TAGGED:

ARIZONA PRINCIPALS WORKING UNDER A LABEL

by

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ABSTRACT

External accountability is embedded in every school system across the

United States. This dissertation study focuses on how ten principals negotiate the

accountability system placed upon their school by the state of Arizona. The

federal accountability policy, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), requires that states

use a standardized assessment to document student achievement. Arizona's policy

to meet the federal requirements of NCLB is Arizona Learns (AZLearns).

AZLearns outlines the formulas for determining which schools are achieving and

which schools need to improve. Each school is tagged with a label annually. The

labels are Excelling, Highly Performing, Performing Plus, Performing,

Underperforming and Failing. The foundation of this study lies in the

interpretation, application and negotiation of a school's label by its principal. To

investigate the relationship between external accountability and the daily life of a

principal, I interviewed ten Arizona elementary school principals. The research

questions of this study are: (R1) What effects do external accountability measures

have on the development of the organizational capacity of a school? (R2) How do

Arizona principals negotiate their school's assigned label in their everyday

professional practice? (R3) What are Arizona principals' views of the state

accountability process? A qualitative, phenomenological research methodology

was used to interview the participants and analyze their stories for common

themes. The commonalities that surfaced across the experiences of the principals

in response to the labels placed on their school are Accountability, Achievement

and Attitude. This study found that Accountability was based on multiple interpretations of policies enforced by the federal government, state or district guidelines and parent or school expectations. Achievement was a result of multiple factors including data collected from test scores, the quality of teachers or instruction and the personal goals of the principals. Attitude was a process embedded in the high stakes testing era, boundaries or conflicts within the location of the school and the personal experiences of the principals. This research is an attempt to share the multiple voices of principals that may lead to alternative meanings or even provoke questions about the labeling system in Arizona schools.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my loving wife, Dr. Nicole Teyechea McNeil. Her continued support, encouragement, much needed patience and unwavering love kept this dream alive. Her tolerance to my uncontrollable mood swings over the past three years have proved her unyielding devotion and love for me. I can only hope that this work shows the love I have for her as well as for the journey we started and are on together. Thank you for being both mother and father to our beautiful daughter Ella and our precious son Michael throughout the sleepless nights and long evenings while in class. You are best and I hope I have made you proud.

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my dreams were always within reach. I will always be proud to call you mom and

dad.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Overview

The Arizona Instrument of Measuring Standards (AIMS) is a high-stakes
testing instrument that determines whether each child meets the state's
benchmarks for academic standards. This test takes place once a year in April as
a requirement of both the federal and state accountability plans designed to
improve student achievement. The federal policy known as No Child Left Behind
(NCLB) requires that students and schools be evaluated based on annual test
scores from the reading and math portions of the state test. The state policy
aligned to NCLB is called Arizona Learns (AZLearns). AZLearns assesses the
areas of reading, math as required by NCLB as well as the writing section of the
annual AIMS test. After the state department of education spends months scoring
and disaggregating the data produced by these assessments, the following three
events will paint a picture of how each school is perceived by the community and
will provide a possible game plan for the upcoming school year.

First, individual student results are sent home to each parent, informing
the families of how their children performed in each assessed area on the AIMS
test. Second, school wide AIMS test results for each grade level and for nine
subgroups are sent to each school. These subgroups are titled Asian, Black,
Hispanic, Indian, White, ELL, Special Education, Low Social Economic Status,
and All. These scores will be analyzed by principals, teachers and staff members

to assess how each portion of their population performed that year. Lastly, the results of students' academic performance will join the existing body of information that tells the story about each school that is disseminated to the public. This process is created by the state and is used to aggregate the students' scores by individual schools using complex formulas that account for growth to determine each school's performance. These results will culminate in one of six labels determining the performance status of each school. The labels are titled *Excelling, Highly Performing, Performing Plus, Performing, Underperforming and Failing*. These performance labels are assigned to schools as either a merit badge or a brand of failure and are based primarily on the results of the AIMS.

When positive, a school's performance label is often made highly visible to the public; massive banners that announce the school's label are often hung by the front office or on an outside fence facing a major road. Some schools even answer incoming phone calls stating the label before speaking to the caller. An example of this would be, "Arizona Elementary, a highly performing school. Hello, how can I assist you?" The label is a part of defining the school to the students, staff, and community.

The label can be used as a celebration of achievement or as a reason to focus on improving student achievement. The process for determining the label for each school is multifaceted and complex. The dialogue around a school's label is a topic of conversation between teachers, parents, administrators and community stakeholders. The labels may even increase the value of homes

surrounding the school. A question that rarely surfaces is, "Why are you a (insert label) school?" These labels are undefined terms used on a daily basis; they do not explain the distinguishing features or defining factors of an Excelling school or a Failing school. The foundation of this study lies in the interpretation, application and negotiation of a school's label by its principal. What are the lived experiences of the principals due to the label placed upon the school?

Purpose of the Study

This dissertation will focus on how principals respond to the labels assigned to their schools. The practical problem that guides this dissertation is that schools are handed these labels as a form of external accountability and they are based primarily on high stakes test results. Critical consequences or opportunities will affect the principal based on the use of test results to determine the school's label. How each student performs will decide the possible outcome for the schools. For higher achieving schools, this testing week is viewed as an opportunity to showcase their students' knowledge and to reap the benefits of statewide recognition and status.   For lower achieving schools, the pressure to meet the year's achievement goal can feel overwhelming. Acker-Hocevar and Touchton (2002) argue that principals must level the playing field of accountability through a variety of strategies. These lower performing schools battle many other obstacles during the school day than just the adopted curriculum. Some of these obstacles include families living in poverty, student mobility, challenges regarding children learning English as a second language and

attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers and administrators. Daily

victories within some or all of these areas are not accounted for or recognized in

the performance label assigned by the state. I am curious to learn more about how

strong external accountability mandates affect the daily life of the school

principal. Principals differ in how they perceive and address these external

forces; some use their school's performance label as leverage to transform the

school; others use it to maintain the status quo. Honig and Hatch (2004)

identified a continuum of how principals interpret their assigned label on their

school. Honig and Hatch's (2004) conceptualization of "bridging and buffering"

set a specific framework to quantitatively link principals with their understanding

of their school's response to the external policy. "Bridging" entails

accommodating policy demands through initiatives, while "buffering" represents

a resistance to policy goals by focusing on local priorities. Top-ranked schools

often showcase their labels, whereas others leave walls bare, suggesting to their

staffs, students, and communities that they don't measure up. Many times there is

disconnect between the label that is disseminated to the public and the daily

successes of a school. This study will investigate this labeling process and the

effects it has on Arizona school staffs and principals. This dissertation will

establish a research problem and research questions that are current and relevant

within this educational conversation; it will also review research and literature

that address how external accountability impacts schools and their leaders, and it

will describe the methodology that will be applied in order to tell the story of how

labels specifically impact the daily roles of the principals who participated in this study.

Statement of the Problem

On April 8, 2008, the *Arizona Republic* reported that 20 schools in Arizona, mainly serving low-income children, were labeled Failing due to the fact they did not meet the state's accountability standards for three consecutive years. In 2007, the prior year, 17 schools had received the Failing label. These are alarming numbers. Failing schools are subject to state interventions meant to improve school performance (Gersema, 2008). When a school does not meet the state's performance standards, a series of interventions that unfold over a two-year period are triggered. The first mandated intervention is the execution of a needs assessment, a process that collects data from a variety of school and community stakeholders and then yields scores in four areas: school culture, leadership, school and classroom assessments, and professional development. The next step in the series of interventions would be to take the gathered information collected from the needs assessment to create an improvement plan. This plan will lay the foundation for all future decisions and set the direction for the school. The improvement plan format involves guided questions concerning the school's deficiencies, grade level and subgroup goals, target dates, and an evaluation of implementation. This plan will evolve as the school meets or falls short of the scripted expectations. The final step or intervention would occur only if the school fails to meet these expectations for five consecutive years. The

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school then would be subject to a state-directed restructuring, which ultimately establishes every future staff development agenda and guides every decision a school principal makes. Principals must pay careful attention their school's assigned label, since this label can significantly affect the challenges of their jobs. It is interesting to point out that using state testing results as a form of public accountability is not new to Arizona, yet principals statewide still scramble to find the best solutions to help their schools be successful and produce higher test scores.

This qualitative study will examine how school principals respond to their accountability labels. My motivation for this study was to learn how principals interpret their labels and what action or lack of action is taken to negotiate the relationship between internal and external accountability at their schools. Little is known about how a principal develops a successful results-based school improvement action plan. Likewise, few researchers have been able to identify consistent factors that help schools move from an unfavorable to a favorable label, leaving questions such as, what actions and processes took place within the school to change its label from Underperforming to Performing, or from Performing to Highly Performing? The selected literature presents conflicting findings regarding possible answers to these questions. The selected literature also points out how school staffs feel and react to these external pressures to perform, leading to the very important question of how this label affects a principal's behavior: How does the principal of a school labeled Underperforming

respond to that label, and does the response differ from that of a principal whose school is labeled Highly Performing? The contemporary administrator must understand the factors that will improve his or her school performance regardless of its current success rate or performance label. Many school principals feel that time is running out to make the gains in student achievement demanded by state and federal requirements.

Research Questions

The research summarized in my Literature Review will discuss how schools responded to the labeling process nationwide, setting a foundation for the following research questions:

1. What effects do external accountability measures have on the development of the Organizational Capacity of a school?

2. How do Arizona principals negotiate their school's assigned label in their everyday professional practice?

3. What are Arizona principals' views of the state accountability process?

Definitions of Terms

Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS). AIMS is a standardized test administered each spring by the state of Arizona. It is Arizona's implementation of Outcome-based Education to address the high stakes testing requirement of No Child Left Behind. All students in third through eighth and in tenth grades are required to take the AIMS test, which assesses their abilities in the subject areas of reading, math, writing and science. Science is the only

subject of the four that is not calculated within the formula for assigning school performance labels under Arizona Learns. Each grade level is assessed on a combination of the three subject areas.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB). NCLB is a United States Act of Congress regarding the education of all children. NCLB supports standards-based education reform, which is based on the belief that setting high standards of performance and establishing measurable goals will improve outcomes in education. The Act requires all 50 states to develop assessments in basic skills for all students in specific grades if those states are to receive federal funding for schools. NCLB is also known as the Elementary and Secondary Act of 2002, proposed by the administration of President George W. Bush.

Arizona Learns (AZLearns). In November of 2001, Arizona voters approved Proposition 301, which provided funds to the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) to develop an accountability system to measure school performance based on student achievement, including student performance on the AIMS test. The legislative requirements for the accountability system are stated in section 15-241 (ARS §15-241) of the Arizona Revised Statutes. The accountability system created to satisfy the statute is referred to as Arizona Learns. The school evaluation given by ADE to each school is referred to as the school's achievement profile or label.

School Performance Label or Label. Labels are based on students' scores on Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards. A complex formula factors in the

percentage of students who raised their AIMS scores and the number of students who passed this high-stakes test. The six labels a school can receive in Arizona are as follows: Excelling, Highly Performing, Performing Plus, Performing, Underperforming, and Failing.

Principal. A school principal is the site instructional leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the operations, organization and resources for an efficient and effective learning environment. The principal is also responsible for monitoring, supporting and evaluating support staff.   This term can be used interchangeably with *school administrator* or *school leader.*

Internal Accountability. Internal accountability can be viewed as a school's commitment to monitoring its own progress toward success. A specific set of standards for performance is accepted by all within the organization, and a system of rewards and sanctions is utilized to increase skill development in all areas. Staff members may face strong peer pressure to meet the desired goals. Leadership is a critical component for providing the internal structure of a school's accountability framework.

External Accountability. This term refers to state and federal mandates for schools to increase their levels of demonstrated student performance. Politicians and policymakers have chosen to utilize the results from high-stakes tests to evaluate schools on their students' academic achievement. Sanctions are then placed on schools that do not demonstrate adequate growth.

Organizational Capacity. Newman, King and Rigdon (1997) used the framework of Organizational Capacity in the context of their study "Accountability and School Performance: Implications from Restructuring Schools." Organizational Capacity describes a school's ability to maximize its human, technical, and social resources in order to reach an effective collective enterprise. Organizational Capacity is also an internally developed mechanism for solving problems. Newman et al. (1997) clarified that internal accountability is a building block toward Organizational Capacity. Depending on the circumstances, internal accountability can either generate organizational capacity or it can be a product of organizational capacity. Organizational Capacity encompasses three dimensions: (a) knowledge and skills, (b) autonomy, and (c) shared commitment and collaborative activity.

Limitations

This study has certain limitations that are unavoidable due to the biases I bring to the study: I have been a school administrator for eight years; five of these have been as a principal of an elementary school located in Phoenix, Arizona. My school struggles year after year to meet the expectations of state and federal mandates stipulated by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Arizona Learns (AZLearns) primarily due to the population of students we serve. The demographics of my school are clearly spelled out in the subgroups created by this external accountability: Hispanic, high poverty, special education and English Language Learners. I possess deep-rooted feelings toward the external forces that

affect my daily life as a principal; they are strict, time-sensitive, and many times, overwhelming. The yearly label assigned to my school unfortunately rings out loudly to create a public perception of success or failure. I experienced life with an Underperforming label during my first year as the school principal, with a Performing label my second year, and with a Performing Plus label for the past three years. As my label has become more favorable over the years, the challenges to maintain or improve it have been very demanding. It is interesting that one or two words, based on one week of testing results, can tell the story of the many efforts my school makes to improve every day of the school year. Parents, school staff, district administrators and local business owners all are aware of the performance label bestowed upon my school and form their perceptions of our work based on that label.

Delimitations

This study also has several delimitations to its research design. The research sample is small in scale and may not be representative of school principals nationwide. Ten principals located in the Phoenix metropolitan area during the 2010-2011 school year form the sample set for this study; they will have been assigned a school performance label for the 2009-2010 school year. This study examines how each principal navigates the policies directed by AZLearns and should not to be confused with another states' accountability policy or experiences. Also, the study is restricted to Arizona public elementary school principals within two school districts and does not analyze principals of

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alternative, magnet, or parochial schools. Therefore, the findings and results may or may not necessarily generalize to other subpopulations, locations, and/or time periods.

Significance of the Study

Inquiring into the daily operations of Arizona school principals in relationship to the performance label given to their schools tells the real story behind the banner. These labels are hung from school roofs, used by secretaries answering the phones, spelled out on marquees and disseminated in the Arizona Republic newspaper for everyone to see. They are also there for everyone to judge. The lives of the principals behind each label are not voiced in a public forum.   Many deep-rooted feelings exist because of these labels. This study is an opportunity to tell the story of the principal who faces society's accolades or criticisms and brings life to the data that has nearly overtaken education. My dissertation is about the lives behind the political spectacle, the stories of the many principals in the field, some of whom are working for social justice in at-risk communities, and others who may instead be perpetuating the inequalities in education.

Conceptual Framework: Organizational Capacity

Since schools are often evaluated externally based strictly on their student achievement data, my literature review will demonstrate how multiple factors lead to differing levels of student achievement on standardized tests. I am interested in the principal's perspective on the relationship between internal accountability

systems and external accountability pressures, as well as in the actions that a principal takes because of these accountability measures. Motivation, pressure, and the changes made with respect to professional development, all lead to higher levels of internal accountability.

To analyze the multiple vantage points that lead to student achievement, I will utilize the conceptual framework proposed by Newman, King and Rigdon (1997) in "Accountability and School Performance: Implications from Restructuring Schools." Newman et al. (1997) challenge the notion that more rigorous policies created by federal and state agencies will increase student achievement. By observing student achievement through the lens of accountability, one must distinguish between the external and internal accountability processes and the Organizational Capacity within a school site.

External accountability can be viewed as a relationship between a provider of a good or service (the school) and a patron, or agent (the state or federal department of education), who has the power to reward, punish, or replace the provider (Kirst, 1990). For schools today, accountability can be defined as the "process by which school districts and states attempt to ensure that schools and school systems meet their goals" (Rothman, 1995, p. 189). External accountability is based solely on students' performance on high-stakes criterion and norm-referenced tests.

Internal accountability, on the other hand, is defined as the inner workings of a school, including teacher knowledge, construction, input, and the connections

between the school and authentic, real world learning. It is important to point out
that internal accountability can, and in many cases does, exist without external
accountability. Internal accountability can rely heavily on peer pressure or
competition, or it may simply reflect the actions of a collaborative school
community striving to improve. Newmann et al. (1997) argue that external school
accountability systems alone are unlikely to increase student learning; the key is
to have a high level of organizational capacity within the organization.
Organizational Capacity is defined as the ability to sustain change from within the
organization. It can also be defined as the human, technical, and social resources
of a school organized into an effective collection (Newmann et. al., 1997, p. 41).
In their study of a nationwide sample of 24 elementary, middle and high schools
in the process of being restructured, Newmann et al. (1997) set out to understand
how external accountability worked or did not work in these schools. Three main
problems were found with the proposition that strong external accountability
alone will enhance a school's performance:

1. States varied in how they scripted mandates and viewed accountability,
   so no consistent expectations or results could be compared across the
   country.

2. Not only did external accountability measures come in different sizes
   and shapes, but schools' reactions to these measures were also
   implemented differently at each site, depending on a school's
   Organizational Capacity or leadership.

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3. Successful accountability systems were also found to occur from within a school community, with total disregard for outside forces.

This internal accountability is the first step to understanding and harnessing a school's Organizational Capacity. Schools must have a grassroots mentality in order to reap significant benefits. It is important for schools to utilize their teachers' knowledge and skills, to have autonomy to act, and to provide opportunities for shared commitment and collaboration toward clear purposes for student learning.

By utilizing the lens that Newmann et al. (1997) have provided, I will tell the stories that ten Arizona principals live day in and day out as they battle external accountability and strive to create an internal system that will maximize student learning, improve test scores and help them play the ever-changing game of accountability.

Summary

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One provided an extended discussion of the need for this study. It also provided three research questions that narrowed the focus and goal of the research as well as set the direction for the data collecting process. Chapter One concluded by explaining the limitations and delimitations and by discussing the conceptual framework for this research. The conceptual framework is the lens through which we view this study and will be carried throughout the review of the literature.

Chapter Two provides a review of the literature that explores the challenges faced by principals and schools as they tackle external accountability measures and high-stakes testing policies. As school testing and accountability policies intensify each year, so does the debate over external accountability mandates. Chapter Two is divided into six sections and includes a brief description of NCLB, AZLearns and four themes that were drawn from the controversial bank of literature. These themes attempt to tell the story of the many schools nationwide embarking on the journey of school improvement and navigating the external demands place upon them. The first section details the challenges of how sanctions and rewards attempt to motivate schools staffs to achieve higher test scores. The second section investigates how the pressure placed on schools to succeed affects test scores, staff morale and student success. The third section illustrates the areas that schools are attempting to modify with respect to teacher professional development, including assessments, standards and teacher collaboration. The fourth section describes the importance that internal accountability plays in school improvement and emphasizes that internal accountability within the school is only as strong as the principal's philosophy toward leadership.

Chapter Three provides the methodological framework for the study. The qualitative research methods used in this study are clarified as well as the rationale for their selection. Chapter Three also illustrates the procedure of and the criteria for selecting the participants. Finally, Chapter Three will include a

discussion of the data collecting process and the importance of how it is to be analyzed. These three chapters establish the foundation of my dissertation, which studies how principals use the AZLearns label in their daily work.

Chapters Four will describe the analysis of the research and depict the implications from this study. Chapter Four is an analysis of the collected stories. These stories are organized into the three themes of Accountability, Achievement and Attitudes. These themes resulted from an analysis of the interviews and provided an organizational structure to tell the principals stories in relationship to the school labels. The themes are described and supported by the commonalities that surfaced from the stories of the principals.

Chapter Five concludes this study by analyzing the relationship between the stories, themes, and the notion of Organizational Capacity as defined by Newmann et al. (1997). My dissertation study provides an alternative lens into the principal's perspective, interpretation and lived experiences of ten Arizona school principals as told by myself as the researcher and author. I hope that this study will lead to a variety of questions about how a school's success or student achievement can be promulgated by a tag placed upon a school with a word or phrase. Teaching, learning and leading are in constant transformation and warrant a description as told in this dissertation.

<center>**Chapter Two**</center>

<center>**Literature Review**</center>

Introduction

Public accountability and high-stakes testing policies affect every school

principal and teacher within our schools. As these testing and accountability

policies intensify, so does the debate over external accountability and how it

affects student outcomes (Carnoy & Loeb, 2002).   While many public

stakeholders support the use of standardized testing scores as an efficient and

accurate way to evaluate school effectiveness, many educators and policymakers

object to the employment of these tests as the primary accountability tool for

public schools. In my review of the literature, I will examine the federal and state

policies intended to support and increase academic achievement. However,

because of their design, these policies often serve instead as an obstruction to

principals who are attempting to improve their students' academic achievement. I

will also analyze four main themes that address how schools and principals

respond to their controversial accountability ratings. The first theme will cover

research that investigates how accountability ratings affect teachers' and

administrators' motivation. The second theme will explore the pressure felt by

schools' administrators and staffs to achieve positive accountability labels. The

third theme will examine how schools' professional development plans alter in

response to sanctions meant to improve their label. The last theme will discuss

how principals rely on strong internal accountability measures to create an

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effective and results-based school. These four themes are factors that are present

in schools today in part due to the federal act titled No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

and Arizona's legislative complement, Arizona Learns (AZLearns).

Federal and State Policies that Impact School Principals

      NCLB Policy. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 expects

100% of students to achieve grade level proficiency by 2014. When it passed with

overwhelming bipartisan support, its purpose was clear but perhaps a bit too

ambitious. This reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

laid out the unrealistic expectation that by the academic year 2013-2014, all

students across the United States would be proficient in reading and mathematics,

thus its name: No Child Left Behind (Stecher, Vernez & Steinberg 2010). As we

are presently in the ninth year of this bold endeavor, it has become quite apparent

that meeting this expectation is unlikely. Furthermore, the aftermath of the

implementation of NCLB has had a negative effect on schools, principals and

student achievement (Sunderman, Kim & Orefield, 2004). In creating a system of

shared control between federal, state and local governments without ensuring a

standard system of evaluation or a common language for evaluative labels, this

law has complicated how school districts and principals navigate the effects of

this policy. The evaluative system is implemented differently in each state, so

there is no way to accurately compare their results. Thus, the labels used in

Arizona are a result of Arizona's particular interpretations of school performance

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and do not match the labels or measures used by other schools across the United States.

NCLB focuses on four educational principles, or *pillars*, for reform. The four pillars are (a) stronger accountability for results, (b) more freedom for states and communities, (c) proven education methods, and (d) more choice for parents (Four Pillars of NCLB, 2004). The four pillars of NCLB work together to support student achievement gains with a focus on lower performing schools. The Pillar of "Stronger Accountability" tightens the ropes on lower performing schools and the second pillar claims that there is "More Freedom". The idea of "Proven Education Methods" may have served as a catapult for education publishing giants, such as Pearson. The fourth Pillar of "More Choice for Parents" has opened up the door for charter schools. When one analyzes the Four Pillars of No Child Left Behind, it is difficult to hold back from thinking about how each pillar serves to benefit privatizing education instead of supporting public schools. Each of these pillars is embedded in AZLearns to decide how a label gets placed on a school.

The pillar of *stronger accountability for results* is the external accountability limb of NCLB and is charged with the task of closing the achievement gap. Its effectiveness is reflected in yearly report cards produced by schools, districts and states. Schools that do not demonstrate the desired progress, called Annual Yearly Progress (AYP), must take corrective action in accordance with the law (Four Pillars of NCLB, 2004). The high stakes involved in this pillar

lead to high-impact consequences for principals, beginning with the label

assigned to each school. If a school is tagged as Underperforming, the mandated

corrective actions are more rigorous than they are for a school that is tagged as

Performing. These corrective actions may also differ based on each state and how

the state implements the second pillar, *more freedom for states and communities*.

The *more freedom for states and communities* pillar of NCLB provides

more flexible practices regarding how states use federal education funds. Giving

school districts the ability to use federal funds for particular needs such as

professional development and increased teacher pay was meant to target specific

needs in local communities (Four Pillars of NCLB, 2004). While this flexibility

may be appropriate, as each state has diverse student population needs, it derails

the notion of "no child left behind." Under the ensuing patchwork of practices

across the country, by the year 2013-2014 each state may have experienced a

different definition of proficiency (Stecher, Vernez and Steinberg, 2010). The

freedom implied in this pillar is so broad that the definition of proficiency may

change from year to year within a single state.

A recent instance of such inconsistency occurred on July 19, 2010, when

the Arizona Department of Education lowered the Annual Measurable Objectives

(AMO) for math in the third through eighth grades due to low scores produced by

schools statewide. For example, the AMO for sixth grade math dropped from a

54.4% passing rate to 43%. The freedom given to the states to create and modify

their own definitions of proficiency allows them to play a deceptive numbers

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game rather than truly requiring them to address the realistic academic progress of their students.

The pillar of *proven education methods* places an emphasis on resources and programs that have been proven to be effective through scientific research, setting guidelines for school districts when seeking out a desired programs or materials (Four Pillars of NCLB, 2004). This pillar theoretically provides a focus for schools in need, because principals are provided with more funding if their schools are performing lower than other schools. However, rather than actually meeting the local needs of a lower-performing school, this pillar may actually have provided a fiscal paradise for publishing companies, as their list of resources were quickly aligned to match the jargon of the Four Pillars. How a principal uses those funds should be based on a fundamental understanding of what the teachers need in order to plan for long-term changes rather than on finding quick band-aids year after year (Sunderman et al., 2004). Through the third pillar, NCLB provides opportunities for publishing companies to determine the curriculum and staff development options for schools in need of internal structure and accountability.

The fourth pillar of NCLB, *more choices for parents*, attempts to provide an opportunity for charter schools to gain leverage in privatizing education by forcing schools to provide for students who want to transfer out of underperforming schools. Schools that have not met state standards for at least two consecutive years will be subject to paying transportation costs for those

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wishing to attend another public or charter school. Schools that fail to meet the state growth standards for at least three consecutive years must also provide free supplemental services to all students who are not meeting the standard.

While the intent of NCLB is to provide parents with more choice, each state determines their standards and benchmarks for student achievement. Rather than forcing low-performing Arizona schools to improve their level of education, the Arizona Department of Education has lowered benchmark minimums so politicians can use the altered results as proof to the public that Arizona is right on track. For example, Arizona's 5th grade passing benchmark for the 2009-2010 school year was 44% in math and 54.6% in reading (Arizona Department of Education, 2010). Therefore, if a 5th grader got less than half of the problems correct on the math portion of the AIMS test, that student was considered to be performing at grade level, or "meeting" the standard. The same goes for reading; if the same student got 55% of the reading questions correct on the AIMS test, that student was considered to be at grade level. While NCLB provides the notion that parents can choose a higher performing school, the state's creative arithmetic may provide only the façade of a performing school. Cut scores continue to fall in order to paint a brighter picture of statewide student achievement, presenting inaccurate data to parents who are trying to make an informed decision on the right school for their children.

Another part of NCLB's accountability formula requires a school's subgroups to meet specific benchmarks, but in small schools, the subsequent

performance label may be disproportionate when compared to a larger school whose subgroups represent more of the population. If a school does not have enough students at a grade level or in a subgroup, those scores are not counted in their label. For example, if a large school has 75 English Language Learners (ELLs) out of their 250 fifth graders, representing 30% of the fifth grade population, then the ELL subgroup must meet a given benchmark. However, if a school has only nine ELLs out of their 30 fifth graders, still representing 30% of the fifth grade population, it is not held accountable for that subgroup because it has less than 40 ELLs. Therefore, a parent's choice may not be well informed and the label smaller schools receive may be inflated compared to the label larger schools receive.

These four pillars affect the daily decisions of school principals working in high need schools (Stecher et al., 2010): "According to a Public Agenda survey, one in three principals maintains that the implementation of NCLB policy is the most pressing challenge he or she has faced at the school" (Sergiovanni, 2006, p. 40). The prescriptive measures of NCLB do not take into consideration the multiple factors that affect student achievement. The various pieces of the law have different effects on different schools. School principals are challenged to interpret the law in a way that makes sense for the community that makes up the school site.

As the NCLB pillars set the criteria and means for school success, the challenge for every child to be proficient in math and reading by 2014 has schools

looking for support. "Each state, school district, and school will be expected to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) towards meeting state standards" (Stecher et al., 2003, p.15). Making AYP is dependent on three factors. First, schools are required to have at least 95% of the student population assessed. This stipulation is to prevent schools from attempting to hide lower performing students from the data pool. The AYP percentages must account for various demographics of a school's student body. These percentages are broken down into nine subgroups reflecting each population within the school (Stecher et al., 2003). The subgroups are as follows: English Language Learners (ELLs), Economically Disadvantaged, Special Education, the five racial/ethnic groups (Asian, Black, Hispanic, Indian and White), and All. Every school is responsible for making the desired gains in each subgroup at the school. Small schools get accommodations and a subgroup with less than forty students will not be calculated into the school performance grade. Small schools, such as charters, may have inflated progress reports due to this accommodation. Next, students must meet the Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) set forth by the state. These AMOs rise each year to reach the 100% proficiency goal by 2014. Third, the students must meet the established threshold criteria; in high school, graduation rates define the threshold criterion, and in elementary schools, attendance rates determine part of the school's AYP.

Principals leading at-risk schools feel more punished than assisted by NCLB's lofty claims of improving student achievement through external accountability measures alone. At-risk students are less likely to arrive at school

with the fundamental skill sets needed to perform at the same rate as affluent

students. Acker-Hocevar and Touchton (2002) report that principals perceived at-

risk students as being at a disadvantage when taking high-stakes tests because

they come from economically, educationally and culturally disadvantaged home

environments.   The selected principals from the Acker- Hocevar study also

believed that measuring student growth, rather than student performance on one

test, was a more equitable way to measure a school's effectiveness. For these

reasons, it is critical to analyze how school principals negotiate the policies that

dictate the world in which they work each day.

Arizona Learns (AZLearns). In November 2001, Arizona voters

approved Proposition 301, which provided funds to the Arizona Department of

Education (ADE) to develop an accountability system for measuring school

performance based on student achievement. The legislative requirements for the

accountability system are stated in section 15-241 (ARS §15-241) of the Arizona

Revised Statutes. This accountability system was created to satisfy the statute and

is referred to as Arizona Learns (AZLearns). AZLearns is the state's only

educational accountability and ranking system to measure how students perform

on the reading, writing, and math portions of the AIMS test, which is

administered in third through eighth grades and then again in tenth grade. The

intent of AZLearns is to inform all stakeholders, including parents and business

owners, of how schools are performing compared to statewide trends in

achievement. These trends paint the picture for all to see and serve as a precursor

of what schools need to improve on in order to meet the designated benchmarks. Six levels of academic performance were developed and given names, or labels: Excelling, Highly Performing, Performing Plus, Performing, Underperforming, and Failing. Each label acts as an individual school report card, and scrutiny from the state, district and local community may evolve if the label does not measure up to each stakeholder's expectations. These labels are solely dependent on how a school's students perform on the reading, math and writing portions of the AIMS test.

The AIMS test was created as the statewide assessment to measure student achievement and satisfies the NCLB mandate that every state across the United States implement a research-based method of assessing performance. As NCLB utilizes complicated formulas to calculate a school's Annual Yearly Progress (AYP), AZLearns employs the use of MAP, defined as the Measure of Academic Performance. MAP is used along with graduation and dropout rates to help formulate the six performance labels.

NCLB and AZLearns were created to ensure that schools are held accountable for their educational practices and delivery. A large component of the job of today's principal consists of upholding and meeting these initiatives head on. Unfortunately, upholding these initiatives is more daunting for principals serving at-risk schools. Jacobson, Johnson, & Giles (2005) state that truancy and dropout rates are generally higher for at-risk students rather than students not found at-risk. Both truancy and dropout rates ultimately affect the

performance label the school will receive, yet these factors are often outside the scope of the school principal's control and are sadly unavoidable. These external accountability pressures add to the already complicated role of today's school principal. Dealing with contemporary school accountability policies requires high levels of skill and great levels of commitment. The following four themes depict examples of how school principals negotiate their performance labels while striving for successful schools and higher test scores.

Sanctions and Rewards to Motivate Staff

Do sanctions and rewards motivate schools to improve student achievement scores? The basic premise or theory behind the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policy is that strict consequences for schools will motivate school staff members to improve how they work and to focus more intently on student outcomes. Interestingly, this line of thinking contradicts what early organizational theorists have written on the topic. Early organizational theorists Lawler (1973) and Vroom (1964), as reported in Marzano (2003), believed that individual performance in an organization or school is a multiplicative function of motivation and ability and not of strict sanctions. These theorists believed that both teacher and student performance are directly correlated to the quality (or ability) and motivation of the staff. Quality and motivation can result in significant gains but the terms can be interchangeable. With the similarities between quality and motivation present, Finnigan and Gross (2007) set out to answer the question of how policy sanctions influence teacher motivation; they

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found that strict consequences through external accountability did not improve student scores. Ten low-performing Chicago schools were selected for this two-year (1996 -1998) study; all were in their first or second year of probationary status. The study's mixed methods approach included teacher interviews and focus groups; these methods produced eye-opening results. 269 teachers across the 10 schools reported they became easily frustrated by the accountability measures, viewed the accountability goals of their school as unrealistic, and reported being conflicted about the accountability policy in general. "The teachers understood the need for accountability, but they disagreed with how it was carried out; they believed that the probationary measures did not match or respect the challenges they faced every day in the classroom" (Finnigan and Gross, 2007, p. 603). The results from this study showed that higher motivation from the staff occurred only when higher performance levels or scores were obtained by the students. In other words, success breeds success. Success, not fear of the sanctions, was the reason for their increased motivation. Finnegan and Gross' findings echoed those of Mintrop (2003) who studied 11 schools that were labeled low-performing and were placed on probation in Maryland and Kentucky. This three-year study (1997-2000) investigated the effect of probation on individual performance motivation, organizational processes and patterns of instruction (Mintrop, 2003, p. 3). Through interviews, classroom observations and survey questionnaires, the study found that placing schools on probation only weakly motivated teachers. Probationary measures had a negative effect on

student outcomes, test scores and school morale. Teachers felt very demoralized, depressed, or mortified (Mintrop, 2003, p. 6). Veteran teachers who described themselves as hard workers were shocked by the labeling process and took it as a personal attack on their craft. Moreover, teachers perceived the assessments that triggered this external pressure as invalid, unrealistic and unfair.

It is clear that probationary sanctions can create unfavorable working conditions for teachers who need to learn purposeful performance-based pedagogy. Probation as a tool for instructional reform did not work in this case. In Florida, Acker-Hocevar and Touchton (2002) pointed out the complications of another approach to improved student achievement: economic motivation (rewards) tied to student scores. The 1999 Florida Legislative Session produced the divisive A+ Plan, which focused primarily on rewarding schools that progressed on the state's high stakes assessment tool, the Florida Comprehension Assessment Test (FCAT). One specific part of this plan took the familiar student grading system of "A" through "F" (high performing to low performing) to label Florida schools based on their students' results on the FCAT in the areas of reading, writing, and math.   High performing schools could earn up to $100 per student for high student scores. These monies forced principals, faculty and school site councils at high-performing schools to make crucial decisions about how and where to spend the funds. However, principals in many of the lower performing schools were not allocated or rewarded financially in any way for student growth on test scores, even though gains were being made. However,

monetary decisions were only made on which teachers will earn a stipend for continuing to teach at a lower performing "D" and "F" graded school. The A+ Plan's effectiveness began to be called into question when entire school districts, such as Miami-Dade County Schools, received little to no financial reward for their students' test scores. Yan (1999) found that Miami Dade County Schools primarily serviced the state's high-poverty, high-mobility and high-minority areas, creating a "rich get richer while the poor get poorer" effect. Many critics believe that rewarding teachers is a positive move, but in this case, the results came in the form of lowering morale, tearing facilities apart and pushing teachers out of low-graded schools into the higher-graded schools (Yan, 1999). In a case like Florida's, an external pay-for-performance plan creates even more challenges for school principals trying to meet the mark.

Leithwood, Steinbach, and Jantzi (2002) indicated that school staffs are more likely to report having higher levels of motivation when implementing school reform that involves goals that are obtainable and fair. They also found that the motivation for both teacher and administrators to implement an accountability policy begins with the perceived desirability of its outcomes. Like Mintrop (2003), Leithwood et al. (2002) found that most teachers and administrators were skeptical of their state's accountability measures and tended to view them as political in nature. The majority of teachers did not believe that these accountability initiatives were motivated by educational concerns, but rather, the educators thought they were merely "a political ploy pandering to

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business interests" (Leithwood et al., 2002, p. 105). Teachers felt that the government's accountability initiatives eroded teachers' sense of self-efficacy, diminishing both their professional confidence and their ability to respond productively. The majority of respondents from this study perceived the effects of most accountability policies to be negative in nature (Leithwood et al., 2002). This negative judgment of effects was aligned with the perception that the government's intentions for many of its policies were unrelated to improving teaching and student learning (Leithwood et al., 2002). The evidence from this study confirmed that not only do the teachers believe they are primarily accountable to students and parents, but also that they are likely to rank the federal government last among the forces to whom they feel they should be accountable.

Similar to the approach Mintrop (2003) took, Sunderman et al. (2004) surveyed teachers in two very different struggling urban districts–Fresno, California, and Richmond, Virginia–to understand teachers' perceptions of the use of rewards and sanctions to improve student outcomes. Over 1,400 surveys were returned (a 77% return rate) by teachers in both Performing and Underperforming schools. First, teachers had a "thoughtful" view of school reform and were accepting of accountability as long as it was based on a system of measured instructional practices (Sunderman et al., 2004). Simply, they believed their schools could improve. With this belief intact, they were not wholly opposed to the use of sanctions for underperforming schools or to the

removal of bad teachers. These teachers did, however, believe that the NCLB

sanctions could unfairly punish and reward teachers, depending on the school at

which they chose to work.   Rather than motivating a staff to make sustained

achievement gains, the sanctions at low-performing schools could actually deflate

achievement over the long run; the surveyed teachers reported that when their

schools were assigned a negative label, they would tend to respond by narrowing

the focus of instruction to just the most-tested topics, thereby cheating the

students of the entire curriculum. Such reactions then contributed to the long-

term consequences of students not meeting district and state mandates.

Amrein and Berliner (2002), who did an analysis using state-level data,

agreed that effective motivation of staff was critical when working toward higher

student achievement on standardized tests. They found no consistent pattern in

Stanford Achievement Test scores analyzed from 18 states after high stakes

testing policies were implemented: "Scores seem to go up or down in random

patterns after high-stake tests are introduced (Amrein & Berliner, 2002, p. 57).

Amrein and Berliner actually concluded that the high-stakes testing policies were

negatively affecting teachers' motivation (2002).

 In a different mixed method study, Helig and Darling-Hammond (2008)

found that external accountability measures can have a slight impact on positively

motivating teachers. For teachers who viewed the accountability data as vital

information, rewards had some motivational value. Being part of a "winning

team" was documented both as an indicator for success and as a competitive

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factor to produce higher test score results. Stipends and bonuses offered to the

Brazos City Texas teachers and administrators for increased scores also drove

student outcomes. Unfortunately, high-stakes testing policies also may lead to

"gaming" the system which produces false results; this phenomenon will be

discussed in the following section.

We cannot prescribe sanctions and rewards that will motivate all teachers

and principals.   According to the bulk of the presented literature, the concept of

paying or punishing for test scores did not produce the desired outcomes. The

next section will explore how the pressure of external accountability measures

and high-stakes testing affects schools, teachers and principals, as new challenges

arise when they feel pressured to produce specific and immediate results.

Pressure to Deliver Results

Does pressure deliver results? State and federal accountability policies

place constant pressure on teachers and school administrators to improve student

and school achievement scores. As the pressure on schools becomes more and

more intense, the question arises: Are teachers really trying harder, can their

increased effort actually create higher learning rates among students? Many times

the pressure to succeed comes at great expense.

Helig and Darling-Hammond (2008) conducted a mixed methods study of

the policies that reward and sanction Texas schools. From the qualitative data

collected from focus group discussions with students and school staffs from

Brazos City, the researchers verified that the pressure of not achieving expected

results and possibly being shamed or fired" led some teachers and school principals to engage in a "gaming of the system." False results were collected and reported by manipulating the data pool, thereby showing false academic gains. Retention, waiver policies, grade-skipping and pushing out low-scoring students was a few of the strategies used by these Texas schools to sidestep the pressure they felt. These inaccurate results had financial repercussions and were utilized to set foundations for school improvement across the country.

Mintrop (2003) found factors that affected the motivation of the staff also identified that "mild pressure" was indicated by most of the interviewees in his study. With respect to possible sanctions and probation, most of the interviewed teachers were not worried about their jobs; instead, many of them were more stressed about their sense of professional worth and how they were viewed by their peers as well as by the larger community. Most teachers perceived probation as only a mild pressure agent. Threats were not taken too seriously, and most of the educators viewed probationary measures as a needed step of support. Finnigan and Gross (2007) found that the degree of pressure teachers felt as a result of accountability policies was inversely related to their level of motivation: "Teachers who felt less pressure to improve scores and felt less fear that their jobs were at risk expressed a higher expectation that their school and students could perform"(p. 603). Generally, the researchers found that the few people who had positive feelings toward the governmental motives to intervene felt less pressure to perform, whereas teachers who harbored negative feelings toward the

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accountability measures generally felt more pressure to perform. Overall, as the

teachers at a school felt more pressure, their levels of anxiety increased, and

school morale decreased. In addition, pressured teachers' internal motivation

decreased, as they displayed less interest in future professional development

opportunities.

Nichols, Glass & Berliner (2006) studied the relationship between high-

stakes testing pressure and student achievement data from 25 states across the

United States to investigate if in fact pressure from external forces would result in

higher levels of student achievement. Their motivation behind their study was to

tell the story of accountability, its impact and the implementation within each of

the states. Portfolios were generated to create independent evaluations of the

pressure value felt in each state. A matrix evolved from the findings which

resulted in a continuum showing either high or low levels of pressure. These

ratings along with correlation analyses of 4th and 8th grade math scores from the

National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) concluded that no

relationship between earlier pressure and achievement existed. Nichols, Glass &

Berliner (2006) also found that no relationship also existed in testing pressure and

reading achievement scores on the NAEP at any grade level or any ethnic

subgroup.

Mintrop (2004) went beyond analyzing the pressure felt by teachers and

instead focused on how external accountability measures affected school

principals. His study established that in many cases, principals dealing with

strong external accountability pressures responded by seizing more control over the day-to-day school operations (Mintrop, 2004). This reaction to the pressure can often create an unwelcome sense of urgency and can place an excessive and unwarranted amount of pressure on staff.

Tomson, Blackmore, Sachs, & Tregenza (2003) agreed with Mintrop (2004) in their narrative analysis of news articles addressing principal shortages. They concluded that the "dominant media representation of principals' work is one of long hours, low salary, high stress and sudden death from high stakes accountability factors" (Tomson et al. 2003, p.1). The pressure and stress of the principals' role under strict accountability mandates seems to be taking its toll on the profession. Heart attacks, loss of hair, sleepless nights, long work hours and a horrendous amount of paperwork is morphing a once-prestigious opportunity into an unwanted position: "The causes of the pressure and stress are attributed to the principalship now having more responsibilities than power" (Tomson et al., 2003, p.118). On June 25, 2000, The Washington Post reported one principal's view toward the pressures of the job: "They hold principals accountable for test scores, yet we don't have the power to hire and fire teachers. A principal is required to be an instructional leader, the social worker, do administrative tasks–there are just so many things we're responsible for. But the general feeling is that we're not getting the support from central administration (Tomson et al. 2003, p 120)."

Friedman's (2002) study of Israeli principals found similar results. In a study focused on principal burnout, Friedman (2002) found that the

"uncontrollability" of the job was one of the major reasons the principals in his study felt overworked and overwhelmed. The pressure to perform the duties of the principalship has become too demanding. It seems that the accountability ratings and forces analyzed in these studies do not consistently help low-performing schools or school principals increase student achievement (p. 232).

The pressure to perform on these high-stakes testing events from state to state can have a variety of effects. In most cases they were not what federal and state policy makers had hoped for. "Gaming the system" is unfortunate, but it is no stranger to schools that struggle to meet benchmarks year after year. Shrinking curriculums and more controlling principals cannot be viewed as a step in the right direction, but they happen every day all across the country. As principals search for the magic bullet, professional development plans will fall victim to the mandates of state policy and directed improvement plans by state agencies. The next section of this literature review will explore the impact an achievement label may have on a principal's decisions regarding professional development.

Accountability Labels Affect on Professional Development

How do sanctions or labels affect professional development? For professional development in schools to be effective as an accountability policy mechanism, it needs to address the challenges established by the external forces of accountability while also building on the skills of teaching and learning. Due to concerns nationwide regarding academic achievement and test scores, large-scale reform of classroom practices has received a great deal of attention. As a

result of this attention, a substantial amount of public resources has been allocated to professional development initiatives at the federal, state and local levels. In 2008, the federal government spent close to $3 billion dollars to improve teacher quality through Title II state grants, one source of federal funding aimed at improving professional development (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). With improved student achievement on the minds of many struggling school principals, setting a focused plan and appropriate venue for professional development opportunities would lead to higher student test scores and ultimately raise their school accountability ranking. Theoretically, these newly developed, high-quality professional development plans would produce superior abilities and skills, which would then translate into higher levels of student achievement. Multiple studies over the past two decades have analyzed the professional development strategies schools undertake in response to increasing accountability pressures. Key themes in these studies include quality teaching and instruction (Sanders and Rivers, 1996), standards and assessment (Hamilton, McCaffrey, Stecher, Klein, Robyn and Bugliari; 2003), and teacher collaboration and/or efficacy (Borko, 2004; Goddard, Goddard and Moren, 2007).

Quality teaching and instruction. The proposed outcome of strict external accountability mandates is to improve student achievement. However, student achievement scores cannot improve without changes in how teachers instruct and how students learn. Not only must the teacher possess a sufficient knowledge of the content he or she teaches, but the teacher must also recognize how the

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students' understandings of that content area mature (Borko, 2004). Educators must be able to deliver content differently for each individual student. The teacher plays a critical role in the current system of accountability and educators know this. Improved test scores depend heavily on the quality of the teacher's instruction (Sanders and Rivers, 1996).

Wenglinsky (2000) believed that classroom practices were critical to the learning process. From his research, he found that what occurs in the classroom is vital and that how a teacher instructs is important (Wenglinsky, 2000). Building on the data collected from Sanders and Rivers (1996) eighth-grade science report of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Wenglinsky (2000) implied that teachers who utilize strategies that promote higher order thinking and active participation were most successful. However, Wenglinsky (2000) acknowledged that this science report snapshot in time proved to be a delimitation of his study, thus providing avenues for additional research. His research concluded that teacher input, professional development, and classroom practices all influence student achievement.

Goldstein (2001) addressed the impact of quality instruction at secondary schools, where students see a variety of teachers a day. He stated, "In secondary schools, it is very difficult to ascribe the progress of any one pupil in a given subject to the teacher of that subject" (Goldstein, 2001, p. 4). According to his conclusions, other factors, such as student ethnic background and school setting, play a larger role in student achievement and test scores (Goldstein, 2001).

Whichever viewpoint is accepted, school principals at struggling schools are bound by the NCLB requirements to ensure the availability of high quality professional development opportunities for all teachers and staff. This emphasis is quite different from previous decades, when professional development participation was mostly voluntary and mainly focused on individual teacher growth (Little, 1993).

Principals approach professional development at their sites in a variety of ways. Some principals choose professional development programs that help teachers develop skills across all subject areas, such as helping students acquire the academic language of math while learning the math standards through both oral language development and math lessons (Kabasakalian, 2007). Another approach is to focus on a multitude of providers or consultants, pedagogical philosophies, formats and contents to model quality instruction for the entire staff (Hill, 2007). Activities could range in format from direct instruction in specific practices to a more authentic, inquiry-based format driven by a teacher's individual ideas or needs.

Standards and assessments to satisfy NCLB requirements. Standards are at the core of school reform and professional development. Publishing companies have begun to customize their texts and professional development services to meet the standards outlined by each state. While standards provide broad guidelines for the skills and topics students should be able to master at a particular grade level, the relationship between the teaching of standards and student

achievement are complex and ambiguous (Borko, 2004). Alignment between the standards and classroom instruction is the first step toward *standards-based reform*. Standards-based reform refers to the rationality of content standards, which is the foundation of assessments and the materials utilized for instruction. Porter (2002) points out that the purposeful integration of instructional content and practices influences how a teacher will approach planning instruction as well as the decisions about their individual delivery of instruction. For standards-based reform to create high levels of success the adopted curriculum must be aligned with the assessments, and both the standards and assessments need to echo high content quality. Sunderman et al. (2004) found that teachers believe that state standards are meaningful and appropriate. However, with the multiple state content standards that exist from state to state, the analysis of how professional development affects student achievement remains uncertain(Hamilton, McCaffrey, Stecher, Klein, Robyn and Bugliari; 2003). Researchers Hamilton et al. (2003) found it problematic to analyze the impact of professional development due to variations in implementation between schools, districts and states. This lack of conclusive evidence creates a problem for school principals as they search for concrete and proven ways to gear their improvement plans for student success.

As states across the country implement each of their assessments to satisfy the requirements spelled out by NCLB, districts and schools are creating their own forms of assessment that range from multiple choice tests to authentic, or project-based, assessments. Mathis (2009) encourages schools that have

implemented benchmark, project-based, or internal multiple choice assessments as a mean to improve scores to continue using them alongside a systematic effort to improve teaching. With assessments and teaching combined at high levels of implementation, increases in student achievement on standardized tests are sure to follow.

Teacher collaboration and efficacy. While researchers have had a difficult time assessing the relationship between professional development strategies and student achievement, they have found evidence that professional development initiatives can support improved teacher collaboration. This collaboration is important in the early stages of knowledge building; it can also act as a vehicle to enhance the professional development strategies within a teacher's skill set. Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) assessed survey data collected from over 4,000 teachers to show teacher leadership as an indicator toward better instructional practices. However, the researchers were not able to fully explain the observed relationship between the two: "We need to go further inside teams and teacher collaboration to get a better understanding of what happens when teachers work together around instruction" (Wahlstrom and Louis, 2008, p. 484).

Borko (2004) found that teachers who approach professional development as a process of learning demonstrated higher levels of student achievement. Just as learning is a process, so should professional development be a process. Many principals struggle with overused professional development terms such as trainings, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), in-services and staff

development for the sake of satisfying external forces, but Borko (2004)

synthesizes the experience of teachers into a process of learning, critical thinking,

application and reflection. Borko shifts the term from training to teacher learning

and professional learning opportunities are developed similar to a teacher action

project. The teachers implement teaching and learning in three phases to make the

teacher learning relevant to the site the teachers work at and the students they

teach. When teachers are supported consistently, teachers become what Giroux

(cited in Borko, 2004) calls "intellectual teachers" rather than skilled workers.

While reading and math reform continues to be tackled by schools

searching for higher test scores, principals explore multiple strategies within their

professional development plans to reach organizational capacity. It is through the

process of learning and coaching that teachers will be ready to face the challenges

of instruction in today's environment of external accountability. Building teacher

efficacy is a critical first step in facing this challenge. Teachers must explore the

relationship between the professional development focus of their school and the

attitudes and practices each of them possesses. The following section points out

the importance of internal accountability, leadership and school improvement.

Internal Accountability's Role with School Improvement

How does internal accountability play a role in school improvement? High

stakes testing policies rely heavily on test scores as a lever to increase student

achievement. However, a common thread in the research on school improvement

is based on the factors of internal accountability. Internal accountability is

viewed as a schools' commitment to monitor its own progress toward success and to utilize rewards and sanctions to set standards for performance (Newman et al., 1997). Such a commitment is not always present due to external accountability and is only as strong as the principal's philosophy about school leadership. Strong leadership is the foundation for a specific set for expectations that are accepted by all within the school organization.

Marzano (2003) showed that students who attended schools ran effectively rather than ineffectively had a 44% difference in their expected passing rate on a given test. These results were alarming and prompted the question, how much does a school's leadership impact student achievement? (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005). Many years of research have addressed the topic of how a strong leadership model can help a school reach its potential through a system of internal accountability.

Leithwood (1994) focused on four critical tools for school principals who desire to create a successfully organized and effective school, calling them the *Four I's*. First, he said that principals must attend to the needs of the staff, creating a unified group and not letting any member feel left out; this personal attention is called *individual consideration*. Some schools apply individual consideration by customizing professional learning communities or growth plans to grade level needs, allowing all teachers at each grade level to have a voice. Next, Leithwood (2004) pointed out that principals should have their staff think of old problems in new ways, using the tool of *intellectual stimulation*. Staff

members should consider themselves agents of change and should break down situations or issues in order to reconstruct them in a way that works within their time and space allocations. Leithwood's recommended approach of *intellectual stimulation* will create a transformation in a staff member's view of the school and the upcoming challenges it faces. When new learning or reform is applied in a meaningful and personal manner, the ensuing intrinsic motivation develops curiosity and provides a lens for exploration. Third, *inspirational motivation* is Leithwood's message of high expectations for teachers and students alike, a relentless and grounded message that never wavers. Lastly, the tool of *idealized influence* manifests itself when the principal provides an opportunity for the behavior of teachers to develop through personal accomplishments and demonstrated character. The idealized influence approach ties Leithwood's four tools together to support the staff's participation in the school organization to grow organically in a manner that creates the ideal situation as defined by the school. The Four I's compose what Leithwood coined the *Transformational Model for Leadership in Education*. The above mentioned leadership style or approaches incorporate the importance of involving staff into making decisions and being a part of the application process. Various forms or styles of leadership prove to be effective in developing quality levels of internal capacity (Leithwood, 2004).

Another form of leadership that incorporates a school's staff in creating internal capacity is called *distributed leadership*. Spillane and Sherer (2004)

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focused on distributive leadership as an approach to the distributions of the many tasks a school principal must address to have high levels of internal accountability and success. By allocating the many roles that principals usually address to multiple leaders, an "interactive web" is created and leadership is "stretched out" throughout the organization (p 144). Distributive leadership consists of three major components: collaborative, collective and coordinated distribution. Collaborative distribution evolves when the actions of one leader transforms or become the basis for the action of another leader. Collective distribution occurs when leaders act independently from one another but ultimately work toward the same goal. This shared approach reaps substantial benefits due to the multiple vantage points created by separate individuals. Coordinated distribution is when specific tasks are headed by a variety of leaders, not just the few that many schools experience. By sharing or dispensing the school's responsibility throughout the entire staff, it is clear to see how the internal accountability within the organization increases an individual's ownership or commitment in the process. Ownership and commitment by staff will undoubtedly produce quality results in test scores. Internal accountability is sustained when the staff is a part of the decision-making process that leads the reform effort. (Marzano, 2005)

The sustainability of an internal accountability system depends on the commitment of the members to the school's plan or vision. Mintrop and Trujillo's (2007) found that the internal accountability or commitment by staff

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provided more tangible results than did the external forces measured by standardized test as placed upon nine California exceptionally high and low-performing middle schools. While searching for the practical relevance of the school accountability system for school improvement, the results came back surprisingly mixed (Mintrop and Trujillo, 2007). After analyzing the data collected from school personnel at both low-performing and high-performing schools, the task was to measure the quality of learning experienced by the two types of schools.   High performing and low performing schools looked considerably similar to their counter parts. The assumption was that the higher performing school would warrant an overall higher level of experience based on the success.   Accountability ratings were not clearly and consistently related to the quality of the educational experiences students received at a particular school (Mintrop and Trujillo, 2007, p.331). Mintrop and Trujillo (2007) contend that standardized tests are an inadequate approach to measure a school's success. Abernathy (2007) agrees that the strong relationship between a student's background and standardized test score results create a measure of error that one cannot ignore. The correlation between achievement and external accountability is still in question and supports the foundation to this research.

Contradicting previous studies, Carnoy and Loeb (2002) found a correlation between external accountability and school achievement. However their state-level analysis of the relationship between external accountability policies and student achievement was in isolation without considering internal

accountability. Carnoy and Loeb created an index of the strength of accountability policies in all 50 states and analyzed the relationship between the accountability index and state-level student achievement scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress NAEP. Carnoy and Loeb's results suggested that students in high-accountability states had higher average achievement. In relationship to the readings presented in this literature review, this study needs to be included as it represents a national perspective without taking into consideration multiple contexts that affect student achievement on high stakes tests. One factor not discussed in the research is that most states' standards are not aligned to what is assessed on the NAEP. Therefore, the apparent correlation between accountability and scores could actually be a sign of how closely a state's standards aligned to the NAEP rather than the affect of high accountability on state achievement. While the use of external accountability measures may be supported by the Carnoy and Loeb (2002) study, factors such as varied state standards and internal accountability were not taken into account when reaching such a conclusion.

The correlation of internal accountability measures to improved school performance has been proven by the studies outlined in previous paragraphs. How external accountability is correlated to internal accountability remains vague, however. While NCLB and AZLearns attempt to enforce external accountability systems for schools, how a school uses its internal resources is disconnected from the results. The rationale behind the four pillars of NCLB

allows for states to determine how external accountability is defined. This loose interpretation and application of external accountability systems inspired my investigation into how an Arizona performance label is interpreted by school principals, providing insight into how NCLB regulations affects the daily life of a school principal in Arizona.

Conclusion

External accountability measures are required by the federal government in NCLB, but the details of their implementation are specifically defined by each state. AZLearns applies performance labels to schools based on the mandates of NCLB. The existing research, as outlined in previous sections, defines the influence of external accountability on schools through the themes of motivation, pressure, professional development, and internal accountability. Multiple factors delineate how accountability is played out at individual school sites. Assessments have been used as data, teachers have been interviewed, and outlines of effective leadership have been provided. The voices and interpretations of principals dealing with external accountability pressures at the school site is the focus of this dissertation study. These voices will be sought out to explain how the label that tags each school affects the principals' daily routines, decisions and questions on each campus. The stories will be collected through a qualitative study that will paint the landscape from the perspective of the school principal. The qualitative methodology used in this study is outlined in Chapter Three.

<center>**Chapter Three**</center>

<center>**Methodology**</center>

Introduction

The first chapter in this dissertation reviews the purpose for the study, explains the research problem, and outlines the guiding research questions. The review of literature presented in the second chapter of this study explained the challenges faced by schools and principals when negotiating external accountability mandates. While the first two chapters set the stage for this study, Chapter Three will describe the qualitative process for collecting and analyzing data regarding how the performance label placed on a school is lived out by the school principal. This chapter is divided into five sections. These sections restate the research problem and research questions, describe the research design, clarify the population and sample selected, and explain procedures for collecting and analyzing data.

Restatement of the problem

On April 8, 2008, the *Arizona Republic* reported that 20 schools in Arizona, mainly serving low-income children, were "failing" due to the fact they did not meet the state's accountability standards for three consecutive years. In 2007, seventeen schools failed to meet state standards for three consecutive years (Gersema, 2008). These are alarming numbers. When a school does not meet the state's performance standards, a series of interventions that unfold over a two-year period are triggered. The first mandated intervention is the execution of a

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needs assessment, a process that collects data from a variety of school and community stakeholders and then yields scores in four areas: school culture, leadership, school and classroom assessments, and professional development. The next step in the series of interventions would be to take the gathered information collected from the needs assessment to create an improvement plan. This plan will lay the foundation for all future decisions and set the direction for the school. The improvement plan format involves guided questions concerning the school's deficiencies, grade level and subgroup goals, target dates, and an evaluation of implementation. This plan will evolve as the school meets or falls short of the scripted expectations. The final step or intervention would occur only if the school fails to meet these expectations for five consecutive years. The school then would be subject to a state-directed restructuring, which ultimately establishes every future staff development agenda and guides every decision a school principal makes. Principals must pay careful attention to their assigned labels, or the challenges within their jobs will increase substantially. It is interesting to point out that public accountability through state testing is not new to Arizona, yet principals statewide still scramble to find the best ways to help their schools produce higher test scores.

This qualitative study examines how school principals respond to their accountability labels. My motivation is to learn how principals interpret their labels and what actions they take to negotiate the relationship between the internal actions taken and external accountability at their schools. Little is known about

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how a principal develops an effective result-based school improvement action plan. Likewise, few researchers have been able to identify consistent factors that help schools move from an unfavorable label to a favorable label. The selected literature presented conflicting findings and inconsistent solutions while pointing out how school staffs feel and react to these external pressures, leading to the very important question of how an unfavorable label might affect a principal's behavior: How does the principal of a school labeled Underperforming respond to that label, and does it differ from that of a principal in a school labeled Highly Performing? The contemporary administrator must understand the factors that will improve his or her school performance regardless of current success rates or performance labels. Many school principals feel that time is running out to make the gains in student achievement that state and federal laws demand.

Research Questions

For this study, I have investigated how school principals respond to the implementation of external accountability policies in Arizona. This sets the foundation to the following research questions:

1. What effects do external accountability measures have on the development of the Organizational Capacity of a school?

2. How do Arizona principals negotiate their school's assigned label in their everyday professional practice?

3. What are Arizona principals' views of the state accountability process?

Research Design and Procedures

This qualitative study investigates how Arizona school principals

negotiate the performance label that external measures assign to the school. This

label is a result of the school's student data obtained from the AIMS test and the

formulas defined by AZLearns. The criteria for the awarded label are complex

and change with any updates made to the state standards or revisions on the state

test. As the lived experiences of the principals I interviewed are not static, neither

is how the label is assigned, reassigned or replaced annually. Therefore the

negotiations between how the label relates to the principal's life cannot be

captured in a static analysis. Instead I have applied a qualitative process to

identify the negotiations of each principal who participated in this study. A

negotiation describes how people might work, live, learn and teach within a socio-

cultural and complex site (Alexander, 2001). The complexity of the multiple

factors that make up a school site and the implications of a performance label on

that site warrant the use of qualitative research.

Research Methodology. I have chosen to conduct a qualitative study in

order to investigate the lived experiences of the interviewed principals in order to

tell the stories behind the labels. By doing so it allowed me to construct an emic

or insider's perspective and collect data regarding how school labels impact the

lives of the school principal. The data used to facilitate a qualitative study is

based on the collected stories. The multiple contexts that give meaning to the

recorded conversations cannot be derived from the application of a formula or

demonstrated in a graph. The lived experiences that the principals decided to

share are retold through my interpretation of the collective discourse, metaphors,

stories, conceptual framework, existing research and commonalities that emerge

across the collected stories. The process I invoked through this qualitative

journey is the "process of human meaning making" (Kincheloe, 2002, p. 188). In

order to engage in the meaning making process, I have chosen to use Seidman's

(2006) structure for in-depth, phenomenological interviews. This structure

provided a procedure to investigate the research problem and answer the research

questions of this study.

I used phenomenological interviews to seek out the complex negotiations

of ten school principals. These phenomenological interviews consisted of three

stages. These three stages are as Seidman (2006) explains as 1) Focused Life

History, 2) The Details of Experience and 3) Reflection on the Meaning. The

three stage interview series designed by Dolbeare and Schuman (Seidman, 2006)

allows the interviewer and participant to understand and respect the experiences

and take into consideration the time, place and identity that make up the contexts

of the principals lives on their school sites. The three stage interview series also

helps both interviewer and participant to explore the topic more fully and make it

more meaningful. This three stage framework for interviewing participants

allowed for the collection of multiple forms of evidence embedded in various

contexts to establish meaning regarding the negotiations principals make in

relationship to external accountability.

The first interview is referred to as Focused Life History. This interview established the context of the participants. By asking open-ended questions, the principal was allowed to tell his or her story and to establish a point of reference to begin the journey together. Using the approach of a life history allowed for the participants to not just tell a story but to decide what is important to tell in their story (Hatch and Winiewski, 1995). I started this conversation by asking an open-ended question where the principal was asked to take me on a tour of the events that lead him or her to becoming a principal at their present school. Once the interviews were complete I had them transcribed and returned to each principal with specific questions for a second interview.

The second interview is called The Details of Experience. This component focused on the participants' present lived experience as a school principal facing the challenges of external accountability. It picked up where their life history ended and depicted how each negotiate the pressures and motivation to lead a school under the rules provided under external accountability. These questions honed in on the details that made up the day to day life of the principal and the role that the school label plays in those events. This interview did not seek out the opinion of the principal on external accountability but rather focused on reconstructing, "the myriad of details of our participants' experiences in the area we are studying" (Seidman, 2006, p. 18). My interview questions focused on what each principal's day consisted of because of the performance label assigned to their school that added hundreds of pages to my already

transcribed set of round one interviews. After I transcribed interview one and interview two, I began to read for themes or common threads that emerged from each storyteller based on the research questions. As I sifted through about thirty seven hours of interview data I could see many threads beginning to surface. I set up chart paper in one of my empty classrooms at my school and began cutting out the stories that related to one another and sorted them on to the chart paper. As questions began to emerge about the stories I returned or phoned some of the participants to ask questions, request more details or confirm their accounts.

The third interview is called the Reflection on Meaning. As the Details of Experience component provided a description of each principal's day to day events, the Reflection of Meaning component provided me an opportunity to ask questions that set the parameters for the principal's "intellectual and emotional connections between the participants work and life" (Seidman, 2006).   My questions in this segment focused on the principal's perspectives on specific events discussed in the first two interviews.   This allowed the principals to reflect on the connections between their work life and the task of creating Organizational Capacity to address the assigned school performance label. This Reflection on the Meaning interview is the final section within the three stage interview process. See Appendix A to see a list of guiding questions for each interview stage. This final process to the interview series allowed me to sort over five hundred pages of data into fourteen categories.

These interviews gave the participants an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of their lived experiences as principals. My experience as a principal and the possible collegial relationships did influence my role as the researcher. My background knowledge as a school principal and the possible collegial relationships I may have with my participants made me what Erickson (1993) has referred to as participant observer. The transparency of my role prior to each interview supported the process of human meaning making. The participants for my research study are described in the following section. My prior knowledge as a principal and researcher provided a starting point when sifting through the hundreds of pages of data. I thought about what I know about performance labels and began to read for detailed language or storied accounts that related to accountability, learning, teaching and many other pertinent areas that I found within the transcribed interviews.

Population and Sample. External accountability has been reinforced with each reauthorization of NCLB. I collected stories from principals that serve on school sites that have an Excelling (highest achieving) level, Highly Performing, Performing Plus, Performing, Underperforming and Failing label. In order to tell their stories, I interviewed ten principals with varying performance labels. I selected principals from three subgroups. The first group is Excelling and Highly Performing. The second group is Performing Plus and Performing. The third group consisted of Underperforming and Failing labels. In order to interview principals with varying school labels, I have chosen to involve principals from

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two Phoenix elementary school districts. Based on the school labels within the two selected districts, I sought out three principals from the top and bottom subgroups and four from the center subgroup to participate in the Three Stage Interview Series. Permission was obtained by each school superintendent prior to conducting any interview.

By inquiring into these principals' experiences, my goal was to identify negotiations, conflicts, and strategies, which may be similar or different across the ten participants and their schools. I purposefully selected principals serving a variety of student populations that represent a typical school district in Arizona. This was done for three reasons. First to illustrate how the label impacts the school principal as they lead their school. Next, to explain how each principal utilizes the performance label assigned in order to build capacity at their specific school sites. Building internal capacity is a very complex process that each principal performs in their own manner. Many of these differences were validated from the literature chosen to set the stage for this study. The last reason was to demonstrate the moments in each school principal's story that described how she or he works through the multiple factors that affect student learning and higher test scores.

My population for this research study consisted of 10 principals across two large urban school districts. In order to minimize the chance of selecting a district without one of the desired performance labels, I have decided on utilizing two school districts with a wide range of student demographics. The subgroup

each principal was assigned to was based on one of the performance labels each received within the past three years. I had to take into consideration a three year window due to the recent changes that has occurred with respect to the labeling process. For example, the 2009-2010 school year produced zero Performing or Failing Schools and very few Underperforming schools. I also wanted to ensure that each principal had at least one full school year working under the assigned label. I have provided a visual representation of the demographics that exist at the ten schools selected for this study. This information is provided in Table 1. Table 1 depicts the principals' pseudonym used for this study, each principal's years of experience as a building principal, their ethnicity, the student enrollment at each school site, the percentage of students receiving free or reduced school lunch, the number of students that are English Language Learners, the percentage of English Language Learners and the performance labels each school has received over the past three years. Each principal's ethnicity will be abbreviated in Table 1 with the following: C for Caucasian, H for Hispanic and A for African American. The performance labels provided in Table 1 are abbreviated as the following: Excelling-E, Highly Performing- HP, Performing Plus- PP, Performing-P, Underperforming-UP and Failing-F.

Table 1

Demographics of the Principals' Schools

Principals	Years of Experience	Ethnicity	Student Enrollment	Percentage of Free and Reduced Lunch	Number of ELL Students	Percent of ELL Students	Performance Labels 2007-2010
Allie	5	C	997	27 %	49	5%	E E E
Annabel	8	C	675	38 %	50	7%	E E HP
Aaron	3	C	583	59 %	69	12%	HP HP HP
Brian	6	C	983	School wide	598	60%	PP PP PP
Bianca	2	C	855	School wide	423	50%	P PP PP
Bertha	8	A	385	School wide	95	23%	U P PP
Bill	8	C	788	School wide	394	50%	U P PP
Cara	11	C	520	School wide	105	25%	U P U
Chris	20	H	1337	School wide	819	61%	U P PP
Cathy	2	C	484	School wide	484	51%	U F PP

This sample has woven the inside voices of the principals with the complexities each face when negotiating the mandates of NCLB and AZLearns. These stories have been collected through interviews and the procedures for collecting these interviews are found in the next section.

Data Collection Procedures. As described above, I utilized the interview process outlined by Seidman (2006) to collect the stories from the ten principals. I notified each principal that I was a doctoral student conducting a dissertation

and that their participation was voluntary and confidential. After they committed to participate in my study, I was transparent about my role, background as a principal and explained that my interpretation of their story would be told. I was open and honest about my background and role as a participant observer so that trust would be established with each principal.

Interviews were set up based on their availability. Seidman (2006) explains the alternative ways to implement the interview framework. Seidman suggests that it either happen in one longer sitting or in two to three visits. I offered the principals a choice of how to be interviewed beginning with three interviews. The first would consist of 90 minutes, the second and third would be up to 60 minutes to collect evidence to support events from their life history interview. The second option was two separate interviews. The first consisting of the life history interview for about 90 minutes followed by a second interview within 3 to 5 days to collect stories for stage 2 and stage 3 of the framework. The final option that was offered for special circumstances was one interview that ranged from 90 minutes to 120 minutes. All ten principals agreed to three separate interviews ranging from 60 to 90 minutes in length.

Once the principals selected the dates and times they were available for the interviews, I requested that we hold them in their office. I wanted to physically walk into each school to observe the school, particularly the front office, the principal's office, and the location of the performance label if posted. Each of these attributes paint the backdrop for the story and adds to the interviews

in order to be able to describe the principals' work life. Sitting across from the principal at his or her desk, while they sit in the boss's chair, situated the location from where the multiple contexts evolved into a meaning making process. Each interview was meant to be a conversation in which I asked a series of open-ended questions which explored how the label affects the daily lives of the principal. See Appendix A for the interview questions.

Each interview was recorded with a digital recorder. Each interview was transcribed verbatim by Transcription Star. Once the data was collected, I prepared the analysis of their collected stories.

Data Analysis Procedures. As promised to each principal, their confidentiality would be upheld and was assigned a pseudonym. I applied a systematic process to analyze the textual data provided in the transcripts using the eight steps outlined by Creswell (2009). The first step in the data analysis process is to organize and read all the transcriptions thoroughly. Taking notes as ideas came to mind helped create the big picture. Next, I searched for general ideas within each interview and took notes with respect to tone, depth and credibility. Sifting through over five hundred pages, I began to color code similar stories across each of the interviews. This aided with the next step in creating organized clusters or chunks of text. Then I proceeded to cut up the highlighted stories and sort them to bring a deeper meaning to the collection of information. Rossman and Rallis (2003) refer to this process as coding. Assigning the topics or codes helped group and categorize similar areas together and lay out possible

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connections to the themes presented from the literature review. As themes

emerged a theoretical model began to set the stage for interpretation of the data. I

had set up fourteen categories and pasted strips of the stories on chart paper. As I

read through and sifted the alignment between the stories in each category,

questions arose about what category the storied account would best support. The

third interview in the process helped clarify a couple of the classifications. The

analysis process then confirmed if the codes were correct or if recoding needed to

occur. This information was crucial in verifying that the questions asked of the

participants produced ample data to move forward with the interpretation process.

Member checking or follow-up interviews occurred to clarify and provided an

opportunity for the participants to reinforce or refine my interpretations. These

practices in the analysis of the data led to reorganizing my categories from

fourteen to nine. This process helped verify the validity of the findings from the

conducted interviews as well as provided a strategy to convince the readers of the

accuracy of this study.

Once I identified the nine categories that were consistent in the storied

accounts provided throughout the interview process, I was able to identify three

themes. Multiple themes emerged but once I had a detailed picture of how the

label impacted the principals' lives, I was able to reflect on my three research

questions for this study which lead to the development of Accountability,

Achievement and Attitudes. The nine categories made up these three themes.

Three categories make up the theme of Accountability, three categories make up

the theme of Achievement and finally three categories make up the theme of Attitudes. This dissertation study will not define these three themes. Instead it will present how these themes exist within the contexts of ten Phoenix principals within the game of labels tagged on their schools.

Summary

In order to understand how principals negotiate the external forces of performance labels it is vital to provide them the forum to tell the stories of their personal journey. By interviewing ten principals from two urban Phoenix elementary school districts, I am hoping to provide insight in how each principal negotiates their school performance label. The goal is to add new insight to the controversial topic of school reform, high stakes testing and external accountability. This chapter has explained the population and sample selected for this study, my methods for collecting the data and the process in order to interpret and report out the findings.

Chapter Four

Findings and Results

Introduction: The Stories Behind the Banner

Providing a forum for principals to tell their individual stories is critical to understanding the challenges each face day in and day out while being a principal during the era of strict accountability. By visiting and interviewing ten principals at their school sites, I was able to begin investigating how they each negotiate accountability within the context of their worlds. While driving through the different neighborhoods and into each parking lot of the selected schools, I found myself speculating what stories would unfold and be shared by these ten life historians (Bloom and Munro, 1995) with respect to the labeling process. Would each be as unique as the furniture, artwork and physical space each school and principal's office flaunts everyday to the students and community? Or would their lived experiences be similar in nature due to the enormous and unavoidable pressure each endures everyday to ensure that "no child is left behind"?

By utilizing Dolbeare and Schuman's (Seidman, 2006) three-stage interview series, each interview provided a narrative opportunity that probed deep into the vantage points that these life historians dwell in and survive throughout each school year. As I listened to their stories and read through their transcripts, I began to witness common threads that united the dedicated storytellers. Each practitioner's years of experience, backgrounds, philosophies toward education and the demographics that make up each of their schools culminated in their story.

Chapter Four will present three common threads or themes that emerged in response to my three research questions. Each research question is aligned to one of threads that organize this chapter. The first thread Accountability is aligned with the first research question, the second thread, Achievement with second research question and the third thread, Attitude with the third and final research question. As the three threads began to take form, it became apparent that multiple arenas or layers were also in play within each of the themes. The layers scaffold from federal and state to district and local then finally the individual. The transition from the broadest accountability of the federal government, narrowing down to that of the state and then more targeted to each school resembles a funnel. A funnel works in constant transformation circulating from the larger space to a smaller more specified space. The stories move through each level of the funnel with a focus on the relevance to historical, social, political and cultural contexts of the site principal.

The first common thread in response to the first research question, *Accountability* is made up of varying approaches in application and multiple interpretations by school principals. This era of accountability has lead to the creation of the "Office of Accountability" in state departments of education across the country. It has also created new directorships and job titles in local school district administrations. It is even posted on walls in the hallways and classrooms at Underperforming and Excelling schools. Accountability in this study is in transformation from a static set of rules into a living experience defined and felt

differently among educators. This research is a reflection of the multiple

perspectives on accountability as told by the ten participating Arizona school

principals. As Arizona school principals tolerate or embrace the long arms of

NCLB and AZLearns, accountability is the common thread throughout each story.

This first thread will also address my first research question, "What effects do

external accountability measures have on the development of the Organizational

Capacity of a school?" The stories of who they feel accountable to and for what

they feel accountable for will be told throughout this chapter.

The second common thread in response to the second research question,

Achievement, presents itself in many shapes and sizes. As the storytellers play the

game of accountability they utilize student achievement data as part of the process

for determining achievement. Student achievement data varies from district to

district and at times provide insight at a moment in time and many other instances

it can be overwhelming. The interpretation of what achievement means to each

principal will be told and intertwined within the context of each story to address

the second research question. The second research question asked, "How do

Arizona school principals negotiate the assigned label in their everyday

professional practice?"The performance label is related to the achievement as

defined by NCLB and AZLearns. This question produced a variety of strategies

and beliefs about the relationship between achievement and the daily lives of each

principal while existing within different worlds.

The third and final thread in response to the third research question, *Attitude,* is a consequence resulting from the previous two threads within the context of the life experiences of each story teller. While accountability and achievement are embedded in the formula for the system they exist in, the attitudes each principal holds varies depending on the multiple contexts of their own accomplishments and challenges. My third research question asked, "What are Arizona principals' views toward the state accountability process? This question will be addressed by the attitudes toward the labeling process that every school leader describes in their stories. A wide range of feelings, strategies, thoughts and emotions presented themselves as each principal told their individual story regarding the state and federal labels. These attitudes result from the experiences that cultivate many of the paths these principals and schools take toward improving student achievement. These paths have been shaped by negotiating the era of high stakes testing and the boundaries we are working within as well as the constant fluctuations of the contextual and textual factors. The label placed on the schools impacted the principals in different ways. The semantics in the terms identified by government officials plays into the attitudes of the principals but may not be a direct representation of the principals' attitudes about student achievement and high stakes accountability.

Population: The Principal Players

The sample for this study consists of ten principals, six female and four male, from two public elementary school districts located in Phoenix. Six

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principals were selected from one school district based on their assigned label while four principals were selected from the other. With ten participants in play it was crucial to organize a framework to associate the testimonials that they have given with their current existence. Each principal has been given a pseudonym to uphold and ensure confidentiality. In order to stay consistent with the three subgroups: Excelling/Highly Performing, Performing Plus/Performing and Underperforming/Failing mentioned in Chapter 3, each principal's first name will begin with an A, B or C depending on their subgroup. The principals that boast the Excelling or Highly Performing label will start with the letter A. They will be referred to as Allie, Annabel and Aaron. The principals that are associated with the Performing Plus or Performing label will begin with the letter B. They will be referred to as Brian, Bianca, Bertha and Bill. The principals that have been bestowed the label of Underperforming or Failing will begin with the letter C. They will be referred to as Cara, Chris and Cathy.

The first and highest labeled cluster of principals consists of Allie, Annabel and Aaron. Allie is currently in her sixth year as a school principal and is one of two principals from this study that has remained in the same district for the length of their educational career. Allie has served as a volunteer, teacher aid, teacher, district office director, assistant principal and now as a school principal all within the same organization. Allie, who has an impeccable record, impressive resume and the utmost respect from her district colleagues due to her win win attitude, has her sights set on continuing her education and working her way up

even higher within the organization. Annabel in her seventh year as a school principal has split her time between serving as a charter school principal and now a public elementary school principal. In both principal positions she has occupied positions where the student body comes from mostly affluent neighborhoods boosting few minorities and a traditional style of teaching and learning. Annabel admits that although she was born to be a teacher, not a lawyer like her father, becoming a principal took a little convincing by her colleagues. Lastly, Aaron is the second and final principal in this study that has worked his way up and remained in the same school district for his entire career. Aaron taught for twenty years before taking the plunge into school administration. Aaron served as an assistant principal for only one year prior to receiving his first principalship three years ago. Aaron prides himself on being patient and purposeful and claims to have a clear understanding of the complex inner workings of his school district.

The next cluster of principals, Brian, Bianca, Bertha and Bill are all currently working under the Performing Plus label. All four principals have had the opportunity to work under three different labels during their tenure as a school principal. In his sixth year as school principal, Brian demonstrates a deep understanding of federal and state policy with respect to accountability and assessment. Brian expresses throughout his interviews the importance of being able to articulate the rules of the game to his constituents. Brian is currently in a doctoral program and hopes to be a superintendent in the very near future. Bianca in her second year as a school principal is very intelligent and well known within

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the education community as one to watch in the future. She has happily returned back to the district where she taught for six years prior to serving as an assistant principal in a neighboring district. Bianca readily admits the challenges of the principalship conflict with her responsibilities as a new mother and wife. Next, Bertha in her eighth year as a school principal finds herself currently working in her third district in Arizona and the second state where she proudly refers to herself as an instructional leader. Bertha is our only African American principal in this study. The last principal found within the middle performing subgroup is Bill. Bill in his eighth year as a school principal finds himself back in the district where he grew up as a child. Bill is known to all as a motivator and a true leader among his teaching staff. He is respected and known to have high standards for his community and most importantly himself.

The final cluster of school principals consists of Cara, Chris and Cathy. These three principals are found in the lowest performing group by showcasing Underperforming or Failing labels within the past three years. However, Cara is currently the only principal that is working under an unfavorable label viewed by the state of Arizona. This unfavorable label is viewed by Cara as just another speed bump on the road to success. Cara has been a school principal in three school districts across the Phoenix metropolitan area within her eleven years as a building principal. Cara is motivated, intense and is well known as an advocate for the underdog. She chooses to work in low income at- risk communities where her expertise can make an impact that can be felt by all. Like Cara, Chris chooses

to lead in an at- risk community where many principals would not dare to work. He is the most veteran principal interviewed in this study with twenty years building experience under his belt and four years as a district administrator. Chris worked for several years in the Chicago area prior to coming to Arizona with his wife who also is a school principal. Chris is the only Hispanic principal in this study. Chris is well respected among his peers, well versed in bilingual education policy and vows to never give in to a broken system that creates unfair challenges for his school, children and community. Lastly, Cathy is the last and only principal in this study that has worked under the Failing label. She was hired and worked her first year as a school principal with this label and is finishing up her second year working under the Performing Plus label. Her school raised three labels in just one year which is almost unheard of. Her perspective of school change and federal accountability pressure has been felt up close and personal due to the gift her predecessor left behind. Cathy is also the youngest principal in this study at the age of twenty nine. Her view of the labeling process may be unseasoned or naïve but is quite unique in that she proudly possesses a path that the other nine principals in this study have yet to experience.

The topic of labeling schools is based on the accountability regulations set forth by AZLearns and NCLB but finds itself many times as a pawn in the political arena used by local politicians. An example of this would be evident from the school year 2009-2010 which produced zero Failing schools and few Underperforming schools. As mentioned in the methodology, I am using three

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subgroups instead of six for the labels because the numbers of schools have shifted from failing to performing based on the formulas revised by the department of education. This validates my study because as the labels drastically improved in 2009-2010, math scores significantly dropped state wide. This political anomaly is part of the purpose for my study on how principals interpret and live under the assigned labels.

Findings and Results

The principals' experiences and voices are the center of my study. I investigated the impact the label had on their daily routine as a principal. In order to ensure their stories were the result of this research, I read and reread the interviews for commonalities. There was so much that could have been highlighted but as I read to respond to my research questions, the themes of Accountability, Achievement and Attitude surfaced. Each of these themes or threads is developed from a variety of moments described by the principals in this study. Each thread is not meant to define the terms of Accountability, Achievement and Attitude or represent one definition or static interpretation of the terms that identify the commonalities. Each section is titled with the theme and the research question that each section will address.

Accountability: Effects on Organizational Capacity

The first thread pulled from the research is Accountability. Accountability can be viewed as a task or the responsibility to act on something. This responsibility is to use the authority in play, in a justifiable and credible way.

Accountability can then be viewed as a form of responsibility. School

accountability has been a major topic of research since the cry of the *Nation at*

Risk in 1983 and schools became partners with business to boost the economy

(Molnar, 2008). Schools are tagged with a label of accountability and held

responsible for the one to two words that sum up their schools worth to all

stakeholders. The life historians, who shared their stories with me about being a

principal and the role accountability plays in their daily lives, had different

interpretations of accountability and the responsibility they hold in their hands. I

have labeled each subsection of accountability with quotes pulled directly from

the principals' stories that represented a similar sentiment among a group of

principals. These different interpretations take accountability from the static

description of holding a school accountable to an external agent toward a more

fluid experience in constant transformation. It is interesting to retell their accounts

as each of their stories and interpretations are closely related to the label subgroup

they belong to. School labels have not always been around but the stories I am

about to share are embedded in the political, cultural and historical contexts of

each of the principals' lives.

      Federal and State Accountability. *Some is good.* The 1983 publication

of *A Nation of Risk* (National Commission for Excellence in Education, 1983)

changed the rules for school principals. This report noted that if public education

did not receive a major overhaul, our economic security would be severely

compromised. The "crisis" that was detailed from this landmark publication

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became many top policy makers number one priority. With public education now as priority number one, the age of accountability, high stakes testing and the birth of labeling schools found its way into the educational conversation. Schools, communities and children that are not on track to be proficient by the year 2014 were now under scrutiny. This landmark year is on the minds of all educators as we anticipate reauthorization and is perhaps a constant reminder of the failure produced every day in our schools. The long arms of the federal and state government sets the "accountability" stage for local school districts to follow and is observed differently among the principals. The pressure or accountability that the federal and state government put into play for Cathy, Bianca and Brian proved to have a lasting impact on the results they experienced. Cathy felt that federal and state accountability moved her school forward.

> I think there are some good things to it; I think it is time that many people step up. I will tell you that I don't think I would have been able to do the things that I have done if we didn't have the Failing label. We talked about having to drive change very quickly and this helped tremendously. We did not have this luxury last year and I think that it helped the staff to accept some of the changes we had to make very quickly.

Cathy makes reference to the performance label acting as a catapult to force change in a school that was very comfortable in the way they performed their daily business. The low socio-economic community, diverse student population and mobile community were used as an excuse from the staff and previous

principals. Once the Failing label was announced, the impact of the federal and state government made it presence known.

> Not only now were there visitors from the district office, state coaches and mentors made their way into to the classrooms, staff meetings and part of the school improvement process. I had to meet regularly with them and provide documentation that we were on the right track. Big brother was here and it created quite a stir.

This account can be related to the external agents mentioned in Dr. Teresa McCarty's book, *A Place to be Navajo,* the experience of having to work under the pressures of outside agents using the school as an "experiment" that can be fixed by those who are not a part of the community (2002). A Failing label brought Cathy into the federal and state arena of the accountability game. During Cathy's first two years as a principal, an outsider to the school herself, the external agents sweeping in to clean up worked for Cathy and her school. In her second year as principal, Bianca has only worked under the Performing Plus label assigned by the state. Overcoming many obstacles within a tight nit community populated mainly of Mexican immigrants and English learners, Bianca points out how she must embrace the fact that she feels accountable to the state of Arizona and federal government in order to be embraced by the community.

> I think that labeling schools has changed the way we do business. I think it has some good things that make people more accountable. We are focused on the number of students that need to reach benchmark each year

and gives us a guide to follow. We are focused on what we should be

teaching and ensuring that our kids are getting the correct information.

Some days however, I think it's crippling us on what we really need to do.

The label we receive narrows our way of thinking and we forget about the

whole child. We try to push everything down their throats all at once and

forget they are eight or nine years old. Drill and kill, drill and kill.

Bianca's designated performance labels have not warranted state intervention. She

has been free from the up close and personal touch of state or federal intervention

but interestingly expresses how the pressure of accountability takes its constant

toll on her.

AYP affects my life every day. It keeps me awake every night. I have no

idea how my third graders are going to make AYP?

Bianca's fear originates from her awareness of the 2010-2011 Annual

Measurable Objectives (AMOs) for the state of Arizona. Schools across the state

must show a 71.9 percent proficiency in reading this year and 65 percent

proficiency in math for third grade. These percentages are an 11 percent increase

compared to last year's benchmark expectations for all third graders. Although

Bianca has shown varied success with her English learner population she is aware

that an eleven percent increase is a lot to ask of a school that barely met the

benchmarks last year. Brian, a six year veteran as a principal, held similar beliefs

about being held accountable by the federal and state influences. In his first

principal position in an at-risk neighborhood, he had a lot to prove and depended on this external accountability system to pull him through. No banner was ever hung at this school and the issue of accountability was nonexistent.

> In those first years as a building principal, every decision I made was tied directly due to the fear of the state taking over. We were an Underperforming school known to all and we acted like it. I didn't know anything else, they didn't know anything else. I believed that if I did not meet my benchmarks (state) I would look like I didn't know what I was doing and my knowledge and ability would be questioned. We did however see growth immediately and I believed at the time that the outside forces were good. Lately, as I continue to build the capacity at my school I really struggle to believe if all that early motivation was needed to move my school forward.

Brian's view of external accountability has changed over the years as well as whom he feels accountable to. Having a school that was infamous within the district for its low performing students, low test scores, questionable teaching staff, Brian chose to utilize the pressure provided by the federal and state government. He showcased data of similar looking schools, posted AMO's throughout the school and openly referred quite often to the days when state coaches would be on campus taking away any or all of the autonomy teachers experienced within the classrooms. While he used external agents as examples of what could happen, Brian did not welcome them as he focused his staff and

community on enhancing expectations. Brian believed he was motivating his staff at the time but now reflects on its authenticity.

Local Accountability. *My Achilles' heel.* When creating a school-wide improvement plan, holding local Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings or just running the daily operations at the school level, school principals' feel the pressure and watchful eye of many stakeholders that possess a vested interest in the outcome. Whether the interest resides in their children's education, their political career or where their tax money is going, accountability has become the norm for school principals' and navigating the varying interests takes a skillful professional. This strategic navigation leads principals to ranking or prioritizing who they feel most accountable to with respect to their performance. Cathy, Bianca and Brian as mentioned above differ quite significantly to the testimonials provided by Allie, Annabel, and Aaron. These three high performing principals did not convey any pressure to perform based on federal or state accountability but all three did assert the significant demands placed upon them to perform by local forces. These forces include district office, colleagues and of course the parents they serve. Being labeled an Excelling school year after year paints an alternative profile of accountability from Allie's perspective.

> External accountability is good, we need it. We will always be compared
> with other states and other countries and without a system to do that what
> would we do? So, I can appreciate an accountability system. My parents
> can appreciate it.

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Allie's school produces some of the state's highest test scores and is located in a very affluent neighborhood. It is apparent the accountability system she refers to is definitely working for her students and community. Children of doctors, lawyers and local sports professionals as well as one of the city's country clubs can be found within her school boundaries. Mountainside homes, well manicured yards and home to the elite is the community that Allie serves. While Allie and I walked her impressive campus it was impossible for anyone to miss the two huge banners that boost *We Are an Excelling School*. "The parents donated them and wanted them hung," Allie reports. As we toured the campus and I listened to her story, I got the sense that this school was a place focused on excellence. From the arrangement of the front office and it's artwork to the business like furniture of principal's office the vibe I felt was unexplainable. Property values, realtor's selling points and the long tradition of pride and excellence engulfed our conversation about who she feels accountable to.

> Our parents want to see their children in the newsletter. They expect to
> see their children in the newsletter. If they do not, they want to know
> why. Our parents are active and they have a vested interest. They
> volunteer, they are in classrooms, and this is a norm.

Allie identifies the accountability she feels day in and day out as "communal accountability." There was not a concern mentioned about accountability ever felt from above or outside the boundaries of her neighborhood.

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They (the parents) expect the best. When you live in this community for 20 plus years and many of the community members are teachers in the school, there can be no room for nothing but the best. They love their school and they expect that their child is going to get the same quality education they received and be successful here. If not it could prove to be my Achilles' heel. I am accountable, therefore I would be responsible.

This "communal accountability" affects all that Allie does to reach Organizational Capacity. Every move she makes with respect to curriculum, public relations, staffing and scheduling is scrutinized by a very involved, committed and educated group of stakeholders. Allie is aware of the importance of including key parents in critical school wide decisions. Her Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) and school site councils tend to be stepping stones for many parents with dreams of running for local or state politics. This communal accountability is also felt by Annabel, another principal who navigates her principalship in a very engaged and active community.

Annabel's Excelling banner that is usually found hung on the chain link fence facing the major crossroads her school sits on is nowhere to be found. It is actually folded and placed in the closet for now with hopes it will be hanging next school year. Annabel, who is currently working under the label of Highly Performing, is feeling the pressure of her recently downgraded assigned performance label. While some schools across the valley proudly hang a Highly Performing banner, Annabel was not going to hang one that was other than

Excelling. The pressure she feels also comes by way of her district peers and supervisors as well her affluent and well educated parents. Annabel's school which is quite similar to Allie's school claims a long tradition of excellence in the realm of test scores and student achievement. Annabel's school is primarily made up of upper middle class Caucasian students. The neighborhood claims it is free from any crime, graffiti and poverty. Annabel has been accustomed to being labeled Excelling year after year and is currently working under a new designation for the first time since the creation of the labeling process in Arizona. Annabel believes that this local form of accountability could also be the demise of her credibility as a leader with her colleagues as well as the community she serves.

> It is tough when you drop a label. It bothers me. Everybody around is used to this school being Excelling, it is the norm. I feel like my colleagues and district office are judging the job we are doing here for the first time due to our current label. Before it was never really an issue. We were always great.

Annabel acknowledged that some things weren't going as planned at her school site last year and that she had expected a possible drop in scores, but never expected a drop in her performance label. Some of the issues included quality of instruction by a few teachers and the quality of the new students that recently enrolled. Enrollment was down district wide and Annabel was encouraged by the district office to take any and all new students living outside the school's

boundaries. However, at the time she did not seem too concerned about the actual label or a possible state takeover. Annabel conveyed that her staff rarely referred to the label in daily operations last year or gave it much thought. Excelling was the norm for her staff as well as her parents and it was business as usual. Upon release of her newly assigned label, Annabel sought out district support to launch damage control with her parents and her staff.

> I found the parents to be extremely supportive for the most part. They were not mad; they just wanted to know more about how this label thing worked. Our district office did an excellent job of explaining to the parents what the labels meant, the z score factor and that high expectation and quality instruction would still be consistent throughout the school.

Annabel concluded that being held accountability by the parents was manageable and fair because they would always let her know their expectations and feelings. Whereas with the school district and fellow principals it was a more covert type of accountability that was unpredictable and almost felt like everyone was holding their breath, withholding judgment, and waiting to see what would happen next. Annabel feels that this second tier of accountability that consists of local influence could warrant repercussions if the label does not increase. She mentioned a possibility of her removal as principal by the district office or by concerned parents could be an option when things are not as many believe they should be. Her parents are used to being an Excelling school and she is unsure they would understand two years without reaching this status. This concern is currently absent

from Aaron's view of communal accountability but he understands that this tier could affect his existence if things change for the worse. Aaron's label has been Highly Performing for three straight years.

During the interview, Aaron seemed pretty comfortable within his current world of accountability. After three years of working under a Highly Performing label, life was good. The community he serves is primarily located in an upper middle class neighborhood and is considered stable with respect to student and teacher mobility. Aaron's school seems to be modest in how they do their business. While walking the campus it became clear that there wasn't any trophy cases' showcasing their recent academic successes or any banner displaying their performance label to the students or the community. With no immediate pressure from the federal, state or district accountability, life as this school's principal was pretty uneventful. Aaron's explanation of his view of accountability resembled that of the times or era before the birth of NCLB and AZLearns.

> With a veteran teaching staff and a very comfortable and stable community, the horrors of accountability do not exist here. The community is comfortable with the learning that is occurring here as well as the teaching staff. Nothing seems to really worry either population. The staff has been through three principals in the past five years and I believe they are waiting to see if they are going to be held accountable to a higher standard. I think they want it.

Aaron stated that he felt more accountable to the district office more so than any other stakeholder but due to his newness in the principal position at this school the level of accountability to perform perhaps had not been fully established or expected quite yet. Aaron stated that there seemed to be an imaginary timeline in place to be held accountable or to push the staff and community to expect higher accountability measures and reach true Organizational Capacity.

      Individual Accountability. *I owe it to myself.* The motivation to excel or succeed is a well researched and documented topic. As presented in the literature review of Chapter Two, the topic of motivation showed that many principals and teachers embrace the idea of external forces in order to help push them in the right direction. Motivation may also create significant change or even act like a spring board to justify the actions they will take toward increasing test scores or building capacity at their sites. However, some principals quite simply ignore these external forces all together and search from within for the motivation to succeed. The third layer of accountability focuses on the individual. This individual or self accountability measure expressed by Bertha, Bill, Cara and Chris was refreshing to document especially because of the expectation of 100 percent proficiency by 2014. Bertha, Bill, Cara, and Chris express the ability to place the pressure or burden on their shoulders and totally discount the worries of external accountability. What also makes this noteworthy is that these four principals are working in some of the most challenging schools in the Phoenix metropolitan area. These schools are located in poor neighborhoods experiencing boarded up

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houses, high crime, graffiti and high transiency. The demographics of their

schools prove to be mostly Hispanic or Mexican, African American, and refugee

populations. Run down apartments and Section 8 housing is home for several of

their families. Many of their parents are undereducated and many are working

multiple jobs to attempt to attain the American dream. Bertha's school has been

labeled Underperforming, Performing and most recently Performing Plus. Bertha

is quite sure her accountability game plan is reliable and dependable even in her

challenging neighborhood. Her school is located in downtown Phoenix and

consists mostly of African American students. Her students usually come to her

lacking the basic skills in reading, English and math.

> I am saying that the label has never moved me. We are doing the things
>
> we need to do no matter of what the label our government grants upon us.
>
> I am an instructional leader. My staff knows that quality instruction is
>
> what we will continue to focus on. I take this very personal. I will use the
>
> numbers provided to tell us how we are doing and make it work for us, our
>
> way.

Bertha is able articulate the ins and outs of the accountability game due to her

school size. Being a small school, and unlike others in her district, the state of

Arizona utilizes a three year rolling average to calculate her performance. Bertha

has less than 40 students in each tested grade level which does not define any

subgroup needed for AZLearns calculation purposes. Even the "All" subgroup

cannot be defined due to the low numbers in each grade. The three year average is

a creative and complex solution by the state of Arizona to hold her school as close to the same expectations as the other schools.

> There is always high pressure every year. One bad year may harm you for two additional years due to the three year rolling average in place. I use to focus on this but I realized that I can control more about our outcomes by reflecting inward. I can control my accountability benchmarks not the political benchmarks created by politicians year to   year.

Bill, like Bertha, has worked as a principal under the performance label of Underperforming, Performing and Performing Plus. Bill is no stranger to a school that may exhibit possible challenges when it comes to showing success or high test scores. He currently has been tagged by the state of Arizona with the Performing Plus label which is an increase from the Underperforming label he obtained in the 2007-2008 school year and the Performing label from 2008-2009. The school he serves now has roughly 400 English Language Learners, proving to be half of his school population. Bill's school is located in one of the highest crime zones listed by the Phoenix Police Department. High levels of drug and gang activity, undocumented immigrants and high teacher and student mobility are some of the aspects Bill negotiates day in and day out as a school principal.

> It is my job to worry about the performance label. I am the principal. I should shoulder this pressure, this burden. My staff should not worry about the inner working of the accountability game; they should worry

about the kids they teach. They need to focus on their daily instruction in the classroom and leave the rest to me.

Bill is sure to point out that the pressure to perform is not a tactic he believes in. He believes in celebrating the smallest successes and treating the teachers as professionals. Bill as well as his recent teaching staff have never had the opportunity of hanging the Excelling banner on their front gate. Sanctions and rewards to perform is not what Bill believes is needed to succeed.

> I owe it to myself to show success. I am in charge of me. The government, the parents of my students or even my district office should not motivate me to do my job well. I don't need a tarp or banner saying we are doing great. We (principals) need to support our teachers and believe in them to do great things. My job is to do this and I was hired to make the school successful. My vision of success is different than my boss's vision of success and different than the state's vision of success. I know that if my school reached my level of expectation for success, then it would meet the states and the districts' level of expectation.

Bill's view on accountability is admirable and quite profound. However, his view of accountability differs from what most principals interviewed for this study reported as who they actually feel holds the greater accountability influence. Bill is accountable to Bill and no one else. Cara, like Bertha and Bill is another exception to the rule. Cara mirrors the attitudes that Bill expresses with respect to

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the motivation and purpose behind whom we should be accountability to. From the first interaction with Cara, she made it very clear that she was in complete control of her school's image, success and academic journey. Being located in one of the poorest neighborhoods in the Phoenix area didn't seem to affect her thoughts about how her teachers or school will produce.

> I do not feel pressure from anybody. I don't even feel pressure from the government because what I believe in is that growth is going to happen if you stay the course. This all falls on me as the school leader. Build a foundation, create a school wide system that maximize the ready available resources and places the skillful employees in their right spots. We have seen growth the first three years I have been here. We are going to do nothing but improve. That is if the government leaves us alone to do our jobs.

Cara's focused approach to school improvement is strategic and purposeful. She has experienced individual and school success by sticking to her plan year after year. Strangely throughout the interview she makes reference to "surviving" the job and almost pleads for the gift of time in order to tackle the pressure she puts on herself to achieve.

> I don't think anybody is going to fire me because I am doing everything that I should and could be doing. It's going to take time for things to respond. Yeah, there is going to be a subgroup from time to time that I can

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explain why there are not doing well but believe me I will be addressing it

with the teachers and we will be refining our approach.

Although Cara has spent time as a principal in the more affluent part of town

serving a different "type" of student, her practices and approach to the

accountability forces have remained constant. She is totally and unmistakably

accountable to herself and herself alone.

It doesn't matter where I am as a principal, either with the rich kids in the

northeast valley or the poor kids downtown; I would be the same either

way. My plan would be the same no matter who is watching me or is

telling what I should be doing.

Being totally unfazed or worried by the pressure that the external accountability

machine places on a school principal is an attribute that a veteran principal like

Cara can manage to pull off. Taking this outside friction and folding it inward to

push individual accountability to its highest level is a work of art. Chris is the last

principal who implements the skill of self accountability. Like Bertha, Bill and

Cara, the approach that Chris takes in coping and wrangling external

accountability is very deliberate.

You know I have always been told by my father not to have anything

upset you twice. I have been upset before early on in my career about

dealing with test scores and student performance. I will not be upset

again. I come here; it is my profession but it also a job and I do my job

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the best I can. I am trying anything and everything to move the school

forward. This dual accountability system is crazy. How can we really feel

bound and responsible to something so complicated and ever changing?

The only thing that I can control is me.

The school that Chris leads has the highest percentage of English

Language Learners, 61 percent, among all the ten schools chosen for this study.

While driving through Chris's community it resembles the travels I have taken

through central Mexico as most of the signs and advertisements are in Spanish.

This large immigrant population establishes itself here for a variety of reasons.

These reasons include local retailers, grocery stands, convenient stores, billboards

and apartment complexes all serving the Spanish speaking population. This

community is mobile, and quite foreign in some aspects. The school however is a

beacon among the boarded up shacks and dirty allies that surround it. The school

is the prize of the district and the newest among all buildings at three years old.

Beautiful brickwork and art displays the front office as well as the hallways as we

tour the campus. One thing that is missing among all the great sights is their

performance label banner. This school has never hung its banner for celebration

purposes or any purpose for that matter. However, Chris's school has recently

experienced an increase in label status from Underperforming to Performing.

With this change Chris still stays true to his individual accountability philosophy

even though the school has failed to make AYP for five years.

We make AYP one year, we don't the next year. We have to make it two

consecutive years to be out of AYP jail. We make it in this area; we don't

in this area, ELL, 3rd grade math, 4th grade reading, and 7th grade special

education. It is a game. We are on a rollercoaster ride. How can we win?

All I can do is focus and hold myself accountable to the rules I put into

place for my school. We will build school wide intervention systems and

create data teams and I will remain positive and focused.

Newmann et al. (1997) argue that the external school accountability

systems alone are unlikely to increase student learning. The stories that have been

conveyed thus far support Newmann et al. findings because of the multiple layers

that make up accountability. The layers may seem to be on a continuum but as a

result of listening to the various stories and making the connections to

accountability, the continuum is not like that of a conveyer belt but more like a

cyclical process that is in constant transformation. Even though each principal

has a different story to tell that consisted of a variety of settings, important and

key characters and of course unique and challenging conflicts, the internal

workings of a school or principal would ultimately secure the desired results.

After dissecting the Accountability theme that was plucked from the stories

collected, one can conclude that these school principals feel undeniably

accountable and responsible for their schools. Student demographics, current

performance label, years of principal experience or even school district may all

play a role in answering our first research question: What effects do external

accountability measures have on the development of the organizational capacity of a school? " Interestingly Allie, Annabel and Aaron who are serving the highest Social Economic Status (SES) communities felt the lowest levels of accountability to the state and federal government. Their current and past performance labels are among the best around and they have never had to experience the school improvement process initiated by their local school district in order to be compliant with state statute. While not feeling accountable to the "system," the quest for internal or Organizational Capacity still carries on. Appropriate curricular decisions, correct staff placements and just good old fashion plain professional growth as an educator is what all three believe needs still to occur. They do however feel high levels of accountability to their community and or parents. Their performance label is a reflection of their neighborhood and their people. This is a very different tale told from the remaining seven principals who have all experienced the formal school improvement process at one time or another throughout their careers. For these seven principals, accountability resembles a good thriller novel. As we get deeper into the story or in our career, we seem to acquire a better understanding of the purpose or meaning for the saga. For the newest principals Cathy, Bianca and Brian we find ourselves in the early chapters of their book. The story just began and our main characters are still collecting information and building background. New to the profession and new to the game of accountability, interpretation and navigating one's philosophy of student achievement is in its infant stage. Fear of

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the machine is extremely real and in every thought as the search for personal success surrounds them. This concern is balanced with the importance of creating Organizational Capacity that makes sense and based on student learning. Bertha, Bill, Cara and Chris are found in the later chapters of the book. They have something the other three do not possess. The gift of years of experience is found up their sleeves and proves to be invaluable for building capacity at their school sites. They have seen things evolve, fall apart and recreate themselves. The wisdom found in "surviving" as Cara states is priceless. These four principals utilize the human, technical and social resources of the school to build Organizational Capacity (Newmann et al., 1997). Either by staying the course, shouldering the burden, creating school wide systems or by refining the data presented they do it their way to increase instruction and raise test scores. This story is as rich as the struggle to do what is best for the profession, the children and for each of them as educators.

Accountability shifts throughout the stories based on the experiences of the principals. While some find the label to shape accountability, it is not the only ingredient in shaping the opportunities within a campus for leading, teaching and learning. Similar to the constant shaping and reshaping of accountability, the second major thread, Achievement, is drawn from the narratives provided from each principal's story. Student achievement is defined, presented, utilized and approached quite differently by each of our participating principals. The three layers of Achievement drawn from the stories of the ten principals are as follows.

The first layer focuses on the belief that achievement is based on the external factors such as AYP, AIMS testing, politics and strategies schools perform to reach what they believe is student achievement. Next, achievement can be acquired through consultants and resources and the result of the dedicated and qualified teacher. Quality instruction by classroom teachers is the simplest form of student achievement and the most meaningful. These results are gained through professional development opportunities, the guidance of others and the continual celebrations within the school. Finally each principal participant demonstrates a strategic attitude in their actions and a purposeful plan when negotiating achievement. Personal and professional attitudes drive their quest for higher achievement for their schools.

Achievement: Negotiating the Label

As the storytellers negotiate the game of accountability they described multiple forms of achievement. Achievement may be delivered during staff meetings, sent home to parents to encourage parental involvement, posted in classrooms with fancy graphics, collected in grade level notebooks or found in war rooms presented as data walls. Some of these forms of data originate from the federal and state government entities, local school district assessments, vendors and school wide and classroom tests. Reliance of the usefulness and validity of these achievement results reported to the public through the labeling process is told by our principals based on the personal journey at the school. Since Arizona developed a labeling system to differentiate and publicize the

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achievement of each school, this section of the chapter will address the second research question. The second research question is as follows: "How do Arizona school principals negotiate the assigned label in their everyday professional practice?"The interpretation of what achievement means to each principal will be told and intertwined within the context of each story. This question produced a variety of strategies and beliefs about the relationship between achievement as represented by the labels and the daily lives of each principal while existing within different worlds. I have labeled each subsection of achievement with quotes pulled directly from the principals' stories. These different interpretations affirm this section on achievement as a common thread throughout the told experiences.

As a new superintendent of public instruction takes office in the state of Arizona, school principals, district superintendents and classroom teachers statewide hold their breath while holding on tightly to witness the newly paved path of educational policy as we know it. Many within the educational realm pose the question of the existence of the AIMS test and rules behind the labeling process of schools now that the national standards are a reality and just two years away. The performance labels we currently are tagged with in Arizona are now on the chopping block only to be replaced by letter grades. This policy change that is new to the accountability game is the vow to publicize the worth of each school by assigning a grade, rather than a label, based on their student achievement. This will be fact very soon if the self proclaimed business model supporter State

Superintendent of Education John Huppenthal has his way (Aleshire, 2011). With changes lurking on the horizon, the definition of achievement continues to transform itself once again. Is achievement viewed strictly as data, labels or grades by our principals while balancing the business or politics of the game? Is it perceived as an effective school focused on quality instruction with quality teachers or is it purely the ability to follow and stick to a passionate game plan focused on learning and not the position or power? The three layers that developed from the stories about achievement include: data used to drive business or politics, qualified or effective teachers and instruction and having a purposeful game plan. The weaving of these three layers paint the picture of achievement as our principals experience it.

Achievement as business, data and politics. *Puppet of the business world.* It is definitely a data rich world these days. A challenging economy, Survey monkey, Microsoft Excel, electronic walk through rubrics, Google docs and data walls are all contributing tools for determining the path of achievement. Within the realm of education compliance, terms such as Scientifically Research Based (SRB) or Highly Qualified (HQ), use formulas, rubric or checklists based on numbers or scores to contribute to the data requirements needed to build on achievement. These data requirements and expectations for educators are demanded by politicians during the era of accountability. These are just a couple of the recent examples of the direction education has been headed in over the past two decades. While visiting the ten school principals it was interesting to see that

data exists in every school. All had data visible posted in their offices presented in a variety of ways and in a variety of forms. Pivot tables, pie charts, and 3D bar graphs displayed reading and math scores, parent survey reports, and benchmark testing. What they think about data and what they do with it on a daily bases varies from individual to individual. Do they think data is a clear measure of achievement or does it get lost in the translation? The first layer within this theme focuses on the stories provided by the principal participants that mirror the belief that achievement is based on the external factors such as making AYP and acing the AIMS test, the business of politics, and the strategies that school districts perform to show achievement. Chris, who has spent many years as a district and building administrator in the Chicago Public Schools prior to completing his 15th year as a school principal here in Arizona delivers his view on his student's achievement.

> We have become an arm of business. Bad achievement is bad politics and
> bad for the business world. We have also become the puppet of the
> business world. What happens out there will surely have an effect on what
> we are doing in the schools. The economy goes bad it is because our kids
> are not performing. So they better fix us or test us more frequently to
> measure if we are doing our jobs or not. Test scores are achievement and
> achievement is all about the data. The data will be compared from state to
> state; school to school in the form of labels or grades, some will be

achieving some will not. Interesting we still are producing doctors and lawyers. I wish it wasn't this way but unfortunately it is.

Chris's 20 plus years as an educator and administrator has influenced his approach to accountability and student achievement. He voices a connection between the two and references that without one there cannot be the other. Chris struggles with the game of accountability and the power the label has over his school. The "rollercoaster ride" as he explains paints the picture of his daily reality.

> We make AYP one year, we don't the next, and we make it the following year and so on. We are Underperforming, Performing, Underperforming, and Performing Plus. This is crazy! It has become a political agenda tied to business. There has to be a better way than the rollercoaster ride of data and student achievement. Unfortunately it is the only carnival in town we have tickets to.

Chris's reference to external accountability and the classifying of student achievement as a "carnival" is quite telling. The spectacle for learning is only available for few to enjoy while others are put on display. His internal conflict resonates as he negotiates the fact that student achievement data magically results in a performance label. Bianca's perspective of achievement echoes the thought that there has to be a better way.

Because labels are so revered or appealing to educators I think it has changed the way we do business. Most days I think what we are doing in order to play the label game is crippling the students. We get really narrowed and focus in our instruction and leave important life learning out.

By narrowing the curriculum and only teaching the tested items on the AIMS test, an increase in a performance label may occur and show gains in AYP and AZLearns. Some would then think that student achievement is on the rise but are our students really getting smarter? Bill would have us think differently about this approach.

What I am getting at is the test results from these high stakes testing events don't necessarily paint the picture of the actual achievement gained by each individual student. By performing selective abandonment on what should and should not be taught due to specific areas being more heavily assessed on the AIMS test, one would question if this is good strategy or is it good teaching? To me it resembles test prep.

Cara confirms Bill's skeptical view of the game of testing as it relates to the school curriculum, teaching and learning as the test date approaches.

These one week testing weeks create a lot of anxiety. In order for any type of assessment to be tied to student achievement it needs to be more ongoing to create a clearer picture of what really is going on. The more

information or target points you have along the way, I think the more

information you will know. It sure will reduce the wondering if the kids

had a bad day or not. This is why I do not spend a lot of time and energy

on the business known as the AIMS test.

Chris, Bianca, Bill and Cara question the notion that the high stake testing

events created by politicians and the business world create questionable and an

inaccurate picture of student achievement. They seem to question how a moment

in time can be used to judge their schools, yet every other moment in time is

dismissed. However, Aaron appreciates the information received from the AIMS

test but is cautious.

I appreciate the quantitative data received from the AIMS test. We have

to keep it in perspective though. We have to remember it's a piece of the

puzzle that isn't black and white. One week during the year doesn't really

paint a true picture of the great things that happens every day in the

classroom.

Annabel was the most positive of all the principals with respect to the connection

between achievement, AIMS testing and the label received.

I think it's important to know what type of school and how the kids are

doing on standardized test. The label does this. It makes it simple for

parents to understand where they want their children to be. They can get

the information from the internet, newspaper where ever, I like it.

While Aaron and Annabel appreciate the data, they were clear that it does not represent the school as a whole. Aaron and Annabel state that the data is just a representation of how their students do on a standardized test once every year. Chris, Bianca, Bill and Cara interpret the data as being political in nature. Shrinking the curriculum, creating higher levels of anxiety, and test prep are the result from these times known for high stakes testing and the quest for data. In this experience, the data snapshot of achievement that results in the label each principal receives is causing more harm than good.

Achievement is what one makes of it, especially when based on high stakes testing and resulting in a performance label by the state. These principals must negotiate the labeling process and its data to receive external recognition. Often times there are factors outside the school such as politics, a change in demographics or attendance boundary changes that result in a change in the achievement picture for their schools. Some outcomes may be for the better and help to paint a brighter picture of achievement for the all to see while some might not be so favorable. The politics or strategies in play here are often times covert but all so impactful. Allie is quick to point out the politics behind the scores.

Is my school really Excelling? What does this mean? It is interesting that the math scores went down in every grade level yet my label stayed the same. Fascinating isn't it? I think the state needs to have Excelling schools, mine included, meeting a criteria not just doing a little better than

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school down the street. AZLearns has created this system and politicians want jobs based on this system.

Allie demonstrates a deep understanding about how achievement data is manipulated in order to sort or separate schools into categories. She continues to address the political careers of politicians who will benefit from the assigned labels.

We all know that Superintendent Horne can't have a lot of schools failing or dropping in performance labels. That would mean he isn't doing a very good job as our state superintendent of schools! If this is the case how would he win the Attorney General position?

The behavior of some of the state's highest education politicians almost seems unethical as they create elaborate formulas to show achievement. Are the actions taken by school districts to show student achievement in their schools any less unethical? Another type of political ploy performed by some school districts to avoid bad achievement data or labels year after year is to redistrict or move the boundaries of a particular school. Bill reflects on how this happened at his school which could have helped his rise in performance label.

Boundaries change. We gained 150 kids from a neighboring school and these students came in and help out my subgroups in question. The million dollar question that needs to be raised is if this is a reflection of the student achievement and teaching going on at my school or the

neighboring school? Does it really matter? I think this should be

addressed. My label got better. Is it because of the teaching and

instruction going on at the school that lost those 150 kids?

Bill poses a question that should be raised by politicians. If the concern or

legislation is truly to ensure that no child is being left behind should this sort of

situation exist? Cathy's experience with the politics behind the political curtain of

achievement data comes not with the movement of students but the movement of

teachers. The process in her district is called "excesssing."

> Due to a drop in student enrollment district wide and being a Failing
>
> school, I had a surplus of teachers on my site and had to pick some to
>
> leave to other schools within the district. A handful of my most
>
> interesting teachers were excessed to other schools due to a variety of
>
> reasons. Some just didn't match the vision of the school. I had thirteen
>
> new teachers and none of them were excessed. They did however have to
>
> sign commitment letters in order to stay here. This was very helpful in
>
> moving my school forward and raising my performance label.

The politics that are played at the federal level are also played at the local level

and are referred to as "working the system." If a label is to inform the public of a

school's success, what is the different between changing the formula and shifting

boundaries in comparison to Nichols and Berliner's (2006) study on the collateral

damage of high stakes testing or the Texas Miracle? (Helig and Darling-

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Hammond, 2008). Newscasters love the extremes of high stakes testing and public relation directors hate it. While these are not supportive to the system as a whole, the spectacle is an attractive story line to the media. However, the politics that happen behind the scene or in the trenches within the district of school politics carry the same weight. These stories are found in my research and may be a voice that may inform stake holders so that the new releases of the performance labels can be questioned and understood within the context the temporal and spatial location of the school.

Achievement as good instruction. *We can make it happen.* The power of a good teacher is no secret to school principals. It is said that if a student has one bad teacher, it takes two good ones after that to make up the difference. Good instruction should equal good student achievement. By using an outside consultant or purchasing an instructional improvement program, good instruction should be the outcome from either one in order to reach high levels of student achievement. Many would like to believe in a system where students come first and student achievement is genuine and pure. After all, an effectively ran school focused on creating Organizational Capacity, quality instruction, competent teachers and celebrating success will increase test scores, right? The first two achievement approaches found within this layer is the support that comes in the form of school adopted programs or the hiring of outside consultants. Cara is currently using the program Galileo to support teachers in identifying student needs.

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One thing we created for the teachers that we really found helpful was this form that takes the student data from Galileo and rates them based on their outcomes. It then correlates the findings and predicts were they are going in terms of gains. Then by creating a developmental profile for each student we can identify the standards each child needs to work on and the lessons teachers should be teaching. We have been doing this for three years now and I think our quality of instruction has improved. Our district likes Galileo because it is impacting instruction. They believe this is the way to target instruction and make it good. It is definitely more purposeful.

Cara uses this tool to help identify the gaps that exist within her testing data. She uses the resource provided by her district to act as a catalyst in her professional development plan. Bertha is also using Galileo but is struggling to balance the autonomy she desires in order to build capacity at her school and the pressure district office demands with respect to their system wide approach to data collection.

I was questioned about my support to Galileo. They were worried because I have only logged in 3 times. I can maneuver through Galileo and support the program but have made it my own. I would think that because we are Performing Plus by the state they would trust my decision making. Here we are focusing on just good instruction and utilizing whatever product we can to make it happen.

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Galileo is one of the many online instructional improvement programs that is purchased by school districts across the state to help school principals manage their benchmark testing data and provide information to plan quality teaching. What and how they use it varies as shown in Cara and Bertha's case. Cara seems to use the program and its information as the spring board to set other tools into motion while Bertha utilizes Galileo to spot check.

School principals differ when it comes to hiring or using extended resources to facilitate student achievement at their schools. The use of an outside consultant to provide coaching, act as a teacher mentor or to provide quality teaching tips to the staff helped Brian and Bianca's mission of reaching higher levels of student achievement and creating quality teaching at each of their schools. Brian has found success with the use of his consultant over the years.

Fred is great. He is a fresh set of eyes that can look at my teacher instruction and student achievement data and help me wrap my head around what it all means. By forcing my leadership to read recent articles on what is working out there, we can make educated decisions that make sense. He isn't a computer program that tracks our scores but gives us support in selecting the tools needed to chart, post and predict our student outcomes on our common assessments. While using Fred for the past three years, we have seen scores increase and our teachers are feeling better about their instruction. All principals should have support.

During the time that Fred was under contract with Brian the performance label for

Brian's school went from Underperforming to Performing Plus. It seemed to

work for Brian because it was a process that consisted of people participating in

analyzing multiple contexts instead of printing reports that provided a picture of a

moment in time. Bianca has hired Nicole as her consultant and is reaping the

benefits.

> Nicole has really helped me set up a system to track my student
>
> achievement data. From this structure we have started having really good
>
> data meetings with the teachers. These data meetings result in better
>
> instruction in the classroom due to the teachers now knowing where there
>
> kids are at. From this and our walk through observation notes we are really
>
> digging deep into instructional practices. We are definitely on the right
>
> track.

In this case, data meetings based on quality instruction served as a catapult

in creating new learning opportunities and providing information in order to make

quality curricular and administrative decisions. The continuum for how the data is

used expands from the use of a chart to a dynamic dialogue within leadership

teams. For Brian his consultant proved to be the extra set of eyes he needed and

for Bianca, the creator of systematic data driven conversation which lead to better

instruction.

The pressure to be better, the motivation behind it and the importance of

celebrating it when it happens all play important roles in this saga. For Cathy,

school pressure is certainly no stranger. With the watchful eye of state coaches and district personnel lurking, her teachers live the importance of becoming better instructionally every day.

> The label we were assigned has created pressure to unquestionably become better instructionally. Once we got out from under the Failing label the pressure to maintain it has almost become harder for the staff to endure. Sure I put pressure on them. I pressure them for good instruction. If we get good instruction the label will hopefully take care of itself. Sometimes I get really upset about it when I see things that don't look so right. I tell them things like we don't have any time to waste. You got to get your pace up! You've got to make sure you know that your teaching is quality.

Allie also agrees that the pressure to be better instructionally is needed for her Excelling school.

> With the upcoming changes in AZLearns and the focus of lack of gains made by the higher performing students, my staff knows that if they do not focus on their instruction and the achievement of the students we may have troubles very soon. Throw this together with a teacher evaluation instrument based on student scores and their personal culture, times are absolutely changing.

Although Cathy and Allie are leading two schools serving completely two very different populations, they both know and feel the pressure of their students achieving as a result of good instruction. While searching for the right way to increase student achievement the pressure to get there can be confused as motivation. Annabel working under her new label points out the conflict she feels to satisfy the labeling process and the struggle for raising achievement.

> I find myself at times motivated to raise the label instead of focusing primarily on student achievement. I have been programmed. I know this is wrong but due to the rules of the game my motivation has become clouded.

Achievement is a balancing act between what is good for students, for principals, for teachers and what is called for by external forces. This conflict surfaces in multiple ways as the contextual factors collide and transition throughout each day.

As some school principals become more and more "clouded" or sucked into programmed thinking, some resist this force and search for an alternative. This power and force that external accountability has created has caused principals to rethink their philosophy toward student achievement. One attribute that may remain constant and untouched from the world of accountability is the need to celebrate any and all student achievement success. No data collecting program, professional development consultant or altered philosophy can hinder a

reason to celebrate student growth. Aaron searches for any reason to celebrate achievement all times of the year.

> We give medals; we post honor lists, speech contests, spelling bees it doesn't matter. I do not need data sheets or benchmark scores to know when my students are doing well. It is kind of pathetic that some principals have abandoned celebrating anything that isn't measured in their war room. I will always celebrate anything and everything that looks like student achievement.

Aaron refers to the power that war rooms and data walls have on school principals. He points out that this achievement data is all that some principals focus on. Brian shares Aaron's thoughts on the importance of celebrating. Brian's view toward celebrating the academic press or the school culture that surrounds the school is much larger and more important than the achievement data that ultimately results in the label that is assigned.

> I believe in celebrating the culture of learning we have created here. Unfortunately the label that I receive each year doesn't measure the intangibles, the hidden success in all types of student achievement. AIMS week and the label I receive do not measure all the great things we are doing at my school. We know and celebrate anytime we can on every type of achievement. Not just gains in our district quarterly assessments in

reading and math and of course our DIBELs gains. It has to be bigger

than that.

The transformation in Brian's philosophy toward accountability and achievement has been well defined in his actions over the past six years as a school principal. Brian recognizes the importance of the external accountability guidelines he lives under but fights to not become robotic in his actions. One of Dr. Seuss's final books, "Hooray for Diffendoofer Day" sits on the corner of Brian's desk at all times as a constant reminder to think outside the box, resist the machine of external accountability and conformity and to always focus on teaching the kids to think rather than the how to take the test.

Focusing on good instruction is the answer for higher test scores as told through Cathy, Allie, Aaron and Brian's narratives. Expecting better instruction from their teachers seems to work for Cathy and Allie while Aaron and Brian uses any and all types of celebrations as the motivation to create better instruction. However, good instruction doesn't always just happen. A well thought out and properly motivated plan of action is also imperative in creating higher levels of student achievement. A principal's plan of action can either be personally motivated or professionally.

Achievement as a plan of action. *Give us time and we will get it done.* As each Arizona school principal negotiate their assigned performance or achievement label in their everyday professional practice, a variety of approaches and beliefs emerged as they tackled the relationship. Some of the stories told by

our principals focused on the fact that data is seen strictly as achievement while others use the quality of instruction as the tell all end all. When it comes to student achievement at all ten school sites, all agree a plan of action is the driving force behind the accomplishments. The personal drive within the principal's core is noted and relayed through each of their actions. Riding the "rollercoaster ride" as Chris pointed out earlier, strangely makes sense to him as he remains at his school through thick and thin.

I have been at my school for many years and I remain here because we are achieving, we are making growth. Our scores prove it. We are also growing as a staff, coming closer together and becoming a family. If the government would give us enough time we will get it done. This game we play is very personal to me. I have seen a lot of things through my career and know that it is working here. I know our community and our plan is working. Sadly though, not everyone believes in us. Some say we will never make it.

Chris is a well respected principal throughout his district and is viewed as a true professional. In the short time I spent in his office I noticed the drive or game plan in play for Chris. His plan is well throughout, organized and purposeful. He is personally invested in his job and in his school. Chris has a lengthy, impressive resume and track record. Any school would be lucky to have him as their leader and many have inquired over the years. Yet he stays put, fighting the good fight.

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Bianca in her short tenure displays a similar personal drive focused on the student achievement.

> I want to bang my head against the wall most of the time. I feel like we are making it and we never get recognized for it because we are not on someone else's time line or at their benchmark and yet our kids make so much growth. So yeah it keeps me up every single night.

The passion in Bianca's words is a snapshot into her being. She is driven to succeed for the right reasons and frustrated with the constant push to attain a mark that was not meant for her students or her community.

> Originally when I left the classroom I think I was meant for something more than the four walls of the classroom. I wanted to have a greater impact on student achievement. I think you see systems you want to improve, and so you move into those positions hoping that your ideas and visions can improve the big picture. I really think by luck and blessing, people took a chance on me and were willing to see if my grand ideas would work. I really think that is how I got here today. I am having a greater impact now rather than just the 24 kids in my classroom. I have to make my work personal. I have a lot of people depending on me.

Bianca does not have years of experience as a principal to create the personal mission she lives day in and day out. It is the theme of her existence as an individual. Chris's personal mission like Bianca's is very personal. Chris still

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remains at his school almost stubbornly to prove everyone wrong that said they couldn't make it. Impacting the lives of students and helping them achieve under anyone's definition of the word is Bianca and Chris's one and only plan of action.

The balance beam principals walk as they navigate the multiple factors of school improvement and student achievement can also be professionally motivated. As Chris and Bianca illustrated, personal reasons to make a difference in the lives of children was their beacon. For Cathy and the reasons surrounding her first position as a school principal, personal beliefs toward increasing achievement had to be put on the back burner. It is now professionally driven. Working under a Failing label definitely impacted her conviction and plan of action.

Walking into this school as a new principal and being handed the Failing label had a huge affect on my approach to student achievement and accountability. All the great things I learned about thematic teaching, patience when implementing change and what leadership model or style I was privy to all took a back seat due to my assigned label. I had to act now and help my staff see the importance of our label. I kept telling them we could be an Excelling school; we can be an Excelling school. The label had to be the motivation. My three year plan was out the window.

Cathy's experience and story are unique in that she is the only principal in this study that was assigned a Failing label. Since improving her performance label

she has altered her plan of action slightly and uses her defined success as motivation to continue to increase her test scores. Bertha's journey or motto to become an Excelling school can be referred to as "reaching for the stars."

> We didn't make our AYP last year for the feds even though we are a Performing Plus school for the state. We celebrated for a moment. We were happy that the state saw we were doing great things but sad the feds didn't quite agree. Once we got pass the turmoil of that, once we talked about what our plan was and how we need to have lines of focus about what we were going to teach I then used being Performing Plus as a leverage to motivate us. I would like for us to be an Excelling school. Now that means we need to have a certain percentage of kids meet or exceed the benchmark standard but anything is possible. We will continue to reach for the stars.

Bertha's plan of action is to raise her school's label and use it as motivation to increase student achievement. This professional driven approach may result in the same outcomes with respect to student test scores but is questionable with respect to it directionality. Perhaps the situation each principal sits in dictates the direction they take to reach higher levels of achievement or better performance labels.

The multiple relationships of how the label is negotiated stems from numerous factors that are not related to the static calculations outlined and reconfigured by the state. Accountability plus achievement are relative to the

attitudes of the principals that have developed through their personal experiences as students, parents and educators in a system that creates a hierarchy of achievement based on a static formula that does not take into account the multiple contexts that make up a school site. The principals' stories are similar yet each is constructed based on different experiences in the era of accountability. Accountability is not a target but a way of life, achievement is a process not a product and both result in the attitudes of each principal.

Attitude: A Principal's View

Accountability is the term most politicians use to frame the school system's achievement process. Since the initiation of NCLB in the early 2000's, researchers have found that the student learning slope has almost leveled out like a plateau from 2002 to 2008 (NAEP, 2009). The recent documentary *Waiting for Superman* (2010) has also attacked the public school system's forms of accountability and levels of achievement. The movie paints a dark picture of public school by focusing on the low achievement of students based on the poor accountability of teachers because of their protection by the teachers' unions or the tenure factor. I refer to tenure as a factor because when we look at teachers who exist in the system and are not held accountable by the principals, administrators or parents, a question I pose is, "When teachers are in a district or school for over three years, are they an investment or an aging babysitter?"In order to answer this question, one cannot base the quality of teachers on age, membership in the local union or test scores. Tenure is only one factor of the

complexity, but attitudes towards education have been adjusted based on factors that are disconnected from the complexities they co-exist in. Just as Newmann et al. found that there are multiple factors that affect the quality of a school and how students learn, accountability of schools also is dependent on the contextual factors that make up each of the stories presented in this study. The first two themes and research questions were based on the relationship between the stories and the external accountability pushed on schools by federal, state and local mandates. This final theme stems from the internal compromises and understandings of the principals and addresses the final research question, "What are Arizona principals' views toward the state accountability process?" This section of the chapter will provide the stories that live within the daily transformations that occur within the multiple contexts of a principal's day in respect to the label placed upon their school. I have once again labeled each subsection of Attitude with quotes pulled directly from the principals' stories.

Learning is a cycle and not static. Learning, teaching and leading occurs in multiple contexts and are in constant transition (Giroux, 1993). As noted in the layers that make up the threads of Accountability and Achievement, there are multiple vantage points from where success can be implemented or measured. Labels in Arizona change yearly while the rules remain static as schools fall in and out of the labels assigned. Since beginning my dissertation study, the Arizona Department of Education has also seen that labels have become confusing to the public. The public is looking to place their children in schools that will provide

optimal opportunities and have faith in the school system. The labels are not only based on arbitrary formulas but the terms are set to sound like schools are performing when they may not be. Most of the labels use the word Performing except for the highest one of Excelling and the lowest using the term Failing. This in itself sets up the misinterpretations from the public as well as the multiple interpretations from the principals who have shared their stories with me. The moving target exist within the lives of those inside the school communities. The leader of the schools also has attitudes that have been developed in relationship to the label on their school. I have found that the attitudes in reference to the label are far more comprehensive than the few days that turnout the test scores and attendance the labels are based on.

In reading the narratives, it was not easy to extract the commonalities across the stories as to how the principals viewed the impact of the label on their daily lives. My third and final research question asks "What are Arizona principals' views toward the state accountability process?"This question created many responses both filled with positive and negative emotions, criticism and real life examples as to what they would do if they were in charge. The three layers that evolved while organizing the *Attitude* theme were era, boundaries or location and experience. First, the times we live and currently work in are known as the era of high stakes testing. This era looks and feels considerably different for the school principal than the years prior to NCLB. Negotiating the state or national standards, politics and labels based on a controversial test created contradictory

findings by the principals. Next, the location or boundaries each principal

transitions through impacts their attitudes with respect to working under a school

label. The attitudes each of the ten principals embrace is a culmination or

collection of the varying stops along his or her life journey. Finally, the vast

experiences lived by each of our principals contribute to the creation of each

one's attitude or one's self.

Attitudes in the era of standardized testing. *Playing the catch up game.*

As the state of Arizona and its school districts scramble to align their state

standards to the newly adopted core or national standards, principals are feeling

once again beat up. Hours of curriculum mapping, creating common assessments

to increase student achievement and fostering quality teaching are out the window

due to the game being changed once again. Allie takes the times of change in

stride.

> As much as I am frustrated with the change, on the second hand I can
>
> appreciate that we (the state of Arizona) are looking at things closer
>
> because I think for the longest time there seemed to be a disconnect. It
>
> wasn't like this pre NCLB. I felt like we were just checking boxes. We
>
> have to change what we are teaching in many grades so does everyone
>
> across the country. Here it is and here we go. The time is now. At least
>
> we won't be spinning our wheels anymore.

This approach for Allie was not surprising to me. Working under the Excelling

label, Allie feels more accountable to her parents rather than the first layer of

accountability, the federal or state. I got the sense that she knew her students would perform at a high level no matter what the standards are and whatever is being taught in each classroom. Interesting, Cara who is working under the Underperforming label agrees with Allie.

> I think the time of accountability is good. I really believe that we can be an Excelling school. Tell us the rules of the game and we will do it. Align it, grade us, whatever. When you see the kids that we have, the only reason we are not Excelling is because we have not given them the time and the opportunity to learn. It is not about them. It is about us.

Both principals were realistic about the role they play within the era of accountability. A positive approach is obvious and wasteful comments about "these" days are absent from anything that defines each. "We are puppets of the business world," Chris pointed out earlier in the Achievement section and I think accepting this notion makes labeling manageable for both Allie and Cara.

Labeling schools is politically motivated and the numbers game in play affects the attitudes of some principal. The rules are shifting in the 2011-2012 school year to change the labeling process into a grading process. This shift further cements the politics of reform as numbers and data. In referencing the change from labels to grades next year, Bianca refers to a PowerPoint presentation that Arizona Deputy Associate Superintendent Robert Franciosi shared with educators. It states that the same percentage of schools that were found in each category in 2010 will match that in the 2011 new grading system.

The bell curve and cut scores will be drawn to mirror the number of schools currently found in each label group for 2010 school year. The images that represent the schools are changing once again but the rules seem to mirror each other. The following stories explain the conflict of negotiating the times of transformation and era of accountability. The AIMS test is not the only measure to prove success or student achievement as Bianca states.

> I think there should be other checks and balances along the way and I think they need to look at other things other than just high stakes testing. There is such disparity between schools today and I think until we really learn how to take a school that is high in poverty to a better place we need to stop and think. With placing the best teachers and right programs along with the proper amount of money to implement it is a step in the right direction. Until then, we are kidding ourselves when it comes to labeling or grading schools. We will always be playing the catch up game here. This is not an issue on the other side of town.

Aaron's attitude projects caution regarding the labels schools receive and the era principals are working under. This era of data driven results and testing that today's principals are working in is under constant transition and their attitudes shift along the way. Once they feel they understand the era, the rules of accountability changes.

> There has always been a grading system or ranking system in education. I do not know if this is good or bad. Maybe it hasn't been so transparent

but it did exist.   The testing system of today is questionable and the

labels we are assigned are based on confusing formulas. There seems like

there should be an easier way. I hate the thought of being a principal with

a bad label. Let's take it one step further: How about the labeling of

children? I understand there is protocol to follow but the direction the

politics are headed scares me. The politics involved in education today

are indeed scary.

 U.S Education Secretary Arne Duncan, recently stated, "This law has created a

thousand ways for schools to fail and very few ways to help them succeed. We

should get out of the business of labeling schools as failures and create a new law

that is fair and flexible, and focuses on the schools and students most at risk"(UPI,

2011). One can only hope that a new law would reflect the lessons we have

learned since the implementation of NCLB and be indeed fair and flexible to take

into account the multiple contexts of education. This is yet another example of

how attitudes are created within the era of high stakes testing.

During the summer months when principals are creating school-wide

master schedules and hiring new teachers, the *Arizona Republic* newspaper has

the honor of releasing the state wide AIMS data to the public. Along with the

scores each school received in reading, math and writing is the performance label

each school is assigned. This day will create both cheerful and depressed

attitudes for the principal based on their label results. However, the attitudes are a

reflection of that moment, not a fixed emotion attributed to the label of the school.

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Bill has worked as a principal under three labels in his tenure as a principal and welcomes the day with a positive attitude.

> I look forward to the label. I look forward to testing. It is my job to worry about this and I will take the blow head on. I have enough faith in my staff that they have done everything possible to create realistic results. Let's remember though we have to look at more information than what is presented in the newspaper. After all, this is a number thing.

Bill acknowledges that data comes in many forms and is careful to base his entire attitude on what the paper presents. Bill has the experience and knowledge to look at each of his tested subgroups along with the data he has collected throughout the year and comes to his own conclusion. His conclusion may be different from what is published in the *Arizona Republic*. Now working under a more favorable label than the Failing label she once had, Cathy's attitude on labeling and testing is more positive.

> I think the label is a good thing. It does motivate me and my staff to do better. We want to be Excelling and our recent label is a step in the right direction.

Cathy correlates the school's success with the label she receives as does Annabel. However, Cathy sees the labeling process as one step and not the entire process. Cathy was fortunate that her label increased while Annabel's attitude

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toward testing and labeling is not as positive due to her dropping from Excelling to Highly Performing.

> I was severely disappointed when I first saw the newspaper. It is extremely hard to maintain the Excelling label. I had a feeling we would drop even before the newspaper released it. We just couldn't get over the hurdles the test was asking us to do.

The moment that the AZLearns labels are printed and making its way to the newsstands, the attitudes of the principals have toward their label has already been formed. Given all the evidence collected throughout the year, most principals know what their school will be tagged. Cathy has consistently improved throughout the years but was not concerned with her students' parents reading it in the newspaper. Whereas Annabel knew her parents would have questions after searching the local newspaper for their label. The paper does not talk about all the changes that the school went through or any factors that may be taken into consideration when the profile is published. As this era continues to be transformed due to the push for national or core standards and high stakes testing, the principals continue to absorb the change without missing a beat. Attitudes are altered and changed based on what each principal believes to be a success that should be celebrated and a failure that is deserved. Whichever the case, the principals will continue to behave professionally and walk the line and push forward. Standards, politics and labels dealt out in predesigned categories based on test taking strategies and results is a part of their daily lives and never seems to

push them over the edge. It only becomes another small piece of the fabric that makes them who they are and what they believe. The next layer within the Attitude thread focuses on the boundaries that are being created due to the state accountability process. These boundaries can be a physical location where one works or assigned or a boundary of ideals based on fear of the other. The shift of boundaries reshapes the attitudes that are part of the position of a principal and woven into each one of us. These boundaries are part of every action each makes within their journey as a principal.

Attitudes about boundaries and conflicts. *Maybe it's gone section eight.* Due to the intense pressure to succeed by the federal and state accountability process, many principals have altered their attitude toward teaching and welcoming all students. Many become on edge or fearful of what their test scores will be when the demographics or type of students they are used to serving changes. Arizona Senate Bill 1070, a decrease in student enrollment district-wide and families residing in apartment complexes all are unstable factors that may play a role in the collective makeup that principals will be held accountable to. Brian is concerned about the recent change in his school's demographics. Due to Arizona Senate Bill 1070 which focuses on immigrants his community is looking a little different lately. This has created a conflict within the boundary he has called his community.

> Senate Bill 1070 continues to put fear into my immigrant population. We
> are losing these families left and right. As they leave, it seems that we are

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seeing an influx in African American and Caucasian families. My

teachers have gotten pretty good working with the student population we

have. I am a little concerned that this change may affect our scores. Will

my teachers be able to respond to the new demographics?

Brian has had success with his label over the years but his focus has been about

the students he serves not the benchmarks outlined by the state. This change that

is occurring within the location or boundary of his school is based on something

bigger than the forces that tag his school with a particular label. The boundaries

that have become the norm for Brian and his staff have just broadened. The

unknown of his teachers' response to the new demographics does not set easy for

Brian and his attitude has been affected.

As Brian rides out the effects that Senate Bill 1070 may have on the

population of his school, his teacher's ability to teach and on his future

performance label, Annabel struggles with the affects of a strapped economy. Her

school district is currently losing students which results in lower amounts of

monies coming into the district. School principals are encouraged to take any and

all students on an open enrollment variance. A variance is granted to a student

that lives outside the district and in Annabel's view is affecting her current reality.

Our demographics have changed. Our English Language Learners

numbers have increased and due to the financial woes that surround us, I

have taken students that would not normally be here. I had to let them in to

help out the district.

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Taking students outside her attendance boundaries has challenged Annabel's boundary of unfamiliarity and created a new frontier for her. The landscape of her school has been disturbed for the time being and the location in which it sits will continue to be held accountable by the same referees monitoring the game.

For Allie, the boundaries she and her community are accustomed to are very secure and sacred. With a stable community that prides itself on a communal support and stature, the recent change in zoning and management at one of the few apartment complexes found in the school's attendance zone has created quite a stir. The lines that have been drawn for Allie's school have been consistent for many years and an attitude unfamiliar to many has shown its ugly face.

I walk up Arizona Street because we have a very large apartment complex that has just gone Section Eight. Apparently it is now a very drug infested place with some very interesting tenants. My community isn't use to this so I have been walking the street to send a message that everything will be ok. I have to also be aware that this population may not represent that of my school. It could or could not affect our scores or the culture that exist here.

The attitude of fear is in play here and Allie's boundaries have shifted bringing to surface a fear of the unfamiliar. Her position in the new space is affected as she becomes the referee for the familiar and unfamiliar. Her constant battle within this

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boundary causes a new shift that she will work through that is not disseminated in the *Arizona Republic*.

The third and final layer found within the attitude thread evolves from the variety of experiences formed from the journey each school principal has lead. It is significant to document the quest each school principal embarked upon in order to paint the picture of each leader. The sharing of their school year experiences warrants a description in this research as principals found it to impact their attitudes regarding the labeling process. The principals shared jovial stories that shape their attitudes toward their role in the labeling process. Their stories of schooling are a part of their identity as principals. The principals' wide range of experiences with demographics, community members, school districts and years of experience impacts the attitudes regarding accountability. Finally, by merging the attitudes created early on in each principal's educational journey and the attitudes formed more recently as a current school principal, the result culminates in the creation of one's self.

Attitude of one's self. *I was born to be a teacher.* By using the three stage interview series designed by Dolbeare and Schuman (Seidman, 2006) it allowed the participant as well as myself to understand and respect the experiences each has lived. The first interview session, Focused Life History was filled with smiles and laughter as each reminisced about the stories from their childhood. Walking down the path of their youth, their elementary school, and their neighborhood

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growing up conveyed to me why each ultimately became an educator. Aaron shared the fond memories of his school years.

> I loved school as a kid. I can remember almost every single teacher's name. In middle school where we had eight or nine teachers it gets a little tougher. I had amazing elementary school teachers which is probably why I liked school so much. I was also really socially involved in clubs and in athletics and so school became my outlet. I knew early on this is where I want to be.

The attitudes created early on for Aaron have carried through to his current position as a principal. He is still in school and loving every minute of it. This passion for school is also felt by Brian.

> I never missed a day of elementary school, I loved it too much. I still know all my teachers name and became a teacher because of the advice from my eighth grade teacher Mr. Watkins. I even remember my high school teacher's names. I played sports and I even remember like taking tests. I was good in school.

A similar tale is told from the remaining eight principals. Every principal shared fond memories of both friends and teachers from their childhood and the community that created their school. Cara's attitude created from her early school years are good and involve a degree of purpose or motivation.

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I loved school. I remember the hands on learning, science and all the

activities. My teachers were awesome. I remember that they cared a lot.

I also remember some things that were not so right even as a kid. SRA

reading groups and the way that they tracked kids really didn't sit right

with me. It also bothered me the way that we were separated into clicks or

groups. We had the jocks, the dirtballs and you know the geeks. I am not

going to tell you which one I belonged to.

Early on Cara was able to distinguish the things she liked about the school system

and the things she did not. These attitudes formed early on in her life may

correlate with her approach to government mandates, labels and external

accountability.

The experiences a school principal lives day in and day out are

multifaceted and many times very complex. These fluid experiences are collected

and united with the attitudes formed throughout each participant's life. Good or

bad, together they delve into the attitudes that are present as each principal

negotiates the forces upon them as they simply perform their job and exist outside

the school. Bianca refers to the attitudes, struggles and tension the job as

principal has created in her personal life.

I think the job interrupts my family life. I mean, the accountability to

perform, it is always on my mind. There are times where I use the TV as a

babysitter in order to try to get emails caught up, plan with my consultant

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or complete my evaluations. I should be talking with my spouse not the school. I worry about a teacher having a problem or a parent in my office waiting for me. I worry about the quarterly scores that are not where they need to be or the budget meeting that tells us we are broke. The pressure to achieve is everywhere. I need to achieve for my school.

Bianca's early attitudes toward the schooling she received in her small beach community resemble a picture perfect education. While these childhood attitudes are not similar to the ones she has today, the nostalgic representation of her past stresses her out as she places her two year old in front of the TV to continue with her work at home.   The reference she makes to the pressure is present in all the stories the principals tell as they attempt to balance the demands of a school and that of their personal life. Annabel shares how her label may reflect how she is as a leader or person.

> Some people feel that that their label totally dictates how they are as a principal. I think that some may perceive it as a reflection of how they are as a person. I am starting to think that I am a better leader when I am Excelling. Scary isn't it? The power the label has is interesting. I begin to second guess my ability as a person to lead others based on my label. Talk about power.

The power of the label that Annabel refers to affects the attitudes of the principals in this study. This is due to the public circulation of the label as a representation

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of the school's performance and leads Annabel and other principals to have to defend their school, teachers and students. Cathy discusses her attitude when she was a Failing school compared to that of her current label.

> When we were labeled Failing, I felt like a failure. Every day I would drive to work to a failing place. Although we were motivated and ready to go it takes a toll after a while. The job and me became one. I could not leave it at the door like we were taught in teacher school. Now that our label is better I find myself more positive, I am better for the kids and my teachers. My time away from school is better.

Leaving behind the baggage of the labeling process and external accountability is something the principals' struggle with as they describe how they feel about the process. Each principal knows the importance of the separation but perhaps due to the attitudes promulgated by the labeling process, the origin of success begins to be replaced with the one to two word phrase tagged on their school. The principals take work home with them as their attitudes convert to one that should please the public. Taking it home with them gives them more time to make it right for themselves as well as for the sake of the children, the families and the learning process occurring within their schools. Everyone deserves to have good school memories not scars from words like underperforming or failing. The principals in this study want to make the difference and want the community to be proud of their schools.

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Bringing together the lived experiences of their childhood events and the attitudes shaped within each interaction, a process of one's self can be shaped and reshaped. Henderson (1978) defines "self" through the lens of the Jungian theory. Self, as Jung points out, denotes the coherent whole, conscious and unconscious of a person. The Self is realized as the product of individuation, culminating in attitudes and personality. These attitudes and personalities collected through time and space create the principals we celebrate today. Bertha, growing up as a "military brat" as she refers was destined for a job in education.

> I never had one neighborhood growing up. I was a military brat. We moved every three years. I remember early on while living in Germany that the baby sitter had a great impact on me. She taught me a lot. I knew then I wanted to take care of children in some way. I wanted to make a difference for as many possible. I wanted to make a memory whenever I could.

This memory for Bertha has become a thread in the fabric of her being. She chooses to work in a school where she makes a difference each and every day. For Annabel, she knows she has always had the personality and right attitude for the classroom.

> I was born to be a teacher. I played school till I was 14. Don't tell anybody. I use to teach my sisters all the time. My mom would be at work

so I would be in charge. I was pretty good at running things. So I ran it as a school. It worked for me.

Annabel pointed out how these early experiences had a great influence in what direction she choose in school. Choosing to be a lawyer like her father was not an option for her. She was always going to be a teacher. Like Annabel, Allie knew early on her fate was in education.

I knew in elementary school that I wanted be a teacher. I remember the fun and the positive feelings around that time. The community really bought into the school and I knew that this type of special emotion was supposed to be with me forever. When I was a child we moved to Omaha. The only reason I wanted one of the homes we were looking at was because it had a basement and it had a chalkboard that was hanging up. Being the oldest in the family of three children I always had that leadership role. We ended up getting that house and look at me today.

Bertha and Annabel's early memories and childhood influences in their life add to the creation of the principals they are today. All are elements that have created or added to each principal's self. Becoming a teacher early on in basements or with sisters while mom was at work set the stage for the teacher they are today, a teacher to teachers or an instructional leader. For Cara, visual memories of her school add to her story of self when she encounters an isolated group of special needs students.

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I think it was one of the most profound things that I remember from

school. I remember when I would go to the bathroom down at the end of

the hall, which is where the self contained classes were. It fascinated me

and kind of upheld me. I think I was only like five or six and remember

that this really depressed me. At that moment I became and advocate for

the underdog. I think this is what drove me to pursue special education as

my primary degree. Not being a brainiac kid I had to push real hard so I

could be successful and help others.

Cara's drive for student advocacy is alive and well today. Fighting for the

"underdog" as she mentioned above is what Cara does well in every aspect of her

job. Cara's identify or self is a creation of the attitudes formed early on in her

childhood and carried through her adult professional life. We are very lucky to

have principals like Cara working in our schools. Her attitude and view of herself

is consistent with her actions.

Summary

This chapter examined the lives of the 10 school principals currently

working under a label. McLaren (1997) wrote that "We begin speaking for

ourselves only when we step outside ourselves-only in becoming the other. It is

in recognizing ourselves in the suffering of others that we become ourselves" (p.

112). This research on the lives of the principals within the process of labeling

their schools discloses diverse positions but also demonstrate inclusivity. Other

educators and politicians working for educational reform can learn from the

stories of these principals about accountability and school performance. We can all learn from the pain, confusion and celebrations that they live as a means to empower themselves as principal of their school sites and a role model for their communities. The threads of Accountability, Achievement and Attitude are only part of the stories that were told to me but are common threads that bring the principal's stories together for this research study.

While some schools hang their labels in their most visible spot on campus, others hide it in the cabinet and some do not even spend money on a banner. As I worked through the narratives, I discovered the themes of Accountability, Achievement and Attitude to tell the stories in a multivocal fashion that transform the status of a school into a complex environment made up of politics, numbers, childhood memories, relationships, tears and fears. Learning and achieving is a personal journey that cannot be summed up in one to two words that claim to define the profile of a school. The purpose of this chapter was to share the findings by organizing the multiple stories told by the principals. This chapter describes the effects accountability has on the Organizational Capacity of a school, the negotiations principals practice as a result of the assigned label and the views of principals towards the labeling process.

The next chapter will expand on the common threads to draw conclusions by summarizing the findings using the conceptual framework of Organizational Capacity. Chapter Five will then provide recommendations for the practice of

school administrators and for future research. The final chapter will conclude

with a detailed account of the implications of this study.

Chapter Five

Summary, Conclusions and Implications

Introduction

According to Webster, a label is a "descriptive or identifying word or phrase" ("label", Merriam-Webster Dictionary). Given the complexity of factors that constitute a school, the act of providing one label to describe or identify the achievement of the school is somewhat naïve. A school's achievement, success, celebrations and/or areas of need warrant a multivocal, transformative arena where the voices of stakeholders can come together to support the school. Gustavo Fischman (2001) argues that images are a missing form of information or data in the dialogue about transforming educational research, methodologies or theories. Fischman's notion of images and visual culture can be related to how a label validates the purpose of investigating the stories of principals to inform the impact of external accountability on schools and be used to inform future efforts for reform. His article on considering the use of visuals and images into educational research emphasized that the visual or label cannot stand alone. "The incorporation of visual cultures requires that educational researchers critically incorporate the notion of inquiry and the reflection of what we see and how those images are constructed and reconstructed by all the participants" (Fischman, 2001, p. 31). This study pays close attention to the educational struggles in which the assigned label plays in the lives of ten principals. Judging a school based on the published label may be a passive act as one interprets the label in relationship to failing, performing or excelling. These are common terms to the general public

but how these labels are determined is far from common. Fischman (2001) sites

researchers who have "proposed to understand the relationship between words,

texts and images as dynamic interactions. The dynamism of the interactions

resides in the absence of a fixed meaning" (p. 30). My research is a piece of the

dynamic interaction that may lead to multiple meanings or provoke questions

about the labeling process affixed upon the schools in this study.

Accountability as a form of comprehensive educational reform has tended

to focus on student achievement and teacher knowledge and skills (Weisberg,

Sexton, Mulhern and Keeling, 2009). The dialogue involved in the debate about

school improvement, accountability and reform revolves around the quality of

teachers and graphs that chart assessment data as a representation of student

learning. While some conversations include school leaders at the national or state

level, it is rare that the same attention is provided to school level principals who

are responsible for addressing the external rules and regulations that disseminate

judgments about the internal capacity of the school and students' performance. As

the numbers are collected and used as a basis for further transformation of

comprehensive school reform, this research focuses on the stories of

implementation that result in the published numbers.

Labels are a means of informing the public about a school's capacity,

service and achievement. While the label is made up of one to two words, there is

much that is unknown about the labeling process and how a school is assigned

their label. Who defines the labels? Why are the labels constantly changing? Who

benefits from the labeling process? Fischman (2001) attributes many moving parts

to the understanding of an image, or in this case a label. "In the matrix of the visual are also inscribed what is there that cannot be seen, through what lenses the visible and invisible become intelligible, and the spatial and temporal location of the observable and the observer. All of which constrain what is possible to see and not see" (p. 29). While the label is published and seen, I am looking into some of the unseen or untold sectors. I have shared the stories from my interpretation of what I was told from a principal's perspective. The principals told their stories that were relevant to the labeling process on the campus they are currently serving. This chapter will provide a summary of the study, reflection of the findings and conclusions, present recommendations and explain the implications.

Summary of the Study

My study is segmented into five chapters. Chapter One introduced the labeling system as it pertains to defining a school's achievement status. NCLB outlines the requirements for schools to demonstrate student achievement based on data from standardized tests. Each state develops policy to meet the requirements of the federal government's NCLB policies. AZLearns is the state of Arizona's plan to adhere to the external accountability measures. Schools are provided a label annually that represents their students' academic achievement. The labels are *Excelling, Highly Performing, Performing Plus, Performing, Underperforming and Failing*. The significance of this study is to provide an insight into the perspective of ten principals about how the labeling process impacts their daily routines. The conceptual framework of Organizational

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Capacity (Newmann et al., 1997) extends a lens into the principal's role within external accountability and school performance. As school testing and accountability policies intensify each year, so does the debate over external accountability mandates and school performance.

Chapter Two was divided into six sections and included a brief description of NCLB, AZLearns and four themes that were drawn from the controversial bank of literature. These themes attempt to synthesize the research of schools embarking on the journey of school improvement and navigating the external demands place upon them. The first section detailed the challenges of how sanctions and rewards attempt to motivate schools staffs to achieve higher test scores. The second section outlined how the pressure placed on schools to succeed affects test scores, staff morale and student success. The third section highlighted the relationship between assessment, standards, collaboration and professional development. The fourth section described the impact internal accountability plays in school improvement and emphasized that internal accountability within the school is relative to the principal's philosophy toward leadership.

Chapter Three provided the methodological framework for the study. This chapter explains and justifies the use of qualitative research methods used in this study. The procedures are outlined including the selection of the participants. Ten principals make up the population for this dissertation. The ten principals are leaders of elementary schools in two Arizona school districts. Allie, Annabel and Aaron were selected because they work at a school that was labeled Excelling or

Highly Performing. Brian, Bianca, Bertha and Bill are principals that work at schools labeled Performing Plus and Performing. The final three, Cara, Chris and Cathy, work in schools that have or had the label of Underperforming or Failing. Finally, Chapter Three explained how the interviews would be conducted, transcribed, analyzed and organized. The first three chapters established the foundation of my dissertation, which is a study about the relationship between the AZLearns label and the daily routines of ten Arizona elementary school principals.

Chapters Four provided the findings of the research. Chapter Four was developed from the results of the analysis of the interviews. The principal stories were retold within the commonalities that emerged during my analysis. Three commonalities surfaced across the told stories and the moments shared by each principal were reconstructed in relationship to the themes of Accountability, Achievement and Attitude. The moments weaved together to justify the three themes also worked out to be responses to my three research questions.

 The perspectives on who principals felt accountable to and what they felt accountable for were not directly related to the label but to the multiple contexts that play a role in their daily routine. The stories of Achievement resulted from the variety of stories that discussed the improvement of student achievement. Some stories were based on data and how data is a means to perpetuate the capitalistic nature of publishing companies or test scores to inform decisions at the school site. Other stories surrounded the notion that better teachers and quality instruction support increased student achievement and then some principals took

responsibility for student achievement and related it to their plans and ideologies. The final thread that developed as a commonality across the interviews was Attitude. Attitudes were not constant and were related to the era of high stakes testing, boundaries and conflicts within the location of the school and the principals' childhood experiences.

Finally, Chapter Five will conclude this study by summarizing the findings and results. I will be using the conceptual framework borrowed from Newman, King and Rigdon (1997) intertwined with the three themes of my study to summarize my findings and draw conclusions. I hope that this will raise questions that may lead to multivocal dialogues or debates about labeling schools under the current reform agendas and be able to inform future reform agendas from the perspectives of school principals.

Summary of Findings and Conclusions

External school accountability systems alone are unlikely to increase student achievement (Newmann et al., 1997). The stories presented in my study support the notion that a variety of factors affect student achievement. In order to summarize the findings and provide conclusions for this study I will use my conceptual framework of Organizational Capacity introduced in Chapter One. Newman et al. (1997) coined the term Organizational Capacity when studying the relationship between external accountability and school performance. Organizational Capacity is defined as the ability to sustain change from within the organization. Organizational Capacity is "based on the human, technical, and social resources of a school organized into a collective enterprise" (Newmann et

al., 1997, p. 41). Newmann et al. (1997) found that increased school performance was not a result of external accountability alone. Three main problems were found with the proposition that strong external accountability will enhance a school performance. First, there was the problem of implementing a comprehensive external accountability policy across the country. States varied in how they scripted mandates and viewed accountability. Second, the school's Organizational Capacity may or may not be affected by external accountability measures. The third is that strong internal accountability can occur within a school community with total disregard or need for outside forces. This internal accountability is the first step to understanding and harnessing Organizational Capacity. The concept of Organizational Capacity provided an opportunity to look at the various factors that impact school performance as measured by external accountability from the perspective of the principals. Listening to the variety of resources applied by the principals, including technical, social and human, provided the findings in response to the following three research questions.

1. What effects do external accountability measures have on the development of the Organizational Capacity of a school?

2. How do Arizona school principals negotiate the assigned label in their everyday professional practice?

3. What are Arizona principals' views toward the state accountability process?

I will use the questions intertwined with the conceptual framework of Organizational Capacity as outlined by Newmann et al. to draw the conclusions for this study. The following is an analysis of the three threads of Accountability, Achievement and Attitude as they pertain to current theory and relate to practice. My research provides an extension to the 1997 study by Newman and Associates as it is from the perspective of the principal. My first question inquires into the effects of external accountability on the development of the Organizational Capacity of the school. The principals addressed external accountability in different forms. Some addressed accountability as a push from federal or local arenas and then the force from the community surrounding the school. This variation in the stories about Accountability is reinforced by Newman et al. (1997). They found that there are controversies about the implementation of standards and rules for improving or reforming educational school systems. The principals' stories identified accountability as a push from a variety of layers in education that may be used as a technical, social or human resource when understood in relationship to the school's needs.

The second research question seeks information from the perspective of the principal to tell us about their school's label in relationship to their temporal and spatial locations. Newman et al. (1997) refers to this contextualized position between the school and external accountability as Organizational Capacity. This is where the formation of the "effective collective enterprise" lives in constant transformation (p. 5). The stories that make up the second thread of Achievement come together to outline what may be considered a result of the human, technical

and social resources within a school. The stories reinforce the collective enterprise as the principals share how they negotiate the assigned label into their daily practice to impact some form of achievement.

The final question of my study delves into how principals view the state's accountability system. External accountability can undermine a school's Organizational Capacity if the external accountability "promulgates standards and incentives hostile to a school's internal accountability system" (Newmann et al., 1997, p. 6). After researching the effects of external accountability in question one and then the use of resources in question two, the third represents the attitudes of the principals. The third thread in Chapter Four, Attitude, is based on the lifelong experiences of each principal as they chose what was relevant to share with me and my digital recorder. Many principals made a nostalgic return to their childhood which expanded my analysis of their attitudes and identities beyond the boundaries of their school's community. Internal accountability is affected by the time, space and identity of the principal in relationship to the external accountability efforts.

The labeling process in Arizona is used as a marker for achievement. The marker is a moving target as it changes based on the annual assessment. Learning and teaching are a result of day to day, moment to moment experience but the accountability system has evolved it into a political and economic agenda to maintain the status quo (Anyon, 1997; Glass, 2008). Some of the stories of my study perpetuate the status quo and follow the notion that accountability as it is defined by the federal and state government is good for education but there are

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also stories or moments that deviate and talk out against the system. This paper will not make any side of the accountability game better nor will this paper provide one definition or result. I hope it will bring about questions about accountability and the role of principals in teaching and learning in the 21st century.

The TAG: Accountability. Accountability is a force of implementation that hopes to lead to greater achievement. The implementation of standards, high stakes testing, highly qualified teachers and the collection of test scores are used to determine the school's performance. Top-down mandates have not produced the dramatic changes since the first wave of reform of the 1980s (Tyack and Cuban, 1995). A recent article in *Education Week* also commented on the failure of over 80% of schools in the United States today (McNeil, 2011). This leads to questions about what schools are being measured on, who decides what is attainable and who benefits from the success or failure of schools? These questions were posed in the early 1840s when citizens were asked to pay taxes for schools (Kaestle, 1983). The relationship between politics and education began at the inception of schools and continues today. Politics coexist within the multiple layers embedded in the historical, economical, and cultural factors of its time. Education shifts occur within those layers and should not be interpreted without the other. Accountability is the layer of the study that includes the political atmosphere within education. External accountability is a push from the federal, state and district offices onto a school's climate and culture.

Newman et al. (1997) found that external agents trying to impose change upon a school may raise many complex issues in relationship to performance, standards and consequences. After their study, they found that even when external accountability was established and followed, external accountability alone could not influence a school without a strong Organizational Capacity. My research supports the fact that strong external agents, including tagging the school with a label, alone cannot improve a school's academic performance. While some principals feel like the labels defined by the federal and state mandates provide them with the authority or power to push their staff, others felt accountability was political or a commodity. Annabel's perspective after her school dropped from Excelling to Highly Performing was a glitch in the system not her school or students. Chris felt like a "puppet of the business world" when it came to accountability. Molnar (2005) claims that the call for action by a *Nation at Risk* (1983) established that schools were failing the economy and needed the support of corporations to improve achievement. "Along with business partners, who took the opportunity to exploit for their self-interested purposes the pressure on schools to show that they were good 'partners' with corporate America" (Molnar, 2005, p. 10). Both Chris and Annabel did not see that accountability as an external force had a direct impact on their school's performance.

This research supports current theory in that external accountability has the potential to support the improvement of a school's achievement; however external accountability alone cannot affect change within a school campus. After analyzing the stories of accountability from the perspectives of the principals,

they describe accountability as an outside force pushing their ideologies and solutions onto the school. The principals in this dissertation study shared a variety of points about accountability that could be used to ask further questions about how accountability is implemented today and how it could be transformed to be used as a platform of support to ensure that schools are sites of transformation for equal educational opportunities, not only in a cultural or economic sense but also in a technological sense.

TAG Team: Achievement. Achievement is not a one person, one mandate or one test outcome. Newmann et al. (1997) found that if a school's Organizational Capacity was strong, then the school's performance was better even when the implementation of external accountability was low or poor. The collective enterprise rested upon a shared commitment and collaboration among the staff to achieve a clear purpose for student achievement. The Organizational Capacity of the school was measured by the teacher knowledge and skill, school autonomy to act and shared commitment and collaboration toward the school goal. These three dimensions working in tandem can facilitate the achievement of a school in meeting their purpose for student learning. My research supports the notion that achievement is a combination of multiple factors, contexts and experiences.

The second thread of Chapter Four is Achievement and expands on how achievement is lived by each principal on each campus of their Arizona school. The second research question was "How do Arizona school principals negotiate the assigned label in their everyday professional practice?" Similar to Newmann

and associates' description of Organization Capacity, external accountability may or may not be related to the achievement of the school's goal but the Organizational Capacity is directly related to the schools' achievement. The stories about how the requirements of external agents were developed in the layers of the Achievement thread in Chapter Four. The layers related to how external agents or accountability systems measured achievement and included: data, teacher knowledge and skills and plans of action. As the principals work towards Organizational Capacity, many stories describe parts of Organizational Capacity. Cara using Galileo as a technical resource and Bianca's purchase of the services of Nicole, the consultant, are examples of using resources to support and build a system for Organizational Capacity. While schools are striving to achieve, the principals are looking to improve their Organizational Capacity by seeking external and internal technical, social and human resources that could support them in improving school performance. Bill and Allie focus on achievement as a result of effective teachers or supporting the professional knowledge of the teaching staff. Cathy, Annabel, Aaron, and Brian find themselves in a constant shift of the rules, tests and labels. Their target for achievement is constantly moving so they refer to their plan of action. Their plan of action is based on the efforts to create a shared commitment and collaboration (Neumann et al., 1997). Like Newmann et al. defines Organizational Capacity in addressing school performance, Hagel et al. (2010) addresses the "choices each of us makes about the environments we participate in and the practices and behaviors we chose to pursue once we're there will make a crucial difference in what we will experience

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and the extent to which we can shape these experiences or simply let random experiences shape us" (p. 99). The principals' stories build layers of achievement rather than achievement as an end point. The layers incorporated the data driven process, the teachers' knowledge and skills and a plan of action. Achievement is not a goal or an end point to the administrators in this study but an ever-changing process that is embedded within the preparedness, practice and environment.

Taggers: Attitudes. Newman and associates (1997) found that external accountability can challenge a school's Organizational Capacity if the external accountability does not match the beliefs within the internal accountability system. After researching the effects of external accountability in question one and then the use of resources in question two, the third question expanded from external accountability to the attitudes of the principals by asking, "What are Arizona principals' views toward the state accountability process?" Many recalled schooling or family experiences from their childhood which contextualized their attitudes across many temporal and spatial locations that affect where they are today. Internal accountability is affected by the time, space and identity of the principal as well as the external accountability efforts. The third thread in Chapter Four, Attitude, is based on the lifelong experiences of each principal as they chose what was relevant to share with me and my digital recorder. In conclusion, I labeled this section *Taggers* because each principal's view toward accountability is personal and informs how the principals redefine the tag placed on their school. Their attitudes represent an active role in defining their school's performance.

Internal accountability is generated by the participation of the staff in defining the standards and goals for the school (Newman et al., 1997). These cohesive internal workings can work as much more than building blocks for Organization Capacity. Internal capacity can be a result or product of Organizational Capacity. Since this study only focused on the stories of principals and not the collection of evidence as it relates to Organizational Capacity of a school or its affect on internal accountability, I looked at what the principals had to say about their own position as a result or product of labels being assigned to schools.

The stories that evolved around the attitudes of principals were about how the internal accountability within each principal was built, changed and lived in constant transition. The inner workings of each principal evolved from way back in the day when they splashed in the beach along the Pacific Coast Highway, played baseball on the community team, or traveled the world as a "military brat." Others referred to the way they worked their way up from student, to teacher to district office within the school district they attended. Some made comments of what they saw growing up and what they did not see, like minority students. While these may seem far from the time and space that make up the school they work in, each is pertinent to the building blocks that lead to the internal accountability that drives each principal to deal with their unique situations. The self that is presented by each principal impacts their experience as a principal living under an assigned label in relationship to the era they grew up in. Each of the principals I interviewed did not grow up in an era of high stakes testing and so

their memories of school were positive and did not refer to the school's label or test scores to determine their opportunity for learning as children in the American school system. As a matter of fact most spoke about their families' values of education and their social economic status. I noticed that principals did not talk about student achievement in reference to test scores or high stakes testing until later in their life as classroom teachers. Most described themselves as effective teachers. For example, Bianca mentioned she wanted to become a principal to provide positive academic experiences to more students than the twenty-four she taught in her last class as a teacher. Then when stories were told about being a principal, attitudes changed because the time was different, not just for each principal in their current role but for the amount of time they have been a principal as well. Chris had over twenty years of experience as a principal and Bianca was working in her second year as a principal. This affected their attitudes toward the changes and the labels. The school site they worked at also affected their attitudes and was included in their stories. Boundaries were found as their world collided with the one they currently work in. For example, Annabel mentioned that, "I had to let them in" when she referenced to the flow of Hispanic students into her school based on budgetary constraints or Allie, "I think it's gone section 8" talking about a poor community and describing it as "drug infested". These examples are not meant to judge or put down the principals in any way but to describe the attitudes that are constantly changing regardless of where one works or lives. Each of the principals talks about their commitment to their students on a daily basis and the decision they make in response to the rules of

accountability. Accountability, Achievement and Attitudes are in constant

struggle and transition as principals strive to address the educational needs of the

contemporary students.

Recommendations

The monitoring and adjusting principals participate in when negotiating

the impact the label has on their school, serves as a commitment that may lead to

a higher consensus and skill development as they work toward building an

internal system to support the school's performance. The boundaries that define

the time and space that each principal works on as they develop and transform

their internal capacity is referred to by Hagel et al. (2010) as a collaboration

curve. Constant collaboration and dynamic interactions (Fischman, 2001) can lead

to what Hagel and associates (2001) call 'Creation Spaces'. "Creation Spaces

differ in at least two ways from the "learning organization" approaches pioneered

a couple decades ago. First they emerge as ecosystems across institutions rather

than within a single institution, so they reach a more diverse set of participants.

Second, they are not primarily focused on learning-their goal is to drive

performance improvements and learning occurs as a by-product of their efforts"

(Hagel et al., 2010, p.19). The analysis of the stories shared in my research aligns

to the notion of Creation Spaces and reinforces Newmann and associates' (1997)

notion that internal accountability is a result or product of Organizational

Capacity. This leads to the following recommendations for School

Administrators:

1. Analyze how external accountability measures can provide access to resources that will address the multiple contexts that can affect the school's performance.

2. Establish Creation Spaces where "human, technical and social resources are organized into effective collective enterprises" (Hagel et al., 2010; Newmann et al., 1997).

3. Deconstruct and reconstruct the school's label in a manner that informs a principal's attitudes about the school's performance in relationship to the historical, cultural, political and economic factors that make up the school.

Labels may serve as a mechanism for sorting schools but these stories demonstrate that there is much more to the label than one to two words. The interpretations are endless but accountability of schools from external sources remains a reality. How these external agents impact the school and student learning can be proven to be unsuccessful by some principals and successful by other principals. However, their decision is based on much more than the formula used by the state to assign the labels. The principals' attitudes are shaped by their evolving and lived experiences embedded in context of their daily lives. The access principals have had to learning and struggles, how the resources are applied to attract multiple opportunities for success and what a school achieves daily differs based on the temporal and spatial location of the moment. According to the principals in this study the school is not tagged by one label but lives in a

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constant state of tagging and retagging based on the needs of their daily routine.

Therefore the following recommendations are suggested for future research:

1. Investigate the perspective of teachers, students, parents or politicians on external accountability measures pushed on schools.

2. Analyze how principals establish and sustain Organizational Capacity.

3. Identify obstacles or avenues for implementing Organizational Capacity.

4. Evaluate the impact of Organizational Capacity to develop Creation Spaces.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

Who would want to send their child to an Underperforming or Failing school as labeled by the state? Arizona schools are categorized by one of six labels to persuade and inform the public about a school's performance in comparison to another. Labels place schools in competition and reinforce laws that support vouchers and charter school initiatives. The labeling process and the opportunities allowed for school choice simulate the opportunity for equality in education. A parent's distrust about a school without a label may be related to Fischman's (2001) example of scholars who are "as suspicious as Mark Twain, who thought it was impossible to understand a picture without its label, adding that there are always paradoxes and alternative stories constrained to any single image. Twain elaborated on this issue by pointing out that, 'a good legible label is usually worth, for information, a ton of significant attitude and expression in a historical picture" (p. 28). While it is the label that began this process of inquiry,

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it is the "ton of significant attitude and expression in the historical picture" from the perspective of ten principals.

The schools of the principals interviewed for this study have been tagged with a label since 2002. For many the label has changed over the past nine years but the school's profile of success is made up by so much more than the labels that have tagged their school. The principals have a belief in their schools because they believe in themselves. Each principal chooses to work at their school site and while their attitudes have shifted throughout the years, so has their take on accountability and achievement as each are not static and cannot be captured on an 8' by 5' sign or banner. A school's achievement, success, celebrations and/or areas of need warrant a multivocal, transformative arena where the voices of principals are acknowledged. The principals' stories could have gone on for chapters and this research study only presents those of ten principals working toward providing multiple opportunities that will allow for each of their unique students to acquire an equal educational opportunity. While the label may be used as a political ploy, work in partnership with businesses, based upon formulaic measures and claim to represent the academic status of a school, there is so much to the story that the label is failing to tell. The missing pieces of the label from the principals' perspective is a relevant contribution to current theory on school reform, as it relates to practice of leading a school and any implications for future research about principals and school performance.

Accountability may be political but it is also personal to me and the principals in this dissertation. This dissertation is personal to me as a principal and

provides hope that there is a space beyond the label to ensure that school performance continues to meet the needs of the unique communities that make up each school. Using Organization Capacity intertwined with the stories of the ten principals provides an alternative vantage point on how categorizing schools via a label affects the inner workings of the school from the perspective of the principal. The assigned label may initially affect how a principal feels about their school's performance but this research moves beyond the label and accounts for the multiple contexts that overlap and shift within the daily lives of the principals. The political, educational and personal realms are intrinsically interlinked throughout this dissertation, demonstrating that principals do not rely on the judgments from external agents. The principals in this study do not see their label as a representation of their daily interactions with the students who are tagged as Failing, Performing or Excelling. Their experiences are shared in this paper within the themes of Accountability, Achievement and Attitude which make up the "tons of knowledge" that may not be captured within a couple of words on a label. I hope that this dissertation study can provoke questions by multiple stakeholders including parents, principals, researchers, politicians, media and community members. Once the stakeholders involved shift what the image of the label represents, then schools may counteract the way our education system is judged and criticized to maintain the status quo.

The process of tagging schools is based on changing rules that set up a game where children's schools are labeled as winners or losers each year. Reflecting on the stories within this dissertation, the system of education is deeply

flawed and penalizes students who are poor, minority, or English learners but what happens with the tag is not defined by the state alone. The principals of my study can be referred to as taggers that initiate a process that accounts for the multiple contexts and factors that make up a school's performance or label. Like taggers, with a can of spray paint, take control of what their message is to the public, the principals in my study have much to say about what label tags their school and take ownership of what that label will represent to their community and stakeholders. Schools are at risk of being sold off to the private sector (Molnar, 2005) whether it be through the allocation of a Failing label to drive parents to charter schools or curriculum that is scripted for the mainstream students or the testing industry monopolized by one to two publishing companies.

Rather than the business world and education claiming to serve as partners to convert education into a market commodity pushing the ideology of a single institution, I would like to propose a shift toward a democratic ideal by looking at the internal resources a principal can use to work collectively and serendipitously, like an ecosystem, accountable for their achievements and attitudes. The system is flawed and while this dissertation may not be able to recreate a system that is pro-child and progressive to meet the unique contexts that make up each school site, I do hope that this study will provide an opportunity where principals take agency and ownership of what label tags their school and the message that is disseminated to their communities. Principals can adhere to external accountability and provide equal educational opportunities to their students within their school that does not promote a gamed system of winners or losers but one

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that focuses on meaningful, useful and quality learning experiences that are relevant to the communities that make up each school. There is a place to be a principal and this place should be included to inform future research or reform agendas. In the meantime, principals can take ownership and "retag" their school to represent the safe-learning environment that focuses on providing equitable learning opportunities within the boundaries of their school and community.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview 1

Introductions

Tell me the story of what lead you here today.

Tell me about your earliest experiences in school.

What was your family's role in your education?

Tell me about your family's values.

Explain to me your community growing up.

How was education viewed by your community?

What were the demographics in your school/ neighborhood growing up? (SES/race)

How did you decide a profession in education?

What is your position at the school?

How did you decided to work in your current position at your current school?

Would you tell me the story of how you became a principal?

What were some of the things that led you to become a school principal? Have these things stayed consistent throughout your principalship?

How long have you been a school principal and in your current position?

What are some of the successes you have experienced as a principal? How are these measured?

Interview 2

Please tell me a little bit about your school – the students you serve, the demographics of the students and teachers, what might make your school unique.

Walk me through a day in life of your work as an educational leader at your school.

What are your thoughts on external accountability or high stakes testing? Do you think your thoughts are similar to your peers?

How do AZLearns and NCLB affect your life as a principal?

How was the school culture affected because of the label assigned to your school? Is it what you expected?

Were school-wide goals created because of the label assigned to your school? In what areas did they focus?

Do you believe that the label motivated teachers to perform or work harder? How?

How do you feel about bonuses or stipends that are tied to teacher and school performance?

Was your motivation affected by the label? Please explain. Was the motivation any different from other labels you received?

How did the school staff deal with the pressure of the assigned label? What things did they do or say?

How did you handle the pressure of the assigned label?

How did it impact you personally and what did you do to support yourself?

Did your community feel the pressure that the school felt?

Did resources and programs change throughout the journey?

Was a school improvement plan put into place? What were some of the changes that occurred because of the plan? Did it work?

Do you think your staff ever felt that they were going through the "change" process due to the label?

As you reflect on the implementation of AZLearns and in particular, on school labeling practices, how do you think labeling affects the quality of education available to the students your school serves?

How did external accountability affect the professional development on your campus? Has it consistent or has it changed due to your recent label?

How did external accountability affect your professional development? What were some key areas of focus for you? Why?

How do you think labels affect teachers' ability to teach?

How does school labeling affect a principal's ability to lead? Would a different label affect your ability to lead differently?

Any other ideas you would like to share?

Interview3

How do you balance the pressures of work with that of your personal life?

Is there anything you borrow from your personal life to help with your career as a principal?

How would you describe the struggles or tensions you negotiated or worked around?

Did you address any of the struggles or tensions? How? What happened as a result?

Would you do anything different? What? How?

How would you describe your position in educations today?

What would you change? How would you change that?

Could you describe the relationship between school labels and your position today?

Based on the previous interview sessions, is there anything you need to add or would like to reflect on?

APPENDIX B

PRINCIPAL CONSENT LETTER

CONSENT FORM

Tagged: Arizona Principals Working Under a Label

December 13, 2010

Dear   _____:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Lynn Davey, Clinical Associate Professor in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to investigate how school leaders negotiate the accountability labels distributed to schools as a result of AZ Learns. Many reactions occur at the school level because of this external accountability and school leaders play an essential role in the direction it takes. This research should be valuable for future administrators to use as a resource in plotting out the changes they will undertake due to possible strict accountability measures

I am inviting your participation, which will involve you to join in on a small scale pilot study of principals designed to elicit your perspective on school labeling practices under AZ Learns. A purposeful selection of 10 principals representing a wide range of years of administration experience as well as school demographics will be interviewed. This study is intended to further our knowledge of school labeling practices and how they affect education leaders and their schools. If you say YES, then your participation will last for approximately 90-120 minutes at your school site. You will be asked to answer a list of predetermined questions related to how the school label may impact changes in staff motivation and the organizational capacity within the school. Approximately 10 principals from the Phoenix area will be participating in this study.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty.

Although there may be no direct benefits to you, the possible benefits of your participation in the research are that future educators and educational researchers will have a greater understanding of how labels affect schools and school principals. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. The results of this research study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications, but the researchers will not identify you. In order to maintain confidentiality of your records, your name will be substituted with a pseudonym in the text.

The interviews will be recorded digitally and submitted to a transcription service to be transcribed. The digital file will be kept in a confidential folder available only to the researcher. The interview will be erased upon receipt of an accurate transcript. A copy will be made available to the interviewee upon written request. The only person with access to the transcript will be the researcher. The interview will not be recorded without your permission. Please let me know if you do not want the interview to be taped; you also can change our mid after the interview starts, just let me know.

Any questions you have concerning this study or your participation in the study, before or after your consent, will be answered by David McNeil at (602) 525-6876 or Dr. Lynn Davey at 480-965-3267 or Lynn.Davey@asu.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk; you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at 480-965 6788. This form explains the nature, demands, benefits and any risk of the project. By signing this form you agree knowingly to assume any risks involved. Remember, your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefit. In signing this consent form, you are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies. A copy of this consent form will be given (offered) to you.

Your signature below indicates that you consent to participate in the above study.

_____   _____ _____

Participant's Signature   Printed Name   Date

APPENDIX C

IRB APPROVAL LETTER
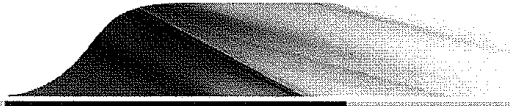
Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

To:	Lynn Davey
	EDUC - HIR
From:	Mark Roosa, Chair
	Soc Beh IRB
Date:	12/15/2010
Committee Action:	**Exemption Granted**
IRB Action Date:	12/15/2010
IRB Protocol #:	1012005809
Study Title:	Tagged: Arizona Principals Working Under a Label

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2) .

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.