

HOW VIRTUAL ADMINISTRATOR BEHAVIORS IMPACT INSTRUCTION:

A CASE STUDY

by

Tamra Lanning

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this case study is to present an in-depth understanding of virtual teachers' perceptions of how virtual school administrators' instructional leadership behaviors impact instruction. The theory guiding this study is Haim Ginott's theory of congruent communication (Ginott, 1965, 1972). Ginott (1972) described congruent communication as harmonious and authentic, where words match the feelings. Virtual school administrators and teachers must rely heavily on communication to accomplish goals. How virtual school administrators relay expectations, criticism, and praise will impact teacher instruction. The experiences associated with teachers and administrators in brick and mortar schools will serve as a framework for discussion about the gap that exists in the literature concerning this issue in virtual schools. Data will be collected through virtual individual interviews, virtual focus group interviews, and documents. Data collected will be analyzed for common themes that transcend the cases (Yin, 2009). The data analysis will allow for conclusions to be drawn about the overall meaning resulting from the case study and general lessons that can be learned (Creswell, 2013).

Keywords: instructional leadership, virtual administrator, virtual education, virtual teacher.

Dedication

This paper is dedicated to my husband, Jeff, and our children, Mackenzie, Emily, and Tucker. My husband has been my greatest source of encouragement, cheering me on during the times I did not think I would make it through. His constant belief in my ability to do this spurred me on more than he will ever understand. Our children gave me the space I needed to work, left notes of encouragement, and picked me up during some of the toughest times. I love you all more than you will ever know.

None of this would have been possible without Jesus Christ and His relentless love, guidance, and sustainability throughout my life. I am forever thankful for the multitude of blessings He has bestowed on my life.

This paper is also devoted to the educators who are passionately paving the way for online education in order to serve the many students who benefit from this form of education. You are often undervalued and always overworked. I consider myself extraordinarily blessed to have worked with so many educators who have truly taught me what it means to be a teacher. You are all my heroes.

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List of Abbreviations

Tennessee Virtual Academy (TNVA)

Response to Intervention (RtI)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

In present times, the role of school administrators has transitioned to include instructional leadership responsibilities. “Instructional leadership seeks to improve the most powerful school-based determinants of student achievement—namely, the quality of teaching and the curriculum” (Hattie, 2009, p. 68). School administrators spend their days on a variety of tasks including, but not limited to, administrative tasks, disciplinary tasks, and evaluative tasks. In their research, May and Supovitz (2011) found that some principals lead instructional change through broad leadership activities aimed at the entire staff, while others lead instructional change through targeted leadership activities with teachers. Teachers have reported that engaging in targeted activities in relation to improving instruction with their administrators led to higher change in instructional practices throughout the year (May & Supovitz, 2011).

At the same time these leadership responsibilities are changing, the very face of education is changing. In an attempt to meet the demands of society, technology is at the forefront of this change. Virtual schools can be found in all 50 states across the country (Kennedy & Archambault 2012). In 2014, there were an estimated 263,700 students enrolled in full online virtual schools (Molnar, 2015). These schools require teachers and administrators to operate them. Unfortunately, virtual administrators enter virtual leadership ill-prepared to tackle the unique challenges of virtual instruction (LaFrance & Beck, 2013). If virtual school leader and teacher relationships are in fact comparative to brick and mortar, then the relationship between teacher and administrator will impact instruction (Goddard, Goddard, Sook, & Miller,

2015). It is imperative, then, to determine how specific behaviors of virtual school administrators impact the virtual teacher's instruction.

The first chapter of the present study introduces important research that grounds the study. The research shared discusses the impact of school administrators on school effectiveness. Chapter one also describes findings in research on how teachers perceive the actions of their administrators' and how these actions impact them and their students. The subsections in this chapter include the background of the study, which will discuss the historical, social, and theoretical contexts of the problem. The situation to self, the problem and purpose statements, and significance of the study are explained. This chapter also introduces the central research questions as well as sub questions along with definitions and a chapter summary.

Background

Scholars note that over the past several years, standardized testing results have grown in importance in all school districts across the United States (Croft, Roberts, & Stenhouse, 2016). The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation enacted in 2001 placed schools in danger of losing funding or being closed if students did not consistently perform well on standardized tests (US Department of Education, 2016). As a result, principals have been forced to focus more on growth and development of teachers than on typical managerial and disciplinary issues in the school. Research has shown the need for principals to operate as instructional leaders, assuming more responsibility for curriculum and instruction issues in schools (Honig, 2012).

Studies reveal that the behaviors of principals directly impact teachers' classroom instruction (Bandura, 1993; Goddard, et al., 2015). In addition, feedback given to teachers from administrators must include: a combination of modeling, inquiry, and praise (Lochmiller, 2016);

the feedback must be seen as relevant and connected to student learning (Feeney, 2007); and, the feedback should focus on observable classroom practices (Blasé & Blasé, 1999).

School administrators are vitally important to school effectiveness and set the tone for the school, placing them in a position to nurture and support teachers (Hauserman, Ivankova, & Stick, 2013). In *The Leadership Challenge* (2012), Kouzes and Posner share the importance of leaders strengthening others. The authors explain that exemplary leaders enhance self-determination and develop competence and confidence. Administrators must foster these traits in teachers for teachers to perform at their highest ability. How administrators interact with, coach, and evaluate educators matters in terms of teacher growth and performance (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

When studying administrator impact on teachers, one must consider examining various modes of education. Because virtual education is presently a growing choice for students and families, current and future administrators could potentially find themselves responsible for leading an online school. Virtual administrators interact with teachers and students in much the same way as in brick and mortar. Principals who enter the virtual field of education must establish the strategies for teachers to receive feedback with little to no training on how to provide feedback as a virtual administrator (Quilici & Joki, 2012).

The impact of administrative behaviors on classroom instruction in virtual schools has not been extensively explored. Existing and current virtual administrators may benefit from learning how their behaviors impact instruction in the virtual classroom.

Historical Context

School administrators have carried a variety of responsibilities over the decades. For example, in the 1920's, principals were described as having "bureaucratic, managerial, instructional, and community responsibilities" (Kafka, 2009, p. 324). Another study by Doud and Keller (1999) of K-8 principals that was completed over a 40-year period, found many shifts in the role of the principal in a school setting. In addition, in 1958, 17 percent of respondents reported that they split their time between administration and teaching duties; however, this number had reduced to one percent by 1988. Respondents to Doud and Keller's survey also showed major changes in challenges facing principals throughout the years. For example, principals in 1958 reported a lack of clerical help as a concern, but by 1998, principals reported unsatisfactory student performance and fragmentation of the principal's time as their chief complaints (Doud & Keller, 1998).

Over time, school administrators have become more responsible for student learning and performance but less connected to it. This is troubling considering Hattie (2009) stated that a movement toward instructional leadership would be the most powerful determinant of school achievement. With the variety of responsibilities given to a school administrator, it is important to identify how their behaviors impact instruction in the classroom. However, this may not always prove to be a simple task. In a 2016 study, Lochmiller found that feedback to classroom teachers provided with the intention of improving instruction lacked breadth beyond the administrator's previous teaching experiences therefore rendering much of the feedback inadequate and ineffective.

Because the rise in virtual education is recent, little to no research has been done to investigate the impact that virtual school administrators have on virtual instruction. In one study on virtual education, Quilici and Joki (2012) found that while virtual principals perceived themselves as instructional leaders, the virtual teachers perceived the same leaders as managerial. The disparity in perceptions may pose problems for these virtual administrators. Virtual administrators must seek to understand their impact on instruction in their school and the context in which it is impactful.

Social Context

School diversity in current times spans racial, ethnic, linguistic, and economic varieties bringing multiple challenges for teachers (Hunter, Brown, & Donahoo, 2012). In addition, some research has noted that the public education system is failing, citing problems from weakening churches and families, and underfunding of schools (Christensen, Horn, & Johnson, 2011).

In addition to these diversities, students today are considered digital natives and are proficient in many aspects of technology. However, a recent study found that their range of use of technology is narrower than what was typically expected and that they do not use the full range of benefits of a tool when they are using them in the context of learning (Thompson, 2013). Thompson's research supports the idea that students must be taught to use technology effectively and that teachers cannot assume that proficiency equates to efficiency.

With the rise in diversity combined with technological proficiency, a new alternative to traditional public education has risen in virtual education. Many families are now choosing virtual education as a solution to many of the problems they see in traditional brick and mortar

schools (Beck, Egalite, & Maranto, 2014). Virtual education is still in its infancy and there is much to be learned about what constitutes effective virtual schooling.

Administrators must support teachers in the delivery and execution of quality instruction (Goddard, et al, 2015). An analysis of the current impact that administrators have on instruction will benefit virtual leaders in establishing best practices in the virtual setting.

Theoretical Context

Haim Ginott's theory of congruent communication focused on teacher and student interaction and communication. Ginott believed that the personal behavior of the teacher directly affected a child's behavior in the classroom (Manning & Bucher, 2001). The theory of congruent communication is founded in psychology and focuses on acceptance and validation as being critical for healthy self-esteem.

High teacher self-esteem has been directly linked to positive teacher efficacy (Huang, Liu, & Shiomi, 2007). In an attempt to identify principal behaviors that directly affected teacher efficacy, Walker and Slear (2011) surveyed a diverse group of 366 middle school teachers. They identified 11 characteristics of principal behaviors that affected efficacy. Upon further examination, the researchers found that the behaviors affected new and experienced teachers differently. The researchers sorted the teachers into three groups: newer teachers (0-3 years), those with more experience (4-7 years), and experienced teachers (8-14 years). The one characteristic affecting teacher efficacy that appeared in all three groups of teachers was modeling instructional expectations.

Administrative responsibilities include managing and directing teachers and teachers will operate best in conditions in which communication and expectations are clear (Walker & Slear, 2011). While providing proper direction and fostering needed autonomy can prove to be a challenging task, it is important to understand the most effective ways to model expectations and communicate, in order to maximize productivity for the benefit of students (Walker & Slear, 2011), and thus create a more positive environment for student learning.

In creating a positive school environment, Ginott (1972) suggested three basic tenets: (a) teachers demonstrate harmonious communication with students; (b) teachers demonstrate behaviors that invite cooperation; and (c) teachers value discipline over punishment (Manning & Bucher, 2001). Application of these same tenets to administrator and teacher communications may reach positive outcomes and desirable behaviors.

Situation to Self

I taught in brick and mortar public schools for 12 years, obtaining my administrative licensure during that time. I have served in virtual education for three years. I entered virtual schools in a teaching capacity, quickly progressed into a leadership position, and ultimately into a school administrator role. Upon transitioning to virtual education, I soon learned that this type of education is essential to the educational success of many students. I believe that students in virtual schools enroll for a variety of reasons, all different, all important. In speaking with students, they have mentioned several reasons including bullying and lack of inclusion in their reasons for enrolling in virtual programs. In this study, I will not be exploring students' perspectives, but I believe strongly in virtual education because of these reasons that students

have provided. Belief in the need for virtual education for students drives my purpose for understanding how to improve virtual education for the benefit of student learning.

Virtual education offers students opportunities that they may not have in a regular classroom setting. With a decentralized approach to learning, virtual students have more flexibility. Learning can be adapted to life and learning styles rather than conforming to school operating hours (Toppin & Toppin, 2016). Teachers in the virtual setting must be innovative and adaptive and they must also know their students personally and academically to help the student succeed and meet his or her goals. For a teacher to transition to virtual teaching, training and support must be given and it must be ongoing.

I believe that leadership is a key factor in a successful school, second only to teaching. As I conduct this research, I will focus on the data that are being presented and remove the bias that may exist in my beliefs about leadership from my conclusions. Being a former teacher, and always having the heart of a teacher reminds me that while good leadership is vital, it is teachers that are essential to student success. For teachers to be successful, they must have proper support and direction from leadership. In my personal experience, I have seen that brick and mortar leadership provides a substantial number of challenges to an administrator, but the challenges faced by a virtual administrator are unique. Teachers in the virtual world should have support, instructional guidance, and effective coaching unique to the virtual teaching role to excel. Should the data reveal that teachers do not need the level of support that I perceive they do, the findings will be truthfully reported.

My motivation for this research is directly connected to my experiences as a virtual school administrator and my desire to ultimately do what is best for students. I have worked

with teachers as a peer and as a manager. Teachers have a tremendous amount of work to accomplish and a personal burden, in many cases, to do it well. In my personal experience in working with virtual teachers, I have seen that administrators can either nurture that desire to excel and help the teachers be the best teachers they can, or an administrator can add more burdens to the teachers' already overwhelming workload. I desire to understand the teachers' perspectives concerning how to empower them to do their jobs well. While I bring firsthand experiences and biases to this study about how the role of the leader should impact the teacher, I fully understand that the reality of teachers and the perceptions they share may be dramatically different from my own. My philosophical assumption in this study is ontological in that I believe that the multiple participants studied will provide multiple viewpoints of reality related to their individual experiences with administrators in the virtual world. I will be objective in interpreting and reporting the themes that emerge in the data. In the interpretation of the data, I will share my own interpretation as well as the interpretation of the participants (Creswell, 2013). I will seek out relevant meanings from the data and work to establish patterns and relationships.

The paradigm that will guide my study is social constructivism. Through this approach, I will value inquiry, collaboration, and honor multiple expressions of opinion. I intend to seek to understand the perspectives of teachers in the world in which they live and work (Creswell, 2013). The questions asked of the participants will be broad and open-ended in an effort to encourage discussion and interaction.

Problem Statement

With rising accountability measures posed nationwide, principals find themselves in a position of being required to focus on instruction and curriculum in schools more than ever

(Hallinger, 2005). School administrators must be aware that the actions they take in a leadership position directly impact student achievement (Grissom & Loeb, 2011). Fully understanding the impact that leadership has on student achievement could mean a shift in mindset for principals. A study conducted by Quilici and Joki (2012) found that teachers perceived principals as managerial leaders rather than instructional leaders. However, the quality of principal leadership, however, is a strong predictor of student achievement (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016). Research has been done in brick and mortar schools to establish the connection between administrative behaviors and teacher instruction (Marks & Printy, 2003). Furthermore, the principals with positive ratings from their staffs have cited the importance of encouraging actions, such as having consistent and positive communication skills and leading by example (Hauserma, Ivankova & Stick, 2013).

With the rise of virtual schooling options, it is important to study how instruction is impacted by administrative behaviors in the virtual setting. Administrative behaviors, such as observation procedures and teacher interaction, occur in a unique way in a virtual instructional setting (LaFrance & Beck, 2014). Therefore, the problem of the study is the impact of virtual school administrators' behaviors on instruction.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this case study is to present an in-depth understanding of virtual teachers' perceptions of how virtual school administrators' instructional leadership behaviors impact instruction. The theory guiding this study is Haim Ginott's theory of congruent communication (Ginott, 1965, 1972). The theory of congruent communication is founded in psychology that focuses on acceptance and validation as being critical for healthy self-esteem. Hauserman,

Ivankova, and Stick (2013) found that school administrators are vitally important to school effectiveness and therefore, positive and authentic communication is vital between administrators and teachers. Ginott (1972) described congruent communication, where words match the feelings, as harmonious and authentic; administrators who regularly value teachers' feelings and hear the teachers' voice are more likely to positively influence teacher behaviors.

Significance of the Study

I am compelled to complete this research because of the growing demand for virtual education (DiPietro, Ferdig, Black & Presto, 2010) and because of the lack of teacher and administrator preparation programs for virtual education (Kennedy & Archambault, 2012). Ginot's (1972) theory of congruent communication explains that harmonious communication is key to fruitful relationships between administrators and teachers. If administrators do not understand the teachers' perspectives concerning how their behaviors impact instruction, this cannot be considered harmonious.

This proposed research study addresses the gap in the literature and adds to the body of knowledge concerning the experiences of virtual teachers and their perceptions of how administrators impact instruction. Research regarding the impact of administrator on instruction is well documented in a brick and mortar setting and reveals that administrator actions directly impact student achievement (Grissom & Loeb, 2011).

If the growing trend of virtual education continues, 50% of all high school courses could be delivered online by 2019 (Christensen et al., 2011). This boom will give rise to a need for more virtual educators and more virtual school administrators. Regardless of the medium,

teachers will be expected to deliver instruction and administrators will oversee and evaluate that delivery.

This proposed study could benefit the growing number of online school administrators by allowing them to understand how teachers perceive their behaviors impact instruction. The present study could also benefit future virtual schools in training and preparation of online administrators. Current administrator preparation programs do not prepare leaders for virtual administration (LaFrance & Beck, 2014), and unfortunately, this lack of preparation forces virtual administrators to learn the necessary skills on the job. The present study will assist future and current virtual administrators in understanding what actions benefit teachers in their delivery of online instruction. By examining teachers' perspectives of administrative behaviors, administrators can adjust behaviors to include those that positively impact instruction and exclude the behaviors that negatively impact instruction.

The site being studied, Tennessee Virtual Academy, is a level one ranked Tennessee state school in a system that ranks schools between a one (lowest achieving) and a five (highest achieving). This particular school may benefit from a better understanding of how administrators impact instruction. The school is owned and managed by K12, Inc. which manages schools in 29 states nationwide. Many of K12, Inc. managed schools are failing (Miron & Urschel, 2012). This research could improve administrator behaviors at many K12, Inc. schools that follow a similar model to Tennessee Virtual Academy.

Research Questions

This study to understand how administrative behaviors impact instruction will be guided by one central research question and four subquestions.

Central Question

How do teachers perceive virtual school administrators' behaviors impact their instruction in the virtual classroom?

The central research question for this study is guided by scholar assertions that school administrator behaviors impact instruction (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). The central research question seeks to discover how administrator behaviors impact instruction in the virtual setting. Teachers perceptions of the identified behaviors will assist in understanding the ways school administrators' behaviors impact instruction.

Subquestions

SQ1: How do virtual teachers define the characteristics of school administrator behaviors that impact virtual instruction?

A recent study of online school principals' perceptions of their leadership roles and their teachers' perceptions of their leadership role revealed discrepancies between the two (Quilici & Joki, 2012). Teachers viewed principals as managerial whereas the principals saw themselves as instructional leaders. This difference between teacher perception and administrative perceptions could have ramifications on how administrator behaviors impact teacher instruction.

SQ2: How do teachers perceive that school administrator behaviors positively impact virtual classroom teaching?

Principals are responsible for many duties in the day-to-day operations of a school. Time spent directly coaching teachers on improved practice and instruction is directly associated with achievement gains; however, coaching seems to be a rare practice among administrators

(Grissom, Loeb, & Master, 2013). Studies show that administrative behaviors in brick and mortar schools directly impact student achievement (Hattie, 2009). Therefore, it is important to understand those behaviors and how teachers perceive their impact on instruction.

SQ3: How do teachers perceive that school administrator behaviors negatively impact virtual classroom teaching?

Teacher evaluation systems serve as quality assurance as well as serving as a professional development process (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016). Evaluating principals may use evaluations as a form of judgement for their teachers or as an opportunity to provide professional growth opportunities. One study found that providing quality instructional feedback to teachers “appears bound within distinct subject subcultures that are a product of the administrator’s past experience as a classroom teacher” (Lochmiller, 2016, p. 98). Virtual school administrators must provide instructional feedback in an effective way if teachers are to be receptive.

SQ4: How does a virtual school administrator’s communication style impact instruction?

There is no one pure model for effectively communicating with educators. Virtual school administrators may use their own intuition in learning effective communication strategies with each individual teacher (Minter, 2011). The perception and relationship that is created between administrator and teacher through communication may either positively or negatively impact instructional practices.

Definitions

1. *Brick and mortar* – The term brick and mortar is used in this study to describe traditional learning in a building with standard school operating hours (Staker & Horn, 2012)
2. *Instructional leadership* – The term instructional leadership refers to a leadership style that seeks to improve student achievement by improving the quality of teaching and the curriculum (Hattie, 2009).
3. *Virtual administrator* – A virtual administrator is a leader of an online school tasked with working with curriculum, improving student success, and guiding teacher performance, all in a virtual environment (Quilici & Joki, 2012).
4. *Virtual education* – Virtual education is an educational option that can have various virtual learning models including synchronous and asynchronous instruction, fully online instruction, and blended instruction (LaFrance & Beck, 2014).
5. *Virtual teacher* – A virtual teacher is an educator tasked with delivering instruction to students in a fully online, virtual environment (LaFrance & Beck, 2014).

Summary

The problem to be explored in this study is virtual teachers' perceptions of the impact that virtual school administrators' behaviors have on instruction. While research exists examining these relationships in brick and mortar schools, very little can be found in relation to virtual education. The purpose of this case study is to present an in-depth understanding of virtual teachers' perceptions of the impact that virtual school administrators' behaviors have on instruction.

Chapter one presented an overview of the need for the research proposed in this study. This chapter also explained the gap in literature as this phenomenon relates to virtual school administrators and virtual school teachers. A background of instructional leadership and its impact on teaching was provided as well as a background on the growth of virtual education. My motivation to complete this study was shared and definitions of key terms were provided.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The second chapter of this proposed research plan provides the relevant literature pertaining to how virtual school administrators' behaviors impact instruction in a virtual classroom as perceived by virtual teachers. A theoretical framework is also provided to ground the research in theory. The theory of congruent communication (Ginott, 1965) guides the research of this study. Ginott believed that the personal behavior of the teachers directly impacts children's behavior in the classroom (Manning & Bucher, 2001). Likewise, the behaviors of administrators may directly impact the quality of teacher instruction (Marzano, Walters, & McNulty, 2005). The literature presented provides a clear representation of the impact that school administrators have on teachers' delivery of instruction. The literature also reveals the rapid growth of virtual education and the structures involved in running a virtual school. Research demonstrating the impact of virtual school administrators' actions on virtual instruction is lacking.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is based on Ginott's theory of congruent communication. Haim Ginott was an elementary school teacher in Israel before immigrating to the United States (Roebuck, 2002). Ginott earned his doctoral degree studying clinical psychology and psychometric theory from Columbia University in 1952 (Ginott & Goddard, 2002). Ginott published *Between Parent and Child* in 1965, the first of three books focusing on communication between adults and children. Ginott focused on parent and child communication as well as teacher and student communication. In his writing, Ginott began to develop his theory

of congruent communication. Congruent communication is described as harmonious and authentic, where words match the feelings (Ginott, 1972). *Between Parent and Child* became a groundbreaking work in the discussion of parent and child communication (Prusank, 2007).

Ginott advocated for the recognition of feelings in all situations. He believed that the way a teacher communicated with a student created a mood of contentment or contention (Green, 2006). He held that parents and teachers should set boundaries on childrens' behavior while showing respect for how a child is feeling. Ginott's theory has been advanced by psychologists such as John Gottman, a leading researcher in emotional intelligence (Ginott & Goddard, 2002).

Ginott (1972) proposed three basic tenets that contribute to a positive school environment. The three tenets include teachers' communications with students being harmonious with how the students feel; teachers' behaviors inviting cooperation; and discipline used as an alternative to punishment (Manning & Bucher, 2001). Manning and Bucher (2001) have translated Ginott's theory into practical application for teachers in an attempt to develop a cohesive model of the theory. Their practical applications include fourteen key points. I have categorized these fourteen points into three areas: Behaviors, Communication, and Discipline.

Behaviors

Three practical applications that have emerged from Ginott's theory of congruent communication can be categorized as teacher behaviors. These three applications are: (a) teachers should handle anger appropriately; (b) teachers should show acceptance and acknowledgement; and (c) teachers should avoid name-calling and labeling students and providing diagnosis and prognosis (Bucher & Manning, 2001). These same applications from Ginott's theory can be applied to leadership behaviors when relating to teachers.

Kouzes and Posner (2012) described how leadership behaviors can strengthen others. The authors explained that exemplary leaders maintain a positive outlook and create an atmosphere of acknowledgement and encouragement. For example, good leaders seek out ways to recognize contributions from their teaching teams (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Though emotions can sometimes become charged, even in leadership positions, it is important to maintain an unbiased perspective and open mind when managing teachers.

In fact, research by Walker and Slear (2011) found that teacher efficacy was significantly impacted by principal behaviors. The authors found 11 characteristics of principals that were determined to be important in supporting teacher efficacy: communication, consideration, discipline, empowering staff, flexibility, influence with supervisors, inspiring group purpose, modeling instructional expectations, monitoring and evaluating instruction, providing contingent rewards, and situational awareness.

Interestingly, these characteristics statistically varied among different age groups of teachers. Less experienced teachers valued modeling instructional expectations, while more experience teachers valued communication, consideration, and modeling instructional expectations. These leadership characteristics can easily be applied to the basic expectations set forth by Ginot's theory of congruent communication.

Discipline

Ginot's theory led to five practical applications concerning discipline. These five applications are: (a) Teachers should refrain from using punishment in handling discipline problems; (b) Teachers should ignore common four-letter words rather than make them an issue; (c) Teachers should use guidance rather than criticism to influence children; (d) Teachers, when

disciplining, should provide students with a face-saving exit; and (e) Teachers should strive for brevity when disciplining children (Bucher & Manning, 2001).

In leadership positions, it is common to be obligated to correct teacher behaviors in terms of instruction, as well as in other areas. Administrators typically use a rubric based evaluations system when observing teachers (Heneman, Milanowski, Kimball, & Odden, 2006).

Administrators can approach these observations as judgement of the teachers' teaching abilities or use these observations as an opportunity to encourage professional growth of the teachers through coaching. Some of these conversations will inevitably be difficult and require proper communication on behalf of the administrator in order to achieve a desired result.

A major challenge noted by Le Fevre and Robinson (2015) in increasing the effectiveness of leaders is overcoming poor communication skills such as the desire to win in a confrontational conversation and the urge for the administrator to maintain control of the conversation. These types of controlling behaviors on behalf of administrators have shown that teachers may respond through extrinsic motivation, which is predictive of shallow behaviors (Eyal & Roth, 2011). Teachers who operate only through extrinsic motivation may experience low morale and burnout. It is important that administrators communicate discipline in such a way that teachers do not feel punished.

Communication

Communication from teacher to student is a vital part of Ginott's theory of congruent communication and has relevance to virtual administrator interactions with virtual teachers. In analyzing the theory, six practical applications emerged. These six applications are: teachers should use clear communication; teachers should use sane messages; teachers should always use

“I” messages instead of “you” messages; teachers should provide appreciative praise and avoid evaluative praise; teachers should avoid sarcasm and ridicule; and teachers should respect students’ privacy and avoid asking prying questions.

An important leadership trait is giving credit where credit is due and assuming the blame when necessary. “When something goes right, they [leaders] look out the window to find someone in the organization to assign the credit. When something goes wrong, leaders stand before the mirror and assume the blame” (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011, p. 139). Administrators in schools face this same flow of responsibility. Proper communication from administrator to teacher is essential to maintaining a professional and productive relationship.

Often, communication between administrator and teacher takes the form of feedback on performance. In describing steps to effective feedback for teachers in his book *Leverage Leadership*, Bambrick-Santoyo (2012) explained that administrators must provide precise praise and identify concrete action steps. In a virtual setting, mastery of communication is critical and must be clear and concise. Virtual teachers benefit from appreciative praise and a respectful tone. Respect for the teacher, not only as a professional, but as an individual will build teacher and administrator relationships that will benefit the school as a whole (Bambrick-Santoyo & Peiser, 2012).

Related Literature

The administrator is the direct supervisor of the teacher and offers guidance, support, direction, and constructive criticism (Leaf & Odhiambo, 2017). In a regular brick and mortar setting, nonverbal cues and ongoing conversation can assist the teacher in interpreting the meaning behind information given from administrators (Reza, 2016). In a virtual setting, an

administrator must also provide guidance, support, direction, and constructive criticism to teachers, however this may be done through a phone call or email. This type of communication may present a disparity in how information is meant to be received and how it is actually received. Communication of this type may cause the teacher to perceive behaviors and actions of the administrator in a way that was never intended. This case study seeks to help administrators understand the perceptions of teachers in order to improve and adjust administrative behaviors that can directly impact instruction.

Teacher and Administrator Communication

Shapiro (2015) posed the question: “Teachers or Administrators: Who’s the real problem?” (p.18). He stated that “the problem may be that teachers and administrators don’t have a dependable shared language with which to communicate” (p. 19). Shapiro (2015) referenced technology integration in classrooms. After speaking at technology events, teachers often mention to him how excited they are to implement new tools, but they see administrators as obstacles. Administrators speak about their wish for teachers to adopt new methods, but feel teachers are resistant to change. It’s a revolving cycle of poor communication.

In his research, Klein (2017) found that the “quality of dialogue between employees and their superiors depends on the distance between them” (p. 396). Klein’s research supported the need for physical and social closeness between leaders and employees in order to establish an effective working relationship. Klein (2017) interviewed 445 teachers in 89 public schools for his study. He found a disconnect between the covert and overt communications in these public schools and also discovered a strong desire for openness and authenticity in relationships.

Administrators and teachers must communicate about a broad variety of issues from students, to teacher performance, to student data (Szeto & Cheng, 2017). This communication is grounded in professionalism but should start with the formation of a trusting relationship that can affect both parties' individual attitudes (Price, 2011). Alexander, Castleberry, and Richardson (2008) explained the difference between symmetrical and asymmetrical communication. Symmetrical communication can be described as a willingness by a leader to respond to employee concerns, while asymmetrical communication is defined as administrators who are not open to exchanging communication with employees. In schools, there is a regular need for teachers to seek discussion with administration. If administration is inaccessible or is unwilling to create productive dialogue with a teacher, this can lead to feelings of isolation and may even increase the teachers desire to leave the school (Alexander, Castleberry, & Richardson, 2008). In a three-year study of three urban elementary schools, Cosner (2011) found that when principals engaged in concise communication surrounding the school's vision of using data to drive instruction, data-based collaboration among grade levels was positively influenced which, in turn, influenced student learning.

Principals shape the climate of a school building and the attitudes and relationships fostered by these school leaders impact teachers and students (Leithwood, Louis, & Anderson, 2012). One can assume that the same applies to leadership in a virtual school. If a principal creates a negative culture for the school and for the teachers, it is felt in the student population (Spiro, 2013).

Virtual leaders must take an extra step of learning to communicate well and form relationships with teachers all within a virtual environment (Farrell, 1999). Administrators in a

virtual environment rely on text-based communication for the simplest of tasks. If not used carefully, text-based communications can easily be misinterpreted. With communication being crucial to proper leadership (Bambrick-Santoyo & Peiser, 2012) and leadership creating a culture of learning (Liethwood, et al, 2012), virtual leaders must take the extra steps of making phone calls to teachers or establishing multiple face to face meetings with teachers in order to build solid relationships that can weather communication missteps.

Rise of Virtual Education

On any given day in the United States, opinions can surface surrounding the failing state of the current public-school system in the United States (Ravitch, 2016). There seem to be a limitless number of fingers pointed at various causes for failure. Common factors that may be identified are over-testing of students and Common Core standards (Ravitch, 2016), charter schools (Fabricant & Fine, 2015), and underfunding of schools (Johnson, 2014). *Disrupting Class* (Christensen et al., 2011) concurs with these reasons and more in discussing the failing United States public school system. The answer, according to the authors, can be found in understanding how students can be intrinsically motivated and why they should be (Christensen et al., 2011).

In recent years, the theory has developed that teacher quality is the driving factor in student success in public education (Tough, 2012). Failing school systems have developed incentives for high-performing teachers to teach in underperforming school systems. Teacher compensation incentives, evaluation procedures, and recognition of tenure have all become more rigorous. Teachers have come under intense pressure to perform at very high levels regardless of the academic ability or socioeconomic status of their students. In *How Children Succeed* (2012),

Tough explains that “if you’re one of the more than seven million American children growing up in a family earning less than \$11,000 per year, you are confronted with countless obstacles to school success that children in families earning \$41,000 per year likely are not” (p.192). It appears that poor teacher quality may be a small part of a larger problem facing public education.

Virtual education offers the ability for students to learn at a pace that suits them as well as in an environment that is conducive to his or her learning style. It provides access to high quality teachers in any location. In an early study, Farrell (1999) outlined several factors driving the development of virtual institutions. Among these factors were the growth of knowledge and the desire for lifelong learning opportunities that allowed for flexible access, a demand for equitable access for isolated learners, and an expectation that an expansion of virtual models will permit expansion without major cost increases. Many of these factors will be found in research today supporting the need for virtual education.

Kanimozhi (2018) cites several positive aspects of virtual learning. These positives include students learning independence and time management. Students learn to work self-reliantly without someone directly every move. Students may have access to advanced or specialized classes that they normally would not be able to experience, especially in smaller school settings. Additionally, Kanimozhi explains that virtual learning requires a strong emphasis on the written work as students are expected to communicate primarily through writing. Kanimozhi (2018) also provides some disadvantages of virtual learning including the lack of face to face interaction with both teachers and students as well as the difficulty that some students may have with self-motivation when students have the freedom to set their own schedules.

Research has shown that academic intrinsic motivation decreases from grade three through grade eight (Lepper, Corpus, & Iyengar, 2005). These same students feel a great need for autonomy (Fernandez, Grijalvo, Nunez, & Leon, 2015). Teacher control in the classroom can foster extrinsic motivation in students, but this does not meet the need for autonomy that leads to intrinsic motivation. Christensen, Horn, and Johnson (2011) suggest that online learning may be the student-centered solution to offering high autonomy to students and a return of intrinsic motivation.

Much of the current research applies to general brick and mortar students. In their research, Palloff and Pratt (2003) attempted to provide a profile of a virtual student. The virtual student was described as open-minded, not hindered by lack of auditory or visual cues, self-motivated, committed, critical thinkers, reflective, and truly believe that high quality learning can happen at any place and time. While it may be impossible to expect that every virtual student will possess these qualities, one must consider all of these traits when teaching at or leading a virtual school.

Many of the virtual school options available to students today come in the form of charter schools (Waters, Barbour & Menchaca, 2014). Because each state has its own specific policy governing the creation of charters, they are not readily available to all students. Forty-two states have charter laws and/or schools and serve approximately 2.5 million students across our country (Rice, 2014). Only a small percentage of these charters offer virtual options and local school districts appear to be hesitant in branching into the virtual school market (Christensen et al., 2011).

Virtual education could be a large part of the next wave of educational reform. In the year 2000, students in grades K-12 who took an online course numbered at about 45,000. By 2009, this number had risen to more than 3 million (Horn & Staker, 2011). Online learning is clearly on the rise. The modes of delivery for online learning may vary. Schools may employ a blended method where learning takes place in a mix of a virtual and a face-to-face setting. Blended models have the potential for changing K-12 education according to Horn and Staker (2011). A blended model may allow for a more personalized, self-paced option for education. This option may also open more discussion about use of teachers and use of space, allowing schools to redistribute sparse funds to other areas.

Schools may also design and deliver curriculum that is fully online. Online learning has the capacity to revolutionize education by increasing motivation through personalized learning as well (Zhang, Zhao, Zhou, & Nunamaker, 2004). Research has shown a trend that online learning used more prevalently by students with a range of special circumstances (Barbour, Brown, Waters, Hoey, Hunt, Kennedy, & Trimm, 2011). Online learning may be an option for hospitalized or chronically ill students as well as for incarcerated students or student athletes. Whether education is delivered in a standard brick and mortar setting or in an online setting, there will remain a need for teachers, and consequently, for administrators.

The State of Virtual Education

An obvious concern of virtual education is whether computer mediated instruction over the Internet can produce the same achievement results as a standard brick and mortar environment (Brinson, 2015). Achievement in K-12 schools is typically measured through high stakes testing. A 2004 meta-analysis on the outcomes of K-12 students involved in distance

education was conducted by Cavanaugh, Gillan, Kromrey, Hess, and Blomeyer (2004). Acting on the “explosive growth” (p. 4) of distance learning programs in the decade prior to 2004, the authors conducted a statistical review of 14 web delivered programs studied between 1999 and 2004. The meta-analysis found no significant difference in performance between students who participated in online programs as opposed to those taught in face-to-face settings (Cavanaugh, et al., 2004).

Barbour (2016) shared research on K-12 virtual student performance stating in a 2009 report that the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL) concluded that online learning was an effective alternative for improving student performance across diverse learners. Upon closer examination, he noted that the students enrolled in K-12 online learning at the time of the studies was a highly selective group. These students were described to be motivated, self-directed, and self-disciplined and not representative of a typical K-12 student. Further, Barbour (2016) cited mixed performance when comparing online students to brick and mortar students. Online students had higher scores in reading, but lower scores in math. In some states, such as Pennsylvania, standardized test scores were significantly worse in online schools.

The mammoth task of determining the effectiveness of a single online school cannot be understated. Rice (2006) stated that “the effectiveness of distance education appears to have more to do with who is teaching, who is learning, and how that learning is accomplished, and less to do with the medium (p.442).” The student who will be successful in one medium may not necessarily be successful in another. This may not accurately measure the effectiveness of the virtual school, but rather the student’s ability to perform well in that environment.

Another significant challenge of virtual education is student retention (Barbour, 2010). One factor that may prove to have a positive impact on student retention is teacher-student interactions. Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) introduced a model of community inquiry that includes three essential elements to educational operation. These three elements were teacher presence, or the clear communication of objectives and instructions including facilitating progress and providing feedback; cognitive presence, or enabling exploration, construction of meaning, and application beyond the classroom; and social presence, or the ability for students to feel a sense of connection to other participants.

Acting upon these three elements, Hawkins, Barbour, and Graham (2011) analyzed the perspectives of eight virtual school teachers from a supplemental virtual high school. Based on their findings, they suggest four actions to improve the state of virtual education in terms of student retention: teachers reaching out to students on a weekly basis, holding smaller class sizes and discussions outside of academics, providing self-disclosure to students, and providing a variety of ways for students to interact with their teacher.

In his critical view of virtual schools, Russell (2004) acknowledged many factors promoting the growth of virtual education. He cited globalization, economic rationalism, and dissatisfaction with the current state of existing schools as reasons for popularity. He did, however, state that the exodus from existing schools to a virtual alternative may exacerbate existing issues.

Russell outlined several problems related to virtual schools. He noted the following as the most prominent concerns: authenticity (or student honesty), interactivity with others, socialization, experiential learning, responsibility, accountability, discipline, teacher training,

teacher certification, class size, accreditation, student suitability, and equity (Russell, 2004). Many of these problems may be found in either brick and mortar or virtual settings, of course, but Russell argued that the “different nature of virtual schools serves to highlight these concerns” (Russell, 2004, p. 12).

The state of virtual education is one that requires much more extensive research (Richardson, et al., 2015). Both brick and mortar and virtual schools have their share of respective challenges. One thing is certain, as a society we have traveled too far down the path of distance education for students to turn back now.

Virtual Education and Administration

A survey of policy and practice in K-12 schools found that specialized teacher training is typically not required upon entry into virtual teaching (Barbour et al., 2011). Most require only a general teaching degree and require teachers to participate in professional development to acquire the skills needed for virtual teaching. Corry and Stella (2012) noted that in order for teachers to receive proper preparation for online instruction, research is needed in: preparing teachers for teaching in an online environment, continued professional development, research in evaluation of online teaching, studying the unique needs and challenges that online teachers face, and providing internships or student teaching in the online classroom.

A different skill set is required of the online teacher that is not required of the face to face teacher. For example, skills possessed by a virtual school teacher must include coordinating pedagogy, technology, and instructional design (DiPietro et al., 2010). In a recent study, only 1.3% of respondents provided field experience in virtual schools to pre-service teachers

(Archambault & Kennedy, 2012). Because of this, one must conclude that teachers must possess these qualities and be able to apply them in order to be successful in the virtual environment.

Administrators entering the virtual world come with only their learned knowledge of leadership, but with little that is directly applicable to the virtual teaching world (Quilici & Joki, 2011). Further research in administrative preparation recommended by Corry and Stella (2012) included: online schools seeking accreditation, research into policy and legislation surrounding online schools, collaboration between online learning schools, administrator training and development for working in an online setting, counseling in online learning, a cost/benefit analysis, and administrative technical training and support.

If virtual education is to be successful, students must have effective teaching (Goe, 2007) and leadership can assist with preparing teachers to be more effective (Kayworth & Leidner, 2002). In fact, Marzano, Walters, and McNulty (2005) found a correlation of .25 between leadership behaviors and achievement of students. Teachers can learn the skills necessary to deliver quality education in a virtual environment. These trainings can be virtual as well. McConnell, Parker, Eberhardt, Koehler, and Lundeberg (2013) found that teachers who participated in virtual professional development in the form of a virtual PLC experienced the same benefits as members of a comparative face to face PLC. The success of an online school is heavily dependent on teachers and administrators as well as the relationship between the two.

In an effort to define effective leadership, Kouzes and Posner (2012) focused on five practices that every leader can follow that lead to exemplary leadership: (a) Model the Way; (b) Inspire a Shared Vision; (c) Challenge the Process; (d) Enable Others to Act; and (e) Encourage the Heart. These five practices can translate across brick and mortar or virtual schools. These

fundamental behaviors can be practiced by leaders, but it is important to understand from a teachers' perspective if the view is the same. Leaders may feel that they are exemplifying these attributes when teachers may perceive their actions to be very different.

Research has found a connection between teacher motivation and school leadership. This relationship indirectly affects student achievement (Eyal & Roth, 2011). Hallinger and Heck (2014) found that instructionally focused leadership was significantly, though indirectly, related to positive math achievement. The same study found that instructional leadership strategies included engagement in recruitment and selections of teachers, organization of teacher professional development and coaching, as well as modeling qualities that support teaching and learning.

Instructional Leadership

The role of the principal has shifted over the years from a more managerial focused role to an instructionally focused role (Grissom et al., 2013). Some central office systems have gone as far as to offer professional development and support in administrators' instructional leadership development (Honig, 2012). Le Fevre and Robinson (2015) identified three barriers to more effective instructional leadership: administrative tasks that distract from teaching and learning, the adequacy of the leaders' content knowledge, and the relational skills required to assist teachers in improving their craft.

Kaya and Gocen (2014) studied the leadership levels at one school implementing a specific curricular approach to education. Their research showed that in order for the curriculum to be implemented successfully, the administrator must be deeply invested in the philosophy of the curriculum in order to facilitate the desired learning environment for the student. This

implies that a leader cannot defer to teachers for curriculum matters. The administrator must be seen as an instructional leader in this case, exemplifying ownership in the implementation of any curriculum.

Administrators' involvement with instruction may vary according to grade level as well. The use of instructional coaches or instructional facilitators is a growing trend in schools today (Knight, 2012). In a study conducted with instructional facilitators, researchers found that administrators at the high school level were less involved with the coaching that the administrators did not understand the teaching practices that were being shared by the instructional facilitator (Range, Pijanowski, Duncan, Scherz, & Hvidston, 2014).

How administrators relate to and communicate with teachers in instructional matters can have a dramatic effect on how teachers perform with the students in their classrooms (Szeto & Cheng, 2017). In fact, Dos and Savas (2015) identified several characteristics of school administration in regard to relationships with teachers. The findings noted that school administrators should be knowledgeable, fair, work in harmony with teachers, a disciplinarian, and intelligent. Many of these same characteristics hold true when compared to Ginott's theory of congruent communication. In order for an administrator to be able to successfully coach a teacher as an instructional leader, it is important that he or she establishes a relationship with the teacher that is conducive to learning and self-improvement (Szeto & Cheng, 2017).

In an effort to compare virtual schools to the standard brick and mortar school, Quilici and Joki (2011) explained the 80/20 principle for virtual education. The authors stated that eighty percent of the characteristics of a virtual school were common across all schools. The remaining twenty percent was unique to a virtual school. The eighty percent, they said, included

instructional leadership in the virtual world. This instructional leadership included having knowledge of the content area of the teacher that they are working with, creating a relationship with the teacher, and having positive interactions with teachers and students. In virtual education, these interactions must go beyond emails and must entail one on one verbal conversations with teachers often.

A study by Leo (2014) sought to establish professional norms that guide school principals' pedagogical leadership. As the role of the principal is becoming exceedingly instructional in the area of leadership, establishing these norms may offer reflection by other administrators on their practices. The principals in Leo's study gave priority to actions that created conditions for learning and leading learning and teaching. The most evident norms established by principals in the study were to be present and close to the teaching and learning process, be engaged and involve teachers in quality professional development, enrich development of assessments for learning, promote teacher development through pedagogical discussion and peer learning, and develop the culture of the school to promote learning (Leo, 2014).

In a study of 18 virtual school leaders, instructional leadership was found to be a core element of virtual school leadership (Richardson, Beck, LaFrance & McLeod, 2016). The principals interviewed in the study reported that virtual leaders must have a strong background in curriculum, standards, and instruction, and that they must have the ability to translate these skills into an online environment. One principal from the same study stated that instructional leadership skills in the virtual leadership environment were more important than technology skills.

Preparation and Role of a Virtual Administrator

Some difficulties faced by online administrators were highlighted by Beck, LaFrance, & Richardson (2015). Their research shared that challenges include creating a shared vision between faculty and staff that are geographically separated, providing guidance that will promote effectiveness in the school and in student learning, and providing services and resources to teachers in a timely manner.

The Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) provides standards to university programs in preparing administrators for licensure (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2002). Each of these standards have implications for the position of online school administrator.

The first standard refers to a shared vision of learning. The virtual school administrator must first work collaboratively, with teachers, to establish a vision for learning in the online school. This vision must be communicated to all stakeholders in the online school and followed. This vision must include high expectations for delivery of instruction and for learning.

Standard two discusses creation of a culture of professional growth and student learning. Virtual school administrators may offer a variety of professional growth opportunities in the online setting. In some cases, the online courses have produced better learning outcomes than traditional face to face courses (Ho, Nakamori, Ho, & Lim, 2014).

The third standard is organizational management. Effective management school is crucial to its successful operation (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013). This standard includes consistent evaluation of teaching to ensure that instruction is of high quality and ensuring

positive relationships with teachers. Teachers in the virtual setting want more communication and relationship with administration than just evaluation (Quilici & Joki, 2011). This third standard also encompasses the managerial and operational tasks that are included in operating a virtual school.

Standard four is collaboration and communication with faculty and community. This standard requires more than just relationship building with the teachers. School administrators must actively work in partnership with community members and teachers to carry out the best possible virtual education for students. Teachers typically stay abreast of current research and appreciate the opportunity to share ideas from a leader who articulates the bigger plan for the school (Hauserman, Ivankova, & Stick, 2013).

The fifth standard deals with integrity and ethics. In the role of virtual administrator, one must attack ethical issues that are unique to online education, such as validity and authenticity in student work (LaFrance & Beck, 2014). Additionally, this standard will encompass ensuring proper classroom interactions such as relationships in the online world and cyber-bullying.

ELCC standard six promotes successful students by understanding, responding, and influencing the social, legal, political, and cultural contexts. Many virtual school administrators are well versed in this standard having dealt with multiple legal and political issues that are almost always tied to virtual schools (Rice, 2014).

The seventh and final ELCC standard mentions internship. This standard implies an important opportunity for brick and mortar leaders to work directly with virtual school leaders in

an effort to build capacity (LaFrance & Beck, 2014). This standard can also facilitate leadership programs for administrators prior to accepting a position in a virtual school.

Some aspects of virtual leadership can be significantly more difficult than traditional brick and mortar leadership (Richardson et al., 2015). To make matters worse, LaFrance and Beck (2014) found that 91% of preservice administrator programs did not offer any type of virtual school field experience in their preparation programs for administrators. Furthermore, more than 75% of accredited programs have no intentions of adding virtual field experience to their programs. The ELCC standards are applicable both to brick and mortar leadership as well as virtual school leadership and can serve as a reminder of grounded characteristics that all leaders must possess.

Not only is virtual schooling a new concept, but the idea of learning to work, teach, and manage virtually is new as well. The dynamics of a virtual work environment are constantly changing making communication fundamental to the success of an organization (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Relationships formed in the virtual work setting are expected to connect colleagues in a way that consistently produces high quality results. In the case of administrator and teacher, the relationship must facilitate student success (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000).

When studying the perceptions that teachers have of virtual administrators, it may be important to distinguish which behaviors negatively impact instruction and which positively impact instruction. Communication between administrator and teacher may play a role in the teachers' perceptions. The behaviors described by the teacher may indicate which type of leader performs best in the virtual environment. Purvanova and Bono (2009) found that leaders with a transformational leadership style had a more positive effect on team performance with virtual

teams rather than on face-to-face teams when participants were studied in both modes. This indicates that proper and transparent communication is not the only key to effective administrator and teacher relationships. Another study found that virtual leaders were labeled as effective by demonstrating the following traits: capability to deal with contradiction and manage multiple roles simultaneously, display mentoring traits, exhibit a high level of empathy, and provide regular, detailed, and prompt communication (Kayworth & Leidner, 2002).

In their research, Richardson, et al. (2016) described four attributes necessary for serving as a virtual school administrator. Virtual leaders must be flexible and adaptable, comfortable with change, and aware that a constant state of change will be the norm in a virtual atmosphere. Next, virtual leaders must have some degree of technological proficiency. Technological proficiency may better be described as being tech savvy. It is necessary for leaders of virtual schools to have a core understanding of virtual learning and what the students will experience in the online atmosphere. Third, instructional leadership skills are a necessity in providing leadership to online teachers. Finally, virtual administrators must be good collaborators and communicators. Managing students and teachers in a virtual environment calls for stellar communication skills and the ability to be consistent collaborators with others in the field of virtual education.

Preparation and Role of a Virtual Teacher

With the growth of virtual education comes a change in the traditional role of the teacher. A typical brick and mortar teacher may be comfortable with teacher directed instruction. Traditionally, the teacher has been the ‘holder of knowledge’ and the students gain from his or her instruction. Virtual learning, however, is much more learner-centered (Zhang, Zhao, Zhou,

& Nunamaker, 2004). The teacher is no longer the only resource for the students as students are now exposed to a world-wide learning environment in which they are active participants.

Since virtual learning requires such unique skillset, a good classroom teacher may not necessarily become a good virtual teacher and teacher education programs have been slow to implement training and internship for teachers who could potentially teach virtually (Baran, Correia, & Thompson, 2011). There are currently no state or national standards for virtual education preservice training (Moore-Adams, Jones, & Cohen, 2015). In most teacher preparation programs, teachers are exposed to observational learning, internships, field experiences, reflection, immersion, and mentoring. They also receive training in social justice, responsibility, fairness, and equity (Kennedy & Archambault, 2012). Some of these skills transfer naturally to a virtual teaching environment, but many do not. Teachers are challenged to build relationships with virtual students and to differentiate instruction. Students in a virtual classroom require motivation and support that is unlike that of a brick and mortar student (Horn & Staker, 2011).

Cyrs (1997) identified areas of unique competence for virtual educators. All of these competencies require experience in distance learning environments. The areas include: course planning and organization that capitalize on distance learning strengths, verbal and nonverbal presentation skills specific to distance learning, collaborative work with others in producing effective courses, questioning strategies, and the ability to involve and coordinate student activities among several sites. This very specific skillset will involve training and education.

After evaluating the several virtual schooling preservice programs, Davis and Roblyer (2005) recommended four levels of virtual competence for preservice teachers. The four roles

are: a virtual school counselor who will be responsible for advising and supporting K-12 students participating in virtual schooling; virtual school assistant who will be responsible for assisting a teacher teaching a virtual course; virtual teacher who will be responsible for teaching virtual school classes; and virtual school designer who will be responsible for designing and teaching virtual school courses.

It is clear that the evolution of student education in the virtual realm is surpassing the preparation of teachers (Davis & Roblyer, 2005). Education preservice programs must do due diligence in prioritizing the preparation of these teachers for this type of service. Hawkins, Barbour, and Graham (2012) examined literature related to the role of the virtual teacher. Much of the literature focused on teacher presence. Teachers were found to be responsible for exhibiting exemplary communication and managerial skills in order to establish a sense of presence in an online environment. Teachers were asked to teach courses, provide timely feedback, respond to concerns, and make phone calls to students whether they are active or not in the virtual environment. Teachers were also expected to have a cognitive presence in the online environment. This set the expectation for teachers to be motivating students. Finally, the literature suggested a social presence from teachers. Communication and instruction in an online environment is vastly different than in a brick and mortar classroom. Teachers must find meaningful ways to connect with students and build relationships (Hawkins, et al., 2012).

In their research, Hawkins et al. (2012) found that teachers feel disconnected from students, disconnected from traditional teaching, and disconnected from fellow virtual teachers. The research emphasizes not only a need for better teacher preparation, but also for development of sustainability measures of the virtual teaching profession.

Teacher Retention

Locating and hiring highly qualified teachers to staff a school can be a difficult task (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 2006). Once these teachers are hired, how then can administrators encourage retention of these teachers? Consequently, school districts have implemented various teacher retention strategies ranging from mentoring programs to bonuses. Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, Loeb, and Wyckoff (2011) found that the background characteristics of a teacher, work experience, and teacher preparation experiences are predictive of teacher attrition.

Other factors that affect teacher retention are school contextual factors. These factors include: teachers' feelings of autonomy, administrative support, staff relationships, student behavior, facilities, and safety (Boyd et al., 2011). Interestingly, administrator behaviors associated with shared instructional leadership, decision making, and creation of a sense of community may positively influence teacher retention (Urlick, 2016).

The research on teacher retention virtual education is scarce. Researchers appear to be more interested in retention of students, which can be interpreted as working backward to ensure success in virtual education. Applying the known information about teacher retention in brick and mortar settings to the virtual environment, one must consider the extra expense incurred by teacher turnover. Teachers are highly trained in the technical aspects of virtual education when recruited to teach a course. Understanding the factors for increased retention rates in teachers should be of utmost importance to virtual administrators.

Hughes (2012) sought to understand the role in which teacher characteristics, school characteristics, organizational characteristics, and teacher efficacy relate to retention of teacher, discovering that the age of the teachers studied impacted attrition rates. Teachers who were

younger were more apt to leave the profession, but the research noted that those who stayed may have stayed because of time invested rather than love of teaching. Furthermore, stress seemed to play a prevailing role in a teacher's decision to leave, the most vacated positions being among the middle school aged teachers. Hughes (2012) found that there was not enough data to fully understand the effects of teacher efficacy on teacher retention, however, school climate was found to be the strongest indicator. The teachers who participated in the study cited salary, administrative support, lack of parental involvement, working conditions, lack of prestige and collegiality, and working conditions as reasons for leaving.

Applying Hughes' findings to virtual education, one can posit that the school climate may be improved in a virtual environment. Teachers have no behavioral issues impacting the instruction they deliver. For a virtual school administrator to truly understand what impacts teacher attrition in the virtual environment, he or she must take what they know about brick and mortar teachers and adjust to be sure the needs of virtual teachers are met until the research gap is closed in this particular topic.

Use of Time

Time is a precious commodity and can be found lacking in both brick and mortar and virtual environments. Brick and mortar teachers are task with a multitude of day to day duties. These may include lesson planning, behavior management, grading, parent contact, serving on committees, and professional development meetings to name a few. Virtual teachers' use of time is somewhat different than that of a brick and mortar teacher (DiPietro et al., 2010).

In a study of Michigan virtual teachers, DiPietro, et.al (2010) found that teachers found it important to communicate with students and parents often. In brick and mortar classrooms, this

may translate into a quick face-to-face conversation. For virtual teachers, it can be a multistep process that involves either an email or a phone call. In a typical virtual setting, a student has access to course materials 24 hours a day, possibly resulting in a virtual teacher feeling that they are working longer hours and spending a lot of time working outside of typical school hours.

Furthermore, DiPetro, et.al (2010) cited that teachers in the virtual environment have lesson planning duties, but these duties vary greatly from those required of a brick and mortar teacher. Virtual teachers often must create and design lessons that will engage students in the online environment, utilizing visual learning components such as illustrations and video. Teachers must understand the needs of the students when creating these lessons in order to meet the varying needs of the student.

In addition to these tasks, virtual educators must also participate in professional learning communities, staff meetings, and various professional development sessions. Teachers in the virtual environment are trained not only on best practices for instruction, but also in all of the technical aspects involved in teaching in the virtual environment. In a study, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010) found that pressures of time led to emotional exhaustion and a decrease in self-efficacy and job satisfaction.

Kanimozhi (2018) shared that virtual education is moving forward in a way that may alleviate some of the current stressors that virtual teachers have as well as make their use of time more efficient. Teachers are using lecture capture software to record and edit a presentation making it available for asynchronous viewing by students. Another option for teachers is to conduct online interactive presentations in the form of webinars. These can be accessed either

synchronously or asynchronously by students at a later time. The final technology mentioned is interactive web conferencing in which real time interactivity can take place over any distance.

Society has changed, and new paradigms have emerged that fully encompass technology as a teaching and learning tool. As new generations of teachers who have always used technology begin to enter the workforce, there may be less insecurities around virtual education as well as more confidence in maneuvering through the multitude of tools available to maximize the use of time in the virtual teaching landscape.

Teacher Perspectives on Administration

Because high teacher turnover can cause significant problems for a school, the impact that administration has on teacher working conditions cannot be understated (Richardson, Alexander, & Castleberry, 2008). Research has shown that teacher perceptions of their working conditions impacts their decision on whether to leave schools and that principals are in the best position to influence these working conditions (Burkhauser, 2016). In a virtual teaching environment, high teacher turnover rates may create a larger problem. Training teachers to work in the virtual environment is a time intensive and costly endeavor and losing these specially trained teachers is counterproductive to the goal of having a highly effective virtual education program.

Teachers who choose to leave a school or leave the profession all together tend to leave due to stressors outside of teaching and working with children (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). This same research found that the main stressors were teacher workload and time pressures, both of which can be managed by proper administrator intervention.

In a recent study of the role of online school principals, the researchers found that the principals at the school perceived their role as instructional and supporting teachers in students' success. Conversely, the teachers at the school viewed their principals as managerial focusing on supervision and evaluation (Quilici & Joki, 2011). This misalignment of views and goals between administration and teachers can cause stagnation in progress, especially in an online setting.

Teachers in the virtual teaching world face unique challenges. Hawkins, Barbour, and Graham (2012) analyzed eight virtual teachers' struggles in delivering instruction. The researchers found that teachers felt disconnected from their students, from fellow teachers, and from the traditional notion of teaching. To be clear, the teachers in this study provided asynchronous support to students rather than synchronous instruction. Administrators in a virtual environment should be prepared to support teachers who deliver both modes of instruction to students.

Blase and Blase (1999) studied the role of administrators as instructional leaders in terms of teacher development from a teacher perspective. The authors sought to understand which characteristics of school principals both positively and adversely impact classroom teaching. Questions were presented to teachers in an effort to gather teachers' perspectives. The research found two major themes: talking with teachers inside and outside of instructional conferences allowed teachers to reflect on their learning and professional practice; and the promotions of professional growth with respect to teaching methods and collegial interaction surrounding teaching and learning. This study included multiple subcategories within the two main themes

identifying specific areas within each theme that will be useful to administrators seeking to improve behaviors that teachers perceive as impactful on instruction.

Hauserman, Ivankova, and Stick (2013) explored teacher perspectives of administrators by asking teachers which actions they would prefer their principals to start doing, which actions they would prefer their principals to continue, and finally which actions their principals should stop. The study conducted by Hauserman, et al. (2013) analyzed principals that were considered highly transformational and low transformational. In the highly transformational group, the teachers responded with four general themes. Teachers preferred high levels of communication from their principal and wanted collaboration in the decision-making process. Furthermore, teachers interviewed valued acknowledgement and positive feedback as well as intellectual stimulation.

There are several uniformities between the two studies above. Teachers consistently identify a need for transparent communication and for professional development and learning. As an administrator, it is important to understand the needs and perspectives of the teachers (Kayworth & Leidner, 2002). Research conducted on teachers in a virtual setting is likely to reveal some of the same trends, with the possibility of adding others.

Summary

The purpose of this instrumental case study is to present an in-depth understanding of virtual teachers' perceptions of how virtual school administrators' instructional leadership behaviors impact instruction. Chapter two described Ginnott's theory of congruent communication, the theoretical framework guiding this study.

Administrators who show proficiency in managing the day-to-day operations of a school including fostering school-community relationships, building positive school culture, coaching and evaluating teachers, and working to increase student achievement may struggle when attempting to do all of these things in a virtual environment.

The virtual environment is evolving in a way that will allow more efficiency for virtual educators. That combined with adults emerging as more competent in technology may will endeavors in virtual education. Chapter two provided a thorough review of related literature illustrating the need for this research to be conducted.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

Chapter Three of the present study describes the research design along with the procedures to conduct the study. My role as the researcher will be discussed along with the setting and participants of the study. Information will also be provided on the types of data that will be collected and how those data will be analyzed. Finally, this chapter will elaborate on the trustworthiness and ethical considerations involved in this research study. The chapter will conclude with a summary.

Design

This research study is a qualitative research design. Creswell (2013) described qualitative research as “an intricate fabric composed of minute threads, many colors, different textures, and various blends of material” (p. 42). Because qualitative research offers the opportunity to tell a story, one can represent various perspectives and paint a picture of an issue in need of examination. Understanding how virtual administrators impact instruction could be measured using an analysis of test scores or other quantifiable data. However, the present study seeks to understand virtual teachers’ perceptions of the impact that virtual school administrators’ instructional leadership behaviors have on instruction. Therefore, asking questions and determining themes is the most efficient way to draw those conclusions.

This qualitative research is an instrumental case study in which I, as the researcher, studied a small group of subjects in order to understand how virtual school administrators’ behaviors impact instruction. This study examined the perceptions of teachers, which allowed various perspectives on how virtual administrators help or hinder virtual teaching. Although,

quantitative measures could allow for easy aggregation and systematic analysis, using a qualitative approach for the present study allowed for longer, more detailed responses, as well as variability in content (Patton, 1990).

The use of a case study allows the understanding of how virtual administrators impact instruction to be studied in depth and a great deal can be learned from the teachers involved in the study (Patton, 1990). A case study method is also appropriate when the researcher wants to answer the questions about “how” and “why” within a contemporary setting with no control over behavioral events (Yin, 2014). An instrumental case study allows the findings of the present study to be transferable to a broader population (Zainal, 2007). Through analysis of data, themes emerge that can assist administrators in identifying ways to better assist their virtual teachers.

Research Questions

Central Question

How do teachers perceive virtual school administrators’ behaviors impact their instruction in the virtual classroom?

Subquestions

SQ1: How do virtual teachers define the characteristics of school administrator behaviors that impact virtual instruction?

SQ2: How do teachers perceive that school administrator behaviors positively impact virtual classroom teaching?

SQ3: How do teachers perceive that school administrator behaviors negatively impact virtual classroom teaching?

SQ4: How does a virtual school administrator's communication style impact instruction?

Setting

The site for the research study was Tennessee Virtual Academy. The setting for this study was based on access granted by the corporation managing the academy (see Appendix B). The site also met the study participant criterion for teachers who have served at the school in a teaching capacity for two or more years. Gathering data from multiple teachers across the school allowed for a thorough understanding of multiple perspectives of administrative leadership.

Tennessee Virtual Academy has operated in Tennessee since 2012. The Virtual Academy is led by one Head of School, or Principal. The school has three academic administrators who are responsible for assisting the Head of School in administrative duties and evaluations. The three academic administrators share supervisory responsibilities for 60 teachers at the virtual school. There is a student-teacher ratio of 30:1. Tennessee Virtual Academy serves 1,181 students in grades kindergarten through eight.

Participants

For this proposed instrumental case study, participants were selected based on purposeful criterion sampling. According to Creswell (2013), purposeful sampling is used in case study research because the individuals being researched can purposely inform an understanding of the problem being studied. Furthermore, the sample size for this study was anticipated to include between 12 to 15 teachers, with no fewer than 10. Moreover, the criterion established required that each participant in the study must have spent two or more years teaching in the virtual

school setting to ensure that the virtual teachers have had adequate experience in the virtual environment and in working with virtual administration.

The gatekeeper at Tennessee Virtual Academy assisted in identifying teachers who met the selection criteria. Emails were sent to those teachers who met the selection criteria soliciting their participation in the study (Appendix C). Of the emails that were sent, 11 teachers agreed to participate (Table 1). The following data table reflects the age of teachers participating and the grade levels that they teach. The data in the table also reflects attendance of the teachers at each meeting and/or interview as well as the focus group to which they were randomly assigned based on the teacher's choice of time.

Table 1

Teacher Participants' Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Years Virtual Teaching Experience	Age	Grade	Introductory Meeting	Individual Interview	Focus Group
Ameilia	Female	5	37	K-10	X	X	1
Elizabeth	Female	5	52	CDC	X	X	2
Victoria	Female	6	29	RtI	X	X	1
Penelope	Female	3	47	8	X	X	2
Natalie	Female	5	37	8	X	X	1
Audrey	Female	4	35	6	X	X	1
Caroline	Female	6	33	K-10	X	X	2
Nina	Female	6	52	4	X	X	2

Piper	Female	6	32	RtI	X	X	2
Isabel	Female	2	31	K-10	X	X	1
Lauren	Female	6	34	RtI	X	X	1

Administrators at Tennessee Virtual Academy were made aware that several teachers would be participating in the study and that all research would be conducted on the teachers' own time.

Procedures

Following a successful proposal defense, application was made to the Institutional Review Board for Liberty University seeking approval for the study. After IRB approval was granted, contact was made with the appropriate gatekeepers at the site chosen for the study. The purpose of this research study and data collection procedures was explained to the administrators of the organizations. Guidance was requested from the gatekeepers in identifying appropriate individuals for my research that met the criteria of the study.

Once the qualifying individuals were identified, an introductory email was sent explaining the research study and the purpose for the research. A timeline was included to encourage prompt responses. Participants were asked to respond to the email indicating interest in participating in the study. After this response was received, participants were asked to sign and return consent forms via email. Next, times were scheduled for individual interviews and focus group meetings. In addition, a request was also made to the gatekeepers and to the participants for access to documents relevant to the research study.

Data collection involved gathering data through the use of virtual individual interviews, virtual focus group sessions, and documents. Each individual interview with the participants was audio recorded for later transcription. In addition, the focus group sessions were audio recorded. Once the appropriate participants provided the requested documents for analysis, these documents, along with any audio recording or transcripts were stored in a password protected digital file to be destroyed upon culmination and successful defense of this dissertation.

Upon completion of interviews and focus group interviews, all of the audio was transcribed in order to begin making marginal notes and establishing initial codes (Creswell, 2013). Next, the data was imported into the Nvivo software program for assistance in establishing word frequency and emerging themes. Color coding was used to identify reoccurring themes and organized the data for interpretation. Analysis of these data relied on the theoretical propositions that led to this case study (Yin, 2014). The previously noted research that administrative behaviors impact instruction guided the analysis.

The Researcher's Role

Creswell (2013) explained that the researcher is the key instrument in a qualitative study. Qualitative researchers examine, observe, and interview participants and collect the data themselves. Qualitative researchers do not use a questionnaire or instrument designed by other researchers. In this study, I am the human instrument of data collection. All data collection was conducted by me and interpreted and reported by me. All information was collected and interpreted through the lenses of my previous experiences and theoretical framework.

I began teaching in 2002. I excelled in teaching English and Language Arts as well as Social Studies in my career, scoring a level 5 on a 1-5 scale in the state of Tennessee. I

consistently earned high scores in evaluations and in growth measures in my students. I have always been passionate about teaching and that passion expanded into a love for technology and teacher professional development. I pursued this in my career and learned how to address adult learners while also learning what other teachers needed to feel successful in their classrooms.

As a teacher, I have worked for five different school administrators, all of whom had very different leadership styles and behaviors. In pursuing certification to become an administrator myself, I tried to be mindful of how my past administrators had impacted my teaching, both positively and negatively.

In my current role as virtual school administrator, I attempt to combine all of my experiences in order to bring the best possible instruction to my students. I no longer supervise teachers but plan to again in the future as my current virtual school grows and expands. I hope that this research will provide guidance in understanding how best to lead teachers in the virtual environment.

My purpose for this research is to understand how teachers perceive all of these actions. It is vital to know, as administrators, what is being done to help and to hinder our teachers in order to ensure the success of students (Kayworth & Leidner, 2002).

The researcher is the key instrument in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). I am a former administrator at the academy. I do not supervise these teachers in any kind of administrative capacity as I am no longer employed by the school. In my research, I examined documents, interviewed participants and conducted focus group interviews. In my years of experience, I have developed opinions on how there may be misconceptions between

administrator perceptions and teacher perceptions; however, my goal is to accurately represent the data collected from the participants omitting my personal biases from the data. Yin (2014) explained that researchers can be sensitive to contrary evidence. As a researcher, I feel that I represented the data accurately. I bracketed out my personal experiences as a virtual school administrator in order to remove my prior assumptions from the topic being studied.

Data Collection

Case study data collection can be extensive. For example, Yin (2014) noted six different sources for data collection can exist in a case study, including documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. As this study involves participants employed by a virtual school, the data was collected virtually, and included: individual interviews conducted via one-to-one video conferencing; focus group sessions conducted using synchronous groups; and documents collected via email using password protected encryption.

Individual Interviews

Yin (2014) cited conducting individual interviews as one of the most important sources of case study evidence. Interviews for this instrumental case study were conducted via video conferencing using a semi-structured format and were audio recorded allowing for transcription. The interviews were conducted using a conversational tone and friendly demeanor, while following the line of inquiry in an unbiased fashion (Yin, 2014).

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. Please tell me a little about yourself.

2. How long have you been teaching?
3. How long have you been teaching in virtual education?
4. Describe your teaching philosophy.
5. How does your teaching philosophy align with your experiences in virtual teaching?
6. How would you describe your relationship with your administrator?
7. Describe the administrative characteristics that you believe directly impact instruction.
Please include evaluative procedures in this discussion.
8. How would you describe your administrator's communication style and how do you feel that this communication style impacts your instruction?
9. What are a few behaviors that you believe your administrator exhibits that directly impact your teaching in a positive way?
10. What are a few behaviors that you believe your administrator exhibits that directly impact your teaching in a negative way?
11. Do you believe your administrator's behaviors impact your daily job performance? If yes, then how?
12. What are some behaviors of your lead administrator that you believe are most effective in the daily operations of the virtual school?
13. Do you believe that your administrator is more a managerial leader or an instructional leader? Please explain.

Questions one through three were designed to establish rapport between the participants and the researcher. Yin (2014) described questions that seek to establish rapport as level one questions. Questions one through three were meant to be friendly and nonthreatening and allowed for basic inquiry about the teacher before asking more in-depth questions.

Questions four and five provided an opportunity to gather an understanding of what the participants believe is important in education. LaFrance and Beck (2014) discussed the changing landscape of education by explaining that modes of learning have changed dramatically, and virtual teachers are on the cutting edge of this change. In moving forward with this interview, the goal was to identify the foundational beliefs of the educator as well as how those beliefs translated in a virtual setting.

Questions six through 12 are directly reflective of the relations between administrators and teachers. According to Ginnott (1972), in teacher and student relations, the teacher's responses to students create "a climate of compliance or defiance, a mood of contentment or contention, a desire to make amends or to take revenge" (p.39). Administrators are responsible for the direct supervision of teachers. This supervision involves assisting with day to day issues, but also evaluating, coaching, and providing positive and sometimes negative feedback. The communication is necessary and must be handled carefully in order to ensure positive outcomes from the teachers.

Question 13 was asked because in a study of online principals, Quilici and Joki (2012) found that there was a discrepancy between how the principals viewed themselves and how teachers perceived the role of the principal. The online principals in the study viewed themselves as instructional, helping teachers improve so that students could be successful. The

teachers, however, viewed the principals as managerial, simply enforcing evaluations and supervision. Failure to recognize what the actual teacher perception is may hinder the process of improvement for the administrator.

Focus Group Interviews

The use of focus group interviews allowed the researcher to interact with a small group of participants and interview using a group dynamic. Patton (1990) described the focus group interview as a “relatively homogeneous group of people who are asked to reflect on the questions asked by the interviewer” (Patton, 1990, p.335). The participants were spurred by the thoughts and expressions of others to expand on their previous comments. For this research, the full group of participants was divided into two smaller groups and held two focus group interviews per group. Time slots were offered for the initial focus group sign up and allowed participants to choose the time that worked best for them. This ensured a random distribution of participants. Once assigned to a focus group, participants only interacted with participants within the same group. Each interview was scheduled for thirty minutes to one hour. These groups were given access to a virtual forum, in which prompting questions were posed, and were asked to provide a response. The Zoom platform was utilized for these sessions and allowed for interaction and commenting among the participants based on comments made in response to the prompts.

Prompting Questions for the Focus Group Interviews

1. Describe experiences with your school administrator that you believe positively or negatively impacted your instruction?
2. What specifically about these behaviors do you believe positively or negatively impact your instruction?

3. How do you believe evaluations have changed over the years?
4. How do you believe communication with your administrator has improved or declined over the years that you have worked for him or her?
5. Of all the things that have been discussed in this focus group session, what is most important to you?

The focus group interview questions were grounded in the communications theory described by Ginott (1965), who believed that the behavior and language of the superior set the tone for the learning, or in this case, the relationship between administrator and teacher. The focus group was prompted to elaborate on additional open-ended questions that were provided from the interview section. Through the setting of norms at the beginning of the focus group session, all participants were encouraged to participate while monitoring and sharing the time with all involved. As the facilitator, I maintained control of the focus group and encouraged thoughtful responses rather than allowing it to become a decision-making conversation, as that was not the intent of the focus group interview (Patton, 1990). Furthermore, all focus groups were audio recorded.

Documents

Yin (2014) discussed the strengths and weaknesses of document collection, noting that documentation as a research tool can be stable and specific, but can also be difficult to retrieve and could reflect reporting bias. With this understanding in mind, time was taken to explain the reasons behind each document being requested. For this research, the following documents were useful in gathering for analysis during data collection:

1. School administrator's evaluation cycle and calendar: It is important to understand how often the school administrator is directly interacting with the teachers in an evaluative and coaching capacity. This information was compared to the frequency in which teachers report interactions of this type with administrators.
2. Evaluation and observation rubric: This tool provided insight into what the administrators are looking for as they observe and evaluate teachers.
3. Sample feedback provided to teachers: Teachers were asked to provide samples of positive and constructive growth feedback that the administrators had given based on the evaluation rubrics. This assisted in establishing the tone of the relationship in a formal capacity.
4. Sample emails from administrators to teachers: Teachers were asked to provide samples of positive and constructive growth conversations between themselves and their administrators that supported the teachers' perspectives of the administrators' roles.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for the research study will followed several different methods. After collection, time was spent time transcribing the audio and organizing the data. Maxwell (2013) discussed the importance of listening to and reading transcripts of the interviews as an opportunity for analysis. While listening and reading, notes and memos were written about what was seen and heard in the data, and concurrently, tentative ideas about relationships and categories were developed (Maxwell, 2013). Next, while reading the transcripts, marginal notes were made and initial coding procedures were formed (Creswell, 2013). In order to analyze case study data, files were created and organized data on my computer. These files were encrypted with passcodes in order to protect identities and sensitive information. According to Creswell's

(2013) recommendation, I then moved to describing the data in codes and themes in the context of the case. Data was imported into the Nvivo software program for assistance in establishing word frequency and emerging themes. After establishing emerging themes and patterns, I began to classify the codes and themes.

As emerging themes and patterns emerged from the software, a second pass through hard copies of the data was completed while color coding all emerging themes. These themes were sorted by question and charted the frequency of the reoccurrences in an excel document. Color coding and reoccurring terms were used to help organize and establish themes. Once the data was coded and themes have been identified, the data was interpreted and generalized in order to present an in-depth understanding of the case. Generalizations were developed from the data that was collected. The data was presented here in narrative form also includes visual representations.

I relied on theoretical propositions to analyze the data (Yin, 2014). The data analyzed was continually compared to how administrators are impacting virtual instruction. Based on prior research in brick and mortar schools, administrative behaviors greatly impact instruction. This proposition guided the formation of the research questions and data collection plan. In analyzing the interview results as well as the focus group results, data was captured in a table that illustrated the positive behaviors of administrators and the negative behaviors of administrators. In order to triangulate the data, the documents were examined to support the perceptions of these behaviors with evidence gathered, such as email communications and evaluation feedback. As the themes emerged, an understanding of how administrative behaviors both positively and negatively impact instruction was formulated..

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness of this research study, multiple data collection sources were used including interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. Through corroborating evidence from multiple data sources, triangulation was achieved (Creswell, 2013).

Credibility

As a researcher, I have a responsibility to accurately narrate and report the findings of the study. I anticipated that not all responses would cast administrators in a positive light because it is possible that teachers involved in the study could report administrative behaviors that negatively impact instruction. It was necessary, however, to account for all of the behaviors for a comprehensive examination of this topic. As explained by Creswell (2013), I put aside my personal biases and reported the findings truthfully as well as provided direct quotations and vivid paraphrasing where appropriate. In addition, I employed the use of member checks allowing each participant to review the data for accuracy prior to final publication.

Dependability and Confirmability

The dependability of this research was established through the use of an audit trail which provided clear documentation of all research activity (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The interview and focus group transcriptions provided record of the participants' responses to the questions and to the prompts. Additionally, copies of emails and relevant documentation confirmed data gathered. In order to ensure confirmability, the data was checked and rechecked throughout the analysis and every document was easily accessible by appropriate persons. I included detailed descriptions of how the data were analyzed and reported.

Transferability

Yin (2014) states that asking “how” or “why” questions as opposed to “what” questions allows for a greater opportunity for generalization. This research study focused on “how” questions in an effort to allow application of this study’s findings to other virtual schools’ settings. While these findings may be a starting point for application to other settings, the finding should be extrapolated rather than generalized (Patton, 1990). Patton (1990) warned of over generalizing findings because each individual situation, in this case each virtual school, will be very different in its own context. The findings from this study may be applied as lessons learned for administrators in other virtual schools. The detail included in the present study will also allow for this study to be replicated in a different setting in the future.

Ethical Considerations

In order to maintain ethical integrity, Creswell’s (2013) steps for addressing ethical issues were followed. For example, ethical considerations were anticipated, and a proactive stance was taken in addressing those considerations in this research study. In addition, proper approval was in place prior to any research conducted. The participants were thoroughly informed of the purpose of the research and appropriate consent was obtained. Trust was built with the participants of the study and leading questions or disclosure of sensitive information was avoided. Furthermore, teachers also understood that they may be removed from the research study at any point and that participation was voluntary up to and including the time of data collection.

All data collected was kept on a password protected laptop and the files were password protected as well. Pseudonyms were used to identify participants and the site of the study and

the data were reported honestly and represent multiple perspectives. Copies of the report will be provided to participants and other relevant stakeholders.

Summary

Chapter Three provided a thorough explanation of the research design and approach that was used and the research questions were explicitly shared. The purpose of this instrumental case study is to present an in-depth understanding of virtual teachers' perceptions of how virtual school administrators' instructional leadership behaviors impact instruction. Tennessee Virtual Academy served as the site for the study and was described and details given as to the purpose for choosing the particular site and discussion of participants chosen as well as procedures for collecting and analyzing data was offered in detail. The researcher's role was extensively described, and a list of individual interview questions was provided as well as a description of focus group interview and document collection procedures. Finally, trustworthiness and ethical considerations were outlined and addressed.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of Chapter Four is to present the findings from analysis of data collected during this case study. In this chapter, the participants are described in detail and the results of the research are presented. Following a description of the participants of the study, a description of the theme identification process is shared.

The purpose of this case study is to present an in-depth understanding of virtual teachers' perceptions of how virtual school administrators' instructional leadership behaviors impact instruction. This chapter will present teacher perspectives of administrative impact through the responses of teachers to 13 research questions presented in individual interview format and five questions asked in a semi-structured interview focus group format. The demographic statistics of the 11 volunteer participants will be shared and the findings from the conducted research will follow.

Participants

The sample size for this study was anticipated to include between 12 to 15 teachers, with no fewer than 10. The criterion established required that each participant in the study must have spent two or more years teaching in the virtual school setting to ensure that the virtual teachers have had adequate experience in the virtual environment and in working with virtual administration. Once invitations were accepted, the study had 11 participants who met the criteria of the study. The participants represented a wide range of virtual teaching experience.

Each of the participants is described in greater detail along with their individual philosophies of education in the following narratives.

Amelia

Amelia is 37 years old with 15 years' experience in education with five years' experience in virtual teaching. She has taught second grade and has recently started coaching teachers in kindergarten through tenth grade science. Prior to virtual teaching, she taught first and fifth grades in brick and mortar schools.

Amelia's teaching philosophy is that every child can learn. She stated that her goal for the last fifteen years has been to figure out how each child learns and attempt to educate that child in the best way possible. "It looks different, it feels different, and it may take different preparation on a teacher's part, but I truly believe that every child can learn." She particularly likes working with special needs students in an intervention setting.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth is 52 years old with over twenty-five years' experience in education. She has worked in virtual education for five years. Elizabeth works primarily with students in a special education setting in grades six through 10.

Elizabeth believes that all learning should be student-centered and that the teacher's role is to support learning through the discovery process. She believes in adapting her teaching and questioning to suit the needs of the students. In terms of virtual education for students, Elizabeth says that she is all in. "I'm finding more and more people that aren't and I welcome a healthy

debate. For my population of students, this [virtual education] is their saving grace and makes all the difference for them and their ability to continue their education.”

Victoria

Victoria is 29 years old and has eight years of teaching experience. Seven of her years of experience have been in virtual education. Victoria taught one year in brick and mortar before transitioning to virtual teaching. She has taught second grade, third grade, fourth grade, and now teaches intervention classes.

Victoria believes in meeting students where they are academically. She believes that students’ learning goals should be individualized by student. “Sometimes, I felt in brick and mortar, that I was just leaving those high students on their own and not giving them quality teaching time.” Victoria also believes that a teacher should consistently practice patience when working with students.

Penelope

Penelope is 47 years old with 17 years’ experience in teaching. She has three years’ experience in virtual teaching. Penelope has taught third grade and middle school grades but prefers teaching middle school-aged students.

Penelope strongly believes in teaching the whole child. She focuses on teaching a student that will evolve into a responsible adult. Penelope believes that the way to do that is to incorporate multiple subject areas into her teaching content. “It’s not just about content anymore. We’re raising responsible adults and I’m constantly trying to think outside the box and

know each individual child in order to make a successful adult.” She believes that instruction should be targeted and individualized for each student.

Natalie

Natalie is 37 years old and has nine years of teaching experience; five of those years have been in virtual education. She has experience teaching first grade and middle school.

Natalie’s teaching philosophy is that all students should feel comfortable, confident, and safe so that they feel comfortable exploring ideas. She feels that students should explore new ideas that they normally would not. “A lot of students need support emotionally, and they just need to feel safe because they are coming from a place that wasn’t working for them.”

Audrey

Audrey is 35 years old. She has seven years of teaching experience, five of which have been in virtual teaching. While she has taught younger students in the past, most of Audrey’s experience has been in sixth grade.

Audrey believes that every child is different and approaches instruction from this belief system. She ensures that her lessons target many learning styles, including visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners. She also attempts to slow her lessons down for all students starting at a very basic level and working up to more difficult topics. “I think that’s the way you approach teaching. You look at it from every possible scenario that any question could come up in. Do they have the schema to understand this?”

Caroline

Caroline is 29 years old. She has been a teacher for seven years and although she did two interim positions in brick and mortar prior to moving into virtual teaching, all of her years of experience have been a virtual teaching atmosphere. She has experience teaching in grades kindergarten through third grade and has recently moved into a master teaching role for grades kindergarten through 10.

Caroline describes her teaching philosophy as community driven. She believes that her role as a teacher is to create a warm environment where students feel welcome and feel like they are part of a community. “My main goal is that students feel loved and cared for and then everything else usually falls into place.”

Nina

Nina is 52 years old and has six years’ teaching experience. She spent several years as a substitute teacher in a brick and mortar setting and completed one full year of teaching in brick and mortar before moving to virtual education. She has taught pre-kindergarten in brick and mortar and fourth grade in virtual school.

Nina stated that her teaching philosophy involves the teacher serving as a facilitator and mentor as well as making students feel safe in her classroom. She hopes to instill a love of learning in her students by modeling how she herself feels about learning. “Also, that they can feel my love for learning, and I want them to see that I am a lifelong learner.” Nina believes that her students should feel comfortable in her classroom and be able to approach her with any questions or concerns.

Piper

Piper is 32 years old and has six years of virtual teaching experience. She taught for one year in a brick and mortar setting before coming to a virtual school. Piper has experience teaching in second, fourth, and fifth grades as well as teaching intervention classes.

Piper believes in hands on learning as well as peer tutoring. She believes that students learn best from each other and from each other's mistakes. "It starts clicking because they're helping one another out." She states that she has focused on student-led teaching for the past few years and has seen positive results.

Isabel

Isabel is 30 years old with eight years' teaching experience. She has had 2 full years' experience in virtual education and is beginning her third year. Isabel has taught English as a second language courses as well as intervention classes.

Isabel stated that she believes every student that comes into her classroom has the opportunity to learn and grow. She encourages a growth mindset in her students, inspiring them to believe that they can achieve. "I think that when we can figure out the specific areas of need that they have and find a way to meet them there, that is just really important." She also believes that meeting students where they are academically is very important to their personal successes.

Lauren

Lauren is 34 years old and has been teaching for seven years. All of her teaching experience has been in virtual education. Lauren has taught fourth and fifth grades as well as

intervention classes. Lauren said that her teaching philosophy is very short and simple: “Do what’s best for the kids, no matter what.”

Results

Results for this study will be presented by answering the research study questions following a discussion of the theme development. Throughout the discussion of theme development will be a description of the data analysis and coding process. A description of results from each data collection method is included.

Theme Development

As the data was qualitatively analyzed, codes were identified, and themes began to emerge. Appendix D is a table providing each individual code along with its frequency of occurrence from each of the three methods of data collection. In order to begin the analysis of the data, word frequency tables were queried across each data collection method. Each prominent term was cross-referenced in other collection methods to ensure consistency in frequency. Through this process, 25 codes were created. Each of these codes was analyzed individually to ensure that the data pieces it contained were accurate. After this step, the process of analyzing how the codes fit together into themes followed. The following table places the codes into the emerging themes.

Table 2

Codes and Emerging Themes

Theme	Codes
Communication	Impact

	Positivity
	Negative
	Emotions
	Appreciation
Learning	Relationships
	Love
	Learning
	Classroom
	Environment
Leadership	Leadership
	Opportunities
	Communication
	Change
	Feedback
Impact	Instructional
	People
	Evaluator
	Team
	Behaviors
	Managerial
	Responsible
	Positivity

	Negative
	Knowledgeable
Administrators as Resource	Feedback
	Knowledgeable
	Appreciation

Once most commonly repeated terms were established, the context of those terms was studied to determine emerging themes. The participants in this case study responded to research questions and provided their perception of how virtual school administrative behaviors impact their classroom instruction. Data collected from each participant is reviewed and followed by data collected from focus group sessions. Documents collected from Tennessee Virtual Academy and from the participants themselves are then described and analyzed.

Communication. Communication was a reoccurring theme throughout each method of data collection as well as throughout multiple questions. Participants in this study found that communication from administration to teachers both in a positive and negative sense directly impacted instruction.

Eight out of the eleven participants felt that communication had improved over the course of their time at Tennessee Virtual Academy. The general consensus from the focus group sessions were that communication to the staff as a whole has improved. However, problems still exist in communication about individual issues, or issues that impact programs outside of the general population. In a focus group session, Audrey commented:

I totally agree with the communication to all of the teachers [improving], but I'm a POC (point of contact), and lately I haven't been getting a lot of responses to my questions in a timely manner. I attribute that to whatever new situations have cropped up.

Other complaints about communication issues came from teachers who were working in gifted programs, special education settings, or response to intervention teaching situations. Timeliness again was mentioned as a hinderance to good communication. Piper shared a document which showed an attempt at contact, followed by a repeat message a week later confirming that the initial message was in fact received, and then another a day later only then to get a response from the administrator that was chastising in nature. Victoria shared, "For me, specifically, I have a student that I'm waiting on input from administration on how to deal with certain situations. It affects my instruction directly because my whole class is put on hold." Additionally, Penelope stated:

I have kids that are supposed to be taking high school credits in the eighth grade. They will be the last ones to start and they are the first one that need to start, but I'm not getting meetings. I can't teach with all of that going on without them doing their parts. I feel like I'm at the lowest part of their priority.

In a separate focus group, Lauren articulated why she believes communication has gotten better in some areas, but worse in others. She stated:

The bigger we've gotten, we've gotten all these layers. There are administrators, then there are master teachers, then there are points of contact. It's just like sometimes you don't know who will know the answer. Teachers will ask five people and then maybe get

different answers. We live in this fast-paced world, but you've got to slow down and just give somebody a minute to process and to think about it.

Amelia added to this statement by saying, "It gets more confusing for everybody to try to figure out who to contact."

During the individual interview process, communication was by far the number one behavior of an administrator that is necessary to running a virtual school with eight out of 11 participants including it in response to that particular research question. Communication was specifically discussed in terms of consistency, timing, and clarity. Some participants described timing of communication as the most important, attributing positivity when "administrators specifically carve out time to meet with me", as stated by Penelope. Further, Amelia described her relationship with her administrator as positive, but she noted that the absence of daily face-to-face interactions presents challenges in maintaining positive communication. Amelia said, "So many things can be misconstrued or just assumed. We've worked really hard the last couple of years to just talk it out when we can and just make sure everyone is communicating."

It was clear that each of the participants were passionate about the role that they occupy at Tennessee Virtual Academy. Many of the responses shared surrounding communication missteps were emotionally charged and directly reflected whether or not the participant felt appreciated for the job that she does. Penelope shared:

I think they care more than any administrators that I've ever worked with. But again, I think that because of the intensity of what we do here and how much is on our plates,

sometimes intentions get misunderstood and then it goes for a while without being able to rectify it and it makes it hard to keep your initiative.

Learning. Participants in this study provided similar responses in terms of belief in students learning. Themes emerged around differentiating instruction and forming relationships with student as well as creating a positive classroom environment that inspired a love of learning in students.

While the verbiage varied between participants, seven out of the 11 participants noted focusing on the individual student for instruction. Isabel stated:

I feel like every child that enters into our classroom has the opportunity to learn and grow and I think that when we can figure out the specific areas of need that they have, we find a way to meet them there.

Caroline also added that the main goal is to create an environment in which students feel “loved and cared for and then everything else usually falls in place.”

The rubric used to score teachers in an evaluation setting is designed to assess student learning. The rubric consists of twelve indicators, many of which are geared directly toward what students are doing in the classroom. The indicators are: standards and objectives, motivating students, presenting instructional content, lesson structure and pacing, activities and materials, questioning, academic feedback, grouping students, teacher content knowledge, teacher knowledge of students, thinking and problem solving.

Leadership. Another consistent theme throughout this study was that leadership at Tennessee Virtual Academy is constantly changing. At the time of the interviews, only two of

the 11 participants were serving under the same administrator for a second consecutive year. Most of the participants have had multiple administrators over the course of their time teaching at the Academy. Piper has been teaching at Tennessee Virtual Academy for 6 years and has never had the same administrator for 2 consecutive years. She sees this as a hinderance to her growth as a teacher and to her advancement in her career at the school. She also believes that this has directly impacted her instruction, stating:

I've never had a bad evaluation, but every evaluator evaluates differently. I can tell you that [one administrator] is all about the instruction portion, while [another administrator] is about getting to know the child. It's never consistent, so that administrator never got to see me grow from the year before.

In her individual interview, Isabel specifically referenced the multiple opportunities for advancement that seem to be constantly opening up at Tennessee Virtual Academy. She explained that she was informed in her initial interview that there are always opportunities for progression through the ranks. She noted that teachers are often told that they would be great leaders in an effort to validate and encourage them. However, Isabel expressed, there are only so many leadership positions available:

They [teachers] apply for these leadership roles and then don't get them. Then they feel as if they are passed up or that they aren't valued. I think there's a fine line. I think that the role of the teacher needs to be valued as highly as the role of the administrator.

In interviewing teachers, most of them stated that positions are constantly changing. In fact, at the time of the interviews, the Academy had just hired a new Head of School. This

particular position was filled by a person who had been at the school for 6 years and has held the positions of teacher, master teacher, and academic administrator prior to being hired as Head of School.

Impact. Throughout the research process, it became clear that virtual administrators' behaviors do impact instruction in the virtual classroom in both a positive and a negative sense. Impact was felt through evaluations using the TEAM rubric. While everyone did agree that the evaluation process has improved at Tennessee Virtual Academy, they had reservations that the evaluation system was well suited for virtual observations. Elizabeth shared that she is consistently marked down for the same indicator: questioning. She stated that, while working with students of lower cognitive abilities, she had done her best to incorporate the demands of this particular indicator. This was cited by Elizabeth as a negative impact on her classroom instruction. She has a desire to improve in the area but feels frustrated.

The impact that administrators have on classroom instruction in the virtual world can be compared to the findings of Szeto and Cheng (2017) in their study of brick and mortar relationships. The pair found that how administrators relate to and communicate with teachers in instructional matters can have a dramatic effect on how teachers perform with the students in their classrooms.

Administrators as a resource. Nine out of the 11 participants included information surrounding coaching and evaluations as having positive impacts on classroom instruction. The participants appreciated consistent drop-ins along with regular constructive feedback from their administrators on how to improve their craft. Elizabeth directly stated, "I think a positive is when she comes in to observe and then we debrief." Penelope appreciated administrators who

are proactive in providing resources. Nina and Natalie both included multiple examples in their individual interviews that showed appreciation for administrators who were knowledgeable about instruction and were able to support teachers with resources. Natalie shared:

How smart they are, intelligence level, if they are learners themselves, that really impacts my teaching. If they can make me feel safe, like I want my students to feel safe, and make me feel confident, that directly impacts my teaching.

Research Question Responses

Participants in this research study were asked to contribute data through the use of individual interviews, focus group interviews, and data collection. The data collected was used to answer the central research questions and sub-questions formulated by the study.

Individual Interviews

Interviews with each individual teacher were conducted using a semi-structured interview and guided conversational format as recommended by Yin (2014). Each individual interview took between 30 minutes and 1 hour 15 minutes. During the interviews, the researcher was careful to remove any comments or expressions from the dialogue that may have been construed as bias by the interviewee or that may have guided the responses of the interviewees.

The data collected during the individual interview process was recorded and professionally transcribed by an online service and was available within two hours of each interview. The results of the transcription were stored in a password protected folder. This allowed the analysis of data to be completed throughout the data collection process.

Each individual interview began with an introduction to the purpose of the research study, along with a restatement of the confidentiality agreement. The participants were aware that the interview was being recorded and transcribed and that participants would be provided with a copy of the transcript. Upon completion of the individual and focus group interviews, transcripts were sent to each participant. No adjustments were made by the participants to the original interviews. Thirteen interview questions were planned to guide the interview. Questions one through three were meant to be friendly and nonthreatening and allowed the researcher to get to know the basics about the teacher before asking more in-depth questions. These questions were designed to gather background information, such as years' experience, about the participant. Ten key questions followed these background questions. All questions were specifically designed to gain a thorough response to the research questions of the study. Occasionally participants were asked clarifying questions to maintain the flow of conversation during the interview or to ask the participant to expand on her answer further. Because many of the participants had taught in both brick and mortar settings as well as in a virtual setting, they were reminded to consider their responses only in the context of a virtual school environment.

Each interview began with the participants being asked to articulate her teaching philosophy and how that philosophy aligned with the teacher's experiences in virtual education. The responses showed an overall theme of student-centered, individualized learning as a belief system at Tennessee Virtual Academy. While the language varied somewhat, most teachers mentioned individualized instruction in their response. Amelia stated that she believes that "every child can learn...but we have to continue to learn the different ways that students think." Many teachers mentioned student-centered learning in their responses as well as meeting students where they are academically when planning instruction. Two participants specifically

mentioned how their teaching philosophy has evolved since moving into a virtual education format. Penelope stated that, for her, teaching is not just about teaching content anymore. She has seen in her experience that students need to “develop grit and stick to it.” She stated that she helps students by celebrating any accomplishment depending on where the student is starting. For some students, she says, showing up is an accomplishment. For others, “going from a 30 to a 40 is an accomplishment.”

All participants in this study shared that their teaching philosophy somewhat aligns with virtual teaching. Natalie shared:

It gives me the opportunity to meet those kids where they are. If you’re in a classroom with 20 to 25 kids, you don’t have that chance to necessarily work with them one-on-one as much as they need it.

Amelia, whose teaching philosophy stated that all students can learn, responded to this particular question with both a yes and a no. She said, “A lot of students choose our school because they couldn’t learn in the regular setting and they are hopeful that this is a new way for them to learn...and it just doesn’t. It’s [virtual learning] not for everyone.”

In describing her philosophy being teacher as facilitator, Nina shared that in the virtual world, her philosophy is more applicable than brick and mortar. She explained how she has backed away and let the students take more control of the classroom, becoming moderators and peer tutors.

Participants were asked to provide the researcher with an understanding of their perceived relationship with their administrator. In describing these relationships, seven

participants reported positive relationships with administrators in general, while four participants were neutral or unsure because of the newness of their administrators. All of the participants have had multiple administrators in their time at Tennessee Virtual Academy. In responding to the question, most generalized their relationships with all administrators while some gave specific examples of both positive and negative experiences in their relationships.

In discussing the positive relationships, four of the seven participants specifically referenced open and clear communication with their administrators. Lauren stated, “So my relationship with my administrator this year is new, but it’s very good so far. We seem to have an open line of communication and she’s leaning on my, which is nice.” Further, Caroline shared:

I feel like I can be open and honest with my administrators. I can say, listen, I’m just going to be real right now and I can be real, and we can come up with a solution, or they can let me vent and I can move on.

In response to this question, Piper, who has been with Tennessee Virtual Academy for six years stated, “I’ve never had the same administrator. I’ve never had the same evaluator two years in a row.” She went on to share how difficult it has been to build positive relationships with new people year after year.

I’ve had some really good ones where they are in my classroom...if I have a Skype question, they’re there...then I’ve had some that are just MIA all the time. Some are just too overwhelmed and then they’re really snippy when you ask a question.

Penelope explained that in her three years at Tennessee Virtual Academy, she has had multiple administrators, sometimes changing in the middle of the school year. She explained that there are times when she seeks answers to pressing questions by asking multiple people in administration. She said, “It’s like all these little things of being so busy...sometimes it can be a hinderance in building that relationship with the administrator.”

When presented with this question, Natalie’s response was “constantly changing because I have a new one every year.” She further explained that one common thread between them all was that she enjoyed working with them all because she felt they all worked to create a positive working environment.

Nine out of 11 participants specifically stated that administrative behaviors impact their job on a daily basis. Isabel said:

I know that what they [administrators] are working on every single day definitely has an impact on the school as a whole because they were there busting their behinds every single day to make sure that they’re getting all the responsibilities that they need to be doing. I would want to lean towards daily just because I know that what they’re doing daily is going to definitely impact the rest of the school.

Additionally, Caroline shared:

Essentially every decision that comes down from them affects the teachers, which in turn affects the students. How they’re communicating with us on a daily basis or weekly basis, that affects us because every decision that they make, we as teachers play out in our classrooms every day.

Nina expressed frustration with the daily impact of administrative behaviors. She stated:

It is probably daily because every day there's a change and they ask you to do something and that's when you start to sit back and think, they obviously have forgotten what it's like to be sitting over here because it's physically impossible to do everything that they just gave us to do."

Natalie concurred with her opinion:

Every day. Every decision they make impacts me significantly. I think after you've been out of teaching for a while and become an administrator, things change a little bit and you forget what it's like to be a teacher. It's important to stay connected.

Furthermore, research participants were asked to define their administrators' managerial style as either managerial or instructional. In response to this question, four participants described their administrators as managerial, two participants described their administrator as instructional, and five participants described their administrators as both managerial and instructional. Victoria views her administrator as instructional. She said:

I feel like she's instructional because I don't ever get that feeling that really any administrator that I've been under is trying to control what I do or micromanage me. It's always been ways to, like, why don't you try this or do this.

Piper, who has had a different administrator in each of her six years at Tennessee Virtual Academy, explained that she has had both managerial and instructional leaders. She described managerial leaders as those who "cross their T's and dot their I's." Instructional leaders, according to Piper, are more focused on the lesson and on coaching.

Penelope shared:

I think that the two I've worked with most recently are a perfect balance of both. I would have tended to have leaned towards managerial, but then when I get evaluations, I do feel like that's when they are giving me really valuable, I mean like super smart ladies giving me really valuable instructional advice. Usually it has something to do with tweaking something or thinking about something a different way or bringing in another idea that I didn't use in that particular lesson. I love that. But for the rest of the time, it's managerial just because they're just overwhelmed. They're swamped.

SQ1: How do virtual teachers define the characteristics of school administrator behaviors that impact virtual instruction?

In response to this particular question, several different characteristics were mentioned. See the frequency of responses in the table below.

Table 3

Administrative Characteristics

Characteristic	Number of times repeated
Communication	13
Positive	12
Clarity	6
Evaluations	6
Attitude	6

Knowledge of systems	6
Coaching	5
Making decisions	4

Five of the 11 participants specifically referenced communication. The use of the word communication, however, varied in the context in which it was used. Piper shared that communication was an issue because with many people in administrative positions it was difficult for a teacher to know who to go to with issues. Lauren stated that the way in which an administrator communicates has a direct impact on her instruction. She feels more confident when her administrators lead with positive reinforcement. She added, “Are they willing to help you? Do they want you to grow? Do you see that through the way that they talk to and communicate with you?” Penelope further defined communication issues as lack of clarity in direction. This distinction was also made by Caroline in her comments giving an example of clear communication as “slow steps.”

Participants in the current study believed that the ability of an administrator to accurately conduct an evaluation, as well as coach a teacher based on the results, had an impact on classroom instruction. Nina said:

A leader is somebody who will take the time to get in the trenches with you and you can feel that with the evaluation process. You can feel it with just everything that rolls out; all the new programs or new anything that we've had... to all the changes that we've had to

go through. You know that they're on your side, even when they are giving you news you don't want to hear.

Another characteristic that was mentioned from three of the 11 participants was having an administrator who was knowledgeable. This, too, was described in different contexts. Audrey explained that having an administrator who was “very aware of systems” directly impacted her instruction. She further articulated that administrators who understand how to use systems understand the scope of the tasks they are asking teachers to complete. Natalie, however, expressed how having an administrator who was knowledgeable of content and a lifelong learner inspired her to be a better teacher. She said, “I can learn from them and when I feel like I can learn from them, I am inspired to work harder, longer hours. It really has a strong effect.” Isabel expanded on this idea by stating that she appreciates administrators who are “up to date with best practices and making sure we have professional development opportunities.”

Two of the participants listed frequent check-ins as an impacting characteristic, while another two participants mentioned the ability to create a positive school climate. Most of the characteristics mentioned were positive and included being empathetic, being a good listener, being a good decision maker and being approachable. Other characteristics that would not be considered positive were only mentioned by one of the participants who noted nepotism and inconsistent evaluations as direct impacts on her teaching. Piper explained how she does not feel that people are promoted at Tennessee Virtual Academy based on their merit or skill. She said, “It should be what’s going to be best for the school, the students, and our teachers and I don’t see that at TNVA anymore.” She further explained that having evaluations from different evaluators every year had a negative impact on her growth as a teacher and on her teaching in general. She

said, “I can name off different evaluators that are really homed in on certain things. It’s never consistent on your evaluation.”

SQ2: How do teachers perceive that school administrator behaviors positively impact virtual classroom teaching?

In response to this research question, four out of 11 participants shared that regular drop-ins by their administrator with feedback provided directly impacts their teaching in a positive way. Elizabeth said, “I think positive is when she comes in to observe and then we debrief.” She further explained that her administrator gives her time to explain her purpose behind what she is doing.

Nina agreed by stating that for her, a positive behavior is “when they pop into your class and take the time to give you a quick note to say, you know, I was in there.” Caroline added, “Drop-ins to the classroom when you’re not evaluating is important to kind of give feedback and coaching without it being tied to a score.” Natalie said, “I like it when they [administration] visit often. I want feedback.”

Three participants mentioned that making teachers feel valued and appreciated impacts teaching positively. Amelia gave a specific example concerning her administrator:

We did the languages of appreciation in the workplace and I told her what mine was. She took that and used that to spend time with me every week, just to listen, help, and support in whatever way she could.

Penelope added, “I like being included in brainstorming. That makes me feel valued.”

Isabel shared that she could not speak enough about how important it was to make teachers feel valued and appreciated.

Other administrative behaviors that positively impact instruction include: listening, being available to teachers, being consistent, and being receptive to new ideas. Many participants articulated that these behaviors not only impact instruction, but also impact school culture as a whole.

SQ3: How do teachers perceive that school administrator behaviors negatively impact virtual classroom teaching?

The participants in this study shared several administrative behaviors that negatively impacted teaching, but there was little consistency in the responses. Two participants shared that lack of communication negatively affects teaching. Further, two additional participants noted lack of support as a negative attribute. Amelia shared about an experience that she had with administration:

I was just given something, and it was like, go do it. I mean, it kind of made me want to quit because I was so lost. Even though I knew I could do it, and I knew that I was perfectly capable of figuring it out, you know, having some sort of direction, some sort of knowledge base...was really difficult.

Other negative behaviors that were shared included: lack of consistency, multiple schedule changes, no clear direction, not knowing content, a lack of caring, and a lack of knowledge of systems. Caroline felt that she didn't have too many negative behaviors to share.

She stressed that building a positive relationship with her administrator allowed her to circumvent many of the would-be negative behaviors that some of the other teachers experience.

Isabel shared a specific issue that she felt negatively impacted the teaching professionals at the school as a whole. Noting that there is regular movement between positions and a multitude of leadership positions that become available at the school, she shared a specific problem. Isabel said:

If they [administrators] see leadership qualities in you, it's great to speak to that. But I think it's hard in a virtual environment because there are only so many leadership positions. Some of our teachers who have been here from the very beginning are told, you would be such a great leader, but then they apply for all these leadership roles and don't get them. Then they feel like they're passed up or that they're not valued. I think that there is kind of a fine line in appreciating teachers, but I think that the role of a teacher needs to be valued as highly as the role of an admin person.

SQ 4: How does a virtual school administrator's communication style impact instruction?

Participants answered this research question in a variety of ways. All of the participants agreed that an administrator's communication style impacts instruction. Two of the participants described their administrators' communication style as clear. Elizabeth noted that her administrator made sure all of the meetings were clearly communicated and consistent. She said, "I don't have to wonder when the next time is that I'm going to talk to her." Victoria noted that while communication from her administration is very clear, it often changes after it is communicated. "Sometimes we get an email and it's like, oh, do this and then twenty minutes later when you've done it, they're like redo this and do it this way."

Two participants described communication style as easy to reach or as having an open-door policy. Natalie said, “I can contact my administrator at any time and I don’t feel like I’m bothering her.” Audrey stated that her administrator is “very down to earth and easy to get ahold of” with no sort of attitude or bossy tone. Caroline described administrator communication as consistent, while Lauren described it as constant. When asked to elaborate, Lauren explained that though everyone is busy, there is communication even outside of evaluation time. Sometimes it’s just “shooting a Skype that says, ‘hey how are you today?’ It’s really about relationships.”

Isabel believes that administrator communication not only impacts teaching, but it impacts school culture as a whole. She described her administrator’s communication as “open, honest, and upfront about things.” Isabel stated that:

It plays into that positive school culture because when teachers feel like they’re not sitting in the dark, or when they feel like they are getting the answers that they need; it just helps to make it feel like we’re more organized and that they know what’s expected of them.

While everyone did agree that administrator communication impacts instruction, they did not all agree that it was all positive. Nina gave an example of an administrator that was very direct in communicating to teachers. Once this was pointed out, the administrator adjusted her communication style. Nina saw this as a positive move and said that the administrator was able to take constructive criticism and improve. Amelia explained that negative communication from an administrator in the past had negatively impacted her instruction. She said, “I’m sure it affected the way I taught because I just wasn’t as enthusiastic. That was weighing on me.”

Penelope and Piper also described administrator communication as negative and slow. Piper went on to say, “If I have been misunderstood or if there’s a harsh conversation before I go into class, I have been known to call in sick.” Piper shared multiple examples of conversations with her administrators where she felt that the communication was not efficient, and she was misinterpreted. Piper admitted that she was a passionate and emotional teacher.

I would say my emotions are tied to everything that I have passion about. You know, my emotions are tied to my family, my work...anything that I put my thumbprint on will have my emotions tied to it because it’s personal for me. It defines me. It’s part of my definition and so I don’t know how to separate the two.

Central Research Question: How do teachers perceive virtual school administrators’ behaviors impact their instruction in the virtual classroom?

When asked specifically which behaviors impact classroom instruction, participants responded through the use of administrative behavioral attributes. The behaviors were shared according to the chart below.

Table 4

Administrative Behaviors in Operation of a Virtual School

Behavior	Number of times repeated
Communicator	5
Organized	2
Knowledgeable	2

Work ethic	1
Uses time wisely	1
Treats as professional	1
Takes criticism	1
Stubborn	1
Provides resources	1
Problem solver	1
Positive	1
People skills	1
Patient	1
Passionate	1
Listener	1
Flexible	1
Fair	1
Encourager	1
Efficient	1
Delegator	1
Decision maker	1
Compassionate with families	1

Available	1
Approachable	1

The most desirable behavior of an administrator operating a virtual school was the ability to communicate well. This behavior was mentioned by five out of 11 participants. Victoria stated, “I think being able to clearly communicate with people, whether it’s email or verbally, that’s a big one.” Piper added, “when they are communicating correctly and giving us the right information and staying on top of it, the year goes by so much smoother.” Piper elaborated on communication, discussing not only the importance of clarity, but also of tone. She described receiving communication that she perceived to be “hateful”. She said:

You feel like either A. you’ve not been listened to, or B. frustrated because your question still didn’t get answered. That portrays into your lessons with the kids, you know, because you’re frustrated and you’re not getting the answers that you need.

Communication, as described by the participants, took on a variety of descriptions. Two of the participants focused primarily on tone and promptness of communication. These teachers clearly placed a high importance on how they perceived administrator communication and how it affected them both emotionally and professionally. Other participants described more the importance of clarity and consistency in communication.

Audrey discussed the importance of organization in being a virtual school administrator. She stated that it was important to be able to delegate tasks in order to keep the school running smoothly. Nina and Lauren stressed knowledge as an important trait, emphasizing how

important it was that a teacher's evaluator be able to provide answers as well. Nina said, "There's nothing worse than talking to somebody from whom you need help and they don't know the answer, but maybe a step beyond that..somebody who's willing to go and find the answer for you."

Focus Group Interviews

Interviews with each individual teacher were conducted using a semi-structured interview and guided conversational format as recommended by Yin (2014). All 11 participants were asked to sign up for times that were convenient for their schedules. This allowed the groups to be randomly divided into the two separate small groups. Focus group questions built off of previously asked questions in the individual interview process as well as some prompting questions that were asked because of some of the interviewees previous responses.

As the data was analyzed from the individual interviews, there were three specific themes that emerged that warranted further exploration in the focus groups when positive and negative impacts on instruction were discussed. These three themes were communication, relationships, and appreciation. The full chart is shared below. These themes help to better understand the responses to sub-question 1: How do virtual teachers define the characteristics of school administrator behaviors that impact virtual instruction? Evaluation was discussed heavily in individual interviews and necessitated further discussion in the focus groups as well.

Table 5

Frequency Table of Codes

Code	Frequency Total	Frequency from Interviews	Frequency from Focus Groups	Frequency from Documents
Communication	206	121	85	0
Instructional	148	106	29	13
People	147	80	67	0
Impact	143	111	32	0
Positively	128	102	26	0
Relationship	126	56	70	0
Evaluator	124	53	69	2
Team	90	40	44	6
Appreciation	78	20	58	0
Learning	72	48	19	5
Negative	71	53	18	0
Change	67	38	29	0
Classroom	65	40	22	3
Behaviors	52	45	4	3
Love	52	35	17	3
Consistent	43	23	17	3
Managerial	31	28	0	3
Responsible	28	24	4	0

Environment	26	16	2	8
Leadership	25	21	4	0
Emotions	21	21	0	0
Knowledgeable	21	11	1	9
Feedback	18	7	8	3
Opportunities	17	16	1	0
Struggling	15	10	5	0

In order to build on data collected during the individual interviews, themes were shared with the participants of the focus groups. They were informed that the top three codes that had emerged were communication, relationships, and appreciation and that these topics would be explored more in-depth. Prompting questions were pre-planned for the focus groups, but many were combined to be conducive to the flow of discussion. The prompting questions were:

1. Describe experiences with your school administrator that positively or negatively impacted your instruction?
2. What specifically about these behaviors positively or negatively impact your instruction?
3. How have evaluations changed over the years?
4. How has communication with your administrator improved or declined over the years that you have worked for him or her?
5. Of all the things that have been discussed in this focus group session, what is most important to you?

It was important to understand how communication between administrators and teachers had improved or declined over the years. Because communication was one of the outstanding themes concerning impact on instruction, these two questions were asked together. The goal was to specifically understand how classroom instruction was directly impacted by each of these areas. Sub-question 4 asked: How does a virtual school administrator's communication style impact instruction? This discussion contributed to an understanding of how communication impacts instruction.

Communication. Focus group one discussed how communication directly impacts instruction in terms of individual students. Natalie specifically discussed students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) who receive special education services. She explained the difficulties in the virtual teaching world of getting the students' specific needs appropriately communicated to all teachers involved in a timely manner. Amelia elaborated on this by stating, "Their [students with IEPs] needs are more specific. They have teachers coming into classrooms to meet all those needs. It's just a different dynamic when they have to do all of it virtually."

Isabel mentioned the challenges of communicating data and attendance for individual students:

Administrators are working to schedule data conferences with teachers, so we can sit down and look at students and look at their growth and communicate about what instruction is working for them. They're working on systems and structures to better communicate about students and even students who are not attending class regularly.

Further, she mentioned students slipping through the cracks and how important communication was between administrators and teachers surrounding data and attendance.

Focus group two elaborated on how communication impacts instruction. This group focused primarily on timeliness of communication and how it directly impacts teaching.

Penelope was able to provide a very specific example:

I can't teach without them [administration] doing their parts...I've been waiting for people to get me IEPs. I was supposed to get them from [an administrator], but she's swamped. She can't get them to me and I was supposed to get them from a new teacher and she sent me the wrong ones. After three days of asking, it's just the biggest thing with the communication. The frustration is the amount of time that it takes to be able to complete my task, and then I get frustrated and I'm just not on my A game. I'm just not. And I don't mean to be that way, and I try to shake it off and just try to take a deep breath, but it really does impact how valuable I feel as the person doing the job. I feel like I'm at the lowest part of their priority.

Audrey agreed by stating:

We are trying to be more consistent as a virtual school, so if I have a question about something we are supposed to all be doing in class or assignments, and they don't get back in a timely manner, it affects my teaching.

In reference to whether communication had improved or declined over the years, the groups had differing opinions. Most teachers in focus group two believed that communication had improved in their years of experience at TNVA, as far as communication to the general

population. The group felt like administration had made efforts to be clearer and more consistent in the communications to the school as a whole. Issues with communication seemed to heighten with information being shared out to smaller groups such as special education issues, response to intervention groups, or gifted students. Questions being asked specifically about these groups seemed to have a longer response time, and the frustrations shared were primarily surrounding issues with these groups.

Focus group one was more critical of improved communication throughout the years. Lauren explained that the bigger the school has grown, the more layers of people and administrators there are (see Appendix E). She explained that sometimes teachers become impatient and ask different people, resulting in different answers which leads to confusion. Lauren also stated that the multiple mediums available for communication adds to the disarray. She mentioned Skype, Lync, email, and text as among the different ways of reaching out to administrators for answers. “Some people, you know, they end up with six thousand Skypes in the day, and then they don’t answer you, so you Lync them.” Natalie added to Lauren’s opinion by explaining that with Skype, immediate responses are expected, but that it isn’t reasonable to expect that with so many other things happening at the same time.

The emerging themes of relationships and appreciation were expressed in both positive and negative contexts. The discussion surrounding these two themes in the focus group setting contributed to a better understanding of sub-questions 2 and 3. Sub-question 2 asked: How do teachers perceive that school administrator behaviors positively impact virtual classroom teaching? Sub-question 3 asked: How do teachers perceive that school administrator behaviors negatively impact virtual classroom teaching?

Relationships. “Relationships are huge,” Caroline shared. This opinion was also shared by Natalie who said, “If you have a lot of respect for your administrator, maybe this is just my personality, but I want to impress them and work harder for them.” Everyone in both focus groups agreed that having a good relationship with your administrator was crucial to their teaching success. Audrey explained that a good relationship with her administrator makes the evaluation situation reciprocal. She felt comfortable being observed by her administrator as well as receiving both feedback and constructive criticism. She stated, “I feel like they’re there to help instead of catch me doing something wrong if we have a good relationship.” Lauren expressed her appreciation at having a good relationship with her administrator. She shared:

I had some really personal things happen two years ago and it was a rough year in a whole lot of ways. My administrator was very understanding, saying yes, you’re a person and stuff got dropped, but now you’ve got to pick it up and put yourself back together. So, empathy, being empathetic.

Every teacher in both focus groups had had multiple administrators over the course of their service at Tennessee Virtual Academy. Piper was in the unique situation of having had a new administrator every year in her seven years at the school. She expressed her frustration at having to attempt to build a new relationship every year as well as not having the opportunity to have one administrator see her grow over time.

Appreciation. Another theme that emerged from the individual interviews was the importance of teachers feeling appreciated. In the focus groups, the teachers were asked to elaborate on this particular aspect and how the feeling of appreciation could directly impact instruction in the virtual classroom. While some teachers felt that this topic was strongly tied to

relationships and relationship building, teachers were specifically asked to explain how it was different from just having a good relationship with one's administrator.

Caroline explained a time when she was in a place where she had taken on extra responsibilities and didn't feel like her extra efforts were being appreciated. "Then you get to a point where you're done. Like, I won't take anymore, and I won't do anymore and then that hurts not only yourself, but your students." She stated that just feeling like administrators see and appreciate what the teacher is doing makes a huge difference in the ability to continue. Audrey added, "If you are constantly working all the time, and no one recognizes what you are doing, the job becomes more of a burden."

Focus group two spent time discussing the difference between individual, authentic appreciation, and generic group appreciation. The group seemed to recognize the effort that administration had made in the past of recognizing teachers but felt that it was akin to "giving every kid a trophy." (Audrey). This focus group expressed that they would rather hear praise and appreciation coming from parents of students or from fellow teachers than from administration.

Focus group one echoed the sentiment of focusing on individual appreciation. Lauren mentioned that her team had studied the languages of appreciation. She explained how deflated she had felt every year when state scores were returned, but small things like notes in the mail or pictures of her team together lifted her up and made her feel important. Isabel said that she felt it was really difficult to separate relationships from appreciation. "You cannot really appreciate someone well without having a strong relationship with them." She shared that much of the relationship building and appreciation had improved since the implementation of using the web

camera during meetings. She said the face-to-face conversations, even virtually, had changed the tone of relationships dramatically.

Evaluations. In both focus groups, teachers discussed how teacher evaluations had changed over their time at the virtual school. All teachers unanimously agreed that teacher evaluations had gotten significantly better and more focused on instruction. In focus group two, Lauren, who had been at the school the longest in the group, shared that she didn't remember evaluations during the early years at all. "I feel like they were really hit or miss and maybe you got an evaluation, maybe you didn't." The teachers explained that during these years, they could not advance their teacher's licensure because their years of experience were not recognized by the Tennessee State Department of Education. The participants in both groups shared the same sentiments on early evaluations at Tennessee Virtual Academy. The evaluations were not instructionally focused and did not help teachers grow in their profession.

Teachers at Tennessee Virtual Academy are now evaluated under the TEAM rubric, which is sanctioned by the Tennessee State Department of Education. This rubric allows evaluators to focus primarily on instruction and allows teachers at the academy to advance their licensure and their years of experience in education. The teachers in both groups felt that the new evaluation system focused on student and teacher growth while prior evaluation systems did not.

All of the responses to individual interview questions, combined with focus group sessions help to effectively answer the central research question: How do teachers perceive virtual school administrators' behaviors impact their instruction in the virtual classroom? As this study has shown, there are a range of behaviors that impact instruction, with communication

being a prominent theme and thread woven into much of the individual and group dialogue.

Document Analysis

Participants were asked to share a variety of documents that supported the information they had provided during the individual interviews and focus group interviews. Teachers provided a variety of documentation including sample evaluations with feedback from administration. Furthermore, administrators were asked to provide an evaluation schedule as well as the observation rubric used to evaluate teachers.

Administrator evaluation cycle. The frequency of teacher evaluations utilized by Tennessee Virtual Academy is provided in in the figure below. This evaluation cycle allows for differentiation in the number of times per year a teacher is evaluated by an administrator. Teachers in the state of Tennessee are scored on a scale of one to five with five being the highest rating that a teacher can receive. The scores are assigned through a combination of administrator evaluation scores and student success on high stakes assessments. Teachers who score higher on the rating scale receive fewer required observations than teachers who score lower on the rating scale. This format naturally results in administration spending more time in observation of teachers who are rated as lower performing on the state ranking scale.

Figure 1.1 TEAM Observation Guidelines

Observation Guidelines

The minimum required number of observations is based on licensure status and evaluation scores from the previous year.

Observing Multiple Domains During One Classroom Visit

Districts may choose to observe the instruction domain during the same classroom visit as either the planning domain or the environment domain.

Announced vs. Unannounced Visits

At least half of the observations must be unannounced, but it is the district's discretion to have more than half of the observations unannounced.

Educator Licensure Status ¹	Previous Individual Growth or Level of Overall Effectiveness (LOE) ²	Minimum Required Observations	Minimum Required Observations per Domain	Minimum Number of Minutes per School Year
Practitioner ³	Levels 1-4	Six (6) domains observed with a minimum of three (3) domains observed in each semester.	3 instruction 2 planning 2 environment	90 minutes
	Level 5	One (1) formal observation covering all domains first semester; two (2) walk-throughs second semester	1 instruction 1 planning 1 environment	60 minutes
Professional	Level 1	Six (6) domains observed with a minimum of three (3) domains observed in each semester.	3 instruction 2 planning 2 environment	90 minutes
	Level 2-4	Four (4) domains observed with a minimum of two (2) domains observed in each semester	2 instruction 1 planning 1 environment	60 minutes
	Level 5	One (1) formal observation covering all domains first semester; two (2) walk-throughs second semester.	1 instruction 1 planning 1 environment	60 minutes

Note: An LEA or charter school using the TEAM model may choose to allow observers to combine domains during classroom observations provided the requisite minimum time, semester, distribution, and notice (announced vs. unannounced) are met.

Figure 1.1 Administrators are required to observe teachers based on licensure status and previous level of effectiveness data. Reproduced with permission (see Appendix E) (Tennessee Department of Education Website. (n.d.). Retrieved October 19, 2018, from <https://team-tn.org/>)

Evaluation rubric. Evaluations have changed significantly over the years at Tennessee Virtual Academy. Teachers in the present study unanimously agreed that they have improved in measurement of instructional practices. A 2013-2014 evaluation rubric was shared by a teacher and is shown below for comparison to the current 2018-2019 evaluation rubric.

Table 6

Evaluation Indicator Comparison

2013-2014 Indicator	2018-2019 Indicator
Class Connect Sessions	Lesson Structure and Pacing
Study Island Participation	Activities and Materials
Scantron Performance	Questioning
Documentation	Academic Feedback
Conferences	Grouping Students
Individualized Learning Plans	Teacher Content Knowledge
Technology Skills Development	Teacher Knowledge of Students
Professional Responsibilities	Thinking
Teacher participation at outings	Problem Solving

The current tool used to evaluate general education teachers is divided into three parts: Instruction, Planning, and Environment. The evaluation tool was designed for teachers in a brick and mortar setting and while the participants in the study agreed that it was more desirable than previous evaluation tools, they also expressed some frustrations with having to adapt it to virtual instruction. This rubric allows administrators to primarily focus on the twelve indicators involved in observing instruction. Evaluators rank teachers in each area on a scale of one to five and then provide areas of strength and areas for growth during post-observation conferencing.

Sample feedback. Only one teacher provided sample formal evaluation feedback from administrators. The verbiage used on this feedback was perfectly aligned with the instructional indicators from the TEAM rubric. For example, Elizabeth shared an example in which she was scored as a four on the indicator ‘Teacher Knowledge of Students’. The evaluator had noted this as an area of reinforcement for her including the following comment: “Great knowledge of students and their ability levels.” Elizabeth had scored a three on the indicator ‘Thinking’. Her evaluator had noted that she should “continue to develop strategies that create an atmosphere for student thinking.”

Figure 1.2 Sample Observation Feedback

Observation Classroom Details					
Focus Area	Special Education	Subject	Special Education	Advanced Specification	N/A
Domain	Section	Indicator	Observer Score	Self Score	
Designing and Planning Instruction		Instructional Plans (IP)	4	4	
		Student Work (SW)	3	4	
		Assessment (AS)	4	4	
Learning Environment		Expectations (EX)	4	4	
		Managing Student Behavior (MSB)	4	4	
		Environment (ENV)	4	4	
		Respectful Culture (RC)	4	4	
Instruction		Standards and Objectives (SO)	3	3	
		Motivating Students (MS)	4	4	
		Presenting Instructional Content (PIC)	4	4	
		Lesson Structure and Pacing (LS)	4	4	
		Activities and Materials (ACT)	4	4	
		Questioning (QU)	4	3	
		Academic Feedback (FEED)	4	4	
		Grouping Students (GRP)	4	3	
		Teacher Content Knowledge (TCK)	4	4	
		Teacher Knowledge of Students (TKS)	4	4	
		Thinking (TH)	3	4	
Problem Solving (PS)	4	3			

Reinforcement

Rubric Indicator: Teacher Knowledge of Students (TKS)

Great Knowledge of students and their ability levels.

Refinement

Rubric Indicator: Thinking (TH)

Continue to develop strategies that create an atmosphere for student thinking for a SPED population that qualifies for an Alternate Assessment.

Figure 1.2 This teacher is provided very detailed scoring in each observable domain on a scale of 1-5. An area of reinforcement (strength) is clearly noted as well as an area of refinement (growth).

Sample emails. Two participants in the study that felt frustration with timeliness and tone of administrator communication shared email examples to support their points of view. Piper shared an example of a Skype conversation she had had with an administrator in which she asked a particular question about professional development hours and evaluations. She received no response and, exactly one week later, asked if the message had been received. When she still did not receive a response, the following day she sent:

“If you do not know these answers, can you direct me to someone that may know? I just need to know the hour expectations, etc. Please and thanks!”

The response she received was:

“Please do not direct me like that. I haven’t looked at PDP points since the 19th when you sent the original message. I will let you know when I do.”

There were also samples of positive communications shared. Caroline shared an example of a positive note she had received from administration: “I don’t know if this note can do justice to the amount of appreciation and respect I have for you...I am excited to see the great things in store for your future! In short, THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU! Your work does not go unnoticed.”

A teacher shared one final example to explain how administration at Tennessee Virtual Academy show teacher appreciation.

Figure 1.3 Sample Appreciation Email

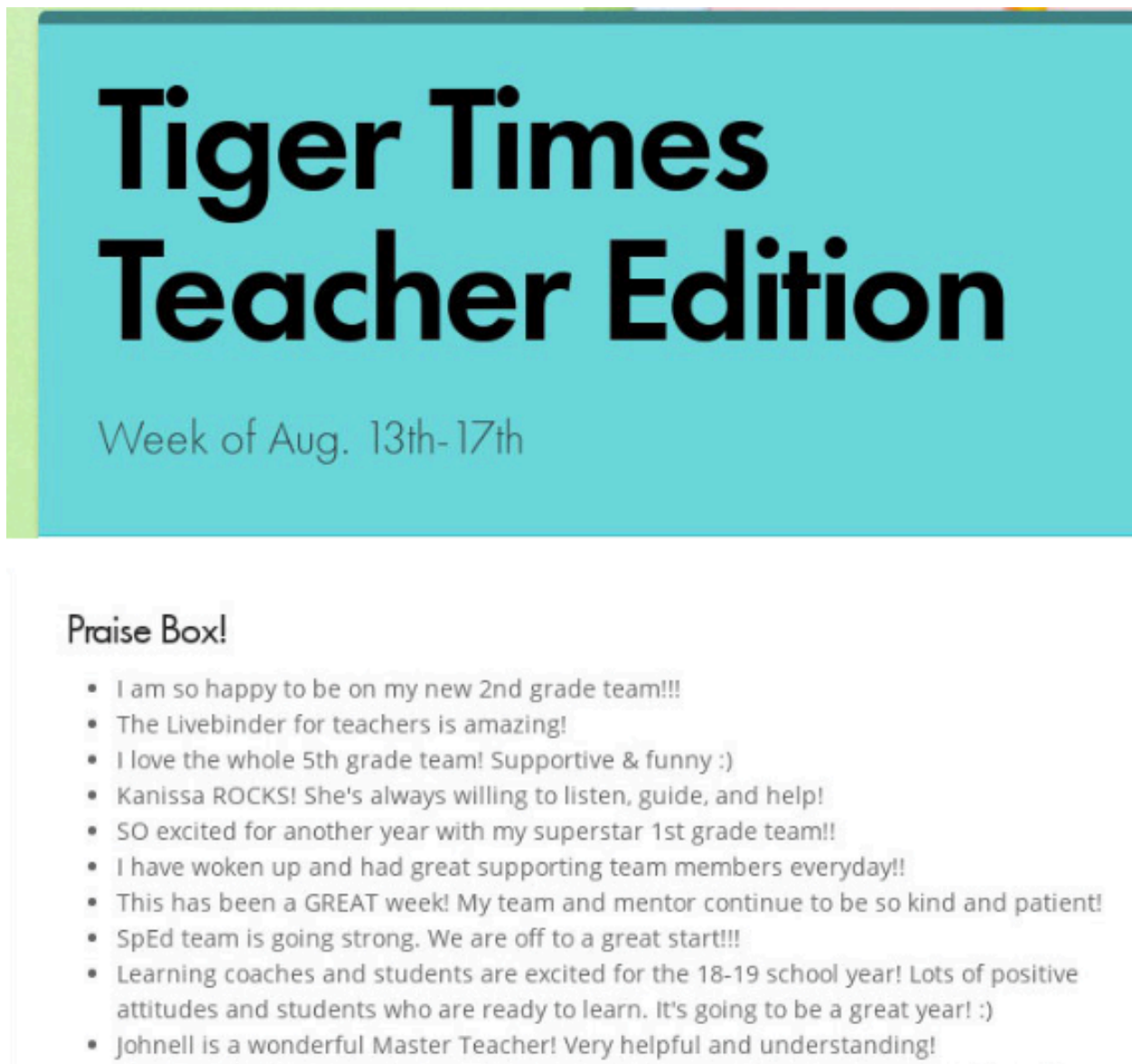


Figure 1.3 Teachers at Tennessee Virtual Academy have the opportunity to submit anonymous praise in a weekly praise box. These statements are then shared with the school as a whole as a component of teacher appreciation.

Summary

This chapter presented information regarding the participants of this research study. The participants were carefully described in order to provide an understanding of the participants who shared their experiences and information for this study. Additionally, this chapter presented the results of this research study. These results were presented by theme identification and organized through the three data collection methods. The data was triangulated through the presentation of data collection from individual interviews, focus group sessions, and document collection.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this case study is to present an in-depth understanding of virtual teachers' perceptions of how virtual school administrators' instructional leadership behaviors impact instruction. This chapter begins by presenting a summary of the findings of this research study. These findings will be discussed in light of literature and theory relevant to the topic of virtual school administrators' instructional leadership behaviors impact instruction. Methodological and practical implications based on the research findings will be discussed as well as delimitations and limitations of the research. This chapter will conclude with recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

Data collected from this case study was able to answer the central research question as well as the four research sub-questions. Data was collected from 11 participants who had been teaching at Tennessee Virtual Academy for two or more years. The data was collected through individual interviews, focus group sessions, and document analysis. It was compiled and analyzed using NVivo software where emergent themes were identified. A summary of each research question follows.

Central Research Question

How do teachers perceive virtual school administrators' behaviors impact their instruction in the virtual classroom?

Findings Applied to Central Research Question

Teachers perceive that virtual school administrators' behaviors do have a direct impact on instruction in the virtual classroom. This impact was defined by teachers as primarily affecting instruction through a variety of communication issues. An administrator's communication behaviors can heavily influence a multitude of matters that directly impact instruction.

Sub-questions

1. How do virtual teachers define the characteristics of school administrator behaviors that impact virtual instruction?
2. How do teachers perceive that school administrator behaviors positively impact virtual classroom teaching?
3. How do teachers perceive that school administrator behaviors negatively impact virtual classroom teaching?
4. How does a virtual school administrator's communication style impact instruction?

Findings Applied to Sub-Questions

Teachers identified a variety of behaviors displayed by school administrators that impact virtual instruction. The most commonly defined characteristic was having good communication skills. Teachers desired clarity and consistency of communication along with promptness and a pleasing tone. Teachers noted that a lack of any of these behaviors could impact their classroom teaching significantly.

Further, participants believed that the ability of an administrator to accurately conduct an evaluation, as well as coach a teacher based on the results had an impact on classroom

instruction. Another characteristic notable for impacting virtual instruction was knowledgeable administrators. Teachers were inspired to do better by virtual administrators who were knowledgeable of their content, were themselves lifelong learners, and had a solid understanding of systems necessary to operate a virtual school. Other prominent characteristics were: conducting frequent check-ins, ability to create a positive school climate, being empathetic, being a good listener, a good decision maker, and being approachable. Negative behaviors that were mentioned as impacting instruction included feelings of nepotism and inconsistent evaluations.

Teachers in this research study stated that regular drop-ins by their administrator with feedback positively impacted instruction in their virtual classroom. Teachers noted that receiving informal feedback that isn't tied to an evaluation score allowed them to grow in their practice. Furthermore, teachers mentioned that administrators who make them feel valued and appreciated positively impacts teaching. Other school administrator behaviors that teachers perceived positively impacting instruction included: listening, being available to teachers, being consistent, and being receptive to new ideas.

Several school administrator behaviors were noted by participants that negatively impact classroom instruction. Among these behaviors were lack of communication and lack of support in current or new initiatives. Other negative behaviors shared by teachers that negatively impact classroom instruction were: lack of consistency, multiple schedule changes, no clear direction, not knowing content, a lack of caring, and a lack of knowledge of systems.

According to the participants in this research study, the virtual school administrator's communication style was the most impactful of all administrator behaviors on instruction.

Description of administrator's communication style took a variety of forms. Among the descriptors of communication that had a positive impact on instruction were: clear, consistent, having an open-door policy, and down to earth. Others discussed communication having a negative impact on instruction describing it as negative, hateful, and slow.

Discussion

The discussion of the findings of this case study includes examining the relationship to the empirical and theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Empirical evidence demonstrated in the literature regarding teacher and administrator communication, instructional leadership, and teacher perspectives on administration is related to the findings in this current study. Discussion of these relationships follows along with the association of the research findings to the theoretical framework of Ginott. Further, empirical, theoretical, and practical implications are communicated along with limitations and recommendations for future research.

Empirical Foundation

A lack of literature is currently available on perceptions of administrator impact on teaching in the virtual environment. Ample research is available on the impact of administrators in the brick and mortar classroom on teacher and administrator communication (Sharpiro, 2015; Klein, 2017; Szeto & Cheng, 2017; Price, 2011; Alexander, Castleberry, & Richardson, 2008; Cosner, 2011; Leithwood, Louis, & Anderson, 2012; Spiro, 2013; Bambrick-Santoyo & Peiser, 2012), instructional leadership (Honig, 2012; Le Fevre & Robinson, 2015; Kaya & Gocen, 2014; Knight, 2012; Range, Pijanowski, Duncan, Scherz, & Hvidston, 2014; Szeto & Cheng, 2017; Dos & Savas, 2015; Quilici & Joki, 2011; Leo, 2014; Richardson, Beck, LaFrance & McLeod, 2016), and teacher perspectives on administration in the brick and mortar school (Richardson,

Alexander, & Castleberry, 2008; Burkhauser, 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015; Quilici & Joki, 2011; Hawkins, Barbour, & Graham, 2012; Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Hauserman, Ivankova, & Stick, 2013; Kayworth & Leidner, 2002). This literature does not reflect the issues with impact of virtual administrator behaviors in a virtual school setting. The current research study corroborates the base of literature while contributing to the novel concept of virtual teacher perceptions.

Teacher and administrator communication. The current research study found that communication was the most important administrator behavior impacting virtual classroom instruction. Alexander, Castleberry, and Richardson (2008) found that inaccessible administration or administrators unwilling to engage in productive dialogue with a teacher can encourage feelings of isolation. Teachers in the current study corroborated this by expressing frustration with administrator's timeliness and lack of engagement in communication about issues that were perceived as important by the teacher. In differentiating between symmetrical and asymmetrical communication, Alexander, Castleberry, and Richardson (2008) further explained that symmetrical communication can be described as a willingness by a leader to respond to employee concerns, while asymmetrical communication is defined as administrators who are not open to exchanging communication with employees. Participants in this study expressed an appreciation for reciprocal prompt communication from administrators, noting that anything less had a negative impact on classroom instruction. A study by Leithwood, Louis, and Anderson (2012) found that principals in a brick and mortar school shape the climate of the building and that their attitudes and relationships impact teachers and students. The current research study found that the same happens in a virtual setting. Teachers in this study reported

that the administrators had a profound effect on their ability to deliver quality instruction in the virtual classroom.

Instructional leadership. Le Fevre and Robinson (2015) identified three barriers to more effective instructional leadership: administrative tasks that distract from teaching and learning, the adequacy of the leaders' content knowledge, and the relational skills required to assist teachers in improving their craft. All three of these barriers were discussed in relation to administration in the virtual setting. Five out of 11 teachers stated that their administrator was alternately managerial and instructional leaders, four reported that their administrator was primarily managerial, and only two identified their administrator as primarily an instructional leader. Many teachers in this study reported that their administrator sought to be a more instructionally focused leader but were often bombarded with tasks that distracted them from this desired task.

Teachers were confident that their leaders had adequate content knowledge to be instructional leaders, but some reported that their administrator lacked the relational skills required to be anything but managerial. Teachers in this research study expressed a strong desire for frequent visits from administration to their virtual classroom. Research has shown that how administrators communicate with teachers on instructional matters can have a dramatic effect on how teachers perform with students in their classrooms (Szeto & Cheng, 2017). Teachers in this study noted that administrators who engage frequently in their teachers' classrooms have an impact on virtual instruction.

Evaluations in the virtual setting was discussed at length with participants in the current research study. Participants shared that the evaluation process had improved in their respective

years of service at Tennessee Virtual Academy, but that the evaluations were not entirely aligned with virtual education. Over and over, participants noted the importance of evaluator knowledge of content and the ability to share resources and expertise in the form of coaching. This echoes one study that reflects the importance of instructional leadership in the virtual setting.

Richardson, et al. (2016) found instructional leadership to be a core element of virtual school leadership. The principals interviewed in the study reported that virtual leaders must have a strong background in curriculum, standards, and instruction, and that they must have the ability to translate these skills into an online environment.

Teacher perspectives on administration. In a recent study of the role of online school principals, researchers found that the principals at the school perceived their role as instructional and supporting teachers in students' success. Conversely, the teachers at the school viewed their principals as managerial focusing on supervision and evaluation (Quilici & Joki, 2011). This current research study found that while 5 of the teachers stated that their administrator was both instructional and managerial, only 2 of the participants perceived their administrator as primarily instructional. Participants in this study reported that their administrator had a desire to focus more on instruction but were often pulled into more managerial tasks. In their research, Blasé and Blasé (1999) found two major themes: talking with teachers inside and outside of instructional conferences allowed teachers to reflect on their learning and professional practice; and the promotions of professional growth with respect to teaching methods and collegial interaction surrounding teaching and learning.

Research has shown that teacher perceptions of their working conditions impacts their decision on whether to leave schools and that principals are in the best position to influence these

working conditions (Burkhauser, 2016). Participants in the current research study shared that many teachers had left the school due to the unanticipated level of stress placed on them by administrators at Tennessee Virtual Academy. Teachers expressed a disconnect between the number of tasks that administration was asking of them versus what the teachers felt they were capable of accomplishing.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical framework for this study is based on Haim Ginott's theory of congruent communication. Ginott (1972) proposed three basic tenets that contribute to a positive school environment. The three tenets include teachers' communications with students being harmonious with how the students feel; teachers' behaviors inviting cooperation; and discipline used as an alternative to punishment (Manning & Bucher, 2001). Manning and Bucher (2001) further translated Ginott's theory into practical application for teachers in an attempt to develop a cohesive model of the theory.

In practice, administrative behaviors in education directly affect teacher instruction. The purpose of this study was to determine how these behaviors impact instruction. Teachers reported that communication from administration had a direct impact on instruction in the virtual classroom. Communication that is inconsistent or unclear can lead to delays in providing adequate instruction, especially to subgroups of students in the general education virtual classroom. When tone of communication is perceived as hateful or has lengthy delays in response, teacher morale is affected which in turn affects classroom teaching as reported by the teachers in this study.

Participants in this study reported primarily positive interactions with administrators in the virtual school. They felt that the relationship that they had with administrators was appropriately cooperative. Two of the participants, however, did not feel that their administrator was cooperative in terms of communication and support. Both participants reported negative effects on their classroom instruction due to these issues.

In leadership positions, it is common to be obligated to correct teacher behaviors in terms of instruction, as well as in other areas. Administrators typically use a rubric based evaluations system when observing teachers (Heneman, Milanowski, Kimball, & Odden, 2006). The same is true at Tennessee Virtual Academy through the use of the TEAM evaluation rubric. Teachers unanimously agreed that evaluation procedures at the school had gotten significantly better over the course of their service at the virtual school. A major challenge noted by Le Fevre and Robinson (2015) in increasing the effectiveness of leaders is overcoming poor communication skills such as the desire to win in a confrontational conversation and the urge for the administrator to maintain control of the conversation. It is important to note that the perceived challenges faced by administration at Tennessee Virtual Academy surrounding communication may affect many other areas of operation including teacher evaluations.

Implications

The purpose of this section is to address the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of the study. Theoretical implications include how Ginott's theory of congruent communication may be used to improve relations between virtual administrators and virtual teachers. Empirical implications expand the scope of current research surrounding the impact that administrators have on instructions into the virtual school realm. Practical implications are

then discussed so that stakeholders may review and use as a guide for shifting the impact that virtual administrators have on virtual classroom instruction to be more consistently positive.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical framework for this study is based on Ginott's theory of congruent communication. Ginott advocated for the recognition of feelings in all situations. He believed that the way a teacher communicated with a student created a mood of contentment or contention (Green, 2006). A large portion of the discussions with teachers during this research study was surrounding communication. Communication from administrators emerged as the highest indicator of impact on instruction in the virtual classroom.

Ginott (1972) proposed three basic tenets that contribute to a positive school environment. The three tenets include teachers' communications with students being harmonious with how the students feel; teachers' behaviors inviting cooperation; and discipline used as an alternative to punishment (Manning & Bucher, 2001). Manning and Bucher (2001) later translated Ginott's theory into practical application for teachers in an attempt to develop a cohesive model of the theory. Their practical applications include fourteen key points, which can be categorized into three areas: Behaviors, Communication, and Discipline.

Behaviors. According to Ginott's theory, teachers should: (a) handle anger appropriately; (b) show acceptance and acknowledgement; and (c) avoid name-calling and labeling students and providing diagnosis and prognosis (Bucher & Manning, 2001). This current research study implies that leaders should consider these three tenets in interacting with teachers. When identifying administrative behaviors that impact classroom instruction, teacher participants noted attitudes among the top behaviors. Participants in this study referenced hateful

tones in written communication with administration as having a negative impact on classroom instruction. Further, participants referenced the importance of feeling appreciated and included as positive impacts on virtual classroom instruction.

Communication. Teachers noted that consistency and clarity of communication directly impact instruction, especially affecting subgroups within the virtual classroom. Communication was also mentioned in terms of tone and promptness, both of which were said to have a direct impact on instruction in the virtual classroom. In analyzing Ginott's theory, six practical applications emerged. These six applications are: teachers should use clear communication; teachers should use sane messages; teachers should always use "I" messages instead of "you" messages; teachers should provide appreciative praise and avoid evaluative praise; teachers should avoid sarcasm and ridicule; and teachers should respect students' privacy and avoid asking prying questions. In documents shared by teachers, administrators displayed both clear messages with appreciative praise as well as instances of messages with demeaning and condescending tones.

Discipline. Ginott's theory led to five practical applications concerning discipline. These five applications are: (a) Teachers should refrain from using punishment in handling discipline problems; (b) Teachers should ignore common four-letter words rather than make them an issue; (c) Teachers should use guidance rather than criticism to influence children; (d) Teachers, when disciplining, should provide students with a face-saving exit; and (e) Teachers should strive for brevity when disciplining children (Bucher & Manning, 2001). Administrators at Tennessee Virtual Academy manage teachers and evaluate instruction. Participants in this study were overwhelmingly complimentary of evaluative procedures that are currently in place at

the school. It was mentioned that past evaluations gave very little opportunities for coaching and growth. In discussions with participants in this study, it became clear that many teachers become very emotionally involved in their roles at the school. This seemed to blur the discussion between what impacted instruction and how their emotional responses tended to skew their individual perceptions. Two teachers referenced times that they felt unfairly reprimanded and their responses were overwhelmingly negative throughout the interview processes.

Administration at the virtual school may benefit from utilization of practical applications from Ginott's theory surrounding discipline between teachers and students, specifically using guidance rather than criticism and brevity during discipline.

Empirical Implications

The literature concerning administrators impact on instruction is proliferate in reference to brick and mortar schools but is deficient in the context of virtual school administration. The findings from this case study increased the body of research by expanding to include teacher perceptions of virtual administration.

Results of the current research study demonstrate how virtual school administrators impact instruction in the virtual classroom. As the concept of virtual education expands, it is necessary to understand how virtual administrators can better support the virtual teacher. The current study opened the door to a novel area of study where researchers can seek answers to how to improve how administrators serve virtual school teachers thereby impacting instruction in a more positive manner.

Practical Implications

Practical implications of the current research study extend to multiple educational stakeholders. Virtual school administrators, virtual school teachers, school administrator candidates, higher education institutions, along with virtual school parents may all derive something from the practical implications of the current research study.

Virtual school administrators. The goal of a school administrator in any setting should be to guide and direct teachers in a way that allows them to deliver the best possible instruction in the classroom. From the results of this study, virtual school administrators should begin by focusing on clarity and consistency of communication as well as how their communication will be received in a written format. Participants in the study seemed to understand the volume of tasks that was being completed by all involved. Many expressed appreciations of a simple reply that a response would be forthcoming. Virtual administrators may consider limiting the modes of communication available between administrators and teachers in order to reduce the expectation of instant responses.

Virtual school administrators should expect to be well versed in systems necessary for operation of a virtual school as well as evaluation rubrics. Teachers noted an appreciation for coaching and content knowledge as well as resource sharing from administration.

Virtual school teachers. Virtual school teachers in the present study shared their perceptions surrounding how virtual administrators impact instruction in the virtual classroom. Current virtual teachers can assess the responses in the study to reflect on their expectations for success in the classroom.

School administrator candidates. Candidates for a role in virtual school administration may consider the perspectives of teachers in this study as a guide for how to interact with teachers in a way that will best support their classroom instruction.

Higher education institutions. While every school administrator completes a preparation program prior to becoming a school administrator, there is little to no preparation in becoming a virtual school administrator (LaFrance & Beck, 2014). Preparation programs may consider developing field experience models that place upcoming administrators in a virtual or blended school program.

Parents of virtual students. Parents who choose the virtual school option for their child are often focused on the educational experience of their child when making the decision to enroll. The current research study will help parents to understand the dynamics of the teaching and learning environment in the virtual setting and how it may impact their child's experience.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations for this study include purposeful sampling of participants, a controlled setting, and a topic chosen by the researcher. Purposeful sampling of participants was used in the case study in order to inform an understanding of the problem being studied. Additionally, a criterion was established which required participants in the study to have spent two or more years teaching in a virtual setting. This was done to ensure that the virtual teachers had adequate experience in the virtual environment and in working with virtual administration. The site for the study was conducive to the research topic. The researcher was aware that the organizational structure at Tennessee Virtual closely mirrors that of a brick and mortar setting.

Limitations for this study include a lack of generalizability due to the design of the case study. The sample size was small and was bound by the school studied. Further, this study was limited by the experiences shared by the participants and may not necessarily represent the larger population.

Further limitations include the potential for bias on the part of the researcher. As I have formerly served as a virtual school administrator, I am aware of the challenges faced by administration in working directly with teachers and instruction in the virtual realm. I took measures to prevent any bias from interfering with any participant interviews by remaining neutral during the interview processes. Finally, there includes a potential for bias on the part of the teacher. Because the teachers were informed of the nature of the research study, some may have participated simply because they had a negative view of administrative practices in the virtual school or vice versa.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research raises other questions that may benefit from further research in the future. Virtual education should be investigated in greater complexity. Based on the results of the current research study, recommendations for future research include increasing the sample size to a larger number and expanding to include other virtual school programs. Virtual program models are very diverse, and future research should include a variety of program models and their unique styles. Considerations may be made for student demographics, as well as educator demographics in future research studies. Of special interest may be the geographic location of the program and the students, as well as the geographic location of the educators involved if it is not in the same geographic region. Additionally, research could be conducted to study the role

of virtual school administrators themselves and the challenges associated with operation of a virtual school.

A future quantitative study is also recommended. Research has shown that school administrators have an indirect effect on student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 2014). Because of this, the factors between virtual student achievement and virtual administrative behaviors should be quantitatively studied to determine if particular behaviors produce higher achievement scores.

Finally, administrators entering the virtual world come with only their learned knowledge of leadership, but with little that is directly applicable to the virtual teaching world (Quilici & Joki, 2011). More research is needed to determine how university programs can better prepare upcoming administrators to serve in a virtual school setting.

Summary

The current research study sought to determine how behaviors of virtual school administrators impact instruction in the virtual classroom. Findings were summarized as they applied to the central question and sub-questions of this case study. Theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of the findings were presented. Further, delimitations and limitations of the case study were shared. Finally, recommendations for future research were offered. This study found a variety of ways in which virtual school administrative behaviors directly impact instruction. This case study will offer virtual school administrators who seek to improve their craft the opportunity to hear directly from teachers concerning how to better improve the way they approach management in the virtual school.

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APPENDIX A

Liberty University IRB Application

APPLICATION FOR THE USE OF HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

IRB APPLICATION #: *(To be assigned by the IRB)*

I. APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

1. Complete each section of this form, using the gray form fields (use the tab key).
2. If you have questions, hover over the blue (?), or refer to the [IRB Application Instructions](#) for additional clarification.
3. Review the [IRB Application Checklist](#).
4. Email the completed application, with the following supporting documents (as separate word documents) to irb@liberty.edu:
 - a. Consent Forms, Permission Letters, Recruitment Materials
 - b. Surveys, Questionnaires, Interview Questions, Focus Group Questions
5. If you plan to use a specific Liberty University department or population for your study, you will need to obtain permission from the appropriate department chair/dean. Submit documentation of permission (email or letter) to the IRB along with this application and check the indicated box below verifying that you have done so.
6. **Submit one signed copy of the signature page (available on the [IRB website](#)) to any of the following:**
 - a. Email: As a scanned document to irb@liberty.edu
 - b. Fax: 434-522-0506
 - c. Mail: IRB 1971 University Blvd. Lynchburg, VA 24515
 - d. In Person: Green Hall, Suite 1887
7. Once received, applications are processed on a first-come, first-served basis.
8. Preliminary review may take up to 3 weeks.
9. Most applications will require 3 sets of revisions.
10. The entire process may take between 1 and 2 months.
11. *We cannot accept applications in formats other than Microsoft Word. Please do not send us One Drive files, Pdfs, Google Docs, or Html applications. **Exception:** Signature pages, proprietary instruments, and documentation of permission may be submitted as pdfs.*

Note: Applications and supporting documents with the following problems will be returned immediately for revisions:

1. Grammar, spelling, or punctuation errors
2. Lack of professionalism
3. Lack of consistency or clarity
4. Incomplete applications

****Failure to minimize these errors will cause delays in your processing time****

II. BASIC PROTOCOL INFORMATION

1. STUDY/THESIS/DISSERTATION TITLE (?)	
Title: HOW VIRTUAL ADMINISTRATOR BEHAVIORS IMPACT INSTRUCTION: A CASE STUDY	
2. PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR & PROTOCOL INFORMATION (?)	
Principal Investigator (<i>person conducting the research</i>): Tamra Lanning	
Professional Title (<i>Student, Professor, etc.</i>): Student	
School/Department (<i>School of Education, LUCOM, etc.</i>): School of Education	
Phone: 423-715-7331	LU Email: tlanning2@liberty.edu
Check all that apply:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Faculty	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Online Graduate Student
<input type="checkbox"/> Staff	<input type="checkbox"/> Residential Undergraduate Student
<input type="checkbox"/> Residential Graduate Student	<input type="checkbox"/> Online Undergraduate Student
This research is for:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Class Project	<input type="checkbox"/> Master's Thesis
<input type="checkbox"/> Scholarly Project (DNP Program)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Doctoral Dissertation
<input type="checkbox"/> Faculty Research	<input type="checkbox"/> Other:
If applicable, indicate whether you have defended and passed your dissertation proposal:	
<input type="checkbox"/> N/A	

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No (<i>Provide your defense date</i>): Spring 2017
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes (Proceed to Associated Personnel Information)

3. ASSOCIATED PERSONNEL INFORMATION (?)	
Co-Researcher(s):	
School/Department:	
Phone:	LU/Other Email:
Faculty Chair/Mentor(s):	
School/Department:	
Phone:	LU/Other Email:
Non-Key Personnel (<i>Reader, Assistant, etc.</i>):	
School/Department:	
Phone:	LU/Other Email:
Consultant(s) (<i>required for Ed.D Candidates</i>):	
School/Department:	
Phone:	LU/Other Email:

4. USE OF LIBERTY UNIVERSITY PARTICIPANTS (?)	
Do you intend to use LU students, staff, or faculty as participants <i>OR</i> LU students, staff, or faculty data in your study?	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No (Proceed to Funding Source)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes (<i>Complete the section below</i>)	
# of Participants/Data Sets:	Department:

Class(es)/Year(s):	Department Chair:
Obtaining permission to utilize LU participants (<i>check the appropriate box below</i>):	
<p>SINGLE DEPARTMENT/GROUP: If you are including faculty, students, or staff from a single department or group, you must obtain permission from the appropriate Dean, Department Chair, or Coach and submit a signed letter or date/time stamped email to the IRB indicating approval to use students from that department or group. You may submit your application without having obtained this permission; however, the IRB will not approve your study until proof of permission has been received.</p>	
<input type="checkbox"/> I have obtained permission from the appropriate Dean/Department Chair/Coach, and attached the necessary documentation to this application.	
<input type="checkbox"/> I have sought permission and will submit documentation to the IRB once it has been provided to me by the appropriate Dean/Department Chair/Coach.	
<p>MULTIPLE DEPARTMENTS/GROUPS: If you are including faculty, students, or staff from multiple departments or groups (i.e., all sophomores or LU Online), the IRB will need to seek administrative approval on your behalf.</p>	
<input type="checkbox"/> I am requesting that the IRB seek administrative approval on my behalf.	

5. FUNDING SOURCE (?)
<p>Is your research funded?</p> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No (Proceed to Study Dates) <input type="checkbox"/> Yes (<i>Complete the section below</i>)
Grant Name/Funding Source/Number:
Funding Period (Month & Year):

6. STUDY DATES [\(?\)](#)**When will you perform your study?** (*Approximate dates for collection/analysis*):**Start** (*Month/Year*): February 2018 **Finish** (*Month/Year*): June 2018**7. COMPLETION OF REQUIRED** [CITI RESEARCH ETHICS TRAINING \(?\)](#)**List Course Name(s)** (*Social and Behavioral Researchers, etc.*):

Belmont Report and CITI Course Introduction (ID: 1127)

History and Ethical Principles - SBE (ID: 490)

Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBE (ID: 491)

The Federal Regulations - SBE (ID: 502)

Assessing Risk - SBE (ID: 503)

Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)

Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505)

Populations in Research Requiring Additional Considerations and/or Protections (ID: 16680)

Unanticipated Problems and Reporting Requirements in Social and Behavioral Research (ID: 14928)

Liberty University (ID: 15111)

Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools - SBE (ID: 508)

Date(s) of Completion: 11/25/16; 11/27/16**III. OTHER STUDY MATERIALS AND CONSIDERATIONS****8. STUDY MATERIALS LIST** [\(?\)](#)**Please indicate whether your proposed study will include any of the following:**

Recording/photography of participants (<i>voice, video, or images</i>)?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Participant compensation (<i>gift cards, meals, extra credit, etc.</i>)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Advertising for participants (<i>flyers, TV/Radio advertisements</i>)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
More than minimal psychological stress?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Confidential data collection (<i>participant identities known but not revealed</i>)?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Anonymous data collection (<i>participant identities not known</i>)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Extra costs to the participants (<i>tests, hospitalization, etc.</i>)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
The inclusion of pregnant women (<i>for medical studies</i>)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
More than minimal risk?*	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Alcohol consumption?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Protected Health Information (<i>from health practitioners/institutions</i>)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
VO ₂ Max Exercise?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Pilot study procedures (<i>which will be published/included in data analysis</i>)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Please indicate whether your proposed study will include the use of blood:	
Use of blood?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Total amount of blood:	
Blood draws over time period (<i>days</i>):	
Please indicate whether your proposed study will include any of the following materials:	
The use of rDNA or biohazardous material?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
The use of human tissue or cell lines?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Fluids that could mask the presence of blood (<i>including urine/feces</i>)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Use of radiation or radioisotopes?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

**Note: Minimal risk is defined as “the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in everyday life or during the performance of routine physical or physiological examinations or tests. [45 CFR 46.102(i)]. If you are unsure if your study qualifies as minimal risk, contact the IRB.*

9. INVESTIGATIONAL METHODS (?)

Please indicate whether your proposed study will include any of the following:

The use of an Investigational New Drug (IND) or an Approved Drug for an Unapproved Use?

No

Yes (Provide the drug name, IND number, and company):

The use of an Investigational Medical Device or an Approved Medical Device for an Unapproved Use?

No

Yes (Provide the device name, IDE number, and company):

IV. PURPOSE

10. PURPOSE OF RESEARCH (?)

Write an original, brief, non-technical description of the purpose of your research.

Include in your description your research hypothesis/question, a narrative that explains the major constructs of your study, and how the data will advance your research hypothesis or question. This section should be easy to read for someone not familiar with your academic discipline: The purpose of this case study is to present an in-depth understanding of virtual teachers’ perceptions of how virtual school administrators’ instructional leadership behaviors impact instruction. My primary research question is: How do teachers perceive the impact of

virtual school administrators' behaviors on their ability to deliver instruction in the virtual classroom? The data gathered from this study will assist me in determining how to improve learning in a virtual setting by understanding how administrators can best support teachers.

V. PARTICIPANT INCLUSION/EXCLUSION CRITERIA

11. STUDY POPULATION (?)

Provide the inclusion criteria for the participant population (*gender, age range, ethnic background, health status, occupation, employer, etc.*): The participants in this study will be selected based on how much time they have worked as a teacher in virtual education. They must have at least two years of virtual teaching experience to participate in the study. No other factors are required to participate.

Provide a rationale for selecting the above population: Teachers who have at least two years experience will have more experience working with a virtual administrator. This will add validity and experience to their responses.

Are you related to any of your participants?

No

Yes (*Explain*):

Indicate who will be excluded from your study population (*e.g., persons under 18 years of age*): Any teacher with less than two years of virtual teaching experience.

If applicable, provide rationale for involving any special populations (*e.g., children, ethnic groups, mentally disabled, low socio-economic status, prisoners*):

Provide the maximum number of participants you plan to enroll for each participant population and justify the sample size (*You will not be approved to enroll a number greater than the number listed. If at a later time it becomes apparent that you need to increase your sample size, submit a [Change in Protocol Form](#) and wait for approval to proceed*): 15

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTION ONLY IF YOU ARE CONDUCTING A PROTOCOL WITH NIH, FEDERAL, OR STATE FUNDING:

Researchers sometimes believe their particular project is not appropriate for certain types of participants. These may include, for example, women, minorities, and children. If you believe your project should not include one or more of these groups, please provide your justification for their exclusion. Your justification will be reviewed according to the applicable NIH, federal, or state guidelines:

12. TYPES OF PARTICIPANTS (?)

Who will be the focus of your study? (*Check all that apply*)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Normal Participants (Age 18-65)	<input type="checkbox"/> Pregnant Women
<input type="checkbox"/> Minors (Under Age 18)	<input type="checkbox"/> Fetuses
<input type="checkbox"/> Over Age 65	<input type="checkbox"/> Cognitively Disabled
<input type="checkbox"/> University Students	<input type="checkbox"/> Physically Disabled
<input type="checkbox"/> Active-Duty Military Personnel	<input type="checkbox"/> Participants Incapable of Giving Consent
<input type="checkbox"/> Discharged/Retired Military Personnel	<input type="checkbox"/> Prisoners or Institutional Individuals
<input type="checkbox"/> Inpatients	<input type="checkbox"/> Specific Ethnic/Racial Group(s)
<input type="checkbox"/> Outpatients	<input type="checkbox"/> Other potentially elevated risk populations
<input type="checkbox"/> Patient Controls	<input type="checkbox"/> Participant(s) related to the researcher

Note: Only check the boxes if the participants will be the focus (for example, ONLY military or ONLY students). If they just happen to be a part of the broad group you are studying, you only need to check “Normal Participants.” Some studies may require that you check multiple boxes (e.g., Korean males, aged 65+).

VI. RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

13. CONTACTING PARTICIPANTS (?)

Describe in detail how you will contact participants regarding this study (include the method(s) used—email, phone call, social media, snowball sampling, etc.): I plan to contact the school administrator for a list of teachers who fit my criteria. Once the participants are identified, I will send an introductory email explaining the research study and offer an introductory meeting to explain the purpose for my research. A timeline will be included to encourage prompt responses. Participants will be asked to sign consent forms at the introductory meeting and I will begin to schedule times for individual interviews and focus group meetings.

14. SUBMISSION OF RECRUITMENT MATERIALS (?)

Submit a copy of all recruitment letters, scripts, emails, flyers, advertisements, or social media posts you plan to use to recruit participants for your study as separate Word documents with your application. [Recruitment templates](#) are available on the IRB website.

Check the appropriate box:

All of the necessary recruitment materials will be submitted with my application.

My study strictly uses **archival** data, so recruitment materials are not required.

15. LOCATION OF RECRUITMENT (?)

Describe the location, setting, and timing of recruitment: All participants will be teachers for Tennessee Virtual Academy. I will solicit volunteers for my study until I reach my minimum number of 10 and then beyond that for two weeks to see if I can hit my goal of 12-15.

16. SCREENING PROCEDURES (?)

Describe any screening procedures you will use when recruiting your participants (*i.e., screening survey, database query, verbal confirmation, etc.*): Teachers years of virtual teaching experience will be submitted by the teacher and verified by the administrator of the school.

17. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST (?)

Do you have a position of grading or professional authority over the participants (*e.g., Are you the participants' teacher, principal, or supervisor?*)?

No ([Proceed to Procedures](#))

Yes (*Explain what safeguards are in place to reduce the likelihood of compromising the integrity of the research, e.g., addressing the conflicts in the consent process and/or emphasizing the pre-existing relationship will not be impacted by participation in the research.*):

Do you have any financial conflicts of interest to disclose (*e.g., Do you or an immediate family member receive income or other payments, own investments in, or have a relationship with a non-profit organization that could benefit from this research?*)?

No ([Proceed to Procedures](#))

Yes (State the funding source/financial conflict and then explain what safeguards are in place to reduce the likelihood of compromising the integrity of the research.):

VII. RESEARCH PROCEDURES

18. PROCEDURES (?)

Write an original, non-technical, step by step, description of what your participants will be asked to do during your study and data collection process. If you have multiple participant groups, (ex: parents, teachers, and students) or control groups and experimental groups, please specify which group you are asking to complete which task(s). **You do not need to list signing/reading consent as a step:**

Step/Task/Procedure	Time (Approx.)	Participant Group(s) (All, Group A, Group B, Control Group, Experimental Group, etc.)
1. Participate in an introductory meeting to explain the purpose of the study.	20 min	All
2. Submit documentation of conversations with their administrators surrounding feedback.	1 hour	All
3. Participate in a one on one interview with me.	1.5 hours	All
4. Participate in Skype focus group session 1	1 hour	All

5. Participate in Skype focus group session 2	1 hour	All
6.		
7.		
8.		

19. SUBMISSION OF DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS/MATERIALS (?)

Submit a copy of all instruments, surveys, interviews questions, outlines, observation checklists, prompts, etc. that you plan to use to collect data for your study as separate Word documents with your application. Pdfs are **ONLY** acceptable for proprietary instruments.

Check the appropriate box:

All of the necessary data collection instruments will be submitted with my application.

My study strictly uses **archival** data, so data collection instruments are not required.

20. STUDY LOCATION (?)

Please describe the location(s)/site(s) in which the study will be conducted. Be specific (*include city, state, school/district, clinic, etc.*): Tennessee Virtual Academy. All research will be conducted virtually via email and Skype.

*Note: For School of Education research, investigators must submit documentation of permission from each research site to the IRB prior to receiving approval. If your study involves K-12 schools, district-level approval is acceptable. If your study involves colleges or universities, you may also need to seek IRB approval from those institutions. You may seek permission prior to submitting your IRB application, however, **do not** begin recruiting participants. If you find that you need a conditional approval letter from the IRB in order to obtain permission, one can be provided to you once all revisions have been received and are accepted.*

VIII. DATA ANALYSIS

21. NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS/DATA SETS (?)

Estimate the number of participants to be enrolled or data sets to be collected: 12

22. ANALYSIS METHODS (?)

Describe *how* the data will be analyzed and what will be done with the data and the resulting analysis, including any plans for future publication or presentation: I will continually compare the data being analyzed to how administrators are impacting virtual instruction. Based on prior research in brick and mortar schools, administrative behaviors greatly impact instruction. This proposition guided the formation of the research questions and data collection plan. In analyzing the interview results as well as the focus group results, data can be captured in a table that illustrates the positive behaviors of administrators and the negative behaviors of administrators. In order to triangulate the data, the documents will support the perceptions of these behaviors with evidence gathered such as email communications and evaluation feedback. As the themes emerge, I will be able to formulate an understanding of how administrative behaviors that both positively and negatively impact instruction. This proposed study could benefit the growing number of online school administrators by allowing them to understand how teachers perceive their behaviors stands to impact instruction, either in a positive, or a negative manner. This study could also benefit future virtual schools in training and preparation of online administrators.

IX. PARENTAL/GUARDIAN CONSENT**23. PARENTAL/GUARDIAN CONSENT REQUIREMENTS (?)**

Does your study require parental/guardian consent? *(If your participants are under 18, parental/guardian consent is required in most cases.)*

No ([Proceed to Child Assent](#))

Yes (*Answer the following question*)

Does your study entail greater than minimal risk without the potential for benefits to the participant?

No

Yes (*Consent of both parents is required*)

X. ASSENT FROM CHILDREN

24. CHILD ASSENT (?)

Is assent required for your study? (*Assent is required unless the child is not capable due to age, psychological state, or sedation OR the research holds out the prospect of a direct benefit that is only available within the context of the research.*)

No ([Proceed to Consent Procedures](#))

Yes

Note: If the parental consent process (full or part) is waived (See XIII below) assent may be also. See the IRB's [informed consent](#) page for more information.

XI. PROCESS OF OBTAINING INFORMED CONSENT

25. CONSENT PROCEDURES (?)

Describe in detail *how and when* you will provide consent information (*If applicable, include how you will obtain consent from participants and/or parents/guardians and/or child assent.*): Once the participating individuals are identified, I will send an introductory email explaining the research study and offer an introductory meeting to explain the purpose for my research. A timeline will be included to encourage prompt responses. Participants will be

asked to sign consent forms at the introductory meeting and I will begin to schedule times for individual interviews and focus group meetings.

XII. USE OF DECEPTION

26. DECEPTION (?)

Are there any aspects of the study kept secret from the participants (e.g., the full purpose of the study)?

No

Yes (describe the deception involved and the debriefing procedures):

Is deception used in the study procedures?

No

Yes (describe the deception involved and the debriefing procedures):

Note: Submit a post-experiment debriefing statement and consent form offering participants the option of having their data destroyed. A debriefing template is available on our [website](#).

XIII. WAIVER OF INFORMED CONSENT OR MODIFICATION OF REQUIRED ELEMENTS IN THE INFORMED CONSENT PROCESS

27. WAIVER OF INFORMED CONSENT ELEMENTS (?)

N/A

Please indicate why you are requesting a waiver of consent (If your reason does not appear as an option, please check N/A. If your reason appears in the drop-down list, complete the below questions in this section): Click to select an option.

Does the research pose no more than minimal risk to participants (i.e., no more risk than that of everyday activities)?

No, the study is greater than minimal risk.

Yes, the study is minimal risk.

<p>Will the waiver have no adverse effects on participant rights and welfare?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No, the waiver <u>will</u> have adverse effects on participant rights and welfare.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, the waiver <u>will not</u> adversely affect participant rights and welfare.</p>
<p>Would the research be impracticable without the waiver?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No, there are other ways of performing the research without the waiver.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, not having a waiver would make the study unrealistic. (Explain):</p>
<p>Will participant debriefing occur (i.e., will the true purpose and/or deceptive procedures used in the study be reported to participants at a later date)?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No, participants will not be debriefed.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, participants will be debriefed.</p>
<p><i>Note: A waiver or modification of some or all of the required elements of informed consent is sometimes used in research involving deception, archival data, or specific minimal risk procedures.</i></p>

XIV. WAIVER OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR PARTICIPANTS TO SIGN THE INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

<p>28. WAIVER OF SIGNED CONSENT (?) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A</p>
<p>Please indicate why you are requesting a waiver of signatures (If your reason does not appear as an option, please check N/A. If your reason appears in the drop-down list, complete the below questions in this section): Click to select an option.</p>
<p>Would a signed consent form be the only record linking the participant to the research?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No, there are other records/study questions linking the participants to the study.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, only the signed form would link the participant to the study.</p>
<p>Does a breach of confidentiality constitute the principal risk to participants?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No, there are other risks involved greater than a breach of confidentiality.</p>

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, the main risk is a breach of confidentiality.
Does the research pose no more than minimal risk to participants (i.e., no more risk than that of everyday activities)?
<input type="checkbox"/> No, the study is greater than minimal risk.
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, the study is minimal risk.
Does the research include any activities that would require signed consent in a non-research context (e.g., liability waivers)?
<input type="checkbox"/> No, there <u>are not</u> any study related activities that would normally require signed consent
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, there <u>are</u> study related activities that would normally require signed consent
Will you provide the participants with a written statement about the research (i.e., an information sheet that contains all of the elements of an informed consent form but without the signature lines)?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No, participants <u>will not</u> receive written information about the research.
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, participants <u>will</u> receive written information about the research.
<i>Note: A waiver of signed consent is sometimes used in anonymous surveys or research involving secondary data. This does not eliminate the need for a consent document, but it eliminates the need to obtain participant signatures.</i>

XV. CHECKLIST OF INFORMED CONSENT/ASSENT

29. STATEMENT (?)
Submit a copy of all informed consent/assent documents as separate Word documents with your application. Informed consent/assent templates are available on our website. Additional information regarding consent is also available on our website.
Check the appropriate box:

All of the necessary consent/assent documents will be submitted with my application.

My study strictly uses **archival** data, so consent documents are not required.

XVI. PARTICIPANT PRIVACY, DATA SECURITY, & MEDIA USE

30. PRIVACY (?)

Describe what steps you will take to protect the privacy of your participants (*e.g., If you plan to interview participants, will you conduct your interviews in a setting where others cannot easily overhear?*): The participants will be thoroughly informed of the purpose of the research and appropriate consent will be obtained and I will work to build trust with the participants of the study and avoid any leading questions or disclosure of sensitive information. Furthermore, teachers will also understand that they may be removed from the research study at any point and that participation is voluntary up to and including the time of data collection. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of the participants. Interviews will be conducted virtually through Skype where each of us will be in a private setting.

Note: Privacy refers to persons and their interest in controlling access to their information.

31. DATA SECURITY (?)

How will you keep your data secure (*i.e., password-locked computer, locked desk, locked filing cabinet, etc.*)?: Password protected computer with password protected files for storing the data.

Who will have access to the data (*i.e., the researcher and faculty mentor/chair, only the researcher, etc.*)?: Only the researcher

Will you destroy the data once the three-year retention period required by federal regulations expires?

No

Yes (*Explain how the data will be destroyed*): Delete all files from the computer entirely.

Note: All research-related data must be stored for a minimum of three years after the end date of the study, as required by federal regulations.

32. ARCHIVAL DATA (SECONDARY DATA) (?)

Is all or part of the data archival (i.e., previously collected for another purpose)?

No ([Proceed to Non-Archival Data](#))

Yes (*Answer the questions below*)

Is the archival data publicly accessible?

No (*Explain how you will obtain access to this data*): I will request documentation from the teachers.

Yes (*Indicate where the data is accessible from, i.e., a website, etc.*):

Will you receive the raw data stripped of identifying information (e.g., names, addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, social security numbers, medical records, birth dates, etc.)?:

No (*Describe what data will remain identifiable and why this information will not be removed*):

Yes (*Describe who will link and/or strip the data—this person should have regular access to the data and should be a neutral party not involved in the study*): The teachers will be ask their administrator to remove identifying information before submitting the data.

<p>Can the names or identities of the participants be deduced from the raw data?</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No (<i>Place your initials in the box: I will not attempt to deduce the identity of the participants in this study</i>): TL</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes (<i>Describe</i>):</p>
<p>Please provide the list of data fields you intend to use for your analysis and/or provide the original instruments used in the study:</p>
<p><i>Note: If the archival data is not publicly available, submit proof of permission to access the data (i.e., school district letter or email). If you will receive data stripped of identifiers, this should be stated in the proof of permission.</i></p>

33. NON-ARCHIVAL DATA (PRIMARY DATA) (?)

If you are using non-archival data, will the data be anonymous to you (i.e., raw data does not contain identifying information and cannot be linked to an individual/organization by use of pseudonyms, codes, or other means)? **Note:** For studies involving audio/video recording or photography, select “No”

- N/A: I will not use non-archival data (*data was previously collected, [skip to Media](#)*)
- No ([Complete the “No” section below](#))
- Yes ([Complete the “Yes” section below](#))

****COMPLETE THIS SECTION IF YOU ANSWERED “NO” TO QUESTION 31****

Can participant names or identities be deduced from the raw data?

No

Yes (*Describe*):

Will a person be able to identify a subject based on other information in the raw data

(i.e., title, position, sex, etc.)?

No

Yes (*Describe*): Title

Describe the process you will use to ensure the confidentiality of the participants during data collection and in any publication(s) *(i.e., you may be able to link*

individuals/organizations to identifiable data; however, you will use pseudonyms or a coding system to conceal their identities): Pseudonymns will be used to protect the identity of the participants. Any reference to the administrators will include a pseudonymn as well.

Do you plan to maintain a list or codebook linking pseudonyms or codes to participant identities?

No

Yes (*Please describe where this list/codebook will be stored and who will have access to the list/codebook. It should not be stored with the data.*): The researcher only will have access to this data. It will be stored in a separate password protected folder from the data.

****COMPLETE THIS SECTION IF YOU ANSWERED “YES” TO QUESTION 31****

Describe the process you will use to collect the data to ensure that it is anonymous:
Place your initials in the box: I will not attempt to deduce the identity of the participants in this study: TL
<i>Note: If you plan to use participant data (i.e., photos, recordings, videos, drawings) for presentations beyond data analysis for the research study (e.g., classroom presentations, library archive, or conference presentations) you will need to provide a materials release form to the participant.</i>

34. MEDIA USE (?)	
Will your participants be audio recorded?	<input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes
Will your participants be video recorded?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes
Will your participants be photographed?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes
COMPLETE THIS SECTION IF YOU ANSWERED “YES” TO ANY MEDIA USE	
<p>Include information regarding how participant data will be withdrawn if he or she chooses to leave the study*: If the participant chooses to withdraw from the study, all data collected from the participant will be immediately destroyed. The participant will be asked to sign a paper formally withdrawing from the study.</p>	
<p>Will your participants be audio recorded, video recorded, or photographed without their knowledge?***</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes (<i>Describe the deception and debriefing procedures</i>): In the introductory meeting, all steps of the research process will be described.</p>	

**Note on Withdrawal: Add the heading “How to Withdraw from the Study” on the consent document and include a description of the procedures a participant must perform to be withdrawn.*

***Note on Deception: Attach a post-experiment debriefing statement and a post-deception consent form, offering the participants the option of having their recording/photograph destroyed and removed from the study.*

XVII. PARTICIPANT COMPENSATION

35. COMPENSATION (?)

Will participants be compensated (e.g., gift cards, raffle entry, reimbursement)?

No ([Proceed to Risks](#))

Yes (*Describe*):

Will compensation be pro-rated if the participant does not complete all aspects of the study?

No

Yes (*Describe*):

Note: Certain states outlaw the use of lotteries, raffles, or drawings as a means to compensate or recruit research participants. Research compensation exceeding \$600 per participant within a one-year period is considered income and will need to be filed on the participant’s income tax returns. If your study is grant funded, Liberty University’s Business Office policies might affect how you compensate participants. Contact the IRB for additional information.

XVIII. PARTICIPANT RISKS AND BENEFITS

36. RISKS (?)

Describe the risks to participants and any steps that will be taken to minimize those risks. (*Risks can be physical, psychological, economic, social, or legal. If the only potential risk is a breach in confidentiality if the data is lost or stolen, state that here*): The only potential risk in this study is a breach in confidentiality if the data is lost or stolen.

Will alternative procedures or treatments that might be advantageous to the participants be made available?

No

Yes (*Describe*):

**ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTION ONLY IF YOUR STUDY IS
CONSIDERED GREATER THAN MINIMAL RISK:**

Describe provisions for ensuring necessary medical or professional intervention in the event of adverse effects to the participants (*e.g., proximity of the research location to medical facilities, or your ability to provide counseling referrals in the event of emotional distress*):

37. BENEFITS (?)

Describe the possible direct benefits to the participants. (*If participants are not expected to receive direct benefits, please state "No direct benefits." Completing a survey or participating in an interview will not typically result in direct benefits to the participant.*): No direct benefits.

Describe any possible benefits to society:

Evaluate the risk-benefit ratio. (*Explain why you believe this study is worth doing, even with any identified risks.*):

APPENDIX B

**AGREEMENT BETWEEN
K12 VIRTUAL SCHOOLS LLC
AND
TAMRA LANNING**

This agreement (“Agreement”) is made this _____ day of November, 2017 (the “Effective Date”), by and between K12 Virtual Schools LLC, with a business address located at 2300 Corporate Park Dr., Herndon, VA 20171 (“K12”) and Tamra Lanning, with an address of _____ (“Student”), each individually a “Party” and collectively the “Parties.”

SCOPE

1.1 Student will be undertaking research for her own educational requirements on the subject of Virtual Administrators’ Behaviors That Impact Instruction: A Case Study Based on Virtual Teachers’ Perceptions (the “Study”). As part of the Study, K12 will permit Student to ask teachers at Tennessee Virtual Academy (“TNVA”) to volunteer to participate in survey data, focus groups, and document analysis so long as such work does not negatively effect their responsibilities to TNVA and K12 and so long as no teacher will be asked to breach any confidentiality requirements including those associated with the Family Educational Rights to Privacy Act. Student will make sure that any request will not have the appearance of being mandatory and that Student will make sure that the teachers understand that neither K12 nor TNVA are taking part in this Study.

1.2 Student understands that she will not be given access to any “education records,” as that term is defined in the Family Educational Rights to Privacy Act, of TNVA students. In the event that, notwithstanding this understanding, she is provided with “education records” of TNVA students, she agrees to promptly return such records to the Head of School of TNVA and to promptly destroy all of her records and notes reflecting or regarding such records. Student will not use, record or publish the names or other identifying information of any TNVA student in the course of the Study or any work product emanating therefrom.

RELATIONSHIP OF THE PARTIES

2.1 Nothing in this Agreement is intended to create an employment relationship, company, partnership, joint venture, association or other legal entity of any kind or for any purpose as between the Parties. No Party will have any authority to bind or commit the other Party, or cause the other Party to incur any liability or obligation, for any purpose without the express written consent of the other Party and either Party has the right to enter into the same or similar relationships with other Parties.

RIGHT TO PUBLISH

3.1 K12 understands that results or other information based in whole or in part on the Study may be embodied in presentations at symposia, lectures, or professional meetings, and may be published in journals, theses, dissertations, brochures or otherwise (collectively, “Presentations and Publications”). If, however, any Presentations and Publications contain K12-Identifying Information, K12 must be furnished notice including copies of any proposed Presentations and Publications at least four (4) weeks in advance of the earlier of their publication or submission to a third party. K12 shall have two (2) weeks after receipt of said copies, to object, in its sole discretion, to the use of the K12-Identifying Information. In the event that K12 makes such objection, Student shall remove from such Presentations and Publications the K12-Identifying Information. K12-Identifying Information shall mean all information, either by itself or in combination with other publicly available information, from which a person could reasonably be expected to be able to identify K12.

3.2 Student will comply with any request by K12 that the following statement be included in any publication related to the Study: “The opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and not necessarily those of K12 Inc. or its affiliates.”

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND OTHER AGREEMENTS

4.1 Nothing in this Agreement is intended to transfer, grant, deny, license or provide permission with respect to any rights in any intellectual property of a Party to this Agreement.

4.2 Nothing in this Agreement is intended to amend, alter, obviate or describe any of the rights and obligations of Student set forth in her executed Employee Confidentiality, Proprietary Rights and Non-Solicitation Agreement or in any other agreement entered into by Student relating to her past or present employment with K12 or its affiliates.

PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS PARTICIPANTS

5.1 In accepting this Agreement, Student warrants that the participation of all human subjects in this research project has been reviewed and approved by the cognizant Institutional Review Board in accordance with DHHS Regulations (45 CFR, Part 46) as required.

TERM AND TERMINATION

6.1 This Agreement shall terminate 180 days from the Effective Date set forth above. Notwithstanding the forgoing, this Agreement can be terminated a) at any time for material breach upon provision of written notice and an opportunity to cure not to exceed 30 days, or b) for any reason upon one (1) month written notice, in which case reasonable efforts shall be made to minimize disruption of the Study.

USE OF NAME AND PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENTS

7.1 Any use of the name of K12 or any of its affiliates, including any of its related logos, in any publications relating in any way to the activities described in this Agreement shall be subject to the prior written approval of K12.

LIABILITY

8.1 Student agrees to accept the responsibility for injury or damage to any person or persons or property that arise out of Student's negligent acts or omissions in connection with this Agreement.

WARRANTIES AND REPRESENTATIONS

9.1 Neither Party guarantees any specific results of the Study.

9.2 Student represents that she understands that any grade, evaluation or degree she receives in connection with the Study is based solely on her own work and that K12 bears no responsibility for any such grade, evaluation or degree.

9.3 THERE ARE NO WARRANTIES, CONDITIONS, COVENANTS OR REPRESENTATIONS (EXPRESSED OR IMPLIED) INCLUDING WITHOUT LIMITATION THE FITNESS OF A PARTICULAR PUPOSE, OR MERCHANABILITY GRANTED BY EITHER PARTY IN THIS AGREEMENT.

OTHER OBLIGATIONS

10.1 Non-Assignment. Student shall not have the right to assign any duty or responsibility arising hereunder without the prior written consent of K12. Any assignment without such consent is void from its beginning.

10.2 Notices. All notices shall be in writing mailed via certified mail, return receipt requested, or by reputable overnight courier addressed as follows, or to such other address as may be designated from time to time. If to K12, to the Executive Vice President of School Services at the address set forth above. If to the Student, to her at the address set forth above. Notices shall be deemed given as of the date received.

10.3 Entire Agreement/Modification. This Agreement constitutes the entire agreement between the parties and may be amended only in writing signed by all parties.

10.4 Waiver. The failure of either party to enforce any of the provisions hereof will not be construed to be a waiver of the right of such party thereafter to enforce such provisions or any other provisions.

10.5 Severability. If any provision of this Agreement is declared void, such provision will be deemed severed from this Agreement, which will otherwise remain in full force and effect.

10.6 Survival. Sections 1.2, 3.1, 3.2, 4.1, 4.2, 7.1, and 8.1 of this Agreement survive the termination of the Agreement.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the Parties have caused this Agreement to be executed by their duly authorized representatives.

TAMRA LANNING

By: _____

Date: _____

K12 VIRTUAL SCHOOLS LLC

By: _____

Title: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C: INTRODUCTORY EMAIL

Dear Educator,

I am a doctoral candidate at Liberty University. I am a former elementary school teacher and now serve as administrator of Polk Innovative Learning Academy, a blended approach to learning for students. For my dissertation, I am researching how virtual school administrator behaviors impact instruction. I would like to invite you to be a part of this research study.

You were selected as a possible participant because you have two or more years' experience in teaching virtually. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to attend a brief introductory meeting. Following this meeting, we will schedule an 60-90 minute individual interview conducted via Skype or other video conferencing software. I will also ask that you participate in two focus group sessions for approximately one hour each. Finally, you will be asked to share communications between yourself and your administrator surrounding feedback from observations.

I ask that you read the accompanying consent form and forward any questions to me that you may have. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may choose to opt out at any time. Compensation is not provided for your participation.

Sincerely,

Tamra Lanning

Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

Appendix D: TNVA Organization Duty Chart

Head of School

AAs

Coordinates with Senior Administration for BIG PICTURE planning for school
 Overall training, managing of academic culture
 I-expense, evaluation, and RTO for teachers
 Approver of grade level changes
 Answers to HOS and K12 regarding academic decisions
 Professional Development Planner for face to face and virtual PD's
 Upholds and Leads School Vision and Culture for grade band
 Summer projects
 End of year planning with k12
 Handles escalated parent and teacher issues
 Sends emails & communications as needed
 Analysis for data for all grade levels
 Coordinate with Union County to analyze and share data
 Coordinate with Union County to implement assessments
 Data conferencing with teachers

Master Teacher

Direct support to and voice for Points of Contact
 Communicate concerns to AAs from POCs
 Regular Course changes
 Give advice to teachers regarding instructional issues
 Coach teachers through regular bi-weekly drop ins and feedback sessions
 Provides instructional strategies and motivation
 Helps plan professional development for staff meetings
 Analyze and support teachers in analysis of data including conducting data meetings
 Assist with new teacher training
 Uphold school vision and culture
 Attend ALC meetings
 Attend weekly admin meetings
 Facilitate PLC meetings as needed
 Record attendance at staff meetings
 Reviews teachers' calendars to help teachers manage day to day tasks

Review ILPs

Grade Level Points of Contact (POC)

Emergency sub plans
 Assist grade level teachers with unplanned absences
 Assist teachers with general questions before sending on to Master Teacher
 Compile documents for grade level and sends to Admin
 Provide feedback to various implementations throughout the year
 Attend bi-weekly POC Meeting
 Notify Admin of team member absences from meetings

Teachers

POD/HR Duties

- Emails: Required response within 24 hours
- Skipping Lessons for students and then weekly for new students
- Send new student Info (Roadmaps, skipped lesson document, welcome letter, etc.)
- Add new students to Running Sheet (New Account for Google Classroom)
- Once google account has been created, send set up information to LC (Username, Password, Joining Classes, Etc.)
- Welcome Calls
- Weekly Newsletters
- Maintain attendance spreadsheet
- Adjust Expected Progress for new students using excel calculator spreadsheet
- Fast Referrals
- Fast Documentation
- Observation/PreVoc Forms for EE

Meetings + Paperwork for Meetings (Usually done on Fridays, but sometimes after classes)

- IEP Meetings
- Paperwork for IEP Meetings (Sign/Scan Back)
- Instructional Coach Meetings + Paperwork
- Evaluation Meetings + Paperwork
- PLC Meetings
- Grade-Level Meetings
- Staff Meetings
- Data Meetings + Paperwork
- IDP Meetings + Development Items
- K12 Trainings

Classroom Duties

- Create Lessons for Daily CC
- Grade Essays

- Daily Attendance/Make-up Assignments
- Enter Daily CC Attendance
- Updating/Maintaining Engrade
- Remediation (Who needs it/How can I meet those needs)
- Weekly Assessments (creating/grading/updating grades for re-dos)
- Data Digs for Remediation
- Google Classroom
- Differentiation Materials
- Monitor Progress/Grades
- Makeup/Missing Assignments Emails

Appendix E: Permission Letter from TEAM

Thank you for reaching out to TEAM Questions. Permission has been granted for use of the TEAM observations guidelines in your dissertation.

This document can also be located in the TN Evaluation statute and policy 5.201 if additional information is needed.

Best,
TEAM Questions

From: Tamra Lanning <tlanning@polkcountyschools.com>

Sent: Wednesday, January 30, 2019 12:10:17 PM

To: Team Questions

Subject: Reproduction permission

Good afternoon,

I am contacting you because I used this chart (<https://team-tn.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Observation-Guidelines-2018-19.pdf>) in my doctoral dissertation and would like to request permission for reproduction of this graphic in my published dissertation. My program requires me to submit my research for publication in the Liberty University open access institutional repository, the Scholars Crossing, and in the Proquest Thesis and Dissertation subscription research database. If you allow this, I will provide a citation to the work as follows:

Tennessee Department of Education Website. (n.d.). Retrieved October 19, 2018, from <https://team-tn.org/>

Thank you for your consideration,
Tamra Lanning