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The Role of the Cyber School Principal: A Mixed Methods Study

by

Jacob P. Jefferis

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Educational Studies
(Educational Leadership and Higher Education)

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The Role of the Cyber School Principal: A Mixed Methods Study

Jacob P. Jefferis

University of Nebraska, 2015

Adviser: Marilyn L. Grady

The educational landscape of the United States is changing. Educational opportunities for students and families are increasing with increased technological capabilities. At every level in the educational process, information is being delivered to students in new and faster ways. Cyber education is one of those new modes of information delivery for students. Just like traditional schools, cyber schools require sound leadership to assist stakeholders in the educational process.

Knowing that the principal is a vital position in a successful educational system, the purpose of this study is to define the role of the cyber school principal. This research is focused on discovering the tasks, traits, and attributes of cyber school principals. This is accomplished through a mixed methods approach that implements interviews and surveys.

The core findings include themes of communication, training, collaboration, vision, relationships, understanding, and management. The findings also indicated high self-assessment scores on the *Leadership Practices Inventory – Self*.

Dedication

I want to thank all those who have unknowingly educated me while I was the educator. To my past and present students and colleagues. To those who went before me and those who will come after me. To my invaluable advisor – Dr. Marilyn Grady, professors, and peers at the University of Nebraska for their relentless support. To my family for their persistence in raising me. To my children whom I love. To my beautiful wife and dear friend, Emily, who; emotionally grounds me, spiritually inspires me, and mentally shames me. And for the promise and hope of the future.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to describe the role of the cyber school principal in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The history of cyber schooling, Pennsylvania cyber schools, and the principal position are described in this chapter. The research problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the significance of the study are presented as well.

Cyber Schooling History

In the United State, cyber schooling, also known as virtual or online schooling, officially began in 1996 with the establishment of *The Virtual High School* (VHS) and the *Florida Virtual School* (FLVS) in 1997. VHS was “created through a five year, \$7.4 million federal grant,” and FLVS was “established through an allocation of \$200,000 from the state legislature” (Barbour, 2009, p. 403). Four years later, “the list had grown to at least fourteen states with existing or planned virtual schools with between 40,000 and 50,000 students enrolled in courses through these virtual schools” (Barbour, 2009, p. 403). By the 2005-2006 school year, the number had ballooned to “approximately 700,000 K-12 students [who] were engaged in on-line courses” to some degree (Barbour, 2009, p. 404). Institutions began to offer full-time cyber education to students. Molnar (2014), in *Virtual Schools in the U.S. 2014*, reported that there were “a total of 311 full-time virtual schools enrolling an estimated 200,000 students [as of 2013]” in the United States (p. 1).

Pennsylvania Cyber Schools

Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) opted for charter schools in 1997 instead of cyber schools. On June 12, 1997, the Pennsylvania State Senate passed Bill No. 123, the *Charter School Law – Act 22*, that “allows for the establishment of charter schools in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania” (PDE, 2014). The law allows any individual, group of individuals, or entity to apply for a charter to establish a school under a pre-established set of rules and guidelines and adopting a “name and corporate seal...[that] shall include the words ‘charter school’” (PDE, 2014). Under pressure from cyber school advocates, the Pennsylvania State Senate Bill No. 4, Act 88 of 2002 was passed allowing cyber schools the ability to function as public charter schools in the state of Pennsylvania. Thus, cyber education was officially established as a publically-funded institution in the state of Pennsylvania. “The Pennsylvania Department of Education is responsible for the oversight of the cyber charter schools including approval of the initial charter and decision whether to renew, non-renew or revoke the charter” (PDE, 2014). All cyber charter schools are held to the same instructional hour stipulation as any other form of education in the state including 180 instructional days or 900 hours of instruction at the elementary level and 990 hours of instruction at the secondary level. PDE has defined cyber charter schools as “self-managed public schools that are approved by the local school districts” (PDE, 2014). PDE described cyber charter schools as an entity that provides “instruction through the internet or other electronic/digital means” (2014). Since the approval of Act 88 in 2002, Pennsylvania has developed 14 full-time cyber schools and more than 25,000 students enrolled in full-time cyber education during the

2013-2014 school year. The schools include: 21st Century Cyber, Achievement House, ACT Academy Cyber, Agora Cyber, ASPIRA Bilingual Cyber, Central Pennsylvania Digital Learning Foundation, Commonwealth Connections Academy, Education Plus Academy, Esperanza Cyber, Pennsylvania Cyber, Pennsylvania Distance Learning, Pennsylvania Leadership, Pennsylvania Virtual, and Susquehanna Cyber Charter Schools. These institutions are housed in a variety of structures and are located in the greater Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, and Philadelphia areas. For example, the Pennsylvania Distance Learning Charter School is housed on the 5th floor of a business complex in the greater Pittsburgh area as seen in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Physical location of Pennsylvania Distance Learning Charter School.

Central Pennsylvania Digital Learning Foundations Cyber Charter School, Figure 2, is located on a main street in a business section of a rural central Pennsylvania town.



Figure 2: Physical location of Central Pennsylvania Digital Learning Foundations Cyber Charter School.

Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School may have the most unique location, in a large suburban mall near Pittsburgh Figure 3. The three mentioned schools did not necessarily participate in this study, but represent the diverse locations in which cyber schools can be located.

Like typical business complexes, these building are surrounded by parking and do not have the typical features of a school such as a football field, nor do they have typical indoor features of a school such as a cafeteria, auditorium, gymnasium, or classrooms.



Figure 3: Physical location of Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School.

The Principal Position

Rousmaniere (2007) asserted that “The first principals’ positions were created in mid-nineteenth century urban districts to address the organizational demands of the new graded school where students were classified by age and achievement and placed in separate classrooms under a single teacher” (p. 7). However, the fundamental structure of the principalship was in flux as we moved through the twentieth century

(Rousmaniere, 2007). During this transition, “the school principal replaced the nineteenth century head teacher, exchanging an informal position of a teacher who took on administrative tasks with an administrator who supervised teachers” (Rousmaniere, 2007, p. 1). Without a doubt, “the creation of the principal’s office revolutionized the internal organization of the school” (Rousmaniere, 2007, p. 2). Even so, “the school principal was an administrator who was responsible for day-to-day building operations rather than strategic policy decisions” (Rousmaniere, 2007, p. 2).

During the next century, the focus of the principal shifted. Hallinger (1996) asserted “that during the period from 1975-1990, the policy of state-mandated principal evaluation increased from 9 to 40 states” (p. 6). The principal was being held to a higher standard and the government set expectations for the position. As Kafka (2009) asserted, “the No Child Left Behind Act, and other similar measures from states and cities, demand that educators be held accountable for student achievement at a school and classroom level” (p. 328). Expectations for children increased leading to higher expectations for teachers and for principals. As a result, “education policy makers, funders, and researchers have become increasingly interested in building-level school leadership...[and a] growing body of literature suggests that there is a discernible relationship between school leaders’ actions and student achievement” (Kafka, 2009, p. 318). The principal position requires individuals to be “managers, administrators, supervisors, instructional leaders, and politicians” (Kafka, 2009, p. 329).

The Problem

The role of the principal is important. Fullen (2007) stated, “I know of no improving school that doesn’t have a principal who is good at leading improvement” (p.

160). Although the traditional principal position was established more than one hundred years ago, the cyber school principal position was established in 1997. With public funds being funneled into these positions, it is imperative for the role of the cyber school principal to be clear and concise. Understanding the role of the cyber principal is important to the success of the cyber school. This information will assist all administrators in creating an educational system that is successful in preparing students for the 21st century. As “the public has become increasingly captivated by the idea of leadership,” the study will focus on the leadership role of the cyber school principal (Northouse, 2013, p. 1). Understanding the leadership role of the cyber school principal helps to inform parents and community members of the expectations for performance by cyber school principals.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this embedded mixed-methods study was to describe the role of the principal in the cyber school setting. Qualitative and quantitative data was collected from the 32 principals in the cyber schools in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. This information provides the basis of the study report.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided the study follow.

Central Question:

What is the role of the cyber school principal?

Sub-Questions:

1. What are the tasks of the cyber school principals?
2. What are the common traits of the cyber school principals?

3. What are the attributes of the cyber school principals?

Significance

First, the study will provide information for future and current Pennsylvania cyber school administrators about the experiences and practices of cyber school principals.

This information may assist others in achieving greater success in their roles. Second, the study will provide information about cyber school principals that may be useful to all principals. The study will provide the public with information on the role of the Pennsylvania cyber school principal.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Overview

Cyber education, since its inception, has changed as rapidly as the technology used to deliver it. Beaudoin (2004) asserted, “the future of distance education is ultimately no so much about enhancing technology or improving pedagogy, but rather about managing change” (2004). Kowch (2009) found that “...an overwhelming number of cyber school reports suggest that developing leaders for these systems will be an essential element of continued growth” (p. 41). LaFrance and Beck (2013) stated that “despite profound changes involving online and blended learning, little research, guidance, or support for technology leadership exists” (p. 165). The role of the principal has been researched, but little data has been compiled and analyzed on the role of the cyber school principal. This literature review is a report of the studies completed on the role of the principal, the cyber institution, administrative studies in the cyber setting and a definition of terms.

The Role of the Principal

The role of the principle has been studied. Institutions of higher learning that offer administration and supervision certificates, prepare students in the area of traditional education administration. The principal’s role has changed from manager to leader. Although leadership is critical to the principalship, it is only one of the principal’s roles.

Yazurlo (2011) studied the role of the principal in schools in need of improvement. Two principals, one whose school met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

and the other whose school did not meet AYP, were compared to find if any differences existed in their administrative qualities that led to the specific outcomes. A comparative case study approach was used for the study. The principals were interviewed. After the principals were interviewed, members of the School Leadership Teams (SLT) were interviewed. Yazurlo observed the schools' SLT meetings and gathered documentation on the schools' improvement plans and other programs. Yazulo found that four different areas led to student success: a principal who is aware of their school's status and has a clear vision, the principal chooses an SLT of diverse backgrounds, the principal uses consensus and collaboration, and a belief that success can be achieved. Although this study has limitations, it provided insight on a small scale into the role of the principal.

Seifert and Vornberg (2002) wrote about the role of the principal in the 21st century. Their work was based on the principal's role as defined by Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards of 1996. They defended the idea that the principal role has changed, because the world has changed. They asserted that "as more technological and industrial development materialized and the communities' populations became increasingly diversified in ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds, the work of the school as the foundation to the community has become more highly criticized" (p. 18). Seifert and Vornberg addressed the leadership role of the principal through the ISLLC standards by providing situational examples that lead to direct application to the ISLLC standards. The examples were hypothetical, but transferred information that allows direct application to the principal position. Forty states use the ISLLC standards in the training and evaluation of principals' performance.

The study is limited in that it assumes the ISLLC standards must be used and it only addresses the traditional school principal.

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) completed a meta-analysis of research on school leadership in more than 2,500 schools from 1978 to 2001. They retrieved data from more than 650 principals. The result of the meta-analysis was the formation of 21 responsibilities of school leaders. These responsibilities were then correlated individually with student achievement.

Goodwin, Cunningham, and Childress (2003) examined the role of the secondary principal. The study had two stages: a Delphi Technique and a survey. The authors studied former nominees for principal of the year and surveyed 375 members of National Association of Secondary School Principals. This resulted in a conclusion that the role of the principal has become increasingly confusing over the years the study reviewed. Four themes of role conflict, accountability conflict, autonomy conflict, and responsibility conflict were discovered. The study did not answer the question of what principals do on a daily basis.

Crum and Sherman (2008) reported on school leadership in a post No Child Left Behind (NCLB) setting. Twelve principals who led successful schools in Virginia were interviewed in hour-long sessions for this grounded theory study. Crum and Sherman's purpose for these interviews was to determine the common themes of successful principals. This study produced six themes of successful principals: developing personnel and facilitating leadership, responsible delegation and empowering the team, recognizing ultimate accountability, communicating and rapport, facilitating instruction,

and managing change (p. 567). These themes were described as the guiding concepts in the principal's daily work life.

The Cyber School Setting

The cyber school has been in place since 1996. During this period many changes have taken place in every facet of its structure. From 2006 to 2008, there was a 47% increase in students experiencing cyber education to some degree. By 2008, "44 states offered significant online learning options for an estimated 1,030,000 students who are enrolled in online or blended full-time supplemental courses" (Kowch, 2009, p.41).

Hawkins (2011) studied virtual high school teacher and student interactions in the cyber environment. Hawkins used a case study method with a mixed-methods approach. The author interviewed eight high school teachers via a semi-structured interview format. Surveys were given to 46,089 students with 2,269 students responding. The concept of high attrition led to the notion that the teacher-student relationship played a possible role in student success in a cyber institution. Being a mixed-methods design, Hawkins took the liberty to arrange the study into three distinct sections (articles): the teacher's interactions with the students, the perceived role of the teacher, and ties between teacher-student interaction and academic performance. Article one focused on the results from semi-structure interviews with eight cyber teachers. The interviews were coded, mapped, and related to original theoretical frameworks via a constant comparative method. The themes that emerged included: student-driven initiation of contact, prompt interaction, absence of face-to-face feedback, progress alerts, mechanisms for social interactions, and barriers to interaction. Article two referred to data retrieved from the semi-structured interview process and focused on teachers perception of their role. This article yielded

themes on disconnect, including being disconnected from students, the traditional notion of teaching, and fellow teachers. The final article used data from the survey portion of the study and focused on the teacher-student interaction and resultant achievement. This data yielded high correlations between the constructs and theoretical constructs. Second-order factors were analyzed and found to all have a high correlation between quality and interaction. There was, however, a weak correlation found between interaction and resultant grade. It was concluded by Hawkins that interaction matters for course completion, but not for grade awarded.

Sherbondy (2008) studied cyber charter schools in the commonwealth of Pennsylvania. This descriptive, qualitative study focused on structured interviews with nine cyber school CEOs about the present and future state of cyber schools in the commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Sherbondy implemented a case study approach. Sherbondy coded and themed the nine interviews using consensus and supporting themes. Sherbondy found three consensus themes in the data. The findings of professional development sources were generated internally and externally and varied between the schools, the financial status of the schools was in question and the schools were looking at upcoming legislation as to the amount of funding they would receive, and a concern for the change that is occurring in the public's view of traditional schooling. The supporting themes that were discovered included: CEOs believe that the strength of the school comes from their staff, CEOs believe that their students are performing well academically, conventional forms are used for evaluation and observation of staff, current legislation could hurt growth, cyber school boards are drastically changing and bring in new ideas, and the blended model of learning is probably the future of cyber education.

Sherbondy concluded that the CEOs expect traditional schools to attempt to compete with the cyber charter schools in the realm of online education in the future.

Marsch, Carr-Chellman, and Stockman (2009) studied reasons why parents choose cyber schooling for their child. In this phenomenological study, Marsch et al. completed interviews, observations, and documentation analysis on seven female parents of students who attended a cyber charter school in Pennsylvania. The interviews were coded, themed, and revised during the process. Member checking on all seven interviews was also implemented. From the data, three themes emerged: customization, no financial risk, and hope in a new system. Marsch et al. came to the conclusion that their data indicated challenges for the traditional school in the areas of meeting the desires of parents who are weary of traditional schools and meeting the needs of parents who enjoy having options for their children's educational format.

Rice (2009) studied priorities in K-12 distance education. Rice implemented the Delphi Method, interviewing for three rounds. A total of 86 potential participants were identified through research conducted via state and collegiate level technology administration websites. Of the 86 potential candidates, 29 experts from 12 states involved in distance education were selected for the study. Ten practitioners who were engaged in distance learning, 11 policy makers, and 8 researchers in the field of distance education comprised the 29 participants. After three rounds of interviews, nine themes emerged including: evaluation of course design and delivery, best practices, accountability, access, learners, professional development, accreditation, funding, and technology. Rice indicated that these themes are controlled primarily by the school's administration. Rice concluded that "the need for administrators with leadership and

evaluation skills in online environments will only intensify” (Rice, 175). Rice also indicated that research in this field is sparse and that it is up to researchers to conduct more studies to provide information to policy makers regarding the topic.

Leadership in the Cyber Setting

Leadership in the cyber setting is imperative in the 21st century. Erskine (2009) asserted that “...the world is shrinking and diverse groups of individuals are becoming empowered. Contextual changes such as remote work, distributed operations, and varying structures in organizations are altering the way work is designed and performed” (p. 12). Leaders who can function in the cyber environment and be successful are in high demand because of the shift in settings. The literature in this section focuses on administrative roles in the cyber school setting.

LaFrance and Beck (2014) studied programs offering educational administration training for online settings in schools of higher education. LaFrance and Beck began the study of leadership by reviewing the ISLLC, Educational Leadership Constituencies Counsel (ELCC), and National Educational Technology Standards-Administrators (NETS-A) standards for leadership /administration. LaFrance and Beck implemented a survey that included closed and open-ended items designed to gather information from schools that offered leadership coursework in educational administration. The survey was sent to 348 subjects. Open-ended questions were coded and themed, closed-ended items were analyzed through SPSS, and descriptive statistics were used. LaFrance and Beck reported that 11 institutions of higher learning offer experience in the K-12 virtual school and 9% of these institutions offer K-12 virtual field experience. LaFrance and Beck found that of the 91% of schools that offer no training on leadership in the cyber

setting, “more than 75% of *NCATE*-accredited educational leadership programs have no plans to add such a field experience” (p. 181).

Mitchell (2009) studied cultural shifts of administrators and faculty in a community college due to implementation of online education. Data for this case study were collected through interviews, analysis of documents, and observations of 13 administrators and eight faculty members in one setting. Participants were selected through random purposeful sampling and the data were reduced and analyzed. The data were triangulated in the collection process, coded, and themed. Results of the study indicated that a significant change had occurred in the work lives of faculty and administration. Specifically, in the case of administration, Mitchell found that the school’s leaders took on the role of leader and guided the staff in a positive manner. This was viewed as a critical phenomenon that had to occur for school success. Mitchell claimed that this shift in leadership was one of the greatest reasons for the transformational change that occurred.

Quilici (2011) studied the instructional leadership role of secondary cyber school principals in Idaho. The case study approach focused on one school and evaluated six administrators and seven teachers. Quilici compared the interviews of the groups and drew conclusions based on their data. Quilici also collected observational and artifact data. The author reported that the most significant finding was a disconnect between the principal’s view of themselves and the teacher’s view of the principal. Quilici found that principals viewed themselves as being instructional leaders, while teachers view principals as being managers. Ten themes emerged from the data including: a focus on rubrics, being visible, connections with teachers, the role of the principal, teamwork,

students' access, teachers as professionals, bonus, individual attention, and the assumption of good intent. Quilici came to the conclusion that online principals need to be instructional leaders and develop stronger relationships with their employees.

Brown (2009) studied virtual high schools and their head administrators to discover the purpose and potential of virtual schools. The study had three phases that included document study, survey, and interview. The document study included 142 schools and looked for key characteristics. The survey had a 46% response rate and included 58 administrators. The interview phase focused on 8 administrators using semi-structured interviews. Nine findings were discovered: characteristics were aligned to the type of school, expansion of online schools will continue, successful schools cannot be projected at this time, education can be individualized, provide continued access to high quality education, reform and transform education as it currently exists, commonalities between administrators, compare well to traditional school administrators, and head administrators were groomed in the traditional setting. Brown also provided information on the head administrator's views of how virtual schools function.

Rosendale (2009) studied supervision and evaluation of cyber school teachers. Rosendale implemented a three-phase study to study the problem. The three phases of the study included an intensive literature review, surveys, and guided discussions and document reviews. The participants included primary contacts which were generated from different online resources including; ISTE, NCES, USDE, SETDA, SREB, and UNF. Phase 1 did not involve any schools for study, phase 2 studied 19 schools, and phase 3 studied 5 schools. Rosendale's research produced a thoroughly vetted definition of cyber school supervision and evaluation. Rosendale also found that the participating

schools provided quality supervision that is aligned to current best practices in schools as a whole. Rosendale discovered that cyber institutions place a high value on evaluative measures that focus on communication, multiple modes of data collection, collaboration, online teaching methodology, management, knowledge, skills, and delivery. The main difference that he found between cyber schools and traditional schools revolved around perceptions of what a classroom should look like.

Definition of Terms

Cyber education –The cyber charter school provides instruction through the Internet or other electronic/digital means. (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2015)

Role – The function assumed or part played by a person or thing in a particular situation. (Merriam-Webster, 2015)

Traditional Education – Education that is delivered through in-person lessons at a physical location. (Defined for the study)

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) – Adequate yearly progress as defined by section 1111(b)(2)(C) of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Public Law 107-110, 115 Stat. 1425) and in 22 Pa. Code §§ 403.2 (relating to definitions) and 403.3 (relating to single accountability system). (PDE)

Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) – High-level policy standards for education leadership. (Council of Chief State School Officers).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) – The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Public Law 107-110, 115 Stat. 1425). (PDE)

Instructional Leader – Outstanding teachers, inspired to use their exceptional teaching skills to impact student learning. (Horng & Loeb, Standford.edu, 2010)

Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) – Independent standards for principals created by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), the American Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP). (Sage Publications, 2015)

National Educational Technology Standards-Administrators (NETS-A) – The standards for evaluating the skills and knowledge school administrators and leaders need to support digital age learning, implement technology and transform the education landscape. (ISTE.org, 2015)

Head Administrators – Defined as the principals of the given school. (Defined for this study)

Summary

The literature provided a depth and breadth of information in the areas of the school principal role with an emphasis on the leadership role, the cyber school in general, and administrative studies on the cyber school institution. The review included works derived from articles, journals, books, and dissertations. Qualitative and quantitative approaches were reflected in these studies. Definition of terms were presented. These definitions may not be common to the average reader, have specific meanings for this study, or have different meanings in education than they do in normal conversation. There was limited information on the role of the cyber school principal or the leadership role of the cyber school principal. The research reflected in this review was mainly qualitative and had a narrow scope. Based on this review, and the gap in the literature, the purpose of my research was to describe the role of the principal in the cyber school setting.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Overview

The purpose of this study was to describe the role of the principal in the cyber school setting. To conduct the study, a mixed-methods design was implemented. Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) defined mixed-methods as “qualitative and quantitative approaches in the methodology of a study” (p. ix). In this design, information is mixed in the research process. The “combination of quantitative and qualitative data [will] provide a more complete understanding of the research problem than either approach by itself” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 8). There are several reasons for use of a mixed-methods design: to use more than one data source, to thoroughly explain results, to generalize findings, to enhance a study, to implement a theory, or to understand research. The mixed-methods approach requires fluency in qualitative and quantitative designs. If completed properly, a mixed-methods design can result in a study that is stronger than a single qualitative or quantitative study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Design

Qualitative research is “interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p.5). This form of research provides a deep understanding of the subject and results in enhanced explanatory power. The researcher becomes “a part of the world they study; the knower and the known are taken to be inseparable” (Hatch, 2002, p. 10). Because of the researcher’s involvement, however, “much

qualitative research is subjective...” (Wrench, Thomas-Maddox, Richmond, and McCroskey, 2008, p. 12)

In quantitative research, “the theories that are most likely to receive direct empirical attention are those which are at a fairly low level of generality” (Bryman & Cramer, 1990, p. 2). By using measurable data points, “quantitative research attempts to be very objective, or to create knowledge by examining facts through the scientific method without distorting the findings by personal feelings, prejudices, and interpretations” (Wrench et al., 2008, p. 12).

The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods has the potential to yield results that are supplementary resulting in both subjective and objective data. Bryman and Cramer (1990) noted “many writers recognize that there is much to be gained from a fusion of the two research traditions” (p. 1). Wrench et al. (2008) noted “In ancient Greece the physical sciences and philosophy were perceived as handmaidens as one informed the other” (p. 2). When considering a mixed-methods design, three fundamental issues need to be addressed: priority, implementation, and integration (Creswell, Plano Clark, Guttman, & Hanson, 2003). Priority refers to deciding which technique will set the precedent for the research, implementation refers to how the methods will be used, and integration refers to how the data will be combined. To assist in combining these two approaches, a mixed-methods approach of embedding, see Figure 4, was implemented (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

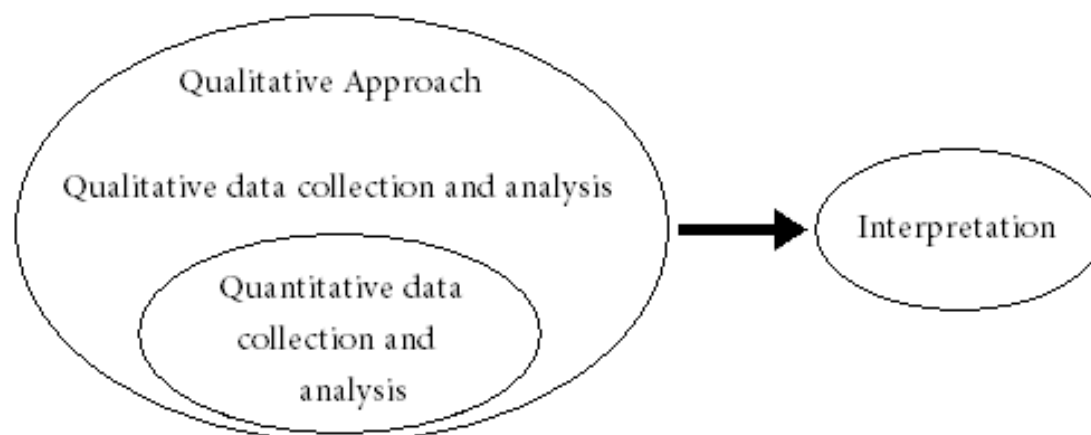


Figure 4. Diagram of an embedded, mixed-methods design.

In an embedded design, both qualitative and quantitative data forms will be used; but, the researcher will give “priority to one or to both forms of data” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 5). In this study, priority was given to qualitative research with quantitative research was used as a supplement. “Qualitative researchers typically gather multiple forms of data...rather than rely on a single data source” (Creswell, 2013, p. 45). If quantitative data is gathered, a survey is the common method of data collection. Yin (2003) noted that “such a survey could be designed as part of a case study and produce quantitative data as part of the case study evidence” (p. 91). The qualitative methods are discussed first, and the quantitative methods are discussed second.

The Study

The purpose of this embedded mixed-methods study was to describe the role of the principal in the cyber school setting. Both qualitative and quantitative measures were used. Qualitative research was used because of its ability to “...provide a voice for these participants, raising their consciousness and improving their lives” (Creswell, 2013, p. 26). To give the research subjects a voice, it is necessary to “...study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the

meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). To achieve these results, the participants were studied in their schools. This is consistent with Creswell’s (2013) assertions that “qualitative researchers often collect data in the field at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under study” (p. 45). Structured interviews were used for data gathering.

For the quantitative portion of the study, a survey was administered. Kouzes and Posner (2007) support and train leaders through their publications, research, and seminars. Their work stems from “evidence-based” research (p. xiii). Their work is the result of more than thirty years of research on the subject of leadership. They assert that “leadership can happen anywhere, at any time” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 8). This affirms that leadership is not a job description, but an action or role.

Knowing that “...the public has been increasingly captivated by the idea of leadership,” (Northouse, 2013, p. 1) it was decided that this area needed to be studied in relation to the role of the principal. Each principal in the study completed a leadership survey. Surveys, as a part of the data collection, are consistent with this research design. Yin (2003) asserted that researchers can “produce quantitative data as part of the case study evidence” (p. 91).

Since the quantitative material was embedded in the qualitative material, the qualitative aspects were discussed first and quantitative second. Although data was gathered and analyzed separately, both qualitative and quantitative results were interpreted together. This process can be viewed in a visual model of the procedures in Figure 5 (see Appendix A).

Procedures

The purpose of this embedded mixed-methods study was to describe the role of the principal in the cyber school setting. Creswell (2013) outlined the steps for a case study. These include seeking data from a variety of sources, analyzing data, and discussing or reporting the results. Potential research subjects were contacted by phone (see Appendix B). The purpose of the study was described as well as the role and expectations of participants. Individuals who agreed to participate were interviewed and responded to a survey at a time that was convenient for the participants.

Qualitative Approach

A case study was selected "...to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena" (Yin, 2003, p. 1). A case study is appropriate when the questions of how and why are asked, no control of behaviors are required, and there is a focus on contemporary events (Yin, 2003). Because the research was limited to a small, defined group of individuals, a case study is appropriate as "...an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (Merriam, 2009, p. 40). The qualitative aspect relied on one source of information for in-depth analysis. The mode of data gathering was structured interviews with cyber school principals. Although quantitative data collection is not typical in the case study approach, Merriam (2009) stated, "...case studies can include quantitative analysis..." (p. 39). A survey was given to the participants. Merriam (2009) stated that a case study approach requires "...in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information..." (p. 97). The data gathering process took place at the principal's school. The study was considered a collective or multicase study because "the individual cases share a common characteristic

or condition” (Stake, 2006, pp. 5-6). Thirty-two principals were invited to participate in the study. “The more cases included in a study, and the greater the variation across the cases, the more compelling an interpretation is likely to be” (Merriam, 2009, p. 49).

Sample

Purposeful sampling was used for the study. Purposeful sampling is “the most common form...” of sampling in qualitative research (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). This mode of “sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). The thirty-two principals of cyber charter schools in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania were invited to participate in the study. There were thirty-two individuals who met the study parameter. The participants were identified through the Pennsylvania Department of Education website. No other method of sampling was necessary because all persons who met the criterion were invited to participate. All participants received a phone call invitation (Appendix B). All participants who agreed to participate were sent a reminder email one week prior to the scheduled interview and survey administration (see Appendix C). A list of the potential subject schools follows:

21st Century Cyber Charter School

Achievement House Charter School

ACT Academy Cyber Charter School

Agora Cyber Charter School

ASPIRA Bilingual Cyber Charter School

Central PA Digital Learning Foundation Charter School

Commonwealth Connections Academy Charter School

Education Plus Academy Cyber Charter School

Esperanza Cyber Charter School

Pennsylvania Cyber Charter School

Pennsylvania Distance Learning Charter School

Pennsylvania Leadership Charter School

Pennsylvania Virtual Charter School

Susq-Cyber Charter School

Data Collection

The qualitative aspect of data collection for the study was through face-to-face interviews. Participants were required to read and sign an Informed Consent Document before the interviews began (see Appendix D). Interviews required no longer than 45 minutes of participants' time.

Interviews contribute depth and breadth to a variety of issues in human activity. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) suggested that “through conversations we get to know other people and learn about their experiences, feelings, attitudes, and the world they live in” (p. 1). Furthermore, “the qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 3). It is important to note that “interviews are often applied in case studies which focus on a specific...situation...[and]...can also serve as an auxiliary method in conjunction with other methods” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p.143).

The qualitative aspect of the study focused on conducting research interviews with subjects with the intent of “producing knowledge” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 4). The interview process included the following steps: scripting the interview around themes, designing a proper interview, interviewing participants, transcribing the digital recordings, analyzing the transcripts, verifying accuracy of transcripts, and reporting the findings of the interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

The interview protocol was developed based on the central question of the study (What is the role of the cyber school principal?) and two sub-questions (What are the tasks of the cyber school principals and what are the common traits of the cyber school principals?) that reflect the qualitative aspect of the study (see Appendix E). The questions were designed to elicit information that describes the work of the cyber school principal and the traits of the cyber school principal. The interview protocol was piloted with four cyber school principals.

All interviews were face-to-face. Interviews were held at a location convenient to the principal. Sites for the interviews were in the areas of Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, and Philadelphia. Interview questions included probes to allow the interviewer to elicit further responses from the participants. The questions were open-ended.

All interviews were digitally recorded. Data files were transferred from the digital recording device to a computer. A computer program was used to slow the speech rate to ease the transcription process. Slowing the speech resulted in a lower probability for transcription error.

Data Analysis

After the transcription of the digital recordings was completed, analysis began. Merriam (2009) warned that “analysis becomes more intensive as the study progresses and once all the data are in” (p. 169). There are six steps in the analysis and interpretation of qualitative data. The steps include: preparing and organizing the data for analysis, exploring the data, describing and developing themes from the data, representing and reporting the findings, interpreting the findings, [and] validating the accuracy and credibility of the findings (Creswell, 2002). In this study, participants were given pseudonyms and assigned fictitious work locations. All interviews were transcribed verbatim. Transcriptions were sent to interviewees as a check on the accuracy of the recorded information. Participants were given a Letter to Explain Transcript Review Form (see Appendix F). Participants were also given a Transcript Review Form (see Appendix G). The transcriptions were coded. A code table was developed. Themes were identified from the codes. Through this process, the data moved from “unstructured and messy data to ideas about what is going on in the data” (Morse & Richards, 2002, p. 111). To further ensure veracity, the transcriptions were sent to the interviewees to ensure their thoughts were well represented (see Appendix F). Understanding that there is “no standard format for reporting such data,” the sorted data was taken and it was “...woven into a coherent narrative” (Merriam, 2009, p. 237).

Verification Strategies

The following verification strategies were chosen for the study.

Exposure to data – I conducted, transcribed, coded, and developed themes for the interviews. An in-depth understanding of the data was gathered through this process.

Member checking – Each participant was provided a copy of their interview transcript. The individual was asked to verify the accuracy of the transcript.

Quantitative Approach

In addition to interviews of principals of cyber schools, a survey was procured and administered to the participants. Yin (2003) stated “...a survey could be designed as part of a case study and produce quantitative data as part of the case study evidence” (Yin, 2003, p. 91). A survey will provide “...quantitative or numerical descriptions about some aspects of the study population” (Fowler, 2014, p. 1). In addition, “surveys have broad appeal, particularly in democratic cultures because they are perceived as a reflection of the attitudes, preferences, and opinions of the very people from whom the society’s policy makers derive their mandate” (Rea & Parker, 1992, p. 1). At the completion of each interview, participants were asked to complete a survey. The survey that was used is the Leadership Practices Inventory – Self (LPI–S). I administered the survey protocol (see Appendix H). The survey was used to answer the third sub-question (What are the attributes of the cyber school principals). Permission was granted to use the LPI–S on June 20, 2014 from John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Publishing (see Appendix I). With more than 1.3 million surveys administered, the new LPI is a survey tool that has had validity tests “conducted over a fifteen-year period [that] consistently confirm the reliability and validity of the Leadership Practices Inventory and the Five Practices of Exemplary Leaders model” (John Wiley and Sons, 2012, p. 3). It was restructured in 1999 to its current form (John Wiley and Sons, 2012).

Reliability and Validity

Reliability measures “the extent to which people in comparable situations will answer questions in similar ways” (Fowler, 2014, p. 86). Validity measures “the extent to which the answer given is a true measure and means what the researcher wants or expects it to mean” (Fowler, 2014, p. 86). The LPI–S has a reliability of greater than 0.70 for all five measured categories (Table 1); Modeling the Way, Inspiring a Shared Vision, Challenging the Process, Enabling Others to Act, and Encouraging the Heart based on Cronbach’s alpha (Posner, 2008).

Table 1					
<i>Internal Reliability Coefficients (Cronbach alpha) for the Five Practices of Exemplary Leaders</i>					
	Modeling the Way	Inspiring a Shared Vision	Challenging the Process	Enabling Others to Act	Encouraging the Heart
LPI–S N = 48,620 Cronbach alpha	0.74	0.88	0.79	0.73	0.86

Information from *Leadership Practices Inventory Psychometric Properties 2000*, John Wiley and Sons Publishing.

The five leadership practices were found to be statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) when measured against an impact scale (Posner, 2008). Measures were completed on a test sample of N=48,620. The results were reaffirmed for reliability and validity in a psychometric study completed in 2012 as well (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

Reporting

The participant surveys were compiled into aggregate scores and the mean score was found with standard deviations for each category. Descriptive statistics were reported based on the findings.

IRB Procedure

Before the interviews began, participants were required to read and sign an Informed Consent Document (see Appendix D). The document included the purpose of the study, procedures, benefits, risks and/or discomforts, confidentiality, opportunity to ask questions, and freedom to withdraw.

Ethical Considerations

I “treat[ed] the subjects with respect and [sought] their cooperation in the research” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The subjects were free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Role of the Researcher and Bias

I have been employed by two traditional public schools for ten years. I have served as a teacher for five years, coach, curriculum developer, professional development instructor, athletic director, assistant principal, and am currently a principal. I consider myself well versed in the function and operation of a traditional school. I have no experience in cyber education at the primary or secondary levels. But, I have been a distance doctoral study student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln from 2012 to 2015. I have experience in the cyber, higher education environment.

CHAPTER 4

PARTICIPANTS

This research was designed to understand the role of the principal in the cyber school setting. Due to the relatively small population of individuals employed in this line of work, participant information such as employment structure, background, current goals, and future outlook was reported in aggregate as if all participants are represented as one body.

Participant Information and Background

Twenty of 31 potential participants agreed to engage in the study. The principals were located throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and were focused in the metropolitan areas of Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, and Philadelphia. The participants had varying backgrounds in education including elementary, middle, and high school levels. One hundred percent of participants were, at some point in their careers, teachers. Fifty percent of participants indicated that they had taught in the cyber school format before they became a principal in the cyber school setting. Seventy-five percent of those interviewed indicated that they had some level of mid-management experience after teaching, but before becoming a principal. The average participant had been in his or her current position of principal for 15 months with a standard deviation of 11.07 months. The principals were reassigned fictitious names of Principal: Smith, Johnson, Williams, Brown, Jones, Lee, Davis, Garcia, Rodriguez, Wilson, Martinez, Anderson, Taylor, Thomas, Hernandez, Harris, Martin, Jackson, Thompson, and White.

Structure of Employment

The management structures of the participants' schools were traditional. All schools had a school board or board of directors. This group of individuals was responsible for evaluating the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). No school used the term "superintendent" to describe the functional head of the organization. Supporting the CEO were other district-level administration positions including: Chief Financial Officer, Chief Operations Officer, Chief Academic Officer, Director of Education, and Dean of Education. Principals reported to this second layer of district level administration, and these individuals were not typically located in the same building as the district level administration. Supporting the principals were mid-level management positions that included: assistant principals, coaches, heads, and coordinators. The teachers comprised the final layer of the hierarchical structure. The average principal oversaw 57 teachers with a high range being greater than 150 and a low being less than 10. The standard deviation for the teacher-principal average sample calculation was 50.15. The average principal was in charge of 1,270 students with the high range being greater than 2,500 and the low being less than 200. The standard deviation for the students per principal average calculation was 1,092.

Reason for Employment

All of the participants acknowledged that they were there to ensure that students were learning. Although some did this mainly through supporting teachers, ensuring a strong curriculum, or focusing on their vision, 75% referenced their chief goal as student achievement. In fact, 55 of the participants specifically mentioned that the most rewarding aspect of their job was when a student, who was failing in the traditional

school model, succeeded in the cyber school model. Finally, student achievement was also used for measuring performance as a principal in a cyber school. Fifty percent of principals acknowledged that some measure of student achievement was how they knew whether or not they were performing well in their position.

Future Outlook

Principals indicated that contentment, anticipation, and trepidation described their future outlooks on their positions. The majority of principals were content in their current positions. If they had a job the following year and nothing new was offered, most indicated that they would be fine with returning to the principal position the following year. In fact, Principal Thompson said, “I feel like in this field, the opportunities are limitless.” There was, however, a sense of anxiousness about what the future holds for purely cyber school institutions. There was a fear that the state might shut down this model of schooling, and the principals would lose their job because of this shut down. Principal Rodriguez said, “I can’t say that I am here to stay. I really fear the stability of this job. . .” Overall, the principals had their sights set on future employment. The most common ideas for future employment included moving back to a traditional school setting as an administrator or taking a higher education faculty teaching position. Of the principals who anticipated a return to the traditional model, Principal Davis said,

I could make that transition back to brick and mortar because I feel that the experience, what I have gained working in a cyber world, the future is in a blended model, not just brick and mortar, not just cyber. So I could help a district in that way. Working here I have seen pretty much everything and so that would

lead me to be able to work in a smaller brick and mortar district because usually they are only focused on the problems that happen in their fishbowl.

Principal Harris thought that “. . . at some point, I could see me possibly wanting to end my career in a small brick and mortar school district. . .” Other principals were actively searching for new positions, Principal Martinez said, “As [traditional] principal jobs are posted in my area, I’m applying to them.” Of the principals who anticipated a move to teach at the college or university level, Principal Anderson said, “I really would like to go to the college level at some point and oversee the student teaching in both a traditional and a cyber world.” Principal Jackson said, “Sometimes I toy with the idea of working on a college level. Because I know that colleges really are, I don’t believe that virtual education is going away. And I believe that college is going to have to gear up to provide a component.” Principal White said, “I see myself doing that, continuing at the college level.” In the end, most principals agreed that the knowledge and experience gained in their current positions would be readily used to procure future positions in education.

CHAPTER 5

THEMES

Using the methods described in Chapter 3, interviews were transcribed, coded, and themed according to frequency of use. The themes were grouped into subthemes. As a result, seven themes were found: Communication, Training, Collaboration, Vision, Relationships, Understanding, and Management. Within each theme, subthemes emerged. The themes and subthemes are presented in Table 2.

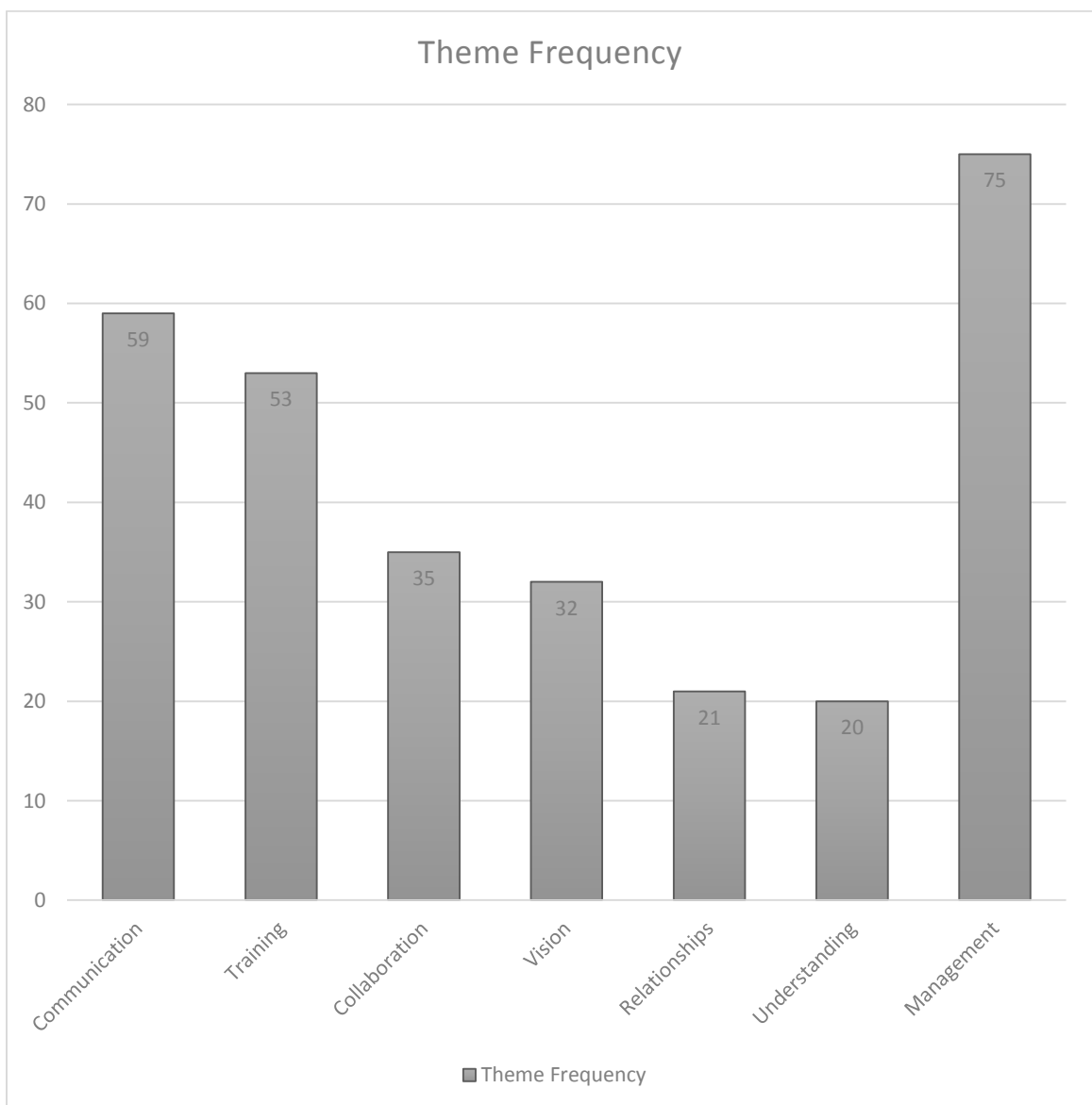
Table 2 <i>Themes and Subthemes</i>	
Themes	Subthemes
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication with Stakeholders Communication Modes Communication Frequency Communication Style Over Communication Listen Difficulties in communication
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training Stakeholders for New Environment Supporting Teachers Professional Development Modeling for Staff

Collaboration	<p>Collaboration with Colleagues</p> <p>Collaboration with Teachers</p> <p>Collaboration with Families and Parents</p>
Vision	<p>Set the Vision</p> <p>Plan for Future</p> <p>Move School in Right Direction</p> <p>Trailblazing</p>
Relationships	<p>Importance of Relationships with Stakeholders</p> <p>Innovation in Relationship Building</p> <p>Difficulty of Establishing Relationships</p>
Understanding	<p>Understanding Teachers</p> <p>Understanding Family</p> <p>Understanding Students</p>
Management	<p>Time</p> <p>Traveling</p> <p>Meetings</p> <p>Resources</p> <p>Academic Accountability</p> <p>Maintenance</p> <p>Student Issues</p>

	Customer Service
	Data Management
	Personnel Issues

The themes and subthemes were tabulated according to frequency of use. Chart 1 shows frequency of use.

Chart 1: Frequency of Themes in Interviews



Communication

Communication is an important skill for the cyber school principal. Seven subthemes emerged: communication with stakeholders, modes of communication, frequency of communication, style of communication, over communication, listening skills, and difficulties in communication. Principal Williams said, “You have to be strong with communication. You have to be able to communicate in a lot of different ways, while still getting that same message across.” Principal Lee added, “I think communication is key.” Principal Davis noted “. . . that it’s all brought together through communication. So it’s somebody that’s a strong communicator.” Principal Rodriguez argued that communication is the biggest contributor saying, “. . . communication would be the biggest one and the most important one.” Principal Hernandez confirmed the importance of communication saying, “. . . one of the greatest skills has to be communication, one of the greatest challenges is communication and it’s that distance element that I think is what plays a part.” He said, “There has to be strong communication skills, I think [they] are definitely a key. Especially written communication since so much of what we’re doing is through computer.” Principal Harris stressed the importance of communication in his position saying,

Communication is a big part of it...whether you’re a leader here or . . . in the brick and mortar world, it’s all about communication and making connections with people. Showing people that you care and obviously giving directives when needed. But, the biggest part is communication and as a leader it’s . . . probably the most important part of being a leader is communicating. To me that hasn’t changed because I’m in the cyber world...but again, it’s a vital piece to the

puzzle. I mean, if you don't communicate in either world you're not going to be successful and neither is your school.

Communication with Stakeholders

Communication with stakeholders is an important subtheme in cyber school leadership. General communication with stakeholders includes carefully planned communication with students, teachers, and parents. Since these groups do not meet face-to-face, it is important to keep the lines of communication open as reading body language is virtually impossible in this environment. There were two distinct groups when discussing communication with stakeholders; administration/staff and families/students. Both of these groups were found to be important. In regards to communication between principals and administration/staff, Principal Jones said that "email for [our school] is the means of communication even between staff [and] administration . . ." He noted that it is important to "always [be] open with them and [have] that open communication." Principal Anderson spoke about the different stakeholders, ". . . you're getting email from your central office, you're also getting email from your parents, you're getting email from your teachers. And as a principal, you need to make sure you are staying on top of all of that." Principal Hernandez also discussed the level of communication with stakeholders,

A lot of communication with answering questions [from] teachers and students. I would say that, . . . having been in brick and mortar setting and now in virtual, the communication piece . . . takes a lot longer in our environment . . . In our environment, it's all through either phone or by email . . . So a lot of times it takes a lot more time to craft an email that you are able to look over and make sure is

clear and truly answers the question, but then also do the follow-up to make sure that they really got it. So it actually takes a lot more time in some of those areas to try and get some of those communication pieces covered. So there is a lot of time that I have to block out each day to just be responding to emails. So actually this morning before you came in that's one of things I was doing, is I was looking in my email to see [if there was] anything that was there from students that I needed to respond to.

Principal Harris concluded that stakeholder focus was important,

Communicate with your staff, communicate with your students, with your parents. Our meeting was delayed a little bit because I got an email from a parent. There was a [parent who] had some concerns. I reached out and I called her and we talked about them.

In particular, it is imperative to communicate with your teachers and staff consistently. Principal Smith argued this point stating, "I also believe that communication is extremely important. So I try to communicate with them [teachers] frequently and openly. I try to be transparent." Principal Smith also stated that ". . . without that [principal position], that middle person, you lose a lot of what needs to be communicated." Principal Jones saw the importance of communication with staff, ". . . communication is the biggest one. Believe it or not, this is a small building. You would think that being in a small building like this, that we would all have good communication. That doesn't necessarily happen in this building."

The other area of stakeholder communication is between the principals and the family/students. Principal Johnson recognized this by offering new ways of doing things,

such as, “I try to answer their emails right away. I try to email the families. I try to have parent and principal night virtually.” Principal Johnson was not alone, however.

Principal Anderson offered the same kind of opportunities, communicating that they “hold principal office hours and that’s for parents to come and talk with me.” Principal Rodriguez also indicated the imperative of communicating with home,

“I have to get on the phone, jump through hoops to contact a kid up in York County or Lancaster County. I got families that pick up in the middle of the night and then a month later I get a phone call from [out of state] that they located the family out [of state].”

Communication Modes

The modes of communication are plentiful in the cyber environment. Although face-to-face discussion are not the norm, many other forms of communication do take place. These other forms of communication bring with them new benefits and drawbacks to the information transfer process. Principal William stated that “you have to be strong with communication. You have to be able to communicate in a lot of different ways, while still getting that same message across.” Principal Wilson agreed with this statement,

In a strange way, we have better communication, better teams, because we have no boundaries. We have multiple communication tools...We actually have those for professional networking purposes. So on the tip of my finger I have hundreds of people that I can contact and put in a group and call a meeting.

Principal Hernandez spoke about the different modes of communication,

Communication is a huge one. In light of our environment, a lot of that communication has to be through email. But I think as an administrator, you have to be able to take a look at an email and know when to stop the thread and to just pick up the phone and just deal with it there. So I think those realms of communication are huge.

Principal Hernandez went on to say, “There has to be strong communication skills, I think [they] are definitely a key. Especially written communication since so much of what we’re doing is through the computer, such as text, email, and other forms like that.”

Communication Frequency

Frequency of communication was found to be high for cyber school principals. Increased communication is due to the style of schooling and the delivery method. With the decrease in face-to-face discussions, principals are forced to entertain more questions and provide adequate feedback. There is also an expectation that internet-based entities will provide answers to questions at any time, day or night. Frequency can be measured by how frequently communication is happening and by how quickly communication is happening.

Cyber school principals tend to receive frequent requests for communication.

Principal Smith explained, “I also believe that communication is extremely important. So I try to communicate with them frequently and openly. I try to be transparent.” Principal Jones explained,

To lead a cyber school . . . it’s just communication with the staff. I send them weekly emails. I know that’s going to be bad because I’m sure once they get that

they're probably like, oh great another thing with like a million items that I have to accomplish. But keeping them in the loop.

Principal Lee said, "I think communication is key. I keep them up to date constantly and that's how I chunk it out to them so they can easily digest it on their end." Principals also indicated that the frequency was sometimes very high. Principal Jackson said, ". . . I think that the volume of emails that we get is, trying to keep up with can be a challenge for us. Not only parents emailing us, but we have students emailing us." Other principals gave a number of emails received in a given day. Principal Martinez said, "I answer teacher questions [and] student emails all day. I probably get over 200 a day, at least." Principal Jackson indicated the number of emails he received, ". . . I probably get between 75 and 125 emails a day that, at some point in the day, you're going to have to answer in order to stay on top of things."

The other area that deals with frequency is the speed or lack of speed at which communication occurs. Principal Smith discussed the slow rate of communication saying, "You [traditional school principals] can walk in a classroom any time you want and see learning and see the lightbulb go off. It just doesn't happen as easily in our world." Principal Lee indicated the same issues with frequency saying, "would have to email them [teachers] or call them and even then it's difficult at times because they might be teaching. So I can't just pull them out and say, hey, real quick, can you tell me what happened in this situation, whatever it might be?" Principal Davis mentioned the same sentiment,

The patience part comes in because there's a lot that you have to do that isn't as straight-forward as it is in a brick and mortar school. Whether it is working with

a staff member that's working from their living room off-site so you don't have that instant gratification and feedback that you do when you walk in somebody's classroom . . . and say, "Mr. so and so, I need this or can you do this for me?"

You have to wait it out and wait for the email response or wait for them to pick up the phone and know they're not dodging me, they're doing what I said, it's just a different medium.

On the principal end, however, the speed of communication is expected to be very fast. Principal Johnson said, "I try to answer their emails right away, I try to email the families, I try to have parent and principal night virtually." Principal Jones also implemented the same technique when dealing with communication by ". . . answering those [email] as they come in as quickly as possible."

Communication Style

A principal's style of communication is important in a cyber school. Style includes writing issues such as spelling and grammar, but focuses most on being concise, clear, open, prompt, and consistent in the communication that is delivered to stakeholders. Principal Smith addressed the style of communication, "I feel like I have to . . . communicate those expectations clearly with them . . ." Principal Smith said, "I also believe that communication is extremely important. So I try to communicate with them [teachers] frequently and openly. I try to be transparent." Principal William said,

You have to be strong with communication. You have to be able to communicate in a lot of different ways, while still getting that same message across . . . Your emails have to say the same things as your phone messages that say the same thing as your . . . bulletin board, everything has to match.

Principal Williams also said, “When it comes to written responses, communication can always be read certain ways. So you really have to be careful as to how you communicate through written speech.” Principal Brown brought up the tone of communication,

The biggest thing is, you’re not face-to-face. So you automatically run into, your communication is 99.9% virtual. So you have issues with tone. Somebody sends an email and they mean it to be very kind of jovial or friendly and it comes across as abrasive . . . Especially in the beginning, you would send, I would send an email, or somebody would send an email and it would be completely misconstrued . . .”

Principal Jones commented on communication. He said it is important that principals are “always being open with them [teachers] and having that open communication.”

Principal Tayler discussed not being able to see others face-to-face,

I can’t be frustrated because they’re not seeing my face, they’re only hearing my voice. So I can’t make any noises that would have mom feel like I’m frustrated with her because she may not call again and that’s our only contact is her picking up the phone or email. And knowing that it only takes giving a message and not delivering it the right way, to have a family shut down.

Principal Davis spoke about not being able to read body language, “I could walk up next to you to get you to pay attention. I could read your body language and your cues, your facial expressions to tell, ok is he getting it, is he not getting it?” Principal Wilson spoke about different stylistic errors in communication,

And then you're also communicating a lot through emails and written communications. So then you lose the benefit of face-to-face. So your written communications and what you do, you have to be very, very clear and be very careful because [others] will read, reread, misread, make assumptions. So your written communication skills have to be spot on.

Over Communication

The concept of over communicating was discovered as a subtheme for cyber school principals. This is the idea that a lack of face-to-face communication leads to a necessity of communication occurring overtly and intentionally to get the information across. Principal Martinez described the importance of over communication,

You really have to be an over communicator because when you have somebody in front of you in a meeting, that's one thing. But, when you're delivering things through Collaborate, through Blackboard, whatever, things get lost in the translation. So you've got to over communicate things and really be clear and concise in how you're giving directives.

Principal Anderson spoke to the importance of over communication,

Communicating and over communicating and making sure that you communicate with all aspects of the community. Whether they be the secretary in the central office or the parent that's in Scranton or Erie or Washington or wherever they are, the child that is across the state, and your staff...

Listening

Listening is an important aspect of communication in the cyber environment.

There was an acknowledgment by the principals that this is a new form of education and

the principals agreed that they did not know all of the answers. Listening allows the principals to learn new concepts, understand their clientele's positions, accept new ideas, and hear concerns of stakeholders. Principal Johnson said, "I have to spend a lot of my time listening to people's ideas and you never know what can happen." Principal Jones said, "I think just listening to your staff and realizing what their concerns are and issues are and then trying to resolve them as best as possible." Principal Lee said, "I listen. I think that's important for them to know that they're listened to and genuinely listened to. And I get back to them too. It's not like we talk and I never get back to them. Principal Davis offered advice to future principals saying, "I would tell them, keep your eyes and ears open." Principal Davis said, "You have to be constantly watching, constantly listening to see needs of teachers, needs of administrative assistants, needs of parents. Principal Taylor said, ". . . you have to be a good listener. You have to stop and listen." Principal Harris said, "I'm always willing to listen to concerns." Principal Martin actually included listening as a leadership style, saying, "I think my leadership style is, I'm a good listener. I like to listen to where staff is, what the issues are, how we can work together to change those things to work for kids."

Difficulties in Communication

Difficulties in communication is an area that was recognized by principals as a point where they experience hardship. Difficulties in communication can arise from tone, general negativity, and poor response rate from stakeholders. Difficulties because of communication were cited as prevalent in the cyber setting. Principal Johnson explained, "I think we have more barriers when it comes to communication with parents . . ."

Although you do have to worry about intentional issues, explained Principal Williams,

“In our model, if the teachers don’t want to listen, or really see what you’re saying, they can tune you out very easily. Same with students.” Principal Thompson said, “. . . the communication, like getting that piece is the most frustrating probably, not just for the principal, but for the teachers as well.” Overall, however, difficulties usually were expressed by principals who found difficulties in the distance between themselves and their stakeholders. Principal Smith said,

When you’re in the environment that we’re in, you don’t have that face-to-face contact, so you don’t see somebody saying something with a smile. What you hear comes through digital media in some way, shape, or form. So it might be an email, it might be an instant message, and it’s very hard to read that sometimes.

Principal Jones said,

I would say the ones that work off-site. Because we have about half [of the] teachers that work on-site and half of them work off-site. So the tough part is whenever you’re doing training sessions or if I just want to walk over to someone and get a real quick response. It’s very tough for me to do that. So I can’t just go down to their classroom and say, hey, here’s the situation, can you give me a little more background?

Principal Jones said,

I would have to email them or call them and even then, it’s difficult at times because they might be teaching. So I can’t just pull them out and say, “hey, real quick, can you tell me what happened in this situation, whatever it might be?”

Principal Davis said,

The patience part comes in because there's a lot that you have to do that isn't as straight-forward as it is in a brick and mortar school. Whether it is working with a staff member that's working from their living room off-site, so you don't have that instant gratification and feedback that you do when you walk in somebody's classroom building and say, "Mr. So and So, I need this or can you do this for me?" You have to wait it out and wait for the email response or wait for them to pick up the phone and know they're not dodging me; they're doing what I said.

It's just a different medium.

Principal Davis indicated difficulties in communication in cyber schools versus traditional schools saying, "I could walk up next to you to get you to pay attention. I could read your body language and your cues, your facial expressions to tell, ok is he getting it is he not getting it?" Principal Davis said,

It's hard that if I see a student struggling, I can't just pull them in my office and say "hey, little Johnny sit down for a second, let's have this conversation."

Everything has to be a call home or over the phone. Things can get lost in translation over the phone. They can get lost in translation over email. In the brick and mortar world, if I pull a kid into my office; they can pick up on your body cues and your body language that "hey, I care, I'm not coming across to just punish you or things like that" . . . With staff, its hard having them out in the cyber universe and not having them where you can just walk out. I miss the ability to just walk into a classroom and see. I can pop into their classroom, but that means that every interaction is always on. It's never where I can go in and just talk to them like, "how's the day going?"

Training

Training was discovered to be a vital aspect of the principal's role in the cyber environment. The realm of training included four subthemes: training stakeholders for the new environment, supporting teachers, professional development, and modeling for staff. To ensure the staff is receiving the training they need, Principal Davis continually asked the question, "is my staff growing, are they learning?" Davis indicated that in a cyber school,

You have to have somebody there that is completely accountable and responsible for the instructional development of the staff. For the teaching that's taking place in the classroom, I think that's why it's necessary. I think it's somebody that is accountable to grow and develop the teachers.

Principal Garcia echoed this sentiment,

I don't teach students. But I have the ability to teach teachers or to learn with teachers or to guide teachers in order to improve that. So I have an indirect impact, but kind of a direct impact in a way, but more than less and indirect impact and I'm fully aware of that. So just keeping teachers happy and making sure they have what they need to effectively educate our students is a huge goal to accomplish.

Training Stakeholders for New Environment

Principals said they needed to focus on re-training their stakeholders for the cyber environment upon arrival. Principals said the teachers were not adequately prepared by their academic institutions to work in a cyber environment. They indicated that parents and students were not prepared for the cyber environment. Therefore, training is

necessary to ensure a successful experience for all stakeholders. Principal Johnson said, “So there’s an entirely different way that you have to train new teachers in a cyber environment.” Principal Johnson said, “training teachers with things, talking to teachers; they come in and out of the office pretty much all day long.” Principal Jones focused on “Working on trainings. We just had a training this week on learning materials that we have online. So planning those, coming up with the training sessions...what we’re going to talk about, what we’re going to discuss at those . . .” Principal Jones said, “It would just be in how you present the training sessions, ours have to be online as well as having people in the office” and “There has been a lot of training sessions in our academy about using standards, eligible content, [and] getting them resources.” Finally, Principal Jones indicated that cyber school principals are necessary,

You need somebody that’s going to train them on all the new initiatives that are coming through the state. I mean you can’t assume that teachers are going to go out and figure out what the new initiatives are and what the state wants them to start doing.

Principal Lee saw a need to train teachers as well, “So I would say in the immediate future I have [to do] a lot of education [for] the teachers. That’s what my focus will be on for definitely the second half of this year and probably into next year.” Principal Martinez said,

It’s a different world here, so those who are brand new to cyber, as administrators, it’s tougher because they didn’t kind of come through the ranks. So I feel like I have that edge because I taught it. I was the teacher first and then I moved up and

did that and so I'm even to the point of I created a teacher orientation course for the teachers . . .

Principal Martinez indicated that a cyber school principal needs to be someone who, Really knows how to train the teachers because the best teachers in brick and mortar could be the worst teachers here and vice versa. We have some extraordinary teachers here who would be eaten alive if they had to stand in front of kids all day. I think as we look at our society and all the [differences] . . . we have . . . you are going to have people who are not comfortable in front of kids but they are brilliant and can teach. But there's something about that security behind a computer that makes them shine.

Principal Thomas said a main area of emphasis is, Teacher training. The transition for a student to cyber is difficult, but the transition for a teacher to cyber is even more difficult. I think I read a study . . . that said it takes almost a year for a teacher to be able to be really good at cyber teaching because it's a different thing.

Principal Harris said, I mean, to be quite honest with you, teaching in the cyber world is a little bit more difficult than teaching in the brick and mortar world. It's harder to adjust because you want to adjust in the brick and mortar world, you have total control when you're inside that classroom. Our teachers are working with a [different system]...So there's different things that they need to do.

Principal Martin said, “There’s teachers that are coming to us fresh out of school that are 21 years old that need to be taught how to teach, they need to learn those pedagogical skills.” Principal White indicated the necessity to train teachers,

How do I support my teachers, because they went to four years of school, they went through student teaching, they had that interactive experience with students. Some of them, for lack of a better term, are ok not having that direct contact. Others, after a couple of years, do miss that. So we always try to maintain an idea of if you really are missing that direct instruction piece, the class, the feel of a classroom, and the chairs and a bell to switch classes, this may not be the area for you.

Principal Anderson acknowledged the immediate nature of training, “I have a brand new teacher that is coming on staff and so I’ll be doing, she’s training . . . with me all of next week.”

Supporting Teachers

Principals reported the need to continually support their teachers, families, and students after they have arrived. This is mainly due to the fact that the cyber environment is shifting continuously. This type of support was more informal in nature and focused on individual teachers. Principal Smith said, “I think primarily it’s support. I really view myself as a support for the teachers, as a support for the parents, and as a support for the students.” Principal Smith said,

I encourage independence in my staff. I sort of think it’s important to give them the tools that they need. [To] set them up for success and then sort of gradually

release them. I want them to be independent, however, I do have expectations that I expect them to meet.

Principal Jones said that a cyber principal needs to always support his staff, “trying to get them the resources that they need.” Principal Jones said, “so just being a leader to them and since we are [in] that school setting, being that educational leader and help and support them in any way that they need it . . .” Principal Davis said that one important area for a cyber school principal is “. . . developing a common language of what good teaching is with my teachers, telling them what I expect, [and] working with them to grow their skills.” Principal Hernandez said,

I want them to know that they can, in a sense, my door is always open, which in this world, would be email. That they can send an email at any time and I will get back to them with an answer. And to know that I’m fully supporting them and wanting to be there wherever I can.

Principal Harris said,

My chief goal is to help support the teachers with strategies and feedback for them to instruct our students to where our students are going to reach their academic success. And that doesn’t change in any environment that I’m in whether its cyber or brick and mortar. I’m always there to work with teachers, support them, [and] help them gain insight on different strategies. All for the betterment of our students and our families...

Principal Jackson said,

One of the things that I think I’m good at is working individually with teachers. So I coach them. So if I’m able to do that where I’m seeing teachers change their

ideas about what is a good classroom and developing projects-based ideas or doing the flipped classroom or experimenting even engaging students on a different level even in an asynchronous class . . . And as I was observing these changes, I feel that I'm doing an exemplary job because I think that's what it's about. And I think that would be true for brick and mortar. As a principal, I need to impact those teachers because in the long run, they're going to impact [the students].

Principal Jackson said,

But I really believe that when you're working individually with teachers and you're coaching them and helping them to see that in a cyber model, lecture doesn't work in a brick and mortar, it's even less effective in a cyber. Because who knows if the kid is sleeping behind a computer or not. So you have to think of even more ways to engage students and in an asynchronous class how are you engaging that student if you're not even talking to them on a daily basis? So helping teachers. I take this idea, well, this is what you learn in college, and this is what you may have done when you were in the brick and mortar, but coaching them to go beyond that and developing classes where materials are being presented and kids are engaged.

Professional Development

Professional development is another area of emphasis. Professional development focuses more on the mandated areas of concern and school-wide initiatives. These trainings included the entirety of the faculty and staff and occurred on a regularly scheduled basis, weekly. Principal Smith said, "I can't say do this without sort of the

professional development that goes with it.” Principal Smith indicated that they do this through,

We offered a lot of professional development this year, all instructional based. We looked at objective-driven instruction. We looked at increasing engagement strategies in online sessions. We looked at effective lesson plans and planning. We looked at co-teaching. And then we looked a lot at assessment and using your assessment, both formative and summative, to truly design a path for student success.

Principal Smith indicated that this practice is continuous in the cyber world, “A lot of professional development. A lot of turn-around training to try to help everyone really feel prepared and adequate to teach their students that content.” Principal Johnson indicated the importance of developing teachers, “training teachers with things, talking to teachers; they come in and out of the office pretty much all day long.” Principal Brown said,

We do more Professional Development in this school than [any other school] I’ve ever been in. I don’t know if it’s because it’s a cyber school, it’s just the model, but professional development is a huge thing. Really, there is not a week that goes by that we’re not doing some form of professional development.

Principal Jones said that one major responsibility is,

Working on trainings. We just had a training this week on learning materials that we have online. So planning those, coming up with the training sessions. What we’re going to talk about, what we’re going to discuss at those [sessions.]”

Principal Jones said, “there has been a lot of training sessions in our academy about using standards, eligible content, [and] getting them resources.” Principal Lee indicated that training is an immediate, “So, I would say, in the immediate future I have a lot of education of the teachers. That’s what my focus will be on for definitely the second half of this year and probably into next year.” Principal Davis said, “What I mean by instructional is developing a common language for good teaching with my teachers. Going in, doing, having a constant presence within their virtual classrooms. Helping them, developing them, building them . . .” Principal Anderson said, “I have my own professional development I lead.” Principal Jackson said,

We have a professional development, so we’re meeting with the teachers as a group . . . we do a professional development component and we talk about instruction and what instruction looks like in an online environment. In addition to that . . . we also have school-wide [professional development]. We’re addressing the bigger school issues.

Modeling for Staff

The participants indicated that modeling for staff was an important way to train them. Modeling continuously the standard of the school and the norms of the school is vital to creating an atmosphere where teachers can grow. Principal Smith said,

I want my staff to behave and embrace learning and professional growth, I think that all needs to be modeled by me. So I feel like one of my roles is to be a role model for my staff so that they know and understand what my expectations are, not just as their supervisor, but as an individual.

Principal Smith stated, “I believe I need to model what I expect from them just like I expect them to model for their students.” Principal Johnson reported the same idea of modeling, “I think its modeling that this is a unique learning experience for students and so it’s also a unique learning experience for instructors.” Principal Jones said,

Making sure you lead that way and I would say also in any leadership [role it] is [important to] lead by example. I mean, I’m always here at least by 7:30 a.m. if not sometimes by 7:00 a.m. We don’t start until 8:00 a.m. so I get here earlier, unless it’s a dire emergency I’m here until after staff working on stuff and getting stuff done, answering questions. So just lead by example for the most part and that would be in any setting.

Principal Lee said, “You have to lead by example, you have to set the bar high. So the teachers follow, so the kids follow the teachers.” Principal Lee reiterated the same thoughts later in the interview, “Lead by example. I don’t ask anything of them that I wouldn’t do myself.” Principal Wilson said,

You have to have that capacity to see that relationship and then articulate it and then model it. Or at least you have to figure it out yourself before you go and model it for someone else. You have to be able to bridge that gap. If you don’t bridge that gap in any of those other areas, it’s going to fall apart.

Principal Martinez said that you have to lead “by example. Really knowing if you’re going to walk the walk, you’re going to talk the talk.” Principal Anderson echoed this sentiment, “you lead by example, modeling.” Principal Hernandez said,

What you need to do is you need to kind of model the way, you need to set the example, and then you need to be working with your teams, you need to be

working in collaboration where everything that you would expect the teacher to do, you need to make sure that you're modeling it. That you're doing it yourself and that you truly invest in their lives.

Principal Harris put the matter bluntly, "I try to lead by example, number one."

Collaboration

Collaboration was a critical theme that was revealed by the participants.

Collaboration includes subthemes of: working with colleagues, working with teachers, working with diverse populations, and working with parents/guardians. Principal Smith said that they led through "a lot of collaborative efforts." Principal Hernandez agreed saying, "working in collaboration with teams. There has to be a strong focus on being a team player." Principal Harris said, ". . . I always think it is important to collaborate with others and make decisions based on a group rather than just my individual thought." Principal Martin said, "I'm kind of a collaborative leader as best that I can." Principal Thompson said, "I do have a collaborative nature, but I also appreciate that people don't have time to collaborate all the time and sometimes decisions just need to be made." Principal White said, "So I would like to think that I'm very collaborative."

Collaboration with Colleagues

Principals indicated that they rely on collaboration with their colleagues in the field. Specifically, there was a strong collaborative connection with fellow principals or superiors within the same school. Principal Smith said, "We are very large, we have multiple departments. So you have to be able to not only collaborate with those departments, but also be able to facilitate some of that collaboration that needs to take place." Principal Smith said, "I also think you need to have someone who can interact

with the other administrators. There are plenty of times we got in a meeting and we say, here's the situation, what would you do?" Principal Jones said, "talking with the other principals within [the school], just to see what they're doing. Seeing if there is anything else that I can do." Principal Davis stated,

It's all about working together, bridging the gaps, and especially here . . . That we, there's so many, all the help I have, all those other departments here, we have to work together. Everybody had to carry a little bit of a piece of it.

Collaboration with Teachers

Participants noted the need to collaborate with teachers in this environment.

Principals said that they often cannot keep up with the changing environment and rely on collaboration with teachers to keep them abreast of current trends and concerns in the school. Principal Smith said,

I often will ask for feedback. If we're about to roll something out, it goes to my teachers first. [I ask them to] pull this apart, poke holes in it. What are the issues that are going to come up? Because I feel like their collaboration and their buy-in is what's going to make it successful ultimately in the end.

Principal Johnson said, ". . . a lot of my week is . . . at meetings with the teams. And just bouncing ideas off of them." Principal William said, "I prefer other people to kind of take change and I really reach out and use the talent. I think more of the people around me than to try and think that I'm the best at everything." Principal Brown spoke of the importance of working with staff, "we really are a team. We make decisions. There are very few times when I will make an individual decision." Brown said, "I really strongly

feel that we all come together with our ideas and our strengths and work as a team.”

Principal Brown concluded by indicating that a cyber school principal is,

. . . a facilitator. I make, when it comes down to it, the final decision is mine. But rarely do I ever make/give directives, rarely do I ever say “this is how it is and there’s not going to be any discussion.” I recognize that I’m not smart enough to do that.

Principal Jones said,

I have a few teachers that I reach out to and know that they will give me an honest response even if it’s not what I want to hear . . . So I think just reaching out to people and seeing what they think and if there’s anything that we can improve on or that I can improve on.

Principal Jones stated,

And working with them . . . what I’d do is I’d say, “Ok, here’s stuff that we can get, we can get these online materials, do you think this would be beneficial? Do you think this is something that you’re going to use?” Rather than just implementing and saying now go use it and then them being like, well we don’t know how to number one and number two, that’s not what we wanted.

Principal Davis said,

I describe my leadership style as, I try to be collaborative. I’m not as comfortable in a completely authoritative position where I go out and dictate and command. I have a very strong staff with a curriculum director, my special education coordinator, [and] my academic dean. They are all very knowledgeable. I could never think to know more than all of them put together . . . I’m fortunate in my

span, my virtual classroom teachers have all been doing it since it got started . . . so they've all been doing it, I know they're experts, so I try to work together. We try to, with our special education staff, to come up with our programs together. If they identify something that they think is going to work, I try to work with them. I try to stay out of that authoritative mode as much as I can. I like to work together to bridge gaps. When I have to be very direct, I can be. But I prefer to work together to try to let people lead.

Principal Garcia said,

I try to be very personable and try to include everybody in decisions. For example, we have faculty meetings Monday. I very easily could have thrown the Powerpoint together, owned it, it would have been mine, but involving the . . . academic deans and the . . . curriculum coordinators in on it too. "Hey, what am I missing? What else is involved? What else do I need here?" Getting input from the teachers, "what do we need to address?" So I try to take everybody's input into account. Now at the same time, as you know, there's just decisions you have to make, but I try to bring all the stakeholders in when possible.

Principal Rodriguez said, "I truly believe it has to be a team effort. And maybe that's where that leadership role for me needs to come in is, is pulling that team together."

Principal Martinez had the same view saying, "You have to have teamwork in mind. And that whole adage, you're not working for me, you work with me." Principal Tayler spoke about how the cyber position has changed their leadership, "I've become a collaborative leader. I've had teachers in meetings before say, you just tell us how you

want it to go. And they're not invested when you do that. So, I've learned to really become a collaborative leader." Principal Hernandez spoke to the idea of collaboration, Developing, nurturing, guiding, and leading teams. And really it's that whole distributive leadership model. And sometimes I think we view distributive leadership because we create a team, but then we're still telling them this is what we're doing, which isn't truly what the whole distributive leadership model is intended to be. And so again, it comes back to, if the whole distributive leadership model is in place and is functioning right, then those teams are going to become autonomous groups that are really high functioning in getting things done and the leader just has to keep them focused on what the vision is.

Principal Harris said,

I have the type of personality where I'm willing to work with anyone. I never make a decision based on just what I think. My style is to collaborate with the people. I surrounded myself with or the school surrounded me with teachers. I gather their input. I take their input into consideration. Then I think about my thoughts and think about how we can move forward. Then I'll ask my assistant principals, "this is my thought, anyone disagree, anyone want to add?" So I'm a collaborative type of guy, I don't believe in our world of education that somebody can sit there and say I have all the answers, this is the way we're going to do it and we're going to be successful.

Collaboration with Families/Parents

An area that was continually stressed by principals was the need to collaborate with parents/guardians. In the cyber environment, the parent/guardian plays a

vital role in the success of the student. This would also include collaboration with diverse populations. Students who attend cyber schools can do so from any location in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Having the ability to collaborate with these different groups is vital to driving them in the right direction. Principal Tayler said, “And then, with us, we have to have that family support...So you have to have that parent who works as a team.” Principal Jackson agreed,

Parents need to be actively involved within the school. So there is that component where we’re receive a lot of emails from parents and we have a lot of meetings and things where we make ourselves available. And I think that we do that on an increased level compared to the brick and mortar school.

Vision

Vision emerged as a major theme in the interviews. Vision includes four subthemes of: set the vision, plan for future, move school in right direction, and trailblazing. Principal Brown said, “I think that you have to have a vision. I think you have to be able to articulate that vision. And I think you have to have the wherewithal to get everybody on board going in the right direction.” Principal Rodriguez said, “I set the vision, the tone. I really do have a fair amount of autonomy to really set the culture and the direction and create the solutions to any of the challenges that we’re currently facing.” Principal Wilson said,

. . . I can really build a consensus and provide a vision of a direction and really build [in] everyone the sense of urgency and why we may need to move in a particular direction and the vision and the articulation of that vision to my staff so that they know and understand each one of their roles and really can support it.

Principal Anderson said,

You have to have a cohesive unit that knows exactly what your vision is and we're all moving in the same direction. And I would have to say that that's very important, the whole vision aspect of things, because it's easy to get off on your own tangent, especially in a virtual world. So the principal really has a responsibility to communicate the vision of the school.

Principal Tayler said,

You can have a room full of innovative teachers, but if you don't have someone with a vision and goals and driving and staying focused on those goals, everyone is going to be going in every different direction and you're not going to meet that main goal and lead your teachers to have that higher performance number. . .

Principal Hernandez said,

You have to have leadership. Without leadership that is providing vision, if there is no vision, people will falter, they will fade away, they will wander. And before you know it, you will have, if you have a staff of 100 teachers, you will have 100 teachers doing 100 different things, 100 different ways. There's no consistency, there's no focus, there's no direction. You need leadership to make sure everyone is moving in the right direction and they are the ones steering the ship.

Set the Vision

Principals of cyber schools indicated that they were the vision setters for their schools. They felt they had a lot of control in this area and that the visions they had truly guided the school in the right direction. Principal Smith supported the idea that cyber

principals should think about “really having a perspective of what and where you want to go with your team and your staff and your students.” Principal Williams said,

You got to make sure that your staff is behind what you’re doing and can see where you’re going and can kind of see your vision of the school . . . So, one of the things that I normally do at the beginning of the year is we kind of layout what our focus is for the upcoming school year and try to stay true to that focus throughout.

Principal Brown stated, “You actually have to have a vision, where do you want to go . . . I think you have to have a clear articulated vision as to where you are going.” Brown said, “So I guess the short answer; the clear, articulated vision.” Principal Davis said it is important to “. . . make sure the vision and mission statement of the school is carried out.” Principal Wilson thought that it was important that cyber school principals “. . . need to articulate where we are, where we are going, what our needs are, listen to your stakeholders, hear their concerns, make them feel good or at least very ok in the challenges that we face.” Wilson said, “People naturally look to a leader. They’re looking at someone to articulate a vision . . . You need to have that vision.” Principal Hernandez said it was important that principals were “working to kind of make sure that they feel that this is a shared vision and that these are shared goals that we’re trying to accomplish. And I believe that once you get there, you will get the buy-in.” Hernandez said the principal “has to be a person that is a vision tasker and someone who is able to build shared values and shared goals with their staff.” Principal Harris said, “. . . There has to be somebody to be able to work with others in order to create a common focus.” Principal Martin said, “Leading a cyber school is really just trying to create a vision for

understanding that you're going to be working with a lot of diverse groups and demographics of kids." Martin indicated, "They [teachers] still need someone to create vision for them. They still need someone to inspire them to remember that there's a purpose for why you're here. And it's not to teach curriculum, it's to educate kids." Principal Thompson said, "My vision for this school was that we could differentiate the curriculum, because that's the beauty of a cyber school, right, . . . We're not there yet. But that, that's where we started from, that's where we're trying to go." Thompson stated that a principal's role in the cyber school is

to set the vision for the school, first and foremost – to not get bogged down into the management pieces. And the management pieces are quite intense here just like they are in any school...but I think vision setting has been something I work on all the time here.

Thompson focused on vision throughout the interview, "So I think a strong vision is really key...you have to know what your vision is because it's so flexible that you could almost do anything with your program."

Plan for Future

Principals related vision setting with planning for the future. The principals interviewed were forward thinking in all they did. Managerially, they would be thinking about how future plans would work, and they always were attempting to innovate in their prospective schools. Principal Lee said,

There's definitely a plan. There's a timeline to the plan. It's well thought out. It will be executed, but I let it go in bits and pieces because I don't want them [teachers] to become overwhelmed and find it to be insurmountable.

Principal Davis said,

You have to plan, there has to be a Powerpoint for everything you do or, in our system, the Powerpoint is converted [to the appropriate computer display] ...but you can't wing it. It all has to be pre-thought-out and in pre-thinking it, you have to make sure that you know...you have to differentiate this up or down on the fly. So you have to have it planned out, you have to have contingency plans built in because you can't be, on-line you're on an island on your computer...you can't stop, you have to teach.

Principal Garcia said, "You got to have somebody there to kind of steer things in the right direction or at least avoid a crash." Principal Anderson said leading a school, "... takes a lot of forethought and a lot of advanced planning."

Move School in Right Direction

Cyber school principals reported the need to tend to their vision constantly. They felt the burden of constantly having to move their school in the right direction, or forward. Principal Smith said, "I think that's key. They have to have a reason to do what they're doing. And they have to believe in what they are doing. And I think you can be that driving force for them." Principal Williams said,

The person who's going to set the school in the direction that it needs to go in and the person that's going to try and keep everybody on the path . . . So it's really that person that keeps that group together and moving forward for that goal or that expectation.

Principal Rodriguez argued that it was important for principals to help their staff by "Making them see that we're growing and we need to start moving in a different

direction, not in that direction that we've always been going." Principal Anderson added the fact that a principal is there, "Making sure you are a cohesive unit that's moving forward." Principal White said, "The principal coalesces those groups and keeps the school moving forward."

Trailblazing

Cyber school principals indicated they were trailblazers in their visions of what their school is and could become. They were focused on implementing new initiatives and coming up with their own new initiatives. They would often proudly state that they were doing things that no one has ever done before. Principal Johnson said cyber school principals have to be innovative, "You have to be an innovator. You don't have to be able to see everything through to the end, but you either have to have the ideas or have to be able to push ideas forward." Principal Taylor stated,

I think innovative would really be a great word. Because you have to be innovative when it comes to, alright, where are you leading the school? You have to be innovative when it comes to, alright, we've tried this four different ways with this student. I have to come up with a fifth way. You have to be innovative with your teachers and how you're scheduling them and how many different directions you're pulling them and how can you not pull them in so many different directions, but get everything accomplished. So it's being that out of the box thinker.

Principal Jackson was supportive of being a trailblazer in visionary thinking as a cyber school principal. Principal Jackson said, "As well as them moving to the future and how

you're going to develop this program to be effective and have the positive impact on students." Jackson noted,

"And also be able to have a vision. Because cyber schools are relatively young...you're developing this idea of cyber education...in a lot of times...I think a poorer leader falls back on what is traditionally done at a brick and mortar, like try to cram this brick and mortar idea into a cyber education. And I think in order for cyber education to be robust and do all that it should be able to do for students, I think you have to be able to think outside of the box. That's where the creativity comes in and I think also the visionary person comes in.

Principal Thompson asserted it is difficult to see the innovation that the cyber principal position requires, "Only until you get into this environment do you really see what cyber schools can do for kids. You can't see that until you get in it. Most people can't see it until they get here."

Relationships

Relationships was a theme revealed in the interview process. Relationships subthemes included importance of relationships with stakeholders, innovation in relationship building, and difficulty establishing relationships. Principal Wilson acknowledged the broad importance of relationships within the school, "And you really need to stop and consider effective relationship building. Education is about people, it's about building relationships." Principal Anderson reported the importance of relationships within your district,

Relationships with your staff, are you making sure that you are creating a positive school climate in a virtual world. Relationships with your parents, parent

partners. Making sure that they feel very much engaged and informed and communicated with about their child's educational process. And then of course the students. Making sure that they are having a good positive school experience. Principal Thomas said, "There's more personal connection" in the cyber setting. Thomas stated, ". . . if the principal isn't emotionally available to people, it's just not going to happen. People aren't going to work for you, people aren't going to work for the school." Principal Hernandez also focused on relationships saying one thing to focus on "would be the relationship building because I believe that the more that you can build trust and commitment, the more that your staff will want to really be energized to do the task." Principal Hernandez noted,

. . . it's been something I've really been trying to work on a lot this year . . . building strong relationships with my team so that they know, I'll go to bat for them, but they need to go to bat for me by giving 110% in the work that they do. And I think over time when you establish a healthy, positive culture and climate within a school that has that trust, that has that type of caring relationship that exists, it just permeates throughout the whole school. So it's not just the principal with the teachers. But the teachers then are going to begin to show those same traits with their students and with the parents and then you're going to see the parents and the students start to show that with their teachers and they need to develop a healthy environment. That is something that you can definitely develop, it just takes time.

Principal Garcia acknowledged the importance of relationships outside of school saying that principals must “. . . work to establish positive relationships with all the school districts is my goal.”

Importance of Relationships with Stakeholders

Principals acknowledged the importance of developing relationships in the cyber environment. They indicated that relationships needed to be developed with teachers, students, and families for cyber schooling to work. Principal Smith spoke about using relationships to build trust, “. . .I think we have to have a rapport and a level of trust so that they can be successful in the way that I envision.” Principal Johnson said, “I feel like I have a much closer relationship with my teachers and the students and parents.” Principal Williams supported this relational aspect of the cyber school: “I’ve had some great relationships with teachers and parents and students themselves in this medium.” Principal Garcia attempted to establish relationships: “You have to make that extra concerted effort to reach out to students, teachers, families . . .” Principal Rodriguez said, “I think, as a school leader, you also have to be able to look at things from every angle and understand where that person is coming from and then be able to develop that working relationship with them.” Principal Davis said, “You work with the teachers to work with the students, you work with the parents to realize, don’t be embarrassed to reach out to me, call me, and you make a difference.” Principal Hernandez focused on all the stakeholders, “So, to the parents and to the students . . . Teachers need to feel like they need buy-in. They need to feel empowered. And the way we do that is working on building those relationships.”

Principals need to focus on these groups individually as well. Principal Johnson stated relationships were important with families,

You have to be present and visible and accessible to the families and the students...So I think it's a little more warm and fuzzy, you have to kind of be in the cyber environment. Because they're not seeing you. They need to know when I call them, [and say] . . . you need to stop doing this . . . they need to not be afraid to pick up the phone when they see it's me.

Principal Davis focused on parents, "Usually lunch happens in front of a computer talking to a parent, hitting the mute button so you can chew your sandwich, but talking to parents is a big part of the day as well." Principal Davis added,

. . . We work with parents a lot more than we work with the students. The parent interaction in a cyber world is much different than it is in a brick and mortar world. It's a much higher level of interaction with parents. So you have to keep working with them. You can't just tell parents, I'm the principal and I'm putting your kids in these classes and this is how it's going to be. You have to work with them and you have to work with the students. They all have their own unique needs and issues and you have to be willing to work with it. If you finally come to that realization that I'm not going to lead, I'm going to walk with, I think you'll be more successful.

Principal Anderson said,

I love the relational aspect of it. Surprisingly, one of the things that I think even our teachers report . . . is that they know their families better because the partnership with the home is much more heightened in our environment. So you

are talking often with parents. Parents are actually hearing what's going on in your classroom because it's being broadcast into their homes. So, I love that part of it. I love getting to know my families you know, inside and out and working with my staff.

Principal Rodriguez said, “. . . In this environment, because you depend on the parents so much, because those parents essentially become the learning coaches, you really get to work with the parents . . . even sometimes more so than the students.” According to Principal White, “. . . parental involvement is key.”

The next major group for relationship building is the students. Principal Davis said, “I learned I could have that connection in an online environment with the students just like I had in the brick and mortar when I was in front of the class.” Davis added, “So you have to have compassion to work with those kids and work through each problem and never give up on somebody you rarely see face-to-face.” Principal Garcia warned,

I guess be aware that you're going to spend the extra, put forth extra effort into those areas I just talked about, getting to know people. I had a student meeting on Monday, face-to-face and it was the first time I think I saw a student in a month or two.

Principal Rodriguez said,

I actually have a list of all our students and whenever there's a free minute, I just work my way down the list and I just send out a phone call. “Hey, just calling, just checking in. Is there anything I can do for you today?” I might not get back to them again, like I'm still trying to work down that whole list of students, but just trying to put out those little things to let them know that they matter. I try to

do birthday cards for them or even if it's not a card in the mail, I like to send out an email, "hey, happy birthday" . . . those little touches that I think matter as a mom, as a parent.

Principal Thomas said,

When I see kids that have been with us for three years and I see their progression and I see . . . so there's a kid that has been with us three years . . . He had already kind of failed his 9th grade year. He was coming in again . . . We met with him so much, we worked with him . . . It finally clicked for him the second year that it was up to him. That's a more independent thing. But, it took a lot of time to get there. It took a lot of personal conversations. But now he's, I think, way more prepared for college than he would be otherwise because he's learned to self-regulate. He's learned to schedule his time.

Principal Thomas added that relationships with students are easier over the virtual lines, But there's something about the anonymity of Google Chat and email that kids will tell you stuff that normally they wouldn't, but forming that connection with them, talking to [them] . . . about, look nutrition's really important and this is really important. That would help them connect to me and then they'd do more work academically.

Finally, relationships with stakeholders are important for teacher principal interaction in a cyber school. Principal Jones spends a significant amount of time investing in teacher relationships. Jones said,

I call them just individual teacher meetings where I call them or bring them in just to see how the year is going . . . I'm also doing the individual teacher meetings where I'm just sitting down with them, seeing how their year is going.

Principal Jones commented, "For me it's being available to my staff as best as I can."

You also have to surround yourself with people that you can bring with you. So I'm pretty confident that if I went out there and said we're not going to do things this way anymore, we're going to do them this way, you know, I would pretty much have like 90-95% buy-in pretty quickly.

Principal Martinez said,

I am very big on relationships and that can be hard sometimes. You know, especially when you have these difficult conversations with somebody that you consider somebody that you see every day and you care about. So, I'm big on that.

Principal Hernandez said,

I think another huge element again because of the distance learning component and we have teachers across the entire state, we don't have a lot of face-to-face time. Again, I think trust building and relationship building is important for any leader, but I think in our environment it has to be something that is even more that we're focused on. We need to make sure that the teachers know they're fully supported and that if they have questions, we can get back to them right away and that we're listening to their voice, we're listening to their opinions.

Principal Hernandez said, “. . . relationship building, because I believe that the more that you can build trust and commitment, the more that your staff will want to really be energized to do the task.” Principal Hernandez concluded,

. . . You’ve got to be creative in making sure that the people that you’re working with, they know who you are, that they know that you truly do care for them. That they know that you’re honest and that you do what you say you’re going to do. That you’re someone that is open and so that they can come to and really be able to share ideas with and that you are an individual with integrity so that they know that the things that they share with you, if it’s confidential, it stays with you. So if you’re leading a school, especially a cyber school, you got to build those relationships.

Principal Harris also spoke about teacher relationships,

I walk around and just visit teachers who are located here in the office just to get some face-to-face time with them, say “hello” . . . try to get a little bit of socially interactive with them. So they know that I’m not just a supervisor, just watching what they do as a teacher. I care about them as a human being as well and just to raise that comfort level to where if they do have an issue that they’ll come to me.

Principal White was another supporter of establishing relationships with teachers,

The other piece is I need to look for and maintain and harvest a sense of community. Because at the end of the day, these teachers have the very tough task of creating a relationship, engaging students, and producing. Getting kids to graduate through a medium that’s not direct instruction.

Principal White mentioned a strategy for establishing relationships,

Normally that door is open. Just so you know, I don't lock my door at night. There is nothing in this office that is that valuable that I have to put under lock and key. I tell that to my staff. If they want to leave me a note, they can put it right on this desk.

Innovation in Relationship Building

Innovative ways to establish relationships were discussed by the principals. From field trips and virtual programs/challenges to activity and home visits, cyber principals found ways to engage stakeholders and develop relationships. Principal Wilson recognized the need to be innovative in relationship building,

I can't get bagels for them at our faculty meeting. I can't do those little things that build your rapport with staff. But, if you noticed on my window right there, it's behind us, we're doing . . . a challenge. So, I got a teacher that led a group and we're all in for the next few months, going head-to-head and we made teams. We're doing team fun stuff.

Principal Tayler said, "Our teachers are doing so many extra things that I have to make a conscious effort to acknowledge those things . . . it's coming up with new ways to connect when you're not right in front of them." Principal Harris said,

I also try to spend some time during the day reaching out to some teachers by phone. We have quite a few teachers [who] work from home, so I don't get that face-to-face time. But, I'll reach out with a phone call. I'll just randomly select a teacher and call them and say "hey, how's everything going?"

Principal Jackson agreed that innovation in relationships with students is important and rewarding, “I would have to say, when I’m interacting with students at outings or talking on the phone with students, I find that the interaction with students is very rewarding.”

Difficulty of Establishing Relationships

Principals indicated that it was difficult to establish relationships because of the distance nature of cyber schooling. This was true for all stakeholders in the cyber environment. Principal Smith spoke about the very nature of the responses that are received,

We get the emails from the angry parents. We get the phone calls from the angry parents. We get the teacher who’s stressed out because you know, X, Y, and Z and they don’t know how to get it done. So when you’re in a building, even just the good mornings and the little smiles as they’re walking down the hallway . . . For me, that lack of constant contact is probably the hardest.

Principal Williams was more specific in discussing relationship difficulties,

It’s really difficult at some point when you really need to have those heart-to-heart conversations with families or with teachers that there’s that distance between you and it’s going to be on the phone or its going to be through the computer. So really getting that face-to-face interaction.

Principal Lee described difficulties in establishing relationships, “Parental involvement is tough at a cyber school . . . percentage wise, I bet it’s much lower [than a traditional school], and I don’t know why that is.” Principal Lee stated, “Know that at the end of the day, the hallway is lonely.” Principal Garcia said,

The disconnect between the teachers and the students [is difficult]. If you think about all the different things that would raise a red flag for you as a principal for student concern or SAP referral or anything like that. I don't have the kids right in front of me to be able to see them, so that becomes difficult.

Principal Garcia noted,

Trying to get to know all of your teachers too, especially when you haven't met all of them face-to-face . . . so, it becomes increasingly difficult to get to know people and to try to show them that you care. But persistence is key. And picking up the phone or shooting them an email telling them you appreciate something they did.

Principal Hernandez said,

. . . I think that is more difficult in cyber to form that connection, but that's what's going to make the difference and that's what's going to move that kid forward. Because otherwise, what do they care? I mean, if they're just logging in to like do abstract work on a computer, it's not going to work . . . So you have to make much more of an effort to have the personal connection with staff.

Principal Hernandez said,

I'm a people person, so one of the challenges is, I would love to have a lot more face-to-face interaction with teachers to again, just to be building those relationships. And I think one of the hardest things is building relationships over a distance. It can be done. It takes a lot longer, I think, and it's just not the same. So, I think that's one of the biggest challenges for me. The same thing goes for

the students. So, when issues come up you don't have a face to go with that name.

Principal Harris also spoke of the difficulties of relationships,

I'm a people person, so I enjoy seeing people face-to-face. I loved walking in the classroom and I loved having the teachers see me and I loved having the students see me. And I loved to go in and just see what they were doing together as a team. And, of course, that's a little bit more difficult to do here. I mean, we do it, it just takes more time. So I can't do it as often.

Principal Martin said,

I always say that every teacher should have a picture of every one of their kids so that we remember there's a face out there and that compassion piece needs to be there. That there's kids on the other end of that computer and, good or bad, probably bad, but that can get lost over the phone. It can get lost typing in a webmail or answering in an email questions, and a kid's just talking through headphones. The human interaction piece is very important. So trying to make sure that people are grounded and remembering that there are kids out there that we have to service and that we have to connect with and we have to get engaged with what we're doing educationally...with school. There's still personal things out there that we have to work with people on.

Understanding

Participants explained that understanding was a major theme in their role as a cyber school principal. The subthemes of understanding include: understanding teachers, understanding family needs, understanding population, and understanding environment.

Principal Smith emphasized all the individuals need to be understood in a cyber school, “. . . I think really having a full understanding of who you’re serving. All stakeholders, from teachers to students to board members.” Principal Smith indicated that cyber school is not meant for everyone, “Just like it’s not for every kid, it’s not for every administrator or every teacher.” Principal Williams said, “. . . you have to be able to understand and read what’s going on in the building and . . . kind of figure out where everybody needs to be.” Principal Rodriguez noted the ability to see things differently as a leader, “But I think, as a school leader, you also have to be able to look at things from every angle and understand where that person is coming from and then be able to develop that working relationship with them.” Principal Wilson said one of the main goals of a cyber school principal is “. . . to be able to effectively know and understand all of your stakeholders...”

Understanding Teachers

To lead a cyber school, principals must have a firm understanding of teacher needs and position requirements. Understanding the differences between a cyber and traditional teacher is vital to leading cyber school teachers. Principals also have to understand the different demands that their teachers face in this environment both as a profession and in terms of personal needs of teachers.

Principal William spoke on the topic of understanding the teaching profession in a cyber school setting, “So I have a lot of experience with that [cyber teaching], and I think that helps me then relating to teachers and understanding what they’re going through or why they’re doing certain things in the classroom.” Principal Jones spoke of understanding the nature of the position in cyber schools as well, “. . . being

understandings with them. There's a lot of new stuff, new initiatives that came out this year." Principal Jones said,

I knew a little bit coming in, but then also learning a little bit about their needs.

At one of our academy meetings, we were talking about the growth and achievement. And one teacher said it was something along the lines of, well we don't know how to do that or we need the support to do that, and that's [when] . . . the light bulb went off that we need to really like sit down and work on this and give them suggestions and here's materials that you can use.

Principal Davis said,

It's very hard for somebody that's never taught in a virtual environment to look at what your virtual classroom teachers do and really get it and get how hard it is to plan each and every detail out like I mentioned before . . . You need to understand and know so you can support those teachers in the online environment. They are giving up so much of their senses that they have, would have in front of those live students . . . You're giving up that [senses], so you have to understand and be understanding of the teachers that, especially the newer teachers, they're learning that, it doesn't all come on your first session. It takes years of practice to understand that your main tool and your main focus is your voice and your personality. That's what makes everything come through and so you have to have understanding for the staff as well to be willing to work with them, to teach them that, to train them . . . I don't know of any teacher preparation programs in the state that prepare anyone to do that. There are a lot of great teachers that come out of college, we have to make great cyber teachers.

Principal Thompson discussed the need to understand the learning environment in the cyber school, “I also try to understand what my teachers are doing so . . . that they know that I understand and have an understanding of what it’s like, day-to-day, for them to do their job.”

The other area when it comes to understanding teachers is being understanding of their needs in general. Principal Brown said, “I really think you need to identify people’s strengths and weaknesses. And really, I hate to say exploit them, tap them and get good use of [their strengths].” Principal Jones acknowledged the need to “I would say, just being patient with the staff. Knowing that a lot of the stuff is new to them . . . So just working with the staff and being understanding.” Principal Garcia expressed understanding of the staff, “I think that if you focus on culture and you are having empathy for the people that are involved and the people that are in the trenches . . .” Principal Wilson showed understanding through meeting the teachers in their homes. Wilson said,

I got out. I got out and I toured the entire state and I got in homes of teachers, and I sat next to them and I said, show me what you do each day. Show me what it looks like to do your job. What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses? What are your challenges?

Principal Martinez discussed the need to understand staff,

But it made me be able to be relatable. They [teachers] don’t want somebody telling them what to do if they don’t understand the impact or how much time it’s going to take. So, I actually can say I know that now. And so, I’m a little more sensitive when [the computer gives you a message], well, that’s ten clicks. Well,

yes it is and I see that so then I go to the tech people and say how can we fix that?

So you have to be relatable.

Understanding Family

Understanding the needs of families in the cyber world is important to leading the school. Schools have diversity of race, sex, age, disability, geographic location, and religion in their midst. Understanding these differences is important to leading a cyber school population. Also, understanding the transient nature of the population is important and needs to be taken into account regularly. Principal Smith indicated that principals should take pause when considering the cyber format, “Having a very good understanding of the population you’re coming into.” The population, as mentioned earlier, is defined by being both diverse and transient.

Diversity, in the cyber system, is profound. Whether it be based on race, sex, disability, or geographic location, stakeholders hail from all backgrounds. Principal Smith said,

You really have to know the population. So you have to know the students. You have to understand where they’re coming from. 70% of our population comes from free or reduced lunch or economically disadvantaged, and 20% special education. So knowing that, you really have to have a different mindset coming in. You really have to understand that population that your teachers are serving.

Principal Lee said,

. . . We have, a high economically disadvantaged subgroup . . . we also have a high teen pregnancy rate . . . So you have these young women that are dealing

with a lot that they shouldn't be at their age and we're about last on the list of priorities. So we have that to contend with too.

Principal Lee added the fact that you have to consider, "The complexion of the students that we have, getting under achieving students to start to achieve." Principal Davis stated,

The second part is being able to work with anyone and manage stakeholders from across the state. Whether it's your students, whether it's your staff, you're dealing with and working with people from every background you can think of. From farm communities in the middle of the state to inner cities in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, to your affluent rural suburbs . . . [or] the inner cities up in Erie. So that exemplary principal needs to understand why we are here. He or she needs to understand the diversity of the populations they are dealing with, the stakeholders they're dealing with. And they need to understand how to bring them all together.

Principal Wilson acknowledged this form of understanding,

Now I have staff from all over and I need to respond and listen to those staff in different ways. I had somebody come and say, I would love to do a segment on gun safety. Well that's very natural for someone from a rural area, but remember, you're serving people from an urban area and they will look at you like horrified.

Principal Anderson addressed this form of understanding,

I have to think of cultures across the state and just even within our own population, we have diversity, every religious diversity, every ethnic diversity. The diversity of whether they are economically disadvantaged or well off. We have all of that.

Principal Martin said,

You know, we work with rural populations, we work with urban Pittsburgh kids, we work with rural Pittsburgh kids, we work with rural Philadelphia kids, we work with kids in Erie, we work with kids in Scranton, we work with kids near the New York state border in places I never even heard of. So, trying to work with teachers to understand that you're going to be working with a lot of different kids and it's not easy working with one demographic, let alone 50 or 60 different demographics in your class.

Understanding population transiency is also important to understand when considering the cyber school principalship. Families that attend cyber schools tend to switch schools frequently. Understanding this phenomenon is critical to running a school. Principal Williams noticed this transient trend,

Our transition at our school is, in most cyber schools is probably roughly 50% turnover in students every year. So you're looking at a brand new crop of students that come in, some of them for good reasons, some of them for bad reasons.

Principal Davis said, "The hard parts [is], we have a very transient population. So that's hard." Principal Rodriguez mentioned transiency,

And that varies, today we just got three new enrollments. So, on average, a student a day. But you could get three today and two may leave tomorrow. It's a very transient, in the door, out the door kind of population.

Principal Wilson indicated that at their school, "we have rolling enrollment, so I have students coming and going all of the time." Principal Martinez said,

The turn rate is huge. Kids come, they try to hide out, they're absent for ten days, they withdraw. And we've invested so much time in getting them started and then they withdraw. So our retention rate is not huge.

Principal Anderson said, "Again, cyber's range because we have a lot of transient population." Anderson noted, "We generally have new students that come in nearly every week. So I have to conduct parent orientation." Principal Thomas reported the issue of transiency, "There is inherently a greater degree of student transiency in cyber which we are working with and doing things."

Understanding Students

Principals need to understand the student's background and learning habits in the cyber institution. Students come to cyber schools for a variety of reasons including: traveling, bullying, perceived injustice, medical necessity, and needs aren't being met. Understanding that these individuals are leaving traditional schooling for a reason and understanding how they learn are important to providing them what they need to succeed. Principal Smith got to the point of why we need to be able to understand students, "Those students need us to get the education that they deserve." Principal Williams stated their goal,

Some of them are good students, some of them are struggling students and the goal is just to make sure that at least from the time they get here to the time they leave, we've done something for them that has helped them.

The principals acknowledged that there are two forms of student understanding. First, is understanding that all students learn differently. Principal Williams expressed this,

So you have to understand that some kids will get it a certain way, some kids will get it other ways. And you have to be able to say sometimes, “Yes, that’s ok for those particular students because that’s the way they learn best. But it’s not ok for another student.”

Principal Taylor commented,

. . . No matter what’s going on, I have to be empathetic when that phone rings and it’s a parent. Because most of the time, I would say at least 50% of our kids, they have a story, they have a back story. There’s a reason they’re here. To know what do, to stop, you have to be a good listener. You have to stop and listen. Seek to understand first. And now . . . when Johnny’s mom calls me again because he’s still not working, I can’t be frustrated . . .”

Principal Hernandez said,

We have a lot of students that come to us who are, for whatever reasons, they are significantly grade levels behind in reading and math skills. So that’s just a challenge and a barrier that we’re trying to overcome.

The second way to understand students, as described by the principals, is to understand why they go to cyber schools in the first place. There seem to be a variety of reasons students go to cyber schools. Principal Smith said,

Do I think this is the right model for a lot of kids? Absolutely. I have seen students who’ve come here change their lives drastically for the better, yes.

Those are the things that I sort of hold on to and hope that we will continue to be around. Because when I think about the student, the bullying. The kids who left because they couldn’t have their needs met because the schools were too big or

the schools were shutting down. Those that have special needs or severe anxieties that literally can't learn in another environment.

Principal Brown indicated there needs to be understanding of students who have not learned well in the past. Brown said, “. . . kids who aren't prepared or have big gaps and things like that.” Brown added,

We have kids . . . they're so far advanced that the traditional brick and mortar is holding them back. So we have those kids. We have a lot of kids who are bullied. We have a lot of kids who have social anxiety. We have a lot of kids who have gender issues, who don't fit in the regular school because they're bullied. And it's a perfect example, it's a perfect model for those.

Principal Jones said, “We just have a lot of different situations, a lot of different scenarios and why they come to us.” Jones continued,

Know the setting and know the culture of your school along with your students. Because we get a lot of students for many different reasons. We have ones that are really advanced and want to work at their own pace so that they can get done with a grade level and then move on to the next grade level in the self-paced class. But we also get those students that come to us with attendance issues and then they have attendance issues here. And then they also come to us because they've been in trouble with the previous school. Whether its brick and mortar or it's another cyber school or another charter school because we get some of those that transfer in. So just knowing those students and knowing how to work with them.

Principal Davis said, “If you went to all of those kids and asked them why you are here, they are probably going to give you a different answer, each and every one of them. And

a lot of those answers are heartbreaking.” Davis noted, “there’s about ten thousand kids here [and] they’re here for about ten thousand different reasons, you can’t ever forget that.” Davis further explained,

There are so many times where I realize, as a principal, this kid isn’t doing their work; they’re not here. This is not a good fit for them and it would be so easy to say, that’s it, try to kick them out or try to alienate them or try to remove them, but that’s not an option. Those kids are here for a reason whether they were bullied, whether for finance reasons, they don’t have the money to have nice clothes, or they’re picked on, or they’re here because they couldn’t practice their religion the way they would want in school. They’re here for those reasons.

Principal Thomas added,

We get a lot of kids who have been told to withdraw before expulsion at traditional schools. That have emotional disturbance or that have things like that and the school has essentially said, we can’t handle you, we don’t have the services, so go find something else.

Principal Martin said,

You know, kids are coming here because of social issues, because of bullying in school and we are trying to create a unique environment for them. So having a little bit of compassion of what may have led them here is different. We experience a lot of kids that, whatever their unique need is . . . Being a cyber school principal, you don’t see that kid every day. So trying to find out what is going on with that kid is a lot more challenging for me than it would be in a brick and mortar.

Management

Management, a task-oriented theme, was discovered during the interview process. The term “management” encompasses different tasks that include subthemes of: time, traveling, meetings, resources, academic accountability, maintenance, student issues, customer service, data, and personnel issues.

Time

Time management is a significant aspect of being a cyber school principal. Knowing how to schedule your time appropriately at work and at home is crucial to being successful. Cyber school principals indicated that the cyber principal role can easily take over one’s life because of the connected nature of the position. Principal Smith said that in the cyber school principal position, “everything is sort of on-demand.” Smith continued,

The demand in a cyber world tends to be far more 24-7 . . . There’s sort of that sense of urgency. Everything is an emergency. That doesn’t seem to exist in traditional schools. . . I don’t feel like our clocks ever turn off here. . . you have to be able to balance. You have to set clear parameters. You have to say, this is my home time, this is my family time. Because if you don’t, it will run your life.

Principal Rodriguez spoke of time management, “The afternoons and the evenings are spent corresponding with the mentor teachers.” Rodriguez spoke of time spent with students,

I had a student that called last night at 11:00 p.m. at night on my cell phone. So you can’t be that person that at 3:00 p.m., your job is done. In a cyber environment, to be exemplary, it’s a 24/7 job. You’re connected constantly.

Principal Martinez referenced time management skills, “And so I’m tutoring this kid online at 9:00 p.m. at night with my kids all around me. So, that had been awhile since I was doing that, and so it was nice just as a reminder.” Principal Thomas added,

I routinely have to work at night. I’m going to say probably 2 to 3 hours a night, every night, and on the weekends to just be able to make due. Because everything I need to do during the day, dealing with other stuff, calling customer support, doing stuff like that, responding to Google Chats. So I’m just not able to get done what I have to get done.

Principal Martin brought up time management, “You got to be willing to put in the hours. And, and it’s a lot of hours.” Martin said,

Balance home life and balancing work and home life. Because the atmosphere is flexible, and I make this joke a lot of times. When you’re in a brick and mortar, if I got a memo that I leave at the office, I’m not going back to the office to get it once I go home. But because it’s on a computer, I have access to that 24/7 so I can’t say, I forgot it at the office. So balancing and learning when to walk away from the computer. When to put it down. Emails come at all times of the night. Because our management company is national, we have people out in California that are working out there and I could get an email at a different time. Try to balance that work life and put it down. And not that it’s any easier for a brick and mortar, you’re always constantly thinking about what it is that you can do for your kids and what you can do for your students. But when I can open up a computer and have access to the same stuff that I can have access to when I go into work the next day, it gets a little bit challenging to put it down.

Travel

Traveling is a significant aspect of being a cyber school principal. Although the students do not have to attend a brick and mortar setting, principals often find themselves traveling all over the state for meetings or home visits. Principal Davis said that in their company, “We have offices . . . all across the state. So I guess you [have] to be willing to travel.” Principal Rodriguez said, “I will probably do at least one or two home visits before I get into the office.” Principal Wilson said, “I get out around the state quite a bit . . .” Principal Anderson said, “Yesterday was a bit different in that I had to travel . . . to make sure that the testing logistics were all worked out for Keystone exams.”

Meetings

Meetings are important in any setting. To make up for the fact that employees are often working from a distance, frequent meetings are held to maintain structure in the school. It is not uncommon for principals to have multiple standing meetings every day. Principal Johnson said, “So a lot of my week is that I’m at meetings with the teams . . . A normal day is probably an hour or two of meetings to start off the day with the departments and the grade level teams.” Principal Williams spoke of meetings, a day consists of “Meeting with parents on a regular basis to discuss the role of, of school and their child’s education” and “Typically during a day I will have a couple IEP meetings that are scheduled so I have to act as the LEA on some IEP meetings.” Principal Jones said, “I’ve actually been meeting with teachers just to see how the year is going because we have teachers that work off-site.” Principal Wilson added,

So I’m usually in some type of IEP meeting, some type of senior leadership type meeting may take place, a meeting with my leadership team, [meetings with

people over me], [and leaders under me], my assistant principal, my coaches, I may be in and or attend department meetings.

Principal Martinez said,

Then I come in and get online and typically [have] either...a standup or an online meeting . . . Department meetings, Friday's all school [meetings]. The other times I'm going into the main meetings. And then I have my scheduling meetings.

Principal Anderson said,

I also hold weekly data meetings with each of my staff members. So they're touching base with me and we're looking at the data and the instructional program and how can we tweak this and what needs to happen here.

Principal Thomas indicated that their cyber school has "...weekly staff meetings with all staff. I have weekly instructional meetings with all teachers who are also in the staffing meetings . . . And then we have weekly leadership meetings." Principal Hernandez said,

So I tend to be moving a lot from one meeting to the next. Where I have a guidance team meeting. I meet with the guidance leadership team . . . there's a senior leadership meeting where all of the principals in the school, we get together for a few hours going through, looking at data. We have a high school leadership meeting in which the principals at the high school level get together and we specifically look at some of the data that relates to that.

Principal Harris said,

Quite often we have meetings throughout the day as administrators. Whether it's looking at data. The meetings that we have going on right now, that we're having

once a week is our PVAAS (Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System) reporting meetings that we're trying to figure out how we're splitting up the percentages, students, things of that nature. Trying to figure out how we're going to do that in the cyber world.

Resources

Resources are central to leading a cyber school. Knowing how to provide appropriate support to students from hundreds of miles away is a critical task. Frequent contact and involvement with outside agencies and traditional schools is common. Principal Rodriguez indicated that cyber school principals “. . . spend a lot of time with outside agencies trying to bring those agencies into the home.” Principal Wilson spoke to the nature of needing this type of resource, “The phone could ring right now and I could have a suicide, a significant suicide attempt across the state and I have to coordinate services to that student.” Principal Anderson said,

We see things and hear things on webcam that we definitely have to make sure are reported and taken care of . . . We have to become very well acquainted with agencies across the state, where a local traditional school principal might only be familiar with their local agencies.

Academic Accountability

Academic accountability is a daily occurrence for cyber school principals. Principals will check lessons, observe classes, and engage in asynchronous review on a daily basis. This is typically done much differently than in traditional schools. All of the aforementioned academic accountability processes are accomplished virtually. Principal Smith said academic accountability was actually a focus of their school this year, “we

also increased teacher accountability tremendously this year. So where they used to share a lot of lesson plans, we said, you need to be developing your own plans for your own students, for your own groups.” Principal Johnson said that in their school, principals . . . focus on the day-to-day that involves, the teachers and their ability to work with the students. So most of it is sort of what you would expect, general supervisory . . . [is] everybody coming to work and oh, you need a sick day, ok and I’ll get coverage for you if you have that. So we look at lesson plans, we go through their meeting agendas, we attend their meetings because they meet both as departments and as grade level cohorts.

Principal Johnson said, “and they [teachers] have to be held accountable as well. So there’s observations and the evaluations and all of that that has to get done.” Principal Brown said, “We focus more on instruction than anywhere I’ve ever been. And I have been around.” Principal Jones added, “Making sure that we have standards and eligible content aligned in our lesson plans” and “just to see how everything is going with their action plan and seeing if there is anything else that they need to help them or if they need to adapt it or adjust it a little bit.” Principal Davis said that his academic accountability procedures include,

Going over their lesson plans with them, making sure they are planning together, working as teams, and coming up with their lesson plans . . . I review all their lesson plans, all their Powerpoints, and then on the managerial side of what I do here, it is making sure people come in on time, making sure people are doing what they need to do. They submit the right things at the right time, working with an evaluation.

Principal Davis said, “And most of my days, I try to spend the bulk of my time, with my headset on, in class. Watching them [teachers], listening to playbacks, and watching the live instruction, whether it is blended or virtual.” Principal Anderson said, “I also am the one that visits their classroom and provides feedback on how they’re doing.” Principal Thomas said that one thing that is beneficial in the cyber world is, “the beautiful, beautiful thing is that every single class is recorded.” This accountability measure seems to be universal in the cyber world. Principal Harris stated,

I’ll tell you where it’s different and it’s easier in the cyber world. Whenever there is a complaint from a parent, something a teacher is being accused of doing, we’re able to go in and watch a playback, watch a recording. Every one of our classes is recorded. So what’s easier is when a parent complains Mr. so and so has done this, I can say, “Well what day and time did this occur?” They tell me, I go and watch the video. A lot of times, it’s not the way the parent said, and then I can support and validate what the teacher has done, and I can call the parent back and say, “I’ve watched this recording, and that’s not the way it went, this is how it went.” And what’s nice about that too is, I can have that parent watch the playback with me. Because through their child’s classes, they can watch a recording. So they can go back and watch the same class I’m watching. So, I can support a teacher that way.

Principal Harris also said that academic accountability is maintained by “doing walk throughs . . . seeing what teachers are doing and then giving them positive feedback. Validating some of the things that they are doing.”

Maintenance

Cyber school principals are responsible for maintaining their school. In a cyber environment, this mainly refers to making sure the servers are running, teachers are teaching, and materials are where they need to be. Principals maintain teacher absentee reports and are responsible for daily work load. Principals are also responsible for making sure the technical aspects of their school are running. Internet outages affect cyber school principals much like snow days affect traditional schools. The principals are also responsible for the students having the necessary materials at home to connect and learn. Principal William said, "I mean it could be system outages that wipe out everybody's stuff. You could have accidental system issues that do wipe out teacher's classes for the day or student stuff." Principal Rodriguez said, "So my role as a school leader...it's to be sure that the students are accessing the curriculum and that they don't have that issue with accessing the curriculum . . . " Principal Wilson said one of the biggest maintenance issues is,

Technology and its reliability. If our systems go down, it's the equivalent of everyone showing up to school and the doors are locked or the power's out and there's no heat. If my software crashes or can't be accessed, that means my students can't go to school that day...we are ruled right now by certain system limitations.

Principal Anderson said,

The first thing that comes to mind is technology. It's great when it works and it's a bear when it doesn't. And having enough foresight to have a back-up plan. So

if it doesn't work, there's minimal impact on the learning that's going on that day.

So I would say that's the most difficult aspect of it, is the technology piece.

Principal Thomas supported the technology maintenance issue,

Unfortunately, a lot of my day is reactive. People call me, this happened at. That guy out there, I know he wants to talk to me about attendance because there's a glitch in the system. Our [computer system] is out right now, so the teachers can't log onto live lesson. There's always stuff like that.

Principal Jackson agreed, "I think that [what] makes the job difficult is that we can be plagued with technological problems. And so if the internet goes down...I could have a lot of angry parents at this point." Principal Thompson said,

Technology not working is another thing that frustrates me. If one of our online textbooks doesn't work, that's a big deal. Whereas at a brick and mortar setting, you might be able to do something else, we post all of our lessons ahead of time. So if something's not working, it can cause quite a bit of problem solving until we get a solution in hand.

Principal White said, "I'm outside with my maintenance guy making sure that the service is done on my . . . generators because that server farm needs to keep running so kids can log in..."

Student Issues

Student issues do arise in the cyber environment and, much like in the traditional school, cyber school principals are responsible for taking care of these issues. Principals acknowledge, however, that it is different. Truancy is handled the same way, but monitored by work completed or log-ins. Discipline focuses mainly on virtual issues, but

can easily turn into the same type of problems that traditional schools face. Materials recovery or asset management is also very important in the cyber environment. Often, principals will have to find a way to recover thousands of dollars of computer equipment from students.

Student discipline seems to be the main issue that principals deal with when discussing student issues. Principal Johnson compared cyber schools to traditional schools, “We have the same issues with bullying and computer issues.” Principal Williams agreed, “Students kind of remain the same [discipline wise], it’s just a different kind of medium of going to get him” and “We deal with your typical, students said a bad word in class, the student typed a bad word in class, or this boy is picking on this girl. I deal with a lot of that type of stuff that goes on as well.” Principal Anderson explained discipline in the cyber setting,

One of the things that often comes to mind is student discipline. People think that because you’re in a cyber world, you don’t have student discipline. But we actually live in a technological age and I’m sure that what the principals are looking at on cell phones and that kind of thing are very much the same types of things that we are dealing with even in the cyber world.

Principal Tayler said, “We do have discipline issues, they’re just different discipline issues then you may have in a brick and mortar school.” Principal Harris said, “I still have issues with behaviors. Plagiarism is big here. So I’m often dealing with plagiarism issues.” Principal Martin said that discipline problems can actually be worse in a cyber school because traditional schools do not,

“have to worry about a student that’s posting inappropriate comments on the web or stalking someone on the web or cyber bullying or things like that. They have to worry about it a little bit, but not as prevalent as we might [have to worry about it] here.

Principal Martinez said, “We get a lot of cyber, the cyber bullying is tough, you know?

We have instant messenger and I have revoked so many kids, it’s not even funny.”

Interestingly, some principals said that discipline was not a big part of the day-to-day job as a principal in this setting. Principal Thompson said, “I don’t have to deal with that much discipline. We do have to deal with some and some of its extreme, but it’s not a daily part of my life.”

A second area of student issues deal with attendance keeping in the cyber environment. Principals admitted that attendance issues in the cyber setting are sometimes very difficult to deal with. Principal Jones said, “Attendance is a big one, trying to get kid to come to class, complete their work. If they’re not doing that, trying to figure out why. So, we deal with attendance [issues].” Principal Davis said,

A lot of my time is still spent looking at attendance data. My dean and I work a lot viewing our attendance reports, so a lot of my day is looking at my attendance reports and coming up with plans on how I can reach those kids.

Principal Tayler also spoke of truancy issues in school,

I am in charge of all of our truancy and that can be a very time consuming role in the cyber setting because as far as we are concerned, our truancy, our attendance is based on work submitted. So it’s not just logging into school, but we actually

go through the students logs to say, "when was the last time you submitted work?"

The final area of student issues deal with material recovery from instances of theft. Principal Thomas said,

Kids walk off with our laptops, kids move back to [outside of the United States] and don't tell us and take their laptop. Things like that. So the costs associated with it are not inconsequential. There's also a lot more tracking/monitoring on the back end that you need to do.

Principal White said,

". . . we keep abreast of local technology fairs and areas that resell equipment because sometimes our students will harvest out parts and pieces of our equipment and sell them. And we try to recover that stuff. It's asset maintenance and things like that.

Customer Service

Customer service is a key role for many cyber school principals. Students leave traditional schools for a reason. Often they are looking for something different that's tailored to their learning style. To attract and retain students, principals need to be prepared to make sure the customer is satisfied with their learning. Principal Davis spoke about the importance of customer service saying,

. . . [It] is to provide a high level of customer service. I realize that my cyber school world exists because students and their parents have chosen to come here. They choose to come here, we are a choice. And one of the reasons why they choose to come here is they felt for one reason or another, something was lacking

at their brick and mortar world. And a lot of times those schools have a much higher student achievement profile than we do. So that's what's left, it's the customer service.

Principal Davis said, “. . . In the back of my head always remember and think, provide a good level of customer service to those families, to those students, to my teachers, to my co-workers, so that hopefully, I keep getting to do it.” Principal Rodriguez said, “You know, we're a business and we're all about customer service and pleasing the client . . .” Rodriguez said,

But I think educating that student and making the parents and the students, I don't want to use the word happy because again you can't make everybody happy, but providing that appropriate service to them and making sure that it's working out for them and if it's not working out for them, what can I do to fix it for you, you know?

Principal Thompson said, “But we always have to keep that customer service aspect in mind and making sure that like our expectations are reasonable.”

Data

Data Management is a vital role of the cyber school principal. Data is a large part of education in modern times, but even more so in the cyber environment. This is caused both by self-induced pressure to achieve at a high level and societal pressure that assumes cyber entities are naturally more technically/data driven. Principal Smith said, “Any principal is going to be focused on data and how you can use data to drive instruction.” Smith said, “So it's analyzing a lot of data to see what we have done. What's working, what's not working? How can we improve?” Principal Williams said,

So we do a lot of data digging. You have to be able to really look through data. And I always worry when it comes down to data because with data you can make it say whatever you want it to say. So you have to be really careful to stand back and look at it without letting yourself influence what you're seeing. And make your decision based on that.

Principal Lee said the principal role in the cyber setting is to be “data manager and disseminator of data and facilitator of data discussions.” Principal Davis said,

But now looking at the data, because this school we've always had a lot of access to data. In the cyber world, we're data people. We have a lot of . . . everything is recorded online and if you look, there's numbers on it somewhere. Well we finally make that transition to catch up with the brick and mortar principals of we're looking at the data and we're using it to design instruction to increase student achievement.

Principal Rodriguez said, “The amount of technology and data that I'm working with and, at the numbers that I'm working with, has really allowed me to apply and develop a whole different skill set.” Principal Martinez said, “We do a lot of data, everybody's doing data, but technologically, I think we probably utilize technology a bit more, just because we have to.” Principal Thomas said, “There's a lot of data. Every school should be using data, but there's a lot of informal data that happens in [traditional] schools that's easier. There's more digging to find that the kid's disengaged [here].” Principal Hernandez said they are, “constantly digging into, diving into data and seeing what the data has to say to direct what type of initiatives we feel we need to focus on.” Hernandez

stated, “So we trying to constantly look at the data that we have and figure out, how in the world can we help these students?” Principal Jackson said,

We look at a lot of data . . . So we’re looking at data to see if we’re making improvements. Whether we’re using diagnostic tests or where they’re looking at failure rates or how classroom performance is going . . . Then they’re [saying] this is the data that they collected or they’re telling us what/how we’re doing. So we’re kind of tracking it along the way.

Principal Thompson indicated a need for data in the cyber setting, but also a joy of exploring data,

I’m also obsessed with data. That’s what I was doing before you came in. We have a really transient population here, so trying to make sure we have accurate data and the teachers can see the fruits of their labor are difficult in this environment. So, trying to get accurate data...this is the first year we’ve actually had data to look at.

Personnel Issues

Personnel issues are an area that cyber school principals engage in on a regular basis. Principals are frequently leading the hiring or releasing process for staff members. Principals are also the main position that is completing evaluations of teachers. Principal Johnson addressed the evaluation of teachers, “and they [teachers] have to be held accountable as well. So there’s observations and the evaluations and all of that has to get done.” Along with the evaluation process comes the need to terminate teachers if not performing well. Cyber principals acknowledge their role in the hiring and terminating process. Principal Garcia participated in “. . . [hundreds of] interviews for teachers.”

Principal Wilson and Martinez, on the other hand, mentioned that they let go of multiple teachers this year.

CHAPTER 6

LEADERSHIP PRACTICES INVENTORY - SELF

Using the methods described in Chapter 3, the survey administered to the participants were analyzed and reviewed for statistical information. Table 3 shows the results of the *Leadership Practices Inventory – Self* given to all participants. Each Leadership Practice had six Likert-type questions associated with it valued at 1-10. Each Leadership Practice could have a lowest value of 6 and a highest value of 60.

Leadership Practice	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Modeling the Way	52.45	1.16
Inspiring a Shared Vision	50.85	1.31
Challenging the Process	51.1	1.45
Enabling Others to Act	53.7	1.05
Encouraging the Heart	50.3	1.58

The information was used to better understand the attributes of the principal in the cyber school setting. The quantitative data, along with the themes from the interviews were used to provide a well-rounded and supported view of the cyber school principal position and role. The combination of quantitative data with qualitative data provides a better overall picture of the role of the cyber school principal in this case study. According to the survey, principals achieved an average of greater than 50/60 points in all areas of the *Leadership Practices Inventory – Self*. The overall standard deviation was

less than 2.00 for each statistical category. The areas of measurement for this survey included: *Modeling the Way*, *Inspiring a Shared Vision*, *Challenging the Process*, *Enabling Others to Act*, and *Encouraging the Heart*. The research indicated that all five leadership practices were evident in the role of the principal in cyber schools.

Model the Way

Participants ranked themselves at a combined overall average score of 52.45 in the leadership practice of *Model the Way*. The standard deviation was 1.16. *Model the Way* is a practice that entails participants clarify their values and set the example for their staff. Scoring high in this practice implies participants displayed skills in the two aforementioned areas. Kouzes and Posner (2007) described the idea of clarifying values in the following manner,

People admire most those who believe strongly in something, and who are willing to stand up for their beliefs. If anyone is ever to become a leader whom others would willingly follow, one certain prerequisite is that they must be someone of principle (p. 46).

Setting the example is the other area of emphasis for this practice and is described as,

Setting the example is all about execution. It's about putting your money where your mouth is. It's about practicing what you preach. It's about following through on commitments. It's about keeping promises. It's about walking the talk. It's about doing what you say. And because you're leading a group of people – not just leading yourself – it's also about what those who are following you are doing (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 75-76).

Inspire a Shared Vision

Participants ranked themselves at a combined overall average score of 50.85 in the leadership practice of *Inspire a Shared Vision*. The standard deviation was 1.31. *Inspire a Shared Vision* is a practice that entails participants being able to envision the future and enlist the help of others. Scoring high in this practice implies participants displayed skills in the two aforementioned areas. Being able to envision the future is described by Kouzes and Posner (2007) as,

Exemplary leaders are forward-looking. They are able to envision the future, to gaze across the horizon of time and imagine the greater opportunities to come. They see something out ahead, vague as it might appear from a distance, and they imagine that extraordinary feats are possible and that the ordinary could be transformed into something noble. They are able to develop an ideal and unique image of the future for the common good (p. 105).

Principals also enlist the help of others to achieve their goals. According to Kouzes and Posner (2007),

“We all need vast reserves of energy and excitement to sustain our commitment to a distant dream, and leaders are expected to be a major source of that energy. We are not going to follow someone who’s only mildly enthusiastic about something. They have to be wildly enthusiastic for us to give it our all (p. 132).

Challenge the Process

Participants ranked themselves at a combined overall average score of 51.1 in the leadership practice of *Challenge the Process*. The standard deviation was 1.45. *Challenge the Process* is a practice that entails participants search for opportunities and

experiment and take risks. Scoring high in this practice implies participants displayed skills in the two aforementioned areas. Kouzes and Posner (2007) stressed the idea of searching for opportunities,

It's quite clear that leaders must be innovators to navigate their organizations into and through the global economy. And the need to be innovative is by no means limited to a single company or country, time or place. Innovation pays off big time (p. 168).

The authors spoke of experimentation and risk taking in the following manner,

Nothing new and nothing great is achieved by doing things the way you've always done them. You have to test unproven strategies. You have to break out of the norms that box you in. You have to do the things you think you cannot. You have to venture beyond the limitations you normally place on yourselves. Getting extraordinary things done in organizations demands a willingness to experiment and take risks with innovative ideas (p. 191).

Enabling Others to Act

Participants ranked themselves at a combined overall average score of 53.7 in the leadership practice of *Enabling Others to Act*. The standard deviation was 1.05.

Enabling Others to Act is a practice that requires participants to foster collaboration and strengthen others. Scoring high in this practice implies participants displayed skills in the two aforementioned areas. The idea of fostering collaboration is described by Kouzes and Posner (2007) as,

Leadership is not a solo act, it's a team effort. In the thousands of cases we've studied, we've yet to encounter a single example of extraordinary achievement

that's occurred without the active involvement and support of many people.

When talking about their personal bests, people spoke passionately about teamwork and cooperation as the interpersonal route to success, particularly when conditions were extremely challenging and urgent (p. 223).

Strengthening others is described as,

...Exemplary leaders strengthen others. They enable others to take ownership of and responsibility for their group's success by enhancing their competence and their confidence in their abilities, by listening to their ideas and acting upon them, by involving them in important decisions, and by acknowledging and giving credit for their contributions (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 250).

Encouraging the Heart

Participants ranked themselves at a combined overall average score of 50.3 in the leadership practice of *Encouraging the Heart*. The standard deviation was 1.58.

Encouraging the Heart is a practice that entails participants recognize contributions made and celebrate the values and victories of the organization. Scoring high in this practice implies participants displayed skills in the two aforementioned areas. Kouzes and Posner (2007) described the idea of recognizing contributions,

Recognition is about acknowledging good results and reinforcing positive performance. It's about shaping an environment in which everyone's contributions are noticed and appreciated... [People] need emotional fuel to replenish their spirits. They need the will to continue and the courage to do something they have never done before and to continue with the journey (p. 281).

Kouzes and Posner (2007) described the subcategory of celebrating the values and victories of the organization in the following way, “By bringing people together, sharing the lessons from success, and getting personally involved, leaders reinforce in others the courage required to get extraordinary things done” (p. 309).

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Findings

The study was designed to contribute to the understanding of a specific role in the field of education. The purpose of this embedded mixed-methods study was to describe the role of the principal in the cyber school setting. Although the combination of cyber schooling and the principalship was established in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in 2002, the role is still unknown to many. Misunderstanding exists in the public at large, evidenced by one participant saying, “Community members from where I live and my father...and even my wife [ask]...Why does a cyber school need a principal?” Misunderstanding also exists among the principals in the cyber position as well, supported by one participant who said,

It’s [cyber schooling] so brand new. Everything we’re doing here and everything I talk about and when I give presentations, everyone wants to hear because there’s nothing out there. I’m really going to read your report [because] there’s nothing out there on us, there’s nothing out there on what cyber schools do and there’s even less out there on what cyber schools are capable of doing, which is almost unmeasurable.

With little being known or documented about the role of the principal in the cyber school setting, I focused on the central question: What is the role of the cyber school principal?

Research questions addressed were:

1. What are the tasks of the cyber school principals?
2. What are the common traits of the cyber school principals?

3. What are the attributes of the cyber school principals?

What are the tasks of the cyber school principals?

Cyber school principals have daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly tasks that they engage in for their school's proper functioning. By admission and omission, the principals described some of the tasks.

Cyber school principals need to have excellent communication skills. Communication is vital and occurs frequently. In a cyber environment, stakeholders expect to receive feedback immediately. The principal must assume that individuals expect prompt, clear, and consistent communications.

Cyber school principals must be actively engaged in training their staff. Principals, teachers, and consumers are often new to the field of cyber education. The point of engagement, however, is usually the first step in a long path of understanding of cyber education. Teachers need to be mentored on best teaching practices, students need to be mentored on best learning practices, and families need to be mentored on best support practices in an online environment. The principal must be the lead in training these groups to be successful.

Cyber school principals are tasked with planning for the future. Principals are at the forefront of the cyber school movement. Planning is critical to maintaining a healthy school environment. Planning for the end of the week, planning for the end of the year, and planning for the distant future must be given constant attention.

Cyber school principals need to find new ways to establish relationships with staff and students. Maintaining relationships leads to positive school climate. Cyber school principals must find ways to engage their stakeholder in new and innovative ways.

Cyber school principals must be willing to travel. Traveling is necessary due to the lack of face-to-face contact between the principals and the families, staff, and superiors. Traveling may occur on a daily and weekly basis.

Meetings are a constant aspect of the cyber school principal's work. Meetings provide the information needed both to lead the school and for decision making.

Academic accountability is vital in the cyber environment. According to the principals, however, this was not a function of being in a cyber institution, but a function of feeling the pressure to increase test scores every year. Principals implemented best practices to ensure that stakeholders were focused on the goal of educating students. The common accountability tasks of checking lesson plans, conducting observations, and enforcing the rules and regulations of the school were described as imperative tasks of a principal for increasing achievement.

Principals need to understand the vital role customer service plays in a cyber environment. There was a business-like mantra of "the customer is always right" from the participants. This task is central to cyber schooling, which provides a service for clients who are not pleased with the traditional model of schooling.

Data analysis is imperative for a successfully functioning cyber environment. Principals use technology to analyze student performance. In an environment where students are virtual, it is only natural to assign each student a number that will represent them in the data system used. Although each student is a distinct person, when the vast majority of interactions that occur happen through electronic means, there is no way to separate the individual from their digital print. Being able to analyze digital prints and

use that information to assist students in academic progress is a main function of the cyber school and its leader.

One task that is noteworthy, due to its omission, is the fact that no principal acknowledged that he/she handles the school's budget. This lack of budgetary oversight is worthy of mention because of the prevailing thought that principals handle their school's budget. Many participants acknowledged the idea of a budget for their school, but none admitted to having any control over that budget. This omitted task is critical because it helps to explain the ability of these principals to intensely focus on other areas.

**What are the common traits and attributes of the cyber school principals
(Combination)?**

Collaboration skills are essential attributes of the cyber school principal. The new, fast paced, unknown nature of the cyber institution lends itself well to working as a unit to achieve goals. Principals need to be able to work seamlessly with colleagues, teachers, and families. All rely on others for support and growth in this environment. A collaboratively-skilled individual is essential to keep all parties moving forward together.

A visionary mindset is an attribute of all cyber school principals. Principals in this environment are attempting to achieve goals that have sometimes never been achieved or even thought of before. Having the ability to envision the future of a school and guiding stakeholders to achieve that vision is an attribute of the cyber principal.

Empathy and understanding are attributes of the cyber school principal. There are reasons why students and families affiliate with cyber schools. Cutting ties with traditional education suggest that individuals may have had experiences that precipitated

the changes. Principals must strive to have empathetic and understanding of all stakeholders.

The final attribute is caring enough to give up one's own personal time. Cyber schools take place in an environment that participants indicated is not limited by time. The typical boundaries of an eight-hour day do not pertain to them because of their virtual accessibility. Principals in this study described being on-call rather than in an office. Answering the phone late at night and checking emails constantly were typical behaviors for these principals. These cyber principals gave their time for the benefit of the students, staff, and school.

Implications

In the study, I examined the role of the cyber school principal. Based on the findings of the study, the following implications are offered.

All principals will be affected by the continued growth of the cyber environment in the school setting. Although the principal will continue to be the instructional leader, a new focus will be attached to the principal's role as the cyber leader. Principals in the study indicated that schools are heading in the direction of the blended model of instruction. A blended model will demand that principals understand the tasks and attributes required in this environment.

Cyber schooling is a new frontier in the PK-12 school setting in the United States. Higher education institutions should note the emergence of the cyber schools in Pennsylvania. In these schools, the role of the principal has changed. Although the instructional leader component of the principalship is intact, the cyber component is new and emerging. Higher education institutions should consider the potential impact of

growth of the cyber environment as teachers and administrators are prepared for their educational roles.

There are implications for education governing bodies. From national to local government, standards are used to train, evaluate, and retain principals. These standards will have to be adjusted to reflect the principal position in the cyber environment. Adjustments will be necessary as well, as school districts move to blended models. In addition to updating standards, governing bodies at all levels, national, state, and local, will need to understand the roles of the cyber principal.

Recommendations

This study focused on the role of the cyber school principal in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The following recommendations for future research should be considered.

Due to the limited experience of the principals studied and the future outlook for principals moving to new positions, a follow-up study of cyber school principals should be conducted. Although the role of the principal may not change, new information may identify the cause of the low retention rate of the cyber principals.

This study was limited to cyber principals in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. A study of other cyber school principals would add to the knowledge base on this topic.

This study focused solely on the role of the principal in the cyber school through the lens of the principal. Superiors, subordinates, and clients of the cyber schools should be subjects of further studies of cyber schools. Their insights would contribute to a greater understanding of cyber schools and their success and challenges.

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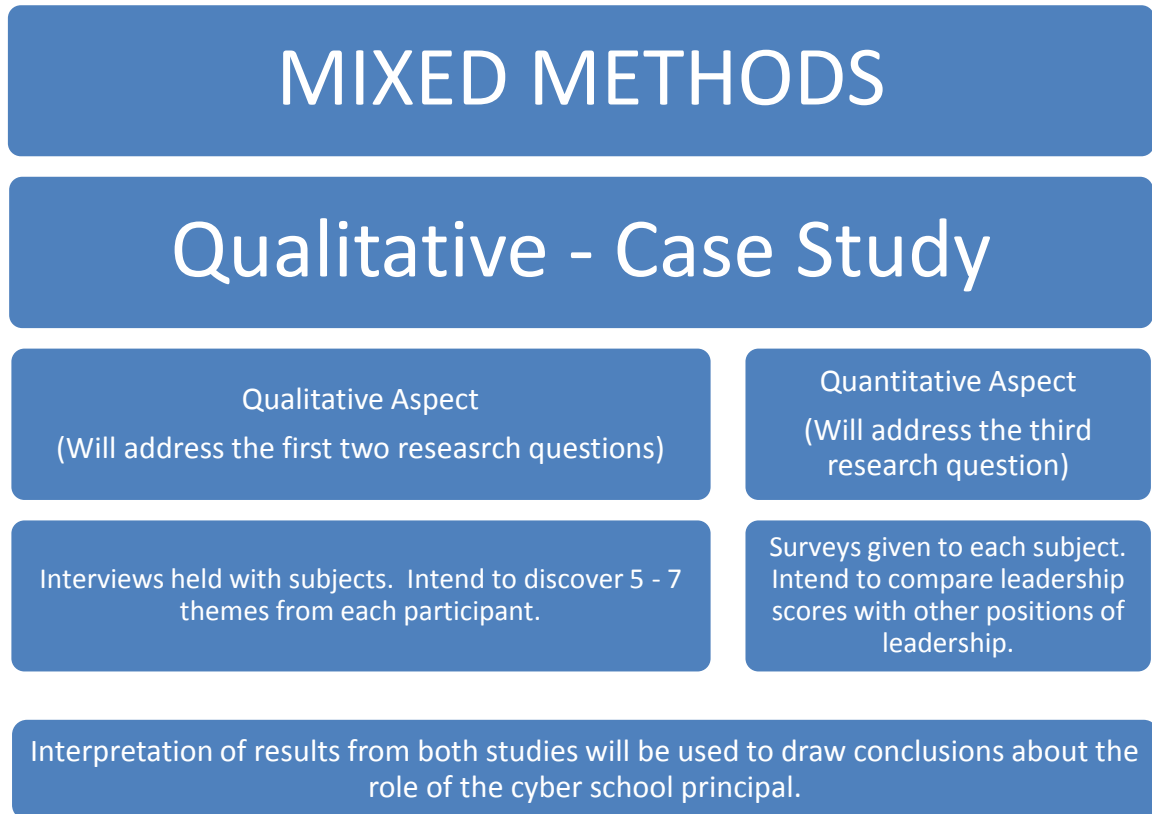
APPENDIX A: Visual Model of Specific Design Process

Figure 5. Visual model of the procedures for this study

APPENDIX B: Research Phone Call

Hello Principal (Name).

My name is Jacob Jefferis and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. My program of study is Educational Studies and my program advisor is Dr. Marilyn Grady. I am calling you today to ask for your assistance in completing my research. The focus of my dissertation is the role of the principal in the cyber school setting in Pennsylvania.

My research will primarily rely on interviews and surveys with cyber charter school principals in the state of Pennsylvania. I would consider it a privilege if you would consider granting me a one hour interview/survey time to discuss your views of cyber school leadership.

Cyber school principals have a very limited opportunity to make their voice heard and I believe that this is a great opportunity for you to help other principals and society understand the importance of your vital position.

Does this sound like something that might interest you?

→ YES

Great. I am excited about the opportunity to learn more about the cyber principal position through your experiences. Do you have any questions or concerns?

A discuss will then ensue regarding specific dates for the interview and survey to take place.

→ NO (Subject will be thanked for considering the process)

I look forward to our meeting on (insert agreed upon date and time). I appreciate your willingness to contribute to this body of knowledge. Please feel free to contact me at any time. The phone number is 724-355-9661. We will talk soon!

Again, thank you and have a good (Afternoon/Evening).

APPENDIX C: Reminder Email

Dear Principal (NAME),

Thank you again for taking the time to participate in a study that will result in a deeper understanding of your position as a cyber school principal. I am excited to hear your views of the position and better understand what you do and how you lead. Please find the below date, time, and location for our upcoming interview and survey administration.

Date: _____ Time: _____ Location:

Thank you again for your consideration and I look forward to our meeting!

Sincerely,

Jacob Jefferis

(724)-355-9661

APPENDIX D: Informed Consent Document

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

IRB #

Title:

The role of the cyber school principal in Pennsylvania.

Purpose of Research:

The purpose of this mixed methods study is to describe the role of cyber school principals in the state of Pennsylvania.

You must be 19 years of age or older and serve as a cyber school principal in Pennsylvania in order to participate in the study.

Procedures:

Participation in the study will require an interview that will last no longer than 45 minutes and a survey that will take no longer than 15 minutes. Participation will take place at the principal's school.

Benefits: The results of the study will be used to help cyber school principals, traditional principals, and the general public, understand the role of the cyber school principal.

Risks and/or Discomforts:

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained during this study that could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. Upon your acceptance of this agreement, you will receive a unique designation identifying any data associated with you. Researcher will audio record interviews and will transcribe those interviews upon completion. After transcription, researcher will preserve all audio recordings on password encrypted memory sticks. These data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the investigator's office and will only be seen by the investigator during the study and for seven years after the study is complete. The information obtained in this study may be published in a dissertation, in academic journals/articles or presented at academic meetings but these data will be anonymous.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. Alternatively, you may contact the investigator(s) at the phone numbers below. Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 to voice concerns about the research or if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant.

Freedom to Withdraw:

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska -Lincoln, or in any other way receive a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

I agree to be audio recorded during the interview.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study.

Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to review.

Signature of Participant:

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Name and Phone number of investigator(s)

Jacob P. Jefferis, M.S., Principal Investigator Office:

(724)355-9661

Marilyn Grady, Ph. D., Secondary Investigator Office:

(402)472-0974

APPENDIX E: Interview Protocol

THE ROLE OF THE CYBER SCHOOL PRINCIPAL IN PENNSYLVANIA

Interview Protocol #1

Name: _____ Date: _____

Organization _____

Title: _____

Location: _____

Introduction:

I want to thank you for taking the time to talk to me today. I will be recording and transcribing what we say today. It is important that the transcription be verbatim so that I do not paraphrase something you've said with an incorrect interpretation.

What I am interested in finding out in this study is the role of the principal in the cyber schools of Pennsylvania. I want to know your perspective, so please feel free to discuss your views. I may ask you some additional questions that you have not reviewed as we go along in order to clarify for me what you mean. Are you ready to start?

Research Question

Central Question:

What is the role of the cyber school principal?

Sub-Questions:

1. What are the tasks of the cyber school principals?
2. What are the common traits of the cyber school principals?
3. What are the attributes of the cyber school principals?

1. Please describe the personnel and management structure of your school.	O.C.
2. What is your role as a school leader?	O.C.
3. What was your path to becoming a cyber school principal? (your background)	O.C.
4. How do you think your career will progress in the future?	O.C.
5. What leadership traits does it take to successfully lead a cyber school?	O.C.
6. What is the most difficult part of being a cyber school principal?	O.C.
7. How do you measure personal performance as a principal?	O.C.
8. How are cyber school principals and traditional school principals different in terms of leadership?	O.C.

9. How would you describe yourself as a leader?	O.C.
10. What is the most reward aspect of your position as a cyber school principal?	
11. Please describe a typical day in your position?	O.C.
12. What is the chief goal of a cyber school administrator?	O.C.
13. What makes an exemplary cyber school principal?	O.C.
14. What advice would you give to aspiring cyber school principals?	O.C.
15. How do you lead a cyber school?	O.C.
16. Why is the principal position necessary at a cyber school?	O.C.

APPENDIX F: Letter to Explain Transcription Review Form

Principal (Name),

In an effort to best capture your feelings regarding the questions posed to you during our interview, I want to offer you the opportunity to review the transcriptions from our interview. This process will allow you, the participant, greater opportunity to express your thoughts. The purpose of this process is to further clarify your responses and/or give the researcher additional information that you believe is vital in understanding your role as a cyber school principal.

If you choose to engage in this aspect of the study, please sign the included *Transcription Review Form*.

When you have completed the transcription review process, please mail the *Transcript* and the *Transcript Review Form* documents back to the researcher using the attached, self-addressed, prepaid envelope.

If you choose not to engage in this aspect of the study, please mail back the unrevised *Transcript* document to the researcher using the attached, self-addressed, prepaid envelope.

If you have any questions or concerns with this aspect of the study, please feel free to contact Jacob Jefferis at (724)-355-9661 or Dr. Marilyn Grady at (402)472-0974

Sincerely,

Jacob P. Jefferis

APPENDIX G: Transcription Review Form

Principal (Name),

Thank you again for your participation in research that is exploring the Role of the Cyber School Principal in the State of Pennsylvania. Your insights are a vital component to the data that will be disseminated at the conclusion of the research.

As part of this process, could you please take a moment and review the included transcript of our interview together. The purpose of this process is to further clarify your responses and/or give the researcher additional information that you believe is vital. These remarks can be made directly on the transcript itself.

Once completed, please check and sign below and return the transcript and this transcript review form to the researcher.

_____ : I have made adjustments that I felt were necessary on the provided transcript.

_____ : No adjustments were necessary.

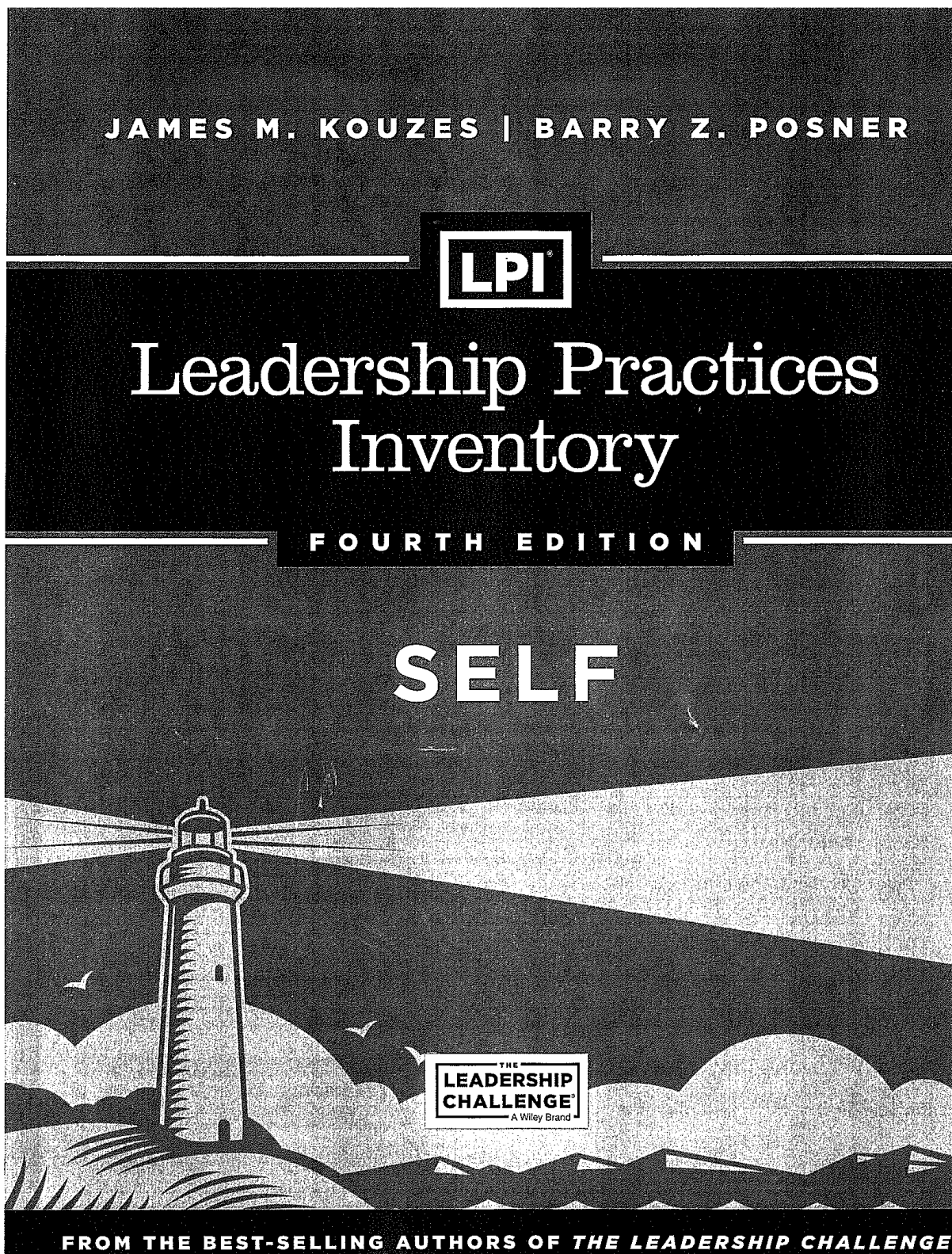
Signature: _____ Date: _____

Thank you again for your assistance in this process.

Sincerely,

Jacob P. Jefferis

APPENDIX H: Survey Protocol



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BY JAMES M. KOUZES & BARRY Z. POSNER

INSTRUCTIONS

Write your name in the space provided at the top of the next page. Below your name, you will find thirty statements describing various leadership behaviors. Please read each statement carefully, and using the rating scale below, ask yourself:

“How frequently do I engage in the behavior described?”

- Be realistic about the extent to which you actually engage in the behavior.
- Be as honest and accurate as you can be.
- DO NOT answer in terms of how you would like to behave or in terms of how you think you should behave.
- DO answer in terms of how you typically behave on most days, on most projects, and with most people.
- Be thoughtful about your responses. For example, giving yourself 10s on all items is most likely not an accurate description of your behavior. Similarly, giving yourself all 1s or all 5s is most likely not an accurate description either. Most people will do some things more or less often than they do other things.
- If you feel that a statement does not apply to you, it's probably because you don't frequently engage in the behavior. In that case, assign a rating of 3 or lower.

For each statement, decide on a response and then record the corresponding number in the box to the right of the statement. After you have responded to all thirty statements, go back through the LPI one more time to make sure you have responded to each statement. *Every* statement *must* have a rating.

The Rating Scale runs from 1 to 10. Choose the number that best applies to each statement.

RATING SCALE	1-Almost Never	3-Seldom	5-Occasionally	7-Fairly Often	9-Very Frequently
	2-Rarely	4-Once in a While	6-Sometimes	8-Usually	10-Almost Always

When you have completed the LPI-Self, please return it to:

Thank you.

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LPI: LEADERSHIP PRACTICES INVENTORY SELF

Your name: _____

To what extent do you engage in the following behaviors? Choose the response number that best applies to each statement and record it in the box to the right of that statement.

1. I set a personal example of what I expect of others.	<input type="text"/>
2. I talk about future trends that will influence how our work gets done.	<input type="text"/>
3. I seek out challenging opportunities that test my own skills and abilities.	<input type="text"/>
4. I develop cooperative relationships among the people I work with.	<input type="text"/>
5. I praise people for a job well done.	<input type="text"/>
6. I spend time and energy making certain that the people I work with adhere to the principles and standards we have agreed on.	<input type="text"/>
7. I describe a compelling image of what our future could be like.	<input type="text"/>
8. I challenge people to try out new and innovative ways to do their work.	<input type="text"/>
9. I actively listen to diverse points of view.	<input type="text"/>
10. I make it a point to let people know about my confidence in their abilities.	<input type="text"/>
11. I follow through on the promises and commitments that I make.	<input type="text"/>
12. I appeal to others to share an exciting dream of the future.	<input type="text"/>
13. I search outside the formal boundaries of my organization for innovative ways to improve what we do.	<input type="text"/>
14. I treat others with dignity and respect.	<input type="text"/>
15. I make sure that people are creatively rewarded for their contributions to the success of our projects.	<input type="text"/>
16. I ask for feedback on how my actions affect other people's performance.	<input type="text"/>
17. I show others how their long-term interests can be realized by enlisting in a common vision.	<input type="text"/>
18. I ask "What can we learn?" when things don't go as expected.	<input type="text"/>
19. I support the decisions that people make on their own.	<input type="text"/>
20. I publicly recognize people who exemplify commitment to shared values.	<input type="text"/>
21. I build consensus around a common set of values for running our organization.	<input type="text"/>
22. I paint the "big picture" of what we aspire to accomplish.	<input type="text"/>
23. I make certain that we set achievable goals, make concrete plans, and establish measurable milestones for the projects and programs that we work on.	<input type="text"/>
24. I give people a great deal of freedom and choice in deciding how to do their work.	<input type="text"/>
25. I find ways to celebrate accomplishments.	<input type="text"/>
26. I am clear about my philosophy of leadership.	<input type="text"/>
27. I speak with genuine conviction about the higher meaning and purpose of our work.	<input type="text"/>
28. I experiment and take risks, even when there is a chance of failure.	<input type="text"/>
29. I ensure that people grow in their jobs by learning new skills and developing themselves.	<input type="text"/>
30. I give the members of the team lots of appreciation and support for their contributions.	<input type="text"/>

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APPENDIX I: Permission for use of LPI

June 20, 2014

Jacob Jefferis
610 Spring Street
Grove City, PA 16127

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Best wishes for every success with your research project.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ellen Peterson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Ellen Peterson
Permissions Editor
Epeterson4@gmail.com