revision or rejection of policy proposals at state and federal levels (Spillane et al. 2002). However, relatively few scholars have considered how this approach is still embedded in the assumption that policy is linear, top-down, and something that exists outside schools (Ball et al., 2011; Papa & English, 2011; Gorur & Koyama, 2013). This assumption is grounded in a view of policy implementation in terms of the intentions of government elites—i.e., policy makers at state and federal levels (Shore & Wright, 2000; Werts & Brewer, 2015).

4.2. Alternative Perspectives: Policy as Lived Experience and Discourse

Meanwhile, some scholars have proposed a shift in view of understanding policy. Werts and Brewer (2015), for example, proposed a conceptualization of *policy as lived experience* by

acknowledging "the centrality of the actor's position, physically and metaphorically, as opposed to the goals of the policy makers" (p. 207). This idea aligns with anthropological approaches to policy analysis—such as policy as practice (Shore & Wright, 1997; Sutton & Levinson, 2000)—and relates the notion of informal policy as locally structured and enacted in daily practice (Anderson-Levitt, 2003).

In their study, Werts and Brewer (2015) argued that prior policy implementation studies often adopted undemocratic views on policy actors' contributions to processes of co-constructing policy by prioritizing policy makers' (at the upper level) intensions. According to them, policy implementation studies tend to interpret gaps between policy as text and practice as a problem that needs to be fixed and represent what educators do to fix their implementation of policy (e.g., Odden, 1991). In addition, Werts and Brewer (2015) pointed out that researchers' analytical focus on policy implementation has been limited to the cognitive dimension of how educators frame policy, without examining embodied practices.

To resolve these issues, Werts and Brewer (2015) framed policy implementation as a democratic political process using Rancière's (1991) notion of presupposition of equality, which assumes "equality between any and every speaking being" (as cited in Werts & Brewer, 2015, p. 208). Werts and Brewer believed that democratic political action is a never-ending process of testing this equality and that we should assume equality with others in order to accept, reconfigure, or reject others' instructions. Furthermore, they highlighted policy embodied in the lives of educators beyond cognitive processes, adding Merleau-Ponty's (1968, 2002) notion of body into Weick's (2009) sensemaking framework, arguing that "people are located within a world and inhabit space, not only that, but also implicated in this space" (Werts & Brewer, 2015,

p. 210). In this way, Werts and Brewer (2015) attempted to explore how bodies and spaces were represented by school principals in their understandings of policy and accountability.

Another way to understand policy is *policy as discourse*. Ball (1993, 2015) distinguished between policy as text and policy as discourse by describing that *policy as discourse* involves producing ideas through policy, which reveals "ways of thinking and talking about our institutional [selves], to ourselves and to others" (Ball, 2015, p. 307). Ball argued that policies are "differentially represented by different actors in different contexts (policy as text), but on the other hand, at the same time produced and formed by taken-for-granted and implicit knowledges and assumptions about the world and ourselves (policy as discourse)" (Ball, 2015, p. 311). Drawing on Foucault, Ball views discourse as that which "constrains and *enables* us writing, speaking, and thinking" (Ball, 2015, p. 311). Ball (1993) also argued that analyses of policy as discourse focus more on readers' capacity to make meaning in discourse while analyses of policy as text focus on readers' control in reading policy. From this perspective, policy aggregates exercising power through knowledge as discourse and that the effect of policy is essentially discursive (e.g., Ball et al., 2012; Stein, 2004). By applying the framework of policy as discourse, several scholars have analyzed policy documents or qualitative data from policy actors at the ground level (e.g., Carpenter et al., 2014; T Kim, 2020a; O'Laughlin & Lindle, 2017; Young & Diem, 2017; Stein, 2004; Wright & Kim, 2020).

Taken together, approaches to analyzing policy processes differ depending on researchers' positionality, stance, and how they frame policy. I argue that the three types presented in the typology above are not mutually exclusive and separable when school leaders interact with policy contexts in reality. I agree with Ball's (1993) statement that "policies *are* textual interventions into practice" because they "pose problems to their subjects" (p. 12).

However, I also think applying the lens of *policy as lived experience* and *policy as discourse* can reveal multi-faceted aspects of policy processes and dynamics among interactions between individuals and policy. Therefore, in this study, "policy" is not confined to a narrow definition such as statements on policy documents or policy directions by state and federal policy makers. Rather, I attempt to understand policy with inquiries about how school leaders' lived experiences represent policies, what makes them think and enact policies, and what policy texts show. This approach aligns with my methodological orientations presented in Chapter IV.

4.3. Policy Interaction: Toward Reciprocity

In this dissertation, I use the term "interaction" instead of "implementation" or "enactment" to describe relations between policy and leaders. I do so based on the notion that language itself can guide or constrain my approaches to conducting research. I thus problematize "implementation" and "enactment" in my study because their meanings imply that policy is an objective truth outside of individuals.

The terminology of *policy implementation* has been established as a dominant frame in policy studies.[3] The dictionary-based definition of "implementation" includes "the process of making something active or effective" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary), which implies policy is a fixed object to be executed by someone without agency. Therefore, I argue that "policy implementation" has limited capacity to embrace the ideas of policy as discourse and policy as lived experience due to its prioritization of policy as text encountered by local actors. While some researchers have analyzed policy implementation from the perspective of school and district leaders, most have been guided by questions regarding why the policy (the written text) did not work in practice, how leaders accepted and made sense of a policy's intention differently,

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[3] The analysis on policy implementation terms in this section was influenced by my personal communication with Dr. Lynn Fendler (April 18, 2018).

and how we can narrow gaps between policy (policy text) and practice (Anderson & Cohen, 2015; O'Laughlin & Lindle, 2017; Werts & Brewer, 2015). Such an approach reflects the notion that school leaders are policy implementers as opposed to "policy makers."

As an alternative perspective, Ball (1993, 2012, 2015) has suggested using the term *enactment* in lieu of *implementation* in policy analysis. Policy enactment is a process of interpretation and translation that provides space for critical considerations of creativity and context (Ball, 1993, 2015). In this enactment process, actors make sense of policy by recognizing what the policy expects of them (interpretation) and they link their interpretations to practices utilizing numerous methods (translation) (Avelar, 2016; Ball, 1993, 2015). It appears that policy enactment implies more action from actors than policy implementation. Both implementation and enactment, however, still impose policy as a fixed object, binarizes policy and practice, and posits unidirectional communication between policy and individual actors. While Ball (1993, 2015) has argued that translation (part of enactment) is an active method that entails actors' creativity in dealing with policy and reflects policy contexts, I argue that translation itself assumes the existence of the original text or object and, therefore, is limited in its conceptualization of policy as lived experience.

My problematization of using "implementation" or "enactment" in policy contexts aligns with Kierkegaard's (1946) concerns on "objective tendency" in humanity that leads individuals to become observers. He argued that individuals need to embrace "their own subjective truths" instead of seeking out "objectivity" in the creation of meanings and knowledge (as cited in Zimmermann, 2016, p.11). As articulated in Chapter IV, I do not want to cover individuals—who create and develop knowledge—and their humanity in the development of knowledge in this dissertation. My intention in using "policy interaction" thus aligns with these "subjective

truths" in leaders' understandings of accountability, which allows me to prioritize my participants' voices over imposed intentions of policy elites. The definitions of "interaction" and its uses in educational research acknowledge a reciprocal influence between two or more nouns. I believe that using "interaction" is useful for overcoming challenges arising from the use of "implementation" and "enactment" that bear epistemological problems in the supposition of democratic relationships between school leaders and policy.

This philosophical orientation helped me to explore school leaders' daily practices and understand accountability as a cultural phenomenon. In their day-to-day practices, school leaders interact with multiple policies where they interpret, practice, and construct accountability. In analyzing this accountability space, where leaders interact with policy, recognizing policy as text, lived-experience, and discourse is useful to exploring implicit and explicit knowledge, norms, and habitual practices that shape my participants' views of accountability.

5. Mapping My Dissertation

As shown in above, in this chapter, I have presented my narratives about how and why I conducted this study. My stories in this chapter were intended to introduce who I am as an inquirer. I introduced how I view the phenomenon of accountability and philosophical orientations that guide this study.

In Chapter II, I review relevant literature in education. In particular, I review literature focusing on accountability and school leadership. The purpose of this chapter is to draw implications for my framing of accountability by exploring major and missing themes in the existing research.

In Chapter III, I present how I frame accountability in this study. Informed by my review in Chapter II, I extend accountability research by applying cultural perspectives. I draw on

scholarship of accountability mainly in public administration, in which multiple researchers have committed to theorizing accountability as a field. I situate my inquiry within the theoretical perspective of accountability as a cultural phenomenon, assuming that meanings of accountability are constructed by explicit and implicit norms as well as tacit knowledge shared among individuals.

In Chapter IV, I introduce my methodological orientations of this study. I agree with the argument that methodology as guiding principles of academic inquiry need to be presented in the introduction; thus, there was no need to have a separate section on methodology. While I have exposed my methodological stance to some extent in this chapter, I also keep this chapter separate to present my methodological journey throughout my dissertating process. I situate my inquiry as snapshots of ethnography within the interpretative tradition and present specific methods I used for participant recruitment, data generation, and analysis. I briefly introduce my participants, Scarlett, Bruce, and Emily and the contexts of my fieldwork. Readers will find my methodology evolved through my interactions with other scholars and my participants.

In Chapter V, I provide the portrait of Scarlett, a principal working at an urban elementary school. Accountability narratives in this chapter show Scarlett's conceptualization of accountability as being responsible for her own data and how she takes "accountability outside of the box." Her accountability enactment created new systems to better address underlying inequalities behind the numbers and scores from her own data. Therefore, I call Scarlett a "system changer."

In Chapter VI, I present the portrait of Bruce, a principal working at a rural elementary school. Narratives from Bruce show accountability as "you're doing what's required," or "you're

doing what's best." As a leader, Bruce saw challenges coming from multiple forms of accountability as opportunities to grow while leading teachers and students in the "arena."

In Chapter VII, I illustrate the portrait of Emily, a principal working at a suburban elementary school. Emily views accountability as meeting expectations. In her accountability narratives, two different forms were found: accountability as punishment and accountability as support. Accordingly, Emily consistently challenged the district's fear-based approaches. Her efforts can be described as another form of accountability to understand a students as whole people.

In Chapter VIII, I present my analysis across the three portraits of school leaders. I discuss four themes that emerged in my analysis: 1) accountability as a virtue and a control mechanism; 2) accountability as flexible, context specific; 3) accountability as a balancing act for equity; and 4) dilemmas resulting from accountability conduct. In discussing these themes, I analyze how accountability can be understood in the three leaders' daily practices.

In Chapter IX, I present a summary of the findings by answering each research question of this study. I then open dialogue by linking my findings to existing studies to argue for the reconsideration of accountability and educational leadership. This chapter also includes implications for policy and practice as well as directions for future inquiry. Finally, I conclude by sharing my reflection on this research process in an effort to bring humanity to accountability narratives.

CHAPTER II.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To understand accountability in school principals' daily practices, I started reviewing

existing literature examining accountability and school leadership in education. The purpose of

this chapter is to draw implications for my framing of accountability for this study, stated in the

next chapter, by exploring major and missing themes in the existing research. While

accountability has been scrutinized extensively in education, in this chapter, I specifically focus

on research that examined linkages between school leaders and accountability in education.

These studies are grouped into three categories: 1) conceptualization of accountability, 2)

relationships between accountability and leadership, and 3) school leaders' responses to

accountability. Each theme will be presented in the following sections of this chapter.

1. Conceptualizing Accountability

Accountability is one of the "magic words" used widely (Pollitt & Hupe, 2011, p. 642).

Policy makers and politicians have frequently used "accountability" as a panacea in describing

modern governance, and this trend has spread as a cultural phenomenon (Dubnick, 2014). This

trend seems to be apparent in education research. In education studies, accountability has been

highlighted by researchers since the 1990s and framed in multiple ways. While the need for

accountability is widely agreed upon, its meaning and functions are less clear (Heinecke, Curry-

Corcoran, & Moon, 2003; Normore, 2004). Accountability, originally adopted from the

corporate world, relies on a relationship between a service provider and an agent with the power

to evaluate the provider (Kirst, 1990; Newmann, King, & Rigdon, 1997). For school settings,

Rothman (1995) defined accountability as "the process by which school districts and states (or other constituents) attempt to ensure that schools and school systems meet their goals" (p. 189).

1.1. External vs Internal Accountability

In earlier studies, multiple scholars attempted to differentiate internal accountability and external accountability to make them applicable to education reform contexts (Abelmann, et al., 1999; Carnoy et al., 2003; Newman et al., 1997; Elmore, 2000, 2005). In these studies, external accountability is defined as control by an external authority to achieve school goals (Newmann et al., 1997). Specifically, Knapp and Feldman (2012) suggested that:

> External accountability systems can be understood as a complex arrangement of policies, and created by actors and interests outside of schools, who are in position to reward and punish schools, aimed at impacting practices inside schools, and requiring reporting to diverse external audiences (Knapp & Feldman, 2012, p. 667).

In contrast, internal accountability can be understood as building the individual and collective capacity from inside the organization to meet the educational challenges identified by local educational professionals (Newmann et al., 1997). According to Elmore (2005), internal accountability is "coherence and alignment among individuals' conceptions of what they are responsible for and how, collective expectations at the organizational level, and the processes by which people within the organization account for what they do" (pp. 140-141). In this sense, Fullan et al. (2015) suggested accountability is "taking responsibility for one's action" (p. 4), which appears to be similar to Elmore's (2005) concept of internal accountability. However, compared to Fullan et al.'s (2015) recent study, the earlier studies on external and internal accountability focus more on school organization as a unit of analysis instead of individuals in deciding whether the "responsibility" is internal and external.

These scholars who distinguished internal accountability from external accountability were concerned with problems of accountability that were forced by external policies, and they

examined these problems from the perspective of schools. For example, Abelmann et al.'s (1999) case studies in 20 schools suggested that schools develop distinctive solutions to the problem of to whom they had to be accountable, which can be explained by the lack of guidance from external accountability systems. In this study, they developed a working theory of school-site accountability and set four premises. First, schools have conceptions of accountability embedded in their day-to-day operation patterns. Second, school-site conceptions of accountability are organic in that they build from interactions between teachers, administrators, students, and parents. Third, school members are active agents in the creation of accountability concepts. Fourth, formal, external accountability systems are only one of multiple factors that impact a school's internal conception of accountability. On the basis of these premises, school-site accountability posits a relationship among three elements: (1) the individual's sense of responsibility, (2) collective sense of expectations among multiple stakeholders, and (3) implementation mechanisms of external and internal accountability (Abelmann et al., 1999).

Applying Abelmann et al.'s (1999) working theory, Carnoy et al. (2003) examined impacts of new accountability systems on school internal accountability. They argued that assessment-based school reform combined two traditions of American education, public accountability and student testing, and the new accountability their relationships tightly coupled. In these studies, internal accountability was framed as accountability already existing within schools, external accountability or new accountability were framed accountability forces that come from state or federal policies. While most educational policies have tried to increase external accountability, school reform studies have argued that internal accountability is important in achieving better school performance. This is because strong external accountability can undermine a school's organizational capacity by limiting organizational decisions that may

best match teachers' and students' needs (Elmore, 2004; Fullan et al., 2015; Newmann et al.,1997; Normore, 2004; Sahlberg, 2010).

1.2. Conditions to Understand Accountability

In conceptualizing accountability, some studies suggest there are several questions that need to be answered in order to clarify the nature of accountability in any particular situation (Abelmann et al., 1999; Newmann et al., 1997; Leithwood, Edge, & Jantzi, 1999). For instance, Leithwood et al. (1999) suggested five questions to ask in defining accountability: "who is accountable, to whom, for what, at what level, and with what consequences" (p. 21). These authors assumed that responsibility is a minimum condition for validating the assignment of accountability (Wagner, 1987).

Given this condition, the question of "who is accountable" must be answered in any consideration of accountability. Leithwood et al. (1999) note that it is questionable "whether a person should be held accountable for acts which, causally, he has neither omitted, committed or influenced," whether a person should be held accountable for "expected performances which are impossible to satisfy," or "whether a person should be solely accountable for matters involving a shared, causal responsibility" (pp. 15-16). This observation illustrates that we need to consider the capacity for responsibility of the person being held accountable. The second minimum condition for validating accountability is "entitlement of the person requesting an account" (Leithwood et al., 1999, p. 17), which can answer the question of "to whom" people are accountable. To determine who is owed an account, we may ask "to whom is the account to be given?," "do those expecting an account have a legitimate interest in the act for which the account is required?," and "how legitimate is that interest?" (Leithwood et al., 1999, p. 18). In terms of "for what and at what level," accountability policies and practices should indicate

objects of accountability. For example, students' welfare, school effectiveness, or meeting standards of professional knowledge have been often described in education studies. Lastly, in relation to the "consequences" of accountability, it is necessary to examine whether the accountable person is obligated, the nature of obligation (e.g., moral or legal), and the involvement of rewards or sanctions in consequences (Leithwood et al., 1999). For example, recent state policies require schools to set achievement targets that need to be met and to specify further interventions as consequences of the school's performance. According to Wagner (1987), if there is no requirement for the account provider, it is hard to establish accountability relationships. These five questions help us understand individual accountabilities and how they function. However, this approach is limited in that the questions "do not address the basic questions of why someone is accountable to someone else or what the origin of the accountability might be" (Hoffman, 2015, p. 2).

1.3. Multiple Forms of Accountability

Another line of study has focused on multi-faceted forms and mechanisms of accountability perceived by practitioners in conceptualizing accountability. For example, Leithwood et al. (1999) described four different approaches to accountability in education: market competition, decentralization of decision making, professional, and management. Market approaches use the competition as a tool for students and schools. School choice is an example of how market approaches work, as they make schools compete with other schools for enrollment and resources. Decentralization of decision making approaches is used for increasing accountability when the purpose of accountability is to represent the voices of those who are not often heard (Leithwood et al., 1999). Site-based management and community-based control are representative tools for decentralization approaches (e.g., Malen, Ogawa, & Krantz, 1990).

Decentralization approaches are utilized for competition between schools and rely on the assumption that needs from students (parents/local communities) as clients should shape educational services. Professional approaches can take two different forms of professional controls. One is related to the assumption that educators who are closest to the students can make the best decisions for students' needs (Hess, 1991). The other model relies on controls by providing professional standards for teachers and administrators. Management approaches include systematic efforts to promote more "goal-oriented, efficient, and effective schools by introducing more rational procedures" (Leithwood et al., 1999, p. 28). Strategic planning such as data-driven monitoring or progress planning at the district level as well as school level are examples of the management approach (Leithwood et al., 1999).

While above studies framed accountability at the school level, Firestone and Shipps (2005) framed accountability from school leaders' perspective. According to them, school and district leaders encounter multiple accountabilities that reflect the operation of numerous policy instruments (Firestone & Shipps, 2005). Under accountability policies, leaders tend to perceive policies as external demands determined by policy actors outside of schools (Firestone & Shipps, 2005). These demands include increasing student achievement, fortifying graduation mandates, requiring teacher evaluations, and promoting classroom instruction (Ingersoll & Collins, 2017). Within such policy environments, Firestone and Shipps (2005) developed a typology of multiple accountabilities to explain how leaders perceive multiple pressures: political, bureaucratic, market, professional, and moral accountabilities.

Political accountability forces citizen pressure by using legal mandates and, thus, leaders are expected to serve as coalition builders and negotiators. Bureaucratic accountability adopts regulations, goals, incentives, and conceptualizes educational leaders as functionary,

knowledgeable advocates for the policies. Market accountability utilizes competition, efficiency, creativity, and allows leaders to function as manager entrepreneurs. These three accountabilities are forms of external accountability in which policy demands are directed from outside schools. On the other hand, professional and moral accountabilities are understood as aspects of internal accountability in which internal motivations drive leadership actions. Professional accountability assumes leaders are expert educators who are focusing on practices and consensus. Moral accountability is rooted in beliefs, values, and commitments, which presumes leaders are consistent, empathic, and defenders of justice (Firestone & Shipps, 2005).

More recent studies have explored diversified dimensions to explore multiple forms of accountability in education, applying extended discourses of accountability in other disciplines. For example, Kim and Yun (2019) examined various logics of accountability by exploring the international data collected from principal surveys in 38 countries. This study used two analytic dimensions to create a typology of accountability: process versus outcome accountability (Patil et al., 2014) and external versus internal accountability (Newmann et al., 1997). Using these two dimensions, they theorized four logics of accountability—test-based, control based, professional-based, and process-based accountability—and conducted the empirical analysis to understand how school principals' practices at the country level can be linked to any of these forms. The findings suggest that only a few countries followed a relatively pure form of control-based, professional-based, and process-based accountability and most countries showed mixed-forms. These findings imply that pure forms of accountability theorized in literature cannot fully capture actual practices of accountability at the school level. Rather, school leaders' interpretations and practices of accountability would reflect complexity in each local context.

In sum, studies on conceptualizing accountability showed that, as accountability has been populated in education environments, researchers have complicated accountability phenomenon by exploring its multi-faceted nature. As such, it is necessary to theorize accountability as a multi-faceted phenomenon in my framing of accountability. On the other hand, existing studies in education have conceptualized accountability from the perspective of institutional systems. In this respect, school is often regarded as a unit of analysis, which assumes accountability as an aggregated collectivity. This approach may not fully reflect individuals' interpretations and meanings that vary on the same event or system (Greenfield, 1973; Hodgkinson, 1993). Thus, it is important to understand accountability through individual school leaders' viewpoints for the present study.

2. Relations between Accountability and Leadership

While many studies have examined influences of accountability on schooling and reported the negative and positive impacts (e.g., Bennett, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Lee & Reeves, 2012; Leung, 2004), relatively fewer studies have specifically focused on the relationships between accountability and leadership. Several scholars argue that accountability-driven policies undermine leadership by narrowing the boundary of school leadership and redesigning the identities of leaders (Anderson & Cohen, 2015; Carpenter et al., 2014; Cranston, 2013; Duke et al., 2003; Foster, 2004; Normore, 2004).

Duke et al.'s (2003) conceptual analysis regarding Virginia's accountability plan addressed key points in terms of "educational leadership in an Age of Accountability" (p. 199). First, the sociopolitical context drove school leaders to focus on student performance on high-stakes tests. Second, educational leaders realized that their regular practices could not resolve challenges of accountability. Third, leaders did not have a clear sense of the long-term influence

of their actions when they responded to accountability. Lastly, pressure for accountability changed the meaning of "being a leader" (Duke et al. 2003, p. 199). These points illustrate how accountability-driven education environments can change leadership roles and how school leaders face challenges and difficulties in relation to externally developed accountability systems.

Studies that reviewed literature on leadership and accountability have revealed that multiple forms of accountability are at play in school environments, which suggests reciprocity between accountability systems and local practices (Normore, 2004; Møller, 2009). Normore's (2004) review of the literature on accountability and school leaders indicated that ongoing accountability-based policies have increased the pressures and complexities of school leaders' practices and preparation. He argued that "a major theme of recent debate in education has been to shift the emphasis from a concern for equity (i.e., distribution–who benefits) to a concern for effectiveness (i.e., what gets done)," which aligns with performance-based accountability (Noremore, 2004, p. 62). Normore (2004) showed multiple approaches to accountability found in existing studies—market, management, new managerialism, political, legal, bureaucratic, professional, and moral accountability—and analyzed several issues that leaders may encounter in performance-based accountability. For instance, school leaders need to deal with combining different indicators about accountability to enact coherent local policies. In this sense, Normore pointed out an issue of internal-external correspondence and of conflicts within accountability systems. Similarly, Møller's (2009) review of the literature found multiple narratives around accountability and examined tensions between managerial and professional accountability. Møller (2009) argued that patterns of accountability should be reciprocal, and the system of accountability needs to be developed with a focus on student learning. Using a four-fold

classification of approaches to accountability (market, decentralization, professionalization, and management-based accountabilities), Leithwood (2001) argued that these multiple accountabilities rely on different assumptions about the problems and solutions of school reform. Therefore, school leaders are likely to face difficulties caused by "the eclectic adoption of different accountability approaches as part of most reform packages" (Leithwood, 2001, p. 217).

In recent studies, researchers, using a macro lens, took more critical stances in analyzing the relationships between accountability policies and leadership. Accountability has been framed in these studies as an ideological discourse or a cultural phenomenon that resides in educational environments. In focusing on the language regarding leadership in policy documents, Carpenter et al. (2014) noted that recent American federal and state educational policy discourses have narrowed the definition of school leadership with a focus on evaluation. Using critical discourse analysis, they analyzed policy vocabularies within the Obama/Duncan Administration's Blueprint for Reform[4] paying special attention to the evaluation of school leaders and determinations of their effectiveness. Relying on the analytic approach of Hajer (1995) that highlighted the way dominant value discourses shape policy solutions, they found traditional values in U.S. policies (individual, collective, general welfare, efficiency) were replaced with globalized values (market, surveillance, and performativity). Their findings suggest that the globalized values embedded in the accountability policy form new parameters for "*effective*" educational leadership of school principals.

Regarding theoretical critiques, researchers have emphasized mechanisms of control in accountability policy. Foster (2004) employed Foucault's (1991) notion of governmentality and technologies of thought as analytic frames: control of numeracy, of information, and of language.

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[4] The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Blueprint) and Race to the Top (R2T)

Foster (2004) theorized that the globalized economy accelerates competition between individuals and governments, which imposes attention on standards and indicators in schooling, while overlooking the question of the purpose of schooling. In his argument, high-stakes testing and regulatory standards in American education policies have shaped national narratives that laud an economic ethos and undermine local initiatives. Foster (2004) indicated that rules, regulations, and state controls through accountability policies can reduce leadership roles to mere agents of the state.

Similarly, Cranston (2013) argued that the established notion of school leaders and leadership in education literature has been limited by accountability narratives. He saw school leadership as "typically 'defined' in sets of standards and statements of expectations as to what school leaders should do" under accountability constraints (Cranston, 2013, p. 129). This accountability pressure expects school leaders to become *doers* who follow policy via the fear of sanctions, thus reducing school leaders' abilities to oversee government policy by applying managerial and legislated practices (Cranston, 2013). To this end, Cranston proposes changing accountability discourses as one way to resolve the problem. Specifically, he argues that education policies need to use the term *responsibility*, which focuses on strong professional internal accountability rather than using the language of accountability to include moral aspects of leading and shared understandings about the purposes of education and values (Cranston, 2013).

According to Anderson and Cohen (2015), controls through accountability policies shape the identities of school leaders. Sociologists of the professions call this a "new professionalism" (p. 3), which focuses on control through policies from above and reduces internal controls from within the profession. For instance, leaders are expected to pursue market and test-based forms

of accountability for direction rather than professional training (Anderson & Cohen, 2015). Within the model of new professionalism, school leaders are defined as entrepreneurial in de-regulated controls such as markets or self-governance (Anderson & Cohen, 2015, p. 3).

In sum, the studies above examined mechanisms and values embedded in accountability associated with the influence of school leaders and their leadership roles. These authors read accountability policy environments as controlling school leaders with new forms of controls, which represents a process of re-regulation and controlled de-control (Du Gay, 1996). This reflects contemporary political environments that generate new types of control strategies, such as less observable, a much more hands off, and self-generating regulation (Ball, 2003), which appears as if nation-state governments devolve authority and promote flexibility in governance. Therefore, to explore accountability from the view of school leaders, it is important to note the idea of visible and invisible controls through policies with which school leaders deal in their daily practices.

3. School Leaders' Perceptions and Responses to Accountability

Another important area of empirical and conceptual research has explored how school leaders perceive and respond to accountability. In a broader sense, these studies can be positioned as policy implementation studies and often take a micro analytic lens in examining school leaders' practices. Unlike the first generation of implementation studies that emphasize the gaps between policies and implemented programs, the second generation of implementation studies began to explore individual actors' implementation processes (McLaughlin, 1987). Studies on leaders' responses to accountability policies have been influenced by arguments from the second generation of implementation studies: the local situation is important, and policy should be translated in local actors' practices (e.g., Honig & Hatch, 2004; Honig, 2009; Ozga,

1987). In these studies, accountability was framed as external forces driven by federal or state-level policies that mostly emphasize adopting standardized tests, evaluation systems for educators, and data monitoring. In sum, empirical evidence has revealed that multiple perceptions and strategies can be generated by school leaders, even under the same policy initiatives because leaders' individual experiences, school context, and local conditions influence the process of their enacting policies (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012). I group existing literature into four categories: 1) leaders' perceptions about multiple accountability pressures, 2) sensemaking of policy mandates, 3) developing strategies, and 4) facing ethical dilemmas.

3.1. School Leaders' Perceptions of Accountability: Multiple Accountability Pressures

Several empirical studies explored interactions between school principals' perceptions and accountability contexts. Marks and Nance's (2007) quantitative study using the School and Staffing Survey data investigated how various accountability contexts influence school principals' capacity to affect instructional decisions in their schools. In this study, accountability contexts were conceptualized via the influence of authorities involved in school decision-making, such as states, local boards, districts, school site councils, parent associations, and teachers. Their findings revealed that principals' perceptions about their influences differ depending on various contexts such as the extent of state and regional control. In addition, teachers' active participation in school-level decision making had a strong impact on principals' influence in the supervisory and instructional domains. Marks and Nance (2007) did not define accountability explicitly, but they implied that accountability is viewed as achieving goals set by the legislated policy (here, NCLB) and is closely related to multiple influences on decision making in schools.

Other studies used Firestone and Shipps' (2005) multiple accountability framework to examine diverse aspects of principal accountability. Since Firestone and Shipps' (2005) framework relied on school principals' cognition of external and internal demands on leaders themselves, it has been used by scholars who attempted to reveal the complex nature of accountability from leaders' viewpoints. For example, Shipps and White (2009) explored how school leaders perceive accountability environments with two rounds of sampling of 25 high school principals in New York City in 2004-05 and 2007-08. Between these two time frames, New York City increased accountability pressures on school principals, such as by adopting principal performance rating systems followed by sanctions or rewards. Using the multiple accountability framework (Firestone & Shipps, 2005) and contingent and goal-directed leadership theories (Northouse, 2006), Shipps and White conducted interviews employing a critical incident technique. They reported notable findings about principals' perceptions of conflicts between multiple accountabilities and how these differ depending on school contexts. The findings showed that professional and bureaucratic accountabilities were critical in principals' decision making and, by the second round of interviews, some of the professional and moral compunction was replaced by political and market accountability. While demands from accountability policy had increased, the participants in their study reported bureaucratic expectations—using data, an award-winning program, school performance rating systems—had come to support their professionalism. In addition, instead of recognizing conflicts between competition and professional accountability as reported in the 2004-05 period, principals seemed to enjoy competition as a resource for their own schools' advantage in 2007-2008. In their second round of data collection (2007-2008), multiple seasoned principals left the profession and newcomers came in to replace them. Most new principals led their small schools by sharing

limited physical spaces and financial resources with other schools. In some ways, the newcomers' professional commitments were shaped by performance-based policies that came with sanctions and rewards. Shipps and White (2009) argued that the principals' exploitation of advantages resulting from the competition for limited resources replaced their moral compunctions that functioned as internal motivation to excel. Thus, their findings suggest that, for school principals, multiple accountabilities became "uncontested forces shaping their decisions" and principals built professional commitments to support their external accountabilities (Shipps & White, 2009, p. 370).

Similarly, findings from Knapp and Feldman (2012) support complexity in the perceived accountability of school leaders. Using data from a multi-case study of 15 schools in four districts, the authors found that the leaders encountered multiple logics of accountabilities, which "merge an externally-driven logic, reflecting management, bureaucratic, and political accountabilities, with one that is more professionally-driven, and anchored to patterns of professional and moral accountability" (p. 37). In this study, they developed four forms of accountability adapted from multiple studies (Adams & Kirst, 1999; Ranson, 2003; Leithwood, 2005; Firestone & Shipps, 2005). Knapp and Feldman (2012) argued that principals can take advantage of accountability-driven environments to meet their goals as school leaders. According to Knapp and Feldman (2012), while school leaders work in a "contentious zone" where they have to deal with multiple demands, they can utilize "the tools and resources available through system-wide accountability arrangements" (p. 668). In this way, educational leaders internalize the external mandates from accountability policies and shape them according to the needs of their school when federal and state policy align with their philosophies and values (Knapp & Feldman, 2012; Louis & Robinson, 2012).

While Shipps and White (2009) and Knapp and Feldman (2012) highlighted how external accountability pressures drive principals' internal accountability, Gonzales and Firestone's (2013) showed different findings. Their interviews with 25 school principals in New Jersey found that 14 participants first felt accountable to themselves. This internal accountability includes their sense of "personal responsibility, responsibility to children, and using moral code to balance among the conflicting accountabilities" (Gonzales & Firestone, 2013, p. 390). Principals in their study felt that "multiple accountabilities were poorly aligned" and they utilized "personal codes to choose a course of action" (Gonzales & Firestone, 2013, p. 390). However, leaders' perceptions varied across school contexts. Principals who focused more on internal accountability tended to work in high achieving schools, while principals who emphasized external accountability tended to work in low achieving schools in New Jersey. Their findings do not align with those of Shipps and White (2009) in which external accountability was a critical motivator of principals' decisions. This may be explained by the research context because New York City schools were under mayoral control and school principals had to take high risks to secure their positions during data collection of the study (Shipps & White, 2009). Mark and Nance (2009) supported this argument by suggesting governance of decision making shaped by districts and states affect how principals perceive their own influences on decision making in schools.

A more recent study by Werts and Brewer (2015) revealed that the participants perceived policy as a part of their daily lives in embodied as well as cognitive ways. They initially used Firestone and Shipps' (2005) multiple accountability theories, but during the interviews with school principals, the authors recognized that accountability represented a more "personal realm" for the participants (Werts & Brewer, 2015, p. 218). Because accountability put increased

pressure on individual leaders with continual policies, some participants felt they should be held accountable in their work lives and personal lives, even for other activities that policy did not cover. This led their study to go against previous findings that argued principals' internal accountability directs their responses to policy (e.g., Gonzales & Firestone, 2013). Rather, Werts and Brewer revealed that leaders' personal and professional lives aligned with embodied conceptions of accountability and policy. Comparing with the findings of Gonzales and Firestone (2013), Werts and Brewer (2015) argued that their study highlights "a more present form of accountability" by representing "the space that we inhabit and how it affects our perceptions of things such as policy, politics, and accountability" (p. 220). This study also suggests that researchers' methodological orientation will lead to different findings regarding leaders' perceptions. Unlike previous policy implementation studies, Werts and Brewer (2015) utilized the idea of *the presupposition of equality* suggested by Rancière (1991) and the notion of bodies indicated by Merleau-Ponty (1968, 2002), as well as Weick's (2009) sensemaking framework. They collected data from 20 photo-driven interviews with four school principals (five interviews for each participant), which led the authors to analyze data by focusing on policy as lived experience, experienced by school leaders.

In sum, studies reveal that school leaders perceive and construct accountability pressures in more complex, sophisticated ways rather than dichotomizing an internal-external distinction of accountability (Gonzales & Firestone, 2013; Knapp & Feldman, 2012; Shipps & White, 2009; Werts & Brewer, 2015). Moreover, existing studies suggest that it is necessary to consider the ways in which school leaders recognize conflicts between competing accountabilities and how contexts interact with leaders' perceived accountability. For example, while studies agreed that principals in high achieving schools recognized internal accountability more frequently than

principals in low achieving schools, their findings about leaders' prioritization of values among conflicts between competing accountabilities were inconsistent (Gonzales & Firestone, 2013; Shipps & White, 2009). Notably, school principals' diminishing perceptions of professional and moral accountabilities along with increased external demands (Knapp & Feldman, 2012; Shipps & White, 2009; Werts & Brewer, 2015) suggest the necessity for research on principals' ethical aspects in relation to accountability. To complicate and extend existing research findings, it might be useful to explore how externally driven accountability pressures shape and realign school principals' own professional and moral expectations (Shipps & White, 2009), in what sense principals prioritize moral accountability, and how to support principals' development of "ethical sense" (Gonzales & Firestone, 2013, p. 402).

3.2. Sensemaking of Policy Mandates

Another important line of literature on leaders' perceptions of accountability has relied on sensemaking as a framework for understanding leaders' responses to accountability policies. According to Weick (2009), sense-making is a set of action-oriented cognitive processes. This sense-making explains "how people select information from the environment, make meaning of the information, and then act on those interpretations to develop culture and routines over time" (Gawlik, 2015, p. 398). In sense-making literature, educational leaders are described as implementation agents who need to understand "what it is that the policy directive is asking them to do" in order to reject or comply with external demands (Spillane et al., 2002, p. 389). In this way, sense-making reveals the cognitive processes of school leaders before they make decisions regarding accountability demands. Practitioners are understood as sense-makers who engage in the process of utilizing prior knowledge, values, and beliefs by reconstructing their schema through learning and applying knowledge structure to interpret policy (Ganon-Shilon &

Schechter, 2017; Spillane et al., 2002). Assumptions of sensemaking theory align with the argument that policies are formed and recreated through policy *implementation* (Coburn, 2006; Spillane et al., 2002).

Empirical studies have explored how school leaders make sense of external policy demands such as adopting standardized tests, evaluation systems for educators, and data monitoring at the local level (Koyama, 2014; Schechter, Shaked, Ganon-Shilon, & Goldratt, 2018). Schechter et al. (2018) examined 59 school leaders' metaphors for describing themselves under the complexity of national reforms in Israel. The national reform, New Horizon, targets entire system changes: promoting individualized instruction, adding individual teaching hours to teacher schedules, reinforcing professional development and raising salaries of school staff, expanding principals' impacts on teacher promotions, and adopting evaluation for performance of teachers and administrators (Schechter et al., 2018). The interviews with school principals highlighted reframing of a leader's role and work, as well as their relationships with teachers. While some participants passively saw themselves as a *puppet*, others saw themselves as *partners* in the educational change and as local policy makers who interpret national reform by reflecting the contexts of their schools. As the reform imposed multiple demands, school leaders recognized their work as multidimensional, centralized, and very stressful. Moreover, they believed they should regulate the increasing pressures on teachers. The symbolic language that school principals used for describing their relationships with the teachers revealed that they tried to find a balance between external policy mandates and internal school expectations. Their findings show that external accountability pressures made leaders focus more on mechanistic, multi-tasking, and administrative roles instead of *leading* staff.

A case study by Gawlik (2015) examined relations between school leaders' sense-making of NCLB and their teachers' meaning making in two elementary charter schools in Detroit, Michigan. In their study, the principals actively adopted *metaphors* and *modeling* that reflected policy messages enforced by external accountability. The veteran leaders emphasized specific measures and instruments required by state standards (e.g., Adequate Yearly Progress, Michigan Educational Assessment Program) to make sense of external demands. With their sensemaking of selective messages, they guided their teachers by setting a boundary "within which they interpreted accountability reform" (Gawlik, 2015, p. 405). This study extends understandings of leaders' sensemaking by suggesting its influence on teachers' collective sensemaking in their schools to achieve the intentions of the state's reaction to NCLB.

In some respects, a sensemaking framework is useful for explaining gaps between what policy intends and what leaders actually respond to within it. Spillane et al. (2002) suggested that the nature of the sense-making process itself can result in gaps between policy directions and actual practices. For example, research has shown that leaders' prior knowledge and practice influenced reform ideas (Spillane, 1996). When leaders perceive new ideas as familiar, it can cause fragmentary changes in their existing practices. These changes do not promote radical transformation in regard to achieving the policy directions because leaders assume that what they are already doing is the same as the new ideas initiated by the policy (Hill, 2001). Moreover, in understanding new reform ideas, leaders are more likely to adopt surface-level connections to their prior experiences than engage in in-depth inquiry about the ideas (e.g., Spillane & Callahan, 2000). Thus, in terms of sense-making processes, inconsistency between policy intentions and practices cannot be fully credited to the lack of effort or denial of the reform ideas (Hill, 2001; Spillane et al., 2002). However, several scholars recognized limitations of sensemaking literature

in analyzing leaders' response to accountability because it only focuses on cognitive processes (Werts & Brewer, 2015) and tends to overlook leaders' behaviors and strategies (Ball et al., 2012; Koyama, 2014). For these reasons, other scholars have used different theories to focus more on how leaders *do* policy practices and have added other frameworks with sense-making theories (e.g., Koyama, 2014; Werts & Brewer, 2015).

3.3. Developing Strategies

Research grounded in organizational theory has explored school strategies in responding to external environments, such as a wide range of buffering to bridging. Honig and Hatch (2004) outlined five strategies found in school reform literature. First, schools may constrain interactions with environments by not joining programs or ignoring feedback (e.g., March, 1994). Second, schools may limit these environmental linkages by symbolically adopting external demands using the language and/or school mission statements at the surface level not to fully engage in the changes (e.g., Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Third, adding peripheral structures such as committees or new offices is another strategy to determine how to interact with environmental demands, which can be understood as a short-term approach to prepare long-term plans (e.g., Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988). Fourth, schools may shape terms of acquiescence by modifying external demands to advance goals or enact policy mandates according to organizational understandings (e.g., Lipsky, 2010). Finally, for the end of the bridging spectrum, schools may pull the external environments in by blurring boundaries between school organization and external environments (e.g., Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978).

However, Shipps and White (2009) argued that, in these studies, principals' strategies were framed as "a series of efforts to contain or manage conflict in the face of mandates from policy makers and occasional demands from middle-class parents and activist teachers" (pp. 370-

371). Especially under high pressure from accountability environments where "external interests and constituencies are shaping principal decisions," focusing on principals' actions to control the internal school agenda is too limited to illuminate leaders' strategies (Shipps & White, p. 371). Aligning with this argument, recent studies show that school principals tend to more actively challenge and question the policy demands and develop strategies (Gunnulfsen & MØller, 2017; Koyama, 2014). Principals are described as "those who are skilled at performing diverse tasks by drawing together whatever material objects or ideas might be at hand, and not necessarily contingent to or destined for completing one kind of task" (Koyama, 2014, p. 281). Thus, studies reporting school principals' strategies in relation to accountability policies have reported more dynamics of interactions between principals' actions and policy environments.

School leaders' strategies found in existing literature are grouped into (1) artificial improvement of test scores, (2) classifying students, (3) moving and re-moving teachers, (4) focusing on targeted measures and data, and (5) negotiating with external authorities. These strategies imply that accountability for school principals is not just a simple direction to obey mandates from federal and state policies. Accountability is more about a complex process of negotiation with external demands, school needs, and their personal beliefs for school leaders.

3.3.1. Artificial improvement of test scores

As accountability pressures are high in terms of performance of required testing, studies showed schools may change the group of students who are subject to the test through school discipline, for example (Figlio & Ladd, 2008). Koyama (2014) examined how school principals in New York City negotiate the district responses to meet No Child Left Behind (NCLB)'s two major mandates: standardized testing and data-monitoring demands. In her study, some principals used alternative software rather than the mandated one, manipulated calculation to

generate data that they wanted to see, and delayed compliance of the policy, even at the risk of their jobs. This type of behavior can be viewed as "undesirable" actions by other researchers, but Koyama (2014) framed principals as "local policymakers" (p. 282) who selectively implement the policy mandates in their own schools even resisting the external mandates.

3.3.2. Classifying students

While school principals frequently mentioned "what's the best for kids," some studies provide evidence that leaders frame students as policy subjects and classify them based on their achievement to increase school average outcomes in testing or to comply with policy mandates (Figlio & Ladd, 2008; O'Laughlin & Lindle, 2015). This strategy often involves students with special needs and low-achieving students. Figlio and Ladd (2008) argued that schools tend to classify low achieving students as learning disabled in accountability systems. Several quantitative studies found that schools changed discipline and suspension patterns around testing periods, which intended to increase average test scores of the school (Figlio, 2006; Ozek, 2012).

Bokhari and Scheneider (2009) showed that adopting school accountability policies increased the number of diagnoses and medication for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). O'Laughlin and Lindle's (2015) qualitative study more closely examined how school principals respond to the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Elementary school principals in their study tended to divide students into "normal" and "non-normal" groups while the policy advocates inclusive education using the clause of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Under high-stakes accountability, some participants appeared to prefer to move students with disabilities to independent special education settings. For example, one participant expressed that "me as an elementary principal, I do not want the responsibility of saying that

your second-grader is not going to get a high school diploma" (O'Laughlin & Lindle, 2015, p. 152).

3.3.3. Moving and re-moving teachers

Studies reported that pressure from testing led school leaders to identify "weak teachers" who cannot effectively increase test scores and remove them from certain grades or their schools. Boyd et al. (2008) illustrated that high-stake tests in New York changed teacher mobility in terms of particular grades and schools. Fuller and Ladd (2013) suggested that elementary-school principals in North Carolina tended to move their weaker teachers from tested grades to untested grades. In addition to test policies, teacher evaluation became one of the critical issues in accountability. While teacher dismissal has been rare (Donaldson & Papay, 2015), recent studies reported that newly adopted teacher evaluation policies have increased this frequency (Dee & Wyckoff, 2015). However, studies showed that depending on teacher supply conditions of the school contexts and social, relational norms (Donaldson & Mavrogordato, 2018), teachers rated as "low-performing" can be dismissed, re-hired, receive intensive professional development, or be encouraged to retire. Donaldson and Mavrogordato (2018) provided evidence that, with "persistently low-performing teachers," some principals offered the teacher a retiring option instead of dismissing them. The principals considered the teachers' pride as well as their relationships with the teacher and other teachers in their schools.

3.3.4. Focusing on measures and data

Research has shown that principals focus on data-driven decision-making by using targeted measures in school operations. Derrington and Campbell (2017) examined principals' responses to new teacher evaluation for a five-year period in a southeastern area of the U.S. While principals were overwhelmed initially, as time went by, principals rapidly integrated

evaluation rubric criteria into classroom observations and school professional development. Luo's (2008) quantitative study using the high school principal survey found that principals used data frequently in instructional leading, organizational operation, and moral perspectives in the NCLB era. The study reported that principals' data use is significantly related to individual analysis skills, school size and socioeconomic status, district requirement, and data accessibility. Interestingly, principal's perceptions of data quality were associated with their data use in instruction but not in other areas. Goldring et al.'s (2015) interview study with principals reported that school principals are "highly engaged in measuring teacher effectiveness using other means that are growing in sophistication and depth, and they are finding numerous productive uses for decision-making in their schools" (p. 102). While using student growth measures is one of the options for human capital decisions and is encouraged by policy makers, principals in their study rely more on data from their observations of teaching. These findings suggest that school principals generate their own data especially for instructional decisions in addition to using student achievement data provided.

Along with data-driven decision making practices, a recent quantitative research shows that school principals focus on targeted measures in existing policies. Lee and Lee's (2020) analysis using the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) data from 1991-2012 found that school principals in the U.S. tended to prioritize academic goals within the NCLB targets at the expense of personal growth and vocational skills. They also highlighted that such trend prioritizing academic achievement over other educational goals was more drastic in public schools than private schools.

3.3.5. Negotiating with external authorities

Principals can negotiate with external authorities who influence policy mandates to adjust requirements and develop their own policy in schools (Derrington & Campbell, 2015; Dulude, Spillane, & Dumay, 2017; Gunnulfsen & MØller, 2017; Keddie, 2014). In the specific context of mandated mathematics curriculum and instruction, Dulude, Spillane and Dumay's (2017) case study in one elementary school showed that school leaders appealed to district leaders and university partners to make them clarify ideas about what was negotiable and nonnegotiable, what they should focus on, and how to "readapt their schedule based on their perceived increase of activities" (Dulude et al., 2017). In this context, since the district tests and state-policy documents were not aligned, school leaders used arguments about the state test to persuade district leaders, but they were denied. However, in their school, school leaders convinced teachers to make them comply with the "non-negotiables," relying on their formal authority while ignoring "negotiables" acquired by the district. Thus, teachers had few opportunities to reshape their schema about mathematics. Their findings suggest that school leaders' "strategic responses were not at the expense of the quality of instruction and experiences for students," but rather embraced "other tactics and rhetorical strategies" (Dulude et al., 2017).

Gunnulfsen and MØller (2017) showed school principals' responses to the national test policy in Norway. Notably, in Norway, where principals' strong internal accountability is buttressed by professional credentials and public trust, school leaders showed "subconscious and relaxed acceptance of the external accountability dimension" (Gunnulfsen & MØller, 2017, p. 470) as compared to the U.S. with stronger external accountability forces. The participants in this study questioned the test data as tools for improvement and passively complied with the policy mandates: using symbolic responses, balancing different priorities, and applying some degree of

assimilation to adopt the new policy. Similarly, Keddie (2014) showed the school's positionality relying on the reputation, historical backgrounds and ethos, and access to resources are critical in developing the school's collective autonomy (power shared with principal and teachers) in order to overcome and challenge the negative effects of performance-oriented demands.

3.4. Facing Ethical Dilemmas

Another line of study explored ethical dimensions in leaders' responses to accountability. As researchers have suggested the existence of pressure from multiple accountabilities on school leaders, some studies have examined principals' responses using an ethical lens. These authors recognized that values are one of the important factors that play a critical role in leaders' decision making, which guides their thinking and actions (Leithwood & Stager, 1989). In this respect, it is conceivable that, even though leaders' decisions or actions are indistinguishable from the consequences of their responses to accountability, values and ethics that guide the practice are different and more complicated.

Mintrop's (2012) mixed-methods study examined the degree of integrity across nine schools in California in the U.S. He found that schools with high integrity held a balance between values and reality and tended to be more open to disagreement. While this study explored integrity at the school level, the author linked integrity to educational leaders' personal strengths and their utilization of moral aspects to balance equity, system efficiency, student-centeredness, and professionalism with discretion. His findings suggest that, under accountability pressure, integrity can be forged in different ways in schools, and strong conformism can infuse "forceful agency" rather than promote the integrity of educators' everyday responses. While Mintrop (2012) examined integrity as moral perspective at the organizational level, his findings imply that school leaders perceive tensions in making ethical decisions while dealing with

multiple values. In fostering integrity, leaders are expected to create a balance which "does not mean equal weights but assigning weights according to a rank order of normative importance" (Mintrop, 2012, p. 702).

By extending Mintrop's (2012) study, Ehrich et al. (2015) examined Australian school principals' perceptions on ethical leadership and ethical use of data under test-based accountability. Ethical leadership in this study was characterized as "a social, relational practice concerned with the moral purpose of education" (p. 198), and ethical leaders were expected to balance different forms of accountability. Using Starratt's (1991, 1996) framework of ethics, Ehrich et al.'s (2015) interviews with principals showed that school principals "were acutely aware of the central role of ethics in decision making and the need to extend ethical practice to every member of the school community" (p. 204). Participants reported that their decisions were closely associated with the notions of care and equity for students' best interests, which was involved in value-based decision making (Ehrich et al., 2015). For example, even though school principals developed strategies of using data and programs that aligned with the curriculum standards and tests, their practices entailed dilemmas along with "doubts and questioning" (Ehrich et al., 2015, p. 210). The authors argued that school leaders strived to achieve "coherence" by developing consistency between external accountability and internal accountability in schools, as Mintrop (2012) suggested. However, they argued that accountability culture prevalent in the national test policy context exacerbated tensions related to principals' decision making. Thus, Ehrich et al. (2015) indicate that examining principals' strategies as consequential actions to accountability only considers surface level responses, which can miss complex dynamics that exist in leaders' ethical dilemmas under the accountability era.

Studies using the social justice leadership framework have also addressed school principals' tensions and dilemmas among competing priorities. Since facets of social justice (associational, distributive, and cultural) can be "interrelated and potentially contradictory under certain conditions," actions for social justice leadership require prioritizing certain values in utilizing limited resources (DeMatthews, 2016, p. 6). These issues mostly involve groups of students with special needs or students from minority populations (e.g., DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; DeMatthews, 2016). Under accountability pressures, "the sheer number of uncoordinated, and sometimes contradictory, federal and state policy initiatives" (Capper & Young, 2014, p. 161) can increase school leaders' dilemmas and undermine their abilities to lead for social justice.

DeMatthews (2016) examined, in the context of a school along the U.S.-Mexico border, how a leader employing social justice leadership prioritized attention, time, and resources. In this study, social justice leadership was characterized as the school principal's efforts to "close the racial achievement gap, create an inclusive school for all students and families, and provide a culturally relevant pedagogy" (DeMatthews, 2016). Using an ethnographic approach in one school, this study revealed that multiple orientations for social justice leadership practice themselves inadvertently can promote or challenge social justice under accountability pressures. For example, the school principal noted that taking a specific action, such as choosing a particular program, could harm a certain group of students while another is helped. From the perspective of social justice leadership, leaders need to maximize marginalized groups' benefits while minimizing unintended negative outcomes, which inherently entails dilemmas. The findings suggested that the principal's practice for social justice was influenced by interactions of competing priorities and challenges, which shaped her efforts to address social justice

challenges with limited resources. Moreover, the unique context of the school, on the international border, played a critical role in affecting leadership practices because the context produced "competing cultural ideologies, varying opinions about language and inclusion, and the long-term impact of discriminatory and under-performing schools" (DeMatthews, 2016). Thus, this study implies that under pressure from multiple accountabilities, school principals should develop a more balanced leadership approach that does not prioritize certain challenges over others among competing values in pursuit of social justice.

In examining ethical dilemmas in the context of high-stakes accountability, DeMatthews and Serafini (2019) applied a bounded ethicality lens to understand school leaders' compliance with the special education law. Using interview data with nine school principals and three district administrators, they found five factors regarding the psychological and social forces that influenced principal decisions and actions: boundedness, district and state culture, competition and self-interests, and evaluation. The authors highlighted that principals' decision making processes were impacted by these factors as well as pressures from accountability policies, which suggests that school leaders' ethics and values can be bounded to socio-political contexts where high-stakes accountability policies are prevalent.

The studies on leaders' ethical dilemmas presented above suggest several assumptions. First, it is assumed that leadership itself is an inherently value-laden and complicated endeavor (Cranston, Ehrich, & Kimber, 2006; DeMatthews, 2016; Ehrich et al., 2015). Second, pressures from multiple accountabilities in recent policy environments increase tensions and dilemmas in school principals' leadership practices (DeMattthews, 2016; DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019; Ehrich et al., 2015; Mintrop, 2012). Third, interactions between individuals' personal backgrounds, school contexts, and political environments influence how leaders recognize and

reflect on their ethical dilemmas and how they make choices (DeMattthews, 2016; DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019; Ehrich et al., 2015; Mintrop, 2012). Finally, these studies suggest that, while leaders' responses to accountability can be simply categorized in conformism, resistance, and strategic alignment (Mintrop, 2012), beneath the surface of actions and final decisions, there are complicated dilemmas and tensions among competing values (DeMattthews, 2016; DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019; Ehrich et al., 2015).

4. Analysis of Literature

An extensive body of theoretical and empirical studies in educational leadership and policy explores links between accountability and school leaders. This work has complicated the concept of accountability in multiple ways, especially from the viewpoint of school leaders (Ehrich et al., 2015; Gonzales & Firestone, 2013; Knapp & Feldman, 2012; Shipps & White, 2009). While the origin of accountability relied on contract-based relations in the corporate world, its usage has become frequent in day-to-day lives as well as education policies and schooling (Pollitt & Hupe, 2011). In this respect, several scholars (re)defined and theorized accountability to make it applicable for school settings and revealed multiple forms of accountability (Elmore, 2004; Firestone & Shipps, 2005; Kim & Yun, 2019; Leithwood, 2003; Newmann et al., 1997). Other scholars examined influences of accountability on school leaders and leadership. These studies expressed concerns in terms of policy's governing mechanisms for leaders' roles and identities (Anderson & Cohen, 2015; Carpenter et al., 2014; Cranston, 2013; Foster, 2004; Leithwood, 2001; Normore, 2004). In this line of research, accountability has been framed as discursive and not necessarily policy texts.

Empirical studies have investigated leaders' perceptions and responses to certain accountability policies. In a broader sense, some scholars have focused on multiple forces or

values that guide school leaders' decisions and leadership practices (e.g., Gonzales & Firestone, 2013; DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019; Ehrich et al., 2015; Knapp & Feldman, 2012; Shipps & White, 2009; Werts & Brewer, 2015), while others have focused on external mandates from specific policies (e.g., standardized tests, teacher evaluation, curriculum mandates) in examining school leaders' perceptions and responses (e.g., Donaldson & Mavrogordato, 2018; Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2017; Gunnulfsen & MØller, 2017; Koyama, 2014; Lee & Lee, 2020; Spillane et al., 2002). The findings from such studies were mixed. Some have shown that leaders prioritize moral and professional beliefs among competing accountabilities (Gonzales & Firestone, 2013), while others have shown that externally-driven accountability forces dominate leaders' decisions (Shipps & White, 2009; Werts & Brewer, 2015). In making sense of mandates from state or federal policies, the interpretation of leaders' responses varied depending on researchers' methodological orientations. For example, some sensemaking studies relied on the assumption that leaders are expected to pursue alignments between practice and policy intentions established by policy makers, which emphasized leaders' cognitive processes of modifying their schemas toward mandates (Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2017). However, other studies have suggested that these cognitive processes should be understood with the assumption that school leaders are political actors like other political leaders who deal with interests of multiple groups; therefore, their strategies in practice and how leaders utilize policies should be prioritized in researchers' orientations in collecting and interpreting data (Koyama, 2014; Werts & Brewer, 2015).

Despite the varied results, the existing literature implies several key findings. First, school leaders' day-to-day practice involves complicated endeavors in meeting different demands from multiple stakeholders. This effort involves prioritizing challenges or values that

are competing with each other. Even though leaders have to conform to federal or state policy

mandates, beneath the surface of their final decisions, there are complicated ethical dilemmas

and tensions among competing values (DeMattthews, 2016; DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019;

Ehrich et al., 2015). Thus, in leadership practice, accountability cannot be simply defined. It is a

complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon. Second, accountability policies have increased

tensions and dilemmas in school leaders' perception of multiple accountabilities. The findings of

existing studies imply that accountability policies impose *technical rationality* based on

measures and data-driven evidence, which is not always applicable in leadership practices in

schools. School leaders have to be responsible for tasks that are not measured in accountability

metrics systems, such as building relationships with students and staff, creating collaborative

cultures, and engaging in communities. As accountability driven policies become more

prevalent, recent studies suggest that school leaders tend to align their professional and moral

dimensions of accountability with external mandates (Knapp & Feldman, 2012; Shipps & White,

2009; Werts & Brewer, 2015). Third, interactions between individuals' personal backgrounds,

school contexts, and political environments in a larger context influence leaders' perceptions and

responses to accountability (DeMatthews, 2016; DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019; Ehrich et al.,

2015; Mintrop, 2012). The reported findings show that principals' years of experience in the

position, district-level support or control, group dynamics in the school community, or political

environments can interface with how school leaders perceive and respond to accountability.

However, I find apparent gaps in the literature. First, while conceptual studies have

provided subtler analyses of accountability, empirical studies have tended to reduce the concept

of accountability to fall within the boundary of implementing certain forms of policy. This may

result in methodological problems in that researchers can prioritize established policy intentions

as a precedence of accountability while overlooking school leaders' practices that are not subsumed by the policy documents. Second, existing studies do not offer enough evidence on underlying mechanisms of accountability control for school leaders' perceptions. While several studies critically examine how accountability discourses and logics can undermine leaders' identity and practices, empirical studies have tended to overlook this insight. This might be related to lack of understanding about *policy as discourse* in empirical studies, which can analyze what enables and constrains knowledge creation of policy makers and practitioners (Ball et al., 2012). Third, dilemmas and ethical dimensions in leaders' responses to accountability have not been visible in research. While multiple researchers suggest the importance of moral accountability, only a few scholars have attempted to focus on the ethical dimensions of accountability practiced by school principals, as compared to studies that applied policy-driven perspectives. Interestingly, practice-oriented journals have continually reported difficulties in dealing with value conflicts and dilemmas that school principals encounter in their daily practices (Doggett, 1988; Mette & Scibner, 2014; Willis, 2011), and some scholars have theorized the role of ethics in leaders' decision making (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016; Sun, 2011). More recent research has addressed issues of equity and social justice that are occupied in daily practices of school principals, showing that individuals' ethics can be bounded by accountability discourses and policy-driven actions (DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019). Therefore, empirical research on school leaders' accountability can gain more insights from further inquiry about role of ethics and value orientations in school leaders' daily practices that have to promote equity and democracy along with other educational values.

CHAPTER III.

FRAMING ACCOUNTABILITY AS A CULTURAL PHENOMENON

This chapter guides how I frame accountability in this study. As shown in Chapter II, previous studies in education have tended to conceptualize accountability from the perspective of school reform and policy implementation. However, such an approach is limited for capturing understandings of accountability from individuals working within the system. Because school leaders' constructions of accountability are influenced by their individual personal and professional backgrounds, school contexts, and current political and social environments, it is necessary to consider different ways to capture the nature of the intersections between accountability and school leaders. The other pitfall found in my literature review is that, while accountability has become a daily discourses and practices in schools, the literature has tended to conceptualize accountability as compliance with exogenous policies, relying on the traditional notions of accountability focusing on principal-agent theory.

With this notion, I extend accountability research applying cultural perspectives from the literature out of educational leadership. In this chapter, I draw on scholarship of accountability mainly in public administration in which multiple researchers have committed to theorizing accountability as a field, understanding administration with complex relationships among individuals and their relationships with organizations. I first present conceptual expansion of accountability and then discuss accountability as a cultural phenomenon. Next, discussion about ethics in accountability conduct is followed. Drawing on these perspectives, my inquiry of this study approaches accountability from the view of school principals, focusing on how accountability is interpreted and enacted in their daily practices in schools.

1. Conceptual Expansion of Accountability

According to Raymond Williams, one of the founders of cultural studies, examining frequently used keywords during a particular period is useful to understanding cultures and changes in the society at that time. Relying on this notion, Dubnick (2014) argued that accountability can be one of the *cultural keywords* in our contemporary society, especially in English speaking contexts. After 1980, the occurrence rate of "accountability" in English language texts has increased sharply (Dubnick, 2014). Other researchers also argued that "accountability" has become one of the "magic words" not only in the field of governance (Pollitt & Hupe, 2011), but also in our day-to-day lives in describing various relationships (Bovens, Schillemans, & 't Hart, 2008). Thus, it is necessary to consider this emergent form of accountability as "a cultural phenomenon that is dominating, altering, and consuming our traditional notions of governance" not merely managerial mechanisms or arrangements (Dubnick, 2014, p. 25).

The concept of accountability can be examined in multiple ways. For example, its dictionary-based definitions suggest that (1) it is related to the description of quality or characteristics, (2) it is understood with synonyms such as responsibility, liability, and answerability, and (3) accountability is often conveyed as "a modifying word" that effectively reduces its meaningfulness under certain conditions (Dubnick, 2014, p. 26). Historically, the notion of accountability is grounded in the practice of book-keeping and in the field and study of accounting (Bovens, 2005; Hayne & Salterio, 2014).

Regarding features of modern governance, accountability has been a core idea of public administration for a long time, but within the past two decades, it has undergone "both an expansion of meanings and an apparent resurgence of popularity" (Pollitt & Hupe, 2011, p. 647).

Along with such trend, several scholars pointed out that accountability literature has used different approaches in conceptualizing accountability with minimal consensus or has not provided a formal definition of accountability (Bovens, 2014; Lewis, O'Flynn, & Sullivan, 2014). This definitional diversity might be attributed to the multiple purposes or expectations that accountability works for in current environments (Lewis & Triantafillou, 2012; Lewis et al., 2014), beyond the classic definition of accountability that focused on two-dimensional rendering of formal accounts to higher authorities (Bovens, 2005). Recent research has expanded this concept by including the idea of "accountable to all the others" (Behn, 2001, p. 201) and with the rise of debates around transparency (Hood, 2007). Relatedly, Bovens (2005) commented that the core idea of accountability now faces "the problem of many hands" in terms of to whom we should be accountable and "the problem of many eyes" in terms of who is the *accountee* (p. 186).

1.1. Accountability as a Virtue & Accountability as a Mechanism

Bovens' (2010) overview of literature on accountability pointed out two main pillars in accountability conceptualization—*accountability as a virtue* and *accountability as a mechanism.* The former concept of accountability as a virtue can be easily found in political discourses and policy agendas because it conveys positive images of transparency and trustworthiness as a rhetorical tool (e.g., McGee, 1980). Given this attempt, "being accountable is seen as a virtue, as a positive feature of organizations or officials" (Bovens, 2010, p. 949). More actively, accountability is used to positively qualify the performance of an actor and to describe "substantive norms for the behaviors of actors" (Bovens, 2010, p. 949). For example, Koppell (2005) suggested five different dimensions found in multiple usages in establishing accountability as a virtue—transparency, liability, controllability, responsibility, and

responsiveness. Studies focusing on accountability as a virtue have tended to explore normative criteria or guidelines in relation to evaluating behaviors of public agents to increase accountability (Bovens, 2010). This line of research focuses on accountability as a dependent variable, assuming accountability as a desired outcome be achieved.

On the other hand, accountability as a mechanism is concerned about a specific social relation—such as a relation between an actor, the accounter, a forum, and the accountee—or mechanism that involves a duty to justify conduct. This approach relies on the principal-agent theory rooted in the historical concept of accountability. Given this attempt at conceptualization, three questions are involved: "to *whom* is the account to be rendered, …*who* should render the account, …*why* the actor feels compelled to render account" (Bovens, 2010, p. 953). In this sense, accountability is instrumental in achieving desirable governance and viewed as an independent variable in studies. The exemplary accountability mechanisms may include hierarch, auditing, performance reporting, transparency of data, and watchdog activities (see Boven et al., 2014).

These two concepts are mutually reinforcing in that elements described as virtues such as transparency, openness, responsiveness, and responsibility belong to the actor, but these are also a purpose of mechanisms (Bovens, 2010). Moreover, the two concepts are complementary because "processes of account giving and account holding cannot operate without standards against which the conduct of actors can be assessed" (Bovens, 2010, p. 962). Under these two concepts, accountability can have passive and active sides, which has been a long-standing debate about how accountability should work (see Jackson, 2009). On the passive side, the argument is that external scrutiny will shape the individual's action. While on the active side, the

argument is that developing individuals' capacity and culture of responsibility is more important (Considine, 2002).

With the expansion of meanings, the concept of accountability has gained popularity supported by the notion that "nobody can be against it" (Bovens, 2005, p. 182), though some scholars questioned this phenomenon. Dubnick (2008) argued that accountability became "a normative standard of political and social life" (p. 1). He indicated the irony of this popularity in that accountability can be "merely an empty concept, an iconic symbol manipulated for both rhetorical and analytic purposes to help us rationalize or make some sense of our political world" (Dubnick, 2008, pp. 15-16). Mulgan (2000) argued that the over-expansion of accountability's definition, especially extending accountability into the internal, can result in ethical issues in that actors measure their manner against their personal ethics rather than being subject to external scrutiny.

2. Accountability as a Cultural Phenomenon

While accountability has been framed as a virtue or a control mechanism broadly, when it comes to accountability experienced by individuals in their everyday lives, it contains multiple meanings and forms. Dubnick (2008) noted that accountability as an iconic symbol became "a normative standard of political and social life" (p. 1), individuals encounter multiple phenomena of accountability that rely on different sources. Later, he commented accountability as a cultural phenomenon (Dubnick, 2014).

While Dubnick (2014) did not define what he means by "cultural" directly, his later work cited cultural theories' approaches, stating that "accountability as a reflection of what kinds of behavior and relationships are prescriptively valued in alternative social settings" (O'Kelly & Dubnick, 2019, p. 5). I found that this approach can be also supported by the argument that

culture is about meaning making drawing on educational literature focusing on culture (Anderson-Levitt, 2002, 2012; Bruner, 1996; Fuller, 2007). In the anthropologic tradition, culture is often understood as implicit and explicit norms (Anderson-Levitt, 2002, 2012; Fuller, 2007), "taken-for-granted practices" (Bruner, 1996, p. 46), or tacit knowledge (Fuller, 2007). Therefore, culture as meaning making refers to "not only the act of interpreting what is going on, but also to the know-how and norms required to behave like a sensible person" (Anderson-Levitt, 2012, p. 443). Moreover, culture can be considered as an active process of meaning making, which includes contesting over definitions in addition to meanings themselves (Street, 1993). Thus, understanding accountability as a cultural phenomenon indicates underlying logics that guide how individuals think and act in relation to accountability in addition to individuals' thoughts and actions.

Drawing on the meaning of culture above, I present theoretical grounds to understand accountability as a cultural phenomenon. These cultural views on accountability stress underlying values, beliefs, and assumptions beyond individuals' accountability conduct. While some scholars separately categorized cultural perspectives and social psychological views in accountability literature (e.g., O'Kelly & Dubnick, 2019), here, I included both aspects together. The latter perspective, social psychological views, also explain implicit and explicit assumptions and norms of society, cultural perspectives; they are linked to individuals' decision making in terms of how they think and behave (e.g., Patil et al., 2014).

2.1. Cultural Views on Accountability: Multiple Forms

Research on cultural understanding of accountability has emphasized the communicative and relational core of accountability (Bovens et al., 2014). For example, Dubnick (2014) attended discourses and narratives emerged from frequent usage of "accountability." Applying

Rudrum's (2005) definition, Dubnick (2014)[5] argued that the dictionary-based meaning of accountability has been altered and changed through a variety of narrative means. With these analytic tools, Dubnick (2014) found four discourses that shape the meaning of accountability: institutionalization, mechanization, juridicization, and incentivization. These discourses are supported by meta narratives about promises—promise of democracy, control, justice, and performance, respectively (Dubnick, 2014).

The first type, institutionalization, suggests that accountability is "institutionalized by its association with constitutional and electoral arrangements designed to constrain and control the power of political authorities, rendering them more answerable and responsive" (Dubnick, 2014, p.29). Accountability is about constitutional arrangements supported by a narrative that such efforts will lead to greater democracy (e.g. Fukuyama, 2011). For example, Schedler, Diamond, and Plattner (1999) argued that democratic governments have to adopt self-restraining systems through constitutional checks and balances to protect democracy from threats by demagogic politicians. In school settings, arranging school board systems to restrict the power of principals or superintendents can be an example of institutionalization. The second type is mechanization, which suggests accountability is a means for controlling procedures and behaviors within a systematized context. In this form, organizational arrangements include bureaucracies, audits, reporting, and hierarchies, which are invented to foster obedience and efficiency. In education, following district rules or state mandates, such as reporting performance rating data and following the procedures of teacher evaluations, can be examples of mechanization. In this

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[5] While there are broader definitions of discourse, Dubnick seemed to rely on narrow definition of discourse and narrative. In his work Dubnick (2014), he said, "discourses are the most general form of language-based verbal communication produced as a means to generate a response from the receiving population, and narratives are a particular form of discourse based on the use of stories" (p. 29). That is, discourses can be understood as linguistic productions which include processes and results of verbal communications constructed by sets of narratives (Brockmier & Harré, 1997). I acknowledge more broader definitions of discourse and narrative have been used in education literature and other disciplines, but I note here what Dubnick (2014) pointed out for his definition.

discourse, "to be accountable is to be subject to active control, but from the perspective of those charged with managing organizations, it fosters a positive narrative of control" (Dubnick, 2014, p. 30). In the third type, accountability has been juridicized and used for criminal and civil legal systems, and it includes formalized sanctions within organizations; that is, accountability establishes formal rules and procedures to deal with undesirable behaviors. The underlying narrative is that accountability brings justice for those victimized by malevolent or detrimental behaviors. Legal rule making, enforcement, and criminalization can be part of this narrative. In education contexts, making laws about special education and curriculum mandates as a means for equity can be an example of juridicization. The last type, incentivization, focuses on the meaning of accountability as the basis for assessment in an effort to promote adjustments in performance. In the incentivization discourses, accountability functions as a tool for enhancing performance. To increase performance, standards and metrics are often designed and used to change individuals' behaviors and responses (Dubnick, 2014). In school settings, using rewards and punishments based on student achievement scores to increase competitions between schools is an example of incentivization.

Dubnick (2014) offers insights into how we use "accountability" in multiple social and political contexts, particularly focusing on the public administration field; his typologies of accountability[6] also share commonalities in educational leadership research presented in the previous chapter. For example, when it comes to the typologies of Firestone and Shipps (2005) and Leithwood et al. (1999), they share concepts with Dubnick's (2014) analysis. Political accountability (Firestone & Shipps, 2005) is comparable with institutionalization, and decentralization accountability (Leithwood et al., 1999) may partially explain institutionalization

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[6] See Romzek & Dubnick (1987) for his earlier work on multiple forms of accountability

based on the promise of democracy. The difference is that, while decentralization accountability emphasizes the right of persons influenced by the decisions of authorities, institutionalization embraces the idea that officeholders have to answer for their actions to one another. Bureaucratic accountability (Firestone & Shipps, 2005) and management approaches (Leithwood et al., 1999) can be understood with mechanization. Market accountability (Firestone & Shipps, 2005; Leithwood et al. 1999) aligns with incentivization. Moral accountability (Firestone & Shipps, 2005) has overlaps with juridicization of Dubnick's (2014) model. According to Firestone and Shipps (2005), moral accountability is proposed as "an antidote to other forms when they fail to embrace fairness and justice" (p. 89) and relies on value-oriented approaches. Thus, it embraces the narrative of justice, but moral accountability is more than formalization of rules and procedures. However, professional accountability (Firestone & Shipps, 2005; Leithwood et al., 1999) is not included in Dubnick's (2014) analysis. This might be explained by the fact that professional accountability is considered more important in education settings compared to other contexts. It can be also understood by the fact that, while professional accountability is important for individual leaders, their discourses and narratives have not been shared broadly in the political and social environment. Lastly, as Shipps & White (2009) suggested, under high pressures from external accountabilities, internal accountabilities that include professional accountability may not be engaged.

Table 3.1. summarizes five different types of accountability. I build on Dubnick's (2014) framework by adding Firestone and Shipps' (2005) and Leithwood et al.'s (1999) types in the last column. In addition to the four types from Dubnick (2014), I added professionalization as a fifth dimension. Historically, professional accountability is grounded in the argument that school and district leadership need to be distinct professions with specialized knowledge in the early

20th century (Firestone & Shipps, 2005). Its narratives rely on promises of professional expertise

for school leaders by establishing professional consensus through training and professional

standards (Firestone & Shipps, 2005; Leithwood et al., 1999). As the last column shows,

multiple accountabilities in education provide comparable concepts. However, their analytic

focus is slightly different. Firestone and Shipps (2005) and Leithwood et al. (1999) were more

interested in multiple sources of accountability in education, while Dubnick (2014) intended to

analyze how "accountability" is used and framed in political and social communications.

Therefore, Dubnick's (2014) model is useful to understanding how accountability is framed as a

virtue and as a mechanism via narratives and discourses.

Table 3.1. *Typology of Accountability*

Discourse Focused: Type	Narrative	Accountability as	Examples	Accountability Type in Education
Institutionalization	Promise of democracy	Arrangements intended to constrain power and foster answerability and responsiveness of officials	Constitution making; accountability forums; site-based management; school board;	Political [1] Decentralization[2]
Mechanization	Promise of control	Means used to oversee and direct operations and behavior within organized context	Administrative control; bureaucratization; rules; reporting; auditing; teacher evaluation; performance reporting	Bureaucracy[1] Management[2]
Juridicization	Promise of justice	Formalization of rules and procedures designed to deal with undesirable and unacceptable behavior	Formalization; legal rulemaking; enforcement; social justice; making curriculum laws; Title 1 fund	Moral[1]

Table 3.1. (cont'd)

Incentivization	Promise of performance	Standards and metrics designed to influence behavior	Performance measurement; standards; student achievement score, school improvement plan	Market[1,2]
Professionalization	Promise of professional expertise	Formal/informal peer pressure and expectations	Certification requirement; training; learning	Professional[1,2]

Source: The table is adapted from Dubnick (2014, p. 29).
[1] Firestone & Shipp (2005); [2] Leithwood et al. (1999)

2.2. Contingency Views on Accountability

One of the important elements to consider in cultural understanding of accountability is the *context* in which individuals interact with other actors and structures, as well as regenerate social norms (Mansbridge, 2014). As many scholars have theorized accountability in multiple ways along with the expansion of its meaning, research has also highlighted contextual factors that shape different forms of accountability beyond the principal-agency theory driven definition. For instance, Manbridge (2014) argued that:

> Accountability scholars should avoid this one-dimensional sanction-based definition by adding back in the traditional definition of accountability—as giving an account of, explaining, and justifying one's sanctions to those to whom one is responsible—and recognizing that two substantively different forms of accountability are associated with these two definitions, each being appropriate in a different context. (p. 55)

From this view, Manbridge (2014) pointed out two different forms of accountability: sanction-based accountability (or compliance-based) and trust-based accountability. Contingency theory is concerned about contexts in which these forms of accountability work; contextual factors included individual backgrounds and situational differences. For example, Manbridge (2014) showed the trajectory of contingency theory regarding accountability. In early work, researchers tended to align with the argument that sanction-based accountability is appropriate

when trust is not valid, while trust-based accountability, which relies on giving an account, would properly work where trust is valid (see Friedrich, 1940; McGregor, 1989).

Recent work on accountability also further complicated the relationships between accountability forms and contexts where different forms of accountability play out. As audit culture, intensive-based accountability approaches have dominated political and social environments since the late 1990s, scholars have become concerned that external, material incentives as a popular tool of sanction-based accountability or *vertical accountability* undermine the intrinsic morale of professionals (Philp, 2008). More recently, Tamir (2012) suggested that accountability can be "malignant" when distrust enables comparable monitoring to be desired and continued work because such monitoring and numerical assessments can lead to corruption, which in turn intensifies distrust.

Other scholars suggested that trust-based accountability can work when individual agents are already willing to do what the principals ask them to do. The *selection model* of principal-agent relations explains these circumstances (Mansbridge 2009):

> When this fortuitous circumstance obtains, it pays the principal to put in considerable effort ex ante, to select the right agent, whose interests are aligned with the principal's own interests, and then afterward let that agent act more or less on her own initiative— rather than putting in all the effort ex post, to monitor and sanction the agent. If the agent's and the principal's interests are aligned well, the principal can afford to engage in less monitoring and sanctioning after the selection, because research before the selection—for example, looking at the agent's past reputation—has given the principal sufficient reason to believe that the principal's and agent's interests are aligned. (Mansbridge, 2014, p. 58)

In the context of developing professionals, this selection model is applicable when explaining how the system balances a use of sanction-based and trust-based accountability. For instance, in the recruiting stage of educational professionals, educational authorities may want to hire someone who intrinsically cares about student learning. In developing teachers, both formal and

informal sanctions are used, such as evaluation, reappointment process, and professional norms which can regulate those who deviate from the shared norms of good teaching. Some scholars called this form of accountability *horizontal* or *network* accountability (e.g., Lillejord, 2020). Relying on this balanced approach, Mansbridge (2009) argued that "a selection core and a sanction periphery" are needed for individuals and systems, along with some balance between trust- and sanction-based accountability.

Regarding to what extent the trust-based accountability should be selected, Mansbridge (2014) pointed out four situational elements to consider. First, as aforementioned, there are potential agents intrinsically motivated with interests that potential principals want to pursue. Second, to what degree the agent's work can be easily monitored because if it is hard to monitor the work, the principal instead has to rely more on trust-based accountability. Third, the impacts of monitoring and sanctioning on the agent matter because, it can undermine the agent's intrinsic motivation. Fourth, to what degree a principal is willing to give flexibility and autonomy for an agent determines what type of accountability will be selected and to what extent.

While the selection model presented above mainly emphasized the relationships between principal-agent, other scholars have suggested individual and situational factors that could influence the broader context of accountability systems. Focusing on individual level, researchers have shown that individuals' motivational differences (Brennan, 1996) and identity or personal characteristics (Besley, 2008) could shape systems of accountability. Rothstein (2011) demonstrated that the purpose of the accountability system, whether radical changes are needed or not, could determine the degree of using sanction-based accountability. Gerber and Rogers (2009) showed that the trend in terms of how the majority behaves within society, as a signal, can influence how people think and decide to behave within the accountability system.

Regarding such perception, some scholars attended to the role of emotions, such as pride and disgust, which are related to different forms of accountability (e.g., Kelly, 2011).

2.3. Reimagine Accountability Toward Reciprocity

While research has suggested multiple views on accountability, these perspectives tend to assume the *relational* aspect of accountability, which entails "linking agents and others for whom they perform tasks or who are affected by the tasks they perform." (Bovens et al., 2014, p. 6). The recent research by O'Kelly and Dubnick (2019) argued that the conventional view of relational model relies on a narrow notion of relationality because such view was designed to explain relations involving *account giving,* which Bovens (2007) described as "the obligation to explain and justify conduct," mostly relying on the view of accountability as a mechanism (p.450). O'Kelly and Dubnick were concerned about the possibility that Bovens' framing can reorient the traditional view of accountability focusing on principal-agent relations at the center of accountability perceptions.

Thus, O'Kelly and Dubnick (2019) extended such perspectives, adding two accountability spaces—*agora* and *bazzar*—in order to reflect the complex nature of organizations, taking into account decision-making processes in everyday operational terms. O'Kelly and Dubnick (2019) conceptualized *agora* as "a 'primordial' accountability space upon which other spaces rely" (p.3, emphasis in original). They also described agora is "a fluid, contingent, and localized accountability space, founded on an unending cascade of social situations and the relationships that these situations inform" (O'Kelly & Dubnick, 2019, p. 13). In this fluctuating accountability context, purposes and norms emerge as individuals' daily interactions continue and social relationships are developed. Considering ground-level administrative work, they rely on Darwall's (2006) idea of second-point standpoints which

argues that moral obligations are inherently linked to their responsibilities to one another within the moral community. Therefore, what motivates the individual's actions is grounded in such relationships underpinned by collective norms around "the fairness of group aims and the internal fairness of the procedures that the group employs" (O'Kelly & Dubnick, 2019). Thus, their concept of the *agora* denotes "the everyday, ordinary, story of collective purpose emerging from people's being together" (O'Kelly & Dubnick, 2019, p. 14); accountability is understood in spaces produced through administrative practices seeking to utilize such social dynamics. This notion of accountability challenges the idea that collective purpose is *a given,* prevalent in the traditional views of accountability as a mechanism. However, O'kelly and Dubnick (2019) argued that such collective purpose is not *a priori* but it is constantly constructed and negotiated through ongoing interactions among individuals and social structure. From this view, they demonstrated that assertions about "unaccountability" fail to capture the "fundamentally relational nature of accountability" because it presumes or impose hierarchical and/or monopolistic relationships instead of democratic views on relationships (O'Kelly & Dubnick, 2019, p. 24).

The other concept O'Kelly and Dubnick (2019) suggested was *bazaar,* which they described "where accountability relationships based on mutual exchange emerge" (p.3). They said:

> Bazaar describes the exchange element in the accountability space: the standpoints that emerge in situations where people develop relationships—fleeting at times—rooted in their trading with others in mutual pursuit of each other's' interests. (p. 17)

Following the work of Adam Smith (1776/1999), O'Kelly and Dubnick viewed exchanges and negotiations as fundamental in administrative environments. Using these exchanges and negotiations, they help people develop reciprocal stances emerging within the agora. For

instance, when individuals exchange materials or ideas, this process involves negotiating values. Once the negotiation is completed, it means both parties reach an agreement, shaping certain norms around their reciprocal interests. In this way, people develop practical rationale and act upon the collaboratively constructed foundations. O'Kelly and Dubnick (2019) argued that the idea of bazaar, the exchange element, is critical in administration because it has ubiquity and drives organizational productivity. Drawing on Darwall (2006), they suggested that people seek their goals by developing connections based on mutual commitments. Darwall (2006) said, exchange "involves a reciprocal acknowledgement of norms that govern both parties and presupposes that both parties are mutually accountable, having an equal authority to complain, to resist coercion, and so on" (Darwall, 2006, p. 48, Cited in O'Kelly & Dubnick, 2019, p. 20). Therefore, exchange can be considered a required and inherent element in human life. At the same time, cyclical exchange leads people to create their reliability while thickening relationships.

What is important in O'Kelly and Dubnick (2019) for this study is that it offers methodologically different views on accountability that explains operations of accountability in everyday practices at the ground level. From this point, first, human beings, individuals are inherently social beings in developing their motivations and conducting actions. Second, individual actors within the organizations are thus active agents; therefore, organizational goals as context of accountability are not fixed but negotiated at the ground level. Third, drawing on the agora as a metaphor, accountability as a virtue toward achieving "the normative" is not something given, from outside of individuals' interests. Rather, a "territorial claim" depending on whose voices are counted in deciding organizational goals (O'Kelly & Dubnick, 2019, p. 24),

which relates questions of power. Thus, what accountability aims need to be considered as polemical, not fixed, sole purposes.

3. Ethics in Accountability Conduct

In terms of accountability conduct at the ground level, ethics are fundamental because values and norms that individuals agree upon for accountability are directly associated with ethical questions. Especially at the individual level, personal ethics are closely involved in the individual's day-to-day decision-making. In this vein, some scholars in educational administration have developed inquiries about values, morals, and ethics in relation to leadership (e.g., Begley, 1996, 1999, 2001; Hodgkinson, 1991; Sergiovanni, 1992; Starratt, 1994) by arguing that "values constitute the essential problem of leadership" (Hodgkinson, 1991, p. 11).

Research has reported that accountability-oriented school environments increase school principals' confronting value conflicts and ethical issues, but few empirical studies have closely examined this domain (Sun, 2011). The terms ethics and morals are often used interchangeably. However, according to Sun (2011), ethics refers to "the systematic study of the values regarding the 'ought' or 'right' (Kimbrough, 1985) while morals refers to "first-order beliefs and practices about good and evil which guide our behavior" (p. 23). Ethics is a more philosophical term that "reflects upon good and evil and upon moral norms" (Robbins & Trabichet, 2009, p. 51). Thus, school leaders' dispositions about ethics play a critical role in shaping their perceptions of and responses to accountability.

I align with the views that accountability is a cultural phenomenon and understand accountability context is polemical and complex. Thus, pragmatic ethics is useful to explain individuals' decision-making about their motivations for accountability and its conduct.

3.1. Pragmatic ethics

Pragmatic ethics rejects *a criterial view of morality* in which "morality is primarily a conscious adherence to prior and fixed criteria" suggesting such a view "over rationalizes human beings" (LaFollette, 2000, p. 401). This springs from pragmatists' belief that practice is critical and human activity is habitual as opposed to some philosophers who believe that everything important for us involves conscious deliberation processes (LaFollette, 2000). LaFollette (2000) introduced pragmatic ethics by stressing that the nature of habit shapes the present, which is influenced by the past. LaFollette argued that our previous experiences "continue in the present, unified and embodied in our habits" (LaFollette, 2000, p. 402). Here, habits can be understood as organized sets of actions, which appears in manifest behavior in multiple circumstances. While habits are not visible and displayed in typical ways, they are still operative. Therefore, habits can both empower and constrain our thinking and acting. LaFollett argued that they are influenced and shaped by individuals' interactions with the social environment in the past. That is, individuals construct their habits under the influence of cultures; therefore, cultures can be understood as the social transmission of habits. Habits are also the crucial tool for conveying our past choices into present action; therefore, according to Dewey (1988/1922), habits "constitute the self; they are will" (p. 21).

In this respect, pragmatic ethics highlighted that "we do not make personal or professional decisions by applying fixed, complete criteria" (LaFollette, 2000, p. 414). This approach declares that the moral is complex and changeable, which aligns with O'Kelly & Dubnick's (2019) view on accountability as reciprocal, contextual, and flexible. Pragmatic ethics do not seek criteria from externally imposed rules, rather they develop criteria from the tool used in making informed judgement. These criteria "embody learning from previous action, [and] they

express our tentative efforts to isolate morally relevant features of those actions" (LaFollette, 2000, p. 415). Thus, the emergent criteria potentially become integrated into our habits, which ultimately guides the ways that we think about and react to our worlds. In this way, pragmatism does not postulate minimal sets of rules to follow to be moral but "emphasizes exemplary behavior—to use morally relevant features of action to determine the best way to behave, not the minimally tolerable way" (LaFollette, 2000, p. 415).

In applying this paradigm of pragmatic ethics, Dubnick (2003) assumed that ethical behaviors are norms and standards of behavior, caused as partial responses to the pressures shaped by accountability mechanisms. Instead of using Kantian and utilitarian paradigms that rely on *a priori* knowledge and some uniformed standards in ethics, Dubnick (2003) believed that the pragmatic paradigm is more appropriate to explain the practical role of ethics when dealing with social dilemmas (e.g., Flanagan, 1996; Putnam, 1998). Dubnick (2003) reported public administrators' ethical strategies based on multiple typologies in relation to circumstances. For example, he suggested that public administrators apply strategies such as "the rule-follower's ethics" shaped by role expectations and social identity of the individual when answerability was required by accountability contexts (Dubnick, 2003, p. 412). On the other hand, when accountability is considered as blameworthiness, he found three different strategies that administrators can use: (1) to utilize the situation instrumentally to improve their organizational capacities, (2) to apply higher moral standards widely approved by the organization, and (3) to engage in an "identity shift" by borrowing an identity from other professions often regarded as inherently praiseworthy.

Pragmatic ethics highlights individuals' interests and motivations to act, which is constructed through an actor's previous experiences and their relationships with the society. This

lens also implies that individuals' responses and strategies in conducting accountability are not fixed and vary depending on conditions, particularly when they have to make decisions regarding dilemmas under the complex goals of accountability.

4. Conclusion

Extant literature presented in Chapter II has shown that school leaders experience multiple forms of accountability in their leadership practice (Firestone & Shipps, 2005; Gonzales & Firestone, 2013; Knapp & Feldman, 2012; Shipps & White, 2009). Such trend reflects accountability as a cultural phenomenon, showing definitional diversity and contextual difference in accountability conduct, as discussed in this chapter. However, more recent discourses in accountability scholarship problematize that conventional framing of accountability still centers principal-agency relations on understanding of accountability. Such view may not capture diversified, flexible, and co-constructed forms of accountability in daily basis at the ground level. As O'Kelly and Dubnick (2019) suggested, if we first bring a lens looking at accountability contexts as fixed, in terms of goals, norms, and values that emerge in reciprocal relationships, we may not fully understand the operational aspects of accountability at the ground level. In addition, I argue that presupposition of accountability as punishment or control, often found in educational research, can limit our understanding of virtue aspects of accountability *and* pragmatically constructed form of accountability that individuals enact at the ground level.

In my inquiry, I approach accountability from the view of school principals, focusing on how accountability is interpreted and enacted in their daily practices in schools. As noted above, this involves understanding accountability as a cultural phenomenon, assume that meanings of accountability are constructed by explicit, implicit norms and tacit knowledge (Anderson-Levitt, 2002, 2012; Bruner, 1996; Fuller, 2007; Street, 1993). This aligns with the approaches of policy

as discourse and policy as lived experience that I discussed in Chapter I. In this sense, accountability should be understood with how individuals think about what they are doing and what makes them think and act in certain ways, in addition to what individuals actually do. This approach goes further than analyses drawing on sensemaking theories that are often used in policy implementation studies (Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2017) because the cultural view of accountability acknowledges both the larger influences of lived realities of school leaders and the cognitive focus of meaning making. Moreover, my inquiry also attempts to explore school leaders' dilemmas resulting from competing and multiple accountability demands. I draw on pragmatic ethics in order to understand how and why individual leaders confront dilemmas within certain contexts and how they respond to specific situations of dilemmas.

CHAPTER IV.

METHODOLOGY: SITUATING MY INQUIRY

Educational research has tended to consider writing *method* chapters as a way to answer the question, 'What is the best method of answering my research questions?' (e.g., Creswell & Poth, 2016). However, there is another movement that advocates for methodological decisions to be grounded in personal elements, "Who I am." (Marsh, 2006; Parks, 2020; Vellanki & Fendler, 2018). For example, Vellanki and Fendler (2018) argued that methodology is "a lifestyle choice" in pursuit of quality of life as a scholar not only an instrumental means for analysis. My approaches to methodological decisions about this study started from the former stance, asking about "What methods would allow me to explore meanings of accountability that I intended to understand," and have evolved, integrating the latter point of the view. During the years of inquiry, I also found my long-term trainings to become a *researcher* in academia—being a graduate student in academia for almost 10 years from my two masters programs in Korea and PhD in Michigan—had blinded me from seeing who I am and what I like the most as a person, educator, researcher, and a writer to some extent. However, exploring multiple traditions of methodology also allowed me to keep asking "Who am I as a scholar" and "Is what I am doing what I value," which has been evolving and will be evolving.

From this view, I want to highlight that my writing of this chapter should not be read as linear steps based on logical reasoning that I followed for my methodological decisions. Rather, my writing of this chapter presents the decisions which entailed accommodating multiple challenges to the initially planned procedures; interactive, ongoing communications with my

participants; and my continuous reflections on who I am as a person and scholar throughout my dissertation process.

My methodological inquiry is grounded in the notion that individuals need to "listen to themselves and to their own subjective truths, rather than allowing objectivity to be their sole arbiter of meaning" (Kierkegaard, 1946, p. 210). This situates my work integrating humanities-oriented perspectives in the interpretive tradition of qualitative study, which emphasizes in-depth, ongoing data generation and analysis to fully understand complex phenomena (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Erickson & Gutierrez, 2002). In seeking out "subjective truths" of school leaders' understanding of accountability, I prioritize my participants' voices over imposed intentions from federal or state policy documents and existing research findings. Thus, I have been open to an emic approach in planning, designing, and conducting this study. This methodological orientation led me to use snapshots of ethnography as a way to generate data. To interpret and present my ideas about my participants' experiences, I used portraiture informed by narrative analysis as it values voices of participants and detailed contexts where narratives are situated.

I begin with describing my research positionality and subjectivity because my story as a person and a researcher influenced why and how I approached the methodological considerations of this study. I then describe methods and analytic procedures employed for this study.

1. Positionality and Subjectivity

Researchers enter into a study with prior knowledge and experiences that impact the research processes, including setting research questions and designing their research (Peshkin, 2000). I acknowledge that who I am as a person and researcher is critical in deciding how I conduct my research (Durdella, 2019). In this sense, I examine aspects of my identity and past

experience that shaped how I understand school leaders and their work as well as research in the field of educational administration.

1.1. Professional Experience and Theoretical Orientations

My positionality is constructed through my previous teaching experience in South Korea and being a graduate student in the field of educational administration both in Korea and the U.S. While I taught in elementary schools in Korea where school systems are driven by national and district policies and a unified governance system, I found school leaders often faced dilemmas in meeting demands from multiple stakeholders. As a novice teacher, I heard a lot of teachers talking about their individual interests or their grade-level interests, complaining about leadership decisions from principals. I became curious about how my principal would orchestrate all these different interests from individual teachers and groups. Fortunately, in my five and a half years of classroom teaching, I worked with four different principals who encouraged my creativity as a teacher and my passion of seeking graduate degrees. Of course their leadership styles were different, but they all agreed that the question, " 무엇이 교육적인 것인가"(what is educational?), should be prioritized over all other aspects in schooling. I later found this value can be exchangeable with "what's best for kids" in American settings.

During my master's program at Seoul National University, I had opportunities to facilitate in-service training for nationally selected principals working with the National Academy for Educational Administrators and the Korean School Consulting Center. Working with school leaders across the country, I realized that school leaders have their own educational philosophies and develop their policies based on the educational beliefs. As Korean public-school principals are required to spend over 20 years in teaching and administration to be promoted as principals, their leadership values seemed to be often rooted in the idea of "what is

good for students and teachers." However, I also observed that their values frequently clashed with national and district policy initiatives toward performance- and competition-oriented accountability.[7] While shared decision making structures and teacher involvement in school management process were popular in Korea, I also found that school principals were the ones who were responsible for the final consequences of the decision-making processes. This experience had led me to understand school principals' leadership practices as exercising their values in dealing with multiple demands from policies and diverse stakeholders.

After I started my Ph.D. program in the U.S., I found that "accountability" is frequently used in political and social life as well as in school settings. School principals I have met through past research projects often used the term "accountability" to describe their roles, purposes and processes of schooling, and policy controls. My unfamiliarity with the popularity of "accountability" in the Michigan context guided me to ask questions, such as, "What does 'accountability' mean to school principals and why do they depend on this concept in describing themselves and their roles?" As my literature review suggested, I also acknowledged that "accountability" became popular with the expansion of its meaning, especially in English-speaking countries (Dubnick, 2014). Thus, my experience with the popularity of "accountability" in multiple contexts made me inclined toward multiple meanings of accountability perceived by school principals in their daily practices. These personal and theoretical orientations are reflected in my writing and data analysis processes.

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[7] Here, I would like to highlight that "책무성" (accountability) was considered a text written in policy documents or research papers in Korean settings. The term "accountability" was not a concept that appeared in daily conversations among teachers or principals in schools. Rather, they referred to it as " 책임감" (responsibility).

1.2. Subjectivity in the Field

Regarding my relationships with participants, I used professional contacts from Michigan State University (MSU) to recruit my potential participants. One of my participants, Scarlett, was enrolled in a graduate program in the same department that I was attending as a doctoral student. Another participant, Emily, attended the certification program for Educational Administration at MSU, and Bruce was connected to MSU through one of his teachers who attended my program at MSU for her master's degree. I assume that these relationships helped me establish rapport when communicating with the participants during the recruitment process as well as my fieldwork in their schools.

As a transnational scholar, I had limited experiences in American K-12 education systems. Based on my previous research interviews with school principals, I assumed my participants would be willing to inform me about their work and school policies specifically to help me understand. As an outsider, I was able to ask naïve questions about taken-for-granted practices, assumptions, policies, and terminologies for school leaders (e.g., Tobin et al., 2009). I believe this led them to interpret their habitual actions and thoughts as well as collectively shared norms in Michigan education contexts.

Moreover, my previous teaching in South Korea was critical in my communication with participants and data generation. I carried emotions toward my experiences while teaching, and I often felt principals exercised greater power than teachers within schools. At the same time, I acknowledged they wore too many hats. Teachers' and parents' views on their principals' practices can differ from school principals' own perceptions, yet principals themselves are the most knowledgeable regarding their own difficulties and dilemmas as school leaders. In terms of regional context, I felt that the relatively smaller size of school districts in Michigan do not

provide enough formal support and resources for school leaders as compared to larger districts that can systematically provide enough resources to individual schools. I believe that these factors influenced how I generated and interpreted my data in this study.

2. Methodological Decisions: Situating My Inquiry

I draw on interpretive research traditions (Erickson & Gutierrez 2002; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011) because an interpretive approach values individuals' subjective realities, which I was interested in to reveal the knowledge of "accountability" constructed by school principals. Specifically, the view of the constructivist-interpretivist is closely related to my inquiry because it posits that "the world is socially constructed through interaction where there are multiple realities and meaning is agreed upon in natural settings" (Durdella, 2019, p. 91). I also relied on naturalistic inquiry as a methodological paradigm because it postulates the existence of multiple and constructed realities while opposing context-free generalizations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I assumed the naturalistic inquiry paradigm would provide a better understanding of school leaders' experiences with multiple realities of accountability in school practices.

In addition, my inquiry is understood through cultural perspectives. The concept of culture is essential in the tradition of anthropology (Glesne, 2006), and educational scholars drawing on such tradition have been interested in actions, social norms, and implicit assumptions shared by groups of people of the society (e.g., Anderson-Levitt, 2002; Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009). In this sense, my inquiry is also about understanding the accountability culture of school principals (particularly in Michigan). Considering school culture highlighted by research on leadership and school reform (e.g., Lieberman, 1988; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016), my participants' understanding of accountability is contextualized within the culture of each school and district. Therefore, my analytic focus of this study to understand accountability

included not only leaders' actions themselves, but also underlying logics and implicit knowledge regarding their actions and intentions (Anderson-Levitt, 2002; Bruner, 1996; Fuller, 2007; Street, 1993; Tobin et al., 2009).

With these considerations, my method can be described as snapshots of ethnography (Cruz, 2011; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), which entailed individual interviews, shadowing, focus groups, artifacts, and reflection essay exchange over the course of a school year (2018-2019).

2.1. Participant Recruitment and Characteristics

The most important factor I considered in recruiting participants of this study was to find a small group of principals who were willing to share their thoughtful, critical perspectives by reflecting on "accountability" over the course of a school year. In June 2018, I conducted preliminary interviews with 10 prospective participants who were working as school principals at K-12 public schools in Michigan using the professional contact information from my doctoral program. Throughout the interviews, I found that regional contexts (locale), district functions, and school-level (elementary or secondary) as well as individual leaders' personal backgrounds intersect with how principals reflect on "accountability." Where the school is located seemed to be related to student demographics, school-community relationships, and resource availabilities. Therefore, I wanted to explore rural, suburban, and urban contexts. Regardless of location, I also found that how districts operate influences school leaders' perceptions of accountability. I specifically chose to focus on participants at the elementary school level, which included 3rd grade, because principals expressed that they had to prepare for the new Read by Grade Three Law in Michigan. This law requires students to repeat third grade if they are behind by one or more grade levels beginning with the 2019-2020 school year. In addition, elementary school

principals seemed to spend more time with students who have "behavioral" issues compared to those working at secondary schools.

Considering such factors, in September 2018, I approached four school principals from the preliminary pool who had shared rich information about accountability phenomena in relation to their school contexts during the interviews. Among them, two principals—Emily working in a suburban district and Bruce working in a rural district—agreed to participate in my dissertation study. The other two declined: one principal felt overwhelmed by new initiatives of his school and the other had family issues to focus on. Scarlett, a principal working in the urban district volunteered to participate in this study when I described my study in an effort to recruit principals from her district. I did not include her for my preliminary interviews because she had just had a new baby at that time, but I had known her for two semesters through the graduate program in which she was enrolled. Table 4.1 shows the characteristics of the study participants.

Table 4.1. *Characteristics of Participants*

Participant	Principal experience	Gender	School level, district
Bruce	9 years	Male	K-5, small-mid rural
Emily	6 years	Female	PK-4, small-mid suburban
Scarlett	2 years	Female	PK-3, large urban

My first participant, Bruce is a principal working at Pearl Elementary School (PK-5) in the rural Green district and had done so for nine years at the time of data collection. His school seemed to be well known for strong relationships with the community and the collaborative culture among staff members. Bruce spent his teaching career in a neighboring district for 10 years and took his current job in the Green district nine years ago. I purposively recruited him because I felt his reflection on current education policy environments during the preliminary

interview was extremely insightful and in-depth. I also thought his many years of experience working as a principal at Pearl Elementary would create a unique culture and policy in his practice. Bruce identified himself as a 40-year-old Caucasian male and "a Midwestern individual" who has lived in Michigan his entire life except his time in college.

Emily is working at Emerald Elementary School (PK-4) in the suburban Purple district. She had just started her seventh year as a principal and her third year at Emerald Elementary at the time of data collection. Unlike the other two participants, Emily worked for four years as a middle school principal in another district and then moved to the Purple district. I selected Emily because she seemed to experience the highest level of district-centered control among 10 prospective participants, even though her school was considered as a high-achieving school in the local area.

Scarlett is a principal at Ruby Elementary School (PK-3) in the Blue district. During the time of data collection, she was in her third year working as a principal at Ruby, which is the first school in which she took an administration position. She taught as a teacher in a large urban district in another state and worked as a reading specialist in another suburban district in Michigan before she became a principal. The Blue district was well known for serving student populations from economically and racially marginalized groups. The district was also well known for systematic efforts to increase culturally responsive education to serve minoritized communities.

2.2. Methods: Snapshots of Ethnography[8]

According to Cruz (2011), ethnographic snapshots include observations and fragmented narratives that generate data in bursts rather than a prolonged method of gathering data. To explore school principals' meanings of accountability through their daily practices, I decided to spend a certain amount of time shadowing my participants. Instead of traditional ways of ethnography, which requires spending a significant amount of time in the research sites, I chose to visit each participant on a monthly basis, shadowing them for a full day of work during the visit because I understood that principals' work was filled with complexity and unexpected incidents that may require privacy of students, teachers, or community members. I used multiple methods to generate qualitative data: shadowing, individual interviews, focus groups, artifacts, and reflection letter exchange.

2.2.1. Shadowing

I decided to use observation data to (1) understand the nature of my participants' work to contextualize my inquiry, (2) inform the generation of specific interview questions to reveal their perceptions and implicit assumptions about accountability, and (3) develop rapport with my participants to help them comfortably share their difficulties and dilemmas with me. I shadowed

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[8] I had a hard time naming my methods while I was working on my fieldwork. The idea of using "snapshots" of ethnography came from my accidental conversation with Ethan Chang at the UCEA convention in 2018. He was a PhD candidate at the University of California-Santa Cruz at that time. On the day of the banquet in the Space Museum in Houston, I was alone looking around several exhibitions in the quiet lobby. Ethan was another person who seemed to be enjoying experiencing spaceship models. We never introduced ourselves to each other, but I remembered his face and name from several sessions at the UCEA and AERA meetings. I had also read some of his published papers. I walked to him and introduced myself. As is the nature of academic conversation, he asked about my work. When I described my methods, Ethan said, "Oh, ethnography snapshots." I was excited to have the right name to describe my methods, and I appreciate the moment we were able to talk. When I was writing this chapter later, he also recommended several works for citation of this name. Therefore, I want to give a credit to Ethan Chang for this "naming" process of my methods. Ethan Chang has now become an assistant professor at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

my participants' daily routines in their work and specific school events that they led to understand the nature of their leadership practice.

Shadowing is understood as "observation on the move" because the researcher follows a target participant (Czarniawska, 2014, p. 43). Several scholars have used shadowing as a methodological tool for leadership study (see Gronn, 2009; Mintzberg, 1973; Wolcott, 1973). Bøe, Hognested, and Waniganayake (2017) argued that shadowing can generate "detailed descriptions on the nature of leadership as a stream of continuous action" (p. 605). Similarly, McDonald (2005) suggested that shadowing can generate "first-hand, detailed data"; therefore, researchers can gain access to "the trivial or mundane, and the difficult to articulate" (p. 457).

I conducted five to seven days of shadowing with each participant, spending six to eight hours during my visit. Each observation helped me to identify prompts to facilitate follow-up interviews to uncover implicit norms and perceptions. My fieldnotes recorded my observations, relying on my jotted memos and memories while I was shadowing the participants. I did not carry a laptop or a visible note pad because I wanted school members including teachers and students not to consider me as an "inspector," "evaluator," or "spy." Instead, I carried a small note pad in my pocket for jotting my thoughts and key observations when I was alone in a quite space or in my car right after the shadowing session ended. (Glesne, 2006). In total, my fieldnotes recorded 22 visits and 152 hours of observations with my participants.

2.2.2. Individual interviews

Individual interviews were conducted during the day I was shadowing. I used both semi-structured interviews and conversational interviews during my visit. My full-day observation helped me to have a sense of when is a good time or not a good time for an interview. When my participants had really "tough" days, I did not ask for formal interviews even though I planned

them on that day. I respected my participants' time for processing their emotions and reflection on difficult situations that they encountered. Later, in subsequent interviews, I came back to such scenes to ask how they had thought and felt. I interviewed each participant four to five times, and each interview lasted from 40 to 80 minutes. In total, I conducted 14 individual interviews.

2.2.3. Focus groups

I also convened two focus groups with all three participants together as a way to enrich responses by creating an opportunity to collectively reflect on accountability and interactively exchange knowledge (Prosser & Loxley, 2008). I had two specific purposes for using focus groups: humanizing my participants and making accountability visible[9]. As I wanted to help my participants build professional networks beyond their research participation, I conducted the first focus group in October 2018. I had them introduce themselves to each other and share their own motivations to participate in this study. Before the first focus group meeting, I also asked them to bring in three to five photos of anything that reminded them of accountability since articulation of the abstract concept of accountability can be challenging. By allowing my participants to use visual representations of accountability, they were able to verbalize insights and interpretations about accountability (Prosser & Loxley, 2008).

I conducted the second focus group in June 2019 after the school year had ended. In this second focus group, I asked them to prepare a dilemma talk where they shared a most difficult dilemma that they had experienced during the school year. Even though I observed several dilemma situations during my visits, I wanted to them to pick certain incidents that they were comfortable sharing with others. I also prepared a Wordle talk using interview data I had

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[9] The idea of using focus groups for these purposes was from my conversations with Dr. Lynn Fendler and Dr. Lynn Paine. Without their advice, I would have not have been able to clarify what I really wanted to do with my participants throughout this study. I would like to give credit to these two inspirational, insightful scholars and my dear mentors who made me much more enjoy being a scholar and conducting this research.

collected. I showed the ten most frequently used words in their interviews and my participants reflected on the results. They also reflected on their yearlong research participation and shared plans for the following school year. During the school year, they encountered each other at conferences, and two of them visited each other's school to learn about school initiatives. My participants seemed to enjoy their professional network and celebrated their hard work for the past school year.

2.2.4. Artifacts and reflection letters

During the visits and focus group interviews, I collected artifacts, which included photos, policy briefs, school accountability reports, school flyers, and any other documents the participants were willing to share with me to supplement interview and observation data. I also collected documents from school websites, including annual education reports, school newsletters, and school event announcements. This data helped me gain a sense as to how each school communicates with people through various forms of media.

When all the interviews were completed, I wrote a letter about my reflection on each participant and delivered the letter to each participant in person in June 2018 because I wanted to share my thoughts with them. Ethically, I also felt it is the right thing to humanize my participants and my relationships with them. Bruce later emailed his reflection letter to me. Scarlett gave me a hug instead of her writing and Emily took 20 minutes to share her reflections on the research participation. Sharing my written reflection with them seemed to benefit both sides. First, writing my reflection letter at the end of the study enabled me to develop my preliminary analysis and reflect on what I had learned from them and how I had grown throughout the study. Second, for my participants, my letters prompted them to think about their leadership from the outsider's perspectives. In addition, their individual reflections confirmed

that my presence in their schools made them feel like they had an opportunity to share their opinions and to have their voices heard.

All interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interview data generation protocols are available in Appendix A. I also included reflective memo prompts for shadowing in Appendix B.

2.3. Data Analysis

To analyze data, I drew on narrative analysis informed by portraiture. I used this approach because both narrative inquiry and portraiture value the voices of research participants and detailed contexts where narratives are situated (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; J Kim, 2015; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). In doing so, I intended to vividly describe and interpret participants' meanings (Glesne, 2006) by representing their individual perspectives about accountability in relation to commonalities and differences across participants within the boundary of school demographics and contexts.

Initially, when I planned this study, I was not sure which analytic method would be the best to analyze and present findings, valuing my participants' voices. As my fieldnotes and interviews offered detailed contexts that helped me understand how and why my participants interpreted and practiced accountability in certain ways, I did not want to simplify or fragment the stories they were telling me. In pursuit of my inquiry, I found that my intentions aligned with narrative inquiry traditions.[10] While there are different forms of narrative inquiry (see J Kim, 2015; Reissman, 2008), reading J Kim (2015) made me feel more autonomy in choosing analytic

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[10] Dr. Candace Kuby, an associate professor at the University of Missouri-Columbia first suggested me to think about narrative methods for my dissertation. I met her through the Qualitative Inquiry SIG mentoring session at the 2019 AERA annual meeting in Toronto. She listened to my intentions to humanize and value my participants' voices and my concerns about presenting my findings not in a way that might result in fragments of data. I appreciate her insights that made me realize that my approaches align with narrative methods in the existing scholarship.

procedures for this study. According to J Kim (2015), narrative inquiry often relies on interview data, following storytelling of participants, but it can be also combined with ethnographic or photographic data. From this understanding, even though I did not design and plan this study as narrative inquiry initially, I found that my research process generated *narratives* from my participants. I also realized that I intended to analyze my data in a way that narrative traditions value those who own the stories, my participants' perspectives. J Kim (2015) described that "individual stories have their own narrative meanings, and cultures also maintain collections of typical narrative meanings in their myths, folk tales, and histories, accumulated over time" (p. 281). Thus, I decided to use narrative analysis and interpretation to explore *narrative meanings* (J Kim, 2015; Polkinghorne, 1988)—diverse facets of my participants' experience with "accountability" in my study—to make explicit how accountability is depicted in school leaders' daily practices.

To present my analysis and interpretations, I chose to use portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005) to provide detailed contexts and stories recorded in observation data along with verbal narratives of my participants. I thought portraiture would benefit from the snapshots of ethnography that I used for this study and allow me to represent detailed scenes into which I wanted to invite readers. Thus, I call my analysis method as narrative analysis informed by portraiture.

The analytic procedure followed emic approaches in constructing participants' narratives. I first identified how each participant made meaning of accountability using data from interviews and focus groups. Second, I explored data from various sources to triangulate, focusing on how each participant's meanings of accountability were interpreted and enacted in their daily practices in schools. This inductive analysis focused on "repetitive refrains," "resonant

metaphors," and "institutional and cultural rituals" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 193),

which generated several themes. Third, these emergent themes helped me to develop plots of

narratives; I portraited each participant's narrative about accountability. I used this cyclical

writing for portraiture as a way of analysis by "remaining skeptical" about the selected contents

or revealed patterns and going back to the raw data. This stage also included "narrative

smoothing" to make my participants' story rich and coherent, which in turn helps readers be

more engaged (J Kim, 2015, p. 283). Last, I analyzed patterns and emerging themes across the

narratives from three participants focusing on commonalities and irregularities to answer the

research questions. I also attended to how existing literature informs my analysis and findings.

This final stage of analysis became the analytic discussion of this study. Once I conducted

preliminary analysis, I visited each participant in the following school year (in October 2019) to

share my interpretation and analysis about their narratives.

3. Contexts of Michigan as Research Site

I chose the state of Michigan for my research site. Historically, Michigan has actively

developed accountability systems beginning with the approval of Public Act 25 in 1990

(Education Policy Center, 2000). This accountability system mandated schools generate

improvement initiatives, create a core curriculum and learning outcomes for all students,

implement a school accreditation system, and complete an annual report (Gawlik, 2015). Since

1995, the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) test has been used for the process

of school accreditation. Michigan was one of the first states to utilize the Adequate Yearly

Progress formula prior to No Child Left Behand (NCLB) to achieve the goals of the Improving

America's Schools Act of 1994 (Education Policy Center, 2000).

Building on above efforts to establish accountability systems, policy environments in Michigan focused on collecting and reporting school data at the time of data collection for this study. Michigan schools were required to report school level data on a dashboard system, including school performances as primary metrics and six other categories as additional metrics: postsecondary readiness, student access/equity, school climate/culture, student factors, educator engagement, and understanding achievement gaps. In this dashboard system, the state average scores, and the average from a set of peer comparison schools were used for comparison values for individual schools (Michigan Department of Education, 2018). To comply with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, the Michigan School Index System was developed to identify a school's strengths and weaknesses in a variety of areas. The index system included multiple measures: student growth, student proficiency, school quality/student success (chronic absenteeism, advanced coursework, postsecondary enrollment, access to arts/physical education, and access to librarians/media specialists), graduation rate, English learner progress, and assessment participation (Michigan Department of Education, 2017). In this system, an index value is calculated for student subgroups that included racial/ethnic subgroups, economically disadvantaged, English learners, and students with disabilities.

In the state report, "Guiding Principles for Accountability," the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) stated that they aim to share the core values of accountability. The document explicitly expresses that "these values shape the work and customer service that we aim to provide to our students, parents, communities, and governing bodies in the State of Michigan" (MDE, 2018, p. 1). The language on Michigan's state policy documents reflected accountability as a tool for improving outcomes and satisfying stakeholders and customers. Increasing

transparency of school information, generating and collecting accurate data, and communicating with stakeholders using the data were suggested guidelines for accountability (MDE, 2018).

At the time of data generation for this study, Michigan educators faced two significant policy changes: the Read by Grade Three Law and teacher evaluation policy. In the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year, the reading law that requires retention of students who are more than one grade level behind was planned to take effect. Regarding teacher evaluations, the impact of student growth and assessment data was increased to account for 40% (up from 25% before) of teachers' final evaluation results in the 2019-2020 school year.

I assumed that these historical and recent trends in the policy context in Michigan may have influenced school principals' perceptions of accountability and related practices. In addition, Michigan has a unique district system. In 2016-2017, there were 56 Intermediate School Districts (ISD) at the county level and 301 Local Educational Authorities (LEA) at the local level in Michigan (MDE, 2018). The LEA runs schools and programs, and an ISD delivers special services, such as early intervention and special education programs. The large number of school districts in Michigan suggests that there can be large variation in accountability approaches across districts. Moreover, I presumed that the multi-layered district systems could increase pressures from competing accountabilities. All these policy initiatives and district systems suggested that Michigan would be an attractive site to explore accountability through school leaders' day-to-day practices.

CHAPTER V.

PORTRAIT OF SCARLETT: "I TAKE ACCOUNTABILITY OUTSIDE OF THE BOX"

Prologue

"I take accountability outside of the box," the statement made by Scarlett, well explains how she viewed and enacted accountability in the urban context of Ruby Elementary. Defining herself as "a leader of social justice," Scarlett said, she wanted to join my research to show her approaches to accountability, "which might be different from other leaders." Scarlett perceived accountability as being responsible for her own data; her understanding of data here was about the "student life," more than "numbers or scores." This perception was well depicted in her reading and utilization of student suspension data, attendance data, and achievement data. Using the data, Scarlett challenged the existing system and deficit-oriented thinking that may perpetuate unequal opportunities and resource distributions, especially for many of Ruby students, what Scarlett called "students of color" and "students of poverty." In this way, Scarlett's accountability enactment created new systems to better address underlying inequalities behind the numbers and scores from her own data. Therefore, I would call Scarlett a system changer. This chapter presents the portrait of Scarlett, which includes introduction to Scarlett in her own language, context of Ruby Elementary, accountability narratives, and the dilemma talk.

1. Story from Scarlett[11]

> *I am Scarlett Watson and a principal at Ruby Elementary. This is my third year working as a building principal at Ruby and the Blue Hill district. How did I enter in education? Well…I can start with my personal background. My mom was an addict and I'm the eldest of her seven kids. But I was lucky enough to go back and forth between my parents. I actually didn't go to college until 23 because I had to support myself. I went to*

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[11] This section is written based on individual interviews with Scarlett where she introduced her backgrounds to me. I used narrative smoothing to make her story telling more relevant to this study, applying the first person view.

community college because I could afford it and transferred to Hope University. I was a history major and got a teaching certificate.

I moved to Chicago on my own and taught in Back of the Yards neighborhood, students were all Hispanic. I taught 7th and 8th grade social studies and that was eye opening about the inequities in education. I mean, it was difficult, but I had a lot of successes. And the staff that I worked with was amazing and they had high expectations. And so we really got some great results. When I was in Chicago, I had gotten my masters under Dr. Tatum, who's a huge voice in the achievement gap literature. I fell into it and learned a ton. It helped me as a content area teacher like crazy. When I came home (Michigan) with my husband, I was able to get the reading specialist position in the Orange district. I taught in Orange for another four years. As a reading specialist, I was still working with at-risk kids and I was a Title 1 teacher. I loved that, but I wanted to be continually challenged.

I had become really frustrated with how much my voice was not heard around at-risk students. I felt like we were out of compliance and I felt like… things could be done so much more efficiently. With the results that I was getting in my classroom, I wanted to have a bigger sphere of influence. However, it was frustrating because whenever I was coming with all these innovative ideas and I had to shut down every single time. I just couldn't do it.

I went back for my administration certificate at Sky University through the certification pathway program, not really thinking I was going to do a principal job. However, that's when I met Dr. Maria Dee and Dr. Melanie Baker and they inspired me and said, "We really need leaders with these ideas." So, I wasn't even done with the certification program and I was hired into Blue Hill like no problem.

Being a leader in social justice, it's always important for me to be the face of students of poverty: how people need to research how leaders take accountability outside of the box and meet those needs of kids in poverty; and what that looks like away from the managerial model, following more the instructional leadership model. As a leader of social justice, I went with the kids and so they're up and I've gotten a ton of amazing feedback from families and from kids. We're not doing a good enough job of teaching social studies, now these pieces are conversations that teachers are forced to have with their kids when kids are asking who these people [in history] are.

As a leader of social justice, I recognize my own White privilege. I worked so hard and was able to get here, but I know it does not work the same for Ruby kids. I saw it did not work for my husband's family. My husband is Black, and everybody has their own opinion about it. I get it. Or ones who don't with that, they don't say anything. I'm like an in between person. They (parents and families) can't get through the teachers they are not communicating well when their teachers are not culturally responsive. They are trusting me. They know I will mediate their communications. My husband got me get lots

of credibility, working at the barber shop in community, and many families know him. That helps me. So many dynamics are here.

I get excited to participate in research that can showcase us trying to move towards the model of social justice and instructional leadership. It's important to me for my staff to see me be vulnerable, to be open, and to be part of research so that I can ask them to do things that are innovative, that I'm walking the walk. It's how I feel about that.

2. Context: Ruby Elementary in Blue Hill

2.1. Ruby Elementary

It was a rainy day when I first visited Ruby Elementary School in Blue Hill. Passing some old houses and construction areas on the uneven roads, I found a hidden gem, a one-story building, surrounded by big trees and a wide playground. As soon as I entered the school building, the walls colored with light blue and green made my mood brighter.

Ruby had the highest proportion of so called "at-risk" kids, though it had the smallest number (260) of students among three schools where I did my dissertation fieldwork. Scarlett described her student demographics: "We're 85% African American or bi-racial, 10% Hispanic, and five percent White." Walking in the hallway, I saw picture frames hanging on top of each wall, showing photos of an old black male holding a saxophone, a black woman making a speech, black kids reading books, and the phrase "Black Lives Matter." Later Scarlett told me she used her school improvement grant money to purchase these frames because "it was the kid's voice." The colorful walls at Ruby made these frames and other art pieces more prominent. I felt like I was walking in an art museum. However, I later found that it was not like this when Scarlett first came to Ruby three years ago. She told me the building was a "hot mess"—the building itself was old, teachers did not do anything similar in classrooms, and kids were screaming and crying. What Scarlett did first was asking the district to paint the walls and her

district sent one person to paint. It took one and a half years to color the walls in the Ruby building. Scarlett said, "Anyway it was done, and I'm thankful to the district."

2.2. Blue District

Scarlett expressed appreciation about the Blue district despite lacking a number of financial and human resources. She said that the district had done a great job in promoting "culturally responsive learning" and "distributing resources for at-risk kids." Unlike the Orange district (an affluent neighbor district) where she previously worked as a reading specialist, the Blue district "listen(s) to our voice and every innovative idea," supporting her to "execute these ideas." Scarlett said, for years, the Blue district focused on "culturally responsive positive behavior intervention support (CRPBIS) to build culture first" and she felt "those systems in place, at various levels." At the time of her research participation, she felt the district's focus was moving toward attendance and achievement as their "culture" had been established.

Scarlett often shared her concerns about students in the Blue district beyond her "Ruby kids." The Blue district was considered as a large urban district in Michigan. When talking about the district's achievement data, Scarlett shared the information with me:

> We're hitting the ground with achievement because there are some very scary statistics. Among the high school freshman across schools in our district, less than 50% are graduating. That is not okay. Gladly it's rising, but it's still completely 911. With the CRPBIS initiative, I think we had zero expulsions last year…. So, we're keeping our kids in. It's the attendance at the high school level, that's really scary because they can just walk out… Or, maybe they stay for the first three hours and then they leave and then they come back for their seventh hour. And it's scary.

At the same time, Scarlett was excited about her "innovative stuff" she had done to increase the attendance rate, such as an automatic robocall system, spreading across the district.

2.3. Teachers: "We are a United Family"

Because we're a family, we storm and we chaos, and we say what we need to say.
And, uh, it tends to get better after that.

- Scarlett, individual interview

I was busy buying packs of cookies and coffee, excited to be observing a whole staff meeting at Ruby scheduled on the last Wednesday of March. A day before the meeting, I received a message from Scarlett asking to cancel my observation of the meeting saying, "Teachers are exhausted, burned out, and it's right before spring break." During my visits at Ruby, I often felt teachers and Scarlett were under stress much heavier than staff members of the other schools I was visiting. Such stresses seemed to be often related to lack of resources, including financial as well as human resources, to support the diverse needs of students and to solve unexpected urgent problems. Within this environment, I felt visible and invisible tensions between Scarlett and her teachers in Ruby.

For example, Scarlett told me the district was not able to hire a substitute teacher for the second grade classroom where the teacher left in October 2018. This resulted in splitting up kids from the class and assigning them to other classrooms. Each Ruby teacher across the grade had five to six more kids coming from the second grade in their own class for 17 days. Scarlett said, having a large portion of students showing "behavioral and mental issues" led teachers to experience high levels of crisis in their classrooms. She also added, "I have high expectations" regarding classroom teaching as an instructional leader.

During my second visit at Ruby in October, Margaret, a teacher coach appearing to be between 45 and 50 years of age, came to talk with Scarlett in the office. She shared what teachers talked about in the morning: "There is a lot of things I am hearing. Two main things are teachers' frustration of having extra kids and bulletin boards." Frowning at her, Scarlett said "I wanted to

fix the situation. They should not have tried to come to you. People should come to me and talk."

Margaret said,

> I know you are listening, and I told teachers, 'you all need to start speaking voices. I'm not going to be your voice for a long time, and you guys should stand up.' But Roney and Patty were afraid about if they were checked out.

Scarlett insisted, "I haven't entered any data things. You know… Teachers seemed to be just afraid." Margaret said,

> It's not coming from you. I think this is about mentality and the system disvaluing their speaking up…. It's like being kicked out because of data collected by the system, something like 'you are going to be evaluated by being louder'… This building was notorious in terms of being loud.

Scarlett later commented that the previous principal at Ruby who retired right before her was a "top-down and managerial" principal. Scarlett told Margaret,

> Old school members don't speak up. New teachers come in and talk it out…. They [old members] don't give me a chance. If I'm be a manager Jo, they would be more frustrated…. I feel I'm disrespected. What was missing? What did I miss?

Margaret went out. Scarlett seemed to be in a gloomy mood. She commented,

> "I am a leader who really want to push instructional improvement rather than being a manager. .... I have a high level of expectations. … I feel, I'm lonely. I got things from downtown (the central office) and try to buffer a lot of things to protect my teachers."

As a third year principal at Ruby, Scarlett dealt with these tensions and conflicts with teachers. However, Scarlett seemed to be open to hear and discuss teachers' complaints about her leadership styles and initiatives her staff members to express their complaints about her leadership because she thought "that's what family does," considering Ruby "as a united family." She described her approaches to teachers in our interview:

I've learned through my leadership to, um, just put it on the table and open the floor. So as a family, *because we're a FAMILY* (Emphasis), *we storm and we chaos and, um, we say what we need to say. And, uh, it tends to get better after that.* Right? What I need to do better than my leadership is, you know, they give feedback to each other, they complain to each other. …but everything that's said to me is in private, so they don't have a global perspective of what's going on in the building access. … I have a much thicker skin now, but it's still very hard to be the only administrator [in this building]…. It shifts again and we come back as a family. At the end the year, we're loving it. Yeah. So, um, this is just the brutal couple of months.

As Scarlett said, her "family" relationships became more calm and closer as the school year was closer to the end. She recalled her School Improvement Plan defense meeting at the district in March, saying that she "intentionally took three of [her] teachers that are very vocal complainers" to help them understand "what's going on, what it's like" being a principal—receiving "67 emails a day" from the district and dealing with a combination of "finance, steering committees, teachers, and parents." Scarlett felt these three teachers with "big mouths" were "very impressed" with Scarlett "being cool, calm, collected and articulate." She described that this opportunity gave these "vocal complainers" opportunities to observe what she was trying to do. Scarlett thought it was a "showcase" for her. She could brag about her school, saying that "…like I said to those key players, behind closed doors we might argue and disagree and whatever. But in front of this team, we are one, we are united family."

Scarlett had a few teachers who had been in the building over decades and they were vocal about her initiatives to be "an instructional and social justice leader"—making and spreading complaints about culturally responsive approaches to promote agenda like "black lives matter." While there were conflicts between teachers and Scarlett, for her, teachers were the members of her "Ruby family" who would "eventually get together and love each other" to make "all innovative ideas" available for the lives of Ruby kids.

3. Accountability: "It's Their Life"

When being asked, "What does the term accountability mean to you?" Scarlett said, "To me, accountability is taking responsibility for my own data." She added,

> Accountability is not just the benchmark scores. It's how we grow readers to give them the best chance to graduate. I want my Ruby kids to not be in that section of not graduating high school….They need a chance to be a reader, to get out of what they're experiencing at home. And part of that is to teach your kids how to be metacognitive and say, 'I know what it's like at home. I don't live it, but I get it. But we have to teach you a way to navigate around it, so that you don't repeat the pattern of poverty.' This does not mean kids in poverty cannot be successful. They need support to have a chance to succeed. That's what accountability is to me. This is not just the score, it's their life.

As multiple studies have shown data-related practices in schools as a part of accountability phenomena, such as teacher evaluation and student achievement data use, I immediately interpreted her "data" as scores and numbers that were often included in evaluative metrices. However, Scarlett's accountability narratives showed my presumptive interpretation of her own data was wrong. Reflecting on her daily practices, Scarlett said, "data" to her was not "just the benchmark scores" but more about "student life." What Scarlett saw beyond the numbers in the matrices were her concerns and hopes for her "Ruby kids." She wanted each Ruby kid "to be a reader," "get out of what they're experiencing at home," and "graduate high school." She also hopes to teach them a way to navigate around difficulties so that "you don't repeat the pattern of poverty." She clarified that this does not mean "kids in poverty" cannot be successful, but she said, "they need support to have a chance to succeed." Thus, Scarlett's perceptions of accountability appeared to be her responsibility to support student success in their present and future lives, particularly for what she called "students of color" or "students of poverty."

Describing herself as "a leader of social justice," Scarlett expressed, "I take accountability outside of the box." Her commitments to being responsible for her "data" as reflection of her students' lives were illuminated in her daily practices with her students, families, and teachers. The achievement, attendance, and behavior data of Ruby Elementary reflected her sense of urgency. To take "personal responsibility" for the Ruby data, she dismantled the status quo in existing systems, challenged deficit thinking about parents, correctified the unworkable systems, and became a model to spread her ideas. In doing this, she felt supported when the district encouraged her "to be courageous" and validated her "innovative ideas," the way in which she takes "accountability outside of the box."

3.1. Accountability as "Urgency" for Students

Scarlett's daily practices highlighted her concerns about student data—achievement data, attendance data, and suspension data—describing that accountability to her is about an "urgency." This sense of urgency to her was about promoting "a chance for students to learn" and "not pipelining them to prison." Reading the trends and student progress in the data, Scarlett wanted to offer opportunities and intensive support for her "Ruby Kids" to attend the school to learn and to become "readers" so that they could have "a chance to succeed."

3.1.1. "I am their chance."

Talking about her perceptions of accountability as "urgency," Scarlett explained why she felt she was "their chance."

> If I don't catch them up by 3rd grade, … and forget the 3rd grade reading law. If they can't read by 3rd grade, I'm gonna send them to a middle grade [in a different building] where they cannot intensely intervene like we can and they're four times more likely to drop out. So ACCOUNTABILITY to me is I feel this like urgency and accountability to myself, for these kids. I'm their chance (emphasis added).

It seemed that results of multiple types of student data made Scarlett feel a sense of "urgency." She said, "Accountability is always haunting us because we just got off of the state's list [of schools that were not performing well]…it was terrifying." Ruby elementary had been in the bottom 5% of the state standardized test before. Scarlett thought the test scores were recognized as a reflection of Ruby, while she thought the algorithm used for the calculation was not "equitable." For example, she said, their mobility rate used to be around 40%, which means "40% of our students were either in or out within a year." At the same time, she felt proud of the data showing Ruby's progress on literacy of "district reading level and Aims Web." The results showed they were the "number one in the district" regarding the performance level.

Such progress to become the "number one in the district" on students' reading levels, Scarlett strongly believed that Ruby offered "intensive interventions" for students compared to other schools. With her background as a former reading specialist, Scarlett recognized that student literacy level strongly influences student high school attainment and their future success.

Scarlett taught a group of students as a way to help "Ruby kids to be readers." She said, "my favorite part of the day is I teach." Ruby elementary school had lunch pods that divides kids up and sends them to do different pods. During the third-grade pod, Scarlett ran a high-level book club with six of the highest third grade kids. From 12:35 to 1:05, on the days, Scarlett read the book with the six kids and discussed the contents and practiced different reading strategies. In the classroom for small groups, there was a standing board that shows daily "learning target" written by Scarlett. For Scarlett, teaching is a way to show how teachers can "empower students' voices" and "help students read." Scarlett later commented on her teaching time,

> These kids have never even been really exposed to chapter books all the way through. So, it's my job to walk the walk and not just talk the talk. I strategically place myself where the right teachers need to see me as a model….And, I love teaching and this is my favorite productive part of the day.

3.1.2. "Robo-wake-up call"

In addition to achievement data, Ruby's attendance data was "a huge problem" for Scarlett. While Scarlett was able to increase students' attendance rate from 75% in her first year to 91% in her third year, she was worried about chronically absent kids who do not come to school 30% of the time, which influences Ruby's achievement data. To increase the attendance rate, Scarlett called chronically absent students every day and also invented a "robo-wake-up call" system. She said,

> If somebody's not calling, then it's easier to stay home because you don't think anybody's following-up… I called the chronically absent students, 'Hey, I noticed Ana's absent.' If I leave a message, 'I'm concerned. Please call me back, so I know that you need support. It's so important that he'd be here. I don't want him to get behind in reading." That's where the conversation is. It's never punitive. They also get from me a robo wake-up call based on my data. So, I'm calling their phone every morning at 7:15 with a stupid message. 'Good morning. It's Mrs. Watson. Time to wake-up. Get your biscuits to class.' It takes a lot of time, but that really helped my data.

In using the "robo-wake-up call" system, Scarlett found 30% of the calls were bouncing because the contact information in the district system was not accurate. During my third visit with her, she told me what she found.

> I had to call this system office and the district. They said, the numbers need to be ordered and should be parents or guardians. Foster parents and grandparents would not get it. Now my secretary and I have to fix all the things correctly. But no one gave us instructions about how to do this. I can take care of this building but imagine how many students cannot get it throughout the district. Right? I just have control in my building only.

Scarlett persistently fixed the system throughout the school year to make the call system correctly work. The bureaucratic system at the district level responded very slowly, but she fixed the system to help Ruby kids to be in school.

3.1.3. "Help them learn"

Suspension trend of the school was another concern for Scarlett to be responsible for her own discipline data. Living with multiple young students having "behavioral issues," Scarlett had kids sent by their teachers almost every day during my visits. On the second day of my shadowing at Ruby Elementary, Scarlett had five students visiting her office for their crying and screaming in classrooms. Scarlett spent more than four hours with these students—"helping them to learn" in school instead of sending them home with referrals "using discipline systems."

At 9:10, a boy with wet eyes was sitting on the chair right next to Scarlett's desk. Scarlett told me, "He doesn't have any preschool experience. This makes him hard to know about how to keep personal space. He just doesn't feel so good." She put three small books with animal pictures and food from the breakfast in front of him, saying, "Kyle, if you feel you are ready to be in the class, let me know and thumbs up." Thirty minutes later, Kyle looked at some pages of the book and smiled at Scarlett. Scarlett walked with him to his classroom. Kyle came to her office again at 10:15. Scarlett made a phone call. After 20 minutes, Kyle's uncle came to her office and walked with Kyle for a while before Kyle came back to his classroom.

At 11:15, Scarlett came to her office holding Denny, another little boy, who was crying loudly. Denny was wriggling out of her arms. Scarlett held him for a while and said, "You can cry. You feel sad? … It's okay…. Can you tell me why you were fighting and what happened?" Denny was continuously crying sitting on Scarlett's knees. They checked the security video together to see how Denny was involved in fighting with another boy in the cafeteria. Scarlett asked him if he was hungry. She told him, "You are missing learning. Mrs. Jenson tries to help you learn. How can I help you to make you feel better and learn?"

Around 11:35, John came to the office. Scarlett explained to Denny that "John had a hard time to be in a line, so he is waiting until all the line is done." Scarlett walked in the hallway with Denny after John got to lunch. Scarlett made Denny run back and forth three times from the building exit to another wall…Scarlett walked with him to his classroom around noon. …Denny came back to her office at 1:15 and spent his time in her office until his grandfather came to pick him up around 3 pm.

Scarlett explained her thoughts about discipline for young kids and pressures from her teachers. She understood that teachers cannot handle behavioral issues from students and send them to the office, but she thought labeling her young kids as "a failure" within the district system from kindergarten is unfair. She said, "I need you to understand now that there is a paper trail following a child that they've been suspended from kindergarten." At the same time, she highlighted her suspension data is "authentic" unlike some other schools who do not report it. Scarlett said:

> I'm not okay with that suspension, but I will tell you my data is 100% authentic. There're schools out here that don't enter anything. And they just send those kids home. So I feel proud that that's not what I'm doing. We run three times more restorative justice groups than [other schools in the district] do. And I have several classrooms, they'd never send a kid home. So we are doing the best we can. And um, those conversations just have to be behind closed doors and um, not everybody is willing to SHIFT in their thinking and it's a true.…you really won't be able to measure the impact I have until I leave.

Scarlett was fine with suspension for "persistent misconduct," but she asked teachers to make the phone call and arrange the conference with the parent. She said, "I will support you but no longer are you just sending them on down here cause they're irritating you…so, they [teachers] hate that." However, she thoughts teachers have to "build a relationship with the child" to help their students learn.

3.2. Accountability as Challenging "Deficit Thinking" about the Minoritized Community

A lens of "social justice" was at the center of Scarlett's accountability perceptions and enactments. She told me, "Whatever I decide to do as an instructional and transformational leader, social justice should be centered." For example, when she reflected on Ruby's suspension data, the first thing Scarlett said was "It's clear in our suspension data, we are suspending African American boys." Scarlett had been battling with a "parent deficit" paradigm prevalent in her staff. Scarlett's idea of "social justice" seemed to be shaped by her notions about unjust, unequal history of the U.S. and social structures that influence how people think of and respond to racially and economically marginalized groups. An important part of her perceptions of accountability was to challenge such deficit thinking about racially minoritized communities where Ruby students and families mostly come from. When she first came to Ruby two years ago, her teachers would complain that "parents don't know how to parent, they need to be doing more and there's something wrong with the kid." Scarlett has tried to shift their mindset toward "How can I help the kid?" Her efforts to be enlightened about unequal social structures and engage with the Ruby communities in this chapter show the ground principles of her accountability practices for "student life."

3.2.1. "Black lives matter"

Scarlett often challenged implicit and explicit discrimination toward "Black people" in her daily practices. She thought deficit-oriented thinking and attitudes about minoritized families and students had have been systemically and socially constructed and reified within the society; therefore, her job as a leader was "to cut this repeated loop" for the better lives of "Ruby kids." In my third visit, Scarlett and her staff were working on a tree-shaped board in the hallway, hanging headshot photos of individual students. For Scarlett, it was important to make her

students who were predominantly Black or bi-racial "visible," along with black leaders, artists, and intellectuals in a space in which most adults (particularly teachers) are predominantly White, including herself. In doing so, she often faced challenges coming from her staff:

> Um, I still deal with a lot behind my back. Um, 'black lives don't matter. All lives matter. All lives matter.' Understood. But they're not all treated the same. Right? So, um, we need to talk about it … it's very difficult for me to understand how you would work in this demographic being a straight-line Republican. You're welcome to, but you're going to be at odds with the culture, and I battle with that. …I really do because there's still deficit thinking that parents don't know how to parent, that they need to be doing more and that there's something wrong with the kid.

Figure 5.1. "Black lives matter" from Ruby Elementary

Thinking of teachers talking behind her back, she felt they were saying about her, "As soon as you exit the system, all of those photos are coming down." However, she was "passionate about being enlightened" regarding structural discrimination in American history and wanted to help her staff "grow" with her. During my visits, I saw a book called *Waking up White* on her desk. Scarlett said she was having a book club with her staff. She said,

> In a very small safe group, we are having amazing conversations. So they were challenging me how I'm going to grow that. But what I have understood as a leader is, um, in this country, we were lied to about black history and I can't expect them to know

that because I really didn't know it until I went to graduate school… So, everybody's in a different space in that continuum of understanding that…. I do understand, but I'm so passionate about [helping them know more about it]. So, I put this book in the hands of anybody willing to read it. My custodians have read this book. My assistants have read this book because they want to. And then, we'll try to grow.

3.2.2. Building relationships and filling resources

In battling with "deficit framing" about parents, Scarlett modeled for teachers how to build relationships with families and "help them" engage in student learning. She greets students and their families outside the building every morning and at dismissal, expressing her appreciation for the "Ruby family" and their efforts to have their children attend school on time for learning.

It was still chilly outside in April. Following a few staff members, groups of students walked out from the building to the school buses parked in the backyard of Ruby Elementary. There were several students sitting on the sofa in the school lobby with a teacher, Amy. Scarlett grabbed her jacket and went out of the building. She welcomed me to join in her greeting. Standing near the pick-up spot, Scarlett recognized whose parents were driving which cars. As soon as a brown pick-up truck entered the school road, Scarlett said, "That's Kala's mom" and texted Amy to have Kala be outside to be picked up soon. "See? Now I know who should be ready to be picked up without seeing their parents." Scarlett remembered each family's car.

This everyday greeting started from her first year at Ruby. She told me, when she started greeting families, she was the only person outside in her first year. However, as the time went, some teachers started joining, especially in the morning. Scarlett said,

> Now, I don't have to worry about if I'm late. Actually, this morning, I was late because of the road construction in King street and I took a detour. When I got here, Miranda and Amy were outside to greet parents. ….I'm glad they're learning from what I've been doing.

As Scarlett intended, some teachers followed what she did to welcome students and their families to make sure Ruby is waiting for their kids, excited to help students learn, and grateful about families' efforts.

Scarlett also initiated annual student home visits. With her staff members, Scarlett visited student homes in the beginning of the year, especially for chronically absent students to "build relationships." Scarlett said this opportunity helped teachers and her realize "their perceptions [on families] were incorrect."

> They [teachers] definitely tried to get the union to block it, and the union couldn't. And so, I pushed the issue and we had a blast, but we found out that many more of our families than we realized live in single-family homes. They thought that they were all in subsidized housing. We found out that our kids are spread all over the city.

Scarlett's efforts to build relationships with Ruby families brought in more resources to Ruby Elementary. Scarlett found that one of the big reasons parents did not send their kids to school was that they did not have enough clean clothes. She bought a laundry machine to install it at Ruby Elementary so that they could increase the attendance rates (see figure 5.2). In this way, Scarlett shifted deficit-oriented framing to filling the needed resources to support her students and communities, saying "We can help!" In addition, in her second and third year, Scarlett also found that families became more active in school events.

Scarlett seemed to prove that the way teachers communicate with students' families can change the way families engage in schools, being away from the deficit framing about minoritized communities. In doing so, Scarlett seemed to intend teachers and herself to be accountable for Ruby students' data by helping kids attend school, stay in the classroom, and make progress on achievement at Ruby Elementary school along with their families' support.

Moreover, most importantly, by constantly challenging discriminatory assumptions and practices at Ruby Elementary, Scarlett tried to empower her Ruby kids, especially "students of color."

Figure 5. 2. Installed laundry machine at Ruby Elementary

3.3. Accountability as Reflection of Her Teaching: "I Have High Expectations"

Building on her data literacy with a lens of "social justice," Scarlett also wanted to be an "instructional leader" who improves teaching at Ruby. She mentioned, "accountability is also a reflection of my teaching." Scarlett believed that the test score itself cannot be the evidence of teachers' accountability, but she admitted "that's what people look at." Scarlett thought that, with the reputation of Ruby earned from her relationship-building with families, teachers and she needed to "move" the "scores" up. One way to do this for Scarlett was "to teach differently" to help curriculum work for "our Ruby kids," what she called "students of poverty." Scarlett also described that she had "high expectations" for teachers, which reflected in her teacher evaluation process.

3.3.1. Inventing new curriculum: "battle with the textbook coach"

To Scarlett, "to teach differently" appeared to be teaching in ways that successfully worked for her "Ruby kids"—what she called "kids in poverty" or "so-called at-risk kids." Recognizing her students' demographic (e.g., 82% eligible for free or reduced price lunch), Scarlett and her staff developed a new curriculum using her expertise in literacy teaching. While the textbook coach from the Intermediate School District demanded teachers implement the district-purchased reading curriculum "only front-to-back," Scarlett thought "that is not going to work" because it would not work for "students of poverty." In my second visit, she commented on her conversation with the textbook coach:

> What goes on is now they're [teachers] taking a learning target, writing a lesson plan around just one learning target, like 'this is what we're learning today', and then formatively assess and then make sure they have criteria for success. … when the textbook coach came, I said, 'This is our initiative …I need you to help me unpack [the curriculum], so that instead of spiraling where you hit main idea, unit two, lesson 10, and then you don't hit it again until unit four lesson 20, I want my teachers to teach it in a row. Because we know students of poverty have a hard time mastering and they need repetition, reteaching, direct instruction.' She flipped and she's like, 'No, that's not what research says. You need to teach it front-to-back.' And I said, 'I've read your research [about the ELA curriculum, Journey] and none of it is done with kids in poverty.'…I said, 'I'm sorry, but we're not doing it that way. It's not going to work for my students. You represent a company that represents the dollar. And this textbook is written for the entire country, not my demographic.' I need to figure out how to make it work for us.

This Ruby curriculum development project "to teach in a row" had been a "secret" for two years. However, with support from her supervisor, a deputy superintendent of the Blue district, Scarlett and her teachers completed developing the third grade reading curriculum. Scarlett told me, after her "battle with the textbook coach," her supervisor called her asking about how she implemented the curriculum. With a pride, Scarlett shared response from her boss

with me, saying that "Once I explained, my boss said, 'That's completely innovative. That's why we hired you… I get that…Now I understand.' So, no problem."

In March 2019, Scarlett finally presented the "Ruby curriculum" to the Blue district when she defended her School Improvement Plan. Scarlett proudly showed two big binders to me, saying, "This is not a secret anymore, and we got a permission to use this Ruby thing from my superintendent." Scarlett believed that having this Ruby curriculum would help her students, including students who are "chronically absent or started late," master more "rigorous" and "comprehensive skills" in literacy. Scarlett believes that the new curriculum will provide guidance and resources about "where you find it" and "what the anchor text is" to achieve broken down learning targets that are aligned with the Common Core Standards. She added,

> It is inferred, but I don't expect every teacher to sit on Sunday and lesson plan and break this all the way down alone, which is not reasonable besides the fact that we have no planning [hours]. So what we've done collectively …So this will tell the teacher what to teach in order next and this will tell we already have written them for students. This is what they need to be able to do.

Such decisions were made based on Scarlett's professional insights about her students. She recognized that her students had a wide range of reading levels and were behind the national-level average score. Thus, she needed Ruby curriculum designed to work for Ruby students to help them be successful readers and learners. Scarlett and her staff members wanted to name the curriculum as "Helping students of poverty master ELA standards" because Scarlett acknowledged "the brain research is clear about kids of poverty, their brains work differently." However, the district did not want to bring attention to their kids "being poor." Scarlett added,

> I do get that, but um, the reason all of us is, their brains are different. You can reprogram them. You can fill in gaps. You can catch them all the way up…. their working memory is low, their executive functioning is low and you have to teach differently.... Teacher preparation programs don't teach you [teachers], they were teaching us classroom

management in teacher school, and you are thrown in there. …So, um, I feel some relief because this is not a secret anymore.

This "Ruby curriculum" showed how Scarlett's perceptions of "accountability" as a reflection of their teaching and being responsible for students' achievement data were enacted in her efforts to make her school-level curriculum aligned with the readiness of Ruby students as well as their backgrounds and home environments. Like Scarlett said, as Ruby's achievement data reflected her teaching, inventing a new curriculum seemed to be a critical way to approach Scarlett's accountability as an instructional leader to "teach differently."

3.3.2. Teacher Evaluation

Scarlett's "high expectations" about instruction to be responsible for her achievement data were also reflected in the teacher evaluation process at Ruby Elementary School. During my visit at Ruby in May, Scarlett was spending almost five hours on teacher evaluation to finalize the results. She said, "I'm very good about entering scores all year…. Before I send feedback in the system, I asked teachers to schedule a meeting to come talk to me. So, I deliver it to their face." Scarlett showed me the teacher evaluation data entry on her computer screen. There was a paragraph with 7-10 lines of comments for each indicator. I said, "You put comments for each, not just entering scores!" She even took a photo of a paragraph in her book as a reference and included it in the feedback for the teacher's evaluation. She explained,

> The conversations [about teacher evaluation feedback] are brutal, but I'm way better at those courageous conversations now. And if you don't like the score, I also give them every opportunity to work on it and invite me back in and I will rescore. The district, um, takes the highest, it's not the average…They can have multiple meetings with me [before I enter their scores in the system]. I offer 15 minutes per year whenever you need me to talk…but, they're not choosing to do it. So, what they're choosing to do is be mad about their scores and then (from their first score) and then, or I would say overwhelmed, right. And burnout. It is scary to have your principal come in, um, who is an instructional leader. It's much easier to have a boss that never thought or was a gym teacher and then

you can just be like, whatever. But, uh, my expectations are high. …I don't have a lot of minimally effective teachers. I have a lot of effective teachers that are pissed off that they're not [rated as] "highly effective."

This year was the first time Scarlett chose to talk with teachers first before she delivered the evaluation results so that teachers are "not shocked." She said, "I sort of soften the blow first and tell them, prep, talk them that.… I realize that evaluations don't change behavior. Behavior changes are from the relationship with coaching." This had led her to capture "what they [teachers]'ve done in their coaching and see if it made a difference" and offered extensive specific comments on each indicator of teacher evaluation. It seemed that Scarlett utilized the mandated teacher evaluation as an effective tool to increase the rigors of classroom instruction in meeting her "high expectations" about teaching. By offering thorough and rich data for teachers, Scarlett drove her teachers to grow so that their teaching would successfully work for "Ruby kids." As Scarlett saw, her accountability as a reflection of her teaching, she wanted her teachers to be accountable, being responsible for their own instruction, which makes their Ruby kids successfully achieve.

3.4. Dilemmas Resulted from Accountability: "Student Suicide Talk"

To be responsible for "urgency" in regards to her students, fighting with "deficit thinking" and promoting differentiated instruction, Scarlett expressed that she had to experience secondary traumas multiple times. During my fourth visit with Scarlett, her school day seemed to go smoothly until Savino, a third grade boy, started talking about his thoughts on "suicide" during his conversation with Scarlett. She told me he lost both of his parents from a homicide in Chicago a half year ago; he had to move here to live with his grandmother in the city of Blue.

Savino came to the office with his long face around 1:40 pm, and started talking about his feeling of "unhappiness," "being lonely," and "being miserable at school and his home." At a

certain point, Savino asked, "Why did God make me? If I walk down the street in Chicago, I would be killed….I don't know the purpose of my life." Scarlett responded, "I am still working on my purpose….You don't have a dream of having a nice house and your own family?" Savino answered sadly, "No, I may not get it." Scarlett answered, "Why not? Your education will open doors. Education will help you make better choices. If you have an ideal job in the world, what do you want to do?" Savino said, "I don't care about it…. I am thinking about killing myself."

Savino burst into tears, with anger, telling Scarlett that he was frustrated by not seeing his two sisters who just moved to his aunt's house. He also added, his grandma yelled at him when he wanted to see his sisters and she was really mean to him. Scarlett's face got frozen and told him, "You refused to see the lady (a counselor who came from Children's Protective Services (CPS)). You don't want to talk with her?" Savino said, "I hate her. I will not talk with her." After the follow-up conversation, Scarlett walked with him to Dr. Snow's room, who is in charge of counseling students. Scarlett told me, "See? I am working so hard to be accountable with him. We have been working so hard to help him be successful and he is now in the highest reading-level group. However, it's so hard. He doesn't want to talk with others except me or Dr. Snow."

In her office, she called CPS to report this emergency. This call lasted about 10 minutes while Scarlett had to answer questions through the protocols. Scarlett also made a phone call to her supervisor to see if there were any other available resources in the district. Her supervisor mentioned a protocol to follow, which required a signature from Savino's grandmother. Scarlett called his grandmother asking her to come to Ruby to report the incident and get her signature.

After 20 minutes, a black woman appearing to be in her 50s came to the office with a stiff looking face. Scarlett later commented that she explained what happened that day and asked for her signature on the form notifying that she got a notice from the school. However, the lady

refused to sign. Scarlett told me the grandmother was upset about the school because she thought the "school made him think that way." Scarlett made another phone call to the grandmother after she left, saying, "I want to let you know I am behind you to protect both of you…(Scarlett was listening to the grandmother for a while)…No. No. that's not true. We have no reason to lie about what he said." The phone conversation was ended by Savino's grandmother. Scarlett told me,

> This is disgusting. This is the least favorite part of my job. He [Savino] would never talk to me again. I am the only person he says something to and now this destroyed our relationships.… He was scared when he saw her…. I'm worried. What if his grandmother would pull him away from Ruby? He [Savino] made such a good progress at Ruby!

Scarlett looked very emotional. She made another call and left the message to Dr. Terry, a therapist working at the Blue district. After a few minutes, Dr. Scarlett got a phone call.

> Yes, it completely destroyed relations with the family and him. We have been working on him inhouse. I and Dr. Snow have been really supportive…I had to report even though I didn't believe he would really do it [killing himself]. No...not specific methods or reason. However, I had to report it.... Right. He needs to be evaluated by CMS.... He refused to talk with the counselor. Now he is not looking at my face… The granny looks like, 'I know my baby and it's school's fault.'…We reached out to them many, many times….I am not talking to him about anything psychiatric. She (grandma) just looks at me as an administrator asking for a signature….He got emotional. I thought his grief is coming out through our talk. I don't have a chance to corroborate. I did report to her even though I didn't believe he would really do it….What if I am wrong?

While she was on the phone, her tears kept coming out. Scarlett put tissues on her eyes. After she listened to the district's therapist, she said, "Okay, Okay, You're right. Don't act wired. Okay, right. Thank you. You made me feel better." She canceled a leadership team meeting scheduled for 3:45 pm on that day.

During the second focus group, Scarlett reflected on this incident, saying, "It was too much…. Unfortunately, I have to protect the district, which is really uncomfortable at times." Since her district lost a high school student in the same year, the district developed "a whole protocol" to follow. However, Scarlett felt she "just broke the trust with this child" by reporting to his grandmother what he said. When she came to school, Savino told his grandma "completely different stories, of course for survival." While Scarlett was able to have a signature from a witness, her secretary, instead of his grandmother based on the protocol, she said,

> I was feeling all types of way….I was basically feeling guilty because I personally didn't think he was going to do it, but I had to protect the district and that I did the right thing by protecting the district….but I was uncomfortable.

In dealing with such complicated emotions, Scarlett said, her 20 minute-therapy session with the district's certified staff, Dr. Watson led her "to like just exude all the emotion I needed to exude and be able to process with decorative runners and then go home." Even though Scarlett "was still angry at them" she appreciated the district for having "somebody to tell I was angry and listen to me."

Epilogue

Scarlett's accountability narratives reminded me the painted walls at Ruby Elementary. It took one and a half years to paint the walls, but Scarlett made it happen. She seemed a bold and innovative leader who changes the system to make it better for students, particularly for students from marginalized communities. She was persistent and perseverant to make changes. For her, being responsible for her own data was part of accountability and this was for student life beyond achievement and evaluation. Fighting for deficit thinking about "Ruby kids," Scarlett wanted them to become readers and have opportunities to be successful in their life.

CHAPTER VI.

PORTRAIT OF BRUCE: LEADING IN THE "ARENA"

Prologue

Right before summer, I saw a frame of the phrase, "Welcome to the Arena" displayed in his office, a gift from Melanie, one of his teacher leaders, who was inspired by the book, *Dare to Lead* by Brené Brown. She left this frame on Bruce's desk when he came back from the three-day-fieldtrip with Pearl students. Reflecting on my visits with him throughout the school year, I could not agree more with the phrase. In my eyes, he was leading in the "arena" trying to see and navigate "challenges" with the "optimistic lens of an opportunity." In this way, Bruce saw accountability as "you're doing what's required," or "you're doing what's best." As an educator employed by the district and the state, he understood his accountability as complying with requirements from the upper level authorities and communities. His perception of "what's required" included the state laws and policies mandated by the district. Beyond the compliance-based accountability, Bruce also kept high rigor to exceed expectations for teachers and students as a form of accountability, "doing what's best." My shadowing Bruce "doing what's best" reminded me of the elements of *a good qualitative researcher*. He listened to students' stories carefully and collected qualitative data interacting with them in the "arena." The same approach was reflected in his efforts to support his teachers, looking at them as "leaders" and helping them grow to "make the profession better." This chapter portrays Bruce by introducing Bruce from his own language, the context of Pearl Elementary, his accountability narratives, and his dilemma talk.

1. Story from Bruce

My name is Bruce Gardner. This is my 10th year as a principal of Pearl Elementary School in the Green District, and my 19th year in education. I'm thrilled to make a positive difference in your child's life each and every day[12]! I have spent my entire career in elementary schools. Prior to being at Pearl, I was a fifth grade teacher in a local district (about 15 miles away from Pearl) for nine years. I have my Masters in Education through Sunny Hill University and my Leadership Certificate through Eastern Sunny Hill University. I am passionate about leadership, positive relationships, continuous improvement, connected learning, and making differences in the lives of others.

How did I decide to become a principal? Well, as a teacher, I loved teaching, and most days were good days. One day, we had a new principal who did not have any classroom experience. The principal's lack of classroom experience definitely influenced his ability to be able to relate to the day-to-day works of teachers. I felt what he was doing was like checking the boxes, and it wasn't actually about what we do in the classroom. Very managerial and that was never my style. I was definitely more about the relationships, more about the connections. There was moment where I felt as though I didn't get a whole lot out of our professional development, I felt as though the professional development was geared towards just a small segment of our staff. I felt as though, when there were any parent issues, I was questioning how the support would fall. There was an overall lack of transparency and the person was not very approachable, so it wasn't my favorite environment. That's what nudged me into saying, "Maybe it's time that you create that environment." That's what pushed me to start taking master's classes and pushed me into thinking I needed to take on more of a leadership role. One day my wife told me, "Did you see the newspaper? Looks like there's a principal opening about 10-15 miles away from us." I submitted my resume and my interview went well. That's how I got into this job.

Looking back on my nine-year career as a principal, I can say there has been two big changes in schools. The first thing is about access to technology. Around seven or eight years ago, we had approximately 10 iPads and a handful of MacBook Airs in classrooms. That was a very big change because as soon as we started putting devices in kids' hands, you saw the engagement level skyrocket. The tricky part was there was a gap with teacher level of comfort. Some teachers were very comfortable; they designed hands-on grade lessons for the technology, and others probably used the technology a little bit more as a babysitter. I immediately tried to get more professional development for teachers so that they could increase the value of what the technology was meant for. What I discovered was some teachers found it was time to retire. Probably, between my third and fifth year, we had a third of the staff retire, which kind of changed some of the

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[12] These quotes from the first paragraph are from his website. It seems he talks to parents by indicating "your kids"

culture, not necessarily for bad or good, it changed in the way of people who weren't necessarily leaders stepped to the forefront, and then you bring in new people, and so you have kind of a jolt of energy. That was probably a really large change in the last 9-10 years.

The second thing that I've noticed is mental health of our students. There's probably 10 to 15% of our communities that are living in crisis and students don't know how to deal with it. It puts a tremendous strain on classroom teachers and on people in the building because the kids tend to be very volatile, confrontational, and they make for a very tumultuous environment. To me, those would be major things I felt big changes in schooling: shift in technology and increase of mental health issues.

Beyond my job as a principal, I have multiple podcasts on education. One of the podcasts is through the Radio Network titled #Discovery. The second podcast features principals from across the State. I also have my blogs and wrote a book. I have passion for giving back to the profession by presenting at local, state, and national professional learning conferences about digital leadership, learning spaces, continuous improvement and developing leadership capacity. I thought participating in this research is going along with these efforts, which expands knowledge to other people. When I'm not at school, I enjoy being active and spending time with family. I love to run and to get outdoors with my wife and two boys. Our family calls Sunny Hill home and we truly enjoy being part of a supportive community.

2. Context: Pearl Elementary in Sunny Hill

2.1. Pearl Elementary

"Our Pearl community strives to be a student-centered school, working together in guiding children toward a lifelong goal of respect for learning, for themselves and others"
(Pearl Elementary School website)

On my way to my first visit at Pearl Elementary School, I was wondering if I could feel any sense of the above sentence posted on their school website. Driving to Sunny Hill was enjoyable. I felt those highways were often times peaceful and the sceneries outside the windows showed me beautiful colors of Michigan nature throughout the different seasons. Across from the senior care center, I found a one-story building whose yard had an American flag. Ms. Kelly, the secretary who appeared to be in her late 50s, welcomed me and let me wait in her office until Mr. Garner came back from his "serious meeting." While I was sitting at the corner of the office, a

couple of young kids came to Ms. Kelly with their eyes full of concern, asking for treatments for their bruise or wounds that they had gotten from playing outside. Ms. Kelly put bandages and ice packs on their injured areas by calming them down. In the office bathroom, there was a transparent plastic drawer filled with a bunch of small clothes including underpants and socks for young children.

As Bruce described, I felt Pearl was a K-5 community school grounded in "student-centered culture." He identified Pearl Elementary School as a rural school because "when the kids get off the bus, they comment about the farm," although they have some families from the university town city area. Bruce told me Pearl Elementary School had approximately 400 students with 15 classrooms. Among them, 92% of students were White and 40% them were eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch program. Because Michigan has school of choice policy, a local district can choose whether or not to accept students who live in other local districts within the same Intermediate School District (ISD). Local districts can also choose whether or not to accept students who live in another ISD to enroll in school. Enrolled in this policy, Pearl Elementary accepts around 25% of its students who were not located in their school zone. Bruce felt that, while the community does not favor the school of choice policy, he thought it helps attain more funding for intervention specialists. He also commented that most parents coming through the school of choice policy were more willing to participate in the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO).

What I liked most about walking around the Pearl building was seeing photos hanging on the walls, capturing both Pearl students' dramatic movements and their serious efforts. I loved seeing big smiles on their faces while they were engaging in learning activities and outdoor sports. Bruce later told me he took these photos using an iPad when he was watching kids. Right

next to each classroom door, teachers' individual photos were hanging with their names. Like their school website said, the spaces of Pearl Elementary were filled with caring and student-centered culture.

2.2. Green District

Bruce said that the Green district had been supportive in providing resources for classroom teaching compared to the neighbor district where he worked as a teacher before. For example, Bruce said, "We have one teacher assistant in every kindergarten and first grade room so you can see at least two teachers. You can also see an additional one or two more adults, usually paraprofessionals supporting the special needs of certain kids." He thought such investment in classroom teaching from the district helped his teachers narrow the achievement gaps. Bruce recalled that a couple of years earlier, Pearl Elementary had been "labeled" by the Michigan Department of Education as having wide achievement gaps, but the district's support was helpful to "get rid of the name tag."

Bruce said that the Green district launched "a brand new report card" and focused on "planning, preparation, and strong classroom delivery" with their new curriculum director at the time of my data collection; these district initiatives came to the school level, developing essential standards for each subject. The district offered professional development for teachers on a regular basis across the schools for curriculum development. When I observed one of the district-level "Teacher Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings," Natalia, a physical education teacher at Pearl Elementary, showed me the essential standards that teachers needed to focus on in each quarter, which they were working as a group during the PLC meeting. When teachers had to be part of the district's professional learning, the district funded substitute

teachers to cover their classrooms. Bruce described that the district is "continuing to try to educate and lift up teachers."

2.3. Teachers: "To Let Them Lead and Grow as Leaders"

To Bruce, mentoring teachers and fostering teacher leadership seemed to be critical elements "to lead" as a school principal. He gave talks about teacher leadership or shared leadership strategies at several state and national conferences during the school year. During my visits, I also observed that Bruce encouraged several teachers to take leadership roles.

For example, each year, Pearl Elementary invites students and their families to an evening event designed to promote reading and literacy education partnered with communities. On this day, Bruce was walking to Christina's classroom saying, "I need to touch base with her because Christina is in charge of this event…. I have lots of teacher leaders and she is one of them." Christina handed over a planning sheet that showed details of the event schedule, a map of sections, and a staff list showing who is in charge of different roles. Following her instructions, Bruce ordered pizzas and sodas, and confirmed a visit from the local newspaper. As he described, the event was mostly led by teachers. Reflecting on this event, Bruce said, "If there's no positive relationship with the teachers, … you're going to be running it all by yourself and you're going to burn yourself out."

Bruce consciously empowers teachers, wanting them to be leaders by giving them opportunities to plan and implement multiple initiatives. Providing structures for teachers' grade-level collaborative planning time was one of these strategies. Bruce arranged and led a weekly morning assembly with students at certain grades so that teachers could have grade-level team meetings. During the grade-level team meetings I observed, teachers discussed students' growth with three interventionists who tracked students' data and planned subsequent lessons together.

Bruce also encouraged teachers to participate in professional development outside school. When a group of his teachers had professional development meetings at the district level, Bruce visited the central office to show his support for them. Such efforts received spotlights from outsiders as well. During the school year (2018-2019), three teachers at Pearl Elementary were selected as "Top Five Teachers" in the Sunny Ville County throughout the thorough selection process with the external committees.

Bruce's efforts to support teachers seemed to be grounded in his good relationships with teachers. Natalia, who teaches students in the gym right across from the principal's office, told me, "Relationship-building is Bruce's great strength, and we really appreciate it." During my visits at Pearl Elementary School, some teachers asked for Bruce's advice for their personal and professional lives, such as issues of their own children and graduate school decisions. The end of year staff survey results Bruce shared with me proved that most teachers at Pearl Elementary loved their family-like relationships and the healthy culture in their school, valuing Bruce's approach to leadership.

3. Accountability: "Doing What's Required" or "Doing What's Best"

Accountability to me has evolved. Because early on, I almost felt as if accountability was a punishment.…The more experience I've gained, the more I see accountability as you're doing what's best, or you're doing what's required.

- Bruce, Individual interview

During his research participation, Bruce offered me diversified perspectives on accountability. As he expressed in his interview, his meaning of accountability is not a fixed concept, but an "evolving" one. This reminded me of his comments that "education is a moving target, which ultimately means that every day is going to be a little different. Every year is going to be a little bit different." Reflecting on new initiatives of the 2018-2019 school year, Bruce

highlighted that there are always different types of challenges that his teachers and he had to deal with from time to time. At the same time, Bruce noted his role as a leader saying,

> My attitude and outlook are going to be critical because if I become overwhelmed and anxious and upset, then that will trickle down to staff members. So, I look at all of these challenges and tell them all the time that it's an opportunity. If we have the optimistic lens of an opportunity, we can grow and get better and be the best we can be.

This response from Bruce as a 10th year principal suggests that his understanding of education environments and his roles as a school leader shape his ideas of accountability as "doing what's best."

I have reflected on his perceptions, asking what made his ideas of accountability "evolved." I first thought about his years of experience in education and changes in his roles. His response implies that the common phenomenon of accountability may exist, but its narratives and discourses are bound to time and space. In his 19-year-career in education, Bruce initially experienced accountability as a "punishment," but now it had been changed toward "doing what's best" or "doing what's required." This change in his perceptions of accountability might be explained by changes in his job: from a classroom teacher to a principal. He said, "My attitude and outlook are going to be critical," considering different types of challenges as "opportunities" to grow instead of seeing them as "punishments" that might discourage his staff. For Bruce, this orientation is needed as a school leader to "be the best we can be," while encouraging his staff members with "the optimistic lens of an opportunity."

There is another possible way to view changes in his perception of accountability. As stated in Chapter II, accountability is "a cultural phenomenon" with its popularity of usage and expansion of its meanings in different social and political contexts (Dubnick, 2014, p. 25); the term "accountability" has been used in different ways in daily conversations. In this way, its

meaning encompasses *accountability as a virtue*, including meanings of answerability, responsibility, transparency, or reliability as well as *accountability as a mechanism* that governs social relationships between individuals and organizations (Bovens, 2014). Therefore, Bruce's current understanding of accountability as "doing what's best" or "doing what's required" may reflect such a trajectory of how "accountability" has been used in social, political, and cultural contexts.

Lastly, studies on accountability using a critical lens can also explain Bruce's understanding of accountability. This line of literature suggests that accountability as an invisible control mechanism has permeated individuals' perceptions and it shapes subjectivity of individuals by imposing efficiency and performativity (Anderson & Cohen, 2015; Carpenter et al., 2014; Cranston, 2013). Therefore, individuals do not necessarily recognize or resist the idea of accountability as a control mechanism, aligning themselves with the mechanism (Knapp & Feldman, 2012). As opposed to accountability research that distinguished internal accountability from external accountability in the 1990s and early 2000s, more recent empirical studies with school principals (e.g., Louis & Robinson, 2012; Knapp & Feldman, 2012; Shipps & White, 2009; Werts & Brewer, 2015) indicate that accountability-driven policy environments lead school leaders to internalize externally driven accountability mechanisms in constructing their ideas of professional and moral commitments as a form of accountability. Such findings suggest that external accountability compounds internal accountability in schools, which explains Bruce's concepts of accountability as "doing what's best" or "doing what's required."

This section of the portrait of Bruce focuses on a set of accountability narratives depicted in Bruce's daily practices at Pearl Elementary School. For Bruce's current understanding, accountability seemed to be complying with requirements and mandates from the upper-level

authorities and societies, including laws and policies ("doing what's required") and keeping high rigor to exceed expectations for teachers and students ("doing what's best"). In dealing with these accountabilities, Bruce encountered dilemmas on "teacher evaluation" in which he experienced tensions between his intentions to support his teachers to grow and the teachers' feelings of being "hurt" and "defeated" and only focusing on the results.

3.1. Accountability To Comply: "Doing What's Required."

Acknowledging his job as "an educator in the Green school district," Bruce described one aspect of accountability to him was complying with mandates, requirements, or expectations given to his school by the district and state. He said,

> I have my own personal opinions about a lot of things. However, I'm an educator in the Green school district. So that means that, in this district, if this is what we believe and I'm a part of the district, then I'm going to align myself with that. And if I don't believe it, I have a choice…. I can find employment elsewhere or I can go and do something different. Or I can try to convince the district to go a different route, but usually, that's not happening. The same thing happens at the state level and at the national level. I'm an educator. I went to school to be an educator. That doesn't mean I'm going to agree with everything, per se. But I do have to follow the law.

Bruce saw himself as "an educator" working in a multi-layered system where the district, state, and federal-level policies were played. While he recognized there was a possibility of convincing "the district to go a different route," he also noted that following mandates such as laws is important as long as he was employed by the district. This perception appeared to reflect his understanding of accountability as "doing what's required."

In his daily work, Bruce said, "There are certain things I have to do." These requirements included "the 3rd grade reading law," "essential standards," "Fountas and Pinnell assessments," "formative assessment," and "intervention group, the term we use is WIN time which stands for What I Need." Bruce described, "These are different ways of saying accountability…. The

actual term 'accountability' is not gonna be used all the time, but yet what it means is used all the time." Then, I asked, "Where does it come from in this case?" Bruce said,

> Accountability is going to often times it could be from the law, legislatively. Accountability could come from your district leadership, school board. Accountability often times also comes from society. Your community. For example, we are accountable to our community because there's a standard of education. If students were finishing their time at Pearl Elementary, and they were not ready for middle school. If our outcomes are poor, then the community will hold us accountable. And that could determine our numbers. It could determine our parent support. It could determine a lot of things.

Bruce saw accountability coming from multiple stakeholders. Among different types of demands, "what's required" to Bruce seemed to directly relate to mandates or laws from the district or state. Bruce said, "I have my own personal opinions about a lot of things that may be different from the district or state policies," but as an employee, Bruce aligned himself with such "requirements." Among these requirements, the "3rd Grade Reading Law" (Ready By Three Law) appeared to be a representative example of "what's required" Bruce had to follow as a form of accountability to comply.

3.1.1. Reading law

Sitting alone in Bruce's office waiting for him, I saw a pile of documents on his desk. Bruce later explained to me that these documents were unread Individual Reading Improvement Plans (IRIPs) as part of his compliance with the "3rd Grade Reading Law." According to the Michigan reading law, all students enrolled in kindergarten through third grade have to be assessed within the first 30 days of the school year (MDE, 2018). Bruce told me that once a student was identified for having a reading concern, the school was responsible for creating an Individualized Reading Improvement Plan (IRIP) for the learner. He started reviewing IRIP documents and forwarding them to teachers, saying, "Basically, it's communicating to make sure that we're in compliance with our accountability, a compliance with what the state and the law's

requiring." Throughout the school year, I saw that the process of compliance with the reading law continued in teachers' grade-level team meetings, WIN time, and Bruce's check-in with teachers discussing student progress in reading, particularly for students holding IRIPs. In addition to daily work at school, Bruce had to notify the parents of students with a reading concern that they needed to engage in "home reading plans" to improve the reading skills of their child.

In February, when parent-teacher conferences were scheduled, Michelle, a first grade teacher, wanted Bruce to join her meeting with two parents whose child had reading concerns. Bruce said, "Today, I'm gonna join Michelle's meeting with some parents. You're welcome to join me." Bruce grabbed a file with an IRIP, and I followed him walking to Michelle's classroom around 3pm. Bruce greeted several parents who were waiting their turn in the hallway.

I felt the first meeting with the parents who had two boys at Pearl Elementary went well. We all introduced ourselves, and Michelle started talking to the parents, "Your kid is a treasure for us. His level of empathy and caring for other kids are like way above other kids…. Just we need to work on reading. We still have time to get there…." Using some documents that showed the kid's reading level and progress, Bruce and Michelle told the parents how they could help, what level Michelle would work on next time, and what resources were available. The parents expressed concerns of their younger boy bothering the older one when he needed to study. Michelle said, "Maybe you can give more independence when the two boys are at home." After 20 minutes of conversation, Bruce gave the copy of the IRIP form to the parents and added,

> This is my abiding the state law. The law says if your kids are a year behind in reading level at the end of the third grade, they will be retained. So, this form is not saying your kids are in trouble, but your signing means you are informed and acknowledge the law.

The parents signed, showing hopeful smiles on their face. The mom said, "We really appreciate what you've done for Andy (her eldest son, a first grade boy in Michelle's class). I know he will make a good progress in your hands. We'll help him do well at home too."

Around 5pm, we joined another conference with Michelle. Before entering the classroom, Bruce whispered to me, "These parents are contentious. Remember." Michelle said, "Sailor is really happy in the classroom, and he is doing well." The dad said,

> I know. We were really worried because he didn't want to go to his two previous schools. We had a hard time, but we feel he really likes to come to this school. When the school bus comes, he is so excited about it.

Michelle and Sailor's parents talked about Sailor's progress of reading level and mathematics. Sailor's mom said,

> He made great progress in reading. Like you said, he was level B like and now he is D… Your expectations are to get to level H at the end of the year, and I believe he can make it. We've tried so hard. Oh my gosh. The last time we got his score of 80, we were just so happy about it. I mean, it was always 40 or 50 before. It was so frustrating.

Michelle suggested that the parents can read certain levels of books that could be found at the library to facilitate Sailor's reading progress. After 30 minutes of talking, Bruce showed the IRIP to the parents, and they seemed to not be happy about it. The dad said,

> Why are you talking about this now? It's the third grade and he is now just in 1ˢᵗ grade. There's no reason he will fail to pass the level. And his level is not D. Like YOU (Michelle) said, it's F-E now. You can't say he will be behind when he starts the 3ʳᵈ grade.

Bruce and Michelle discussed reporting his current level on the document. Bruce said, "This has the information from the last evaluation period, but we can change the reading-level

with today's date and signature." Still the parents seemed to be upset about the school saying

there is a possibility that their boy can be retained despite the progress he made. Bruce added,

> It's not about your kid being retained. This signature means you are just informed by us
> that you know the state law exists. I am saying that I just abide with this law as a
> principal although I don't agree with it. Me and some others have actually prepared legal
> actions against the law. If you can express your opinions to your state representatives, it
> would be so helpful for us and our school.

The parents appeared to be dissatisfied with it. Eventually, the dad just signed the form and left

the classroom. On the way back to his office, Bruce said, "I think the only hard part with

accountability is sometimes there are so many layers to it. Those layers make it difficult to do

what you're supposed to do."

Like many parents who have expressed their discomfort with the state law, Bruce also

does not agree with the reading law. Even though he and other principals were working on

actions to change the law, Bruce, as a principal employed by the district in the State of Michigan,

seemed to apparently acknowledge his role to comply with the law. He was able to express his

personal opinions through different platforms like his Blogs or Podcasts, but within the school,

he had to solicit his parents and staff members to abide by the law. This incident of getting

signatures from the parents implies that Bruce enacted compliance-based accountability in

dealing with "multiple layers" including bureaucratic controls, educators' mindsets on student

growth, individual parents' interests, and his values about education.

3.2. Accountability To Excel: "Doing What's Best"

Beyond "what's required" from the upper authorities including the district and state,

Bruce also recognized that he is held accountable to his students and staff. From this view, his

perceptions of accountability seemed to be related to his view of leadership, saying that "it's time

for me to be a leader not a manager." For Bruce, being a leader appeared to be "doing what's best" for his students and staff "to excel" beyond meeting requirements.

3.2.1. Accountability, "It starts with students"

In the first focus group where participants brought in photos that reminded them of accountability, Bruce showed a picture of nine students smiling with him in the hallway. While explaining the photo, he said,

> I just stole a picture of myself with some of our Pearl Pride students. When you asked the question about accountability, I feel like it starts with students. As adults and educators, we have to continue to learn, the bar has to be high. We have to meet students where they are and try to take them as far as we can. That's why ultimately, I think for me there's never a spot where I feel I can take a breath, because I'm constantly trying to be the best I can be for kids.

His perceptions of accountability, "to meet students where they are" and "take them as far as we can," were often visible during my visits at Pearl Elementary.

It was around 8 am; the school was quiet, but Bruce was already in his office. Before students came in, he grabbed a portable speaker, heading out to the entrance of the building. Students at Pearl start their school day with a greeting from Bruce and his song selections. "ObLaDi ObLaDa…" melodies warmed the chilly air of November. A boy hi-fived with him, asking, "Mr. Gardner, soccer?" My multiple visits with Pearl confirmed that it was a code for them to communicate that they were going to play soccer during recess. A little girl, who seemed to be a kindergartener, got a kiss from her dad and walked to the building. "Happy Tuesday Lilly. How's it going?" Bruce asked. "Hi, Mr. Gardner." The little girl, Lilly, smiled at him once, and then told him with a serious face, "You know what? Joy got an injury on her leg last night. We were playing in the garden and she fell down." It seemed that Lilly was explaining what happened to her sister Joy, who was a fourth-grader at Pearl Elementary.

During the school day, Bruce often visited classrooms while sitting aside students, observing their work, and talking with them, particularly with "frequent flyers" who often visited his office for their behavioral issues. He carefully approached them without giving the class a sense that the principal came to see those "frequent flyers." During recess, Bruce played games with students on the ground. When he was out for recess, the students shouted, "Gardner is out, Gardner is out!" with their fully charged spirit. As he promised students, Bruce played soccer, basketball, or football with them, constantly checking his emails through his Apple watch. Bruce was sometimes a player, sometimes a mediator, or sometimes referee in the "arena."

Figure 6.1. Bruce playing soccer with Pearl kids for recess

Bruce's daily interactions with his students showed me his efforts "to meet students where they are." As he said, Bruce collected student "data" from every different perspective "to see every student and incident as unique." He told me, "I take a pride in knowing my students. When Pearl kids move to another school and their new principal calls me, I can talk about how they were in school and their family without looking at my screen." To me, Bruce was good at

collecting and utilizing qualitative data about his students, in addition to knowing about quantitative data of student test scores, attendance rates, and small group intervention progress.

Utilizing his rich data about "every single Pearl student" appeared to be crucial for his accountability for kids, "to take them as far as we can." Bruce provided evidence for parents or the district officers when he made decisions about student suspension, instructional support, or accommodations and resources to meet student needs. When he communicated with parents, teachers, and district leaders, his "data" about "Pearl kids" became strong evidence to support Bruce's opinions in bridging resources. In my reflection essay delivered to him, I said, "You are a great qualitative researcher."

3.2.2. *"I also feel an accountability to my staff"*

Bruce also highlighted that support for teachers is another critical element in his understanding of accountability, saying, "The better I can be for my teachers, the better they can be for their students." Bruce commented on his view of accountability:

> I also feel an accountability to my staff. They need me to be their leader. They need me to be the best I can be. They need me to, at times, hold the shield for them and protect them. And at times, walk beside them and support them.… I want them to feel fully supported to be able to do the very best job that they can do.

His support for teachers seemed to be related to teachers' needs for "student behavior and mental health issues" and mentoring teachers as leaders. Bruce said, "For the last couple of years, a lot of my teachers … struggle to teach the rough kids and the school community has a wide range of socio-economic status of families." To support their needs, Bruce wrote a grant proposal for social emotional learning to implement a building-wide professional development for teachers. This grant brought in a specialist who provided teachers with weekly mindfulness coaching for the school year. Having this building-wide professional development was helpful in

developing shared agreement on school discipline, which aligned with Bruce's idea of guiding students. While he had two or three teachers who wanted him to be "a heavy iron fist" and use more "black and white" approaches regarding student discipline, most of his teachers seemed to value his approaches "to lead" not just "to manage" and the end of year staff survey proved it.

As he did for his students, Bruce mentored teachers based on their individual needs and helped them thrive as leaders, which seemed to be critical in being "accountable for his teachers." When I visited Pearl Elementary in the fall, Bruce invited me to his 1:1 meeting with Amy, a first grade classroom teacher who started last year. I followed him to visit Amy's classroom. Bruce started his conversation with Amy by asking about her goals for the school year.

> Bruce: What's your goal this year?
> Amy: This year I want to focus on student talk.
> Bruce: Sounds good. How will you know it's been successful?
> Amy: Maybe designing performance task to show what they know….Ideally, I imagine, in the morning we start with kids' stories related to math problems in daily life and then move on to math lesson, then we read…. For some aspects, this is a lot at once.
> Bruce: Did you sign up for Math Academy?... If I were you, I'd be an expert in content in addition to pedagogical skills…. How about talking with Hannah (ISD math coach)? Using your resources, you may ask Hannah to see your class and discuss what you can learn.
> Amy: Sure, I will. I am very interested in meaningful and authentic assessment, and I think she can help.

Continuing his conversation with Amy, Bruce linked the issue of "essential standards" to Amy's interests and goals. He added,

> Bruce: We need to zoom out and think about a year.… We can teach all, but students don't learn everything. Sometimes, we need to slow it down for mastery. Let's think about day-to-day duty…Here's the thing. When kids do so many things, at the end of the day, what they learn is hard to pick because it's a lot for them. It's

not only for kids, for adults too. Think about our 8-hour PD. You may not recall all the lessons. We may pick important topics from the morning and afternoon.…We need to slow down instead of having too many writing, math, and science activities every single day.…So, you know your central standards. Slow down, build toward mastery.…We need to think about covering multiple topics versus mastering fewer essential topics. Here's a green light.

One of the biggest initiatives of the Green district was creating and utilizing "essential standards" for student assessment to help them master key components in the curriculum. Bruce seemed to help Amy think about how she could use "meaningful and authentic assessment" with her interest in "student talk" informed by available resources and agendas in the district.

In addition, Bruce also asked about her relationships with peer teachers and expressed his concerns about if there was any chance Amy felt pressure to follow the other veteran teachers in her grade.

Bruce: I know you're in an interesting spot since they've been here for a long time (Michelle and Linda). I know they may offer many resources you don't want to use…. I want you to be a great team member and supportive. I'm not gonna say you have to do what they do, their way.

Amy: I know, I have different thoughts of teaching and concepts…. But I really appreciate having mentor-mentee relationships and seeing what they are doing…. This helps me to think about meaningful and authentic practices and assessments.

Bruce: Sounds good. So, to whom you are going to talk when you have challenges? That's what I'm worrying about.

Amy: I would say, Linda and Natalia… And for the small group intervention, I talk with Anna.…I know this is gonna take some time.

Bruce: Great. So, let's remember this. Your goal is student talk and depth of it. …When I walk in, I would expect to see actual conversations on your topic and the depth of it. I'm gonna check with multiple groups as well. Thinking of curriculum, Nick (the curriculum director of the Green district) created documents for grades 1 to 4. And pre- and post-test documents focusing on central standards from the district. We may use this. Is there anything else I can help you with?

Amy: They would be so helpful. I will let you know if I need to talk with you more.

Bruce: If you need help, I hope you'll find me.

After we came back to his office, Bruce commented on his support for Amy.

> She's got new ideas, she has new approaches, and she's trying to create a great environment…. If I continue to work with Amy to support her and try to give her mentorship and help based on what she needs, she's going to be, my hope is fingers crossed, she's here for another twenty-five years. Twenty-five years… The two ladies that she's teaching with will be long gone. And so she is the next leader for new teachers who are just starting at our school. She can say, "You know what? If by trying this, you add that. Or, what about this?" She can take on a whole new role.

Bruce saw Amy not just as a novice teacher, but a future leader who may mentor other teachers after 25 years. Like he saw "every student as unique," Bruce's stories about his teachers—including Natalia, Christina, Michelle, and Amy—confirmed that he saw each teacher's strengths and needs. Bruce wanted his teachers to be successful with his individualized support as well as the building-wide collective efforts "to excel, to be the best for students," as part of his views on accountability for teachers.

3.3. Dilemmas on Teacher Evaluation: When Accountability Focuses on the Results

Living with two dimensions of accountability, "doing what's required" and "doing what's best," Bruce encountered dilemmas, particularly when compliance-based accountability focused on consequences, rather than improving "processes to get the results." When I asked where accountability can be a bad thing, Bruce said,

> When it becomes so important to see the results. You take away a person's ability to grow in their ways and at their speed. I fear because, for example, if I start trying to make Amy somebody that she's not, based on scores, I could take all her initiatives and creativity away…. I think that sometimes in education, we chase our tails, and what that means is, we don't allow things the time to take form. As soon as we don't get a positive result, we want to change it. Rather than saying let's work through it.

His concerns about "too much focus on the results" were actually found in some of his teachers' responses to their teacher evaluation results. In our second focus group, Bruce picked

"teacher evaluation" as a title to share his most challenging dilemma coming from accountabilities.

When he visited classrooms for his formal observations for teacher evaluation, he pointed out two paradoxes. First, he was able to "spend more time in classrooms" to support teachers before the teacher evaluation became an official policy. Since the policy was established, he had to follow metrics designed by the system and spent more time on producing reports and documents than actually engaging with teachers' instructions. Second, particularly during the 2018-19 school year, he struggled with a few teachers who felt "defeated" when they received the "effective" rating and not the "highly effective" rating. Bruce said,

> What I've discovered is most teachers were really good students themselves, and because they were really good students they see "effective" and they looked at that as average or a "B".… And so they will verbalize that it's a slap in the face to receive the "effective" rating.… I had two teachers in particular that I ended up in the effective category that are really good at what they do, but I couldn't in good conscience give them distinguished and they were hurt, defeated, ticked, whatever you want to call it.

With the teachers' responses, Bruce "struggled" because the teachers who "fall within my 80%" were people that have potential to be good leaders. He wanted them to be on his side to support his initiatives and leadership, saying, "I don't want to split hairs that could end up pushing them the wrong way." Bruce explained what he did with these two "effective" teachers:

> I went through the rubric one item at a time, telling them, "This is where I think you are. I guess that's where I think you struggle, and this is why I don't think you are not here." We talked all the way through…. Eventually, I was able to make these teachers agree with over 95% of my ratings for their evaluation results.

In this dilemma situation, Bruce tried to comply with the requirement of the teacher evaluation system. In doing so, he wanted to use high rigor in evaluating instruction that were intended to support teacher growth. For example, he argued that there should be clear differences

between "effective" and "highly effective" because there are "highly effective teachers" at Pearl Elementary anyone can recognize their instructions are "excellent." Bruce wanted his "effective teachers" recognize gaps in their instruction to grow as "highly effective" teachers. However, his efforts to improve instruction using the system would encounter confrontation and emotional discomforts of "effective teachers." Bruce said, "I mean, these teachers are not bad, they are good, they are not just excellent as rock stars in my school. I need them as cheerleaders on my side, but this evaluation I have to follow makes it difficult."

To me, these teachers' mindsets were already shaped by a form of "accountability" where the visible results are so important along with the consequence-based teacher evaluation policy. Like Bruce acknowledged, students have their own paces for learning; he also believes teachers have their own paces to grow. Bruce seemed to evaluate his teachers with high rigor, identifying gaps in their instructional practices to help them to grow. However, to some extent, when accountability is understood as scores within the metrices, overlooking the processes that led to the results, Bruce seemed to be dealing with tensions between the teachers' feelings of hurt and his intentions to support them to grow.

Epilogue

In April 2020, under the COVID-19 situation, I saw weekly videos Bruce uploaded for Pearl students and families. There was a message for his students: "I want you to be learners. I know we are in a difficult, complex time, but don't let the situation you down…. Let's find what you can do. When you take a walk, you can learn about names of the birds and flowers." This message reminded me of his accountability narratives where he tried to see challenges as an opportunity. As a leader in the arena, Bruce needed to do "what's best," not letting the situation

define his role. This seemed to shape his ideas of accountability and accountability conduct at

Pearl Elementary.

CHAPTER VII.

PORTRAIT OF EMILY: "TO BE EMPOWERED, I WILL BE THE VOICE"

Prologue

To Emily, accountability was "doing what you're expected to do." What is also important to her was, "how you manage it [accountability]," meaning, how people meet these expectations. To me, shadowing Emily's work was like seeing two totally different scenes. On one hand, I saw Emily and her staff members talking, laughing, and working together toward "what's best for kids" to promote a "kids first" mindset. On the other hand, when Emily dealt any issues with the Purple district, I saw her anger, frustration, and exhaustion from the district's "fear-based accountability" relying on top-down approaches focusing on student test scores. Walking across these two different scenes, Emily had to meet "expectations" both from the district and her own "moral compass" in making accountability in supportive ways at Emerald Elementary. In doing so, tensions between two different *accountabilities* were depicted in the portrait of Emily. She questioned and challenged the district's competitive, punitive mentality "to be empowered" and "to empower" her teachers. Emily never stopped increasing her voice to warn and challenge the district's "fear-based accountability." This chapter shows the Portrait of Emily. I begin by sharing the story from Emily in her own language, context of Emerald Elementary, accountability narratives, and the dilemma talk.

1. Story from Emily[13]

My name is Emily Boyle and I am a principal at Emerald Elementary School in the Purple Hill district. I started my teaching in a neighboring school district called Teal. I taught sixth grade for three years, then I taught seventh and eighth grade for three

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[13] This story is mostly based on her individual interviews, when she introduced her backgrounds and her school to me. I used narrative smoothing to make her story telling more relevant to this study, applying the first person view.

years in Teal in a different building. Then I taught one year in second grade in Teal. So all my teaching was in Teal, but I had experienced a wide range of student age groups. I had a lot of middle school background, but I wanted to have some elementary school experience too because I knew I was going to go into administration after getting my administration certification. As I completed the certification program, I was hired as a middle school principal at Moon Middle School, a 5th to 8th grade building in the Rose Hill district. I stayed there for four years.

This is my third year as a principal at Emerald Elementary School. We have kids from transitional kindergarten through fourth grade here. I have mostly been with students who are considered "at risk." When I worked as a principal at Moon, it was even more of a challenge than where I'm at now. That school was in a really interesting situation in which the state had come in, and said basically, your building was considered as one of the bottom five percent of schools. So the state says you either are going to take over your school, we're going to turn it into a charter, or we will lay off half of your staff. The school chose the plan of letting the principal go, so I was coming from Teal, which is a pretty well-to-do-area, parents are very involved, and so then I had this opportunity. It was nothing of what I had experienced with teaching, but I thought I would really like working at Moon Middle School. When I was in the position, a lot of things had to happen really fast because basically, we had three years to "fix" the school. If you don't get it done, then there will be further consequences. So, we had to do a lot of different things, but the staff was really good about it, because you don't have choice. You have to do what the state says you have to do. Otherwise your job is on the line. But we were able to turn it around, and actually in three years' time, we went from bottom 5% to we ranked, I think it was like the forty- something, so we moved up quite a bit. I enjoyed working in Rose Hill where I got a lot of support from the district and staff.

The school ranking came out after I moved to Emerald Elementary last year, showing that the Moon Middle School that I went into was a reward school now, so it actually jumped to the top 5%. Unfortunately, I didn't get to celebrate with them because I was here, but that was really exciting that they were able to turn it around. So it was kind of a challenging situation, but rewarding at the same time. Interestingly, I've heard that Emerald was potentially at risk of getting the label of "Persistently Low Achieving School" about five or six years ago for having too much disparity between higher and lower achievers. Before I got here, Emerald did a lot of work to really boost its scores and to bring everybody up and really supported the kids at the bottom. I can't take credit for anything here because I wasn't here to get it that status, but it was interesting that both of them were reward schools last year, and then the state changed the ranking system this year.

Unlike my previous experience, I'm in a place where people are not really encouraged at all and people don't have much of a voice. I guess anytime anybody wants to listen, I'll just tell them. I think this research participation would be an interesting opportunity to share my experience just because it's not something that is, like I said, not something that's ever discussed. This is kind of an oddity, because I have been in other districts before as an administrator and it was just a very different feel. By participating in this research, I feel a little empowered to share what is going on with you all. I think it's important just to be open to share about myself being vulnerable. And also to be open to new experiences and different things that maybe you're seeing. This helps me to be

more self-reflective too. Because I think I go through a lot of things and it happens so fast every day, but when I'm sitting down with Taeyeon I can actually really think about it and slow it down a little bit, which is kind of nice.

In addition to my professional background, I have three kids, one in a middle school, one in an elementary, and the youngest is in a preschool. I love learning and attending conferences to grow. During my weekends, I sometimes go to see sports games at Mountain University with my family and friends.

2. Context: Emerald Elementary in Purple Hill

2.1. Emerald Elementary

In preparing for my first visit to Emerald Elementary School, I was thinking about the mission statement on its website: "The Emerald School community believes ALL students can learn. Our School's purpose is to ensure all students make adequate yearly progress as determined by district, state and national standards. A comprehensive system of support will be used to promote academic, social, physical and emotional growth." To me, the mission statement about meeting externally set standards explicitly seemed unusual, and therefore, I was prepared to see the school climate shaped by test-oriented or standard-oriented approaches. However, I realized my perception was biased when I actually met people in the building of Emerald Elementary School.

It was around 8:20 am of a beautiful fall day. Students were waiting in front of the main entrance of the building. Once the door was opened, everybody came in. There was another group of students staying outside lined up following a woman looking like their classroom teacher. Emily later commented that her third grade teachers took some moments with their kids to explore nature around the school before they entered the building in the morning. I came to the building with smiling kids. Wailea, the secretary in the office, greeted me and talked to Emily via walkie-talkie, saying, "Taeyeon is here."

I looked around the hallway filled with the lively energy of morning. The building was a square-shaped one-story, and the hallways were all connected. Emily was talking with students and teachers walking around the hallways. We walked to her office together. Emily told me she already emailed all of her staff that I would be here at Emerald and would be popping up over a year. She asked me how to pronounce my name correctly. I told her "Tae-Yeon."

Emily described that Emerald Elementary School has around 428 students from transition kindergarten to the fourth grade (TK-4) levels and each grade has three classrooms, except grade four which had four classrooms. It is considered as a large suburban school and also categorized as a Title 1 school. For student characteristics, she described that almost 59% of the students were White, 14% were Hispanic, 13% were two or more races, 11% were Black, and 3% were Asian. Emily said, almost half of them were enrolled in the free or reduced-price lunch programs, but she assumed actual numbers of people who were eligible for these lunch programs would be much higher because some parents do not want to get through the process of enrollment and are anxious about turning in the sheet. Because of the school of choice program, Emily told me that 40% of her students were from the Blue district (where Scarlett works), which neighbors the Purple district.

In her office, there was a big white board hanging on the purple-colored wall with multiple sheets containing tables of the PD schedule across the school year and recess duty. There were photos of her three kids, artworks from students, and some inspiring phrases. One paper sheet caught my eye: "At Emerald Elementary, you matter, you are important, and you are loved." Throughout my visits over the course of the school year, I felt this phrase well represents what school members may feel at Emerald, including Emily.

2.2. Purple District

Emily described the Purple district as "very prescriptive about everything that principals do." She assumed this might be for two reasons. First, as a relatively large district (compared to other districts in Michigan), the district wanted to have cohesiveness across buildings. She also assumed that the curriculum director who oversees all elementary schools and who was a former principal at Emerald Elementary School often uses top-down approaches to control most areas of curriculum, staff development, and data monitoring. Emily described that the curriculum director, Josh, is "a big advocate about data, numbers, and test scores" and the district really sticks with test scores "being very competitive."

According to Emily, the superintendent is more "community-focused instead of looking at schools, like within buildings" since a man recently arrested for conducting sexual crimes for many years was found out to be coming from the community of Purple Hill. Unlike her relationship with the superintendent in the Rose Hill district where she previously worked, Emily did not have opportunities to receive support and encouragement from the current superintendent in the Purple district.

In addition to controls over curriculum, Emily also complained that the district did not invest in teachers' participation in professional development, technology use, and school facilities. For example, Emily had to pay $10,000 from her "building money" to fix the swings because the district did not pay for playgrounds. In addition, to Emily, it seemed that people at the central office "don't communicate with each other well." For instance, she had to spend hours to email and make phone calls to figure out processes for simple issues within hiring (e.g., arranging time for the job candidates) and budget distribution (e.g., reimbursement for professional development) because there were miscommunications at the central office.

Her frustration with the Purple district appeared in almost every interview with her. At the end of the school year, Emily actually moved to another elementary school in a neighboring district. In my final visit with her during the summer break, she said,

> The HR asked the reasons why I am leaving, and I said everything. You guys do not listen to voices from your buildings, the district is not supportive, not encourage people, too much competitive… Douglas (superintendent) needs to be take care of the issues working with building leaders, not letting Josh control over all the things….

2.3. Teachers

Oftentimes, during my visits, Emily received multiple visits from staff, parents, or community members, all who just wanted to say hello to her. She kept her office door open except when she had meetings or phone calls that needed privacy. It was her "open door policy" welcoming visitors to her office. It seemed that teachers at Emerald did not hesitate to ask for help or greet Emily by visiting her office.

In October, during my visit at Emerald, right after I entered her office in the morning, Linda, a dean of students, and two other staff members brought flowers and chocolates saying, "Happy Bosses' Day!" Emily seemed to be surprised. "It's adorable… thank you. Thank you so much." When Emily sat down on the chair to work on email, another teacher came in and kept talking about kids' behaviors, parents, and personal issues for about 20 minutes. Her secretary Wailea came in to ask if Emily wanted coffee. A group of staff members brought in their Halloween costumes delivered by Amazon. They talked about how the price was reasonable and about the movie related to the costumes. Until the school day ended, Emily could not finish responding to any of those emails. She later commented on her "open door policy."

> I never shut my door. We're doing this (interview with me) right now, but they still come to the window and look at me like what she is doing there with the door shut. I want people to feel like they can always come to me, but it also hurts me in the end too

because I never get anything done. Even when there's a meeting or the door shut, you see how many times people still come in and hand me something to drop off. So, it's good because they feel comfortable and that they feel like they know that I'm accessible, but then, at the same time I'm a big sister. It's a tradeoff for sure.

At Emerald Elementary, in addition to teachers, there were 15 paraprofessionals who often assisted in meeting the individual needs of students with special needs. Emily, Linda, and these paraprofessionals often communicated with each other using "walkies" when there was any issue that needed immediate assistance from adults in addition to classroom teachers. Emily said, "People really love this building and I feel like, it's definitely like a family unit." In my reflection memo, I wrote, "Emily has always had someone to talk and to share her joyful moments as well as her frustrations. She might not feel lonely as much as other building leaders." I felt the picture from the hallway in the Emerald Elementary building well captured how Emily and her staff members worked together as a "T.E.A.M." (Together Everyone Achieve More).

Figure 7.1. TEAM: Picture from the hallway in Emerald Elementary

3. Accountability: "Doing What You're Expected to Do"

I think accountability is doing what you're expected to do….There's an expectation that you're doing certain things, but what matters is, how you MANAGE it! (her emphasis)

Emily, Individual interview

When I asked, "What is the meaning of accountability to you?" Emily pointed out "doing what you're expected to do." At the same time, she highlighted "how" this accountability works, meaning how people meet these expectations. Her emphasis on the ways accountability functions might be related to her work environments, walking across the two different territories: One from the Purple district's mentality of "fear-based accountability" and the other from Emerald Elementary School's openness in meeting "expectations." Working within two different "accountability cultures," Emily expressed what she thought of "expectations" during the conference call with the grant writing consultant:

> I want to change the status quo by empowering staff and making them keep kids first in their mind. …I want to bring the view looking at kids not just for a score but them as a person. They have individual needs that we have to support.

This statement was powerful to me, reminding me of her efforts to support students and staff throughout the school year.

To Emily, addressing two different lines of "expectations" depends on "how you manage accountability." This constantly shaped her narratives about accountability in daily practices. For example, given the district's "fear-based accountability" focusing solely on student test scores and top-down approaches to control school principals, Emily felt "accountability" was "a very scary term" along with a sense of "toxic," "competitive," and "unsafe" environments. These environments asked Emily to respond to "tons of email" from her boss immediately and to follow "what the district tells" with "no fidelity adjusting or modifying" the district-level policies

regarding curriculum, budget, and teacher development. In this way, she often felt "not empowered," and she felt her "moral compass" was challenged by the district.

To buffer this "fear-based accountability" focusing too much on test scores, Emily also had "expectations to do the right things," establishing a "kids first mindset" in her building to look at "a kid as a person." Following her professional insights as a leader, her expectations for "what's best for kids" was fostering "socio-emotional learning" at Emerald Elementary. In doing so, Emily wanted accountability in her building to work in "supportive ways" unlike her district.

To meet two different types of expectations from the district as well as her "moral compass" as a school principal, Emily had to make "accountability" being "supportive" in her building. Because her "expectations" did not align with the district's initiatives, she had to find all the resources from outside the district not from the formal support system of the Purple district. In doing so, she encountered dilemmas coming from conflicting values between two different expectations about data held by her teachers: student for "score" verses student as "person."

The portrait of Emily in this section shows two different cultures of accountability she was dealing with *and* how she enacted accountability by negotiating "doing what [she] was expected to do." Next, Emily's dilemma about a teacher who followed the "district mentality" overlooking a student's socio-emotional needs were followed.

3.1. The "Status Quo": "Fear-based Accountability."

During the first focus group, the photos Emily brought in to talk about accountability included her weekly and daily "to do list", "meeting schedules," and teacher evaluation guidelines. Emily said, "Oh, my photos are all boring" when she listened to the other participants' photo stories. She said,

I feel like so much of my life is in the meetings. And it's unfortunate because obviously we talked about the kids being the reason why we do this….However, it probably goes in one meeting after another. Each meeting has an agenda for accountability. It's very specific in my district, like, 'This is the format. You follow this.' Everything you do has to follow this protocol. I'm worried. All grade-level and building-level leadership team meetings—every meeting has an agenda, a policy the district wants us to follow.

These photos seemed to reveal Emily's perceptions of accountability shaped by how the Purple district approaches accountability. In my individual interview with her, Emily also explained accountability for principals as "staying on top of data is the biggest thing." Describing the Purple district's approaches, Emily said,

Just for that accountability piece, I think of staying on top of data as the biggest thing, for the principal anyways. To know your building data, and teachers, too, they really know that. So, that would be the biggest thing for accountability. For my own personal self, we have our own evaluations that we have, like teachers do. We're rated on the same system teachers have, so Marzano. We have to provide evidence to show that we're doing certain things. So there's an accountability that I've gotten of everything that I'm rated on.

It seemed that such "data" guides what Emily was expected to do. In the Purple district, data "has been very, very the fore front of everything." At the district level, the meaning of "data" seemed to be shaped around consequences, answerability, and comparability focusing on student "test scores." As literature on accountability has shown is common in school districts, "data" in the Purple district appeared to be a widely-used tool for communicating to evaluate what and how a school is doing, providing evidence using numbers, scores, and measures (see Derrington et al., 2015; Donaldson & Mavrogordato, 2018; Park, 2018). Emily confirmed that "data in this district is really about student test scores."

3.1.1. Student test scores: "It overrides everything"

With her background being a principal at the turnaround school previously, Emily completely agreed with usefulness of data, saying, "You should be keeping track of data and use

it to inform decisions about kids." However, she felt, "Here, it overrides everything. Data is like the central focus of everything." For example, talking about her district-initiated professional development with George Batch who is "the guru of MTSS" (Multi-Tier System of Supports), she described,

> We may be ten years ahead of everybody else in MTSS, and 20 years behind in everything else education related because we're so centrally focused on MTSS here…. We found out that everyone in the district knows how to do Academics MTSS in our sleep, no problem, but we have never talked about behaviors…. like "socio-emotional," which is one of the important elements in MTSS.

In her one-to-one or group meetings with teachers scheduled for "data meetings," they collectively reviewed and monitored student test scores, which was required by the district. Emily thought that the district's hyper focus on "test scores" has generated a view looking at students as "scores" and not as a "person." She wanted to change this "status-quo" that the district had drilled into teachers' minds.

3.1.2. Emails: "Toxic," "competitive," and "unsafe" environment

Emily received on average 60 emails daily and had to spend lots of time replying. While email was found to be an important communication tool for principals in this study and their district leaders, emails from Emily's boss showed the ways in which her district relied on "fear-based accountability." Emily described the Purple district as being a "toxic," "competitive," and "unsafe" environment rooted in top-down approaches towards schools. In particular Emily talked about her supervisor Josh, a curriculum director in the district, as difficult to deal with. She felt pressures to respond to "a lot of emails from him [Josh]," saying that "there's an expectation you have to respond right away, even when I was on vacation and during weekends."

Additionally, there was a sense from Emily that Josh was pitting the principals against one another. Some of his emails were CCed to all of the elementary school principals and included comparative data across schools. Emily explained,

> The tone of the email put me and the other principals on guard. It's like, this building got the best score in M-STEP math and literacy and this building got the lowest. This building got the lowest rate in attendance. Explain why you got this.... Give me answers.

This competitive, punitive approach from the district made Emily feel that "here, accountability is a scary term."

3.1.3. Curriculum: "To be blind to follow"

The district's expectations for principals with "toxic" and "top-down" ways of functioning seemed to undermine Emily's and her teachers' efforts to improve instruction. Despite the district's priority of increasing student test scores, Emily also thought the ways the Purple district functioned undercut student achievement. Commenting on the district's curriculum, Emily told me that third grade teachers at Emerald found that there were gaps in the reading curriculum in preparing for the state-level standardized test. However, the district's "fear based accountability" seemed to make her teachers feel "unsafe for being creative and thinking out of the box" and required to "be blind to follow." Emily recalled,

> We've been using Reading Street curriculum across the district. In my first year, I found, here we blindly teach this program, hoping that if students know this program really well, then they're going to do really well at M-STEP, instead of looking at where are the holes in the program [Reading Street] to fill. This year, third grade teachers had said, 'We already know that this [some elements measured in the M-STEP] is not covered in our curriculum, Reading Street.' I said, 'Who knows?' and they said, 'Nobody. But we have to teach this.' Teachers would never like to say anything negative. That's because they know this is what they're supposed to be doing, with fear of like I have to do what I'm supposed to do, instead of challenging authority and saying, 'Hey I dug into this and this is what I found.' Nobody felt comfortable enough to do that until this year.

Emily told her academic interventionist, Patty, about this issue. Patty identified thirty standards that were not covered in third grade that they were missing every year. With this evidence, Emily went to the district, but she recalled, "They're like, 'Oh it's accountability, you teach this Reading Street curriculum and don't even think anything else.' Don't even think that there's nobody doing right here in the district. It's like you teach the manual." Throughout the year, Emily had tried to convince the district to share other available resources to fill the gaps or allow teachers to use supplemental materials to teach the "missing elements." In my last visit I asked, "How did your curriculum battle go?" Emily said the district did not want teachers to use other materials to complement, but "use only Reading Street."

Emily expressed, "It's a fear-based accountability. I think a lot of times in this district, we're like, this is what we're doing, do it, and don't question it." Emily felt that the district's "fear-based accountability" deteriorated student achievement on the state-level standardized test as well as students' holistic development, even though the district prioritized their "test scores" over any other initiatives. "It's a paradox, isn't it?" Emily added.

3.2. Accountability for What's Left: "Do the Right Things"

Emily was worried about the Purple district's "fear-based accountability" with too much focus on student test scores and overlooking "kids as a whole person." Since she started working at Emerald Elementary, Emily had observed an increasing number of "students with trauma" experienced at home. She recognized that teachers needed support to help their students deal with emotions and control their bodies to focus on learning. However, she felt the district's "competitive" environment using test-scores did not help teachers listen to their students' diverse needs. Indeed, behavior issues from students with trauma became worse. The district did not offer enough resources to help schools enhance "trauma-informed practice" or "socio-emotional

learning." Emily thought the district undermined school-level efforts to promote student holistic development, even academic achievement. Whenever she asked the district for any support, the answers from the district were "lip services" not "actually" helping principals and teachers.

This tendency at the district led her to be vocal about her own expectations of "what's best for the kids." The key agenda for Emily was advocating for "socio-emotional learning" as a form of accountability at her building. As a leader of Emerald Elementary, Emily viewed accountability as "to do the right things" to support the diverse needs of her students, with "kids first" mindsets among her staff members. My shadowing of her days highlighted Emily's and her staff members' continuous learning for "socio-emotional learning" and Emily's interactions with her students, particularly students with "trauma."

3.2.1. Continuous learning: "To look at kids as a whole person"

Emily is an enthusiastic learner. Whenever she talked about her "learning" from professional development trainings, conferences, and her interactions with teachers and students, Emily seemed to be very thrilled about knowing new ideas and practices and being inspired by people she met. The Purple district did not support Emily and her teachers in attending trainings outside of the district focusing on socio-emotional learning. However, Emily wanted to promote such learning opportunities for her teachers, so Emily encouraged herself and her teachers to participate in these learning opportunities using "her building money."

Emily told me how her building-wide initiatives for socio-emotional learning started this year. Before the school year starts (2018-19), Emily and her teacher leaders, Patty (Academic interventionist) and Linda (Dean of student behavior), attended professional development about socio-emotional learning in Kansas. Emily said, "This Kansas PD made me realize our district and Michigan had been really behind on socio-emotional learning and trauma informed

practices." When they came back, Emily and her teacher leaders set agendas to improve "socio-emotional learning" practices for the school year, using the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) score and trauma-informed practices that they picked up from the "Kansas PD."

One of the initiatives included a teacher book club, reading and discussing *Help for Billy*. Five teachers volunteered to facilitate the book club discussion within groups. In Emerald Elementary School's PD calendar, Emily assigned each chapter of the book for monthly discussion. On the day of a whole group PD in March, teachers got together in the library around 2pm. A group of teachers brought snacks and put them on the table right next to the entrance. Emily announced the agenda of the meeting, showing a photo from another PD in Chicago about trauma-informed practices. After a short comment on her conference experience, Emily let teachers discuss the chapter within groups for 30 minutes. Teachers found different places to work as a group. The group of five teachers staying in the library was led by Penny, a kindergarten teacher. The group discussion began by sharing their reflections on the chapter. A fourth grade teacher Camelia said,

> I was surprised about non-verbal communication, I mean, it says 55% of expressions are body and facial expressions. Some kids say that 'my grandma says something bad' but it doesn't mean the grandma says it, but they [kids] are so cued about how adults act and express…. I feel like, a lot of times, adults are liars, using words that are different from their facial or body expression.

Once the group discussion was ended after 30 minutes, all teachers came back to the library. Emily played a video titled "My teacher loves me" about a school in Chicago. The video showed how teachers in the school interacted with youth and how the students appreciated it. After watching the video, Emily said, "I have some books to give away. I got these from a pre-conference session in Chicago. You guys think about numbers and someone who picked the

closest to mine will get these books." Teachers seemed to be excited and everyone shared the numbers they thought. Emily gave the book to three teachers.

As a whole group, teachers shared their group responses about using non-verbal expressions and how they could apply them to their own classroom. After that, the third grade teachers shared a video that they recorded about what they had been doing for students' socio-emotional learning beyond academic achievement. In the video, three teachers were taking their class to help their students look outside in nature, including grounds, trees, and sky, before they entered the building in the morning. They called this "Nature Lesson." Rose, one of the third grade teachers, was introducing student journals where they wrote how they feel each day. Another teacher, Marie, was explaining group activities designed to build up their community. After watching the video, the whole group discussed and asked questions about their activities. At the end of the meeting, Emily commented that the third grade teachers' using multiple activities for their "nature lesson" and "personalizing comments to students" were impressive and powerful.

While walking to her office with me around 3:45pm, Emily said,

I was able to attend the conference in Chicago, but not my teachers. So, I wanted share what I learned from there with my teachers so that they can do things like that in their classroom. It is also closely aligned with our initiatives at the building level, like the book club and grade-level PD, a collaborative group PD using a video to share with other teachers. All these have components to support student socio-emotional learning and their trauma informed practices.

As the PD day showed, to Emily, professional learning opportunities outside of the district were important to enhance her understanding of socio-emotional learning and promote collective learning of her teachers at the building level.

3.2.2. Learning for students

Emily's efforts to enhance "socio-emotional learning" practices were also found in her interactions with students. In addition to her efforts to listen to and help several students experiencing trauma at home, Emily was able to offer mindfulness yoga lessons for all students with the external grant she applied for. Her book reading to every classroom was another effort to enhance students' understanding of their emotions and care for others.

In my fourth visit with Emily, she went to Hannah's first grade classroom. There were 25 kids sitting on the rug. Emily read two picture books to them: *We're All Wonders* and *I Am Human.* Emily told them, "Today, I am going to talk about empathy. What is empathy? Anyone heard about it?" Once she read each book, Emily asked. "Did you have any similar experiences like him? How did you feel about it?" Students' responses included, "I felt sad," "Someone told me I am not good at…," and "I told Lea, you are a bad sister.… She might have felt bad." Afterward, Emily explained what empathy means, saying, "It's about knowing how others feel, understanding your friends' feeling, your family's feeling, like how you feel…." Emily asked students, "Then how can we use this? You can practice and do this on your own." She exercised breathing with kids, and then, had them close their eyes and think about their personal experiences related to emotions and any incidents from the books. Emily told me she had been doing this "book reading" weekly for each classroom throughout the school year as a way to help students develop emotional sensitivity and skills to control their own emotions and behaviors.

Buffering the district's "fear-based accountability" that saw students as "scores," Emily was committed to her accountability "to do the right things"—seeing "kids as a whole person," having "kids first mindsets," offering multiple learning opportunities for herself, teachers, and students.

3.3. Making Accountability in Supportive Ways

Emily had to deal with two different types of accountability in meeting her "expectations": the district's fear-based accountability focusing on student test scores *and* her building-level accountability to promote a "kids first mindset." Unlike the district's "fear-based accountability," Emily believed that having support would bring much better outcomes "to meet the expectations."

> So, for me, the accountability pieces are that … I want you to do with the expectation. But if you don't know what that means and how to do it, you definitely come and see me, and I'll help you. 'I'm NOT gonna SHAME you for coming to me and you know wondering what, what it is that I'm asking of you…(emphasis added).

Her valuing "supportive ways" of accountability was depicted in Emily's multiple data meetings with her teachers. In my first visit with Emily, her day was packed with five teacher meetings. Rose, a third grade teacher, came in for an "M-STEP meeting." Emily put out six sheets of paper that showed the percentage of proficiency of each third-grade classroom in math and English Language Arts (ELA) without using teachers' names. They talked about grade-level teacher meetings and the district's mandatory professional development that Josh told Emily of earlier in the day. Looking at sheets, Rose said,

> My ELA looks okay, but math is below 50% [the rate of her students who are in the proficiency category]... it seemed that Marie [her fellow teacher] has the highest… 70% in Math, can I talk with her about what she uses? I guess this is Marie's, right?"

Emily confirmed, "These are supposed to help your teaching and not be offensive. If you think that might be helpful, yes, it's Marie's." Rose showed some concern on her face, but I felt her feelings were not hurt by the results, and she seemed to be willing to improve her skills to have better outcomes. Rose, an established teacher, rather than be offended by another teacher

performing better than her, seemed to seek opportunities to learn from instructional strategies from Marie, a younger colleague.

Emily's communication with Rose was completely different from Emily's meeting with her boss Josh who often asked, "Why is this? Why does this person have the lowest scores?" or "You need to submit this and this." Emily later commented on her meeting with Rose, "Yes, academic achievement is important, especially in this district. However, teachers can do a much better job when they feel supported. I mean consequences don't change anything. They know I've got their back." Throughout my visit at Emerald Elementary, I got the sense that teachers at Emerald accept "scores," "data," "teacher evaluation," and "PD" in fairly positive ways without expressing resistance. When I asked how this was possible, Emily said, "Teachers know how this district works, and they can't say 'no.' I also know that systems don't always work and they're not always what's best for kids and for staff." With this belief, her days were filled with constant negotiations with meeting the district's expectations and her building's initiatives in approaching accountability in "non-threatening" and "supportive" ways.

3.4. Dilemmas on Trauma-Informed Practice: "Such a Rule Follower"

As Emily said, most teachers at Emerald Elementary seemed to be eager to learn about and practice a "kids first mindset." However, Emily told me it took time to make this happen.

> When I first came here, everyone had color charts to control student behaviors. It took so long to change their mindset. Linda and I really have worked hard to take them down….When Josh was a principal here, he drilled the mentality, controlling everything with data, pushing hard to increase test scores, numbers and scores! And there are still two adults sticking with that idea here. And everybody knows how this district is functioning and I'm the only one who stands up, saying that's not okay.

While Emily was good at compromising two different approaches to accountability in meeting her "expectations," there were multiple times she appeared to be exhausted standing against and buffering "the district mentality."

On the day of my visit in spring, when Emily came into her office after her book reading in a classroom, Tanya, one of the paraprofessionals was with Jimmy, a first grade boy, in Emily's office.

Tanya: He kept telling lies to me. He mixed white and red clays but when I asked if he did, he said no. He did the same thing in class.

Emily: Okay, that's fine. I will talk with him. (When Tanya left, Emily lowered her body and saw Jimmy's face.). Jimmy, do you want me to get some water for you?

Jimmy: Nope. I didn't mix them, but she kept telling me I did. (Jimmy spoke in a very angry voice, stood up and walked to the corner).

Emily : It's okay. (grabbing Jimmy's hands) I'm not angry about the Play Do. It's fine. I'm okay with it. Can we practice breathing together?"

Jimmy breathed deeply and became calm. Emily had Jimmy have snacks and water.

Emily: Did you know water decreases your stress? I drink water when I feel upset or stressed. Because our body contains huge amount of water and water refreshes your stresses. So, if you are upset or don't feel so good, you can drink water and calm down by yourself. Right?"

Jimmy: Okay. Good to know.

Emily: What happened in class?

Jimmy: Mrs. Edwards moved me to yellow. …because I went to my chair.

Emily kept asking several questions to understand what happened and why Jimmy was upset. It was found that, during the whole-group math session, Mrs. Edwards explained something and had kids sit on the floor. Jimmy wanted to have his jacket from his chair instead of sitting on the carpet because he was cold.

Jimmy was one of the students who regularly visited Emily's office with his anger. Coming from an unstable home—his mom was in jail, his father was unemployed, and his grandmother was responsible for household income and taking caring of Jimmy—Jimmy seemed to have hard time to process his anger, especially when he had issues with his teacher, Mrs. Edwards. Emily described that, while many of her teachers absorbed the initiatives for "trauma-informed practice," there were still some adults (two teachers and a paraprofessional) who were "so much rule-based" wanting to have "power" over students.

Later in the day, Emily went to Linda, the dean of students, and discussed what had happened with Jimmy and his teacher, Mrs. Edwards:

Emily: Every day, she [Mrs. Edwards] is escalating it [Jimmy's anger]. She cares a lot about work 'holding it accountable' but WHO CARES right now and WHY? I think Jena [Mrs. Edwards] still sees him as very calculative and manipulative. I wonder if she read the book [*Help for Billy*, the book they study together]. Otherwise, how does she identify him like that?

Linda: She thinks of them as power things. She is such a rule follower. I think she sees Jimmy in that way…. I have been trying so hard to get rid of the color system. She is the one who still has it!!

Emily: If he is in the 2nd grade, he will be fine. Picturing him with 2nd grade teachers, Alicia is really good with these kids.

Linda: Yes, warm and compassionate. That's what Jimmy needs.

Living with students like Jimmy, Emily felt that Emerald Elementary had to support students' needs first. It was not necessarily about "rules" and "scores," even though these are what she and her teachers were evaluated on. For three years, Emily had tried to shift teachers' mindsets from the mentality shaped by the district's "fear-based accountability" to viewing a student "as a person" because it is "the right thing to do." What she was "expected to do" as accountability was what was left from the district's strong focus on "score-centered" and "fear-based accountability." However, not every adult was "on board" and she still had a hard time

with two teachers, like Mrs. Edwards, who were "such a rule follower" persistently living with "the district mentality" using the "color system" and "power things," not necessarily shifting their mindsets toward the building-wide efforts "to look at students as a whole person."

Epilogue

Emily's accountability narratives show two different forms accountability working in schools. The district's "fear-based accountability" was filtered through Emily's efforts to make accountability supportive at Emerald Elementary. This process involved intensive tensions between rigid bureaucratic controls and Emily's moral disposition in her accountability conduct. Emily raised her voices to question and challenge the district's competitive, punitive mentality to be empowered. However, it seemed that the status quo, punitive approaches deeply rooted in the district, were fortified by its mentality and system, thereby making Emily frustrated and emotionally drained. Finally, she left the district in the next school year. Emily's story also highlights the role of district in shaping norms and expectations in accountability practice in schools.

CHAPTER VIII.

ANALYSIS ACROSS PORTRAITS:

UNDERSTANDING ACCOUNTABILITY & DILEMMAS

In this chapter, I revisit the three portraits of school leaders Scarlett, Emily, and Bruce. I analyze across their narratives to discuss the research questions of the study: (1) How do school leaders interpret and enact accountability in their day-to-day practices?; (2) How do school leaders understand accountability as supporting or undermining their leadership practices?; and (3) How do school leaders respond when they confront ethical dilemmas under conflicting accountability demands? In doing so, I add my own narratives in which I reflect on my participants' stories about accountability. While answering my research questions, this chapter presents four themes that emerged in my analysis across the three portraits. Rather than following the conventional way of presenting findings, such as reporting them under each research question, I take a thematic approach because the emergent themes organically answer the questions. I also believe that this approach better supports my methodological decisions following emic perspectives.

First, I suggest that accountability to my participants can be understood as both a virtue and a control mechanism. Second, I discuss how their accountability perceptions and enactments are flexible and context specific. I found three elements in particular that were influential in shaping my participants' understandings of accountability: individuals' personal and professional backgrounds, organizational needs based on school contexts, and district-level support. Third, building on the aforementioned understanding of accountability, I interpret accountability for my participants as a *balancing act* in pursuit of equity-driven learning. Finally, my analysis reveals

how these understandings of accountability generated constant negotiations and dilemmas for school leaders and how they responded to them.

1. Accountability as a Virtue and a Control Mechanism

Across the three portraits, I found my participants interpreted accountability both as a virtue and as a mechanism, which supports Bovens' (2014) argument in his overview on accumulated accountability literature. My participants' virtue statements were often related to their efforts to support students, while instances regarding control mechanisms were often related to their compliance with the upper authorities *and* efforts to establish collective norms toward accountability approaches at the school level. In terms of what matters in shaping the participants' dispositions toward accountability, their stories highlighted the way in which accountability works is critical in determining how they understand accountability.

1.1. Accountability as a Virtue

In accordance with Bovens (2011), the narratives of the three principals suggest that their understandings of accountability include both accountability as a virtue and accountability as a control mechanism. In terms of virtue statements, my participants interpreted accountability as "taking responsibility for my own data" (Scarlett), "doing what you're expected to do" (Emily), and "doing what's best" (Bruce). Accountability as a virtue to my participants often indicated their support of the diverse needs of students and teachers. In this way, accountability was enacted through the identification of individual students' and teachers' needs.

For example, Scarlett found that "Ruby kids" needed different types of support to learn, such as "teaching in a row" and her teachers needed to move away from "deficit thinking" about parents from minoritized communities. Bruce collected *qualitative data* to understand what his students, particularly his "frequent flyers," needed to help them engage in daily life and learning

at Pearl Elementary. Bruce also listened to his teachers to understand what they wanted from him as a mentor and leader. Emily saw many of her students at Emerald needing "socio-emotional learning" and "trauma-informed practices" from their teachers. Simultaneously, my participants found and provided their students and teachers with relevant resources "to be accountable for them." These resources included physical, visible resources as well as emotional, invisible support. Thus, the participants' interpretation of accountability as a virtue was understood as their efforts to support "what's best for kids" aligning with their moral disposition. Many times, the enactment of this notion of accountability was found to take *a horizontal* form (network-and trust-based accountability) in which their professional insights and collegiality were valued (Lillejord, 2020).

1.2. Accountability as a Control Mechanism

The participants also viewed accountability as a control mechanism with which they both needed to comply, i.e., set by district- and state-level policies, *and* wanted to comply, i.e., set by professional norms. That is, participants' daily practices suggest that accountability as a control mechanism includes both rigid bureaucratic controls and normative controls. These two-dimensional control mechanisms (vertical and horizontal) in my analysis align with accountability literature that has suggested both trust-based (horizontal) accountability and sanction-based (vertical) accountability work in tandem and may balance each other depending on context (Manbridge, 2009, 2014).

The participants considered their compliance with state-mandated law and district-demanded protocols as one way to achieve accountability. For example, Bruce said that accountability is about "doing what's required" and that, to him, these requirements included complying with the state's "reading law" as well as implementing the "teacher evaluation

policy," "formative assessment," and small group interventions that he called "WIN time," following the district's guidelines. This means public schools inherently cannot avoid bureaucratic controls because school is an institution under upper authorities—the district and state. As employees within such a system, participants had to follow certain protocols and rules imposed by the upper authorities, which can be described as *vertical* accountability (Lillejord, 2020).

In addition to vertical accountability, *horizontal* accountability, which can be described as network-based or trust-based accountability, also appeared to work as a mechanism in driving participants' understandings and enactments of accountability. While accountability as rigid bureaucratic controls seems to rely on laws, mandated policies, and protocols that follow consequences when leaders do not comply, accountability as *normative* controls seemed to rely more on professional norms shared with individuals within the school, district, and community. Across the three portraits of accountability, all three principals built organizational norms through meetings, modeling, professional development, and relationship-building with students, teachers, and communities to establish "what's okay" and "what's not okay" in the collective achievement of intended goals and setting these goals. For example, Emily's accountability narrative highlights how she and her teacher leaders established collective goals toward a "kids first mindset" at Emerald Elementary, buffering the district's "fear-based," "competitive," and "toxic" culture of accountability. Scarlett's narrative about "data" showed how normative controls help their students to attend school via robo-calls and how everyday greetings with parents are part of her accountability enactment. This also supplemented the district- and state-level bureaucratic controls, enhancing their data collection and data-informed decision making.

Thus, regardless of types of controls, bureaucratic or normative controls, my participants' enactment of accountability as a mechanism reveals that it motivates, governs, and monitors how individuals think and behave *and* establishes a collective sense of "what you're expected to do" within the system. This finding supports O'Kelly and Dubnick's (2019) argument that accountability purposes are not a given but are constructed through reciprocal interactions between individuals.

1.3. What Matters is "How It Works"

Across the three accountability portraits, two key conceptualizations of accountability—accountability as a virtue *and* a control mechanism—were found to be complementary. The former focuses more on "accountability *for what*"—what participants believe are the purpose of accountability—based on both individual and collective values. The three participants appeared to agree that they are accountable to students first, while simultaneously recognizing there are certain requirements they had to follow to be accountable to the district or the state where they belong to professionally. My visits with these three leaders reminded me that education is *human affairs*, i.e., nurturing human beings; therefore, accountability for my participants needed to center *human* practices (Head & Pryiomka, 2020; Labaree, 2005).

In highlighting "how" accountability works in their narratives, participants detailed their conceptions of accountability as either supporting or undermining their leadership practices, yielding important insights for answering the second research question. Accountability as a mechanism within their work environments was shown to be crucial in their daily practices and shaping of their attitudes toward "accountability." My participants perceived that accountability can be "good" when t it "motivates" teachers and school leaders to achieve "better results" for student learning. For them, it was more important to focus on the process of accountability where

leaders' and educators' professional insights are valued. However, accountability could be "bad" or "scary" for my participants when there was "too much focus on outcomes" accompanied by "punitive" approaches and competitive measures while overlooking "what's happening in schools." For example, when my participants had to use and implement externally developed metrices, indicators, and protocols where they could not reflect their local contexts—teacher evaluation guidelines, state-level standardized testing, and universally developed curriculum—they felt "accountability" undermined their work. Like Bruce said, if accountability as a mechanism "only prioritizes outcomes," i.e., not allowing enough time for individual students and teachers to grow, it may result in viewing students and teachers as "scores" within the metrices. Bruce worried such a trend in accountability would harm the profession in the long run because it can result in losing leaders in education who can bring mentorship and wisdom with accumulated learning experiences that will help students and teachers grow.

2. Accountability as Flexible, Context Specific

Since accountability has become a global, frequently used concept, literature has highlighted its conceptual flexibility and ambiguity (Dubnick, 2014; Kehm et al., 2009). Aligning with the literature, the phenomenon of accountability revealed in the three portraits of this study differed depending on school context. Detailed narratives from the three principals showed that their understandings of accountability should be considered as non-fixed and context-specific (Mansbridge, 2014; O'Kelly & Dubnick, 2019).

One of the apparent examples that explain accountability as context-specific is the data use shown in my participants' narratives. In accordance with the literature, the use of "data" in accountability practices across the three narratives seemed to be a common phenomenon (Carnoy et al., 2003; Diamond & Spillane, 2004; McShane & DiPerna, 2018). Living in current

educational environments where numbers (e.g., "test scores" and "attendance rates") play a critical role in determining school quality, data-related perceptions and practices were found to permeate my participants' daily practices. However, depending on the context, the meaning of data was different and much broader than the narrow understanding of data as numbers or scores. For instance, Bruce collected his own qualitative data about students by observing and interacting with them in different situations, such as joining in recess activities. Looking at her students' data, Scarlett was concerned about "student life," which drove her to help "Ruby kids learn" and recognize the urgent need to stop "pipelining school to prison." In Emily's context, data was a critical tool to compare schools and students at the district level. By contrast, at the building level, this "data" was combined with students' experienced trauma and "socio-emotional learning" at Emerald Elementary School. These instances show that my participants utilized "data" as part of accountability conduct to guide their decisions in setting ongoing, future goals and develop strategies to achieve these goals based on their professional insights and local needs.

As such, the portraits in this study suggest that my participants' interpretations of accountability were contingent on their individual backgrounds, school contexts, and district environments.

2.1 Individuals' Personal and Professional Backgrounds

Accountability perceptions of my participants also seemed to be rooted in their values and ethics (Dubnick, 2003; LaFollette, 2000). Shadowing my participants' daily practices affirmed that leadership is a value-driven practice (Greenfield, 1979; Hodgkinson, 1993). What was important to my participants as educators and leaders seemed to shape their perceptions of accountability and drove how they conducted accountability. Across the three narratives, the

participants showed shared norms as educators and leaders, such as "what's best for kids" as part of their accountability, but the ways and areas in which they emphasized these seemed to differ depending on individual background.

Commenting on his accountability for "frequent flyers," Bruce told me he was not a good student, was not favored by his teachers, and did not like being at school when he was a boy. During his teaching and leading in education, he committed to seeing "every single student" as unique and helping students enjoy their school days. Similarly, Scarlett's personal background of coming from a family experiencing poverty and addiction enabled her to understand "how it's like being at home" for many of her Ruby kids, whom she called "students of poverty." In addition, her interracial marriage and postgraduate learning led her to see invisible social structures and norms in the education system that perpetuate racialized inequality. Responding to so-called "students at risk," Scarlett viewed accountability as a matter of "urgency" that requires her to be responsible for students' lives, making sure her "Ruby kids" read and have opportunities to succeed in the future. Emily's background, being a mother of three kids, also relate to her focus on a "kids first mindset." Of this, Emily reflected on how she treated her kids, talking about trauma-informed practices that she learned from conferences and workshops.

In addition to their personal backgrounds, my participants' professional experiences also appeared to influence how they approached accountability. As many researchers have pointed out (e.g., Shirrell, 2016; Shipps & White, 2009; Weiner & Woulfin, 2017), years of experience as a principal seemed to also be related to how my participants perceived and enacted accountability. For example, Bruce who had been in education for his 19-year career expressed that his understanding of accountability "has evolved." He had experienced changes in accountability discourses in education from "punishment" to "doing what's best" for 19 years.

His nine years working as a principal at Pearl Elementary may have led him to invest more in his relationships with students, teachers, and communities in the rural context, which I argue shape his view on accountability more broadly. For instance, Bruce mentioned that his commitment to improving the profession is part of his accountability in regard to developing teachers as the next generation of leaders and making a better society by supporting students.

Emily's previous experience as a turnaround school principal in another district also seemed to influence her negotiations in dealing with the two different forms of accountability at Emerald Elementary (fear-based accountability at the district level and student-first accountability at the school level). Emily highlighted that she understood data-informed decision making and increasing student achievement are important, but based on her previous success, she also believed that it could be done in supportive ways without harming students and teachers and without imposing "toxic" and "competitive" environments. When talking about their district-purchased curriculum that does not cover 30 standards of the state test, Emily brought up her curriculum development experience as a teacher before the Common Core era. She lamented that younger teachers in the current time may not experience what she called "a beauty of teaching"—developing and implementing curriculum with their professional discretion to make it work for their students. Rather, Emily saw that her teachers were expected to follow the prescriptive program purchased by the district as opposed to creating and developing curriculum.

Compared to Bruce and Emily, as a relatively new principal, Scarlett seemed to struggle with several teachers holding "conventional" teaching styles that are limited in their ability to adequately consider the needs of Ruby students, "students of color." While her struggles were related to the district's lack of resources, to some extent, her limited experience in the principalship could also partially explain her difficulties dealing with seasoned staff members

who increased and circulated complaints about her "innovative ideas" and "high expectations." However, the reason why she could defy such resistance and keep moving on toward her "innovative ways" of accountability for "students of color" or "students at risk" was also grounded in her professional experience as a teacher and teacher leader. Scarlett mentioned her teaching "at risk kids" in Chicago was "an eye opening experience to revisit inequality in education." Her expertise in literacy education from her graduate degree and working as a reading specialist also led her to conduct accountability in advocating for "innovative ways" to help so called "students at risk" effectively learn and succeed.

2.2. School Contexts: Organizational Needs

I also found that my participants' understandings of accountability can be partially explained by organizational needs from students and teachers at the school level. For instance, all three participants centered students in their accountability perceptions, but the needs of their students were slightly different. Particularly, the urban context of Ruby Elementary highlighted the complex needs of students and their community in the face of resource scarcity, types of needs that often used to describe urban education (Gadsden & Dixon-Román, 2017). Compared to suburban and rural school contexts, Scarlett pointed out that Ruby's student culture and voices were not fully represented in school settings. For instance, she stated that Ruby kids were predominantly students of color, but her teachers were predominantly White, including herself. Scarlett's accountability toward "Black lives matter," i.e., looking at student data as a reflection of "their life," seemed to be closely related to the needs from her student demographic. This led Scarlett to advocate for "culturally responsive teaching" and "social justice leadership" at Ruby Elementary as evidenced by her invention of a new curriculum to "teach differently." Her

purchase and installation of the laundry machine at Ruby Elementary also reflected the needs of students' homes and their families to help Ruby kids attend school and learn.

I also found that the participants' thoughts on the extent of teachers' preparedness to meet their students' needs appeared to be critical to their accountability conduct. Scarlett wanted her teachers to recognize taken-for-granted practices and assumptions that could perpetuate racialized inequality in student learning and their future success. Thus, her accountability practices included modeling building relationships with minoritized communities to shift "deficit thinking" about parents. Emily's accountability practices in enhancing teachers' collaborative learning for "socio-emotional learning" and "trauma-informed practices" also reflected their teachers' needs because she thought her teachers were not familiar with such approaches due to the district's intensive focus on student test scores. In the rural community context of Pearl Elementary, I recognized that teachers had been staying at Pearl for a long time, like Bruce did. During their years, Bruce supported his teachers to keep developing their competencies as teacher leaders at the school. This might allow Bruce to see his accountability as mentoring and supporting teachers' individual needs, viewing them as future leaders in the school and community, not just classroom teachers.

Given the above, I argue that organizational needs are contingent on who the students and teachers are and where the school is located. In addition, these organizational needs at the school level keep changing through processes of individuals achieving intended goals and setting new ones. My analysis shows that organizational needs and goals are not given as a fixed set of metrices but are instead developed through reciprocal dynamics between individuals within schools. This supports O'Kelly and Dubnick's (2019) claim that organizational needs emerged through mutual exchange in the space where people construct collective purposes at the

organizational level. Based on this, my participants seemed to develop practical rationales and act upon collectively agreed norms around organizational needs for their accountability conduct.

2.3. District-level Support

Another element which influenced my participants' perceptions of accountability was associated with district level support, i.e., the extent to which their district supported their initiatives. Specifically, the extent to which the district values and listens to school leaders seemed to be critical in determining my participants' views on accountability in terms of whether accountability supports or undermines their work as leaders.

For Emily, her district's test-focused, compliance-based approaches dominated her understanding of accountability as a punitive control mechanism. While research has suggested that high-performing schools tend to experience less pressure from accountability demands (Gonzales & Firestone, 2013), her district's competitive "mentality" did not exempt her from such pressures, even though her school showed the highest level of achievement on the state standardized test among the participants. Buffering the Purple district's competitive "mentality" became a priority for her, which led her to focus on building-level accountability that promoted "socio-emotional learning," "trauma-informed practices," and "being supportive" to meet "expectations."

In contrast, in Scarlett's case, because her district valued and encouraged her to execute her "innovative ideas," Scarlett seemed to view accountability as a virtue, not necessarily a punitive control as Emily expressed. While the Blue district offered more limited financial resources for hiring subsidized teachers and paraprofessionals compared to the other two districts, Scarlett's supervisor and the district officials seemed to listen to her agenda and difficulties. This likely influences her perceptions of accountability as more positive than

Emily's understanding of accountability. The narrative from Bruce also corroborates that the alignment between leaders' values and district support plays a critical role in shaping the leaders' understandings of accountability. Bruce thought his district had been supportive in enhancing instructional quality and meeting the individualized needs of students by providing teacher assistants and paraprofessionals for kindergarteners and first graders. He also agreed that the Green district's new initiatives focusing on essential standards and small group intervention were needed for their Pearl students.

Thus, regardless of the amount of resources the district had, whether the district could support what my participants prioritized and needed seemed to be more critical in shaping their attitudes toward accountability, particularly regarding leaders' notions about *vertical accountability.* As principals are expected to be boundary spanners coordinating resources for diverse stakeholders (Goldring, 1990; Honig, 2006), my participants' perceptions of accountability also relied on the district's support, particularly in terms of their normative support including the district culture and emotional support for leaders in achieving accountability at the school level. This finding also aligns with the selection model of accountability, which argues that when the *accountor's* and the *accountee's* interests are well matched, there would be less monitoring from the *accounter* (Mansbridge, 2014).

3. Accountability as a Balancing Act for Equitable Learning

Building on understandings of accountability as a virtue and a control mechanism grounded in local contexts, my analysis implies that principals' accountability can be understood as a balancing act that pushes agendas and efforts that are missing or overlooked in existing educational systems. Like Bruce said, "education is a moving target," meaning that educational goals are complex, broad, and not always measurable in schooling (Labaree, 2005; Tosas, 2016).

In this case, federal- and state-level policies often create and highlight specific targets for schools to achieve (as a form of vertical accountability), which are bounded to time and space. The selected "targets" included in externally developed metrics, protocols, and laws circulate messages about what local schools and their leaders are expected to follow and make efforts to achieve. However, manipulating certain targets to bring them to the foreground can result in letting other important educational goals be left in the background. Thus, school leaders tend to work on goals left in the background to help every goal of education be achieved. In this way, their accountability conduct can be understood as a balancing act in achieving multiple targets expected for school education.

In the three portraits, accountability as a mechanism from upper authorities highlights abidance by the reading law, increasing test scores, and individual teachers' focus on their teacher evaluation results. In responding to this kind of *vertical accountability* imposed as a system to follow, my participants asked: "What's best for kids?" and "Is there anything left or overlooked?" They turned their eyes to the needs of their students, particularly students with diverse needs, or "frequent flyers," "kids of poverty," "students of color," and "students with trauma." The principals recognized gaps in existing systems of teacher evaluation, curriculum design, state standardized testing, and educators' mindsets in supporting the diverse needs for these underserved students. For instance, Scarlett found that following their district-purchased curriculums and taken-for-granted practices would not be the best option to enhance student achievement, particularly for "students of poverty" and "students of color" at Ruby Elementary. Emily saw that the district's score-driven approaches would harm students with trauma, and she was concerned that they would also harm teachers' mindset in supporting students' socio-emotional development. Stories from Bruce show that consequence-oriented, outcome-driven

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evaluation would not give teachers and students enough time to grow based on "their own pace" of learning. The principals' accountability perceptions and enactment for students and teachers were thus working in the background upper-level policy demands to fill these gaps.

In this way, accountability for my participants can be viewed as a balancing act to achieve "equity" not just "equality" in learning. School leaders in my study were held accountable to students, particularly students from marginalized groups, who needed additional help and who might be harmed by the existing policy-driven accountability measures. While their accountability enactment included their efforts to meet system-driven targets, my participants also emphasized equity-driven leadership practices to be held accountable in pursuit of the multiple, sometimes contradicting goals of school education.

Considering the accumulated literature on educational accountability, it is interesting that my participants viewed accountability as being in service of equity. Educational research on socio-political perspectives of accountability has revealed how accountability-driven policies and practices can harm students from marginalized groups (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 2007; DeMatthews, 2016) and undermine educators' professional insights (e.g., Anderson & Cohen, 2015; Carpenter et al., 2014; Cranston, 2013). My participants' accountability perceptions included not only such aspects of accountability, but also their "pushback" to protect students in need and support teachers so in enabling their students success. The narratives of the three school leaders on accountability in this study seemed to highlight more of the "pushback" perspective. This might be related to their role as school leaders as shown in the portraits; i.e., wanting to advocate for their students, elevate their voices, and see "challenges with an optimistic lens" to be "a leader, not just a manager." Moreover, as accountability has become a cultural phenomenon, leaders cannot escape accountability discourses. They rather live with such

discourses in their daily work. Given this current educational environment, my participants'

narratives suggest that school leaders may create their own ways of accountability at the building

level as a balancing act to support equity.

4. Dilemmas Resulting from Accountability Conduct

It is important to note that the participants' efforts to balance the various demands of their

complex accountability perceptions led them to face dilemmas. The principals' portraits showed

that they often experienced dilemmas when "protocols" conflicted with "relationships." In day-

to-day practice in schools, my participants spent a large portion of time with teachers and

students until the end of the school day. Of course, there were documents and metrices they had

to complete for state and district policies, but they prioritized visiting and talking with teachers,

students, and student families while they were in schools. The underlying assumption behind

these practices is that school education is about nurturing human beings, which requires viewing

them as a "whole person," and that having good relationships enables schools to achieve multiple

goals.

However, such a *relational ethos* in schools seemed to not be valued or considered in

system-driven accountability (Head & Pryiomka, 2020). For example, in spite of their efforts,

both Bruce and Emily had a hard time supporting teacher growth. They had to spend a

significant amount of time helping a few teachers whose mindsets focused too much on

evaluation criteria and visible outcomes captured by the teacher evaluation system. Bruce wanted

his teachers to utilize their evaluation results as an opportunity to grow, but a few "effective

teachers" perceived their "effective" ratings as defeating and hurting their identity as a teacher.

Emily tried to shift teachers' "rule-follower" mindset by looking at students for "test scores" to

understand "students as a whole person." She sought to do so by shaping normative and

collective controls (e.g., PD, school culture) to promote a student-centered mindset. However, how district and state metrices evaluated teachers, and even the existence of the evaluation itself, seemed to become a barrier for participants' support of teacher growth. Similarly, Scarlett's dilemma on "student suicide talk" highlighted that her responsibility to follow the Blue district's strict protocol seemed to be working as a way to "protect the district," but appeared to ruin her relationships with Savino and his grandmother. In her incident with Savino, Scarlett had to rebuild her relationships with them after reporting what he said to his grandmother, even though she believed it was going to break Savino's trust with her.

These dilemmas imply that accountability as a mechanism imposing compliance through laws, policies, and protocols is followed by "consequences" when leaders do not comply. These consequences may include losing job security, harming their personal and professional reputation, and even damaging their schools' reputation. Therefore, my participants felt they were supposed to follow "policies" and "protocols" to avoid punitive consequences. When they complied with them, however, this resulted in *other consequences* in their workplaces, such as harming or damaging *relational ethos*. In this instance, the system imposing compliance-based accountability does not necessarily help school leaders deal with these other consequences in schools that might be harmful or hurtful for their own health (mentally and physically) and relationships with others when complying with these mandates.

Such dilemmas drained participants' emotional and physical energy and resources. Specifically, participants experienced great stress because their interactions with students and teachers had to be continued on a daily basis. These feelings lasted while they were out of their schools. For example, Scarlett's district had formal support in form of a certified therapist who listened to her feelings and provided professional advice. Such resources can help leaders feel

their decisions are valued and may motivate them to recover from their secondary trauma and emotional drain. However, when districts do not function in supportive ways, like in Emily's story, leaders may have to seek the resources they need beyond the district's formal system and take care of themselves. Emily left her district the following school year. Thus, my analysis suggests that school leaders' enactment of accountability is accompanied by constant negotiations and dilemmas in their everyday practices that necessitate self-care and emotional support.

Research on educational leadership has highlighted dilemmas that school leaders encounter in dealing with accountability demands from multiple stakeholders and have shown such dilemmas led school leaders to question their moral beliefs and explore unexamined values (Ehrich et al., 2015; Jenlink, 2014). Similarly, dilemma stories from my participants revealed that the outcome of their decisions in dilemmas can be seen as compliance, negotiations, or resistance. However, the portraits in this study also showed that leaders' reflections on their decisions brought the realization that hurt feelings lasted for a long time, regardless. Even though my participants chose to follow "protocols" and "laws," their internal negotiations to make sense of what they had to follow and dealing with "other consequences" seemed to minimize the harmfulness of their actions and thereby protect students and teachers.

Dealing with accountability dilemmas required my participants to process their emotions in order to carry on their leadership. In the second focus group where my participants reflected on their dilemmas, they also shared strategies for how they soothed their emotional burdens and burnout. Scarlett said that she started working out at the gym to enhance her physical strength and deal with painful emotions coming from her own secondary trauma. Bruce expressed that he ran regularly and that having his "own moment" at Pearl Elementary early in the morning was

helpful. Compared to Scarlett and Bruce, Emily seemed to have a harder time protecting herself

during weekends or vacations because of the pressure from the district for her to "respond

immediately" when the district requested anything related to district work. Like Bruce described,

"juggling" their accountability demands regarding their work and their personal care seemed to

be important for my participants in protecting their personal lives and continuing their jobs as

school principals (LaFollette, 2000). This finding echoes recent research showing that school

principals experience stress, burnout, and wellness concerns in an accountability regime (e.g.,

DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019; DeMatthews et al., 2019; Oplatka, 2017). As such, the portraits in

this study call for formal support through districts and informal support from personal and

professional relationships in which principals can share their "vulnerability" as well as "cheer"

each other by reflecting on dilemmas they encounter. This would be one way to keep, develop,

and retain leaders like my participants who want to be held accountable for students and

teachers.

CHAPTER IX.

CONCLUDING REMARKS:

BRINGING HUMANITY IN ACCOUNTABILITY NARRATIVES

In this last chapter, I provide concluding remarks to my dissertation study regarding what I discovered about "accountability" from three leaders. I begin by summarizing the findings in relation to three research questions I asked. Second, I link my findings to existing studies in the field to reconsider accountability and educational leadership. Third, I use this discussion to reflect on what I've learned from conducting this study. Fourth, I present directions for future inquiry. I conclude this chapter with my reflection on the research process, ultimately arguing for the element of humanity in accountability narratives.

1. Summary of Findings

My inquiry in this study asks three questions: 1) How do school leaders interpret and enact accountability in their day-to-day practices; 2) How do school leaders understand accountability as supporting or undermining their leadership practices; and 3) How do school leaders respond when they confront ethical dilemmas under conflicting accountability demands?

My findings first suggest that accountability for my participants can be understood as both a virtue and a control mechanism. Their virtue statements tended to include their support for the diverse needs of students and teachers. The perceptions of accountability as a control mechanism revealed in their portraits included the participants' compliance with externally developed laws, policies, and protocols *and* collectively established norms shared with other educators and wider society. Regardless of control type, a view of accountability as mechanization motivated, governed, and monitored how individual leaders thought and behaved

and established a collective sense of their expectations within the system. Their virtue statements pointed out the purpose of their accountability "for what," in accordance with individual and collective values. All my participants' narratives showed that they are accountable to "students first," even while they had to follow certain requirements to be accountable to the district or the state. In this aspect, I found that leaders' enactment of accountability could be understood as a balancing act for equity in which they push agendas and efforts that are missing or overlooked in existing educational systems. In this sense, the leaders in my study supported the needs of students, particularly students from marginalized groups, who could be harmed by the existing matrices and protocols in their accountability conduct.

Regarding the second research question, my analysis highlights that accountability, as perceived by individual leaders, needs to be interpreted within its context, that of which is flexible and complex. This suggests accountability is not a fixed concept. My participants perceived accountability positively when they felt it motivated members of their schools to achieve "better outcomes" for student learning. However, they interpreted accountability negatively when it was accompanied by an intensive focus on outcomes along with competitive and comparative measures without support. This suggests that one of the critical elements that shape leaders' views of accountability as supporting or undermining could be associated with the alignment between values at the district level and values at the individual level. That is, the extent to which a district values and listens to school leaders is critical in shaping leaders' dispositions toward accountability.

Finally, my findings show that these understandings of accountability generated constant negotiations and dilemmas for school leaders. The complex, sometimes conflicting demands in the leaders' accountability enactment resulted in dilemmas where my participants had to make

decisions. My analysis shows that leaders often experienced dilemmas when externally developed protocols followed by consequences conflicted with their relational ethos in schools. As these consequences may include losing their job security and damaging their schools' reputation, it is hard for school leaders not to comply to rigid protocols. However, my findings also showed that this compliance resulted in other consequences in their workplaces, such as harming their relationships with students and teachers in schools. These dilemmas caused emotional drains along with physical and mental stresses for school leaders because daily practices of leadership often rely on their interactions and relationships with students and teachers. Thus, the findings suggest that school leaders' accountability conduct is accompanied by constant negotiations and dilemmas in their everyday practices that necessitate self-care and emotional support.

2. Dialogues: Reconsidering Accountability and Leadership in Education

Overall, my findings expand the literature on accountability and leadership by adding insights into how school leaders understand accountability in their daily work. In this section, I discuss how this study contributes new perspectives to the field, while reflecting on my findings and the accumulated literature.

2.1. Revisiting Accountability: Accountability Culture of School Principals

Accountability discourses have dominated not only research and policy in education, but also educators' daily school practices (McDermott, 2011; Suspitsyna, 2010). However, the following statement by McDermott (2011) suggests what is missing and/or overlooked in popular ideas and discourses of accountability in education policy:

> It is common for analysts of education policy to talk in terms of accountability movements, implying that accountability systems developed where none had previously been. However, schools and teachers have always been accountable to somebody for something. (McDermott, 2011, p.2)

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Motivated by the question "what does accountability mean to school leaders?," I intended this study to explore school leaders' daily practices to show how school leaders are "accountable to somebody for something." Interestingly, my participants viewed accountability as nurturing students in pursuit of equity-driven learning. Put another way, they viewed themselves as accountable to students *in addition to* their districts and state. This differs from accountability as currently understood by policy makers and legislators; it even differs from multiple research findings because many empirical studies on accountability have tended to imply that accountability comes from a set of criteria predetermined by federal or state policies (McShane & DiPerna, 2018).

2.1.1. Relational ethos in accountability conduct

I first want to point out that *relational ethos* was shown in my participants' accountability conduct (Head & Pryiomka, 2020). Their portraits revealed how individual leaders make efforts to be accountable to their relationships with students, teachers, and parents/families while following protocols and laws set by the upper authorities. The three portraits suggest that "relationships" within the context of school constitute more than personal connections because they determine how people think and behave in shaping norms regarding accountability goals and mechanisms at the organizational level. For school leaders, "building relationships" can be understood as an ongoing process of developing collective norms that they all agreed upon as well as trusting and caring for each other, which aligns with research viewing accountability construction as *inherently social* (O'Kelly & Dubnick, 2019).

However, each participant showed different foci regarding relationship building. For Scarlett, her relationships with students and their families, particularly those from marginalized communities seemed to be critical to her accountability in terms of being responsible for their

attendance, achievement, and suspension data. Offering hands-on support such as home visits

and robo-call use was part of her efforts to build stronger relationships with her communities.

For Bruce, his relationship building was centered around individual students and teachers. His

"frequent flyers" were oftentimes students who had special needs and were identified by their

teachers for being "aggressive" and showing "unacceptable behaviors" in the classroom. To "do

the best" for students, he believes that teachers need support from principals, which starts with

hearing teachers' concerns and needs and offering personal as well as professional advice.

Meanwhile, Emily had to deal with two different dynamics. On one hand, she had to navigate

top-down, consequence-based accountability pressures from the district. On the other hand, to

buffer such pressures, she engaged with teachers to build trust through her "open door policy"

and by inviting teachers into her decision making. While my participants' strategies for

"relationships" differed depending on areas they focused on (i.e., for whom and how), dynamics

around relational ethos played a critical role in constructing accountability in schools.

Literature framing school principals as political actors (Ball et al., 2012; Koyama, 2014)

has moreso emphasized political perspectives regarding stakeholder interests in describing

school leaders' strategies of dealing with accountability policies. Such political interests may

partially explain my participants' "relationship building" as a practice of accountability, but my

fieldwork and analysis led me to understand their commitments to relational ethos as naturalistic

and organic ways of schooling and leadership practices, which also aligns with O'Kelly and

Dubnick's (2019) idea of *bazaar*. This could be explained by the fact that the three schools I

visited for this study serve relatively young students (Pre-K-5) as well as the fact that school

principals meet and interact with teachers and young students on a daily basis for long periods of

time. This might lead school principals' dispositions toward accountability to rely on caring and

human relationships; firmly centering their accountability perceptions in a *relational ethos*.

In accountability literature, research focusing on individuals at the ground level also

supports the human side of accountability, particularly in terms of examining dilemmas and

difficulties that individuals encounter (e.g., Aveling, Parker, & Dixon-Woods, 2016; Brennan,

1996; DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019; Koyama, 2014; O'Laughlin & Lindle, 2017) instead of

focusing on the final outcomes of leaders' decisions—i.e., compliance, resistance, or partial

compliance to policy mandates. However, in this study, *relational ethos* was found to be more

grounded within the accountability perceptions and enactment of school leaders. This is likely

because I did not limit participants' definitions of accountability to policy contexts, but provided

space for the consideration of daily practices as contexts that informs participants' accountability

construction.

2.1.2. Accountability for equitable learning

Regarding accountability "for what," this study contributes to extant literature the

importance of being accountable for equitable learning. This might be an unexpected finding for

some readers given that accountability literature in education tends to conceptualize

accountability as punishment and sanction-based mechanisms. My analysis of course reveals

such aspects by suggesting that leaders' being accountable to upper authorities accompanies

punitive approaches along with their notion of accountability as a 'devil.'

At the same time, my study reveals that leaders are finding other ways to conceptualize

accountability that are more human-centered. My participants' accountability perceptions and

conduct included suggestions for how to make punitive accountability mechanisms less harmful

and make student learning more equitable; especially for students from marginalized

communities. These efforts were apparent for Scarlett given her challenging of deficit-oriented thinking about Black students and families. In her accountability perceptions and practices, she continued to modify and challenge the systems and institutionalized practices that she thinks perpetuate racial inequalities. Creating the new literacy curriculum and installing a laundry machine at Ruby Elementary School were among her efforts to support students, particularly students from economically and racially marginalized groups.

Bruce's notion of "equity" was grounded in his perception of "every student as unique." He noticed many students at Pearl Elementary struggling with problems related to economic or mental health issues their families faced in the rural area. When Bruce described his student demographic during the first focus group meeting, Scarlett interpreted his students as "white poverty." Bruce noted that several students enrolled in the special education program had behavioral issues that were not welcomed by classroom teachers. His "frequent flyers" fell into these two categories. His accountability, i.e., "doing what's best," thus focused on how to better support each student's needs, particularly those with special needs. In doing so, he challenged the idea that equally distributed resources and support are enough to ensure all students succeed, which is still a prevalent assumption in policy and classroom practices in schools. He saw differentiated needs and support for every individual to help each student be successful and happy at Pearl Elementary, saying that "it's about equity not just for equality."

Emily's notion of equity was not explicitly mentioned in my findings. However, she recognized "unjust" and "unfair" chains of command in her district that did not support students' socio-emotional development. Like Bruce, Emily wanted to offer additional support for students with trauma. Emily's idea of using Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in her staff data meetings helped all teachers identify students coming from structurally oppressed families for

whom they could provide trauma-informed care. Particularly, she spent dedicated time with students with trauma from "unstable homes," whose parents faced economic and mental health problems. Establishing a school-wide agenda for socio-emotional learning and trauma-informed education can be also viewed as part of her efforts to promote equitable learning, which was critical in her accountability perception and conduct.

Unlike Scarlett who vocally criticized systemic racial inequity, Bruce and Emily did not make explicit statements about structural and racial inequality. However, they both implicitly and explicitly understood that there should be additional support for so-called "students at risk"—students coming from economically disadvantaged families and students with special needs—to promote equitable learning where school education can adequately support them. While their notions of equity may not address socially structured racial inequality as Scarlett's did, it is important to highlight my participants' focus on additional support and commitments for students based on their individual needs that have often been neglected by conventional ways of teaching and implementing policy in school systems. Such efforts seemed to be critical to their accountability perceptions and practice.

This finding differs from other empirical studies in that educational researchers have tended to separate equity issue from leaders' accountability conduct, suggesting that accountability *policies* have been harmful for equity (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 2007; DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019). However, as I focus on viewpoint from school leaders while being open to follow their perspectives, accountability narratives in this study included leaders' efforts to enhance equity driven learning. Research examining multiple forms of accountability partially supports my findings by arguing the existence of internal accountability based on their internal needs, such as moral accountability and professional accountability, (e.g., Elmore, 2004;

Firestone & Shipps, 2005; Knapp & Feldman, 2012). Nevertheless, I argue that using a lens of internal accountability cannot fully explain my findings of leaders' accountability for equity driven learning because my participants' assumptions and initiatives toward equity reciprocally interacted with district-level approaches. It is possible their moral dispositions might also be shaped by previous and ongoing interactions with externally driven or developed metrics. Thus, my observations suggest that the boundary of external and internal forms of accountability becomes blurred in the context of school principals' work.

By offering the above aspects, this inquiry expands theoretical perspectives on accountability using a lens of cultural phenomenon, which reflects complex and unfixed contextual elements in accountability contexts (Dubnick, 2014; O'Kelly & Dubnick, 2019). Unlike other existing studies on accountability (e.g., Firestone & Shipps, 2005; Gonzalez & Firestone, 2013), I did not enter my inquiry with a fixed definition of accountability. As O'Kelly and Dubnick (2019) argued, framing accountability as a fixed notion limits researchers' ability to reveal complex dynamics in relationships among individuals and their interactions with socially constructed norms and discourses in accountability contexts. Thus, exploring accountability in terms of what school leaders think and interpret on a daily basis enabled me to reveal the unique accountability cultures of three Michigan principals at the heart of this study. As accountability has become a cultural phenomenon, leaders cannot escape accountability discourses. Rather, they live with "accountability" in their daily work. Given this current educational environment, my participants' narratives suggest that school leaders may create their own methods for enacting accountability at the building-level as a balancing act. Moreover, they do so to support equity on the basis of relational ethos in schools, thereby exhibiting *human elements of accountability*.

2.2. Educational Leadership in the Era of Accountability

2.2.1. School organizations as accountability spaces

My findings showing accountability as "a balancing act" offers a new perspective through which to think about school organizations as accountability spaces. O'Kelly and Dubnick's (2019) ideas of *agora*—spaces where accountability is constructed through human interaction—and *bazaar*—multiple types of exchanging activities between actors—are applicable to considering school as "a fluid, contingent, and localized accountability space" (p. 13). In this regard, it is important to explore how to understand school organizations as spaces of *agora* where individuals exchange ideas, collaboratively practice, and establish norms as an ongoing process of *bazaar*. In such organizational contexts, goals and norms for accountability emerge as individual members' daily interactions continue. For example, accountability for Bruce was constructed in the "arena" where he "played with students" on the ground on a daily basis. For Emily, her "open door policy" as her agora invited individuals—including her staff, students, and community members—to constructing her accountability. Scarlett used the "walk the walk" strategy to lead her teachers as part of her accountability conduct

From this view, the accountability narratives in this study suggest that schools face multiple, sometimes competing, and conflicting goals (Watkins et al., 2020); thereby, accountability enactment is understood as "a balancing act" in achieving these goals. This finding can be supported by paradox theory, which suggests that schools as organizations intrinsically have multiple contradictory, interrelated elements and that leaders should embrace complexity and uncertainty in their efforts to achieve accountability (Currie & Spyridonidis, 2016; Jarzabkowski, Le, Van de Ven, 2013; Smith, Erez, Jarvenpaa, Lewis, & Tracey, 2017; Smith & Lewis, 2011). In this way, "long-term sustainability requires continuous efforts to meet

multiple, divergent demands," while prioritizing certain demands over others may only improve certain performances in the short term (Smith & Lewis, 2011, p. 381). This contrasts with contingency theory, which focuses on specific variables and cause-effect relations by seeking certainty given the conditions, while paradox theory assumes uncertainty in practice as a priori (Smith et al., 2017; Smith & Lewis, 2011). The paradox theory also aligns with the idea of *agora* as a space of accountability, which rejects any fixed goals, functions in accountability spaces as a priori, and assumes organizational goals emerge through social dynamics of the space (O'Kelly & Dubnick, 2019).

Therefore, my findings provide an alternative perspective for understanding school organizations using a paradox lens beyond technical, linear, and rigid view of organizations. While recent research on organizations has reported evidence to support paradox theory (e.g., Ehren, Paterson, & Baxter, 2020; Watkins et al., 2020; Solomon & Lewin, 2016), seeking certainty and clarity in organizational functions has been prevalent in educational administration. I argue that this tendency may result in understanding schools as fixed, goal-oriented organizations that prioritize efficiency by overlooking the complexity and ambiguity of educational goals in school education. It is important to note that paradox and complexity are inherent in school organizations. As found in this study, accountability as a balancing act shows that school leaders have to achieve multiple competing and conflicting goals. Specifically, they must do so by balancing all of them, not shifting or eliminating certain goals intended in school education.

2.2.2. Leaders as active agents constructing accountability

This study further posits school leaders as individuals who respond and/or react to existing accountability systems as individuals who actively construct accountability in their

schools. Such a stance supports recent literature on accountability in public administration,

assuming individuals are active agents who create and develop dynamics in organizations, thus

co-constructing accountability in accordance with their local contexts (Aveling et al., 2016;

O'Kelly & Dubnick , 2019). This view also aligns with educational research that considers

school leaders as street-level bureaucrats who exercise their autonomy and discretion at the

ground level (Lipsky, 1980, 2010). The idea of school principals as street-level bureaucrats has

been used in education policy studies, and the context of such literature often relies on a certain

federal or state level policy implementation at the local level, focusing on individual leaders'

sensemaking of legislative goals (Honig & Rainey, 2012; Watkins et al., 2020). While this type

of approach is helpful for understanding policy processes and outcomes at the ground level, other

scholars have raised concerns that it reduces the meaning of the agency that principals potentially

exercise (e.g., Ball et al., 2011; English & Papa, 2010; Koyama, 2014) by assuming that

educational leaders and professionals are those who serve policy goals as "mere policy tools"

(O'Laughlin & Lindle, 2015, p. 142). I noticed that such an orientation would limit my efforts to

illuminate a full spectrum of accountability as understood in my participants' daily practice,

which led me to not limit accountability to a certain policy context. Given this, the current study

frames accountability as constructed through leaders' daily practices and thereby bolsters

Lipsky's (1980, 2010) concept of street-level bureaucracy grounded in school principals' lived

experiences where policies converge as well as their leadership is enacted (Nolan, 2018).

My participants held positive attitudes toward accountability when either vertical or

horizontal accountability supports the agendas and values that they wanted to pursue. Even

though leaders acknowledged that there are punitive forms of accountability imposed by

legislators and state-level policy elites, leaders tended to be open and optimistic to embracing the

reality that they have to follow certain requirements as employees within a system. Therefore, principals further utilized the policies and mandates as resources to create different forms of accountability (e.g., a balancing act for equity) working in their schools. I argue that this aspect highlights the role of leadership in accountability regimes. Leaders in this study showed agency, not just as complying to externally developed mandates but also through creating their own forms of accountability in schools. As Bruce pointed out, they are in a leading position. If principals get frustrated by punitive forms of accountability and let themselves down, teachers and students are negatively impacted in their schools. Thus, leaders' internal negotiations of accountability enactment underscore the roles of leadership grounded in agency.

These findings offer a different perspective from the literature arguing that accountability discourse and ideas in education have narrowed the role of leadership and identity (Anderson & Cohen, 2015; Cranston, 2013). This might be explained by positionality. While the focus of critical analysis presupposes power discrepancies between policy elites and leaders as practitioners at the ground level (Shore & Wright, 2000), my approach to this inquiry assumes school leaders to be active agents who can exercise political interests and power in relation to other policy elites (Werts & Brewer, 2015). These discrepancies also relate to my understanding of policy because I theorized policy in multiple forms, including policy as text, discourse, and lived experience, as depicted in school leaders' everyday practices of. In this way, leaders can be described as active agents who create and negotiate multiple policy demands as opposed to passive agents who implement policy as a fixed form of text in the context of accountability conduct.

2.2.3. Equity-driven leadership

Another contribution of this study is the expansion of equity driven leadership in accountability contexts through the addition of principals' narratives. Together, the three portraits of show how school leaders understand equity in their practices. For example, their approaches to "equity" can be distinguished from policies and practices relying on "equality." In explaining "achievement gap" discourses, the idea of equality assumes that offering the same starting points, procedures, and resources is enough and relies on ahistorical and individualistic views of fairness (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Ryan, 2006). An equity lens instead notes the inequalities rooted in social structures and systems and consciously recognizes how school policies and practices preserve and reinforce such inequalities in schools (Brayboy et al., 2007; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Furthermore, equity driven practices should encompass asset-based approaches "building on the cultural strengths and human potentials of diverse learners" (Jordan, 2010, p. 153).

Research on accountability has tended to critique accountability discourses in policy for undermining equity driven practices in schools (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 2007; DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019; Holloway & Brass, 2018). However, my study shows how equity driven leadership can be operationalized in accountability spaces (i.e., accountability as a balancing act, as stated above). This involved principals first recognizing gaps in existing policies and practices in schools, which revealed inequalities that adversely affected marginalized students in terms of race, parents' socio-economic status, and special needs. To drive changes in their schools, participants set visions and routines to offer resources needed and shifted norms around deficit views of marginalized students that instead developed the potentials of diverse students (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014). The strategies principals used included modeling as well as

individual and collective learning, which were framed as accountability in this study. Interestingly, equity driven leadership studies have a tendency to assume increasing and narrowing gaps in student achievement as outcomes (Brayboy et al., 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2006). However, my findings suggest students' holistic development/learning to be an ongoing process of developing their potential instead of a narrow view of achievement as scores and levels determined by pre-developed evaluative measures. Thus, my findings suggest that equity driven leadership "for what" can be extended in accountability contexts.

According to the framework *Drivers of Equitable Leadership Practice* developed by Ishimaru and Galloway (see Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; 2019), equitable leadership can be understood along a continuum from showing low to exemplary levels of equitable practice. From this view, I problematize Scarlett's use of language. Compared to the other two participants, her understanding of equity seemed to be advanced by her use of "social justice leadership" and "culturally responsive leadership." In her daily work and interviews, Scarlett advocates for "social justice" based on her notion of intersectionality between race and socio-economic status by challenging deficit views of students of color. However, one thing I found interesting and hard to make sense of in this study is that Scarlett uses language assuming deficit views, such as "students of poverty" and "at-risk-kids" without hesitation to describe the Ruby students she served. I assume this can be explained by her own positionality and personal background coming from a family that experienced poverty and addiction. She might be comfortable naming her students with such language as she had the similar experience. Because of this personal connection, using such language may not bother her. Another explanation could be that Scarlett viewed herself is "a social justice leader" aware of inequalities in existing

systems via her learning experiences and positionality. For example, the racial dynamics affecting her life are bound up in her positionality as a white woman with biracial kids through her marriage. Moreover, she has engaged in multiple efforts to support students of color in particular; thus, she might assume that what language she uses may not discredit what she actually *does*. Finally, critical perspectives may explain her habits by suggesting that her use of language has been shaped and governed by deficit-oriented discourses on minoritized students prevalent in previous policies and research. Thus, the discrepancies between language use and practices in equity driven leadership in my findings cannot be fully explained by Galloway and Ishimaru's framework; as such, future studies are needed to clarify this point.

2.3. Leaders' Ethical Dilemmas in Accountability Conduct

My findings also support literature on ethics in accountability (e.g., Dubnick, 2003; LaFollette, 2000), showing that school leaders working at the ground level hold complicated interpretations of accountability. As shown in empirical studies in education, leaders' ethical dilemmas in this study imply that consequence driven accountability in education policies intensify tensions in leaders' dilemmas (DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019). In examining dilemmas, research in educational leadership has tended to apply rational approaches, focusing on multiple ethics (e.g., Mintrop, 2012; Ehrich et al., 2015) or individual leaders' decisions on what forms of accountability they follow (e.g., Gonzales & Firestone, 2013). More recently, several studies have applied a lens that suggests leaders' ethicality can be bounded by social and political environments; thus, high-stakes accountability policies drive leaders' ethical decisions even when individuals do not agree with the value imposed by the policy (DeMatthews & Serafini, 2019).

My interpretation of dilemmas in this study expands the recent view on ethics in leadership by offering the lens of pragmatic ethics (LaFollette, 2000). As I viewed accountability spaces as flexible, my findings on leaders' dilemma stories found ethical decisions to be more process-based and situational, while existing studies have more so been interested in the final decisions as outcomes. From the perspective of practical ethics, I found several values that may guide leaders' habits and actions. For example, in school organizations as accountability spaces, learning for young students is prioritized and relational ethos is crucial to making leadership effective in daily practices of schooling. Thus, when leaders have to follow certain mandates imposed by externally developed criteria that results in damaging relational ethos in schools, their ethical dilemmas are accompanied by emotional drains, burn out pressures, and mental and physical stress.

In such circumstances, the leaders in my study suggest that self-care ethics should be considered because what leaders have to comply with does not always align with what they value as individuals and educators. What I found by shadowing school leaders' throughout their dilemmas was that that there is no stop sign for my participants saying 'this is enough to do.' There are always more things you can do for students beyond the standards enforced by policies and researchers. This notion may lead school leaders to feel emotionally drained, even as they "absolutely love" what they do. Of course, there are some leaders who think being a principal is a job. However, experiencing dilemmas suggests that those leaders are reflective and thoughtful about their own practices and want to do better as leaders. The reasons leaders encounter dilemmas in this study cannot be explained by the outcome of their decisions or whether they comply with the mandates; rather, they can be explained by the fact that leaders had to follow mandates they could not align with their values because these mandates would harm students or

teachers. Therefore, my findings suggest that, given the ethical dilemmas caused by accountability conduct, more to support need not be accorded to leaders based on the outcomes of their decisions (e.g., compliance or resistance), but more based on their internal negotiations and justifications of their decisions and the consequences of those decisions in schools.

2.4 Humanizing Accountability Research

The above contributions to the literature were made available through my methodological decisions for humanizing school leaders in this study. Unlike existing accountability studies in education that often consider accountability as externally imposed policies and mechanisms (Watkins et al., 2020), my findings humanize school leaders and the knowledge they gain from their work by prioritizing individual leaders' meaning making processes regarding accountability in their daily practices (Morgan, 2016; Nolan, 2018; Werts & Brewer, 2015). For instance, my findings treat school leaders' dilemmas, emotions, and embodied practices as key components of generating knowledge on accountability. This involved both an epistemological question of how we understand knowledge of accountability *and* a power related question of whose knowledge is counted in our research.

Regarding the epistemological question, I sought school leaders' subjective truths in this study in accordance with their own understandings of accountability, which allowed me to see what I have called the human side of accountability. This contrasts from traditional ways of doing social science research that have tended to examine social phenomena in a way the natural sciences do. In this way, terms like objectivity, validity, and reliability are often used even in qualitative research to justify methods. My inquiry problematizes this trend, particularly in regards to accountability research in educational leadership. I view knowledge as being generated from individuals and human interactions; therefore, humanity cannot be separated

from knowledge (Morgan, 2016; Kierkegaard, 1946). Even though accountability has become a cultural phenomenon that permeates our daily lives, researchers have tended to alienate individuals from knowledge construction of accountability (O'Kelly & Dubnick, 2019). My methodological decisions—using snapshots of ethnography, narrative analysis, portraiture—allowed participants share their stories with me and made space for valuing their perspectives, which ultimately helped me to bring humanity in knowledge of accountability. I align myself with O'Kelly and Dubnick (2019) in that accountability emerges in the recognition of humanity. Thus, my methodology adds a human aspect to research on accountability and demonstrates that such a methodology can be just as valuable as traditional methodologies.

Furthermore, my epistemological standpoint drove me to ask a key question: whose knowledge is counted in research? Reviewing literature on school principals' accountability, I found that the viewpoints of researchers and policy elites tend to be more weighted in research seeking to define accountability. In such cases, responses from school leaders were considered reactions to the fixed definition of accountability. In other words, school leaders are often marginalized in the construction of knowledge of accountability. Given this tendency, I find it critical to highlight power asymmetry between researchers and research participants in educational research (Paris & Winn, 2013; Tuck, 2009). To be conscious about researcher-participant power relations, I designed this study to amplify participants' voices and help them develop their own professional networks through research participation. For example, two focus groups using photo-elicitation and dilemma talk helped my participants to feel connected to each other as opposed to isolated. Thus, our focus groups across the school year offered a space where research participants could find informal, professional, and emotional support beyond their

participation in this study. In addition, my shadowing their work and my willingness to represent their stories to others communicated to participants their knowledge and work are valued.

My methodological orientations and decisions in this study offer insights into how research can better address participants' views in not only qualitative ways but also in humanizing ways. I thus argue that there has been a tendency in qualitative research on accountability that, even though researchers assume subjectivity of knowledge, participants' voices have been used to support existing definitions of accountability that researchers assume in advance by prioritizing theory/research over practice. In order to overcome these power asymmetries, this inquiry revisits knowledge construction of accountability by centering and incorporating the voices of school leaders. In this way, I intended to value my participants' experiences by bringing their embodied knowledge and humanity into the construction of knowledge on accountability.

3. Revisiting Policy and Practice: What I Have Learned

Reflecting on my findings, I now revisit policy and practice based on what I have learned by conducting this study. First, this study reaffirms existing studies' arguments regarding how individuals perceive and enact accountability at the local level is crucial in policy process. Without the perspectives of school leaders, policy-making and practices of accountability may continue to reify system-based accountability approaches in schooling (Greenfield, 1979; Hodgkinson, 1993). My participants also showed that the abuse of system-based accountability can prevent leaders' insights—insights that are directly informed by their local contexts—from helping to develop the structures of equity and support students need to thrive in school settings. Moreover, as school organizations are complex and accountability conduct in schools is context specific, I found it would have been beneficial to my participants' work to support of the diverse

needs of students if upper-level policies allowed school leaders to exercise their professional insights informed by their local contexts.

While the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) promoted federal controls over schools, a recent law, the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), transfers a significant amount of authority back to states. Accordingly, states should develop their own accountability measures and districts should be expected to follow such plans and meet their states' standards (Young, Winn, & Reedy, 2017). Given this environment, state-level policies should respect local decisions in order to adequately support students' diverse needs. However, if a district's controls are rigid like Emily's case, school leaders may not feel autonomy and empowerment (Weiner & Woulfin, 2017) even though state-level policies grant flexibility.

Relatedly, the findings highlight the importance of district-level leadership in supporting equity driven practices in schools. Regardless of the amount of resources the district has, the alignment between the district-level agendas and individual leaders' values and initiatives is critical in determining leaders' attitudes toward accountability. In particular, their normative support, including the district culture and emotional support for leaders, matters in achieving their accountability at the school level. The three portraits of this study showed that local districts' provision of formal and informal support for school leaders was critical to their abilities to support students from marginalized groups. As they show, this can be achieved through professional development, resource distribution, cultivating cultural norms, and creating support systems for leaders.

In addition, reflecting on dilemmas depicted in this study, I learned that it is important to consider leaders' resiliency and burnout pressures in accountability environments. To help address ethical dilemmas, leaders and researchers might embrace complexity and paradox as

inherent in school organizations. It is also vital to offer spaces for leaders to explore their values and ethics as well as to develop abilities to deal with dilemmas, emotional drains, and stresses in leadership practices. For example, my participants appreciated having focus groups that I organized because the groups offered professional networks where they could vulnerable in sharing their dilemmas and resources. Even after their participation in the study, Bruce later invited the other two participants on his podcast to introduce their leadership perspectives and strategies to other educators and leaders. Our experience demonstrates how research can be reciprocal and benefit all involved.

4. Directions for Future Inquiry

This study provides a structure for thinking about accountability in ways I'd like to further explore in future studies. First, I intend to do a deeper dive into the ethical dimensions of accountability in the context of leadership. In reviewing extant accountability literature outside of educational leadership, I found a wide range of inquiry on multi-faceted accountability in daily practices. For example, contemporary writers such as Steven Darwall (2006; 2013) and Judith Butler (2009) can help me understand how school leaders deal with ethical issues regarding accountability conduct in the context of top-down administration systems.

Second, I plan to my expand organizational inquiry about schools as accountability spaces using a paradox lens. Through this study, I found that school principals' reflection on themselves as leaders cannot be discussed separately from their organizational contexts. Beyond conventional organizational theories that assume goal achieving processes to be linear and fixed, my future study will apply a lens of paradox theory to explore how organizational goals are constructed and transformed in accordance with the complex and at times conflicting dynamics of accountability spaces.

Third, I will investigate the relations between equity and accountability in schools. The theme accountability for equity emerged in the findings of this study, and are deserving of further expansion in future studies. For example, I aim to explore what equity means to school leaders and how they operationalize it in different accountability spaces. While my findings suggest that equity driven practices can take different forms in different accountability contexts, a thorough investigation of this was beyond the scope of the current study. A future study can thus further expand the link between equitable leadership and accountability in schools.

Lastly, in alignment with the findings of this study that show accountability to be context specific, I will build on these results to explore multiple spaces of accountability. For example, leaders working at different school levels, such as secondary school settings, would offer different views on accountability because students' characteristics and their needs are different from those in this study. Moreover, I also want to explore commonalities and differences between school principals' views on accountability and teachers' and teacher leaders' views. In addition, I also plan to investigate how school leaders' personal backgrounds and school contexts influence their leadership conduct in regards to accountability beyond Michigan contexts.

5. Coda: Humanity in Accountability Narratives

My first time falling in love with qualitative research was in an anthropology course taught by professor Cho in my masters' at Seoul National University. One of the lessons that lingers in my mind is my professor's insistence that: "Doing qualitative study will make you a good person. And to be a good qualitative researcher, you should be a good person." The process of dissertating provided an occasion for me to think more deeply about what that means to me. At the moment of writing this section, I find I have grown so much from the time I started planning this study. My interactions with scholars, peers, and most importantly, my

participants—Emily, Bruce, and Scarlett—during my inquiry, have helped me to think about and

reflect on what I have done as an educator and researcher in addition to my inquiry. Therefore, I

close my dissertation by sharing my reflection on the process of this inquiry[14].

My disappointment with the limited research on policy contexts, especially in U.S.

schooling, drove me to keep working on this study. I specifically sought to humanize my

participants and their knowledge. When I moved to Michigan, it did not take long to acquire the

sense that there is a tendency to not respect practitioners in schools among several researchers

and policy makers. As a former teacher in Korea, it was surprising to discover widespread

nuances that teachers and leaders need to be controlled by policy "to be accountable." Through

writing this dissertation, I was able to connect with more scholars whose work advocates for

leaders on the ground—those who actually practice accountability in the arena.

Shadowing the principals in this study through the complexity of their work without

knowing what was coming reminded me of my previous experience teaching at elementary

schools. On my way home from their schools after each visit, I often questioned myself: What

did I do as a teacher? Did I really listen to Jaehee's stories enough? Did I really care what

Jihoon's parents said?[15] Was I satisfied with what I did for my students? I made lots of mistakes

as a teacher; I knew that these mistakes hurt someone's hearts and mine. How many educators

and leaders can agree they did enough for others, especially for their students? Being an educator

in schools was not easy for me because there were always more things I could do for students

beyond the standards and mandates. This might be why my participants often felt emotionally

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[14] My writing this section is based on my reflective essay written right after my conversation with my advisor, Kristy Cooper Stein in Spring 2019. It took time to answer her question, "how's your dissertation going?" because I had to hold back my tears before I shared my emotions from the fieldwork. Kristy recommended writing about my impression and I drafted an essay. I specially thank Kristy, an incredible educator and person who values my emotions and feelings as important elements of my dissertation.

[15] Names in this paragraph are all pseudonyms.

drained even while they "absolutely love" what they do. The difference between my participants in this study and me is that I walked away from the day-to-day lives that gave me conflicted feelings. I hoped that there might be a better place where I could understand this complexity, center educators' voices, and more importantly, protect my physical and mental health. I was not been confident getting through the complex, emotionally difficult, and physically exhausting multi-tasking jobs in schools.

At a certain point, the dominant narratives around leaders being "successful" and "effective" in educational research became uncomfortable for me to believe in without question. Anyone who has experienced working in schools may instinctively know that leaders cannot be good at everything and cannot make everyone they encounter happy. However, some research reports and policy documents say otherwise. While worth striving for, I have always worried that achieving the required minimum standards might come at the cost of not fully engaging in the complicatedness embedded in students' lives. To some extent, Tyson Edward Lewis's (2014) work about im-potentiality in education regarding Giorgio Agamben's theory can answer why I carry this uncomfortable feeling about the field.

Nonetheless, the daily lives of Bruce, Emily, and Scarlett showed me they were doing their best in spite of the challenges and that they were doing so for their students. There were hundreds of times I got choked up at their schools drafting my fieldnotes, writing about their stories, even at this moment of reflection. Shadowing them reaffirmed for me that what makes actual change in student lives and our society are the tremendous efforts of educators like them. They remind us that enacting accountability to students is not just about numbers, scores, money, or signatures on documents; rather, it is about impacting someone else's life and the next generation of the society. For so long I had relied on the narrowly defined concept of

accountability in education research. Yet, listening to the stories of these three principals taught me that there are equitable ways of conceptualizing and enacting via analyzing the human element in accountability narratives.

As a human being, everyone makes mistakes; we learn from them. Leaders and teachers do as well. But their recognition of mistakes can make them feel guilty regarding how those mistakes might impact their students' lives. I recall a series of conversations with my insightful mentor Dr. John Yun about accountability. Accountability systems have traditionally been set up to make leaders struggle more, i.e., make them feel guilty, like their efforts are "not enough" because they are expected to spend more time on inputting metrices and hitting benchmark scores. Leaders who cannot bear this sense of guilt and emotional drain may leave their jobs. This begs the question: What types of leaders do we want to have in schools? I very much want to keep leaders like Scarlett, Emily, and Bruce in our education systems; people who struggle to promote relational ethos, encounter hurting dilemmas for their students, and stand up to against unjust metrices and undemocratic practices. To help them stay and make the profession thrive, it is important to me that their voices be heard in research and policy, as they have much to teach us about bringing humanity to accountability.

Overall, my journey of dissertating has helped me become a better person throughout the opportunities to re-think accountability, leadership, and education. In all those moments where I paused, there were always *people* who helped me to rediscover humanity in accountability.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview Protocols

Individual interview 1 (October 2018)

The first round of interviews focused on the atmosphere of the new school year in their schools and updating information from the preliminary interview. I also explained my dissertation study to participants and discuss how participants and I could co-develop knowledge through the research process. In this interview, I asked participants' definition of accountability with their own words. At the end of the interview, I shared my plan about the first focus group interview. I asked them to take 2-3 photos about any objects or scenes that reminded them of accountability or that they think are accountability related by the next meeting.

Background
1. Introduce myself and my study. Update information about myself, participants' personal backgrounds, and school information if anything is missing or changed from last summer regarding issues such as: their professional backgrounds and recent issues around them and their school.

Local Context
2. Can you describe briefly your school and district context in terms of school size, student demographic, community relationships, and climate? What are the relationships between you and the central office in your district?

Accountability
3. I am interested in how and where you spend time in your regular school day. How's your regular school day? Can you draw or list tasks you usually do in a day as a principal? How is it different or similar to today?
4. As a leader, where and how do you commit the most energy to? And why? Do you think these areas are important? If so, for whom and why?
5. How often do you hear, see, or use "accountability" in your school practice?
6. How do your district and your school deliver accountability messages?
   (probe: law, community involvement, professional development, accountability systems such as school dashboard, state mandated tests, teacher evaluation, student subgroups, district mandates)
7. What does "accountability" mean to you? How can you describe accountability using your words?

Individual interviews (October 2018-June 2019)
The following interviews were conducted after or during my shadowing with my participants. In these interviews, I aimed to explore implicit meanings behind participants' actions and used language frequently observed in my field notes. Several interviews also focused on how and why participants' perceptions of accountability are related to their leadership practices. During the field work, I planned to observe community-related school events that my participants lead in their schools. In this session, I asked some questions related to their perceptions about multiple demands coming from diverse stakeholders. In the last individual

interview, I also brought highlighted transcripts that I wanted to discuss or clarify by asking their reflections on previous responses.

Focus Group Interview 1 (October 2018)

The purpose of this interview was to let my participants get to know each other and provide a space to share their experiences as a leader with other principals. They reflected on their own and others' definitions of accountability using photos that they have taken.

Introduction & Ground rules

Thank you all for taking time for my study. I really appreciate you spend time to get here. Shall we introduce each other? As you know, this study is about school leaders' voices on accountability. I chose you because you all are hardworking, thoughtful, and reflective principals in different school environments. The only commonality is that you all are building principals in the state of MI. I am trying to show complexity of principals' understanding of accountability. Please help me to understand from today's conversation.

So, before I start our focus group interviews, I want to suggest some ground rules. Since this study is not a comparative study, I don't compare your experiences or thoughts. I don't really worry about this, but want to make sure as a facilitator, please consider there should be no harms, hurtful responses to others, which means we are not judgmental. I will start with questions I prepare. Once each of you answer, please ask questions each other.

Since we are going to have three course meals, I prepare my questions relevant for each segment.

Starter talk
- Please share your thoughts about why you decided to participate in this study. Of course, your participation is super important for me, but can you share why do you think your participating in this study is important to you?
- Since it's Halloween season, I brought some candies. Can you briefly share your big agendas of this year and why you focus on them? Please pick one candy and use it to describe your work as a principal.

Main dish talk
- I asked you to bring some photos that remind of accountability. Can each of you show us your photos and share stories related to the photos? (I will let them talk freely about their photos. I may add several follow-up questions as below).
    a. How did you feel about this when taking this photo? What do you think about this issue now?
    b. Can you describe how this photo can be connected to accountability in your mind, in your school, or education in general?
2. I remember each of you mentioned what is accountability to you in your first interviews. Would you like to share your ideas with others here? Are there any changes or additional thoughts from today's talk with photos? Please feel free to add any thoughts.

Dissert talk

- Is there any thing you've noticed standing out from our conversation?
- Any questions and thoughts to each other?

Focus Group Interview 2 (June 2019)

The purpose of this interview is to share their reflections on participation in my study and explore how their understanding of accountability has been changed or remained the same. This interview was planned to provide a space for my participants share their dilemma talk that they chose to share within the group. Celebrating research participation together is also important.

Introduction & Ground rules

Thank you all for taking time for my study. I really appreciate you spend time to get here. This is a celebration for your research participation during the school year. As you know, my dissertation study is about school leaders' voices on accountability. I chose you because you all are hardworking, thoughtful, and reflective principals in different school environments. I was able to see how you all made great efforts to support students and staff in your school. I have been privileged I was able to watch your school days.

So, before I start our focus group interviews, I want to suggest some ground rules. You may remember from our last focus group, but I will remind them again. Since this study is not a comparative study, I don't compare your experiences or thoughts. I don't really worry about this, but want to make sure as a facilitator, please consider there should be no harms, hurtful responses to others, which means we are not judgmental. I will start with questions I prepare. Once each of you answer, please ask questions each other.

Since we are going to have three course meals, I prepare my questions relevant for each segment.

Starter Talk

- Please share your thoughts on this school year & anything excited for the next year.

Main dish talk

> ***Activity 1: Dilemma storytelling***
> At the end of the school year, I gave you a chance to look back and want you to share the most challenging dilemma you have experienced. Your leadership practices taught me to understand there are multiple competing/sometimes conflicting coexisting accountability demands in schooling and leaders often encounter dilemma situations where you had to choose one over other demands or goals.
> - I asked you to be prepared to share your story about the most challenging dilemma that can be shared with us. I put your topic you sent me here and you can start talking about <u>what happened, how you felt and thought, and why you chose this incident to share</u>.
> - Each person talks, and I will ask the follow-up questions if needed:
>   - o Does anyone have questions? Any thoughts/reflections you want to share about this situation?
>   - o Did you hear any similarities across your stories?

> ***Activity 2: Wordle talk***
>
> Thankfully, I was able to interview with you all multiple times. Using your interview transcripts, I created this "WORDLE" that shows the frequency of words appeared across our interviews. As you can see "kids/students" is the big word in our conversations and

words like "teachers/staff," "year," "time" also frequently appeared. I selected only nouns that show top 10 frequencies in this table.

- o I just wonder what you recognize from this WORDLE.
- o What do you think about the relationships between the words you used and your experience of accountability?

Dessert talk

- Is there anything you've noticed standing out from our conversation?
- Without your participation, I was not able to work on this research. As you reflect on this research participation, I wonder how you would describe this experience.
- What do you want educational leaders, policy makers, and researchers to take away through your stories in my dissertation study? Please help me understand your overarching ideas to help me organize and represent your ideas as well as possible.

APPENDIX B

Reflective Memo Prompt for Shadowing

During the shadowing sessions, I did not plan to take a memo while I interact with participants, but I would carry a small notepad for jotting to remind my memories of events during the day (when I have time to be alone). Guiding questions for my shadowing sessions were:

1. Who does the participant talk with and about what issues?

- I planned to write down summaries of conversations and some direct quotes from the principal that capture ideas related to accountability

2. Where and when does the participant look like she feels pressures and tensions?

- I flagged with a star any times or conversations in which there appears to be pressure or tension; take particularly careful notes in these instances.

In analyzing memos after each shadowing session, I focused on the following questions.

1. Are there any words and routines the participant frequently uses and shows?

2. In which situation and for what purpose does the participant use "accountability"?

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