

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP THROUGH THE LENS OF CHAOS

by

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April 2011

DEDICATION

I dedicate this body of work to my parents, Lt. Col. Austin “Blu” Middleton and Mrs. Suzanne Juvenal Middleton. Attaining an education was a non-negotiable in our household. My parents, both deceased, can be proud of their four children who heard the message clearly, and who have attained meaningful careers in healthcare, engineering and education. My parents were lifelong learners and avid readers. Their high expectations, sometimes conveyed in uncomfortable conversations, at least for we four siblings, resulted in all of us becoming lifelong learners with always a book nearby. The gift of a life worth living is something we are responsible for creating, nurturing, and challenging ourselves with, not something we expect to fall in our laps. Thanks Mom and Dad for teaching me this lesson. I also dedicate my dissertation, along with my parents’ dream, to my own five wonderful children whom I hope will continue the legacy of their grandparents and father in recognizing the importance of education and lifelong learning.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	1
Introduction.....	1
Theoretical Lens: Chaos Theory.....	2
Assumptions.....	5
Statement of the Problem.....	5
The Purpose of this Study.....	13
Research Questions.....	14
Significance of this Study.....	15
Limitations and Delimitations.....	17
Summary.....	18
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	20
Chaos and Complexity in the Business World and Social Sciences.....	20
Systems Theory.....	23
Chaos in Business.....	23
Implications for Superintendents as Instructional Leaders.....	30
Implications and Applications of Chaos Theory for Instructional Leadership.....	32
Stakeholders and Strategies for School Reform Amidst Chaos.....	39
Students.....	40
Board of Trustees.....	41
Parents and Community.....	43
Principals.....	45
Teachers.....	47
Summary.....	49
3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	51
Introduction.....	51
Rationale.....	51
Researcher’s Entry, Role, and Ethics.....	56
Phenomenological Study Method, Rationale, and Design.....	59
Sampling.....	62
Site Selection.....	65
Data Collection.....	65
Data Management.....	67
Data Analysis Strategy.....	69
Trustworthiness.....	73

TABLE OF CONTENTS – CONTINUED

Replication	75
Pilot Phenomenological Study	76
4. THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY	77
Introduction	77
Pilot Study	80
Pilot Study Participants	80
Superintendent Pilot 1 – Richard	80
Superintendent Pilot 2 – Charles	81
Superintendent Pilot 3 – Taylor	81
Participants and Evidence of Emergent Themes	82
Overview of Emergent Themes	82
Participants	84
Superintendent 1 – Michael	84
Superintendent 2 – Thomas	88
Superintendent 3 – Susan	92
Superintendent 4 – Joseph	94
Superintendent 5 – William	97
Superintendent 6 – Peg	100
Superintendent 7 – Robert	102
Superintendent 8 – John	105
Superintendent 9 – Maria	108
Superintendent 10 – James	110
Superintendent 11 – Martha	113
Answering the Research Questions	116
Research Question One	116
Emergent Theme One: Purpose	118
Emergent Theme Two: Accountability	119
Emergent Theme Three: Stakeholders’ Response	120
Research Question Two	122
Emergent Theme Four: Re-organization	122
Research Question Two (A)	125
Emergent Theme Five: Transformational Leadership	125
Summary	126
5. ANALYSIS AND REFLECTION	128
Introduction	128
Research Questions	129
Previous Research on Chaos Theory	129
The Phenomenological Study Summary	133

TABLE OF CONTENTS - CONTINUED

Implications.....	138
Future Research	143
Conclusion	145
REFERENCES CITED.....	148
APPENDICES	156
APPENDIX A: Participant Data Sheet.....	157
APPENDIX B: Corresponding Interview Questions to Research Questions ...	159
APPENDIX C: Interview Questions and Probes.....	162
APPENDIX D: Informed Consent Form.....	163
APPENDIX E: Pilot Study	166
APPENDIX F: 1958-59 District Report	178
APPENDIX G: Questions and Themes	180
APPENDIX H: Laurel Outlook Guest Editorial.....	182

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Patterns of Function	27
2. Transformational Leadership with Chaos Theory Response & Reasoning	36
3. The Leadership for Learning Framework	38
4. Four Data Management and Timeline	71

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Chaos theory cycle.....	7
2. Chaos theory cycle in American Express.....	8
3. Chaos theory cycle in K-12 education.....	9
4. Chaos theory cycle in K-12 education.....	136
5. Chaos theory cycle in participants' districts.....	144

ABSTRACT

Chaos theory espouses that any system will grow and develop only when it recognizes the need to change and develop. Whether in nature or a human related system, such as an educational system, a relatively small change in a variable can create a chaotic state demanding the need for further, deeper change. In this era of accountability in the public school sector, there is evidence of transformational leadership by some superintendents who embrace the idea of a clear and focused mission, distributed leadership, and fostering change through data-based decision making resulting in improved student achievement. This phenomenological study reviewed research on chaos theory and transformational leadership, gathered data from 11 superintendents, and through interviews and artifact examination discovered five emergent themes in whose districts there was significant growth in student achievement. Superintendents who embrace such actions are shifting from being systems managers to systems change agents. Instructional leadership, once left to teachers, principals, and specialists, is now a role the effective superintendent embraces.

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

After billions of dollars spent on educational reform in the last 15 to 20 years, many involved in the field believe our public educational system is on the brink of systemic change, deep change that is focused on classroom instruction and student achievement (Fullan, Hill & Crevola, 2005). Utilizing the tools and methods of transformational leadership by seeking the values, vision, and input of stakeholders, a new system, with a core belief that all students can learn, is being embraced by more and more districts (Lezotte & McKee, 2006). It is recognized that transformational leadership must start with the superintendent as he or she takes an active and participative role as instructional leader (Schlechty, 2002).

Within any system that is considering change, another theory and set of actions and reactions take root. Chaos theory states when a system in need of re-creation or new growth occurs, it causes a seemingly chaotic sense and set of events, which fosters change. The resistance found during this period of disequilibrium or imbalance comes from a variety of sources who desire equilibrium. Systems analysis reveals that a period of growth and change occurs during disequilibrium, not equilibrium, despite assumed desire for complacency (Wheatley, 1999). Even small, simple changes can lead to large, complex behavior within a system, (Wolfram, 2002). This idea was originally founded by Edward Lorenz who was studying computer based meteorology patterns at MIT. What he labeled as the butterfly effect, resulting from computer generated images that took on the shape of a butterfly, essentially stated that a small change in one part of the world could cause devastating weather patterns elsewhere. Applied to the social sciences, one small

change or decision can have an impact worldwide. The application of chaos theory to management depicts organizations as complex and unpredictable because of the relations among constituents of a system (Gleick, 2008). The Middle Eastern political unrest in countries such as Egypt and Libya and the natural disaster in Japan, all during the spring of 2011, have led to security, economic, and production implications as far away as Laurel, Montana, home of Cenex Refinery (P. Kimmet, personal communication March 19, 2011).

It was the researcher's purpose to holistically examine the concepts behind the assumed disequilibrium (chaos) that may occur in school systems that leads to the transformational superintendent to become highly engaged and deliberate in the role of instructional leader. With educational reform and the accompanying accountability, there may be disequilibrium, conflict, resistance, but most importantly, change in instructional strategies resulting in student achievement (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). In contemplating what could be, this is an exciting time for educators and the deep, systemic changes that are possible.

Theoretical Lens: Chaos Theory

Autopoiesis is a Greek term that refers to the ability of life to create itself (Wheatley, 1999). This process is an organism's capability to create, re-create, and renew itself for growth and change. Wheatley also reports that living systems are a series of processes that are engaged with each other in producing and preserving itself. However, such change and preservation within an individual or system occurs when the organism

recognizes that change is the only way to preserve itself. Further, it is recognized that such change, change needed for preservation, creates new growth, sending an organism or system from a state of equilibrium or balance to a state of disequilibrium or imbalance. Wheatley's insightful observation is one that questions the assumption that a balanced state is a desired state if true renewal occurs during disequilibrium. If everything in nature changes, and that change only occurs when moving from a state of equilibrium to disequilibrium, it would be incorrect to assign favored status to equilibrium. Chaos theory explains these changes as periods of erratic behavior, but over a long period of time appearing as a system functioning in a very predictable manner with slight deviations (Darity, 2008).

From a classical science perspective, it appears that these slight deviations or changes average out over time, and predictions in such a model can be made. Chaos theory is based on the assumption that the world is not in a linear mode but quite sensitive and unpredictable. It is not a simple system in which systems are truly stable or in which 'A' can always predict 'B.' It is a system that will restructure itself through a series of chaotic events that appear random and unrelated, yet over time are obviously distinct and complex patterns made up of relatively simple, inter-related parts that may appear from an unexpected source (Wheatley, 1999).

In the business world, a company may undergo change in order to survive. In 1850, American Express was a delivery express service that provided faster service from the eastern United States to the growing western frontier. Though not a financial institution at the time, its chief customers were banks. With the eventual rail service

crowding out American Express and its stagecoach and horse “expressman” delivery, the company restructured into a long standing financial institution by providing various banking and financial services (American Express, 2008).

Throughout the universe, order exists within disorder and disorder within order. It was believed that disorder was the absence of the natural state of order, seen in the world itself; disorder. Chaos could be an irregularity, or order could be a lucky moment grabbed from natural disorder. The point is that while organizations cling to policies and structures to define a system, a system is really a set of processes. Murphy and Murphy (2002) wrote, “If September 11 made one point crystal clear, it’s that maximizing your knowledge assets is essential to protecting against chaos and uncertainty” (p. 78).

In organizations that recognize a systems approach, the leader is transformational when answers need not flow directly from him or her and an enabling behavior is present that sets egos aside to find the best solutions from somewhere, anywhere within an organization. No longer is there the stifling belief about traditional hierarchy and power. Such leadership is best thought of as a behavior, not a role. Such perspective removes the idea that chaos theory is a mystery and the origin or solutions are unclear when in fact; values create meaning as strange attractors. While systems are composed of parts, there cannot be a deep understanding and resolution of problems or concerns without examination of the whole system (Wheatley, 2006).

The heart of chaos has been revealed with modern computers. The system careens back and forth with cautious unpredictability, never showing up in the same spot twice. This chaotic behavior weaves into a pattern and order emerges on a shape. The shape is “strange attractor,” and what has appeared on the screen is the order inherent in chaos. (Gleick, 1987, p. 75).

Chaos and order have always partnered, but it was not discernable until it was seen with computers. What appeared to be unstructured turbulence was really chaos, the last state before a system appears to enter random behavior only to self-organize into a pattern created by strange attractors with an array of possible new patterns.

Assumptions

The researcher identified five assumptions to be considered in studying the role of the superintendent as the instructional leader in this era of accountability. (1) Within chaos theory, growth occurs due to a period of chaos or disequilibrium within an organization. As described in later chapters, the researcher limited his study to superintendents who served in districts that experienced academic growth. There is acknowledgement that disequilibrium could lead to zero gain or loss in growth. (2) Both transformational leadership and periods of disequilibrium within chaos theory allow for solutions to emerge within an organization rather than just a linear hierarch model. (3) School districts acknowledge that the accountability movement requires academic growth. (4) The American public educational system has been and continues to be in a state of chaos or disequilibrium. (5) The superintendent must assume a facilitative role as instructional leader within a system undergoing chaos.

Statement of the Problem

Transformational leadership within a school district calls for leaders to enable or empower community, staff, students, and trustees to help create a renewed, more meaningful, and engaging learning environment (Reeves, 2008). Permission is given to

these parties to be flexible in the recreation of the system. Likewise, the deliberate actions of the reformer must be considered. Therefore, a natural fit emerged in this phenomenological study exploring the actions of the superintendent, as the instructional leader, as a result of the accountability movement through the lens of the chaos theory and transformational leadership. According to Pourdavood, Cowen & Svec (1999):

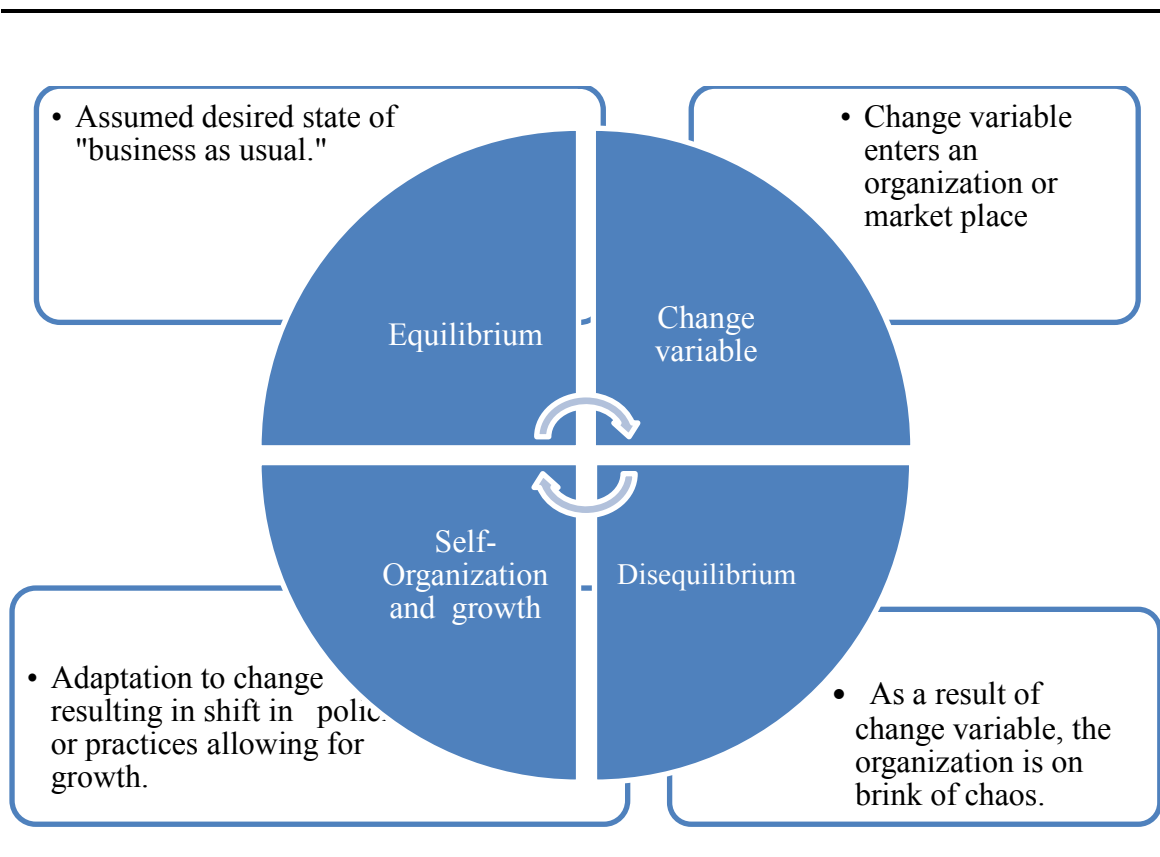
Chaotic situations such as school reform challenges conventional leadership strategies, interrupts stability of the school climate and suggests an uncertain future which perturbs education systems and create conflict because a business as usual mentality reacts to cultural and structural changes. (p. 14)

Wheatley (2006) states that life will always organize into systems of interdependence, but that life will not move to independent or isolated beings or events. Further, our attempts to gain control leads to disorder or disequilibrium. Deep change that is embraced in a system will be a result of people sensing purpose in the organization's mission with ideas that are important to them. Similarly, the superintendent is expected to identify new opportunities through persistent and vigorous scrutiny while expressing the alignment of implementation with a district's mission (Bommer, Rich & Rubin, 2005). Additionally, the success of an educational leader may be determined by his ability to set direction, develop people, and redesign an organization (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

Currently in American public education within the *No Child Left Behind Act* and related expectations, there is a call for accountability and reform with a landscape that is being dotted with alternative choices such as charter schools, home schools and vouchers poised to fill any voids (Guskey, 2007). Viewed through the lens of chaos theory, it is revealed that a system will undergo change, whether it is in the field of business or

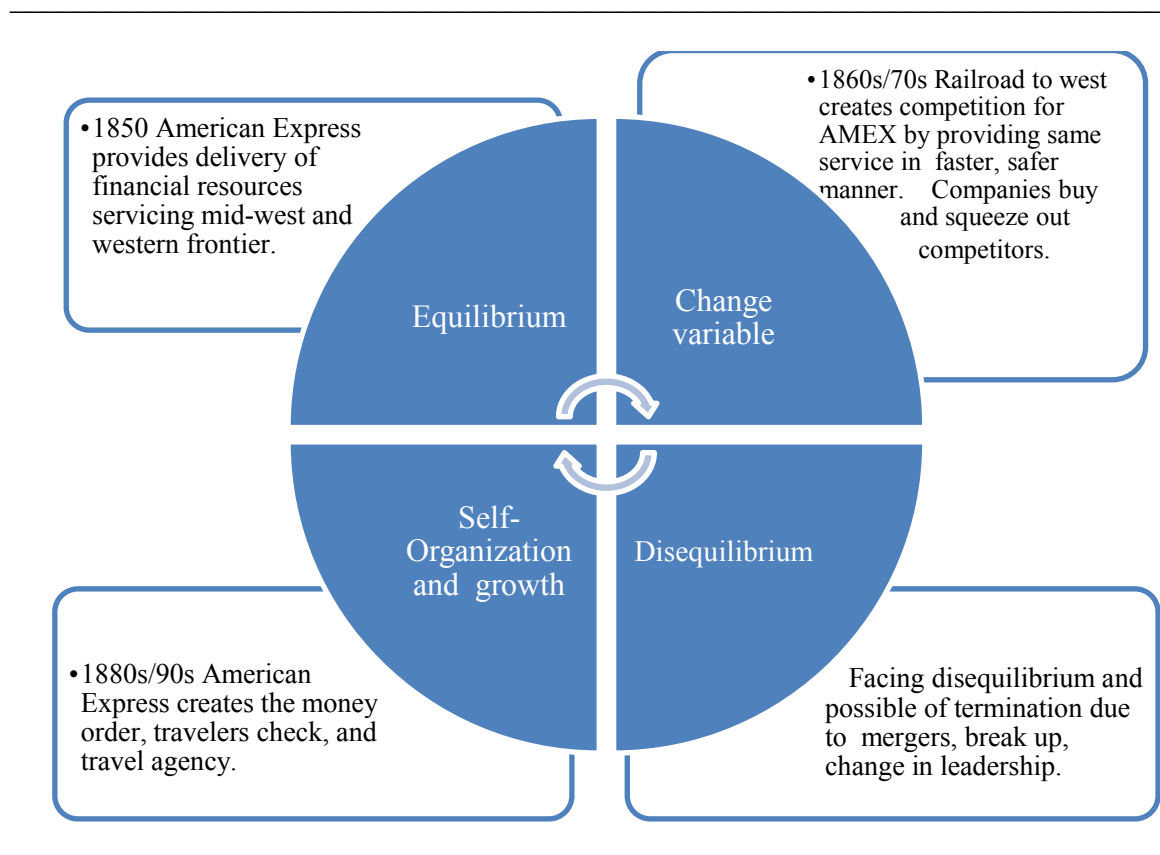
education, and it is at this time of change that growth and renewal will occur under terms that can come from unexpected sources. American Express adapted to the changes in its business in order to survive and public education is now nearing the end of the first decade of nationwide accountability with more changes in store planned in and outside of the system (Fullan, 2010). Figures 1, 2, and 3 examine the chaos theory cycle in a general systems approach, as American Express adapted with change, and the current K-12 public education environment respectively.

Figure 1. Chaos theory cycle.



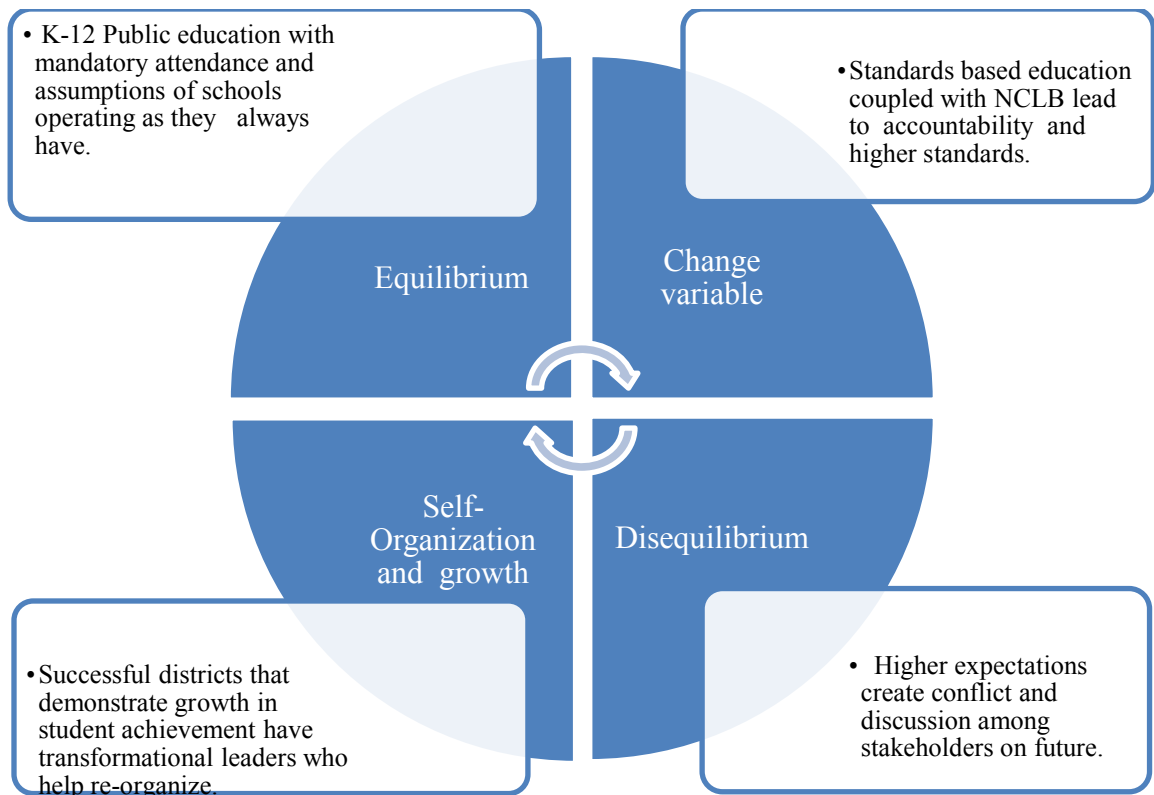
If there is acknowledgement in systems that two-thirds of organizational initiatives fail when implemented in the traditional top-down mode, yet that a clear correlation between participation and productivity in which productivity can increase by as much as 35%, logically there should be acknowledgement that the simple adjustments and tweaks to systems will fail to yield the results truly desired (Wheatley, 2000). When economists consider a society's educational system in economic terms, a change in systems thinking and practice translates to economic prosperity and social cohesion, especially when the three basic elements of literacy, numeracy, and well-being, are addressed (Fullan, 2006).

Figure 2. Chaos theory cycle in American Express.



However within a period of chaos, even when transformational leadership skills are exhibited, there will be resistance in the form of core educator beliefs (Schlechty, 2002). One area of resistance is the belief held by teachers and administrators of whether all students are capable of learning or not. It is one thing to say it, it is quite another to adjust instructional strategies and programs to embody it. A second area of resistance is the belief that transformation of a system occurs through collaborative and collegial work.

Figure 3. Chaos theory cycle in K-12 education.



Deliberations to discern what is negotiable and what is non-negotiable will lead to “weeding the garden” of programs that are incongruent with a school or district’s vision (Reeves, 2006). Finally, there is a challenge to educators’ beliefs of what their role truly is. Are they to be education reformers and transformers or facilitators of raised test scores? While most view these as mutually exclusive, the fact is the answer is ‘yes’ to both questions. When answers to these questions are collaboratively resolved, a system will be able to transform and move through this chaotic state (Schlechty, 2002). It is within the context of the need to change, the difficulty and inevitability of change, and the tools of change that the purpose of this study is framed. Further, Schlechty (2002) wrote:

There are two things I know about the office of superintendent. First, whatever moral authority resides in, or is bestowed upon, the school system, that authority resides in the office of the superintendent. Second, the superintendent can delegate to others nearly anything he or she wants to delegate except the moral authority that resides in the office of superintendent. In the long run, therefore, who the superintendent is, what the superintendent values, and the style of operation supported by the superintendent will be manifest throughout the school system. (p. 71)

Kouzes and Posner cite transformation leadership as present when motivation and morality reach new heights as people, due to their interactions with each other bring out the best in one another. They describe co-workers purposes, “which might have started out as separate but related as in the case of transactional leadership, become fused . . . but transforming leadership ultimately becomes moral in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethics of both the leader and the led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p 34).

Chaos theory recognizes that the slightest shift in any of these tasks within a sensitive system, such as education, can have lasting positive or negative consequences resulting from the butterfly effect (Cutright, 1999). The butterfly effect occurs due to change in small factors which may have a potentially larger effect throughout the system. For example, consider the hiring of a new principal by the superintendent. Schlechty's reflection includes:

Yet it remains the fact that it is the relationship between the superintendent and building principals, more than any other factor, that explains the ability of school districts to ensure that change efforts are sustained beyond the tenure of the initiating principal and that whatever positive effects there are become distributed throughout the system. When that relationship is strong and mutually supportive, good things can happen. When the relationship is fragile or antagonistic, whatever improvements occur in the district will be isolated and temporary. (p. 67)

In spite of this knowledge, especially in the chaotic time of *No Child Left Behind* with greater pressure to perform and realizing the classical leadership style is no longer effective, there is not a bridge between knowledge and practice. In a survey with over 92% of the Wisconsin superintendents, it was reported that the 21 leadership traits identified by Marzano et al. are critical for principals to possess, yet not one superintendent responded that they had an instrument in the interview process to help identify a candidate's possession of those 21 traits, let alone the seven critical deep change leadership qualities (Rammer, 2007). The butterfly effect of hiring a principal will have a lasting impact on the relationship between superintendent and principal and the success (or failure or mediocrity) of the school. Mediocrity or failure will occur if a systematic process that relies more on candidate data rather than personal connections is not implemented (Mac Iver & Farley-Ripple, 2006). The incongruence of the knowing-

doing gap in the hiring practice of a principal leaves a district open to leverage by other groups to make sense of the disorder in a school system, e.g. charter schools, vouchers, and home-school coalitions.

The researcher made the assumption that the expectations of the superintendent simply being a good manager or organizational leader are no longer valid. Marzano and Waters (2009) cite findings “that suggest that when district leaders are carrying out their leadership responsibilities effectively, student achievement across the district is positively affected” (p. 5). However, it is now being acknowledged that superintendent preparation programs have inadequately prepared these leaders with any sort of assessment literacy (Moore, Dexter, Berube & Beck, 2005). Despite a superintendent’s ultimate responsibility for the district’s day-to-day operations, he or she is also responsible for carrying out a board’s overarching mission statement which likely embraces student learning and achievement. While often deferred to principals, it is clear that effective leadership has a direct relationship with student success (Marzano et al., 2005).

Due to past practices, leadership is often confused with authority, but in fact they are very different concepts within the context of transformational leadership. For example, a superintendent may recommend a principal candidate for hire to a school board, and upon such action, the board now authorizes the principal to serve in that capacity. The management of the building is now an expressed duty of the newly hired principal. Embedded within a job description may be the words of carrying out tasks related to curriculum revision and textbook adoption; again, management related duties. Instructional leader status is not automatically assumed by those a principal leads

(Lezotte & McKee, 2006). “The staff, parents, and students choose whether or not to follow the new principal based on their perceptions of this individual and his or her actions. The realization that leadership is delegated from followers leads to examination of what key qualities, in rank order, are most important” (p. 38). Wheatley (2007) added:

If self-organization already exists in organizations – if people are naturally self-organizing – then the challenge for leaders is how to create the conditions that more effectively support this capacity. They do this by attending to what is available in the domains of information, relationships, and identity. What leaders do in self-organizing organizations as their organizations move toward a mode of operating that seems to exclude most traditional activities of planning and control. (p. 40)

The Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the actions taken by district superintendents in response to greater expectations in this era of accountability. With the passage of NCLB, improved student performance for all is expected. This study examined how accountability measures and subsequent changes within districts and schools were addressed by the districts’ instructional leader, the superintendents. Within the context of chaos theory, there can be speculation whether the accountability movement caused disequilibrium in which one of two paths is taken. The polar extremes include superintendents who could become the catalyst for deep change by utilizing transformational leadership to meet the new expectations, or superintendents who choose no response or resort to a reactive mode in which superficial or minimal changes occur all in the hope of re-establishing equilibrium and/or outlasting the mandate. For the former, deciding what to do as the instructional leader, specifically in curriculum development and teacher instruction, involve responsibilities that are shifting from the

building level to the central office as principals and teachers articulate their need for guidance and leadership in standards based education in this current era of accountability (Mac Iver & Farley-Ripple, 2008).

Research Questions

Chaos theory allows for a system to re-group or self-organize, but a system must recognize the need to change. Both transformational leadership and chaos theory allow for solutions and changes to manifest themselves in different ways from different sources. Transformational leadership looks upon chaos as opportunity for further growth, acknowledging that such growth will create disequilibrium (Marzano et al., 2005; Wheatley, 1999).

With reflection upon these concepts, the overarching question of the study asked, how does the superintendent address expectations and accountability measures associated with organizational change and improvement? Two research questions emerged that examined the actions of the superintendent as instructional leader.

(1) How has accountability resulted in disequilibrium and change within school districts?

(2) How does the superintendent address accountability as a catalyst for promoting growth as measured by student achievement?

(2A) Is there evidence of transformational leadership by the superintendent in creating such change?

Significance of this Study

Following Janesick's approach to qualitative research, the first step of the process is asking what the researcher wants to know in this study (1994). Bellamy, Crawford, Marshall, and Coulter (2005), believe that the *No Child Left Behind Act* is the first initiative in K-12 public education that make districts and schools accountable for student achievement. The assumption therefore is that school districts must address this paradigm shift from mandatory attendance and the mental model of what schools were and its purpose of previous generations (Lezotte & McKee, 2006) to today's local, state, national, and international expectations. Glor's (2007) work on organizational adaptation states that sustained and necessary change comes from self-organized emergence from within an organization rather than from a top-down mandate. Transformational leadership in a school district bridges the land masses of accountability and second order change by developing and including a clear and focused mission statement with trustees, keeping stakeholders focused on student achievement, providing meaningful professional development that aligns with district and school purpose, allocating resources to appropriate endeavors, and hiring change agents who embrace transformation, including healthy dissent.

The research conducted was a phenomenological study examining actions of the superintendent as an instructional leader in the era of accountability. Interviews with school district superintendents were conducted to identify emerging themes and changes in their actions as districts' instructional leaders. The selection of the superintendents was based upon improved student performance over a five year period, as measured by state

criterion referenced tests in reading and mathematics. Superintendents who had served in districts for five years during which time test scores improved were considered as candidates for participation in this phenomenological study that examined superintendents' reflection of their change in leadership and actions as the district's instructional leader in this era of accountability.

The findings of this study contribute to the body of knowledge for educational leaders who are implementing first or second order change as a result of disequilibrium, such as accountability, within their districts or schools. The researcher's assumption was that chaos theory recognizes that the American public educational system has been and continues to be in a state of chaos or imbalance. As accountability measures are demanded by a globalized economy and national lawmakers, it is up to practitioners and theorists to utilize the transformational leadership skills to re-create a system that expects and enables all students to learn. If the practitioners and theorists continue to exist under the old system and deny the need for change, chaos will allow another system to overtake this system to find equilibrium in another way. Likewise, top-down, mandated improvement without the opportunity for self-organization can lead to anger and cynicism from the very teachers and administrators with the schools. Reeves (2005) wrote:

But compliance-driven leadership is ultimately limited to the least helpful leadership tool, punishment for bad behavior. I cannot think of any high-performing organization in any field that thrives on merely avoiding punishment. Success, motivation, resilience and personal satisfaction stem not merely from avoiding poor performance, but from doing great things and engaging in a profession in which we can literally change the world. Although state and federal laws require the use of academic standards, our students, communities and

colleagues are better served when leaders make the moral, rather than the legal, case for standards. (para. 3)

Therefore, the superintendent must assume a facilitative role as instructional leadership within a system undergoing chaos. Within this study, chaos theory provided the lens to examine the response and actions of the superintendent as instructional leader as a result of accountability and any subsequent changes, deep or superficial, that accompany such perceptions and actions. Findings from this study will be shared with the educational leadership community to enrich our understanding of transformational leadership in an era of accountability. “Organizations are successful and most likely to sustain that success over time when leaders at all levels serve as teachers of others. Such leaders establish teaching and learning for every as an organizational norm” (Sparks, 2007, p xix.).

Limitations and Delimitations

Public education has been put on the clock. According to the *No Child Left Behind Act*, all students are to be proficient by 2014 in math and reading as measured by each state’s criterion referenced test. A quantitative study could have been proposed with a survey of various interventions and leadership strategies; however it would be difficult to generalize results to other districts with the absence of texture (Yin, 2003). The limitation of this phenomenological portion of this study was the fact it was a qualitative study with just 11 participants. Despite the depth of the holistic analysis, questions could arise as to the generalization and applicability to other districts. However, Eisner (2002) contends that while qualitative studies might not be transferable in truly statistical sense,

they provide an important source “secured through parables, pictures, and precepts” (p. 202). Finally, the effectiveness of transformational leadership during chaotic times in one district may not work in another because of a number of variables indicating, the time for reform is not present, or in other words, context of the situation is crucial yet may be a limitation. “Context plays a key role in deciding whether certain approaches to leadership will be effective or not. Thus what a leader says in one kind of enterprise may not lead to effectiveness in another kind of enterprise. (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 24). The key delimitation of the study was found in the purposeful selection process which included Montana school district superintendents who served in districts in which test scores had increased over a five year period during which the participating superintendent was serving.

Summary

This chapter provided the background for the study, a statement of the problem, and it described the research questions. It further went on to discuss the significance of the study, an explanation of relevant trends and a brief statement of the limitations of this study. With greater expectations of student performance, the accountability has created disequilibrium among school districts as a shift from mandatory attendance to mandatory learning is the norm. Transformational leadership provides superintendents with the skill set to lead districts through this set of chaotic events by facilitating and collaborating with stakeholders instead of managing or providing top-top directives. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the actions of superintendents, along with

pertinent artifacts, who provided such leadership and in whose districts' student achievement was evident.

The following chapters of this work are organized as follows: Chapter 2 presents a review of the related research literature. Chapter 3 details the methodology for the study. Chapter 4 presents the profiles of the participants and emerging themes generated from the data collection. Chapter 5 presents analysis of the study findings in relation to the research questions guiding this study along with discussion and recommendations for future study considerations.

“There is a long way between chaos and creation if you don't say which of these you're going to choose” (McCartney, 2006, track 1).

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

Chaos and Complexity in the Business World and Social Sciences

It has become apparent within the business, political, and social sciences that the traditional hierarchy of leadership is viewed as less effective, if not a hindrance, to the creative and problem solving processes in a complex and global society. Top down processes are considered overly simplistic and outdated when in reality there are hubs of networks within a system which indicate decisions do not flow top down in a linear fashion but rather from innovative individuals or groups within those networks (Murphy & Murphy, 2002; Wheatley, 2006). Such relationships may cross the boundaries of the hierarchy, finding fluid groups coming in and out creating mega-connections continuously. According to research conducted by Lichtenstein, Uhl-Bien, Marion, Seers, Orton and Schreiber (2006), the importance of leadership is not diminished when the leader recognizes his or her new role as leader of a complex system instead of managing a top down traditional organization:

Recognized by interactions among the heterogeneous agents and across agent networks certain interactions in a social network will have a nonlinear influence on future interactions within the network. Focus on how leadership events may occur within and or give rise to emergence nodes in a social network. Complexity leadership theory accepts the juxtaposition of order and apparent chaotic change as an essential characteristics of social environments; in this way a complexity framework for leadership is fully integrated within the social psychology of organizing. Generates new managerial strategies, including the use of tension to create adaptive change. (p. 8)

Despite the acknowledgement that complexity leadership relies on creation and solutions from within the system instead of coming from the top of a hierarchy flow

chart, there continues to be belief in linear cause and effect when in fact our world is subjective due to the many and complex interactions individuals and groups engage in. While some seek simple solutions to complex issues in an attempt to isolate an issue and control the sequence of events, in reality control does not equate to order, especially when creation is often a result of disorder. In a complex and chaotic system, leaders are called upon to provide purpose for their organization rather than strict management which in turns enables those within a system to create their environment and future rather than become a real or perceived victim of their circumstance (Keene, 2000). Kurtz and Snowden (2003) further explored this issue validating the value of the interaction between order and disorder while distinguishing between effectiveness and efficiency. People need to be effective but machinery and structured interactions need to be efficient. Such human effectiveness and structural efficiency, a foundation of transformational leadership, builds capacity and allows for self-organization (Glor, 2007). The research of Bommer et al. (2005) indicates when change implementers engage in transformational leadership there is a reduction in employee cynicism.

In the market place, entrepreneurs are finding that customer loyalty and simple cause and effect may be a phenomenon of the past as markets and technology create complex and highly competitive environments.

Much of the literature in the field suggests that traditional bureaucratic models are unsuited to such turbulent environments and it also suggest that entrepreneurs flourish in complex and turbulent environments. Mason (2006) noted that:

Not only are the product life cycles becoming shorter and less manageable, but customers are becoming increasingly demanding. Increasing complexity and

turbulence appears to be inherent in most non-linear dynamical systems. Those firms that can achieve the transformation into an entrepreneurial organization will ensure that the entrepreneurial processes of autonomy, innovation, calculated risk taking, pro-activeness, and competitive aggression are an integral part of their business. This will increase the chance of their survival and success. (p. 261)

“People in an organization or any kind of system can get through anything as long as they realize they know they are all in it together” (M. Wheatley, personal communication August 17, 2009). Discovering, forming, and embracing purpose and meaning are key change components at both the individual and organizational level. The redesign of an organizational flowchart is not accepted simply because leaders publish it. However, when mission, purpose, and core values are extracted from within the organization real change can occur at the personal and systems level regardless of the organizational flowchart. “Only as we’re engaged together in work that is meaningful do we learn to work through the differences and value them. Change becomes much easier when we focus on creating a meaning for the work that can embrace us all.” (Wheatley, 2006, p. 147).

Wheatley continues this line of reasoning in consideration of our schools.

“Corporate CEO’s report a startling record of failures initiatives up to 75%. How many in education would garner support for a project that was successful only 25 percent of the time?” (2007, p. 101). However, she also states:

To find these solutions, the system needs to connect to more of itself. This means meeting with those we’ve excluded or avoided, those we never imagined could share similar interests. Deep inside a school, we often forget how many others – parents, community employers, public officials – care about what’s going on in the classroom. (p. 106)

Systems Theory

According to Senge (2006) learning organizations are:

Organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together. (p. 3)

The connection of systems theory to chaos theory can be found in the creative tension of systems theory and disequilibrium in chaos theory. Creative tension refers to the gap between vision and reality. Disequilibrium is the disruptive force desiring re-organization. In neither scenario of either creative tension or disequilibrium is stress or anxiety necessarily the desired outcome. In this situation, mental models may be the assumption that the creative tension or disequilibrium is about the impact of change for an individual or loss of familiarity rather than building better learning organizations (Ruff, 2005; Senge, 2008).

Chaos In Business

In today's sluggish economy with an obligation to be fiscally responsible to stockholders, Cenex Harvest States officials from its Minnesota headquarters asked local management officials in Montana to inform the area school district that CHS was protesting 55% of their taxes and would go to court to contest recent property valuation by the state. Despite installing a new plant and expanding their refinery operations, the company cried foul when the tax assessment was received. The refinery used an analysis comparing two other area refineries and their respective tax obligations, size, and revenue

to justify their actions. The school district, which receives forty-five cents of every tax dollar from Cenex, is left to scramble in order to meet its academic responsibilities while being effective and efficient with taxpayer funds (P. Kimmet, personal communication December 11, 2009). The leaders of each business and educational institution, both accountable to stockholders and stakeholders, must justify their actions as they react to this new disequilibrium in their respective and intertwined worlds. Cenex Refinery produces gasoline, diesel, and asphalt and adjusts the quantity of any of those on a daily basis depending on the costs of production and market prices. This constant monitoring of costs allows the company to supply the greatest amount of a product that will meet consumer demand at a price that will exceed their breakeven point and remain competitive in the market place. Similarly, the school district must re-evaluate each dollar spent as the tax burden shifts from the number one employer in the area, Cenex, to the rest of the community.

The previous example is a chaotic moment in short time span in which the community will reorganize and establish priorities with unknown consequences at this time. In a business related longitudinal study conducted by Collins (2001) involved the selection and examination of eleven companies over a 30 year period, companies that grew financially at a greater pace than other companies within the same industry as well as between industries. Though Cenex was not among the 11 selected, leadership during times of change and chaos is referenced in both. One of Collins' first tasks was to determine who these good to great companies would be compared with (2001):

What did the good-to-great companies have in common that distinguished them from the comparison companies? Think of it this way: Suppose you wanted to

study what makes gold medal winners in the Olympic Games. If you only studied the gold medal winners by themselves you'd find that they all had coaches. But if you looked at the athletes that made the Olympic team but never won a medal, you'd find they also had coaches! The key question is, What systematically distinguishes gold medal winners from those who never won a medal? (pp. 7- 8)

Collins cites that the good-to-great companies transformed during a two phase process, build up and breakthrough. Each of the phases included specific concepts and steps that led to success. These include having a leader who are self-effacing and not self-promoting, finding the right people for the right positions, confronting reality while embracing perseverance, simplicity of purpose, removal of bureaucracy when discipline thought is present, and using technology for the benefit of the mission, not for the purpose of technology.

Wheatley expounds on leadership and purpose when writing, "We need leaders to support us as we learn how to live by our values. We need leaders that understand that we are best controlled by concepts that invite our participation, not policies and procedures that curtail our contribution" (2007, p. 131). Wheatley (2007) adds that a leader's role is not to make sure every knows what to do and how to do it but rather ensuring people have clarity about the mission and purpose of the organization.

Organizations that have a defined purpose succeed and are distinguished in two ways because (a) the same outcome is produced under different circumstances; and (b) different outcomes are produced in the same or slightly different environments, (Gharajedaghi, 2006). Similarly, research has discovered three outcomes when examining structure and systems. First, structure influences behavior. Second, structure in human systems is subtle. Three, leverage often comes from new ways of thinking, (Senge, 2008).

People organize in order to gain purpose, identity, and to affirm our identity (Wheatley, 1999).

Coca-Cola exemplifies these concepts as they partnered with the World Wildlife Federation to examine their practices that made an environmental impact beyond a bottling company's four walls. Coke was using three liters of water to produce one liter of cola. Seeing an inevitable water shortage globally as well as examining the deteriorating water conditions outside of its plants, the company decided to partner with WWF to consider their entire watershed system. Dan Vermeer, director of Global Water Initiatives said this of the partnership with Coca-Cola:

The process unleashed a lot of creative energy. But to make it work, your bias should be toward engagement and understanding one another, not to trying to make all your objectives align too quickly. This takes patience. There is really a gulf separating the reality of these two organizations and you need time to appreciate and start to bridge the gulf (Senge, 2008, p. 89)

In Glor's study, there is an assumption that change occurs easier in complex, self-organizing entities than through traditional, linear dimensions. Glor's hypothesis was that self-organization will take on one of three patterns of function: variety, reactivity, or capacity for emergence. Variety is present if diverse points of view from diverse positions have freedom to share and present ideas in a safe environment. Reactivity refers to the combination of the formation of the intent and the actual will to act. It is the sensitivity to change just prior to a cascading of change. Capacity for emergence occurs when people come together to discuss, plan, and implement change. Glor (2007) states variety and reactivity are conditions; whereas capacity for emergence is a process. In her

study, Glor took eight organizational patterns and conducted a study to determine which pattern of function these organizational patterns fall.

Table 1

Patterns of Function

<u>Variety</u>	<u>Reactivity</u>	<u>Capacity for emergence</u>
Large groups	Individual motivation	Capacity to implement
High participation	Organizational culture	Endurance to change
Large idea variability	Support of change agents	

Review of other research supports the premise that dynamic change occurs in an organization when individuals take ownership, when looser managerial constraints are present, and employees become co-creators of emerging and complex systems rather than relying on top-down direction, (Keene, 2000; Smith, 2004). Returning to the Coca-Cola and World Wildlife Federation partnership, Coke exhibited the capacity for emergence that Glor discusses by bringing WWF to the table to find solution to something that was bigger than Coke itself.

Educational leaders can learn from the world of commerce in chaotic and complex periods. Such lessons are described in the ten lessons researched to effectively deal with today's business culture. In studies by Murphy and Murphy (2002), they make no judgments about volatility or chaos, just that it is the reality. Volatility and chaos are opportunities to bring about change, good or bad, for a system. Below are ten key points

from Murphy & Murphy (2002) that leaders should consider as such chaos envelops their system. These measures may address what occurs to many groups who are on the edge of chaos, teetering between the strains of too much organizational stress and exhausting a group's energy supply (Butz, 1997).

Murphy & Murphy (2002) make 10 suggestions in giving guidance to business leaders to deal with volatile and chaotic economic conditions. First, they emphasize that leaders should rush to think rather than rush to act. The ability to see problems from different points of view can be the difference between effective or ineffective change. Second, they recognize the value of partnering with customers. This is a reminder to leaders to build bridges with potential customers, maintain bridges with current customers and not to burn bridges with former customers. Third, they suggest fostering a culture of commitment. Leaders must find the balance between innovation, technology, and customer service based on the core values on which an institution was founded. Fourth, is a suggestion that regarding personnel selection and placement. Putting the right person in the right place, right now involves crucial and strategic placement of staff. Collins calls this getting the right people on the bus, (2001).

Murphy & Murphy embrace the idea of solutions coming from within an organization. Citing this concept as maximizing knowledge assets, they believe leaders must take stock of their knowledge assets, cultivating new and innovative ideas within an organization. Similarly, becoming efficient in operations may result in cutting costs, but not value. In other words, organizations must continually find ways to reduce expenses without sacrificing quality or customer service. Cutting costs is not the only way to out-

position one's competitors. Those organizations that recognize trends and adjust accordingly are in better position to outlast their competition.

Murphy & Murphy also recognize that during chaotic economic times, disequilibrium can create new growth if employees are held to high standards without causing them unnecessary stress. Part of that stress reduction is the ability for business leaders to cut through the noise and distractions that occurs during times of change, and perhaps poor communication. When leaders understand the interference that can occur in communication, they can better state the mission or objectives for employees to embrace. Finally, there is the idea of focus or fail, which Murphy and Murphy clearly sum up as the last element for success by stating that the ultimate purpose of leadership is to bring order out of chaos.

Complementing the business research are Kouzes and Posner's (2007) findings which are ranked as effective leadership qualities as perceived by staff members: (a) *Trustworthiness*: Trustworthiness is the follower's sense that the leader will be consistent in his or her beliefs, visions, and direction. (b) *Competence*: Competence is less about knowing it all as much as being a co-learner, visible and participative during change conversations. (c) *Forward looking*: Forward looking is a leader's ability to be proactive in anticipating what short-term and long-term initiatives and/or needs there may be and articulating them in a timely manner. (d) *Enthusiastic*: Enthusiastic leaders are those who communicate the excitement, vision, and passion they have for their district and encouraging others within the organization (Lezotte & McKee 2006).

Implications for Superintendents as Instructional Leaders

Transformational leadership is a process that changes the dynamics of the interactions among people. It takes into account the vision, values, short-term and long-term goals, along with emotions, motivation and ethics of those involved in a system in an attempt to make their work meaningful and engaging. What is unique is the distributed planning and authority that is shared willingly by a transformational leader. It engages employees with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower. The Kouzes and Posner (2007) model lists five practices that enable leaders to get extraordinary things accomplished. One practice they cite is modeling the way. A transformational leader does not dictate from the top or engage in the politics of transactional leadership. This new leadership leads the way by modeling behavior that he or she would like employees to replicate in the problem solving process. Teaching how to state vision and beliefs, participating in a systems process, even how to dissent are the new duties of this type of leader. Likewise, inspiring a shared vision while not imposing his or her values directly on an organization, Kouzes and Posner state the importance of a leader being able to discern and voice his or her values. Challenging the process has the underpinnings of perceived safety in order to take risks at any level or step in the change process. Enabling others to act allows for staff behavior, positive or negative, through expressed or subtle permission to take action without repercussions or second guessing. "Through that relationship, leaders turn constituents into leaders themselves" (p. 235). Encouraging the heart is legitimate

encouragement during difficult tasks. It is a celebration of success while validating the culture and reinforcing its values.

In *The Learning Leader*, leadership dimensions are discussed in the context of transformational leadership in the educational world of accountability (Reeves, 2006). Reeves liken the first dimension, visionary leadership, to that of an architect preparing a blueprint for student success. Working with teachers and principals, the superintendent as the instructional leader needs to ask questions with school stakeholders such as “Where are we headed this year? Where do we want to be in 5 or 10 years? What role will you play in any future changes or initiatives?” (p.36). Such visionary questions that involve staff members build leadership capacity.

The second dimension is that of relational leadership. Relational leaders possess communication skills in which empathy, listening, clarification, confidentiality, and recognition are all components of held conversations in which there is value and attention. Longitudinal studies even indicate that relationship skills account for as much as three times impact on employee performance as analytical skills do (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002).

Reeves’s third dimension is systems leadership. According to Reeves, systems are complex but the greater challenge is to create systems that are simple. Such simplicity is found in having a defined focus with a few goals rather than a dozen priorities. Reflective leadership is the fourth dimension and it refers to the deliberate and thoughtful consideration of the plans and initiatives taken and future planning. Collaborative leadership is the conscious decision of a leader to include stakeholders in the planning

and decision making process. Analytical leadership involves the competence and willingness to review the various data and to share with other district and school personnel to help guide instructional decisions and practices. Communicative leadership is the final leadership dimension that leaders need in order to express a complex strategic plan to community members or simply to share a comment of appreciation to a staff member for a job well done (Reeves, 2006). These dimensions will assist a transformational leader through chaotic periods as it narrowly focuses vision and action.

Implications and Application of Chaos Theory for Instructional Leadership

Wheatley (2007) states public schools are not necessarily systems if they do not draw from a common purpose. Rather than a network of complex relationships working toward a common goal, education has a history of independence and an overt aversion to collaboration. However, in these chaotic times there is an opportunity for transformational leaders to draw from the stakeholders, stakeholders who do care about the education of its community's children but whose purpose has not been weaved together.

If there is acknowledgement in systems that two-thirds of organizational initiatives fail when implemented in the traditional top-down mode, and that a clear correlation between participation and productivity can raise productivity as high as 35%, acknowledgement should be given that the adjustments and tweaks to systems will fail to yield the results desired (Wheatley, 2000). When economists consider a society's educational system in economic terms, a change in systems thinking and practice

translates to economic prosperity and social cohesion, especially when the three basic elements, literacy, numeracy and well-being, are addressed (Fullan, 2006).

Marzano & Waters (2009) identified five key components that successful transformational leaders at the district level have employed that have correlated with student achievement. The first component is ensuring that goal setting is a collaborative effort among stakeholders. Second, non-negotiable goals are set for achievement and instruction. Third, the board must be in alignment with and in support of district goals. Fourth, there must be a monitoring of achievement and instructional goals. Last, resources must follow the goals and allocated accordingly.

To begin to mesh transformational superintendents as the instructional leader within a chaotic system of education, there are 13 overarching acts that a superintendent may perform that would indicate district leadership capacity (Lambert, 2003). Reported in *Leadership Capacity*, they include:

1. Developing a shared vision of excellence about teaching, learning, and leading with students and adults.
2. Maintaining focus on the shared vision.
3. Establishing an infrastructure of democratic practices involving all community spectrums.
4. Articulating a range of best practices and options.
5. Co-creating accountability systems at all levels.
6. Translating policies, mandates, and requirements in ways that maintain the congruence between vision and practice.

7. Ensuring collaboration among multiple groups and agencies at the local, state, and national level.
8. Developing transparent, multilayered communications systems.
9. Apprising community members of whom to talk with and how to get actions initiated.
10. Modeling actions that build system and individual leadership capacity.
11. Educating and engaging board members in understandings of board roles, vision, learning, resource allocation, and policy development.
12. Seeking and developing educators committed to the district vision, shared leadership, and active engagement in their own learning.
13. Securing essential resources, including time, talent and ideas. (p. 87)

Marzano et al. complements Lamberts work by recognizing that transformational leaders do the works of second order change by leading with seven specific traits. Second order change is defined as deep change that alters a system with substantive governance, problem solving, planning, and implementation. Sources for such change break from the traditional top down model and include educators who demonstrate comparative advantage due to their competence and experiences (Marzano et al., 2005). The seven key traits found in the second order change model include knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment, being an optimizer, providing intellectual stimulation, facilitation as a change agent, monitoring and evaluating change, demonstrating flexibility, and being well-grounded in beliefs and ideals (Marzano et al., 2005). A district superintendent must be able to assess the research and be selective about the

innovations introduced within a district while understanding the values and beliefs within a community (Mullin & Keedy, 1998).

Table 2 lists the predominant transformational leadership qualities needed in the new leader, specifically the superintendent whose roles shift within the chaos context from manager to instructional leader. Such duties of transformation leadership in a school district include facilitating a clear mission statement with trustees, keeping stakeholders focused on student achievement, providing meaningful professional development that aligns with district and school purpose, allocating resources to appropriate endeavors, and hiring change agents who embrace transformation, including healthy dissent.

“Schools cannot be made great by great teacher performance. They will only be made great by great student performance” (Schlechty, 2002, p. xi ii). Crucial conversations, those discussions between two or more people where the stakes are high, opinions may vary widely, and where emotions can sometimes outweigh reason are framed by Schlechty’s words and become the overarching goal of a chronically underperforming school district. Such crucial conversations fail to occur either due to deliberate avoidance or because they are handled poorly. However, when conducted properly, previous mistrust, anger, or anxiety can yield to powerful dialogue and change (Patterson et al., 2002). Positive change “occurs fastest” in an atmosphere of trust and openness, (Molitor, 1999). In an academic setting, Reason and Reason (2007) state that when an agenda is pursued in which educators have little input or control, they become

Table 2

Transformational Leadership with Chaos Theory Response and Reasoning

Transformational	Leadership	Theories	Chaos Theory
Kouzes & Posner	Lambert	Marzano et al.	Wheatley
Model the way	Maintain congruence between vision and practice; modeling	Leading with adults and students	Chaos is viewed as opportunity to lead; model desired behavior, process
	Accountability	Knowledge of curriculum, instruction	
Inspire a shared vision	Shared vision	Shared vision of excellence	Look beyond the chaos to help frame options that look beyond past
	Articulation	Beliefs and vision	
Challenge the Process	Democratic process	Change agent	Growth occurs when system no longer is effective and change is necessary to continue
	Ensuring Collaboration		
	Instilling leadership capacity		
Enable others to act	Transparency and communication	Intellectual Stimulation	Chaos theory states that new solutions and growth will come from unexpected places
	Community initiation to act	Optimizer; flexibility	
	Securing resources: time, talent and ideas		
Encourage the heart	Encourage participation		Growth and development is encouraged for a stronger system

less effective in their work and experience high levels of frustration. On the other hand, it has been determined that high performing schools make school based leaders, teachers, as well as principals, a key component for continued success (Reeves, 2007).

Lezotte and Edmonds of Michigan State University began their research into Effective Schools in the 1960s. Though they believed system wide change was an opportunity missed in 1983 with the *Nation at Risk* report, the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 has reignited the implementation of the Effective Schools model and its seven correlates into school districts (Lezotte, personal communication, March 5, 2006). There has also been a distinct shift at the national, state, and district level that has moved the mission of a school from providing a place for students with required attendance to a place with mandatory learning, (Fullan, 2006; Lezotte & McKee, 2006). As schools are discovering, mandatory learning, or sustained student achievement does not occur by chance.

“Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northhouse, 2007, p. 3). While other approaches have been tried in turnaround districts, often times there are short term academic gains but no deep change within the culture (Fullan, 2006). With the district’s goal to keep the sitting superintendent in place, it would be appropriate to provide a model of transformational leadership by the new co-superintendent as transformational leadership calls for deep change while building collaboration and sustainability regardless of who is superintendent (Sparks, 2007). Transactional leadership and the Leadership Styles approach devalues a district’s long term vision even though shallow change with short term rewards, for both the district and the hired superintendent’s bank account, can be quickly realized (Northhouse, 2007). Fullan (2006) describes shallow approach as

moving a school or district from horrible to adequate, and Collins (2001) would suggest that is why a business, and in this case school results, fails to move from good to great.

In Table 3, Reeves (2006) asks educators to consider Achievement of Results or level of success on the vertical axis. On the horizontal axis are the Antecedents of Excellence such as quality of leadership, teaching, curriculum development, parental involvement, board support. The Lucky quadrant describes those schools that may yield higher student achievement, but there is a disconnection between professional practices to results. Reeves believes these schools have dedicated classroom teachers, but leaders who will be taken by surprise when the luck runs out and scores drop as expectations rise.

Table 3

The leadership for learning framework

Results of Achievement	Lucky High results, low understanding of antecedents Replication of success unlikely	Leading High results, high understanding of antecedents Replication of success likely
	Losing Low results, low understanding of antecedents Replication of failure is likely	Learning Low results, high understanding of antecedents Replication of success likely

Antecedents of Excellence

The Leading quadrant includes those districts that recognize the Antecedents of Excellence and therefore have high test scores. The Learning quadrant is made up of schools that also recognize the Antecedents of Excellence and will emerge to the Leading

quadrant in time. The final one is the Losing quadrant in which results will remain low as the same instructional practices and leadership will remain constant, as will the blaming of students, families, school board, socio-economic status. The energy is spent playing a victim of circumstances and the professionals work to shift responsibility away from school and classroom, (Reeves, 2006).

Lessons learned from school turnaround experiences have yielded four findings to help the second generation of turnaround schools to be successful (Hess & Gift, 2008). The first finding validates previous research that giving greater freedom to principals and teachers to problem solve collaboratively while reducing bureaucracy will encourage change. Second, reformers should consider changing principals in districts if necessary. The preference has been to refocus professional development, but research has indicated there can be immediate benefits if there is a change in building leadership. Third, reform should be addressed as all or nothing with clear intentions articulated from the outset. Fourth, districts should require less whole-scale, top down initiatives, but approach change one teacher at a time as successful turnaround schools require individual teacher commitment.

Stakeholders and Strategies for School Reform Amidst Chaos

Transformational leadership calls for collaboration with various stakeholders. Chaos theory acknowledges that solutions during disequilibrium may come from unexpected sources. For the superintendent to lead a district through chaotic times, it is imperative to involve stakeholders. “What is lacking are not case examples or processes

but the commitment to involve everybody. We keep hoping we don't need to – that if we design a good plan, people will accept it on its merits. Who is missing? Who else needs to do this work? What about partnering with confusion and chaos?" (Wheatley, 2007, p. 111). The following subsections reveal researched based strategies that effective transformational leaders may employ in school districts with their stakeholders.

Students

School district mission statements often speak of the responsibility of preparing students with a rigorous academic program that will assist them to succeed as citizens of a technological and global society (Suarez-Orozco & Sattin, 2007). While the goal is noble, unless the policies, curriculum and instructional strategies are aligned, districts will continue to teach 21st century students with 20th century practices (Lezotte, personal communication, March 7, 2004). With the expectation that all students will be proficient in math and reading by 2014, it is time for schools to adjust in determining what is to be accomplished. Three primary areas should be monitored: knowledge and skills as articulated by local and state standards and assessment tools, student participation to determine who is participating in classes and activities and why, and equality and equity in programs and opportunities (Leithwood, Aitken & Jantzi, 2006).

There is some movement to balance NCLB and the high level of accountability with taking a holistic approach to educating students. With business leaders seeking not only greater accountability in schools but also in the way school is conducted, they are seeking students with a good work ethic, ability to communicate verbally and in writing, creativity, and the ability to synthesize complex information (Castleman & Littky, 2007).

This can be accomplished when something in addition to high stakes assessments are used. Specifically, students become more engaged as a learner and peer when given the opportunity to offer constructive feedback to fellow classmates. Such feedback also gives the classroom one more authentic assessment to determine student comprehension (Reynolds, 2009).

Becoming a global citizen, developing a good work ethic, and making critical decisions can help engage students in their school experience. It is recommended that students, through teacher blocked out time, learn to make decisions on priorities, time allocation, and be accountable for use of that time. Students can also develop these qualities when teachers allow students to develop classroom rules, choose work locations, develop assignment rubrics, and participate in teacher-led conferences (Guskey & Anderman, 2008).

Board of Trustees

The board-savvy superintendent makes governance a top priority. This means that the superintendent devotes the time required to become a true expert in this complex, and rapidly changing field. He or she regularly dedicates a large chunk of time – somewhere in the range of 20 to 25 percent – to working directly with the board. The board-savvy superintendent is a board capacity builder par excellence. (Eadie and Houston, 2003, p. 56)

The board-superintendent relationship and their respective governance are critical for student achievement to occur, (Townsend et al., 2007). Articulating the role of each is equally important. A board of trustees should focus on three types of tasks: strategic, tactical, and operational, (Van Clay & Soldwedel, 2009). Strategic tasks are considered long-term or big picture items in which a board views how each part of a district fits and

works within the whole system in glimpses of three to five years or more out in the future. The board of trustees represents their community's needs and interests. Strategic tasks provide structure for district goals, and they set clear targets and expectations for the district to achieve. Tactical tasks are those that assist in the coordination with the various parts of the organization by creating interdependence. A board uses tactical tasks as they work with various groups of the constituency as they provide guidance and resources that will lead to improvement. Finally, operational tasks are those that focus directly on students. These are typically short term decisions or tasks that support the larger strategic and tactical tasks and that have an immediate impact. A board will empower a superintendent to oversee operational tasks on their behalf. Along with these three types of tasks are the roles that are played by the board, administration and teachers. These include expertise, time, and access. Each group has a certain degree of involvement in all three roles which necessitates the need for roles to be well defined and respected so micro-management can be avoided and ownership honored.

A board of trustees must be educated regarding their roles and responsibilities. This can occur through strategic planning sessions that help define their purpose, core values, and what the district should and can look like from as far out as 20 years back to the present regardless of who is in the role of trustee or superintendent. The strategic planning process takes a backward design approach to move from broad, long term goals to short term and specific goals. It also honors all stake holders in the community while following the guidelines, laws, and expectations from various state and federal governing bodies. According to Van Clay and Soldwedel (2009), the board that does not remain true

to its purpose and core values and has misaligned roles with its superintendent, administrators and teachers may exhibit these risk factors (a) engaging in partisan voting, (b) not supporting a majority board decision, (c) responding to community discontent without data or process, (d) applying expert advice literally without consulting staff, (e) ignoring the impact of culture on change, (f) not supporting district policies, (g) conducting its own research, (h) failing to foster a three-way partnership with the superintendent and union leaders, (i) hiring a superintendent on a split vote, or (j) failing to personally detach from board decisions. The challenges of the board-superintendent relationship must be grounded in the purpose and core values established by the board, and carried out in the day-to-day operations by the superintendent.

Parents and Community

Parents are often referred to as children's first teachers. Research has provided a clear link between parents' involvement in their children's lives and school with student achievement. Similarly, research indicates that a community's values, mores, and expectations affect student achievement, (Callison, 2004; Price, 2008). Callison goes on to detail the correlation between the level of involvement of fathers in their children's school career and the children's academic success (2004). Lezotte reflects that the home-school relations is a key correlate for schools to be effective, and that the challenges are even greater today than ever due to both parents working, the increase of single parents and/or blended families. Continuing, he states that school reform may occur with cursory involvement by parents, but sustained results occur when parents are actively involved in their children's school (2008).

There are six levels of involvement that districts can encourage for parental involvement:

1. Provide basic parent education classes that address the basics of good parenting with emphasis on education and learning.
2. Promote the school-home relationship with a thorough communication plan that not only provides information on school events, but also on students' progress.
3. Invite parents to participate in learning more about instructional goals, objectives, and standards.
4. Provide parents with techniques for working with their children at home to support their children's learning.
5. Allow for and encourage parent input in decision making. This transparency will create new levels of trust and engagement.
6. Broaden the holistic approach to student, student development, and the needs that may be filled with community resources by providing access to such information and services. (Callison, 2004, p. 25)

The community can be engaged in similar ways for two purposes: First, to better understand the level of success for a school district, and second, to partner with the district to emphasize the importance of academic achievement for future community and economic growth. For a school district, it is a critical piece to include community stakeholders in the strategic plan process, (Townsend et al., 2007). For parents and community members, it may start with understanding the fundamental law and expectations of the *2001 No Child Left Behind Act* and becoming involved locally but

lending a voice at the state and national level as appropriate (Public Education Network, 2002).

In a world of growing interdependence, it's more important than ever to learn how to expand the boundaries of normal management attention concern in order to see the larger systems in which businesses operate. Failing to do so leads to policies and strategies whose side effects eventually sabotage the intended effects (Senge, 2008, p. 45)

Principals

“Leadership capacity can refer to an organization’s capacity to lead itself and to sustain that effort when key individuals leave” according to Lambert, (2003, p. 4).

Similar to the Effective Schools Correlate of Strong Instructional Leadership, leadership capacity is not limited to the principal or superintendent, but to anyone willing to ask the difficult questions and share power in a way that promotes collaboration for the betterment of the school or district. Lambert challenges building principals to consider their own style of leading by asking themselves the following questions, (2003, p. 47):

1. How was the last important decision made in our school? Did it involve those affected by the decision?
2. When asked for a decision, do I make it without thinking about the process or including others?
3. When I observe teachers, students, or staff members doing things that I consider unacceptable, do I quickly correct and redirect them, or do I involve them in a problem-solving conversation about the behavior?
4. Do I get overly frustrated with process and long for the day when I could just do it myself?

5. Do I delegate tasks only to take them back if things aren't going the way I want them to go?

Marzano et al. (2005) complements Lambert's work by recognizing transformational leaders who do the work of second order change by leading with seven specific traits. Second order change is defined as deep change that alters a system with substantive governance, problem solving, planning, and implementation. Sources for such change break from the traditional top down model and include educators who demonstrate comparative advantage due to their competence and experiences. The seven key traits found in the second order change model include knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment, being an optimizer, providing intellectual stimulation, facilitation as a change agent, monitoring and evaluating change, demonstrating flexibility, and being well-grounded in beliefs and ideals (Marzano et al., 2005). The point is to assist principals to determine whether they are building leadership capacity within their schools whereby a culture that values collaboration, shared vision as well as differing perspectives, not that any of these tasks are easy. The goal cannot be about popularity, and there must be the upfront acknowledgement that it takes time, practice and accountability to institute defined goals with measurable results (Reeves, 2009). Principals must also move from seeing and working with their schools in a vacuum to a systems approach realizing that the school is just part of a whole and the questions and answers have implication throughout the system (Senge, 1990). Or as Schmoker (2006) puts very bluntly, "it's this simple: Schools won't improve until the building leader

begins to work cooperatively with teachers to truly, meaningfully oversee and improve instructional quality” (p.30).

Teachers

Education is a relationship driven endeavor. The most important relationships are the ones created in the classroom between student and teacher. However, for the student-teacher relationship to be effective, leadership capacity needs to be built that creates trust between teachers and principals and district leadership. This approach of transformational leadership will occur when teachers are enlisted to own both problems and solutions by administrators who appeal to common ideals and animate the vision (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

Provided common ideals are found, no doubt there will be agreement on the desire to improve student achievement. Discussion must center on research of what works and what does not. For test scores to improve, there must be rigor and high expectations, but there are common mistakes that can be detrimental to student achievement. Popham (2009) cites six common mistakes found in districts. The first mistake is having too many targets that are identified as benchmarks or standards which can lead to teachers not covering all of them forcing them to prioritize, or trying to cover all of them with very little depth. Neither approach equips students for state assessments. The second mistake is an underutilization of classroom assessment. Typically these are used for teachers to assign grades, not give periodic feedback within a classroom or grade level to re-direct instruction or provide data to building or district leaders. The third mistake is a preoccupation with instruction process. Too often schools, colleges,

supervising teachers and professors are concerned with the outcome of teacher performance without tying it back to student performance.

The fourth mistake is the omission of an attitude assessment. Simply put educators value students' emotional engagement, but rarely assess it to gauge what impact schooling or subject matter may be having on them. The fifth mistake is instructional insensitivity. Popham (2009) believes national tests allow for comparisons among students but they may only reveal what students bring to school, not necessarily what they learn there. He also believes state assessments are simply validations of affluence. Finally, mistake number six addresses assessment illiteracy. Throughout a district and despite the greater presences of all sorts of assessments, the connection between performance and the modification in the classroom fails to occur (Popham, 2009).

Schlechty (1997) states, "Structural change not supported by cultural change will eventually be overwhelmed by the culture, for it is in the culture that any organization finds meaning and sustainability" (p. 136). The overarching goal of any school district is to improve student achievement creating an environment where all students can learn and stakeholders will do whatever it takes to promote and reach that goal. In accordance to *NCLB Act of 2001*, all students shall be proficient in reading and mathematics. In the school improvement process cycle of identify, research, implement, measure, refine, and proceed, the act of reflection is becoming a more critical, time honored piece between measurement and refinement (York-Barr, Sommers, Ghore & Montie, 2006). Too often initiatives are quickly dropped or changed without asking the difficult question of why

and how something can be done better. Trust, ownership, and value are heightened when stakeholders take the time to reflect and then share their perspectives and before further change is made.

Summary

Chaos theory allows for a system to re-group or re-create itself, but a system must recognize the need to change. Both transformational leadership and chaos theory allow for solutions and changes to manifest themselves in different ways from different sources. Transformational leadership looks upon chaos as opportunity for further growth, acknowledging that such growth will create disequilibrium (Marzano et al., 2005; Wheatley, 1999).

Science now utilizes chaos theory to explain how simply changes at a basic level can lead to complex and sophisticated organisms (Wolfram, 2002). Systems theory and chaos theory have some similar origins and conclusions, specifically in that solutions or change come from unexpected sources (Senge, 2006; Wheatley, 2007). Business and commerce addresses chaos and complexity through adaptation and application through various problem-solving and interdependence acknowledgement and schemes (Murphy & Murphy, 2002). Education, which is in the greatest period of change in decades with the implementation and expectations of the No Child Left Behind laws, could position itself to learn from science, systems theory, and the business model as it attempts to transform itself from a public system of mandatory attendance to mandatory learning (Lezotte & McKee 2006).

There must be a focused empowerment, which would come as a shift in superintendents' actions and skill set, in which individual teachers and administrators would embrace change, change that result in greater student achievement. Similarly, human and financial resources must be directed by the board of trustees' overarching purpose and core values. Difficult employee decisions, such as job assignments for administrators, must be made with the idea of student achievement, not popularity, kept in mind. Students, parents, and community members must also be given opportunities to share their voice in shaping a transforming school under the leadership of a transformational superintendent in chaotic times.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the actions taken by district superintendents in response to greater expectations in this era of accountability. With the passage of NCLB, improved student performance for all is expected. This study examined how accountability measures and subsequent changes within districts and schools were addressed by the districts' instructional leader, the superintendents. The purpose of this chapter is to present the plan used for conducting the study, demonstrate the researcher's ability to conduct the study, and assert the need for flexibility in utilizing qualitative research methodology. Rationale, the role and ethics of the researcher, site selection, sampling, data management and analysis, trustworthiness, and a management plan are elements to be addressed in this chapter (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

The qualitative methodology for this research was a phenomenological study that examined the overarching question of how does the superintendent address expectations and accountability measures associated with organizational change and improvement? How this study addressed the research questions along with the rationale of the methodology follows.

Rationale

In the social sciences there are two predominant research paradigms. The first is the quantitative paradigm in which research is conducted using tools of the scientific

method. The second is the qualitative paradigm in which data collection and analysis are more open ended allowing for greater interpretation by a researcher (Gliner & Morgan, 2000). While quantitative research methods collect quantifiable data that can be analyzed within a narrow focus or scope, qualitative methodology relies on interviews, diaries, and/or artifact review with holistic analyses which may yield emerging themes from the study. According to Yin (2003), “Each strategy has peculiar advantages and disadvantages, depending on three conditions: (a) the type of research question, (b) the control an investigator has over actual behavioral events, and (c) the focus on contemporary as opposed to historical phenomenon” (p. 1).

The interpretive nature of this dissertation was grounded in the field of qualitative research, as defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2005) who wrote that qualitative research is characterized by:

A situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p.3)

Van Manen (1990) described qualitative research as, “An umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world” (p. 520). Merriam added to the fullness of qualitative research with four identifying characteristics (2009). She wrote that qualitative researchers focus on meaning and understanding, serve as a primary

instrument, use the inductive process, and utilize rich description. Further, she goes on to say that a researcher must have a high tolerance for ambiguity.

The design of a qualitative study is flexible, relevant variables are not known ahead of time, findings are inductively derived in the data analysis process, and so. Thus one has to be comfortable with the ebb and flow of a qualitative investigation and trust in the process. (p. 17)

In this study, the researcher collected phenomenological data as defined by Creswell (2007), “this type of study describes the meaning of experiences of a phenomenon for several individuals and the researcher reduces the experiences to a central meaning or essence of the experience” (p. 236). For this study, a quantitative study was not appropriate. Consider (b) the control an investigator has over actual behavior events. The researcher was not conducting an experiment or quasi-experiment in which an independent variable was controlled and dependent variables were measured. As actions of superintendents in the role of instructional leaders were analyzed in the chaotic era of accountability, conducting a phenomenological study was an appropriate research method. Consider Moustakas (1994) who took a perspective of detachment as a researcher. He wrote:

I am alive with images and ideas, struck with the wonder of passionately discovering that the only way I can truly come to know things and people is to go out to them, to return again and again to immerse myself completely in what is there before me, look, see, listen, hear, touch, from many angles and perspectives and vantage points, each time freshly so that there will be continual openings and learning that will connect with each other and with prior perceptions, understandings, and future possibilities. In other words, I must immerse myself totally and completely in my world, take in what is offered without bias or prejudice. (p.65)

Van Manen (1990) took a constructivist perspective adding that the researcher's background may be bracketed but will still be influential in the experience, interpretation, and analysis of the essence:

Anything that presents itself to consciousness is potentially of interest to phenomenology, whether the object is real or imagined, empirically measurable or subjectively felt. Consciousness is the only access human beings have to the world. Or rather, it is by virtue of being conscious that we are already related to the world. Thus all we can ever know must present itself to consciousness. Whatever falls outside of consciousness therefore falls outside the bounds of our possible lived experience. (p. 9)

This qualitative study focused on the actions of superintendents as instructional leaders during this era of accountability through the lens of chaos theory. Selection of a research approach was an important decision made by the researcher. The objective of this decision was to select the approach that offered the "best fit" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 17) for the study being conducted. Determining which research approach to use to conduct a study was affected by several factors. The researcher considered the study using a particular set of "assumptions about the world," the topic selected for study, and "methodological preferences" (Maxwell, 2005, p 37). The researcher then determined the approach that provided the "best fit" that guided decisions regarding research design, data collection and reporting and ultimately, responses to the research questions.

In addition to the underlying assumptions of qualitative research, Janesick (2003) provided three rules researchers should consider when conducting their studies. They are: (a) look for meaning, the perspectives of the participants in the study; (b) find relationships in the structures, and occurrences; (c) recognize points of tension or conflict, things that do not fit.

Selection of a research method for this study was guided by multiple factors. In the review of literature conducted for chapter two of this dissertation, the researcher found only a small number of studies examining superintendent actions as instructional leaders during the tumultuous and changing environments that calls for greater accountability (Lambert, 2003; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Wheatley, 2007). The researcher was unable to find any phenomenological studies undertaken in districts that focused on this specific area. Therefore, the researcher was interested in uncovering the actions taken by superintendents as instructional leaders. Merriam (2009) stated that the task of the phenomenologist is to depict the essence or experience:

To get at the essence or basic underlying structure of the meaning of an experience, the phenomenological interview is the primary method of data collection. Prior to interviewing those who have had direct experience with the phenomenon, the researcher usually explores his or her own experiences, in part to examine dimensions of the experience and in part to become aware of personal prejudices, viewpoints, and assumptions. This process is called *epoche*, “a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment”. (p. 25)

It was appropriate to conduct a phenomenological study because the researcher planned to conduct the study in naturalistic settings and was interested in uncovering and understanding the perceptions, actual lived experiences, and internalized analysis as described by the respondents. Support for this paradigm was offered by Janesick (2003) who stated that it was preferable to hear directly from those involved in the lived experience. Further support was provided by Maxwell (2005), who stated that “the strength of qualitative research derive primarily from its inductive approach, its focus on specific situations or people, and emphasis on words rather than numbers” (p. 22). The data collection method included in depth, face-to-face interviews.

Researcher's Entry, Role, and Ethics

The researcher brought to this study twenty-five years of experience in public education serving as a teacher, high school department head, and administrator. Thirteen of these years included service as a district superintendent in Montana. Maxwell stated while some may view the researcher's perspective as unfavorable bias; he believed the subjectivity was the basis and strength of the study (2005). The researcher brought to the study the acknowledgement that a system's disorder was not a crisis but an opportunity for reform. In reform there can be anxiety, similar values yet new solutions, a sense of loss, and the larger culture still weighing on the system or organization (Carr-Chellman, Beabout, Alkandari & Almeida, 2008). It was the researcher's experience and prior knowledge of the accountability movement and the related difficulty of creating the right environment for shared leadership, data based decision making, transparency and collaboration, the pillars of transformational leadership that brought further context to this phenomenological study. Returning to the concept of what a researcher brings to a phenomenological study there were two schools of thought when researcher perspective was considered. According to Creswell (2007), the Moustakas school of thought would require the researcher to bracket out his experiences and rely on descriptive experiences of participants. Van Manen acknowledged and embraced the researchers experience and his interpretation of participants' reflection of lived experiences. Both realize that previous experience will influence a researcher's study, one attempts to set aside while another believes it leads to a richer essence (Creswell, 2007; Van Manen, 1990).

“In qualitative research, ethical dilemmas are likely to emerge with regard to the collection of data and in the dissemination of findings” (Merriam et al., 2002, p. 29). It is not uncommon in qualitative studies for the researcher to act as the “primary data collection instrument” and for the participants or informants to engage in “acts of self disclosure, where personal, private experiences are revealed to the researcher in a relationship of closeness and trust” (Mauthner, Birch, Jessop, and Miller, 2002, pp. 91-92). It was the reflection from fellow superintendents that the qualitative researcher sought and in turn had an obligation and responsibility to protect participants while accurately reporting findings. “The researcher has an obligation to respect the rights, needs, values, and desires of the informant(s)” (Creswell, 2003, p. 201). In addition to protecting the participants, the researcher was bound to protect the research process. Strategies “such as triangulation, member checks, use of rich, thick description” (Merriam, 2002, p. 30) coupled with obtaining participant consent following disclosure to participants regarding the purpose, process and nature of the study, accurate data collection and reporting findings, as well as the use of integrity in interpretation and drawing conclusions provide evidence that an ethical study was conducted. The researcher conducted this study using precautionary measures to address the ethical issues that commonly arise in qualitative research. First, this study was designed to eliminate as much as possible risk to participants by disclosing the purpose of the study, seeking voluntary participants, and assuring confidentiality and anonymity. Written permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Montana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and individual participants.

To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, participants' identification were not made public. Instead, codes were used to refer to individual participants and their schools. The codes were constructed in such a way that the true identity of the participants and their schools were not detectable. Notes and other written data collected and audio files and recordings of the interview sessions were securely maintained. Field notes and audio files of the sessions were labeled using a coding system rather than the actual names of participants. Artifacts gathered from each participant were also labeled using the researcher's coding system and the participant and school identifiers were obscured.

The researcher had no supervisory responsibility over any of the participants or informants in the study. The researcher maintained an open acceptance of the reflections shared by participants and was reminded of underlying purpose of this study was not to share his own instructional leadership perspective, but rather to explore and understand how others construed and made meaning of their own instructional leadership in this era of educational accountability.

Finally, while the researcher had worked as a superintendent for thirteen years in the state of Montana, it was held that a strong understanding of the complexity of the superintendent's role assisted in quickly establishing a comfortable rapport with the participants, and to be sensitive to the broad environment and general climate in which the participants conducted their business and shared their reflections as instructional leaders. In phenomenological research, the researcher wanted to gain access to the lived experience from and with the participants and develop a trusting relationship.

Phenomenological Study Method, Rationale and Design

The study used a multi-site design guided by a description of phenomenological research provided by Marshall and Rossman (2011), who stated that, “Phenomenology is the study of lived experiences and the way we understand those experiences to develop a worldview. Its rests on an assumption that there is a structure and essence to shared experiences that can be narrated” (p. 148). Marshall and Rossman (2011) further characterized this type of qualitative approach as using in depth interviewing “to describe the meaning of a concept or phenomenon that several individuals share” (p. 148).

The phenomenological strategy was appropriate for this study because, like the participants in the study, the researcher was a district superintendent who had experienced the heightened awareness of accountability within schools due to NCLB and related expectations at local, state, and federal levels. A multi-site study design “implies that multiple sites or subjects are studied using a common focus for the research” (Wiersma, 2000, p. 207). This common focus was studied across all sites and participants as the researcher examined the actions taken by superintendents in their role as instructional leaders.

As there was a set of assumptions that guide qualitative research, there was also a set of assumptions that supported how phenomenological research was conducted.

Wiersma & Jurs (2009) provided the following list.

1. A priori assumptions regarding the phenomenon being studied are avoided.
2. Reality is viewed holistically.
3. Data collection and instruments used should have minimum influence on the phenomenon being studied.
4. Openness to alternative explanations of phenomenon.

5. Theory, as applicable, should emerge from the data as grounded theory rather than preconceived theories (p. 274-275).

The phenomenological approach using a multi-site design was well suited to this study because even though the researcher was a superintendent, it was understood that individual superintendents constructed their own meaning and perception of instructional leadership. The researcher had no a priori assumptions about the individuals' perceptions or meanings that the participants in the study may have had for the concept of instructional leadership. Instead, the researcher sought to understand any phenomenon of superintendents' roles and actions as instructional leaders in a chaotic era of accountability. Wiersma (2000) explained it by stating "the phenomenological approach emphasizes what the meaning of reality is, in essence, in the eyes and minds of the beholders, the way the individuals being studied perceive their experience" (p. 238).

The study was conducted on site in each superintendent's district. Data collection was conducted using face-to-face in depth interviews that will be recorded and transcribed. The researcher for this qualitative study was an instrument (Maxwell, 2005). As advised by Wiersma (2000) the researcher did not manipulate, stimulate, or externally impose structure on the research situation. To further illustrate this point, Patton stated "A human being is the instrument of qualitative methods. A real, live person makes observations, takes field notes, asks interview questions, and interprets responses" (p. 64). However, the researcher maintained openness, also described as taking a "stance of neutrality" while collecting data (Patton, 2002, p. 51).

Interpersonal skills of the researcher were important to the success of this qualitative study. Necessary were the researcher's ability: to listen, observe, respect

participants and their perceptions and setting; communicate information about the study clearly and concisely; build trust and maintain positive reciprocal relations; and be mindful of ethical issues all of which contributed to the success of the study. The researcher had twenty-five years of experience as a teacher and administrator ranging from small rural districts to large urban districts. As a result, there was a positive rapport and professional relationships that assisted the researcher in becoming familiar with multiple school environments. Taken together those experiences provided the sensitivity and awareness the researcher needed to gain entry with participants, gather data from them, and represent their perceptions.

Through interaction with participants, the researcher was also responsible for collecting, analyzing, interpreting and reporting the data, findings, and conclusions of this study. Many years of administrative work that required the collection, analysis, interpretation, and reporting of various data as well as graduate level study had prepared the researcher for these tasks. A more detailed description about actual procedures to be used in this study is addressed in the sections on data collection and data analysis procedures.

As a career educator, the researcher had served as a teacher and administrator. Through years of work experience, the researcher had come to understand that even though there were some common components found across the work of all superintendents, the meaning each constructs for his or her work and the perception each held may be different. This understanding allowed the researcher to set aside the researchers own perceptions and meanings regarding instructional leadership. Setting

these aside permitted the researcher to conduct this study from an open or neutral stance that is appropriate for the design of this study. The intention of the study was not to define one best skill set or the right set of actions. It was believed that the teaching and administrative experiences of the researcher would assist in understanding the articulation of other superintendents regarding their own meaning of instructional leadership in an era of educational accountability. In addition, several data sources and methods of data collection were used for the purpose of triangulation. A more detailed description of triangulation is presented later in this chapter.

Sampling

This study was conducted to ascertain from superintendents the actions they had taken as instructional leaders as a result of disequilibrium and changes in this era of accountability. Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants. “The logic of purposeful sampling is based on a sample of information-rich cases that is studied in depth.” (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009, p. 342). Put another way, “The idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites (or documents or visual material) that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question” (Crewell, 2003, p. 185).

This participant selection method of purposeful sampling is also referred to as extreme case sampling. According to Wiersma & Jurs (2009, p. 344) this type of sampling is used to select “units that have special or unusual characteristics.” The special or unusual characteristic that bound the participants was based on student achievement,

as measured by state criterion referenced tests, which indicated improvement over a five year period. The researcher was provided data by the Montana Office of Public Instruction (2010) and examined CRT scores for reading and math from 2006 through 2010. From the School Administrators of Montana (2010), a list was generated indicating the current lengths of tenures of Montana superintendents.

The researcher gathered data that met two standards. First, CRT scores in either math or reading had to have improved over those five years at a significantly higher average than the state average. Those districts that had shown improvement or significant growth in the state criterion referenced test over a five year period had scores evaluated by having t-tests conducted to determine significance. The state K-12 CRT scores improved by an average of 1.6% per year in math and 1.8% per year in reading. Using independent t-tests, only districts whose equality of variance and means that were statistically significantly higher were considered. Second, the general criteria used for the selection of all participants was that at the time of the study each was or had been a superintendent of a Montana school district having served in that position for the past five years who had served in aforementioned districts was classified as eligible participants. A minimum of a five-year tenure was established based on the assumption that district growth has resulted due to second order change. Marzano et al.(2005) writes:

To successfully implement a second order change initiative, a school leader must ratchet up his idealism, energy, and enthusiasm. Additionally, the school leader must be willing live through a period of frustration and even anger from some staff members. No doubt this takes a great personal toll on a school leader and might explain why many promising practices in education have not led to improved student achievement and ultimately have been abandoned. (p. 75)

Once the eligible participant list was determined the researcher acknowledged the possibility that convenience sampling would occur based on “time, money, location, availability of sites or respondents, and so on” (Merriam, 2009, p. 81). The study would continue from that group of eligible and convenient participants until saturation was reached.

Final selection of participants was guided by the desire of the researcher to reach saturation anticipating between 10 and 15 participants. This small number of participants was widely supported. Maxwell (2005) stated, “Qualitative researchers typically study a relatively small number of individuals or situations, and preserve the individuality of each of these in their analyses” (p. 22). Patton (2002) referred to “using even single case selected purposefully to permit inquiry into and understanding of a phenomenon in depth” (p. 46). Merriam (2009) wrote that the size of the sample depends on the questions being asked, the data being gathered, and the resources available to the researcher. Ultimately, Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend sampling until the point of saturation or redundancy (Merriam, 2009) in which no new information or themes emerge.

Initial contact with each of the superintendents was made in the form of a letter (Appendix D) written by the researcher. Also included in the letter was a brief overview of the purpose, design and significance of the study and a request for the superintendent’s participation in the study. One week after the letter was sent, a follow up contact was made to each superintendent invited to participate in the study to request his or her inclusion in the study, answer questions regarding their participation, and arrange an

appointment for the in depth interview. Participants were drawn for inclusion in the study in the order in which they consented to participate in the study until the data saturation was reached.

Site Selection

The focus of this phenomenological study was on the actions of superintendents as the instructional leader during a period of disequilibrium caused by greater accountability. Therefore it was appropriate to conduct the study in a naturalistic setting. As described previously, this study was designed as a multi-site study. No one central or common site was used for the in-depth interviews, observations, or artifact collection. Instead, the data collection methods were conducted at multiple sites. The sites for data collection were the home district location in which the superintendents served.

Closeness to the people and phenomenon through intense interactions provides subjective understandings that can greatly increase the quality of the qualitative data. A realistic site is where (a) entry is possible; (b) there is a high probability that a rich mix of the processes, people, programs, interactions, and structures of interest is present; (c) the researcher is likely to be able to build trusting relations with the participants in the study; (d) the study can be conducted and reported ethically; and (e) data quality and credibility of the study are reasonably assured (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 101).

Data Collection

The primary data collection methods used for this study was face-to-face

in-depth interviews with support from observations and artifacts offered at each site. This type of interviewing is sometimes referred to as “phenomenological interviewing” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 148). In this form of interviewing the focus is on “the deep, lived meanings that events have for individuals” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 148). Each interview was scheduled for up to 90 minutes and was conducted in the district location in which the superintendent served.

Prior to beginning the interview, the researcher reviewed with each participant the purpose and design of the study and obtained both a signed written consent and a completed Participant Data Sheet (see Appendix A). The researcher used this form to collect information about the superintendent’s education and training, administrative service, and district demographics. The researcher answered any questions related to the study, its design and the interview. Each interview was digitally recorded.

Each interview was designed to begin with several neutral questions regarding the participant’s schooling and how he or she came to be a superintendent. The purpose of these questions was to put the participant at ease and to help him or her reach a comfort level with both the researcher and the use of the tape recorder.

To guide the interview, the researcher used a set of open-ended, semi-structured interview questions but remained flexible and open to asking additional questions or probes when needed for clarification, to deepen meaning, or to continue along an emerging path of interest that seemed pertinent to the study (Merriam, 2009; Weiss, 1994). Appendix C lists the interview questions and related probes. During the interview, the researcher made field notes about the interview. The content of the field notes

included verbal descriptions of the setting and participants, direct quotations or substance of idea shared, and observer's comments. "The field notes are highly descriptive to the point that the reader feels present onsite with the researcher" (Merriam, 2009, p. 131). Rather than trying to capture the participants' responses verbatim, the notes focused more on things such as the researcher's observations of the participant as they responded, questions that arose for the researcher as the interview proceeded, key words or phrase that were repeated or emphasized, and topics or statements raised that required clarification. Flexibility was built into the process with the related probes which allowed the researcher to explore related issues (Merriam, 2009). Appendix B shows a listing of interview questions and their correlation to the research questions of this study.

At the conclusion of the interview, the interviewer again reviewed the purpose and design of the study, and thanked the participant for his or her time and commitment to the study. As a follow up to the interview, the researcher asked to examine any district artifacts to provide additional contextual and supporting data.

Documents, particular, often are drawn on in a qualitative study. Various kinds of documents can provide background information that helps establish the rationale for selecting a particular site. As such, the analysis of documents is potentially quite rich in portraying the values and beliefs of participants in the setting (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 160).

In reviewing any artifacts, the researcher asked if artifacts were in alignment with one another and with state required reports.

Data Management

The data collection phase was conducted over several weeks in the fall of 2010.

Data collected during the interviews was recorded using a digital audio recorder.

Precaution was taken to ensure that a new digital folder was selected for each interview and the audio files were coded to preserve the confidentiality of each participant. Once the interview was concluded, each audio file was transferred to the researcher's computer to be transcribed into printed words for further reference. Field notes were taken during the observation. These focused on what was observed, its significance and connection to the data from the in-depth interview and artifacts collected at the site. Artifacts were only taken or copied with permission of the superintendent. Like the audio files from the interview, all artifacts collected at the site were coded to preserve the anonymity of the site and confidentiality of the superintendent as much as possible. For example, each superintendent had a coded file that contained memos and interview transcriptions coded by number and pseudonym. District documents were also maintained securely in files and not referenced by name in chapters 4 and 5.

A system of multi-level note taking was used throughout the data collection and analysis phases of the study. Marshall & Rossman, (2011) recommend utilizing the following levels as a strategy for data collection:

Level 1 - Condensed account – Direct account; taken quickly during actual event; included quotes and immediate impressions

Level 2 - Expanded account – Enhancements to level one notes; additional details and key words not recorded during the event

Level 3 – Daily log – record of questions that arose for researcher and the researcher's view of things at that point in the study.

Level 4 – Ongoing analysis of interpretations – notes on connections between interpretations and insights with underlying theories and notes from the first three levels. The audio files, transcriptions, field notes, artifacts, other documents, and data collected related to this study were reviewed as needed during the analysis and interpretation phases of this study. All audio files, transcriptions, field notes, artifacts, other documents, and data collected that were related to this study will be shredded after the conclusion of the study. Using a schema designed similarly by Marshall and Rossman (2011), the following timeline provided in Table 4 was instituted.

Data Analysis Strategy

“The process of data analysis involves making sense out of text and image data” (Creswell, 2003, p. 190). Wiersma (2000) described data analysis in qualitative research as “a process of categorization, description, and synthesis” (p. 204). Marshall and Rossman (2011) defined data analysis generally as “the process of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to the mass of collected data” (p. 207). Patton (2002) wrote, “Qualitative analysis transforms data into findings” (p. 432). He further cautioned that, “no formula exists for that transformation. Guidance, yes. But no recipe” (p. 432). Marshall and Rossman (2011) further described “data collection and analysis typically go hand in hand to build a coherent interpretation of the data” (p. 207). Data analysis in qualitative research can be an overwhelming task due to the large amounts of data that are collected, and the generally interpretive nature of the qualitative research paradigm. Patton (2002) offered guidance in his statement to qualitative

researchers. He said, “The challenge of qualitative analysis lies in making-sense of massive amounts of data. This involves reducing the volume of raw information, sifting trivia from significance, identifying significant patterns, and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal” (p. 432). Marshall and Rossman (2011) described seven typical phases for analysis in qualitative research. The seven phases they listed were: “(1) organizing the data, (2) immersion in the data, (3) generating categories and themes, (4) coding the data, (5) offering interpretations through analytic memos, (6) searching for alternative understandings, and (7) writing the report or other format for presenting the study” (p. 209). These phases were used to guide the data analysis and interpretation in this study. Maxwell (2005) added to not “letting your analyzed field notes and transcripts pile up” (p. 95). As such, analysis began following the first interview and observation.

Following a review of data collected from each participant, the researcher created notes that addressed initial understandings and thoughts about the reflection of the participants. The researcher reviewed field notes made during the in-depth interviews, artifact collection, and observations. Audio files were replayed and transcribed to identify emerging categories themes and patterns that were used to organize data. This process was followed after encounter with each of the participants. As common themes emerged, they guided adjustments to questions for interviews with the remaining participants. Common patterns as well as differing viewpoints were noted and analyzed. Reduction of data using categorization and coding made interpretation of participant’s reflections more manageable and was used as the basis for findings and conclusions. Open coding was

used to develop categories that emerged from the primary data collection. As various categories became evident, axial coding was used to connect such themes. Clustering was

Table 4

Data management and timeline

Date	Place	Activity	Who	What
October, 2010	Laurel	Purposeful Sampling	Researcher	t-tests of Montana districts with improved test scores over 5 years and which had same superintendent
October, 2010	Laurel/Billings	Purposeful sampling	Researcher	Contacted eligible superintendents who met tenure criteria in districts with significant improvement in student achievement (state CRT)
October, 2010	Montana State University	Approval of proposal and IRB approval for data collection	Dissertation Committee and IRB Board	Submitted proposal and protocol
October, 2010	Laurel	Purposeful sampling	Researcher	Made contact with eligible participants for interviews.
November and December, 2010	Selected sites	Primary data collection	Researcher	Conducted interviews and examined artifacts
November – January	Laurel	Data Analysis	Researcher	Used open, axial, and clustering coding methods, mined themes and prepared findings and conclusions.

then used to develop the story of any interconnection among the superintendents' actions during their tenures in which greater accountability as measured by student achievement was in place (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Although qualitative research is a circular process, the following is a linear description of the steps taken in conducting the analysis:

1. The researcher read and re-read the transcribed word-for-word interviews to make sense of them and acquire a feel for each description. The researcher also utilized the field notes and artifact reviews to make cross-references to the transcribed interviews.
2. The researcher extracted significant statements, which pertained directly to the proposed phenomenon, from the descriptions. The extraction or open coding was conducted by highlighting the significant statements within the transcriptions with specified colored highlighters. Significant statements were again cross referenced to field notes and artifacts.
3. Using axial coding, the researcher formulated meanings after analyzing each significant statement. The researcher again reread the original protocols to assure the original description was portrayed in the extracted significant statement meanings.
4. The researcher organized the formulated the meanings into clusters, which allowed for themes to emerge. The researcher again referred to the original protocol for validation, being cognizant of repetitive themes and discrepancies.

5. Using the emergent themes, the researcher articulated the individual stories from each participant in writing up the findings that were rich and thick with direct quotes supporting identified themes.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness or as Creswell (2003) wrote “validity does not carry the same connotations as it does in quantitative research” (p. 195). Qualitative research uses no statistical numbers to support findings or significance levels to indicate what is meaningful or not. It does not “attempt to design, in advance, controls that will deal with both the anticipated and unanticipated threats to validity” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 107). Instead, Creswell (2003, p. 198) described validity in qualitative research as, “used to suggest determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account.” Maxwell (2005) contended that the researcher cannot capture reality.

Validity is a goal rather than a product: it is never something that can be proven or taken for granted. Validity is also relative. It has to be assessed in relationship to the purposes and circumstances of the researcher rather than being a context-independent property of methods or conclusion. (p. 105)

To further illustrate how qualitative researchers might check the accuracy of their findings, Creswell (2003) offered eight possible strategies from which a researcher could choose. Triangulation was one of those strategies. This study used the widely accepted strategy of triangulation to address trustworthiness concerns. It involved collecting data in a variety of ways, such as different data collection methods, settings, or people. Marshall and Rossman (2011) defined triangulation simply as, “the act of bringing more

than one source of data to bear on a single point” (p.252). The purpose of using triangulation, as described by Maxwell (2005), is that “it reduces the risk that your conclusions will reflect only the systematic biases or limitations of a specific source or method, and allows you to gain a broader and more secure understanding of the issues you are investigating” (p. 93).

In this study, data regarding the superintendent’s role as instructional leadership in an era of chaos and accountability was obtained through in-depth interviews conducted with 11 different superintendents and any pertinent artifacts shared at the site. Each interview was audio taped and transcribed. Artifacts collected were copied and coded. During each site visit, the researcher also made field notes. In this way, the researcher had collected several different types of data from each respondent to analyze and interpret.

Respondent validation or member checking occurred at the conclusion of the researcher analysis when the researcher compared his conclusions with the study’s participants. Typed transcripts of the interview were sent to the participants to confirm accuracy. Maxwell (2005) wrote respondent validation or member validation:

Is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstandings of what you observed. (p. 111)

In providing member checking opportunities to participants after the interviews, the researcher and the 11 superintendents attained a shared meaning in what was said and how the researcher interpreted transcripts in order to derive meaning and discover emergent themes.

Replication

According to Merriam (2002), “Reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated” (p. 27). It is widely understood that replication of a qualitative study will probably not produce the same results. Even though this may be the case, “this does not discredit the results of any particular study” (Merriam, 2009, p. 220). This is a reasonable assertion since it is commonly understood that human behavior is changeable. In qualitative research “reliability and generalizability play a minor role” (Creswell, 2003, p. 195). The qualitative researcher is guided to focus on a “more important question.... Of whether the results are consistent with the data collected” (Merriam, 2002, p. 220). This notion of “dependability” or “consistency” in qualitative research was first recognized by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 288). Reliability in this way relies more heavily on concurrence of others that the results derived from the data collected “make sense – they are consistent and dependable” and that “the question then is not whether findings will be found again but whether the results are consistent with the data collected” (Merriam, 2009, p.221).

Several methods described were used to ensure consistency and dependability. One common method listed is the use of triangulation. As mentioned above, triangulation was used in this study. It consisted of the analysis and interpretation of multiple data sources from each participant and multiple data sources across multiple respondents. Primary data collection of artifacts was also used to evaluate consistency and helped develop emerging themes.

Pilot Study

The researcher conducted a pilot study of this phenomenological method before conducting the full study. The purpose of the pilot study was “field testing a draft of the interview guide. A single pilot interview can suggest where a guide is over weighted or redundant and where it is skimpy, but three or four pilot interviews might be the minimum for safety” (Weiss, 1994, p. 58).

Pilot studies can be useful, not only for trying out strategies but also to buttress the argument and rationale for a genre and strategy. When the researcher proclaims that he is capable of conducting the proposed research and provides a description and assessment of a qualitative pilot study with intriguing preliminary data, doubters are often persuaded (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 95).

The researcher conducted three pilot interviews and examined respective district artifacts for this study. Appropriate adjustments were made following each of the pilot interviews as necessary and for the full study itself. Specifically, minor adjustments were made in the number of questions asked and placement of probes related to interview questions. Specifically, in the pilot study the researcher asked the participants to describe how accountability measures had impacted their leadership duties and expectations. This was followed by a question of how have expectations evolved for the participant during tenure as superintendent. After asking these questions during the first two pilot interviews it was clearly a redundant question yielding no new information. The third pilot participant and the 11 participants of the study were not asked the former question.

CHAPTER 4 - THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Introduction

As an introduction to the data and emergent themes found in Chapter 4, there are a number of opening quotes from participants that highlight the findings. The first theme is *purpose* highlighted by the following: “We need to have students ready to either enter the work place or advance their educational progressin order to meet both national and international competitiveness” (James, 2010, p. 3). The second theme is *accountability* to which this comment was made. “Accountability has made a positive impact on our school. I heard for 20 years that Montana students do pretty darn good, but you know what, we got better” (Thomas, 2010, p. 5). The third quote was made by a participant who shared this about the theme of *stakeholders*, “I think the school board was very supportive of the accountability initiatives we proposed and supportive of our recommendations” (Michael, 2010, p. 9). There were difficulties and resistance as this superintendent reported, “Accountability has created difficulties especially in Montana and it has to be massaged a bit because living in Montana where there are strong unions, it’s something you can’t demand and impose it on teachers” (Susan, 2010, p. 2). The next set of comments were from superintendents who reported on *reorganization*, and who stated their roles are more facilitators of change as instructional leaders, but the demands are taxing. On reorganization, “I don’t see boundaries anymore, I don’t see grade levels” (John, 2010, p.1). “There are some days and all of a sudden it’s 5 o’clock and I’ll go, yet I never got to talk to one teacher or one student today. That’s just the way it is these

days” (Maria, 2010, p. 13). “It’s no wonder now I have an ulcer and I am on medicine because I can’t, I just honestly cannot keep up with the demands” (Martha, 2010, p. 9). Despite obstacles, this last superintendent’s comments highlighted the *transformation leadership* exhibited her to lead a collaborative effort among stakeholders. “There was collaboration and it was led by the teachers. It was teachers willing to take the lead while I provided them training and set the stage for success for students and teachers in the classroom” (Susan, 2010, p. 11).

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the actions taken by district superintendents in response to greater expectations in this era of accountability. With the passage of NCLB, improved student performance for all is expected. This study examined how accountability measures and subsequent changes within districts and schools were addressed by the districts’ instructional leader, the superintendents. Within the context of chaos theory, 11 district superintendents who have served in their districts for a minimum of five years and whose students in their respective districts outperformed students in the state with growth above the state average were questioned about their perspective and actions regarding the success of their students in this era of increased accountability. Interviewing and analyzing artifacts with the 11 superintendents revealed ideals and actions that other leaders could implement to increase student achievement.

Chaos theory allows for a system to re-group or self-organize, but a system must recognize the need to change. Both transformational leadership and chaos theory allow for solutions and changes to manifest themselves in different ways from different sources. With reflection upon these concepts, an overarching question asked: how does

the superintendent address expectations and accountability measures associated with organizational change and improvement? Two research questions emerged that examined the actions of the superintendent as instructional leader.

(1) How has accountability resulted in disequilibrium and change within school districts?

(2) How does the superintendent address accountability as a catalyst for promoting growth as measured by student achievement?

(2A) Is there evidence of transformational leadership by the superintendent in creating such change?

The researcher attempted to answer these questions by analyzing the actions of superintendents through the lens of chaos, while also seeking evidence of transformational leadership in this era of accountability. This phenomenological study relied on data gathered through interviews and artifact examination of three pilot study participants and 11 research participants. The researcher slightly modified interview questions as a result of the three pilot interviews. The 11 interviews that followed were with superintendents who had served in their districts for at least five years, and whose districts had shown significant growth in student achievement compared to the overall state average from 2006 through 2010 as measured by the Montana criterion referenced test. Finally, in a phenomenological study it is necessary to interview a sufficient number of participants in order for themes to emerge; typically interviewing occurs until a saturation of data is achieved (Creswell, 2007). Sufficient data was collected by the 11th

interview in which textual statements led to emergent themes. Appendix G identifies the research question, themes and participant support in table form.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted for the purpose of “not only trying out strategies but also to buttress the argument and rationale for a genre and strategy” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 95). In addition, practical matters such as interview protocol, wording of interview questions, and foreshadowing of future problems were discovered. Three pilot interviews were conducted with findings located in Appendix E. The researcher chose these participants due to geographic convenience for the purpose of practicing interviews. Rich data was gathered validating the researcher’s choice of methodology. The researcher did remove one interview question after conducting the pilot study due to redundancy.

Pilot Study Participants

Three superintendents participated in the pilot study. The following is a description of their backgrounds and the districts they serve. Findings for the pilot study in Appendix E follows the format found in this chapter for the eleven superintendents who participated in phenomenological study.

Superintendent Pilot 1 – Richard Richard has served as a Montana school superintendent for a total of twelve years; eight years in his current K-8 district and four years in a K-12 district. Prior to his positions as superintendent he was a principal in another district for four years and a teacher in two other districts for six years. His current district has 370 students of whom 59% participate in the district's free and reduced lunch program. There are 38 certified members on his staff. His district is located in an economically depressed logging area in western Montana.

Superintendent Pilot 2 – Charles Charles is in his fourth year as superintendent and principal in a small town outside of the state's capital. Prior to his current role he was a high school teacher for 12 years. In his current district, there are 200 students and 18 certified staff members. Of the student population, 70% qualify for free or reduced lunch participation. The chief employer in the area is state and local government agencies that include departments within the county seat to state correctional facilities, as well as opportunities to commute to Helena.

Superintendent Pilot 3 – Taylor Taylor is in his 10th year in education. He served two years as a middle school teacher before becoming a principal and superintendent in smaller districts in Montana, Wyoming, and Alaska. Currently he is the superintendent of a K-8 district that feeds into the larger Billings High School District. He has approximately 370 students who he describes as coming from two economic extremes: deep poverty or from million dollar houses. He has 28 certified members on his staff.

Interviews and artifact review yielded information that was highly pertinent to the research questions. After the pilot study the researcher determined that a phenomenological study was the correct methodology for this research with only slight modifications to the interview questions due to redundancy.

Participants and Evidence of Emergent Themes

The researcher selected a phenomenological approach as the appropriate methodology to deeply understand how the accountability movement may have caused disequilibrium within school districts and to specifically examine superintendents' responses to the greater expectations in student achievement. There were 11 superintendents in this phenomenological study. This section provides an overview of the emergent themes. That is followed by an introduction to each participant with background information about his or her education, experience, and district along with perspective of the purpose of the 21st century school district. This is followed by the emergent themes that became evident through interviews and any artifact examination that occurred during the data collection process.

Overview of Emergent Themes

The rich interviews and subsequent reviews of pertinent artifacts led to the following five emergent themes described here briefly:

1. Participants reported with urgency the purpose of the 21st century school district to include strong emphasis on instruction and development of

technological skills, critical thinking skills, and the necessity of lifelong learning.

2. Participants universally welcomed accountability in K-12 education, though equally universal were various cited flaws of NCLB.
3. While there was some initial resistance to accountability measures, participants reported a “we’re in this together” collaborative demeanor among stakeholders that helped propel discussions and actions directed at student learning rather than arguing about or deciding to wait out the accountability movement.
4. Self-organizing patterns were evident as participants and their staffs focused on a few goals that supported student learning, quality instruction, and student management techniques. One related and common finding was the disdain for state plans and reporting and the existence of dual sets of school improvement plans.
5. Participants discussed actions that would be described as transformative as they inspired trust, demonstrated transparency, encouraged problem solving from within the organization, and utilized data to help foster change. Frustration with the increased reporting caused a number of participants to “run interference” so principals and teachers were not impacted by the increased demands.

Participants

There were 11 participants in this phenomenological study and each participant with his or her reflections on disequilibrium, accountability, and leadership are presented here independently to give greater context to each superintendent's story.

Superintendent 1 Michael

Michael currently serves a K-12 south central Montana school district of approximately 470 students and 46 certified staff. He has been in the district for 12 years. Prior to that he was a superintendent in a north central Montana district for five years and had also been a principal for four years and a teacher for four years. Fifteen percent of students in his district participate in the free or reduced lunch program. Isolated from other towns by at least 20 miles, this district is situated in the mountains where tourists come to ski in the winter and camp in the summer. The town also offers small commercial resorts to host family and business events.

When asked to describe the purpose of the 21st century school district, Michael stated there were multiple purposes (2010):

One of them is to create a desire for lifelong learning. Because there is no way that we are to prepare kids for what's to come in the next 10, 20, 30 years, they just have to make that decision or the model that they are to learn through their forties, through their fifties. I think the other thing we need to provide them with the tools that they are to need to enjoy learning and to facilitate, make it efficient, so that they don't, you know, are not doing long divisions, but they understand the concepts of long divisions, but once they got it, they can use calculators. And in terms of a democratic society, truly I think if we start to falter as a democracy, that's going to be the reason why, is because we don't have the educated populace making the tough decisions based on a high level of knowledge. (p. 2)

Michael went on to state that his district also believes it is a must to have the very best teachers in the classroom to carry out the purpose, “we have to put the best people in the classrooms. That is the frontline where it really matters. If they are not good, you have got make difficult decisions quickly and move on” (p.2). Michael makes it very clear the priorities of his district by stating, “We spend a fair amount of time establishing the fact that we are here for academics, number one and number two we are here for the rest of the education we are experiencing” (p 4).

When discussing the accountability movement and its impact on the district and subsequent responses, Michael readily stated:

No Child Left Behind, I think the positive thing that occurred there is just the focus that are put on students and student achievement. I think the end goals are unrealistic and I think that if you concentrate on it too much, you set yourself up for failure because statistically you can't have everybody at 100% above normal. (p. 5)

Despite his statistical skepticism, Michael sees that it has made a difference in the district's focus:

I think there is a point of no return, or where you don't get return on that accountability, I think if you keep it in perspective and take the accountability and utilize it on an individual basis with students and on a classroom basis it has been a good thing. (p. 3)

Michael cited four concerns with the accountability movement that caused disruption within the district in how they were carrying out their mission. First, he saw a need for a change in the culture among his staff. “Probably 25% of our staff that was inadequate or really didn't like the accountability pushed back” (p. 4). However, over time and through conversations with the union president, he believes such pushback is now almost non-existent:

I meet with organized labor once every month or every other month trying to make sure that we weren't going to step into something, and it has really worked out. I've worked with a solid president and kept her in the loop letting her know where we were headed and why and that our actions were simply the right thing to do for kids. I established credibility with them. (p. 7)

He credits the community's support of its educational system as an indirect benefit of keeping resistance to a minimum:

Our community values education. We did not need have to state our case of what we wanted to do, there was community that was right there with us and stepped up and said we are willing to support you. We had things going in the right direction. We tapped into that, then we just started holding the marginal members accountable not renewing some non-tenured and releasing some tenured teachers. (p. 8)

Similarly, the board of trustees are supportive of the accountability measures and desire to improve the school system recognizing the work needed to set goals and priorities and at times, making difficult decisions. "Our board has held retreats and work collaboratively on some specific goals of where they wanted to go" (p. 11). "We tapped in to that and started holding marginal staff accountable with some non-renewal of non-tenured teachers and releasing some tenured teachers" (p. 11).

Second, he expressed concern for the instrument being used to measure student achievement. "I really have some concerns about the viability of our state test and everything that goes on with that test isn't something we should hang our hats on" (p. 8).

Michael went on to state:

That's nuts, I mean that is absolutely nuts, that we go through that testing exercise for compliance and create misleading data possibly and lose a couple of days of instruction, and when we are teaching to standards, it may be measured on a test that may be inaccurate. (p. 8)

Third, while he is not opposed to data based decisions, he expressed his discomfort with using data as a sole indicator, especially when it comes to staff feedback. “I really struggle with hiring and firing concept with data” (p. 3), a direction where he believes accountability could go if there are not changes made. “I mean it’s going to come back and haunt us if we don’t make some sort of veering away from the unrealistic 100%” (p. 3). His belief is in good administration making sound decisions about hiring and firing “in the absence of a ton of data” (p.3).

Fourth, the amount of reporting and paperwork was distressing. “I don’t think the state needs to come in and create this huge mass of paperwork, it really is distracting to what our mission is” (p. 4). S1 stated that his district was already in midst of creating goals and priorities:

We have the Five Year Plan and generated staff input, and we have various committees on instruction and assessment, and that’s where we get the collaboration of staff, we get staff concerns, we communicate our expectations and the process is efficient and functional. (p. 6)

Michael clearly states he is not arguing against accountability, but states that the school district improvement plans were already taking shape when the state required reporting that “runs parallel to what we are trying to do and you throw too much on the plate your buy in is gone” (p. 7).

Upon self-reflection, Michael recognized the change in his leadership approach with the accountability movement:

When I was young in my career I was very much, or tried to control situations more. Now I’m more of a facilitator where I get my expectations out, I listen to positives and negatives, try to address both and facilitate from point A to point B. You have to keep that collaboration at a certain level and develop buy-in. (p. 11)

Michael credits board support, staff collaboration, and having a simple and flexible set of goals to the increase in student achievement. Though the district does not have “an ivory tower method of describing what we are trying to do” (p. 12), he tells his teachers that “our job as administrators is to deal with the yuck, and you guys teach on a consistent basis and take care of the classrooms” (p. 12). He states that curriculum alignment, participation in the Montana Behavioral Initiative, and professional development in Response to Intervention have been key to building a culture of accountability.

When you have a culture with majority of students expecting to do things a step above, it really shuts down the few who might try to be disruptive. Our discipline issues have decreased by 70% over a three year period. Our kids are coming in saying we need to be challenged in class. (p. 13)

Superintendent 2 - Thomas

Thomas works in a district in a small community in central Montana whose community demographics have changed in the last 10 years. Once a long standing agricultural town with families who farmed and ranched and sent their children to the school district, the town now has a high transient rate. “I think less than 30% of our kids are so called locals, you know, where their names have been in the community for 30 or more years” (2010, p. 3). Fifty-four percent of its students participate in the free and reduced lunch program. The superintendent is in his ninth year in this role. Prior to his current position he was the high school principal for three years. In another district he had served as an elementary teacher for five years and a counselor for five years. Thomas described the purpose of a 21st century school district with the following (2010):

I don't think they are wrong to go in there and saying reading, writing, and arithmetic are important, but more so than that now, we are trying to develop kids so much with, we are preparing our kids for jobs that don't exist. The world's changed more in the last 3 years than it did the 100 years before that. We must give kids the ability to learn and the ability to succeed. (p. 2)

The mission statement of this school district reflects Thomas' perspective as it attempts to "maximize students abilities and potential as lifelong learners" and for its schools to educate "students to their fullest potential and help them become responsible, productive citizens. Thomas adds "our kids need to be a positive impact on society, make it a better place" (p. 2).

The accountability movement is openly embraced by Thomas who indicated that despite his superintendent colleagues' displeasure with No Child Left Behind and its increasing expectations, he believes it has made his teachers better instructors and improved student performance.

I think when No Child Left Behind came out, everybody cursed it, and said there is no possible way we'll be 100% proficient. But what it has done is made our kids a whole lot better and teachers teaching all kids instead of overlooking some. Do I agree with a lot of it, probably not, but it has made a positive impact on our school. (p. 5)

He was quick to point out the time factor involved with meeting the demands of the accountability movement. "It didn't just happen overnight, it took us three to four years just continuing to improve" (p. 9). As the instructional leader, Thomas said it took an investment of time to work with his staff because he did not approach this as a top down directive.

We aren't hammers. I think we all have our reasons, and I think if we can explain our reasons and get teachers to buy into it, and if you can explain it and listen to your staff, that is a big skill needed for superintendents. I think teachers appreciate the fact that you respect their opinion and listen to them. (p. 4)

There was some initial concern as Thomas dealt with turnover in his staff at the same time greater expectations were being implemented. “We went through that stage of not knowing really who to hire and what to look for, so we developed a whole different kind of questioning in our interviews” (p. 5).

Thomas identifies a culture defined by collaboration within his school district. “I think we have always been a leading district in the state” (p.8). “I don’t think we were ever worried about No Child Left Behind. I think our teachers are committed to better education and finding ways to help kids” (p. 8). Eight years ago Thomas identified with his staff that low reading scores needed to be a goal for their district. “Reading was our weakness, now it’s our strength” (p. 8). He credits the scheduled collaborative time he sets aside for teachers for reviewing how students achieve and how to improve instruction and student learning for the change in culture despite some initial grumbling by staff.

Thomas cites professional development for Response to Intervention and differentiated instructional strategies as key components for the district’s academic success. He also says he is willing to send teams on site visits to other schools to discover what is working in the state. As a result he says the number of special education referrals have been reduced by one third. “I think RTI and differentiated instruction is where we needed to go for special ed. and gifted. I think that’s good teaching” (p. 9). Students have been recognized for their academic performance, specifically when a higher education official visited with the senior class and staff after students scored in the top ranks of the Montana writing assessment.

Thomas is frustrated with other aspects of the accountability movement: “Do I worry about No Child Left Behind? I worry about the paperwork, but I don’t think they’ll ever shut us down, but the paperwork is a nightmare. I think it has taken me off task away from productive time as superintendent and it makes us be a paper monkey.” (p. 7). Thomas states that though all but three teachers have been hired by him in his nine years there as superintendent, his board of trustees have remained stable, and with that a positive board-superintendent relationship. Thomas believes that the mission statement and core beliefs of the board and board policy are in alignment, but keeping “focused on just one to three goals” each year has been why they have been successful and everyone knows what the goals are. “We focused our goals to just one to three goals a year. Because our focus is narrowed, everything falls in line” (p. 9).

We know that reading is always going to be one of them. We identify our other goals and you can go out and ask every one of my teachers and you hear what our concentration is on, what we are going to do. (p. 9)

Throughout the interview Thomas teetered between the satisfaction of the growth his district has experienced academically, assessment, and professional development, with the demands of state and federal reporting and how that pulls him away from interacting with students and staff.

I’m lucky because my school is small and I can walk out in the hall and see kids, but it is crazy and when I had to complete the Effectiveness Report or Five Year Plan, I was pissed. We are not a checklist and that is what all this paperwork is. I don’t think that’s how you run a school. (p. 8)

Superintendent 3 - Susan

The third superintendent of this study, Susan served in a district that is a K-8 feeder district to Billings School District #2. With 19 years of experience as a teacher, principal, and superintendent, she worked with 250 students and 21 certified staff members for five years before taking a new position. Inheriting a “messy situation” involving personnel concerns, Susan immediately had to put some processes in place and helped get the focus back on student learning. Working with the board and teachers, Susan says the district purpose included a “learning for all” perspective.

It has to prepare kids for the jobs that we aren't even aware of; that are going to be there which includes the technology piece of it and making kids thinkers versus just feeding them information and having them learn how to be critical thinkers and grow from that and just open as many doors as we can for them and look at them as individuals, rather as masses and tapping into those skills and building from that and having diverse curriculum to give them exposure. (Susan, 2010, p. 1)

Further, Susan stated that “we want them to be lifelong learners and continue learning when they change jobs every 5 years or when they have 10 jobs by the time they are 30” (p. 1).

Susan felt the accountability helped focus her school district. “I wasn't using accountability as a demand, but I believe it was making people feel intrinsically accountable to educate every child and build a team approach” (p. 2). She said this went beyond instruction and academic performance to also meeting the social and emotional needs of every child. Her approach was to look first at larger, more global issues having her staff examine “without pointing fingers” (p. 2). “That's why it's important to have

that collaborative time to where they can prepare and you respect that needed time” (p. 3).

Accountability arrived at a time when “there was a lot of autonomy, which is good, but it was to the point where teachers were doing what they wanted (p. 3). Susan stated it was not a cohesive climate at that point, but she believes that staff turnover helped over a three year period. Susan had to in different settings inform “some of the more seasoned teachers who thought NCLB was just going to pass” (p. 3) that accountability was part of the educational landscape. “That’s where some of those difficult conversations would come into play, whether it was a small committee or one on one” (p. 3). The changing of some grade level teaching assignments, creating team time to review data, and insistence upon curriculum fidelity, “they saw the scores increase, they saw those struggling students develop, and it validated their efforts” (p. 4).

According to Susan, the longest process involved implementing Response to Intervention process to “get kids where they need to be” (p. 4). The other component implemented by Susan was staff participation in the Montana Behavior Initiative.

For the kids it was very different because behavior is rather controlled and there was no system to dealing with behavior, but once we implemented MBI and did it with diligence the behavior disciplinary referrals went down 150% and I attribute that to increased academics but the test scores went up because there was a better learning environment. (p. 5)

The improvements in student performance were well supported by the board of trustees who, with Susan, kept their district improvement plan “simple without taking on too much where people are overwhelmed and making sure it was something staff would

buy in to” (p. 7). “I didn’t have to go to the board and pour in a lot of training because they were supportive and wanted to empower me as the district leader” (p. 9).

Accountability and growth in Susan’s district came with multiple costs: As the superintendent, I was spending more time on paperwork and issues not directly related to kids and student learning. It’s leading to superintendent burnout. Ironically, with the emphasis on accountability, you as the instructional leader end up spending less time in that role because of all the reporting. The day isn’t long enough. (p. 10)

Superintendent 4 - Joseph

Joseph has had a varied career in and out of Montana serving in urban districts in Colorado as a principal as well as a teacher and administrator in Montana. He has served in two Montana districts as superintendent and is currently completing his seventh year in a K-12 district of 540 students and 51 certified teachers. His small community includes an agricultural base, peripheral economic services, and people who commute to Bozeman. Thirty-one percent of the student body participates in the free or reduced lunch program.

Joseph is quick to acknowledge that his previous out-of-state experience has helped prepare him for the inevitable accountability movement that came later to Montana. Acknowledging his long career has given him time for reflection, Joseph (2010) had this to offer about purpose:

Really to me the underlined parts of education isn’t much different than what it was in 1950, but with the technique and the new technology, you know it’s just upgrading to meet these needs. It goes back to providing the best education possible for your students and that requires a lot of paying attention to trends that are coming up and expectations that are changing. One publication stated a couple of years ago that the purpose of public education was to create and educate people to run a democratic society. And yet today in a lot of ways what the federal government is asking schools to do is move away from that philosophy because

they have got different goals. It's less about an educated citizenry but how students can operate in a work situation to enhance this country's abilities to stay on the top (p. 2)

Joseph cites the need for districts to be flexible and adapt accordingly which may mean moving resources to address those changes. For example, Joseph saw the need for the district to attain an assessment system that would give timely information rather than wait for the annual criterion referenced test. "I pushed for MAP testing for five years because I want that information, that immediate feedback. I run it and get it into the hands of teachers and principals right away because the CRT wasn't immediate" (p. 4).

The idea of competition was brought up by Joseph in two different contexts. First, Joseph made reference to global competition and how schools are to prepare students to help the nation become competitive in the world economy. Second, from his out-of-state experience, he said that competition among schools was very common, especially in those cities that had multiple schools and in which districts promoted schools of choice and charter schools. "People up here don't really understand that" (p. 4). Joseph expressed gratitude for the professional development experiences he had in Colorado that allowed him to work with Robert Marzano, and that it gave him an edge in preparing his district for higher expectations.

His experience as an instructional leader in his current district has produced high student test scores, however he states that there are conflicts within the stakeholders groups that make it taxing as he works to implement systems of accountability. "No Child Left Behind is accepted here" (p. 4). However in the same vein, "the union would like to see me go away" (p. 7) and "I've got two board members that like to run the

school district and yet they have minimal experience other than going through high school” (p. 8). Add to this the demands of state and federal reporting, Joseph shares:

Most of the effectiveness plans that I have seen is B.S. I think schools just write minimal things and turn them in. To meet the needs of the feds and state you have got to play this game of writing up Five Year Plans and Effectiveness Plans and all this kind of stuff does do some good, but it’s not a bible. It takes quite a while to write this up. The point is, it may make us more accountable to the feds or state, but not to your local school board or at the local level, and well, shouldn’t it be there? (p. 7)

Despite conflicting interests and the time needed for reporting, Joseph said over the course of his tenure in his district and his commitment for improved student achievement, he stated after a number of years “the administrators and teachers began to see what I was trying to do” (p. 6). Further, Joseph stated “the teachers finally came to me and said they understood and that began the buy in which prompted us to implement RTI, so I got them involved in that” (p. 6). A reading coach was hired and assessment instruments at all levels were utilized. According to Joseph, the staff buy in led to accelerated test scores.

All of a sudden you saw reading scores go up 20 points in the first year and then our students were scoring 100%. Before, the union was fighting against everything, but when scores increase like that, the union accepted it because it makes everybody look good. (p. 9)

Joseph does worry about the future of NCLB, “there’s no school that’s not going to not fail” (p. 10). He believes there are positive aspects to the accountability but is concerned with “stifling creativity” (p. 10) and putting extra pressure on special needs students and their teachers. “NCLB has a lot of good, but it’s trying to put a square peg in a round hole” (p. 10). The other positive aspect is greater expectations are now placed on him as the superintendent by teachers for what they are doing and what they may need in the

way of professional development. “We partner with the university. We learn how the brain works. We bring specialists in” (p. 11). The district also worked on their discipline plan and embedded MBI into their school improvement process. Joseph also embraced the idea of allowing elementary students to be placed in classes based on abilities rather than their chronological age. Though there was some early resistance, Joseph says it is a philosophy of not holding students back.

The community has been supportive of the initiatives implemented, however Joseph falls back to the difficulties on the board. With four members he describes as “visionary and indicated to him that they hired him to lead the district” (p. 12), there are two who don’t respect the “institutional knowledge” (p. 12) of the other, longer serving members. The other members are frustrated.

I mean that’s what I’m seeing, you know, and it’s just so funny because you have this high performing district, one of the highest performing in the state that makes AYP every year at all levels, and yet you have to deal with a board member who is worried about the cabbage soup being served in the cafeteria, and I’m afraid I’m not too worried about cabbage soup. So that’s what you go through. We are doing okay, but the cut scores go up, and it’s going to be tougher and tougher to make it in a system that is designed to cause failure. (p. 12)

Superintendent 5 - William

William serves a 9th-12th grade high school district as its superintendent. A small but stable student population of 185 students of which 20% are on free or reduced lunch, make up its’ pupils. There are 21 staff members who the superintendent describes as experienced with low teacher turnover. The community is an isolated one that lines an interstate highway. William’s entire career has been in this district, first as a teacher for 17 years followed by three years as principal and now 10 years as superintendent. An

advocate of a well-rounded and engaged student, he describes a district's purpose as, "There is the academic side of things, but the other part of our philosophy includes encouraging self and others, tolerance, how to get along, how look at your skills and strengths" (p. 3). William cites research on student engagement in the classroom and in activities as being a core value of the district. "It's our goal to get each student involved in at least one school activity" (p. 6). He finds it is necessary to have continual communication among stakeholders for clarification of the district's purpose, "And so that balance act between academics, which is number one, with blending all the other things going on in kids lives with activities, opportunities to work with each other, opportunity to return something to the community" (p. 5).

William utilizes a communications committee made up of board representatives, administrators, and teachers. They meet at least once a month to "talk about the issues being talked about in the community." Issues are then addressed in an appropriate manner, which often means for the district, getting more information out to stakeholders. He credits this committee for "being out in front" of the accountability issues that were surfacing across the state.

NCLB is a great concept and it has done some good for us, but I can't say that the 5 Year Effectiveness planning is what turned the corner for us. We were ahead of this back in the mid-90s to 2000 to now. It's just another report to fill out. (p. 7)

William acknowledges that his students are high achieving, and that his staff is competitive. They are a district that makes AYP, but also checks to see how similar sized districts are doing. "If we aren't among the top two or three, we notice it and adjust accordingly" (p. 9). Two ideas are emphasized by William. The first is professional

development which has evolved from being individually designed to team focused. While there may be multiple topics being studied in professional learning communities, no one is doing something on their own. Likewise, some whole staff initiatives have taken form, such as school wide participation in MBI, which not only helps with student environment, but it reinforces a district core belief that “as long as you are active in learning, you are going to improve” (p. 5).

A second idea shared was the how important curriculum work done within the departments has been. Greater articulation and alignment led to improved student achievement. William shared that his teachers are about standards based education for the sake of a solid education, not for fear of performance on a state mandated test.

Don't worry about the test, it will come in its own time. Because there was this worry, then I remember the statement made, I remember the teacher making it and everybody nodding their head, we are not going to teach to a test, we are not going to do that, we are not going to sell ourselves out that way. (p. 9)

Though reported that the district was well underway with school improvement goals with NCLB, “I think they bought into accountability as something we are stuck with and we got it and still have got to live with it” (p. 10). William states that accountability has impacted him as the instructional leader. “I do feel an obligation to create the atmosphere and the environment that is striving to meet those accountability goals” (p. 12). He credits the staff for generating ideas for improvement, but he makes sure he is available to help facilitate ideas into action.

While William is pleased with his district and the services offered to meet students' academic, social and emotional needs, he stated that he puts in his time completing 5 Year Plans, but the district does not have a strategic plan, but rather a

culture that is simply “a good system with a good staff” (p. 12). “I think it would have taken even longer to get where we are now” (p. 12). Consistency in leadership, according to William, is one of the chief reasons for the districts success. The superintendent prior to William was there for 17 years, and now William is completing his 10th year.

That is something I have to say about this board and community. They get behind you and support you, and let you do some things, give some time to do things, but our success is related to a consistent staff as well. We have enough carry over with low turnover so our goals are consistent. (p. 13)

Superintendent 6 - Peg

Peg is the superintendent of a small K-8 district outside of Bozeman with 225 students, 35% of whom are on free or reduced lunch, and with a certified staff of 15 teachers. Peg taught for 10 years before entering administration as a superintendent in north central Montana and is now finishing her 8th year in her current assignment. Peg by her own admittance struggled with defining a school district’s purpose in today’s era of accountability. Clearly she was torn between the need for higher expectations but felt under the current national pressures, it came at the expense of student engagement.

I used to believe we prepared students for the world of work and active citizenry but it’s now, for me, about having kids find work that is fulfilling and meaningful to them, it’s to help kids to be part of our culture and our society. But further we want kids who will grow into adults who are, who are able to think critically, who are able to be critical, who are able to see and are interested in seeing with a wider lens, a deeper view of the world (2010, p. 2)

Peg believes some aspects of the accountability movement have been good. “I think scrutinizing data and examining practices and talking about what we teach and why is good” (p. 3). However with higher expectations have come consequences that frustrate Peg.

I think that sometimes, certainly for myself, I feel like I spend too much time with work that isn't meaningful or isn't important from my perspective, and it's infuriating and it's bureaucratic drudgery and that has been, that's awful and that's deadening and it's deadening to me and to other people, so I have to try and minimize that sort of deadening work for other people. I feel like that's the role I have to play as leader. (p. 7)

Part of that frustration stems from her inability to be in classrooms and with students because of required reporting, "there is much of that that is not meaningful because, because we do things in a different way that doesn't quite fit that format" (p. 3). Peg stated that she visited with her board and with the Montana Office of Public Instruction about the amount of time reporting takes and sometimes creating plans that "show goals, some are ridiculous goals and unachievable" which is how "I preface my statements for the goals" (p. 3). Her board is supportive of her and has even asked her rhetorically, "what if we say forget it, that we don't want you to spend your time this way" (p. 3)?

"Running interference" (p. 4) is a role Peg assumes, "I take care of some of the work that is not so meaningful, so teachers and board members aren't aware or feel the pressure that I take on" (p. 4). Peg reports that she has designed much of her school improvement plan and shares pertinent information for staff and board. She finds herself with a new board requiring additional education on accountability measures in the state.

Providing a "well rounded" education and school experience is a core value of Peg and her district. While she acknowledges that math and reading are considered high stakes when it comes to AYP status, she also says that "we are not going to take recess away and we are not taking kids out of science and social studies" (p. 5).

Much of that decision is based on conversations with board members, staff, and community. "I feel like I am a good collaborator and good at building coalitions. I give a

lot of voice to our stakeholders” (p. 8). Response to Intervention strategies were implemented because of Peg and her staff’s goal of reaching all students. However, she readily admits that she does not believe there is alignment of mission statement, board policies and strategic plans. Instead she believes her immediate goals are appropriate and “people feel we have a lot going on” (p. 8) but she credits her staff and “taking advantage of the people we have now and using the strengths they bring to the table” (p. 9).

Peg would like to have a more formal strategic plan in place with all stakeholders given the opportunity to participate, but she is equally passionate about revisiting the school’s purpose and asking the difficult questions at the local, state, and federal level.

I am happy for changes, but I think also we don’t protest enough, it’s still a shock to me that here we got all these years of No Child Left Behind and I don’t know that it’s going to get any better in what it morphs into, but we’ve said we’ve taken on that mantle of improving test scores, but why aren’t we screaming about all these other issues for our kids, kids who live in poverty or difficult economic factors, and social factors we pretend don’t exist. (p. 9)

Superintendent 7 - Robert

Robert brings a personal and passionate advocacy for all students that while he succinctly describes a district’s purpose, he also states “everybody has a story.” His story includes that of being a foster child and later adopted by parents with non-negotiable high expectations which became the foundation of what he believes professionally. Clinically, he describes purpose as:

Our job is to prepare every kid to have the skills necessary to survive in the emerging job field. Our goal as educators is to first of all figure out what kids need, what employers are looking for, what colleges want, and making sure we are providing them in our curriculum and standards (2010, p. 1)

Behind the purpose is a personal drive, “I don’t want to see any kid left behind and we can make the difference and we are small enough to let that happen.” Robert’s district has 630 students, an 18% free and reduced rate, with 51 teachers serving grades K-12. S7 taught for 13 years before serving as a superintendent in two districts for two and three years respectively. He is completing his 10th year in his current position in a town that has a strong agricultural and mining economy.

I came in here 10 years ago and there wasn’t really any sort of plan. Principals sort of ran their own show. With No Child Left Behind being implemented but no one doing anything before I got here, I said the district would be in trouble if we didn’t start looking at what students were doing. I ended up educating the staff on the law, and getting the staff to see the urgency helped us get back in front of the curve again. (p. 3)

On top of educating the staff, Robert had to address a community that was dissatisfied with their schools, working with a split board, and developing a plan of improvement for the district’s schools. While the community welcomed Robert as a new superintendent, “at first about half of the teachers were resistant and the other half said they wanted more rigor” (p. 5). Robert was not just concerned about curriculum, standards, and assessment, but also concerned with the learning environment.

You can’t have good learning in the classroom without a good learning environment, and the learning environment had to change. I am a little less forgiving when it comes to some people’s expectations. This isn’t your living room, this is a public educational facility, let’s act like it. (p. 7)

Along with higher expectations for the learning environment, the district spent time aligning its curriculum with national standards and articulating grade level benchmarks from kindergarten through 12th grade. “We’ve aligned our instruction and curriculum with the state standards but even more importantly, we’ve been using national standards, you know OPI had state standards but they were really nebulous” (p. 8).

Further, Robert remarked, “The thing is, the ideas are good behind NCLB and 5 Year Plans, but in honesty, I think a lot of that in meeting the mandates takes away from the actual, our actual ability to improve education” (p. 8).

Much of this work was done in a collaborative manner. “There’s time for top down directives, and there is time for collaborative work” (p. 9). However, Robert believes the superintendent’s role as instructional leader determines the success or failure of a district regardless of the amount of collaboration going on. “Regardless of NCLB, a superintendent is either going to care about student achievement or he isn’t. If he doesn’t, the district probably won’t perform well” (p. 10). Robert believes the same way about the use of data. “I’ve always used data, I think it’s just common sense ingrained. We have more research for techniques, but data has always been there to some degree” (p. 10).

Today Robert is pleased with the instruction, learning environment, and student performance. He utilizes professional development to focus on weak areas, and has implemented Response to Intervention in his schools. And according to Robert, the community and board are pleased with the results leaving Robert to set the direction and develop school improvement plans. “My board isn’t terribly involved with Five Year Plans and strategic planning. We do those things but not to the level the BPE wants” (p. 10). That does bring up a source of frustration for Robert and the planning and reporting in this era of accountability.

The disruption has gotten almost overwhelming. I do all those reports because I try to keep all this stuff out of the principals’ hands so it doesn’t disrupt them from being in the classrooms with teachers and students. I’ve assumed the role that all of that stuff stops with me. We have a mission and a strategic plan, but to do the state’s Five Year Plan, I’ll tell you, it was completed simply to meet a

requirement. I'm tired of putting a lot of energy into writing that stuff and then it's changed that it isn't relevant now. (p.10)

Superintendent 8 - John

John recently retired after spending his entire career in the same K-12 district starting as a teacher for 14 years, moving to elementary principal for 6 years followed by 6 years as superintendent. In his last year as superintendent there were 700 students and 80 certified staff members. Having been removed from his position for five months, he offered reflection that he felt he did not have the time to engage in while working 60 hour weeks. He offered a perspective on the purpose of schools and community merging together to meet needs of lifelong learners that exceed the traditional K-12 setting.

I don't see school boundaries anymore. I don't see grade levels. It's overlapping so much more now, and I don't know how we will get schools to that point where there is no longer kindergarten, first grade, second grade, third grade, whatever, but it's you moving at your own pace as you go through school and it never ends. So that's how I see it, but once they get out there the schools still need to be a support mechanism within the community and that if they decide to change, because they are going to change what they want to do with their lives, the school is still there (2010, p. 1)

The strategic plan of this district expanded on this concept by stating it will “focus resources on identified wants, preferences, and needs of its community.” John and his district formulated one of the first strategic plans in the state concurrent and in support of NCLB, and with the recognition of lifelong learning for all.

John is clear that the educational system needs to be in support of student learning and “for too many years we had students who weren't challenged by teachers who weren't pushing them hard enough” (p. 3). He used NCLB as a catalyst for change within his district.

I had to go to the teachers and say, listen, accountability is here to stay. It's going nowhere, and I do not wish to be part of a system that's failing, and we were, we hadn't made AYP the first year I was superintendent. So I changed the way I approached my job, and I expected others to change their approach as well" (p. 3)

John reports that his board applied pressure for change to occur within the district and that they expected improved test scores. "My administrative team needed some shake up, and actually two of them returned to the classroom" (p. 3). He met with the teachers to share his vision of change and accountability and was met with little resistance, however his principals experienced pushback as they implemented new programs. John also shared that students could sense a change and that a more "business like environment" (p. 5) was present. He credits RTI and a renewed focus on curriculum development as instrumental to their success.

John enthusiastically embraces the accountability movement and cites missed opportunities stemming back almost 30 years.

I became a principal in 2000, and then came No Child Left Behind, but accountability goes back further than that. If you take a look back at, and it's been such a long time but it was the *Nation at Risk* report written during the Reagan administration. That was a huge message to us and I think we missed for many, many years, and it took three Presidents before everyone said okay, there is going to be accountability, we are going to raise the bar. Now throw in NCLB and AYP, I don't necessarily agree with all of it, but the accountability piece I do agree with. (p. 8)

As part of the accountability piece, both for economic and academic reasons, the district went to grade leveled schools. "Grade leveling and RTI were probably the two best things to happen to our district" (p. 5). "We saw tremendous growth and when you consider everything we were doing, except the 5 Year Plan, it drove up to making the gains that we had" (p. 5). John reports some resistance initially to the overall changes:

NCLB probably took the biggest hit. People didn't like it, but in theory, it is the best thing that ever happened to education. Who would want their kid, if you would put all the parents and teachers in one room to say, raise your hand if you'd be okay with your child left behind in learning? I would say when NCLB first came in, we were all upset that the teachers had to give up some of their favorite lessons in order to concentrate more on math and reading. However, what I hear them saying now is they are glad that they had to do that because they see that the kids have progressed (p. 6)

Returning to the strategic planning process, upon his departure from the district, S8 told the board that the "strategic plan was good, a resource they need to visit often as a road map"(p. 12).

John left his district in June, 2010 and shared with the researcher that "he literally lost his life" (p. 8) and calculated working "60 to 70 to 80 hours per week" (p. 8) because of all the demands on a superintendent in today's era of accountability.

I felt like I was on the defensive constantly about these changes that we were putting in place, and it was why I am defending something that we can throw results on the board and say look how well our students are doing, but some on the board and the union didn't buy it. But in the end, I just didn't have my life, so the results can speak for themselves, it worked out for me and I was able to just kind of gracefully fade off into the sunset (p. 8)

Superintendent 9 - Maria

Maria is completing her 50th year in education. After 25 years as a teacher she entered the administrative ranks with the last 13 years as superintendent in her current district of 1200 K-8 students and 105 certified staff. Half of the pupils qualify for free or reduced lunch. As stated in the mission statement, her board of trustees takes an active role in advocating for the provision of "diverse opportunities to attain their potential as lifelong learners and productive citizens." Further their strategic plan includes providing

for “opportunities for student enrichment and activities that will afford physical, mental, and social development.” As for her ideas of school district purpose, she states:

I think as always, we are here to prepare the students for the citizenship outside the school, we’re not educating the children for school, we’re educating them for their life, I know that’s very lofty, but it is what it is. And it’s a technological world that we’re in these days so have to expose the kids to all kinds of technology. In addition I believe it is our obligation to foster a sense of community service so our kids to service projects in our community. (2010, p. 3)

Maria says it is important for service projects to go beyond the boundaries of her school grounds and to reach out to different segments of the community. “We’ve worked to improve community parks, create public service announcements for the fire department, and created emergency packets for senior citizens as part of disaster planning” (p. 3). She says she has seen the long term benefits in her students beyond their 8th grade.

We had a grant that a particular group of students participated in for three years in middle school. When that group went to high school, this group of students, all outsiders as they fed into the larger area district, went on to high school and became student council presidents, class presidents, and in leadership in all four years of high school. (p. 3)

Participating in service projects is part of the district’s and Maria’s goal of creating an educational experience that is “well-rounded for students” (p. 4).

The accountability movement at first disrupted the district because as S9 states, “when NCLB arrived we were all upset that teachers would have to give up their favorite lessons” (p. 4). However Maria now reports that teachers are glad “they had to do that because they see kids have progressed in math and reading with that extra push” (p. 4). She is quick to point out that her teachers are not “teaching to the test” (p. 4) because her primary teachers aren’t testing but “are truly concerned with sending better reading and math students on to the intermediate building” (p. 4). In her district it is a team approach

to student learning, “we set up time for teachers to work through what is necessary for students to be successful through 8th grade, and all the teachers take responsibility and an active role in the process” (p. 4). She also says that her district still have P.E. and music as an integral part of the curriculum.

Though the district is now a high performing one, it was not always that way. “I think the first couple of years we didn’t make AYP, there was great concern” (p. 6).

This community has great pride and when we weren’t making AYP there were lots of questions. The negative publicity was horrendous and assumptions were made because we are a very poor community. The teachers were embarrassed, they were upset, and they didn’t really know what to do. And unfortunately, their mindset for about three years was that NCLB would eventually go away. (p. 7)

After the third year, Maria says there was clear acknowledgement that accountability “was not going away even with a transition politically at the national level” (p. 8).

Maria says that teacher leaders, especially in the 4th grade, began to analyze the state assessment data and everybody “started to work together and talk about what they have to do and they’d set goals” (p. 9).

The district’s board of trustees was patient as the teachers and administrators worked on their academic plan for improvement.

I think the board understood the educational climate of accountability but only after lots of board meetings educating them on it. They have been a good group, and we’ve been fortunate that they’ve been a board that doesn’t micromanage, they let me do my job, but I keep them informed about everything going on, and they haven’t been terribly concerned if one group doesn’t make it, they understand that now. (p. 9)

Despite the teacher acceptance, eventual acceptance of the need for improvement, and the overall board’s support, Maria says there have been positives with accountability, however:

Well, it's very stressful and it's actually forcing us to keep staff we probably wouldn't because of all the paperwork. I think the most frustrating thing is that we have to spend all this time doing all these reports and I really don't see any effectiveness coming in the other direction. (p. 11)

Maria credits response to intervention strategies, differentiated instruction, and curriculum alignment as three areas that made the biggest difference in test scores. "Every building is using RTI and differentiates, and what's frustrating is that NCLB should have started with these" (p. 10). Maria also reports hiring reading and math coaches and require teachers to meet weekly as grade level teams to review data and discuss "which parts of the curriculum they have covered and students successfully accomplished" (p. 11).

Upon reflection of her 50th year in education, Maria says her role as a superintendent "used to be more managerial, but I think instruction and leadership are the key things these days" (p. 11). She says that she has worked hard "to get her board, teachers, policies, and strategic plan all in alignment and everything very transparent" (p. 11).

It's been fun. I was, this is my 50th year in education, and I was actually going to tell the board in January that I wanted to retire, but accountability and now some taxation issues have come up, and I thought, I've still got some challenges here, I think I'll stay around another couple of years (p. 12)

Superintendent 10 - James

James serves a small district of 340 students in south central Montana where agriculture or commuting to Billings is the chief source of employment for residents. The superintendent is in his 8th year in the district and has 37 total years in public education as a teacher and superintendent. His perspective has evolved in his career about the role and

purpose of public education reaching a pinnacle in this current time advocating for more and more education in order for the United States to be competitive and for all students to possess critical thinking skills.

We need to have our students ready to either enter the work place or advance their educational progress, either to the junior colleges or to the 4 year colleges in order to meet both the national and international competitiveness. And with everything that's out there available, they need to be able to evaluate and make their decisions based on thorough evaluation or investigation of whatever that they are working on or whatever they are into. I know it's good thinking skills. (2010, p. 3)

While James readily embraces higher standards and student expectations, he readily points out flaws in the accountability systems that have cause him, his staff, and his students great distress.

I think it's taken too much time away from what we need to actually do in the classroom and time in the learning process because there are so many tests, reports, and programs we are required to do. Some of them have been good, ones that tell a student and teacher where a weakness is. However, they make all these requirements but they don't send the money. (p. 4)

James felt obligated to share his concerns with the Montana State Schools Superintendent, Denise Juneau in an email dated September 28, 2010:

Superintendent Juneau:

We as school administrators are being overrun with reports and data collection required by the OPI. The ADC for a school district our size is ridiculous. We have to enter data on five separate reports. It takes approximately 30 to 40 hours to complete this report along with all the other data which seems to be increasing. We used to complete the fall report in 8 hours. Currently there is a shortage of school administrators and many are being driven out due to the increasing required paperwork. It is easy to be removed from the frontlines and then develop another program, survey, or report and have the schools do it. I do appreciate your staff, they are really good to work with. We need your leadership to correct this situation. I look forward to your response.

According to James, he received words of encouragement from his fellow superintendents who shared similar feelings. For James the greatest impact for him is “it takes me out away from the halls and kids and puts me behind the desk more than I want” (p. 4).

We are not administrators, we are computer operators, and I think what they are passing down to us comes from Washington, and it’s real easy for the people in Helena to give it to the schools without realizing the time and impact. (p. 5)

The district’s stakeholders may have similar feelings, but in spite of the time and energy it takes for planning and reporting, James is pleased with the marked improvement in student performance. “The parents are with us making sure kids are well educated, and they know about the testing we do because we communicate that with them (p. 5). For the teachers, the accountability movement has “been evolution” (p. 6). James says that he is very proud of the teachers’ ability to “accept the changes in the classrooms, the open mindedness, and probably the biggest thing is departmentalization in our intermediate grades” (p. 6). The district continues to have a small student-teacher ratio which pleases teachers and parents. James says the board is also supportive and sets up to five goals per year in which they evaluate with the superintendent and administrative staff annually.

The adoption of Saxon math was a “difficult but necessary change we made” (p. 6). James said that specialists were brought in along with a curriculum consultant who helped the district to vertically align grade level standards. Our scores “show what a difference these changes made for us and both the students and teachers have really responded positively (p. 7).

Returning to the idea of accountability, James says, “while I think philosophically that NCLB is probably good, I don’t think it is practical.” He says that that he “takes care of the reports and planning, but it isn’t anything formal like some of the bigger districts” (p. 8). He feels challenged himself with the new technology and graciously gives praise to his administrative team for “helping him out at least once a day” (p. 8). His praise goes beyond the technological support from his administrators but also for their ability to facilitate change and help teachers collaborate on school improvement committees, curriculum and professional development. “You surround yourself with good people, give them direction, and get the hell out of the way” (p. 10).

Superintendent 11 - Martha

Martha is the superintendent of a K-8 school district that feeds into Billings School District #2. With just 154 students and 15 certified staff members, this superintendent and district strive to meet the mission statement “Where Excellence and Enthusiasm Collide.” This is further discussed by Martha (2010) in her description of a 21st century district’s purpose.

I think we are not preparing our students for jobs that don’t exist right now, we are still preparing them for jobs that are in existence, so we have to focus more on critical thinking skills, problem solving, communication, how to work collaboratively and not, when we were taught it was you need to know this because you might need to know this someday, and now it’s you need to know how to find the information and to be able to problem solve. The foundation of public education remains the same in creating a productive community who are contributing to society. It’s still embedded in our education, but for the 21st century we need adjust our approach to what students need for tomorrow. (p. 3)

A sense of belonging and service is also of importance to Martha, “when you build self-efficacy and they are good problem solvers, they enjoy learning and feel like they belong.”

The accountability measures, even prior to NCLB, have “generated conversations between teachers that never happened before” (p. 3). Martha reports that in her district such conversations have led to a “streamlined curriculum so that we are aligned horizontally and vertically” (p. 3). Further, she states that teachers are now more accountable for making sure students are learning and “figuring out ways to change our instruction.”

Until accountability standards came along, we didn’t practice differentiated instruction. So really, though I don’t agree 100% with NCLB, proficiency for all by 2014, especially certain subsets of a school population, but I think it has translated into us at least looking at how we teach and how students learn. (p. 4)

Martha expresses gratitude to her staff for “shifting their paradigm” (p. 5) of teaching. “There were some tears the first year as we went through data” (p. 5) but they approached it by accepting the data and then “setting priorities of where we needed to improve and designing curriculum revision and staff development around a few goals (p. 6). Similarly the board of trustees is supportive, according to Martha.

The board members I have right now, they are supportive of the district, they are very supportive of me, they want what is best for kids. The trouble is the board I have now weren’t on the board when academics and scores weren’t a priority, so they haven’t seen that part of building up to that (p. 6)

There are three measures taken by Martha and her teachers that have helped propel the district to greater student performance. The first has been curriculum alignment that started with partnering with two other area school districts that had similar

sized staffs. Creating a consistent curriculum and common assessments in collaboration “validated all of the teachers from the three districts so we believed we were on the right track” (p. 5). Second, professional development in RTI and MBI were “critical if we were to expect different results” (p. 8). To change the culture of learning, “we needed to raise the expectations of student behavior and have everyone on board, so we are a big MBI school” (p. 8).

“It’s no longer just pull out for gifted, but putting kids in the right class regardless of their age” (p. 4). Thus the approach taken in the district is to meet students at their performance level, not necessarily their chronological age. Third, Martha cited the use of data to make such decisions. “I’m the data queen” she proclaims (p. 9). “We do cross grade level meetings, meetings that are sacred as we analyze data. It’s build into our master schedule.” Data is also used to drive the goals of the district as well.

While she is pleased with the data analysis and data drive decisions made in her district, she expresses frustration at the expectations placed on her district by the state when it comes to planning and reporting.

My passion is not submitting a Five Year plan, much to the dismay of OPI. My passion is being a superintendent and instructional leader. What’s frustrating is our district has a nice system for creating our own five year plan, but it doesn’t fit into what the state wants, so then I have to redo it all. I think there is a disconnect between what’s going on with what the state requires and what is realistic for schools. I really feel a huge disconnect there and I know that they are mandated by the Feds for a lot of things, but I just get frustrated with them on paper work, especially in the fall when we are trying to be in classrooms. I think it’s taken too much time away from what we need to actually need to do in the classroom and learning process (p. 9)

She also believes to be successful in a district,

A superintendent certainly has to have a balance of the instructional leadership part and balance of the managerial part because the fact remains that is part of our job. We have to balance that and the key is getting good people to you balance it. But honestly, I'm tired. (p. 11)

Answering the Research Questions

Research Question One: How has accountability resulted in disequilibrium and change within school districts?

The first research question examined how the accountability movement had resulted in disequilibrium within school districts. The responses fell into one of three groups when participants were asked about accountability. This general question yielded responses of assumption; notably that the research study was narrowed and specifically asking about the measures of No Child Left Behind. The first group included those school districts that had implemented school improvement plans prior to 2001. Specifically, William and Peg were in school districts or had experience in school districts pre-NCLB, which had implemented school improvement plans that included data examination for the purpose of adjusting curriculum and instruction. Robert had mentioned the use of data in the past, but not to the extent that it was used now. The second group included Charles, Michael, Thomas, and James; participants whose districts had high expectations, were making AYP, but utilized the accountability measures to encourage greater growth. The third group, Richard, Taylor, Susan, Peg, Robert, John, Maria, and Martha, is made up of superintendents whose districts did not make AYP at least once since its inception, and who provided leadership in creating a focus on student

learning rather than teacher driven instruction with other initiatives discussed later in this chapter.

Emergent Theme One: Purpose All of the participants in the pilot study and research study were given the opportunity to discuss the purpose of the 21st century school district. While elements of the traditional mission statement were cited, specifically developing an intelligent and productive citizenry who would contribute to society, there was an urgent sense that technological skills, critical thinking skills, and lifelong learning skills were more necessary than ever. Now 11 years into the new century, these superintendents felt an urgency and necessity in preparing students for a rapidly changing technological world, for jobs do not exist yet, and with critical thinking skills that give students the ability to sift and sort through incredible amounts of information. Susan and John summarized this overarching purpose best as they addressed the likely trend that many future jobs have yet to be created, that individuals will change jobs often, and that lifelong learning will be a requirement for continued success throughout students' lives. Charles, Thomas, Susan, Peg, Robert, John and Martha, all made reference that the purpose has remained the same but emphasized students must have the preparation in anticipation to fill future jobs that have yet to be created. Charles commented:

There is direct economic benefit tied to the higher educated populace that you have. We need to be able to teach kids to learn their skills, have solid skills to be able to learn anything at any given time and to challenge themselves for the future of democracy so that they are never stuck in a position where they have no choice. (2010, p. 1)

Along similar lines the importance of critical thinking skills was paramount to Taylor, William, Peg, and Martha. Finally, two of the study's superintendents, Peg and James, cited global competition as a component factoring into a district's purpose in the 21st century. Martin was cited earlier advocating for the preparation of students "in order to meet both national and international competitiveness". He expanded on this idea in his district:

Everything we do. Everything that is out there. Everything that is available. We investigate it and evaluate it to see if it falls within our purpose of preparing our students for a global perspective in whatever they are working on or they are into. It all comes down to students having good thinking skills. (2010, p. 3)

Emergent Theme Two: Accountability Regardless of how many ways it was stated, the second common theme that emerged was the ready acknowledgement that accountability for America's public schools is a phenomenon that will continue into the future. All 11 participants stated that there were some flaws with the current laws under No Child Left Behind, but that the idea of schools being accountable for student learning was embraced. Many remarked that their superintendent counterparts may have objected to accountability, NCLB in particular, but theirs was a welcoming of a system that placed responsibility for student learning at the local level. John stated "It's the best thing that ever happened to education" (p. 5).

The idea that all students would reach proficiency by 2014 was received with little more than a chuckle or roll of the eyes rather than a distraction to their own commitment to student learning for all. One would get the sense that accountability in

education was a welcomed opportunity for school districts to improve despite the requirements that were imposed by the federal and state departments of education.

Continuing on this subject, two contrasting positions about accountability were taken by all participants in the study. Remembering that the context of accountability was assumed to be driven by NCLB, participants welcomed a system of accountability philosophically, but had grave concerns about its end goal. Michael stated the statistical impossibility of 100% of all students reaching proficiency, Taylor cited it was a system to see what district will be the last one to fail, and S6 simply indicated it was a system of accountability designed to fail. The interesting contrast to this was the ready acceptance by superintendents for some sort of accountability system and an assumption that changes to NCLB were inevitable, but that in the end, accountability was here to stay.

In making connections to purpose and accountability, Charles summed it up by simply saying that “accountability hasn’t impacted our purpose, it has helped us achieve our purpose” (p. 2). Charles and his colleagues in the study have found similar connections, again leading to the embrace of accountability in public education. William and his staff made a conscious decision regarding accountability in his district:

We don’t accept anymore that kids in the lower math and reading groups can never be good at math or reading. We changed. We adapted. Not so much because of some standardized test, but because it is our obligation to teach all students wherever they level they are at. (2010, p. 14)

Robert was the most impassioned of the superintendents when it came to accountability because he saw this as the opportunity to ensure all students will learn, and for him, the needs of the at-risk, “throw away child” (p. 3) could now be addressed.

Emergent Theme Three: Stakeholders' Response The stakeholders' responses in the 11 districts, according to the participants interviewed, varied little. On a spectrum of total resistance to ready acceptance, the superintendents reported that many of their teaching staffs believed that NCLB would be a short-lived initiative but realized relatively quickly that accountability was not going to be eliminated. Some teaching staffs were defensive or as Martha reported "shed some tears" (2010, p. 5). All participants were complimentary of their teaching staffs for embracing the accountability movement and began a collaborative approach of how to improve. James said, "I am just so pleased with the staff and how they are able to accept changes in their classrooms. They have met this challenge with being very open minded" (2010, p. 4).

The role and response of the school board and community varied among our participants. A general sense of support was shared almost universally among superintendents. For some, they reported spending time teaching board members about the new accountability measures, and in turn share progress and updates on a regular basis. The majority of the participants reported that their school boards were not as involved or knowledgeable in the intricacies of NCLB and the accountability movement. For other participants, they reported educating their board about NCLB and its impact, their boards viewed them as the district leader and expert, therefore the trustees did not immerse themselves in the data, implementation or reporting. The participants reported that as long as there were gains and AYP was being made, their boards did not have much input or interest. The one outlier in this study was Peg and her board of trustees who openly suggested defiance of the various state and federal mandates. Most common

were comments about community stakeholders who were not engaged in matters of accountability except when AYP status was not attained.

Though the 11 superintendents did not believe that most students could not articulate what the impact of accountability was for them, the participants could report indirectly of a more business like environment in their schools. Further they indicated that through revamped behavioral plans, most notably the Montana Behavioral Initiative, discipline referrals dropped significantly as improved learning environments were created. This, according to Robert, Martha, and Charles, translated into a peer influenced intolerance by engaged students for other students who attempted to pull classes off task.

Stakeholders' response was a critical element of this study as the researcher wanted to determine if there was a sense of disequilibrium or chaos within the participants' districts according to the superintendents in the study. With the three pilot study superintendents and 11 research study superintendents, only one reported that there is continued resistance by members of his teaching staff to the idea of accountability and the measures and programs implemented to support accountability. Richard stated that organized labor had filed grievances related to actions he had taken. As reported in Appendix E, he said his staff was split when it came to embracing these changes.

Remarkably, all other participants in this study reported that there were no longer arguments, discussions or debates about accountability, and that there was realization of "accountability is here to stay." Clearly this was not the case early on as participants reported that staff believed NCLB would be eliminated due to the early discourse and demerits of the law. With the ready acceptance of accountability, and despite its assumed

flaws, superintendents reported this was an opportunity to make systemic changes that emphasized student learning for all. As time progressed, teaching staffs quickly moved from suspicion and reluctance to working collaboratively to analyze data, align curriculum, and implement best instructional practices. Martha reported that “it’s not threatening, it’s more of goal development and determining what we need to do, so they have appreciated being part of the process” (2010, p. 5).

Research Question Two: How does the superintendent address accountability as a catalyst for promoting growth as measured by student achievement?

Emergent Theme Four: Re-organization There are a number of effects from re-organization resulting from the increased accountability in which the superintendent uses as a catalyst for promoting academic growth. Such efforts reported by the participants have changed the complexion and focus of these districts. A sense of an accountability movement appeared on the educational horizon with the publication of the 1983 Nation at Risk followed by individual states implementing high stakes graduation exams. With the passage of NCLB in 2001, the examination of student performance has become an expectation in each state with deeper analysis in the breakdown of student subgroups. The superintendents in this phenomenological study all made reference to colleagues within the profession who “railed against NCLB” (Susan, 2010, p. 3), however these participants whose students have outperformed the state over the last five years reported their embrace of accountability and the relatively quick acceptance of accountability by their teaching staffs. Though this theme was reported previously under research question one, it is relevant as a prelude to research question two for this acceptance and embrace

of accountability appeared to be a catalyst that propelled these superintendents to lead change in their districts.

The effects of reorganization that emerged as a result of its disequilibrium within districts included some systemic changes including the manner in which those changes were created and implemented. The participants reported sharing information about accountability, specifically NCLB, test scores, and the incremental steps found in growing expectations in student test scores.

Collaborative efforts resulted in schools planning and participating in programs commonly found among these districts. These included curriculum development that emphasized vertical and horizontal alignment. In other words, teachers in the same grade level and between grade levels were having regular conversations about subject content and articulated who would teach what standard and when. Superintendents reported that this team or department time was valued and scheduled as a non-negotiable time to accomplish this articulation. Professional development became more focused and deliberate. With an expectation that all students are to learn, differentiated instruction and the state sponsored Response to Intervention, became opportunities that professional development committees, with superintendents' guidance, planned and participated in. Michael, Thomas, Joseph, Robert, Maria, James, and Martha, along with Richard and Charles, all reported bringing in academic coaches. Some districts have hired permanent reading coaches, others contracted with coaches to come in periodically. Robert reported that there was push back from organized labor when a reading coach was hired until test

scores started improving. Charles reports that the coach in his district remarked how the culture had positively changed with a greater academic focus.

Learning for students, especially in the elementary grades, took on a new secondary look as some schools either departmentalized in math and language arts in which flex math groups or walk to read groups were created based on students abilities. In other words, students now traveled to other teachers' classrooms for their math and language arts based on their skill level rather than staying with the same teacher all day long. Similarly, some schools reported students now transcended grade levels to be taught at their level rather their chronological age.

Finally, it is apparent that these high achieving school districts deliberately implemented some sort of behavioral plan. As mentioned in the stakeholders section, many of the superintendents reported that MBI improved their learning environment resulting in improved test scores. As Michael reported, teachers and engaged students helped create an atmosphere that minimized any distractions from those disengaged students, often times resulting in those same detractors becoming engaged themselves. Susan and Martha remarked that they recognized the need to implement a behavioral plan simultaneously with the changes in curriculum and instruction.

Three final residual effects of this theme that are related included (1) the superintendents' obvious disdain for the reporting expectations set by the Montana Office of Public Instruction; (2) that a dual set of plans are maintained, specifically the Five-Year Plan required by OPI in which minimal data and plans are maintained. Clearly these are completed just to get them done, not as a tool for sustaining continuous school

improvement. These same superintendents had devised their own school improvement plans that they utilized in spite of the OPI plans expressing frustration that “their plans didn’t fit the OPI model” (Martha, 2010, p. 8). (3) Our study’s superintendents “ran interference” for their principals and teachers “dealing with the yuck” (Michael, 2010, p. 12) so teachers could take care of student learning in the classroom. The fallout of running interference was an equally frustrating removal from daily interaction from students and teachers because of computer generated obligations. As articulated earlier in Chapter 4, there were a number of superintendents who were frustrated that they find themselves removed from students and teachers, working 60 to 70 hour weeks, and that they long for the days when their jobs were not “computer operators” (James, 2010, p. 6).

Research Question Two (A): Is there evidence of transformational leadership by the superintendent in creating such change?

Emergent Theme Five: Transformational Leadership Evidence of transformational leadership was presented by participants during the interviews and site visits. The superintendent participants all reported that the accountability measures have been good for their districts. Despite the reporting demands, they embraced this as an opportunity for all students to learn. While some reported a “not sure where to go from here” to “here’s our data, together let’s do something about this,” transparency and a staff collaboration were two ingredients that allowed stakeholders to commit to their school improvement process. Participants chose to accept the demands of accountability rather than expending energy fighting against something that had improved student learning for all as a core belief.

From the data it was evident that these superintendents drew from transformational leadership skill sets. The superintendents interviewed stated that in order to be successful, top down directives were not effective. Thomas reported that their changes in accountability were “not top down directed” (2010, p. 6). Remaining optimistic, supporting deep change with professional development, and using data driven decisions removed any “gotcha” from the accountability measures have been actions these superintendents have taken. “Our teachers meet in small groups or committees collaborating on concerns, expectations or curriculum. It’s all very functional” (Michael, 2010, p. 7). As time proceeded and plans were put into action, those staff members who were not in compliance or did not exhibit buy-in found themselves in difficult discussions with their superintendents sometimes resulting in non-renewals. Susan reported that most of her staff participated and appreciated collaborative efforts in reform but she did “have some difficult discussions with teachers and needing to say ‘this is the way it’s going to be’” (2010, p. 4). William spoke of his role as the instructional leader this way:

I feel the accountability movement has impacted me a lot. I have to admit that I feel an obligation when held to this certain measuring stick of NCLB; I think there is an obligation that I will do anything to get us to that point. Don’t get me wrong, a lot of the ideas and programs going on came from the staff, but I have to create the atmosphere, the environment in which we can strive to meet those accountability goals. (2010, p. 14)

Summary

This chapter examined the emergent themes of this phenomenological study by telling the stories of 11 superintendents who led districts with significant growth in student achievement in an educational climate of accountability. Greater expectations

placed on school districts has created disequilibrium, but for these 11 superintendents, they have been able (a) identify a more urgent purpose for the 21st century school district; (b) embrace accountability as benefit for student learning; (c) lead stakeholders through this era of accountability factoring in purpose and accountability; (d) focus on a few goals that support student learning, quality instruction, and student management; (e) lead with transparency, trust, encouraging collaboration among stakeholders despite bureaucratic paperwork that infringes on their time typically spent in classrooms.

CHAPTER 5 - ANALYSIS AND REFLECTION

Introduction

“The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality” (DePree, 1989, p. 11).

“The ultimate purpose of leadership is to bring order out of chaos” (Murphy & Murphy, 2002, p. 193).

Whether the call for accountability and improved student performance in K-12 public education originated from the pressures of the global marketplace, the think tanks that compared international test scores, the bi-partisan effort to demand proficiency by 2014, the local businessmen who simply want employees capable of counting out correct change, or the school boards and parents who did not want neighboring districts outscoring their student, the fact remains that the clock has been ticking for improvement. Educational reform in America’s schools has a well deserved and undeniable reputation for failing to gain traction. However, greater pressure has been applied in this current era of accountability. And while passive resistance may have worked previously, there is a sense that this current pressure for performance is not short-lived. What has occurred for many districts has been a disruption, disequilibrium, chaos. This phenomenological study examined the responses of 11 Montana superintendents who, despite the disequilibrium that came with accountability, used this as an opportunity to transform their districts and demonstrate academic growth.

Research Questions

Chapter 5 will present an interpretation of the data in the context of the research questions and the theoretical framework. This study was a phenomenological investigation of superintendents as instructional leaders in this era of accountability. The research questions were:

(1) How has accountability resulted in disequilibrium and change within school districts?

(2) How does the superintendent address accountability as a catalyst for promoting growth as measured by student achievement?

(2A) Is there evidence of transformational leadership by the superintendent in creating such change?

A brief summary of the theoretical framework used will be presented. Salient points related to current literature regarding chaos theory, accountability, and transformational leadership will be reviewed to provide context. The researcher's intent was to review literature on chaos theory and transformational leadership moving from broad concepts to actual data collection whereby the findings from 11 superintendents could contribute to the body of knowledge in these intersecting areas.

Previous Research on Chaos Theory

Chaos theory allows for a system to re-group or re-create itself, but a system must recognize the need to change. Both transformational leadership and chaos theory allow for solutions and changes to manifest themselves in different ways from different

sources. Transformational leadership looks upon chaos as opportunity for further growth, acknowledging that such growth will create disequilibrium (Wheatley, 1999; Marzano et al., 2005.)

Science now utilizes chaos theory to explain how simple changes at a basic level can lead to complex and sophisticated organisms (Wolfram, 2002). Systems theory and chaos theory have some similar origins and conclusions, specifically in that solutions or change come from unexpected sources (Senge, 2006; Wheatley, 2007). Business and commerce address chaos and complexity through adaptation and application in which various problem-solving and interdependence is utilized (Murphy & Murphy, 2002). Education, which is in the greatest period of change in decades with the implementation and expectations of the No Child Left Behind laws, could position itself to learn from science, systems theory, and the business model as it attempts to transform itself from a public system of mandatory attendance to mandatory learning (Lezotte, 2006 & McKee).

However, there must be a focused empowerment, in which comes a shift in superintendents' actions and skill set, and in which individual teachers and administrators would embrace change, change that result in greater student achievement. Similarly, human and financial resources must be directed by the boards of trustees' overarching purpose and core values. Difficult employee decisions, such as job assignments for administrators, must be made with the idea of student achievement not popularity kept in mind. Students, parents, and community members must also be given opportunities for their voices to be heard in shaping a school under the leadership of a transformational superintendent in chaotic times.

Undergoing such deep change creates systems in which people become effective and structured interactions become efficient. Such human effectiveness and structural efficiency, a foundation of transformational leadership, builds capacity and allows for self-organization (Glor, 2007). The research of Bommer et al., (2005) indicates when change implementers engage in transformational leadership there is a reduction in employee cynicism and greater buy in. “People in an organization or any kind of system can get through anything as long as they realize they know they are all in it together” (M. Wheatley, personal communication August 17, 2009). “Only as we’re engaged together in work that is meaningful do we learn to work through the differences and value them. Change becomes much easier when we focus on creating a meaning for the work that can embrace us all” (Wheatley, 2007, pp.147-148).

Wheatley (2007) adds that a leader’s role is not to make sure everyone knows what to do and how to do it but rather ensuring people have clarity about the mission and purpose of the organization. People organize in order to gain purpose, identity, and to affirm our identity (Wheatley, 1999). Organizations that have a defined purpose succeed and are distinguished in two ways because (a) the same outcome is produced under different circumstances; and (b) different outcomes are produced in the same or slightly different environments, (Gharajedaghi, 2006). In Glor’s study, there is an assumption that change occurs easier in complex, self-organizing entities than through traditional, linear dimensions. Educational leaders can learn from the world of commerce in chaotic and complex periods. These measures may address what occurs to many groups who are on

the edge of chaos, teetering between the strains of too much organizational stress and exhausting a group's energy supply (Butz, 1997).

Transformational leadership is a process that changes the dynamics of the interactions among people. It takes into account the vision, values, short-term and long-term goals, along with emotions, motivation and ethics of those involved in a system in an attempt to make their work meaningful and engaging. What is unique is the distributed planning and authority that is shared willingly by a transformational leader. The Kouzes and Posner (2007) model lists five practices that enable leaders to get extraordinary things accomplished: (a) model the way; (b) inspire a shared vision; (c) challenge the process; (d) enable others to act; (e) encourage the heart. Similarly, Reeves (2006) identifies dimensions of leadership that will assist a transformational leader through chaotic periods as it narrowly focuses vision and action.

Wheatley (2007) states public schools are not necessarily systems if they do not draw from a common purpose. In these chaotic times there is an opportunity for transformational leaders to draw from the stakeholders, stakeholders who do care about the education of its community's children but whose purpose has not been weaved together. Marzano et al. recognizes that transformational leaders do the works of second order change and lead with seven specific traits. Second order change is defined as deep change that alters a system with substantive governance, problem solving, planning, and implementation. Sources for such change break from the traditional top down model and include educators who demonstrate comparative advantage due to their competence and experiences. The seven key traits found in the second order change model include

knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment, being an optimizer, providing intellectual stimulation, facilitation as a change agent, monitoring and evaluating change, demonstrating flexibility, and being well-grounded in beliefs and ideals (2005).

Transformational leadership calls for collaboration with various stakeholders. Chaos theory acknowledges that solutions during disequilibrium may come from unexpected sources. For the superintendent to lead a district through chaotic times, it is imperative to involve stakeholders. “What is lacking are not case examples or processes but the commitment to involve everybody. We keep hoping we don’t need to – that if we design a good plan, people will accept it on its merits. Who is missing? Who else needs to do this work? What about partnering with confusion and chaos?” (Wheatley, 2007 p. 111).

The Phenomenological Study Summary

The researcher designed a phenomenological study to examine the responses of superintendents in this era of educational accountability during which change is present and student achievement is expected. The theoretical framework of this study was derived from various research and conceptual ideals of chaos theory and transformational leadership. As cited earlier in this chapter, the expectation for present day public K-12 education is mandatory learning. This is a significant shift from the previous era whose sole accountable benchmark was mandatory school attendance for children. Such a shift has created disequilibrium in America’s schools with greater attention focused on student performance; specifically NCLB laws state that 100% of students in public education will be proficient in mathematics and reading by 2014.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the actions taken by district superintendents in response to greater expectations in this era of accountability. This study examined how accountability measures and subsequent changes within districts and schools were addressed by the districts' instructional leader, the superintendents. Within the context of chaos theory, 11 district superintendents who have served in their districts for a minimum of five years and whose students in their respective districts outperformed students in the state with growth above the state average were questioned about how they have addressed accountability and how their actions have led to increased student achievement.

Chaos theory allows for a system to re-group or self-organize, but a system must recognize the need to change. Both transformational leadership and chaos theory allow for solutions and changes to manifest themselves in different ways from different sources. Figure 4 returns to the chaos theory cycle for K-12 education introduced in chapter one. Clockwise from the upper left hand corner, this depiction identifies the status quo, followed by some change variable that creates disruption or disequilibrium in which re-organization of the system is necessary. The lower left hand quadrant is one in which successful systems adjust when transformational leaders embrace change and solutions emerge from self-organization.

With reflection upon these concepts, an overarching question asked will be: how does the superintendent address expectations and accountability measures associated with organizational change and improvement? Two research questions emerged that examined the actions of the superintendent as instructional leader. There were five

themes that answered the research questions which emerged from the interviews and artifact examination with the 11 superintendents.

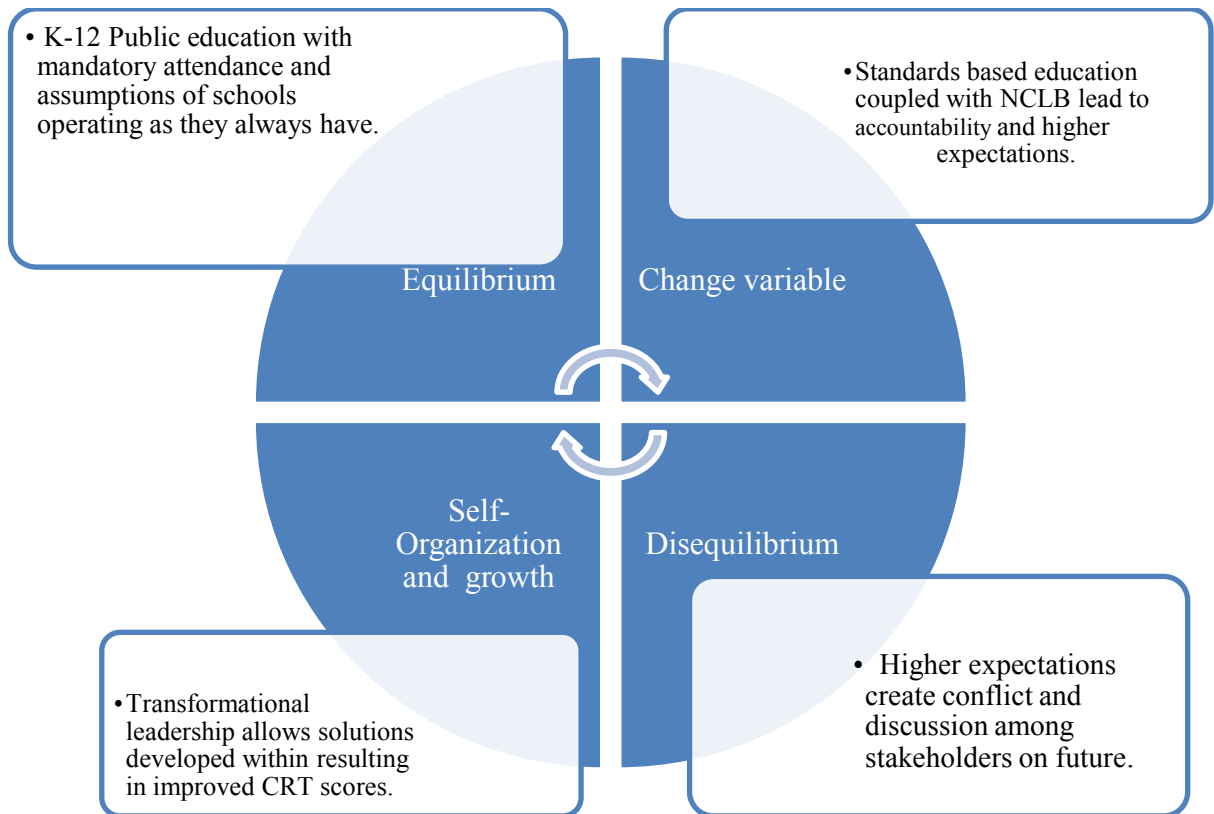
- (1) How has accountability resulted in disequilibrium and change within school districts?

The *first theme* that emerged that answers the first research question is purpose. Superintendents reported that their districts' purpose involved an urgent need to equip students with critical thinking and technological skills, in addition to the traditional democratic values and becoming productive citizens. The fast paced, ever changing society demands lifelong learning as students must prepare for jobs that are yet to be created.

The *second theme* under research question one to emerge was accountability within the school district. Superintendents stated that accountability was a welcomed and integral part of the K-12 public school landscape. Despite exasperation with many of the tenets and demands of NCLB, all participants stated that accountability helped achieve the districts' purpose.

The *third theme* to emerge was stakeholders' responses. Superintendents reported that did not need significant convincing or cajoling of their stakeholders to help them realize that accountability of some form was here to stay. School boards relied on their superintendents to guide them through the nuances of NCLB. Teachers may have had some initial reluctance for two reasons. First, their initial response was accountability was a short lived experiment that would change due to political pressures. Second, teachers

Figure 4. Chaos theory cycle in K-12 education.



did not want to give up favorite lessons or practices. However, they quickly became collaborative partners with educational leaders when they accepted this newly focus system on student learning. Students also noticed the change in climate and that school developed a more business like atmosphere.

(2) How does the superintendent address accountability as a catalyst for promoting growth as measured by student achievement?

The *fourth theme* that emerged under question two was tied to the re-organization of the school district under the leadership of the superintendent. Participants reported that a more collaborative environment was created in which changes and solutions to problems came from within the organization and not solely from top-down directives. Teachers, principals, and superintendents implemented programs, such as Response to Intervention and student behavioral plans, to ensure learning for all students. One irony discovered in this study was while accountability relied on superintendents playing a larger role as instructional leaders, the immense paperwork and reporting led to frustration as it forced them to have less interaction with teachers and students. Related to this finding was the consistent report of superintendents filling out state required plans and reports, but having another set of specific goals and plans in a format that was district designed and more meaningful for their stakeholders instead of a state mandated one.

(2A) Is there evidence of transformational leadership by the superintendent in creating such change?

The *fifth emergent theme* is evidence of transformational leadership. Superintendents report this skill set is needed in systems of accountability. Moving away from top-down directives, participants set up teacher teams to examine data and to be part of the problem solving decision making process as issues and concerns arose within the district. Professional development was designed with specific goals for grade levels or schools instead of self-selected by individual teachers. Though a punitive system to measure teacher effectiveness was not embraced by participants, they also reported not

shying away from having difficult conversations or making difficult recommendations if they felt instructors were not performing at a level that met student needs.

Implications

Wheatley has written in support for the desired state of disequilibrium, a time of imbalance in which an organization will change (2007, 2006). Within the chaos theory cycle, transformational leadership allows for the type of growth that Wheatley discusses when solutions are sought from stakeholders rather than in a linear and traditional hierarchy (2006). The researcher found within the data collected, support for the work of Marzano and Waters which indicates a correlation between student achievement and educational leaders who take an active role in instructional leadership (2009). However, there was information derived from this research that has new theoretical and professional implications. First, Murphy and Murphy (2002) advise in a chaotic business environment that it is prudent to avoid the “ready, fire, aim” approach to change and instead be aiming at multiple targets. From this research there is evidence of success in aiming, or in educational terms, strategically planning after taking steps in implementing change. Similar to Murphy and Murphy’s rush to think concept, the participants in this study shared their rush to embrace accountability and developed cultures within their districts a sense of urgency.

Second, there emerged a four-pronged approach to accountability that superintendents implemented. The first prong was focused goals (Marzano & Waters, 2009). Under the first two emergent themes of purpose and accountability, the researcher

found the participants to have a few focused goals to meet districts' goals. The second prong was curriculum alignment. Time and effort was spent in these districts to ensure vertical and horizontal curricular alignment (Marzano et al., 2005).

The third prong that was evident was the implementation of student behavioral and management plan. Though the implementation was through a collaborative effort typical of transformational leadership, this finding is identified as unique considering the number of participants who cited the Montana Behavioral Initiative, or some other student management plan, as a key ingredient leading to the improved student achievement. Marzano wrote:

Safety and order (by other names) are addressed in all five of the studies reviewed in Chapter 2. Edmonds calls them "a safe and orderly atmosphere conducive for learning"; Levine and Lezotte use "productive climate and culture." Sammons calls them "learning environment," "positive reinforcement," and "pupils rights and expectations"; Bosker and Scheerens use the terms "school climate." (2003, p. 53)

Regardless of the name, Marzano (2003) wrote that in order to achieve a safe and orderly environment there must be "ecological interventions, establishing school wide rules and procedures and consequences." (p. 59)

The fourth prong that is directly related to the emergent theme of re-organization is the provision of professional development in the areas of the first three prongs. Superintendent participants reiterated the importance of being having professional development in alignment with their purpose, goals, and re-organizational efforts (Reeves, 2006).

For the first time in American history, public education is on the clock for improvement and to attain a level of proficiency for all students. Zhao wrote:

No Child Left Behind has undoubtedly been the most significant component of recent educational reform efforts in the United States. Although it intends to ensure every child receives a good education so no child is left behind, its definition of good education is good scores on standardized tests in reading and math. (p. 2)

While many programs at the local, state, and national level have come and gone, the broad implications of NCLB were for states to hold the local district accountable for student performance. This bi-partisan legislation did not disappear or disintegrate like many predicted soon after its approval in 2001 (Lewis, 2005). Despite a change in political power and a change in presidents, the expectations of student learning for all remain. Through the lens of chaos theory it was evident by the response of the educational community that disequilibrium had disrupted the American school system. The former Montana state superintendent had pleaded her case with the Department of Education that students were well educated in Montana, and had attempted to set up measurements that would not be intrusive to local districts. When denied, large annual measurable objectives had to be implemented which meant large gains over a short amount of time were required as opposed to smaller gains over a longer amount of time (J. Staab, personal communication, September 14, 2010). The Montana Office of Public Instruction also set into motion an accountability system that required Effectiveness Reports and Five-Year Plans.

As the 11 participants shared, they perceived many of their colleagues to be in opposition of an accountability system, but they viewed the greater expectations as a necessary tool to improve student achievement in their districts. Chaos theory states that systems that are in a state of disequilibrium have the greatest potential to change when

there is a perceived need to change, and that change is most efficient when the system can self-organize. Research was presented in previous sections of this study of how the business and science models follow this pattern. This phenomenological study revealed how in an educational system disequilibrium can create a re-organized and re-generated system when transformational leadership allows for solutions to arise from within the system rather than from top-down directives.

In spite of the state's efforts to impose school improvement plans on these 11 districts, the participants reported two common findings: (a) these districts formulated school improvement plans that were tailored to their district based on the goals they set for improvement; and (b) often these superintendents ran interference from the demands of state reporting by planning and reporting themselves on the mandated plans, but facilitated second order change within their districts with their district designed plans. In other words, through the chaos of accountability, these superintendents embraced it, formulated plans to fit their districts, and prevented external "noise" from interfering with their principals' and teachers' work with students.

These 11 school districts all had improvement in their state test scores at a percentage significantly higher than the state average. The 11 superintendents all reported earnestly embracing the accountability movement and that most of the teachers within their districts also embraced this, and as one superintendent stated, they were no longer having conversations of whether NCLB would remain in place. Recognizing the need to change coupled with an invitation to work collaboratively to re-organize signals a change in the way second order change can occur in school districts.

The researcher found that the self-organized efforts contained a common four-pronged approach for school improvement among the districts studied and as reported by the respective superintendents. The first prong was focused goals. As referenced earlier in this chapter, superintendents used a school improvement plan designed specifically for their district. However, the finding is that these plans were narrowly focused for short amounts of time. The second prong was collaborative efforts at aligning curriculum vertically and horizontally. The third prong was implementing a school wide behavioral plan. The fourth prong was having a professional development plan that directly linked back to one of the first three prongs. As a result of implementing this four-pronged approach, superintendents reported a decline in special education referrals, a decline in discipline referrals, a more business like atmosphere environment that promoted learning, and ultimately significantly higher growth in student achievement as measured by the state criterion referenced tests. Robert's experience during his tenure at his district is a good example of this four-pronged approach that has resulted in academic achievement. Figure 5 depicts the chaos theory cycle when the 11 transformational leaders' actions are taken into account from this study.

Re-examining Robert's experiences in his district is one way to examine how his actions align with the four-pronged approach while following the chaos theory cycle. Robert's passion was evident in his expressed purpose, "Our job is to prep every kid to have the skills necessary to survive in the emerging job field" (2010, p. 1). Coming into a district that was in disequilibrium, he discovered that the staff had not embraced accountability. He found an equally frustrated community that was not pleased with the

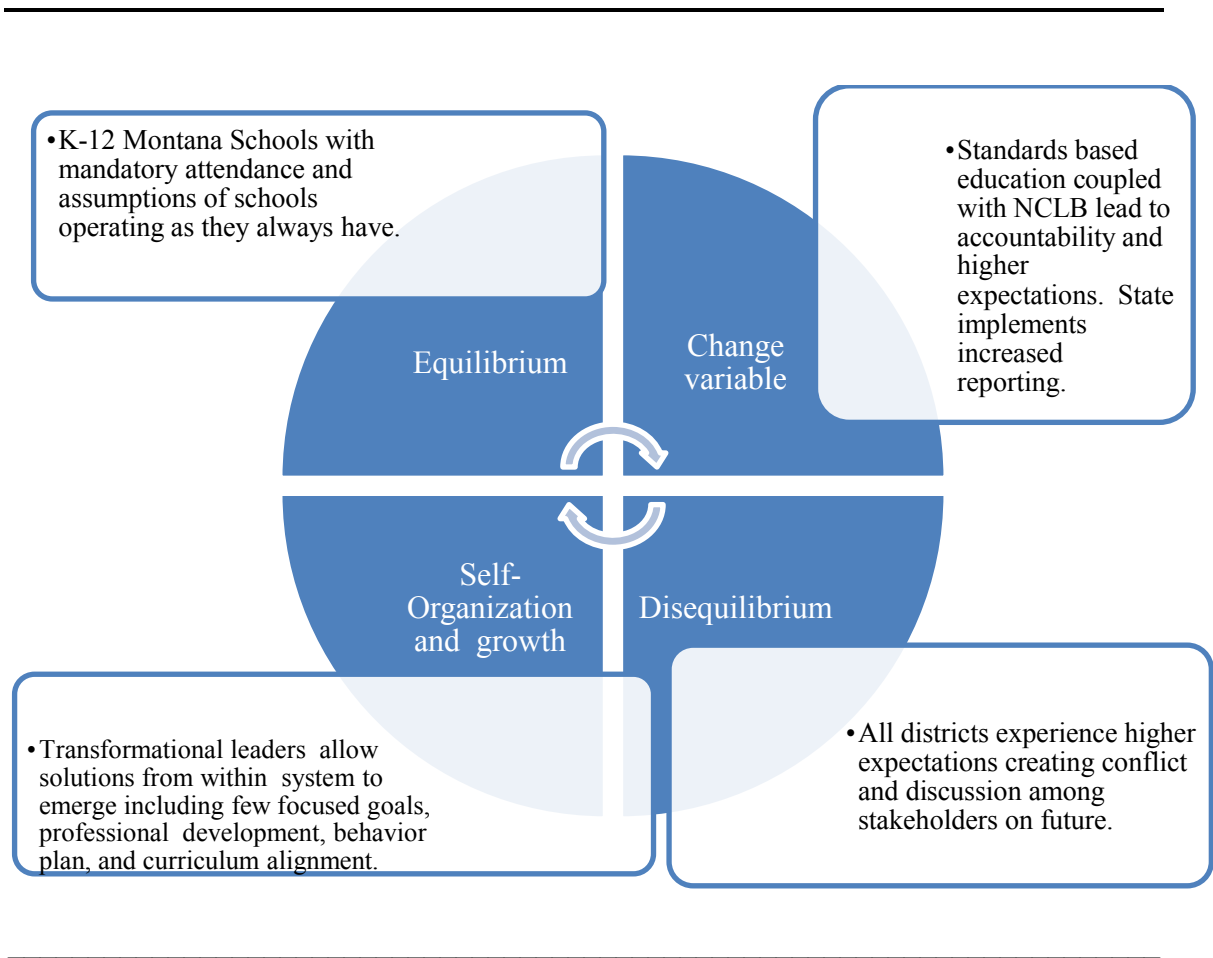
academic program. Robert found himself providing inservices and holding expectations for the staff about NCLB, but also providing professional development in curriculum development, standards, assessment, and creating positive learning environment. Inviting staff to participate in collaborative work, teachers began to vertically and horizontally align their curriculum. Implementing Response to Intervention and having higher standards for both staff and student behavior helped create an environment conducive for learning (2010).

Future Research

The results of this study suggest several opportunities for further inquiry. First, it would be useful to replicate this study with a larger population of participants. Though a saturation of findings was discovered with the number of participants, reaching out to the entire group of eligible participants across the state to discover if findings were consistent would be of interest in how change and accountability are best received and implemented. Second, the methodology selected for this study was appropriate; however including members of the various stakeholders groups would provide validation of the participants' responses. Third, while it was not the researcher's intent in this study to discover why most districts make modest, average gains in student achievement despite having the same superintendent for at least five years, for someone it may be of interest to discover through a comparison study what hurdles prevent significant growth. Fourth, it would be of interest to work with the Montana Office of Public Instruction and in sharing this research allow districts that are achieving significantly higher than the state average growth to opt out of the mandatory state regulated Five Year Plan and to use the

district plan that they currently use in a dual manner. Fifth, the participants of this research came primarily from smaller K-8 Montana districts or districts classified as Class B or Class C in which there are enrollments up to 1000 students. The majority of Montana school districts are Class C schools, but expanding the study with eligible participants from Class AA and Class A districts would be of interest for a wider lens.

Figure 5. Chaos theory cycle in participants' districts.



Conclusion

As we entered the 21st century, a number of educators spent time writing satirical articles about No Child Left Behind using sports analogies describing the unrealistic expectation that all teams would win championships because all athletes would be proficient in their sport. Their points were absurd and missed the underlying theme of accountability. The researcher also wrote an Op-Ed piece using a sports analogy entitled “No Hockey Team Left Behind” (Appendix G).

That article discussed the progressive improvement the author’s hockey team made over a four year period. In other words, it was not about developing the team into a championship caliber team, but having a coach who monitored our collective and individual improvements during this time frame.

The 11 superintendents studied in this phenomenological study were educators who have shared their philosophical approval of NCLB and all students can learn, and used a skill set of a transformational leader by defining for their stakeholders the impact of accountability. Instead of lobbying against an enacted law, or waiting for direction for the state for federal departments of education, they brought stakeholders together to “define reality” and to “create order out of chaos.” In the case of William, a system of self-accountability was already in place, but for all participants, they used the new expectations as a catalyst for school improvement.

The implications of this study are not causal. The researcher initially inquired about the academic success that students in these superintendents’ district were experiencing. What were the responses by the superintendent that could have contributed

to growth in student achievement that was significantly higher than the state average in a period of accountability that created disequilibrium or chaos in school districts?

The researcher believes from the data collection that these 11 superintendents held core beliefs that (a) all students can learn and (b) they agreed with the general ideal of accountability in schools, therefore reduced the amount of time to “buy in” for themselves and in turn, for their teachers. However, they also knew that positive participation in accountability measures could not occur as a top down directive or in any linear pattern, but through collaborative efforts in which solutions could come from anyone, not just the person with the title of superintendent.

These superintendents also engaged their boards, community, and teachers in a way that helped keep the focus of school improvement to just a few goals. Though there was minimal participation by the board and community stakeholders, superintendents readily gave praise to their teaching staffs for embracing change and accountability. Granted, for some it was a three to four year process, but now 10 years into No Child Left Behind, these superintendents are no longer being asked “when will NCLB go away?”

In the collaborative planning, it was evident that not only curriculum and professional development were needed, but a student behavioral management plan was also implemented in many of the districts. Most of the districts participated in curriculum alignment, the Montana Behavioral Initiative program, differentiated instruction, and Response to Intervention. These districts were putting in place school improvement plans that worked for their districts, and as confessed by many of the participants, a dual set of school improvement plans were maintained due to the frustration with the Office of

Public Instruction's set of required plans. The work of maintaining these plans with staff has required participants to be more involved in the instructional leadership role, but it has also taken a toll on these superintendents as over half the participants expressed health concerns and have retired or are planning their retirement. However, Maria, the 50 year career educator has changed her mind. She believes there is more work to be done and she recognized that her role as a leader has changed. As Senge (2008) aptly wrote:

As people work together they also come to focus on what truly matters to them, and their thinking evolves from a reactive problem-solving mode to creating futures they desire. With this comes a level of commitment, imagination, patience, and perseverance far beyond what happens when we are just reacting to problems (2008, p. 48).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT DATA SHEET

Participant Information

1. Participant's

Name _____

2. Position _____

3. How many years have you been the superintendent of this district? _____

4. Were you ever a superintendent in another district? _____

a. Where and for how many years? _____

5. How many total years have you served as a district superintendent? _____

6. How many years were you a teacher? _____

7. What grades and/or area did you teach? _____

8. Current District _____

9. District Address _____

10. Phone number _____

11. Fax number _____

12. Number of certified staff members _____

13. Student enrollment _____

14. District grade span _____

Researcher's Notes

_____ Informed Consent Form Signed Date _____

_____ Interview Appointment on _____ Date _____

_____ Interview Completed Date _____

_____ Artifacts Collected

Date _____

_____ Study Codes Assigned

Code _____

_____ Appreciation Note Sent

Date _____

APPENDIX B

CORRESPONDING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
<p>1. How has accountability resulted in disequilibrium and change within school districts?</p>	<p>1. How would you describe the purpose of a 21st century school district?</p> <p>2. Has today's accountability measures impacted a district's purpose?</p> <p>3. Describe stakeholders' reactions to the growing expectations?</p> <p>4. No Child Left Behind. Adequate Yearly Progress. 5 Year Plans. Annual Measurable Objectives. Differentiated Instruction. Response to Intervention. How have these measures of accountability impacted your district?</p>
<p>2. How does the superintendent address accountability as a catalyst for promoting growth as measured by student achievement?</p> <p>2A. Is there evidence of transformational leadership by the superintendent in creating such change?</p>	<p>5. Have new leadership expectations evolved for you during your tenure as a district superintendent?</p> <p>6. To succeed as the district's instructional leader in today's era of accountability, are additional skills needed for superintendents?</p> <p>7. Describe the changes and respective achievement within your district as a result of greater accountability?</p> <p>8. How would you describe your superintendent leadership skill set in relation to the increased levels of accountability?</p> <p>9. Please share any plans, policies, documents, or other artifacts that indicate your response and your district's response to increased accountability measures. How would you assess the alignment of such artifacts with the district's mission and your leadership in this era of accountability?</p>

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND PROBES

1. How would you describe the purpose of a 21st century school district?

- Mission statement
- Productive Citizenry
- Learning for all students
- Lifelong learning
- Opportunities

2. Has today's accountability measures impacted a district's purpose?

- Community involvement
- Strategic planning
- Defined roles
- Collaboration

3. Describe stakeholders' reactions to the growing expectations.

- Local control
- National, international pressure
- Range of responses, emotions

4. No Child Left Behind. Adequate Yearly Progress. 5 Year Plans. Annual Measurable Objectives. Differentiated Instruction. Response to Intervention. How have these measures of accountability impacted your district?

- Time
- Opportunity versus obligation
- Meaningful or superficial changes

5. Have new leadership expectations evolved for you during your tenure as a district superintendent?

- Priorities
- Burden or benefit
- Stakeholders view

6. To succeed as the district's instructional leader in today's era of accountability, are additional skills needed for superintendents?

- New, additional roles
- Skills present or new skill set
- Data driven decision making

7. Describe the changes and respective achievement within your district as a result of greater accountability.

- Shared leadership
- Teaming
- Collaboration
- Stakeholders voice
- Professional development
- Student achievement

8. How would you describe your superintendent leadership skill set in relation to the increased levels of accountability?

- Collaboration
- Communication

- Empowerment
- Top down versus solutions from within

9. Please share any plans, policies, documents, or other artifacts that indicate your response and your district's response to increased accountability measures. How would you assess the alignment of such artifacts with your district's mission and your leadership in this era of accountability?

- Alignment of practice and policies
- Stakeholders
- School improvement process
- Collaboration
- Professional development plans

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Montana State University

Informed Consent Form

**A Phenomenological Study Examining the Transformational Leadership Through
the Lens of Chaos**

The study in which you will be participating examines the superintendent in the role of instructional leader in this era of accountability and as a result of No Child Left Behind and related local, state, and federal expectations.

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to participate in a 60 to 90 minute interview regarding superintendents' actions in the role of instructional leader in this era of accountability. I will ask you questions regarding the impact of No Child Left Behind on teaching practices, professional development, strategic planning, and/or data based decision making in relation to the superintendent. You will be invited to share artifacts, such as mission statement and school improvement plans. The interview will be audio taped. The tapes will be transcribed verbatim by the interviewer. Only I will have access to the tapes from the interviews. These tapes will be erased by June 1, 2013. I may also contact you at a future date to clarify questions or to provide insight into my interpretation of the data. Copies of artifacts will be made. Field notes will be taken during data collection.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You are free to stop participating at any time, or to decline to answer any specific questions. You may ask me about the research procedures and I will answer your questions to the best of my ability. **Your participation in this research study is confidential.** Following our initial conversations, I will identify you using a code number. I will be the only person with access to the key linking your name with this code number. Results of this study will be reported using pseudonyms. If I believe that information from this interview could result in you or your school being uniquely identifiable, I will decline to disclose this information.

If you have any questions regarding this research project you can contact me, Josh Middleton, at (406) 628-3356. Any additional questions about the rights of human subjects can be answered by Dr. Joanne Erickson (406) 994-6670, my academic advisor and dissertation committee chair, or by the chair of the MSU Human Subjects Committee, Dr. Mark Quinn, (406) 994-4707.

I agree to participate in a study examining Transformational Leadership through the Lens of Chaos. I understand the information given to me, and I have received answers to any questions I may have had about the research procedures. I understand and agree to the conditions of this study as described. I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and that I may withdraw from this study at any time by notifying me, Josh Middleton.

Participant Signature

Date

Interviewer Signature

Date

APPENDIX E

PILOT STUDY

The researcher conducted a pilot study involving three superintendents to determine if interview protocol, questions, and artifact review yielded robust information about each district.

Pilot Study Participants

Superintendent Pilot 1 - Richard

Richard has served as a Montana school superintendent for a total of twelve years; eight years in his current K-8 district and four years in a K-12 district. Prior to his positions as superintendent he was a principal in another district for four years and a teacher in two other districts for six years. His current district has 370 students of whom 59% participate in the district's free and reduced lunch program. There are 38 certified members on his staff. His district is located in a depressed logging area in western Montana.

Richard describes the purpose of the 21st century school district with the following. We need to make sure our kids are literate and technologically literate. I believe they should be fluent in English, and have the ability to classify and evaluate information if it is valid and authentic. I think they get bombarded with so much information that they've got to have better critical thinking analytic skills (p. 2)

Richard believes that an educated democratic society who have opportunities for lifelong learning are still foundational in our system, but "students must possess technological skills as part of that well rounded education" (p. 2).

Accountability measures are welcomed by Richard and "mirrors the right thing to do." Admittedly not "too excited about test scores versus student skills" (p. 2), believes that if his teachers are true to the standards in their instruction, including differentiated

instruction, then the “test scores will take care of themselves” (p. 2). “I’m not afraid of accountability, I think it does make some people do what they are supposed to do” (p. 3). Being proactive is an action Richard takes pride in and being “proactive starts with the focus of a school” (p. 3).

I know we’ve had a reduction in our special education population by instituting a reading program in kindergarten through third grade. We push so that by the time that our students are in 4th grade, they are all on grade level. Everyone is aware of what we are doing as well. The board knows, parents are appreciative, and while teachers were resistant at first, once we got a reading specialist and got focused, our scores went up, but more importantly, student skill levels improved and they started to feel better about themselves (p. 3)

Expanding on teacher resistance, Richard identified two extremes on his teaching staff. Those “who have been here for 22 years pulling out the same teaching material each February” (p. 3), and the other extreme of teachers who will do whatever it takes for student learning to take place “because they really care” (p. 4). Further he states that “our new teachers that come straight in from the universities do a great job with our prescriptive reading program but for some of our veterans, it’s been a battle” (p. 7). He said he has had to involuntarily reassign staff and faces a grievance arbitration hearing as a result. “I was brought in by my board to improve math and reading skills. I submitted my plan, which included a reading specialist” (p. 7).

Though Richard does not consider himself a collaborative type leader, he does believe that RTI strategies and the professional development opportunities to support that initiative have been “a huge component of what we do here to make us unique” (p. 5). He believes the departmentalizing of math and reading at early grades along with hiring

secondary teachers with specific subject endorsements for his upper elementary grades has helped “maintain academic focus” (p. 5).

Richard describes the NCLB accountability measures as “broad, generic guidelines that might help some schools, but we are ahead of the curve, so it’s just paperwork for us” (p. 5).

October is extremely time consuming and takes me away more and more from students. In fact the irony is I keep posted on my bulletin board a copy of the 1958 Fall Report (Appendix F); one legal page, double sided, hand written. Compare that with the size of reports we are doing now (p. 6)

One aspect of accountability that is local in nature is the expectation that differentiated instruction is used in every classroom as appropriate, and for students on Individual Educational Plans, teachers sign an additional district form acknowledging the modifications needed for their IEP students and that they will implement them in their classrooms.

This is the direction we are headed. I went to the board directly with our RTI plan and school wide improvement plan, the board signed off, and then from there I have been implementing it. My staff; some are embracing our plan, some are walking along, and some are getting dragged (p. 8)

Superintendent Pilot 2 - Charles

Charles is in his fourth year as superintendent and principal in a small town outside of the state’s capital. Prior to his current role he was a high school teacher for 12 years. In his current district, there are 200 students and 18 certified staff members. Of the student population, 70% qualify for free or reduced lunch participation. The chief employer in the area is state and local government agencies that include departments

within the county seat to state correctional facilities, as well as opportunities to commute to Helena.

Charles believed that the purpose of school district had far reaching effects into each students future.

To ensure a) in the beginning kids are given the essential skills needed for the rest of days in school and b) as kids evolve through system, preparing them for next level in their lives from pre-K to post high school. There is direct economic benefits to populous and so they can learn anything at anytime. Never stuck in their lives without options. Need basic skills to attain additional skills. To live their lives with choices but with umbrella that is quite a responsibility that a school district has. (2010, p. 1)

He also believes that the accountability movement has actually helped define the purpose of school districts “with positive influence and gives a common purpose” (p. 2).

As he discussed the accountability movement, he made it clear he was advocate for the measures and standards.

I think NCLB has impacted us in a good way. I know a lot of my colleagues across the state and nation probably disagree, you might be one of them, but I think the key word is accountability. Montana is notorious for doing what it wants. Now people are saying you are paid to teach. I like it. I like accountability because it gives us all a common goal to work towards (p. 2)

Charles states that most stakeholders have different reactions to accountability. Boards like accountability because we have done good job cultivating mission, purpose, planning of what is best for kids and its’ focused on instruction. Indirect feedback from community is positive. Staff struggle with it. Most have twenty or more years of experience in their career and I’m not sure if it is accountability or the lack of ability in being flexible. Younger teachers are more flexible. Students, I notice, take things a lot more seriously. School has become a place of business, not a place for dinking off. (p. 4)

Upon reflection, Charles believes that NCLB, the benchmarks established to meet adequate yearly progress, the Five Year Plan all fit together, but he credits response to intervention as the key to the marked improvement in student achievement. Coupled with the use of data, Charles states that “at the end of the day conversation is involves data that shows the job is getting done or isn’t getting done” (p. 4). Coming back to the theme of accountability, Charles adds,

We are still in midst of significant change process --- its impacted time, but greater impact is long term... not about me being here or it will go away when I leave. There is no going back. Just no going back. Provided vehicle for leadership to strategically say, this is what test scores say. Still in infancy but it still coming along. (p. 5)

Charles shared that his own expectations of goals and mission have not changed significantly, but expectations for leadership has changed significantly by staff and board compared to when he first started the job.

The biggest change is leadership in the past has been management but now the board still wants to fall back to talk about boilers, budgets, roofs, but knowing I’m competent, but not concerned. My forte is not these things. The expectation has changed because of what they expected and what they got. You will do managerial stuff but everyone will take care of self, but the superintendent needs to be instructional leader. A board might think they want a manager, but they are getting a leader in me. (p. 7)

Part of that leadership is to develop teachers to be about student learning and becoming “masters of the craft of education” (p. 5). For him as a leader, it means a deep understanding of teaching initiatives, organizational theory, change theory, and leadership theory. “You need a good personality that can build strong relationships. The skill set was bricks and mortar, the new skill set is people skills...lead people to see new things” (p. 5).

Charles reflected on a comment made by the instructional coach who said the district environment was a completely different culture; a culture that Charles includes strong collaboration and a focused professional development plan. He credits having a bigger picture in mind for a vision and “not get fired up about a lot of things that people think you are prodding at them” (p. 7). He believes building strong relationships and having a wide knowledge base assists with every interaction. “I’m honest and upfront with stakeholders to get them to see the common good of excellent schools” (p. 7). Every conversation Charles holds in the context of education is centered on “what about the student” (p. 7). “There are no more exclusively top down decisions. It’s your decision, our decision, my decision. I’ll even say this is “my decision and I’ll deal with consequences.”

The district culture has been developed so that “it wouldn’t fall apart under new leadership, but to safeguard, we don’t have alignment. It’s more “strategic doing” than “strategic planning.” Further, “We have made level two changes but haven’t formalized it” (p 8). Part of that planning meant taking professional development out of the individual hands of teachers and into the collective plan for improvement so it is more systemic.

The RTI process has helped us create an instructional manual. We have lots of PD centered on instruction, it is all about instruction. That has been biggest key to what we are doing. We don’t have good planning until you build relationships and set down the road acknowledging and embracing accountability, perhaps not even knowing where it is going to take you because the change is fluid and you have to be flexible and adaptable. (p. 9)

Superintendent Pilot 3 - Taylor

Taylor is in his 10th year in education. He served two years as a middle school teacher before becoming a principal and superintendent in smaller districts in Montana, Wyoming, and Alaska. Currently he is the superintendent of a K-8 district that feeds into the larger Billings High School District. He has approximately 370 students who he describes as coming from two economic extremes: deep poverty or from million dollar houses. He has 28 certified members on his staff.

Taylor stated that the core purpose of a school district has not changed very much despite entrance into the 21st century except that now teachers are more the facilitators of information rather than the sole source of information. He believes that democratic ideals are still suited for K-12 public education but critical thinking skills are necessary for students to know “what sources are valid and reliable” (p 1).

Taylor cites the popular fight against NCLB, but welcomes the idea of accountability in schools. “The model right now isn’t the way, but it has provided improvement” (p. 2). He believes NCLB has created more focus on how students learn and how student are doing. And while he embraces accountability he said that it took some time for his district stakeholders to welcome it. A turning point was when the district did not make AYP and “the finger pointing started for a short time, but more importantly it helped us realize we needed an alignment of our curriculum” (p. 5) He reports that “the teachers who have embraced the growth model have revitalized their careers. As educators we must model lifelong learners” (p. 6).

While he believes it has helped with student achievement and teacher instruction, it has caused frustration for him as a superintendent due to planning and reporting expectations.

First thing, overall the more we have put on plate, the further and further away it takes us away from being instructional leader. October is a killer with all the paperwork. I left one position for this one is because I wore all the hats. I was jack of all trades and master of none. I love instructional leadership so I moved. The more paperwork that is given the more I'm taken away. It is self defeating. (p. 5)

Another source of frustration with the current accountability for Taylor is the intangibles such as pride or community support are not measurable in AYP status reports. "AYP is more a measure of who is the last to fail. Stay ahead of the curve, eventually all schools will fail under this system" (p. 5).

While Taylor recognizes the changes in education and how accountability can lead to improvement, he believes "the old model was the Bs – budget, buses, beans. But today it is about student learning so I try to build connections with stakeholders" (p. 6). He has led discussions with staff members to determine "where our holes are, let's say in math curriculum or text books" (p. 7). He advocates teacher collaboration and everyone "must be open to ideas no matter where they come from" (p. 8).

I have teacher committees, based on correlates of effective schools, and I give them more and more power. I'm a facilitator to help our schools improve. Most things are things I would do, but by giving that to the teachers, there is a lot more buy in. You need to delegate things to both teachers and community. Differentiated instruction and RTI need to be integrated so all students are challenged. This is just solid education. (p. 9).

And while his stakeholders are supportive of this transformational leadership, Taylor readily admits that "it's a work in progress" (p. 9), and that the district is working on

alignment of plans, policies, and mission, but right now they are focusing on a few areas for improvement.

APPENDIX F

1958-59 DISTRICT REPORT

Superintendent's, Principal's or Teacher's Report

TO COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT AND DISTRICT CLERK

Report of the Public Schools in District No. _____ In the County of Missoula Montana, from the first day of July, 1958 to the thirtieth day of June, 1959

	Kindergarten	Elementary (Grades)	High School
1. Aggregate days of teaching (No. days school was actually taught excluding holidays when school was not in session)		184	
2. No. pupils enrolled during year: Boys		122	
Girls		114	
Total		236	
3. No. original enrollments (See Register page 2) Boys		116	
Girls		111	
Total		227	
4. No. received by transfer from another school in the county		9	
5. No. received by transfer from another school in the State outside the county		3	
6. Aggregate attendance (sum of daily attendance)		36965	
7. Aggregate absence (sum of daily absences)		1808	
8. Average daily attendance (6 divided by 1)		205	
9. Average number belonging (sum of 6 and 7 divided by 1)		215	
10. Per cent of attendance (6 divided by sum of 6 and 7)	95.33		No. cases of tardiness 24
11. No. cases corporal punishment 0; No. cases suspension 0; No. cases expulsion 0			
12. No. visits by county supt. and deputies 2; No. visits by trustees 2; No. visits parents of pupils			
13. Has the school a library? Yes. How many volumes were added to the library this past year? 200			
At what cost? \$350 No. of books in library, not including Dictionary or textbooks? 1130			
14. No. of globes 7 No. of wall maps 20 No. of large Dictionaries in school 4			
15. Does the district comply with the law in regard to the purchase of textbooks used by pupils? Yes			
16. Was Arbor Day observed in accordance with the law? Yes Pioneer Day? Yes			
17. Was instruction given regarding the effects of alcoholic drinks and narcotics? Yes Regarding the prevention of communicable diseases? Yes (See Sections 1054 and 1078 Revised Codes, 1921.)			
18. Has your building been thoroughly cleaned at least once every three months as provided by law? Yes			
19. No. pupils receiving eighth grade diplomas 25			
20. No. supervisors of instruction of special subjects and grades 0 No. supervising principals 0			
21. No. positions (No. teachers required to fill all positions at the same time):	Kindergarten	Elementary (Grades)	High School
Men		3	
Women		7	
22. No. different individuals (excluding superintendent) employed as teachers during the year: Men		3	
Women		7	
	Men	Women	
23. No. teachers not high school graduates and with no normal training			
24. No. teachers who are high school graduates but without college or normal training			
25. No. teachers with 1 yr. preparation beyond 4 yr. high school			
26. No. teachers with 2 yrs. beyond 4 yr. high school but without advanced diploma			
27. No. teachers with 3 yrs. beyond 4 yr. high school but without advanced diploma			
28. No. teachers who are graduates of normal courses 2 yrs. beyond 4 yr. high school			5
29. No. of teachers who are graduates of four-year college courses		3	5

NOTE: If data for 30 to 32 are not kept separately, segregate on basis of number of teachers employed in each department:

	Kindergarten	Elementary (Grades)	High School
30. Total annual salaries and expenses of supervisors of instruction: Men			
Women			
31. Total annual salaries and expenses of supervising principals: Men			
Women			
32. Total annual salaries of teachers (excluding supt. or prin. if 3rd class): Men		10,660	Instr. Bnd
Women		35,870	Instr. Bnd
33. Annual salary and expenses of superintendent (principal if 3rd class) \$81.00 Salary of high school principal \$			
34. Expenses of special departments: Manual training \$; home economics \$; art \$; music \$260; other special departments \$			
35. Date of opening school 9/2/58 date of closing school 5/29/59			
36. I have filled out the age-grade table on the back of this sheet.			

*According to law, only first and second class districts can employ superintendents. A third class district should report the head of the school as principal. (NOT heads of systems.)

APPENDIX G

QUESTIONS AND THEMES

Research Question	Theme	Participant Support
(1) How has accountability resulted in disequilibrium and change within school districts?	Purpose	“I used to believe we prepared students for the world of work and active citizenry but it’s now, for me, about having kids find work that is fulfilling and meaningful to them.” (Peg, 2010, p. 2)
	Accountability	“No Child Left Behind, I think the positive thing that occurred there is just the focus that are put on students and student achievement.” (Robert, 2010, p. 4)
	Stakeholders	“Our community values education. We did not need have to state our case of what we wanted to do.” (Michael, 2010, p. 8)
(2) How does the superintendent address accountability as a catalyst for promoting growth as measured by student achievement?	Re-organization	“We don’t accept anymore that kids in the lower math and reading groups can never be good at math or reading. We changed. We adapted. Not so much because of some standardized test, but because it is our obligation to teach all students wherever they level they are at.” (John, 2010, p. 4)
(2A) Is there evidence of transformational leadership by the superintendent in creating such change?	Transformational Leadership	“We have the Five Year Plan and generated staff input, and we have various committees on instruction and assessment, and that’s where we get the collaboration of staff, we get staff concerns, we communicate our expectations and the process is efficient and functional.” (Michael, 2010, p. 9)

APPENDIX H

LAUREL OUTLOOK GUEST EDITORIAL, JULY 2005

Leaving No Hockey Team Behind

Educational Changes for the 21st Century

By Josh J. Middleton, Laurel Superintendent

Between 1978 and 1981 there were 8 games played between the high school aged hockey teams in Butte and Billings. Similar to American Legion Baseball, these hockey teams represented their home towns, not specific high schools. The following are the scores of those games, two per year, during that four year period.

	Game 1	Game 2
1978	Billings 21 Butte 3	Billings 20 Butte 1
1979	Billings 15 Butte 4	Billings 13 Butte 2
1980	Billings 8 Butte 3	Billings 7 Butte 4
1981	Billings 5 Butte 4	Billings 3 Butte 3

As a member of that Butte squad during those four years I can share some background information that will help put this hockey history into perspective:

- Butte began their formal youth hockey program in 1977. Billings was well established by the mid-70s.
- Butte had an outside rink that required flooding and shoveling by hand, and at first only occasionally did the Butte Civic Center provide indoor ice time. Billings also had an outside rink but with artificial ice and a Zamboni, and they had greater access to indoor facilities.
- Butte changed coaches after 1979 from someone who had never played the game before to an ex- professional hockey player.
- Greater expectations were placed on the Butte players in the 1980 and 1981 seasons and off seasons, i.e. more ice time, longer practices, conditioning, and summer camps, just to name a few.
- The Billings team **did not** “ease up” during the ’80 and ’81 seasons so the Butte players would “feel good about themselves.”

Before we examine some of the hockey lessons that can apply to education today, let me reiterate some of the philosophical beliefs that I embrace as superintendent. In Jim Collins' book, *"Good to Great"* he states that the "enemy of great" is not bad, but "good." In other words, an institution stops performing at high levels when complacency seeps in. We should not be satisfied with good efforts and results, but always be striving for excellence. Likewise, Collins is also a believer of having the "right people on the bus, in the right seats." He has found that great companies have properly placed employees performing the necessary tasks at high levels of efficiency, referred to as "on the bus in the right seats." Equally important, according to Collins, is getting the right people off the bus because before you figure out where to drive the bus (meeting goals and objectives), one must be sure the right leadership is in place. The district has worked at getting the right people on and off the bus.

The educational model I embrace and continue to promote is The Effective Schools approach and its 7 Correlates or characteristics. This is not a program as much as a belief system that learning for all occurs when these correlates are in place. They are: 1) Clear and focused mission 2) Strong instructional leadership 3) Safe and orderly learning environment 4) Protected time to teach 5) Good school and home relations 6) Climate of high expectations and 7) Frequent monitoring of student progress. Many of these correlates are sprinkled throughout our district, but the goal is to use this mind set as a filter and foundation in making sound educational decisions at every level.

Recently, a woman who volunteers for the district commented to me that she thought recent decisions in the district had been hastily made. I vehemently, yet respectfully, disagreed stating that on the contrary, many developments and implementations had been very deliberate and thought out. Here are four examples:

1. **MAP Testing twice a year:** MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) allows us to track how our students are doing and what areas we need to improve. Over testing? I would rather monitor progress and adjust instruction in a timely manner than teach material and hope students get it.
2. **All day, every day kindergarten:** I cannot believe Montana is still having this debate! The research is clear on the subject. Early intervention for the neediest 5 year old students may be the only timely intervention that closes the achievement gap. Our one section of all day, every day kindergarten is a highly successful pilot program. It is time for the legislature to fund full time kindergarten with a parental option of sending children full or part-time!
3. **Construction and remodeling** – I continue to be in awe of the community support for our construction projects that will bring about facilities that are safe and conducive for learning.
4. **ACE Curriculum** – The decision has been made to join the ACE Curriculum Consortium. The question shouldn't be, "Why is a Class A district joining with smaller Class B and C districts for curriculum?" The questions should really be, "What took so long? And why do 20 + similar sized Class A districts in this state work independently when an interdependence with other districts would yield greater results and validation?" Such collaboration makes educational and economic sense.

I know school is not hockey and hockey is not school. But there are some parallels between the Laurel schools and a Butte hockey team from 25 years ago that highlight similar fundamental changes. At that time, a highly qualified coach held higher expectations of players, demanded more time on the ice, monitored our progress by having us scrimmage against the adult men's team, got us into better facilities on regular basis, and developed our work ethic/mission as individuals and teammates. He even transferred us into the positions that he thought we would perform at best, though not

necessarily the ones we wanted or thought we were entitled. And though I was not part of the squad after graduating and leaving Butte, the team continued to improve (and win) due to this shift in philosophy.

We have been refining our philosophy or belief system about how we do education here in Laurel. Educational change, innovation and accountability are here to stay. The sooner we embrace the shift from teacher lead instruction to student and standards based learning, the sooner we can honestly say that in the Laurel School District there is learning for all, whatever it takes.