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A Case Study of One Principal's Influence on Developing Teachers who Became Educational Leaders in Other Settings

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Abstract

The purpose of this investigation was to explore through a historical case study the ways in which one principal mentored and built capacity with a school-based cohort of teachers who became school leaders themselves in a variety of capacities. Findings reveal a generative female leader who embraced strong philosophical and theoretical foundations enacted in an enriching, innovative culture. This case study illustrates the nested activity of leadership in the development of a learning organization focused on strong relationships, continuous adult learning, and practical leading capacities. This nested activity contributed to leadership dispersion, strong community identity, and personal transformative experiences for teachers who chose to become leaders as well. Findings suggest ways in which principals in contemporary schools can mentor and develop teachers to become teacher leaders and learning-centered administrators.

Introduction

Increased expectations for excellence in organizational performance and annually increasing student achievement targets challenge principals and teachers to focus on best practices and collective responsibility for excellence in teaching and in student learning. Teachers' continuous learning and their active engagement in learning organizations are critical in order to provide exemplary learning opportunities for the students they serve (Darling-Hammond, Aness, & Falk, 1995; Hord, 1997; Klimek, Ritzenhein, & Sullivan, 2008; Lambert, 1998).

Principals in democratic schools embrace collaborative processes involving all community members in making decisions and in solving problems (Beane & Apple, 1995; Lambert, Zimmerman, & Gardner, 2016; Sergiovanni, 2001; Wood, 1992). Individual and collective reflective practice and inquiry support generative possibilities in constructivist learning practices in classrooms and school-wide (Klimek et al., 2008; Lambert, Walker, Zimmerman, Cooper, Lambert, Gardner, & Slack, 1995). When principals and teachers collaboratively engage in

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reflective practice, are committed to personal and collective growth in all aspects of teaching, and understand the positive impact on student learning, opportunities for transformative learning are optimized (Collins, Hess, & Lowery, 2019; Leithwood & Duke, 1999; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

The purpose of my study was to investigate a case of a cohort of elementary teachers mentored and developed by the same principal over a nineteen-year period. The principal opened the school in 1973 as its first administrator. There were a large number of teachers who developed leadership capacities and chose to progress in their own leadership roles and positions while being mentored and developed by this principal, which has the potential to illuminate the factors and experiences that contribute to building teachers' leadership capacities and how such capacities are then dispersed beyond the school and district sites.

Literature Review

Instructional leadership dominated the educational research agenda during the 1980s and continues to do so (Brazer & Bauer, 2013; Knapp, Copland, & Talbert, 2003; Johnson, 2019). Heck and Hallinger (1999) identified the 1990s as the decade of the emergence of transformational leadership as schools began to deal with restructuring. Transformational leaders developed conditions that support school improvement (i.e., staff development, building collaborative cultures, etc.) rather than direct intervention in curriculum and instruction (Leithwood, Jantzi, Silins, & Dart, 1993). Transformational leadership theory was focused on change and relationships, elevating both the leader and the followers to higher levels of morale, motivation, and morality (Bass, 1999). Transformational leaders focused on problem solving and collaboration with others that supported improved organizational performance (Hallinger, 1992; Leithwood & Poplin, 1992). Innovation and shaping organizational culture were central to the principal's role in the school (Conley & Goldman, 1994), and they motivated and inspired others to embrace organizational goals (Marks & Printy, 2003).

The 1990s also provided a context for educational researchers to investigate elements of leadership in school settings that had not been previously studied. Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (1999) introduced the theory of distributed leadership which identified elements of enacted leadership in schools involving "activities engaged in by leaders, in interaction with others, in particular contexts around specific tasks" (p. 6). Distributed leadership embraced collaborative opportunities for all teachers to be engaged in leadership (Huggins, Klar, Hammonds, & Buskey, 2017; Lambert, 1998) and provided a more effective way of coping with a complex, information-rich society (Bennett, Wise, Woods & Harvey, 2003).

When schools are in the learning business (Killion, 2002) and organized as learning communities, they are focused on "the common good, provide students with a safe harbor in a stormy sea, build relationships, enhance responsibility, and support learning" (Sergiovanni, 2001, p. xi). When learning communities embrace democratic principles and practices, students learn about democracy and they "[are] empower[ed] to become members of the public, to participate, and [to] play articulate roles in public space" (Greene, 1985, p. 4). In schools where democratic structures and processes were in place, students and teachers engaged in shared decision making, collaborative problem-solving, reflective inquiry, and valued diverse opinions and ideas (Cate, Vaughn, & O'Hair, 2006; Parker, 2006). The value of individual and collective voice was critical to the open sharing of ideas and contributing to the good of the school and everyone in it. Students became active participants with adults in the schooling experience (Beane & Apple, 1995).

Democratic school culture permeates everything that happens in a school (Deal & Peterson, 1999) and reflects foundational beliefs, values, purposes, norms, and assumptions of the organization. Cultures that support developing students' intellectual, social, cultural, and civic capacities provide teaching and learning opportunities that are generative and empowering (Sergiovanni, 2001). Positive collaborative cultures where relationships between all staff members were valued and appreciated inside the school optimizes conditions for building strong partnerships with students, parents, and community members (Elliott, Bradbury, & Gardner, 2014; Epstein, Sanders, Sheldon, Simon, Salinas, Jansorn, Van Voorhis, Martin, Thomas, Greenfeld, Hutchins, & Williams, 2019; Francis, Blue-Banning, Turnbull, Hill, Haines, & Gross, 2016). Saphier and King's (1985) research suggested that strong cultural norms will have a lasting impact on school improvement efforts. Empirical evidence suggested that positive school cultures significantly impact achievement of school improvement initiatives and school reform efforts (Barth, 2002; Fullan, 2003b).

Schools that were focused on learning for both students and adults were involved in individual and collective reflective practice and inquiry to build capacity for improved teaching and student learning (Copland, 2003; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009). Constructivist perspectives structured learning opportunities school-wide and this was a critical foundation to building capacity with students and teachers (Klimek et al, 2008; Lambert et al., 1995). A strong commitment to a continuous learning ethic (Frick, Polizzi, & Frick, 2009) strongly supported the infusion of research and research-based practices in classroom instruction. Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2018) posited four pillars of practice that support adult learning in schools: mentoring and coaching teachers differently based on where they are in developing leadership skills and instructional expertise,

establishing teams, providing leadership roles for teachers, and collegial inquiry.

Schools that experience success by embedding professional development in school improvement areas realize the critical impact they have on students' learning and understand the importance of on-going, focused professional development on their level of expertise, and shared a commitment to their vision (Hord, 1997; Leiberman & Miller, 2001). These schools understand that the "relationship between staff development and student achievement is correlational, not causal" (Killion, 2002, p. 22) and they have experienced the empowering effect of working as a professional learning community to achieve learning gains for their students (Smylie & Hart, 1999). Leaders in high achieving schools participated in, supported, and encouraged teachers' new learning by allocating time, resources, and expertise (Copland, 2003; Corcoran, 1995).

A dynamic global economy has created the need to study organizational effectiveness from a systems perspective. New understandings emerging from quantum and chaos theories are requiring organizational theorists to conduct empirical investigations by utilizing new tools while also generating new interpretations (Wheatley, 1994). Senge's (1990) research identified learning organizations as a construct congruent with these new interpretations. He posited the following definition of a learning organization: "where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together" (Senge, 1990, p. 3).

Schools identified as learning organizations "continually expand capacity to create the future" (Senge, 1990, p. 14). A systems perspective yields an understanding that schools are composed of three nested systems: the classroom, the school, and the community (Lambert et al., 2016; Senge, Cambren-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton & Kleiner, 2000). Leadership in today's schools must be focused on relationships and interdependencies within the organization and work from a mental model of organizations as systems (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2018; Klimek et al., 2008). Contemporary schools that identify themselves as communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), communities of responsibilities (Sergiovanni, 2001), and professional learning communities (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004) most likely embrace the essential elements of learning organizations.

Research Methods

The purpose of my study was to investigate the individual and collective generalized influence and mentoring experiences and processes delivered through one principal that led to the leadership development and consequent dispersed leadership enactments of a group of teachers originally associated with that principal. An instrumental,

historically-bound strategic case study was selected as the most congruent method to study the phenomenon under investigation (Stake, 1995). A historical case study provided an opportunity to investigate a phenomenon over time utilizing primary documents to support research findings. Merriam (1998) explained, "to understand an event and apply that knowledge to present practice means knowing the context of the event, the assumptions behind it, and perhaps the event's impact on the institution or participants" (p. 35).

My inquiry was to understand what experiences and processes contributed to teachers' decisions to become school administrators and leaders in other settings who were mentored and developed by the same principal. This case was selected because of the large number of teacher leaders mentored by the same principal who became educational leaders in other settings over a 19-year period. I also chose this case because empirical evidence suggested that strong leadership was developed in the case and that the principal served as an important mentor to teachers. Huffman (1994) conducted a study of the school and her findings revealed "the development of teacher leaders was [an] important part of the school and...the principal fostered individualization and for people to be leaders" (p. 87).

A purposeful sample of former teachers who taught at the school who became educational leaders in other settings were identified as meeting criteria for sample selection. The interview sample included fourteen teachers who became educational leaders in other settings, one teacher who became a college professor, the case principal, and the district superintendent. Individual participants were contacted by phone, email, or letter to obtain permission to participate in the study. All participants agreed to participate, and individual interviews were scheduled.

Data collection involved one-on-one, in-depth interviews with all participants. Thirteen participants were interviewed in the state in which the case is located. Four out-of-state interviews were conducted; three at their individual homes and one at a University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) conference. Case documents and artifacts were obtained from the principal, four participants, and my own research.

Data analysis was conducted manually using thematic analysis. Each interview was coded and themed individually before I initiated a constant comparative process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) which involved identifying like themes across interviews. A running record of preliminary codes and themes was created. Rereading interviews and studying preliminary codes and themes provided a finer lens through which more inclusive themes were generated. Miles and Huberman (1984) identify this process as clustering themes in order to come to higher levels of abstraction. A running record of final codes and themes was created. This same process was followed with case documents and artifacts. Miles

and Huberman (1984) also suggested the importance of creating a visual representation of study findings to support clarity and understanding. As such, a concept map of final codes and themes was also created.

Research Findings

Strong Philosophical and Theoretical Foundations

Strong foundations in Deweyian and Piagetian perspectives and shared leadership were well established in Janey's (pseudonym) thinking when she became principal. Teachers who had taught with her previously shared these common understandings. New teachers who were hired as members of the inaugural faculty were made aware of these perspectives during the interview process and were willing to learn about and embrace them.

A faculty retreat was held prior to the beginning of the school year. A participant recalled the group focused on "philosophical kinds of conversations" and effective communication skills based on Thomas Gordon's work. Teambuilding activities with the whole faculty provided a fun way to support building relationships and establishing a strong sense of group identity.

Participants remembered collaborative discourse about democratic schools, and the ways in which students, parents, and faculty would experience it. According to a participant this revealed strong commitments:

Respect for every citizen, providing experiences for children in which they learn how to become good citizens, a sense of fairness in the way schooling was enacted, and all children could learn...shared leadership among the faculty and creating a Student Council for students to share leadership.

One participant explained the school's vision in her dissertation in the following manner: "Dewey framed our school's authentic, democratic setting and ignited our passion to co-create learning, understanding, and meaning with our students" (p.18). The mission of the faculty was "to achieve the goal of developing rational thinking skills by using inquiry as the process, and content as the vehicle, while helping learners to become self-actualized participants in our country's democracy" (Heath, 2009, p. 19). Creating everyday experiences in which students actively engaged in democratic processes was congruent with Dewey's ideas of school and society.

Faculty collaborative decisions established grade-level teams (e.g. K-1, 2-3, 4-5) without a teacher being named a team leader (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2018). All teachers were expected to be leaders and contribute to the collective. One participant remembered, "The principal taught us how to make decisions as a team. She left a lot of stuff up to us to decide what was best for us and the students." Teachers collaboratively made decisions about daily schedules, teaching responsibilities, and classroom locations. Other decisions implemented early in the first year became traditions: each day began

with a morning assembly where the entire school came together to build community, teams collaboratively planned a program with the music teacher, and a Student Council was established where students representing each homeroom shared responsibilities at the morning assembly.

Female Generative Leadership

Janey was a generative leader who enacted characteristics of female leadership and embraced democratic and participative styles of leadership. She focused on building relationships, communication, consensus building, power as influence, and working together for a common purpose (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Lambert et al., 2016; Trinidad & Normore, 2005). Other researchers have identified communal characteristics of female leadership, including creating a sense of group solidarity, empowering subordinates, communicating and listening effectively, and concern for compassionate and fair treatment of others (Deaux & Kite, 1993; Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000; Fondas, 1997; Sebastian & Moon, 2017). Her leadership supported the creation of an empowering culture that built leadership capacities within a learning organization.

Her vision of creating a consensus school required that she model leadership that was congruent with the school's vision and beliefs. She included teachers in shared leadership and decision making (Lambert et al., 2016). It also required "putting the appropriate people together, design[ing] constructive methods, provid[ing] good information, ...[that allowed] people [to] create authentic visions and strategies... Leadership was generated throughout the building rather than focused and static leadership positions."

Developing strong relationships with each teacher, teams, and the faculty as a whole was very important to Janey.

I spent intentional time with individual teachers by taking walks at lunch [and] share[d] my support of what they wanted to do or encourage[d] them to think through [things]...urging them to take leadership responsibilities throughout the district. My expectation was that everyone would be highly involved in something and...it really didn't matter to me what it [was], but I want[ed] them to be passionate in pursuing something.

She "expected [teachers] to work together as professionals, not love each other." Communication protocols and processes learned at the first retreat were modeled in team and faculty meetings to support everyone's voice being heard. A participant shared that "we held each other accountable to talk together in ways that validated everyone's ideas and opinions" (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2018). Janey also had an expectation of excellence in everything that happened at the school. She expressed this in the following manner: "There just wasn't anything less than excellence that was

ever expected. From me, from everybody. If anybody slipped a little, they were quickly reminded. Sometimes nicely, sometimes not so nicely.”

When new teachers were hired, Janey recalled they became a “member of the family.” Prior to starting school, each new teacher received a letter written by the faculty welcoming them, sharing beliefs, and sharing expectations. The equality of all faculty members meant that a new teacher had equal status with the rest of the faculty.

All participants talked about the influence of Janey’s modeling and how it impacted them both personally and professionally. One participant shared, “[Janey] modeled leadership for us in communication, collaboration, what we do, and how we do things.” Another participant remembered that “[Janey] built relationships first, built trust in one another, and the importance of camaraderie. She knew people well.” The strength of personal relationships between Janey and faculty members provided a foundation on which trust and respect supported their commitment to each other, their collective work, and the community as a whole (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeSefano, 2018; Lambert et al., 2016). All participants shared the ways in which Janey supported them individually. One former teacher shared, “[She] believed in me and made me think I [could] do anything ...[she] believed I could do it before I thought I could ...I developed confidence in my abilities because of her belief in me” (DeWitt, 2019).

Participants also discussed the methods by which Janey dealt with conflicts and how they were resolved. One former teacher remembered:

Problems were not ignored.... Janey never pushed things under the rug...[there were] mechanisms in place to work through difficulties and issues.... Janey worked with teams to resolve issues [with the] goal to have respect for each other and work together as professionals.

Janey’s leadership modeled the importance of building caring, nurturing relationships with all members of the community and provided the foundation upon which trust and respect among community members evolved and thrived. Teachers learned powerful leadership lessons by observing her in action with other faculty, students, parents, and community members (Bryant, Escalante, & Silva, 2017). Her support and encouragement of individual teachers and the whole faculty was an empowering influence and contributed to the generative nature of the schooling enterprise at the school. Her embrace of democratic practices through collaborative processes provided multiple opportunities for collective engagement in building an authentic commitment to the shared vision and mission of the school and ownership in leading the direction of the school.

Enriching Innovative Culture

When the school became one of six arts-in-education (AIE) demonstration schools in the state in 1976, Janey remembered, “The arts took over! It caught everybody and this arts piece permeated our school, and I think made a huge difference in everything we did.” The arts created a whole new context for teaching and learning at the school. Participants remembered attending many professional development opportunities focused on arts integration and developing lesson plans using new instructional strategies. Trying new instructional strategies provided energy and enthusiasm for the reflective discourse that happened in teams and in the faculty as a whole. The music teacher, at that time, became a resource for helping colleagues embed music in classroom instruction. One participant remembered the school “believed in nourishing and nurturing us to believe and do with the arts.”

Many participants shared the traditions that developed after becoming an AIE school. One former teacher shared the significance of Good Morning Eastside (GME) to the school’s culture in the following way:

A big part of [the] school culture revolved around GME...it mirrored everything that was special...we came together every morning as a school...and then the music piece just mirrored and emphasized what we were trying to do in our classrooms and school.

Grade-level programs were a collaborative project planned by the music teacher and grade-level teams and performed by students once a year. Looking-at-Art, a ten-minute presentation in GME done by a member of the AIE Committee, highlighted works of a particular artist. The AIR (Artists in Residence) Program provided opportunities for artists to work with students during contracted residencies ranging from two to six weeks in length.

The lived experiences of adults and children were significantly impacted by the AIE initiative embraced at the school. An aesthetic context highlighted the importance of exploring creative potentials and developing imaginations and possibilities. Collective engagement in this enriching context provided multi-dimensional opportunities for learning and growth to take place.

In the mid 1980s, the district brought Saphier and King’s (1985) norms of a strong culture to Janey and other principals. She recalled:

Like all things that came to us I applied them, but I also taught the faculty what they were. So...we had these common understandings throughout the faculty.... So the norms of a strong culture [were] a framework that the whole faculty understood.

The faculty understood the norms and worked tirelessly to embed them in the everyday work of learning at the school (Johnson, 2019; Lambert et al., 2016). Understanding that people thrive in a strong culture, intentionality and focus were placed on creating an exemplary learning

environment for both students and teachers. These norms grew and evolved throughout Janey's principalship and provided an enriched context for teaching and learning at the school.

Building Teaching and Leadership Capacities

All participants remembered intentionally learning from colleagues (Johnson, 2019; Little, 1990). One shared, "When you came into the school, it was a school made up of...very accomplished master teachers...there was the capacity to learn from your colleagues because you were surrounded by excellence."

Another former teacher recalled:

I always had an opportunity at Eastside because of...the philosophy and the culture of the school was that we all learned from one another and openly shared ideas... We always looked at where we were and what we needed to do differently and how we could get there.

With more specificity, a participant shared her experience while teaching at the school. She remembered, "We learned about individualization, how to write units, how to look at curriculum, how to self-pace, how to pace the kids, how to team teach...[and] how to address the needs of the gifted."

Janey modeled the importance of research supporting practices at the school. This required everyone to read research and share with colleagues. One participant recalled, "I had been able to read a lot of research because I had been encouraged to do that." Teachers shared research articles with team members and discussed them at team meetings. Janey often brought research articles to faculty meetings with groups engaging in collaborative conversations to develop common understandings of the topic being discussed and possible teaching implications to consider (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2018).

Embedded professional development continuously infused new learning (Buttram & Farley-Ripple, 2016; Johnson, 2019). Faculty and team meetings regularly focused on topics identified by Janey, teachers, or the district to support collaborative discourse and common understandings. Janey encouraged teachers to attend workshops, become members of professional organizations, and become presenters. One former teacher remembered: "[We] always realiz[ed] how far ahead. We were always light years ahead! I knew things that many other people did not know."

All participants remembered being mentored and coached by Janey. Janey's modeling was one of the most important contributors to their development of teacher and leadership capacities (Johnson, 2019). One participant described Janey's coaching from his point of view:

She coached us really well just by talking to us... When she engaged in conversation with you, you clearly knew you were the only person in the

world...and her questions...were never limiting, they were always expanding. They seemed to push buttons in a constructive way.

Another participant remembered the questions Janey asked him during his post observation conference. He stated the following:

Janey would always ask a question that I didn't expect.... 'Oh, I never thought of that!' It really stretched me in thinking about my teaching and being reflective about my teaching.... She always knew how to question you to where you would do reflective thinking about what was going on in the classroom, what the lesson was about, why you did this or why you did that.

The music teacher did not have a teaching team and was the only music teacher at Eastside. She relied on Janey for support, encouragement, problem-solving, and ideas to deal with situations that presented themselves. She remembered the struggles during her first year and the ways Janey encouraged and supported her.

I felt like I wasn't good in terms of managing the classroom. I was bewildered. I did not have a firm grip on what I was supposed to be teaching and how I was supposed to deliver it.... When I met with Janey and told her, 'I'm not teaching well. I don't have control of my students,' she'd say 'Now, that's not entirely true. Here's what I'm seeing. I'm seeing kids who are happy to go to music class.... They like you because you like them! You have a lot of enthusiasm and a lot of excitement about music, and that's contagious. You're just a little bit willy nilly in how you're choosing to...teach it, but there's no lacking that you bring a lot of enthusiasm to it.'

This participant remembered multiple conversations similar to the above scenario during her first year. When asked about the ways in which Janey's support and encouragement impacted her, she responded:

She gave me a vision that I did not have. She provided me a glimpse of the kind of teacher I wanted to be. Not because she wanted me to be someone different, but because she wanted to help me realize who I was, and she provided that.

Several participants recalled that Janey encouraged them to think about becoming principals. One remembered a conversation they had during a post observation conference:

She said to me, '[Have you] ever thought about being a principal?' And I said, 'Not really.' And she said, 'Well, I think you need to think about that.' And that was the beginning of planting that seed in me personally.

Democratic practices at Eastside embraced shared leadership, and all teachers understood that actively participating in leadership opportunities was a community

expectation (Hollingworth, Olsen, Asikin-Garmager, & Winn, 2018). New teachers joined other faculty in stepping up to leadership roles both inside the school and in the district and community (Bryant et al., 2017; Vernon-Dotson & Floyd, 2012). When one former teacher remembered the many leadership experiences she had at the school, she shared that “the more you lead, the more confident you feel.” Many participants shared that their experiences at Eastside helped to develop confidence in their leadership abilities.

A Learning Organization

Senge (1990) identified five disciplines as essential elements in a learning organization: team learning, shared vision, mental models, personal mastery, and systems thinking. Janey described her thinking about learning organizations in the following way: “We always designed things we wanted to do with systems around them.... We thought in systems. When we did interventions because a child was not being successful...we tried to create a system of success around the child.” One participant who learned about Senge’s research in a university course shared that he thought Janey “was...creating a system. I think she’s systemic. I think she sees the world systemically.” Janey’s modeling of systems thinking provided a powerful example for teachers to build understandings and leadership capacities in co-creating change initiatives and school improvement efforts (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2018; Lambert et al., 2016).

Developing Teacher Leadership in Contemporary Schools

I felt it important for my study to ask participants what the most important things were for principals to do with teachers to develop leadership. Ten of the teacher participants had direct experience with implementing the ESEA *No Child Left Behind* mandates in their buildings.

Accordingly, principals must have extensive knowledge and skills in building strong relationships, collaborative teams, and a culture that enriches and supports diverse school communities. They must also have a thorough understanding of research and best practices and build capacity with teachers to provide exemplary learning opportunities for students in all classrooms (Johnson, 2019).

Active engagement in mentoring and coaching by principals and teachers provides critical support and encouragement for personal and professional growth and development. Reflective practice and discourse, shared leadership, involvement by novice teachers, and developing learning partnerships among principals and teachers are essential to build capacity in schools to address the diverse learning needs of all students. A rigorous curriculum, democratic practices, leadership in effectively implementing change initiatives, and focus on adult learning are critical. Developing students as leaders

and having students take ownership of their own learning, supported by principals and teachers, provides an empowering culture in which community leadership develops and thrives.

Discussion and Conclusion

Deweyian and Piagetian perspectives were foundational pillars on which Eastside was envisioned and created. The school community’s commitment to democratic practices was observable through shared decision-making, collaborative problem-solving, reflective inquiry, and valuing diverse opinions and ideas (Beane and Apple, 1995; Cate et al., 2006; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2018; Parker, 2006). Students were encouraged to mess around (Dworkin, 1959) which provided multiple opportunities for them to discuss ideas and to share experiences, which created sense-making (Greene, 1978) in socially constructed ways.

Janey was a generative leader (Klimek et al., 2008) who understood systems thinking (Senge, 1990) and modeled the importance of developing strong relationships with all stakeholders at the school. Caring and nurturing relationships built throughout the school community resulted in trust, support, and encouragement between the principal, faculty, students, and parents and that relational practice was foundational to the enactment of teaching and learning at the school (Cherkowski & Walker, 2016; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2018; Noddings, 1993; Noddings, 2013). Case findings were supported by empirical evidence identifying the importance of building strong relationships that create positive school climates (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Epstein et al, 2019).

The arts initiative embraced at the school contributed significantly to community members sharing aesthetic experiences and the expansive possibilities these create (Dewey, 1934). Eastside’s teachers focused on developing children’s imagination and creativity (Mayhew & Edwards, 2008) through the arts and curriculum taught at the school. The impact of the arts, evident in study participants’ renderings twenty-five years later, expanded worldviews and provided a deeper understanding of themselves and the world around them (Eisner, 2002; Greene, 1978).

The school embraced what Fullan (2003a) identifies as the moral imperative of school leadership at the classroom and school levels and actively engaged in collaborative problem-solving, decision-making, and reflective practice and inquiry (Deal & Peterson, 2016; France, 2019; Lambert et al., 2016). Vision and mission were collaboratively developed and explicit short and long-term goals were written to operationalize organizational direction (Brown, 2004). The embrace of democratic principles and practices for community members supported equal participation in making a contribution to the mission, to the purpose, and to leadership development at the school (Johnson, 2019).

Participants experienced both personal and professional transformation through their lived experiences at the school. They created life-long friendships, were empowered by the modeling of Janey and other colleagues, built teaching and leadership capacities which resulted in confidence and recognition of personal abilities and skills, and had a passion to create this opportunity for others in different settings after developing through the Eastside community.

Generalizability of case findings is not possible because of the particularistic and heuristic nature of the method and Eastside being a unique case situated in a particular state and community. Spillane et al. (1999) argued that a rich understanding of how leaders go about their work and why leaders do and think what they do is needed to help other school leaders think about and revise their practice. This study contributes to such a knowledge base by providing a rich, in-depth investigation of leadership enacted through mentoring and capacity-building experiences and processes delivered through one principal that resulted in the generative dispersion of leadership in other settings.

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