

Exploration of professional identity development of PK-12 educational leaders in a public school system

by

Shanna L. Rector

B.S., Wichita State University, 1994
M.S., Wichita State University, 2000

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2024

Abstract

Educational leaders in a public school system contribute to the success of students and impact the learning environment. Discovering ways to support these important professionals is a worthwhile endeavor. An educational leader's professional identity is significant to their performance and serves as a compass to guide decisions and actions. Supporting the professional identity development of educational leaders is a crucial way to contribute to the journey and effect of the leader during their career. This basic qualitative study explored how educational leaders develop their professional identity and the relationship of professional standards to their professional identity. The study design included interviewing administrators from a public school system that experienced at least one career move within the same district to a leadership role, recognizing them as an educational leader. Employment of a pilot study was included to strengthen the design of the exploratory study data collection methodology. In conjunction with the semi-structured interview data collection, additional data was collected in the form of participant created concept maps. The conceptual framework served as a guide during the data collection and analysis process to orient the influencing constructs and descriptions of educational standard intersections to the development of professional identity. Five themes were identified: 1) capacity creating opportunities; 2) drivers toward the mission; 3) establishing desired culture; 4) influencing socializing agents; and 5) living aspired dispositions. The study results served to enhance the ability to inform practices of support for educational leaders focused on: supporting and growing current leaders through dialogue and access, infusing the repository of professional standards as a resource to enhance expertise, and harnessing the power of leaders within the system as developers of the professional identity of the next generation of educational leaders.

Exploration of professional identity development of PK-12 educational leaders in a public school
system

by

Shanna L. Rector

B.S., Wichita State University, 1994
M.S., Wichita State University, 2000

A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2024

Approved by:

Major Professor
Royce Ann Collins, Ph.D.

Copyright

© Shanna Rector 2024.

Abstract

Educational leaders in a public school system contribute to the success of students and impact the learning environment. Discovering ways to support these important professionals is a worthwhile endeavor. An educational leader's professional identity is significant to their performance and serves as a compass to guide decisions and actions. Supporting the professional identity development of educational leaders is a crucial way to contribute to the journey and effect of the leader during their career. This basic qualitative study explored how educational leaders develop their professional identity and the relationship of professional standards to their professional identity. The study design included interviewing administrators from a public school system that experienced at least one career move within the same district to a leadership role, recognizing them as an educational leader. Employment of a pilot study was included to strengthen the design of the exploratory study data collection methodology. In conjunction with the semi-structured interview data collection, additional data was collected in the form of participant created concept maps. The conceptual framework served as a guide during the data collection and analysis process to orient the influencing constructs and descriptions of educational standard intersections to the development of professional identity. Five themes were identified: 1) capacity creating opportunities; 2) drivers toward the mission; 3) establishing desired culture; 4) influencing socializing agents; and 5) living aspired dispositions. The study results served to enhance the ability to inform practices of support for educational leaders focused on: supporting and growing current leaders through dialogue and access, infusing the repository of professional standards as a resource to enhance expertise, and harnessing the power of leaders within the system as developers of the professional identity of the next generation of educational leaders.

Table of Contents

List of Figures	x
List of Tables	xi
Chapter 1 - Introduction.....	1
Researcher Background	1
Professional Identity Conceptual Framework.....	3
Educational Leadership.....	6
Problem Statement.....	9
Purpose Statement.....	11
Research Questions	11
Overview of Research Methodology	11
Limitations of the Research	13
Significance of the study.....	14
Definition of Terms	15
Summary	15
Chapter 2 – Literature Review	17
Development of Identity Theory.....	17
Personal Identity	18
Work Identity	20
Leadership Identity	22
Professional Identity	24
Definition	24
Construction	26
Professional Identity in Medicine	30
Professional Identity in Educational Leadership	32
Professional Identity Quantitative Measures	33
<i>Professional Identity and Engagement School (PIES)</i>	33
<i>Professional Identity Values Scale (PIVS)</i>	34
<i>Professional Identity Scale in Counseling (PISC)</i>	35
<i>Professional Identity Five-Factor Scale (PIFFS)</i>	36

<i>Professional Identity Swedish Principal Survey</i>	37
Professional Identity Qualitative Measures	37
<i>Professional Identity Educational Leadership (K-12) Case Studies</i>	37
<i>Professional Identity Qualitative Studies Outside Educational Leadership</i>	40
Conceptual Framework.....	41
Summary	44
Chapter 3 - Methodology	46
Research Questions.....	46
Qualitative Research Approach	46
Participants.....	47
Pilot Study.....	52
Data Collection	53
Semi-structured Interviews	53
<i>Interview Process</i>	55
Concept Map	56
<i>Concept Map Process</i>	56
Documents	58
Data Management	59
Data Analysis	62
Background and Role of the Researcher.....	69
Researcher Subjectivity	69
Trustworthiness.....	70
Summary	71
Chapter 4 - Findings.....	73
Findings	73
Capacity Creating Opportunities.....	74
<i>Autonomy</i>	75
<i>Immersion in the Position</i>	76
<i>Preliminary Experiences</i>	77
<i>Processing with Others</i>	78
<i>Professional Development</i>	79

Drivers toward the Mission.....	79
<i>Advocacy</i>	80
<i>Overcoming Challenges</i>	81
<i>Collective Commitments</i>	82
<i>Increasing Impact</i>	84
<i>Power of Education</i>	85
Establishing Desired Culture	86
<i>Alongside (With)</i>	86
<i>Belonging</i>	88
<i>Trust</i>	89
<i>Voice</i>	90
Influencing Socializing Agents.....	91
<i>Colleagues</i>	92
<i>Encouraging Leaders</i>	93
<i>Mentors</i>	94
<i>Role Models</i>	94
Living Aspired Dispositions	95
<i>Listening Collaborator</i>	96
<i>Reflective Learner</i>	97
<i>Supportive Leader</i>	98
Theme Alignment	99
Professional Identity	99
Professional Standards	103
Chapter 5 - Discussion	109
Interpretations of Findings.....	110
Capacity Creating Opportunities.....	110
Influencing Socializing Agents.....	111
Drivers toward the Mission, Establishing Desired Culture, and Living Aspired Dispositions	113
Implications for Practice	115
Professional Identity Support and Growth.....	116

Professional Standards to Enhance Expertise	119
Leaders as Developers of Professional Identity	122
Recommendations for Research	125
Conclusion	126
References	129
Appendix A - Recruitment Email	144
Appendix B - Consent Form	146
Appendix C - Interview Questions	149
Appendix D - Concept Map Directions	151
Appendix E - Data Alignment Chart	152
Appendix F - Theme Alignment Tables	156

List of Figures

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework	43
Figure 2. Participant Concept Map	58
Figure 3. Participant Profile Example.....	61
Figure 4. Data Questions and Memos.....	65
Figure 5. Professional Identity Components Data Coding	66
Figure 6. Professional Standards Data Coding	68

List of Tables

Table 1. Overall Themes and Categories	73
Table 2. Theme Alignment to Professional Identity	100
Table 3. Theme Alignment to Professional Standards.....	104

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Schools around the world are led by excellent leaders. When a school has a high quality leader, extraordinary things happen. Student learning increases. Graduation rates go up. Staff feel a stronger sense of connection and belonging. Community trust increases and schools flourish with support. One of the ways to retain an excellent leader is to sustain and build their professional identity.

I believe in the power and significance of effective educational leadership and that nurturing one's professional identity has influence in keeping the leader connected and thriving in their school system. The work of optimist Simon Sinek (2011) explains there is power in leading with WHY because it provides the "context for everything else," (p. 69) it provides the message about the beliefs and values of an individual or organization to put into perspective, and it provides a point of reference 'the what you do' and 'how you do it'. This qualitative research study began with a journey into my why followed by a discussion of professional identity. The importance of educational leadership and the challenges to maintaining an educational leader workforce provides the rationale to the significance of understanding educational leaders' professional identities as a definitive means to supporting educational leaders. A general outline of the research process was included.

Researcher Background

"There are those who revel in their work and find meaning in it for themselves and others. There are also those who are addicted to their work, in the best sense of the term, and seek it out in ever increasing measure" (Gini, 1998, p. 707). This quote speaks to me and I fall in the category of addicted to their work. I have over 20 years of experience within the same district where the research was conducted. As an educational leader, I have experienced great fulfillment

in my career and have always had a sense of belonging, connection, and purpose that made going to work each day easy, even when the work was very hard. There has been a congruency with whom I want to be and my profession. Over the last ten years, I started to notice the career paths of others and wondered about why I had a passion to continue within my current school system. And, as of late, my wonderings have also turned to worry because I am not seeing the same commitment, career exploration, or longevity within my district. The same is true for many school districts in the surrounding area in regards to limited leadership position applications and shortened tenure of leaders according to the anecdotal evidence gathered through collegial discussion.

Along with the wonderings, there was also a guttural belief that there had to be a describable essence of the personal thoughts, influences, and actions of an educational leader that kept them in and excited about the profession. The environment I work in provides access to educational research and theory along with experiences from a school system's lens through the professional organizations, training, and publications encountered as part of the leadership position. Formal and informal professional development was a critical component to developing the dispositions and skills of educational leaders and served as the living literature review to build knowledge, application, and impact strategies for acting school and district leaders. Sahlin (2023) concluded, "the combination of research- and practice-based learning and interactions with professional peers seem to be a way to challenge and confirm" (p. 15) development of leadership actions and increase sense of professionalism. The professional standards promote academic success and well-being of students as the foundational principle anchoring each standard to serve as a compass for decisions and actions to bring the standards to fruition. Relating to where I turned for best practice, Hattie and Smith (2021) stated it is the mindframes

of educational leaders, their why, that guide actions and practices to get to results; "school leaders' beliefs and values, their mindframes, explain their actions and maximize their impact on teachers, parents, and students" (p. 2). The moral purpose and high expectations described by Michael Fullan (2010), as the core that automates and creates a relentlessness for the why requiring all strategies, actions, and collaborations to "trigger moral obligation and responsibility to do better" (p. 63). These descriptors of the why is the professional language I familiarized myself with to articulate the reasons for what I do as an educational leader.

I have since discovered, through the literature review associated with this study, that the wonderings and guttural beliefs I was trying to understand and articulate in my mind were professional identity; which in a basic sense is an individuals' self-image of their professional capacity and commitment that is defined by the beliefs, values, experiences, attributes, and professional standards (Caza & Creary, 2016; Dobrow & Higgins, 2005; Ibarra, 1999; Slay & Smith, 2011). The term professional identity was never discovered during my career, but it was continually developing throughout my career. It was what I called my why. I believe professional identity is analogous to the why of an educational leader, because both speak "to understanding what motivates and inspires. It is the purpose, cause or belief that drives every organization and every person's individual career" (Sinek et al., 2017, p. 13). Through the process of qualitative research, the conceptual framework and direction for the research was developed to go beyond just a wondering to create greater understanding of professional identity and its development.

Professional Identity Conceptual Framework

Professional identity is shaped by external and internal influences incorporating distinct values and attitudes of self-identity in conjunction with the role and norm expectations of the profession to develop a consistent image of what it means to be a member of the profession

(Caza & Creary, 2016; Cruess et al., 2019; Moral Santaella, 2020). Acceptance through socialization and developing a sense of belonging to a professional community helps form a strong professional identity (Chin et al., 2020; Cruess et al., 2019). The experiences within the professional role become a field of influence to shape the professional identity and create convergent and divergent practices aligned to whom they are individually and as a professional (Crow et al., 2016). Probing into the professional identities of school leaders to "extract those elements that are key to understanding how school leaders build an identity oriented toward successful educational practices"(Cruz-González et al., 2021, p. 173) was presumed to be found in the narratives of the life histories of the leaders. Findings from the International Successful School Principals Project (ISSPP) argued that professional identity construction relates to the cultural, political, and social constructs of the environment involving both an individual and relational dynamic that has public and subjective influences (Gunnulfson et al., 2022). The professional identity of educational leaders was explored to understand the construction and influencing constructs.

To frame professional identity within a profession an "understanding of professional standards, expectations, ethical values, ideology, and conduct" (Jackson, 2016, p. 834) was important and contributed to the deeper internalizing and expressing of behavior and expectations for the professional role. According to the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), professional standards serve as a vehicle to communicate the work, qualities, and values of effective educational leaders to not only the practitioners, but also the stakeholders such as the public, policy makers, post-secondary institutions, and education associations (NPBEA, 2015). Although this research was not aimed at identifying the qualities of an educational leader, how the participants speak to the standards in relation to their professional

identity development was explored. "The standards focus on accomplished leadership practice to inspire educational leaders to stretch themselves and reach a level of excellence in their practice, no matter where they are in their careers" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 3). During the data collection process, the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) served as the point of reference for the domains, qualities, and values of educational leadership work to promote the academic success and well-being of each student:

- develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high quality education
- act ethically and according to professional norms
- strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices
- develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment
- cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community
- develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel
- foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff
- engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways
- manage school operations and resources
- act as agents of continuous improvement. (NPBEA, 2015)

In an interpretative phenomenological approach, Stone-Johnson and Weiner (2022) affirmed that educational leadership fits the description of a profession especially in the area of expert knowledge, normative orientation of service, and professional discretion and autonomy. The building of professional identity was associated with the measurement of learning and was

considered a significant outcome for educational preparation programs and should be part of the program assessment to ensure there are opportunities for its development against the backdrop of the professional standards and perspicacity of the responsibilities associated with a profession (Trede et al., 2012). "Standards have direct influence on members of the profession by creating expectations and setting direction for the practice of educational leaders" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 5).

Educational Leadership

Educational leaders make a profound impact on learner outcomes. According to NPBEA (2015), "an expanding base of knowledge from research and practice shows that educational leaders exert influence on student achievement by creating challenging but also caring and supportive conditions conducive to each student's learning" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 1). Leithwood et al. (2004) brought greater attention to the importance of educational leadership and has been widely quoted touting that "leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school" (p. 5). Actually, the information found in the report, *Review of Research: How Leadership Influences Student Learning* (Leithwood et al., 2004), had influence and impact over my career as a resource to guide leadership decisions and inform best practice actions as a principal. Recently, Leithwood et al. (2020) revisited seven claims derived from the study and stated subsequent research has "unequivocally, point[ed] to the fact that school leadership matters greatly in securing better organizational and learner outcomes" (p. 16).

In a 2021 study conducted by the American Institutes for Research, principals related the standards to their daily positions and said the standards represented the work of school leadership, but the demand of attention changed based upon the needs of the school and issues. According to the ISSPP (2015) findings, successful educational leaders across all jurisdictions

shared similar values, expectations, skills, and level of respect, but achievement and realization of school outcomes was through the individual judgment and application of strategies and expertise. Overlapping realms of exemplified skill of educational leaders were also identified by Grissom et al., (2021) in the area of instruction, people, and organization. Four classes of behaviors were seen to produce positive school outcomes:

- Engaging in instructionally focused interactions with teachers. Forms of engagement with teachers that center on instructional practice, such as teacher evaluation, instructional coaching, and the establishment of a data-driven, school-wide instructional program to facilitate such interactions.
- Building a productive school climate. Practices that encourage a school environment marked by trust, efficacy, teamwork, engagement with data, organizational learning, and continuous improvement.
- Facilitating productive collaboration and professional learning communities. Strategies that promote teachers working together authentically with systems of support to improve their practice and enhance student learning.
- Managing personnel and resources strategically. Processes around strategic staffing and allocation of other resources. (Grissom et al., 2021, p. xv)

It was not just about having knowledgeable educational leaders, it was about having effective leaders that are able to foresee what is needed in our schools and how to align their expertise to address demands; "schools and school districts need effective leaders like never before to take on the challenges and opportunities facing education today and in the future" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 7).

The systematic synthesis of two decades of research commissioned by the Wallace Foundation, reported "it is difficult to envision an investment with a higher ceiling on its

potential return than a successful effort to improve principal leadership" (Grissom et al., 2021, p. xiv) and encouraged attention to support and cultivate the workforce of educational leaders. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) allows states to use federal funds to support activities directed at increasing the quality level of educational leaders due to the powerful impact school leadership has on improved educational outcomes (Branch et al., 2013; Herman et al., 2017). The turnover rate of educational leaders was expected to increase and the shortage of highly effective principals was projected for the future (Leithwood et al., 2004; Stone-Johnson & Weiner, 2022). This future is already evident in the school district in the area of this study and is seen across all levels of educational leadership positions. "The high turnover rate of educational leaders nationwide points to the complexities, responsibilities, and relentless pressures of the job, and such turnover derails improvement efforts necessary for student learning" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 6). Highlighting research released from the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASPP) and National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), Ruggirello (2022) outlined key points predicting a large exodus of principals leaving the profession in the next three years. In the respect of status, income, and rewards as being part of the definition of professional, these were seen as in decline where the status of educational leaders was being challenged and a level of accountability felt daunting; diminishing the weight of intrinsic or monetary rewards associated with the educational leadership position (Stone-Johnson & Weiner, 2022).

School systems have had increased difficulty sustaining an experienced and high-quality workforce due to leaving educational leaders and the reduced market of new leaders (Stevenson, 2006). Effective educational leadership has an encouraging contribution to the positive human resource patterns and speedier school improvement efforts. When there was high turn-over or

ineffective leadership, there was lower teacher retention and diminished student gains (Herman et al., 2017). The Wallace Foundation outlined four components for shaping an effective educational leadership pool within a district: "rigorous leaders standards; high-quality preservice preparation for high-potential candidates; data-informed hiring and placement; well-aligned on-the-job support and evaluation" (Grissom et al., 2021, p. 3). The Rand Principal Preparation Series promoted district and university partnership programs to build a candidate pool:

District-program partnerships are critical because principal candidates will eventually seek leadership positions in schools, and districts expect program graduates to be ready to lead; retaining or providing supplemental training could be time- and resource-intensive. Moreover, within a partnership, districts can provide insights to program enrollees in the context of a preparation program into the specific needs and challenges of their schools and the qualifications of successful school leaders. (Wang et al., 2022, p. 1)

Problem Statement

School districts have always been in search of effective educational leaders to lead at the school and district level and recent research has increased the appreciation of the impact of these leaders on student achievement and educational outcomes. Although the importance of leaders was amplified, this has not brought about a surge in candidates wanting to embark into the formal role of educational leader at the school or district level. Over the last 15 years, several studies focused on development, best-practices, and sustainability of principal pipeline initiatives to cultivate effective school leaders and guide efforts to maintain the pool of leaders once they were within the sponsoring school system (Anderson et al., 2023; Mitgang, 2008; Turnbull et al., 2013). The resources available to school districts were from the technical viewpoint that outlined effective practices for the system and the characteristics and actions of educational leaders and

the standards to which educational leaders should aspire. Helpful, yes, but they did not provide enough discussion and examples to go more deeply into the nuances of how to support the professional identity of the educational leader beyond mechanical procedures and working conditions.

There was considerable research to suggest development of professional identity was important to the institutions, as well as the constituents, that are served and associated with the profession and professional. The studies, especially relevant to K-12 school systems, reviewed as part of the literature review highlighted the complexity and multifaceted nature of professional identity development and its reliance upon the context specific environment, experiences, and expectations encountered by the educational leader (Crow et al., 2016; Cruz-González et al., 2021; Møller, 2003; Moral Santaella, 2020; Real & Botía, 2017; Scribner & Crow, 2012). Criticizing the state of K-12 educational leadership research, Scribner and Crow (2012) called for greater focus on the identity dimensions of educational leaders:

the concept of professional identity provides a valuable antidote of the overreliance of technocratic orientations to school leaders' work by helping us understand what influences a leader's behaviors and what drives a leader's willingness and ability to take on and enact creative and effective leadership in a high stakes, dynamic knowledge society. (p. 245)

The literature on professional identity as it related to informing a school system or district leader on how to better understand, support, and maintain their current internal leaders was limited. At a school system district leader level, the effort to build educational leadership capacity was more of a personal human endeavor that required understanding of the dynamics and the contextual attributes of the environment the educational leader is experiencing. This

aligned with the type of research suggested by Crow et al. (2016), "a more nuanced view would enrich our understanding not only of what leaders do but why they do it and the values, beliefs and practices that shape" (p. 10) their professional identity. From the nuanced perspective that context matters for professional identity development and to situate research where it can provide insight beyond available technical resources for retainment and improvement of educational leaders' skills and performance, an exploratory study focused on educational leaders within a school system by a district leader provided a platform which will contribute to professional identity research of educational leaders.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the study was to understand how educational leaders develop their professional identity. This qualitative study documents how educational leaders from the same school district described the characteristics, influences, and sequences within their professional identity development.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study:

1. How do educational leaders describe their development of a professional identity?
2. How do educational leaders describe the professional standards in their professional identity?

Overview of Research Methodology

This exploratory research was conducted using basic qualitative research approach where I acted as the primary instrument for data collection. The research questions were "stimulated by real-life observations" and experiences in my "local setting that reflect a perplexing problem begging for systematic inquiry" (Johnson et al., 2020, p. 138). All of the selected participants

volunteered to be part of the research study and were chosen due to their educational leadership positions and shared characteristic of serving in multiple roles within the selected school district. Continued employment within the same district and moving into a leadership role indicated the participants had a commitment to the system, and the individual was selected as a leader by the system. As I interacted with the participants of the study, the terminology of professional identity was unfamiliar, but the essence of their professional identity already existed within them and through their actions, just waiting to be illuminated.

Data collection involved two rounds of semi-structured interviews, with the second interview following the development of a concept map by the participant to "peel away a superficial understanding of one's experiences to a deeper understanding of one's experiences" (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 127). To accompany the interview and concept map data, documents and artifacts identified by the participants as having meaning associated with their professional identities were collected. Crow et al. (2016) suggested the value of the use of interview "narratives as central to researching identity construction. Other tools, including rituals, ceremonies, meetings, language and other artifacts, can serve in the identity formation of principals" (p. 274). Prior to the data collection process, a pilot study, involving two participants that met the selection criteria, was conducted to provide interview technique rehearsal, question evaluation, and procedure refinement to increase the quality of the research data. Another element to increase the quality of the research involved engaging the participants in member checking actions, which "lead toward trust" in the researcher in a situation where there was an "inherent" power structure due to my organizational position (Stahl & King, 2020, p. 27).

Throughout the data collection process, there was an element of concurrent data analysis along with validating methods, such as triangulation, to increase the credibility of the study and

to ensure full examination of the data against the research purpose and conceptual framework (Johnson et al., 2020). The methods incorporated in the analysis were based on an inductive approach to move back and forth across the data. The following guidelines from Bhattacharya (2017) are the actions that were taken to support the analysis process: familiarized self with data by reading and rereading; used writing as an inquiry form to understand questions that arose and connect data pieces; chunked data into coding units that can be labeled; created clustering patterns to develop categories; and, as patterns arose, looked across and within while asking deep questions. The analysis process was iterative and continued until I was able to "close the loop" through the drawing of conclusions that "clearly link research questions, study design, data collection and analysis, and interpretation of results" (Johnson, 2020, p. 144).

Limitations of the Research

Identifications of limitations in qualitative research illustrated the ability to articulate an understanding of the conditions that may affect the outcome. As the primary data collection tool, I brought to the study a level of subjectivity and bias. Within this study, I knew the participants prior to the interviews and had observed each participant in the educational setting as a leader and a colleague. The purposeful sampling of participants did include an element of convenience sampling, since all participant volunteers were from within the current school district of the researcher. The interviews and concept map data collection tool engaged the participants to reflect on past events and relied on memory and their own perceptions.

I was cognizant of the leadership position and history in the organization and purposefully contemplated the aspects of influence, productive or counterproductive, throughout the research process and documented or adjusted actions as necessary. With experience in the district there was a familiarity and grounding that created prior knowledge and perspective to

balance, so that discovery, inquiry, and openness required as part of the qualitative research process took center stage. My subjectivity was a variant in the research that I systematically looked for to increase awareness and consciously attend to reducing its impact in the research process (Peshkin, 1988).

Significance of the study

Educational leadership is extremely important to school districts and student learning. There is a need to have a continued rich workforce of educational leaders to steer the school systems around the world. This research was timely to understand the development of these leaders professional identity in order to provide access and knowledge to better understanding their Why for being and staying an educational leader. There was international research to indicate a key factor that contributed to the improvement and effectiveness of schools was the educational leadership found within the school systems; Cruz-González et al. (2021) further state "to understand how principals exercise leadership, we need to be aware of how professional identity is developed" and to identify the "determinants" (p. 45) which need fostered. If we could create opportunities to support the professional identity of an educational leader and understand what contributed to its formation, then the return on the investment was a leader that was able to commit and "perform competently and legitimately" in the context of educational leadership "over the course of the individual's professional career" (Tan et al., 2017, p. 1505). "Evidence consistently shows that the development of professional identity is critical if leadership is to be exercised successfully" (Cruz-González et al., 2021, p. 45). Associating Lord and Hall's (2005) concepts of leadership identity to professional identity as important to providing the subtext educational leaders organize relevant knowledge within, served as the motivational and directional forces to access development situations, and was the source for the core values and

motivators of the school leader. The ISSPP, identified as probably the most comprehensive international study of school leadership ever undertaken, included professional identities as a critical strand of study acknowledging it as essential to the "comprehensive picture of the values, characteristics, strategies, and skills of successful school leaders" (ISSPP, 2015, p. 2).

Definition of Terms

Educational Leader: An individual that served in a formal administrative position within a school system, such as a principal, assistant principal, director, executive director, assistant superintendent, or superintendent.

Hierarchal: Used to delineate an individual that had obtained an administrative (educational leader) position within the participant's school district that would be placed at a higher employment status than the individual previously held within the same district.

Professional Identity: "The ability to perform the functions of the profession; knowledge, as evidenced by education and/or certification; identification with a community of practice and with the values and ethics of the profession; and personal identification as a professional within an identified professional group" (Fitzgerald, 2020, p. 470).

Summary

The journey into understanding the development of professional identity began with an internal wondering about educational leaders' persistence to begin and continue along the leadership path within a school system. Each leader had professional identity that was influenced by the system around them and forces within. There were professional standards for educational leaders that established the expectations of the important work they did and provided aspirational guidance to what they represented. Once a school system has an effective educational leader at the helm much needs to be done to keep them there. Through the exploration of the words of the

educational leaders about their professional identity construction within their school system insight was gained to perpetuate and continue the vital cycle of educational leadership support to sustain the professional leaders. This exploratory basic qualitative research study provides some insights into the professional identity of development to school leaders.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

All of us have an identity that was influenced by the world around us and the thoughts within us (Gee, 2001; Jackson, 2016; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Identities have been named, defined, and theorized about across a spectrum of interests; the interest for this study laid in the realm of professional identity development of educational leaders. The review of literature guided by this purpose revealed the necessity to review identity theory, personal identity, work identity, and leadership identity before embarking on a deeper study of professional identity. Another component of the literature review to help focus the study (Guthrie, 2010; Patton, 1990) was to distinguish professional identity from other identities and to uncover the contributing factors to professional identity construction. Primarily, the research and literature reviewed originated from the medical field, higher education programming, institutional organizations, and school principal studies. The quantitative measurement instruments and qualitative research studies that were highlighted in the literature review provided guidance and insight to the research methodology decisions implemented by this researcher connecting the contribution of other researchers to the topic (Merriam, 2009). The final component of the literature review was the conceptual framework for professional identity construction by educational leaders establishing the groundwork for the qualitative case study conducted as part of this study's methodology.

Development of Identity Theory

The research on the concept of identity was discussed across a span of disciplines from philosophy, sociology, psychology, cultural studies, and organizational studies to name a few (Epitropaki et al., 2016; Hammack, 2014) and "investigated through a wide array of phenomena" (Alvesson et al., 2008, p. 5). The exploration of the foundations for the concept of identity

grounded the research discussions regarding the meaning, formation, and study of professional identity providing a conceptual lens of thought for this study. Although there were numerous mentions to a lack of coherence and fragmentation across the study of identity (Caza et al., 2016), the predominant authors throughout this literature review, addressing professional identity, spoke to identity theory and social identity theory (Alvesson et al., 2008; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Caza & Creary, 2016; Stryker & Burke, 2000) as the basis for identity term reference. In the critical comparison of identity theory and social identity theory, Hogg et al. (1995) provided distinctions between each theory identifying similarities and differences and situated identity theory as having microsociological roots and social identity theory as rooted in psychology. Further distinction by Stryker and Burke (2000) pinpointed social identity theory as permitting differentiation and conception of identity of self within and among group membership to give a sense of we (Epitropaki et al., 2016), whereas identity theory distinguished group membership and roles separate from one another. These two theories were expanded upon in relation to the concept of personal identity, and then theoretical frameworks and studies associated directly with professional identity were explored separately as a discrete section of the literature review.

Personal Identity

Personal identity is composed of times of consistency and fluidity across the span of a lifetime and is built from what cannot be controlled alongside the purposeful interchanges one experiences with others and the world (Alvesson et al., 2008). Personal identity includes how one defines self through the beliefs and goals within and through the interactions of relationships, roles, groups, organizations (Alvesson et al., 2008; McLean & Syed, 2014; Zheng et al., 2021); it was a subjective (Alvesson et al., 2008; Nicholson, 1984) concept that was

complex to understand and study (Caza & Creary, 2016). The influences upon personal identity change over time and live within the context of the culture and environment experienced by the individual (Caza & Creary, 2016; Geijssel & Meijers, 2005) as "distinct discursive sources" (Lammers et al., 2013, p. 507) influencing the way the person sees themselves and how the individual was seen through the eyes of others (Slay & Smith, 2011).

An individual was not defined by one personal identity. There was a mosaic of identities encompassing social identities (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016) and professional identity that were dynamic and build perspective for understanding the collectives and categories experienced. The categories of which one can belong and identify, such as gender, class, race, ethnicity, and occupation along with others provided meaning and depth (Hammack, 2014). The sophisticated and nuanced (Brown, 2015) aspect of identities made for a highly varied structure to study and define. The identity of the person had bearing to support, reinforce, and confirm, the choices of activity, therefore, acting "like a compass helping us steer a course of interaction in a sea of social meaning" (Burke & Reitzes, 1981, p. 91).

There were cultural and historical circumstances that contributed to the configuration of personal identity, and these cannot be easily analyzed (Alvesson et al., 2008) without considering "how one defines one's beliefs or goals, which is represented in the negotiation of culturally relevant roles and positions" (McLead & Syed, 2014, p. 2). This leaned into the concept of narrative identity, which reflected the stories of the reality and construction of the individual's identity (Zheng et al., 2021). The narratives aligned to the personal motives, thinking, behavior, and realities of individuals to provide explanation and context to the developing and desired self (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). The personal identity was said to be an operational identity or "salient possible self" (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016, p.114) that was composed of many selves that

take residence in the past and present, but "most, importantly, in the future" (Ibarra, 2003, p. 37) in which they aspired to and was based on the individuals, organizations, and jobs that shaped the identity (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Ibarra, 2003). The personal identity was further developed by the "self-conceptions" and the "desired future selves" (Ibarra, 1999, p. 766), such that it acts as a prerequisite for the development of professional identity (Öhlén & Segesten, 1998).

Work Identity

The term 'role' constitutes belonging to particular group or profession and was characterized by the definitions of expectations and classifications relating to organization or profession associated within the reference. The expectations of a group or occupation form the role descriptors and stay relatively stable and are external to the individual, while work identity was the internalized role expectation that is influenced by whom the person is (Grodzki, 2011; Stryker & Burke, 2000) as a basis of identity. Social identity theory and identity theory both use role as part of its paradigms leading to debate on the meaning and significance (Burke & Stets, 2000; Hogg et al., 1995); for the perspective of this study, a solution to the debate was not necessary based on the definition set within this study. Theorists from both camps agreed, according to Caza and Creary (2016), when professional values and attitudes associated with the role become part of the work identity, those expectations are incorporated and become part of the personal identity: "we find identity and are identified by the work we do" (Gini, 1998, p. 714). In this study, the term work identity represented role identity and the term 'role' singularly referenced an occupation, job, or position within an organization.

Work identity stories provided important insight to an individual's work identity and how they make meaning about the "why they are who they are and do what they do within their work

roles" (Zheng et al., 2021, p. 1179). Caza and Creary (2016) stated researchers were interested in how individuals form work identities due to the resulting beneficial inputs for the work organizations due to the knowledge and skills developed for the work role. There was a cyclical aspect of identifying with the role that provided the motivation to learn and internalize as part of the work identity (Burke & Stets, 2000; Ibarra, 1999; Scribner & Crow, 2012). The role became relevant and descriptive of the person as self-meaning and identity was formed (Burke & Reitzes, 1981) from the system group interaction and performance knowledge existing within the organization (Clarke et al., 2009). In the discussions of work role transition, Jackson (2016) viewed work roles as networks of goals and means-ends relationships involving people moving along a continuum from replication to exploration as high personal and role development within the organization.

Socialization and orientation provided a framework to build social group membership and scholarship in an organization to practice and reciprocate the norms, behaviors, patterns of interaction, and human agency associated with the profession and developing work identity (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Caza & Creary, 2016; Ibarra, 1999; Nicholson, 1984; Scribner & Crow, 2012). The interactionist perspective was seen as socialization as part of the development of work identity based "upon the interactional settings or roles," along with performance within the organization (Burke & Tully, 1977, p. 883). As personal and social meaning was developed in the work environment, the relationships become part of the framework and fabric of the work identity and determined how priorities and decisions were determined (Ibarra, 2003). An adaptation and negotiation transpired as the work identity was established using the internal standards and external feedback of self and others as experimentation within the role was attempted (Ibarra, 1999; Slay & Smith, 2011).

Organizational studies and management scholars sought to understand how work identity was formed to create occupational group membership into organizational behaviors that supported cooperation, effort, belonging, and collective efficacy to create a work community that supported the interests and societal culture of the organization (Caza & Creary, 2016; Lammers et al., 2013; Vough, 2012,). According to Dutton et al. (2010), positive work identity perspectives—virtuous qualities, high regard, fit with internal and/or external standards, and complementary identities—built social resources that were critical to the group member's work identity and organizational functioning. The work identity went beyond the organization to the development of the personal identity in such a way that the individual drew from the qualities (values, creativity, trustworthiness, point-of-view, and expertise) of the organization to assign meaning to what they did and who they wanted to be (Caza & Creary, 2016; Ibarra, 1999; Nicholson, 1984).

Leadership Identity

Leadership identity, according to Zheng et al. (2021), was associated with the leader role in an organization, and had no universal meaning across the research in regards to the definition, and was also subject to different interpretations based on the varied contexts (Day et al., 2013). As with other iterations of identity, the development and understanding of leadership identity was a dynamic process that was couched in the individual moving along a continuum of learning and assimilating the skills, dispositions, and expectations associated with the role of leader or the work identity (Dobrow & Higgins, 2005; Lord & Hall, 2005; Zheng et al., 2021). Lord and Hall (2005) emphasized the progression of a leader from novice to expert and grounded their model in identity as it provided the substrate of values, stories, and experiences as the source of momentum, capacity, and motivation toward leadership identity acquisition.

In the empirically based study to understand the underlying developmental process of leaders, Day and Sin (2011) indicated the aspiration to lead and adoption of a leadership identity provided a trajectory to seek, practice, and embrace leadership skills and competencies. Throughout the leadership identity process and movement from group member to leader, there was an adoption of the provisional leader identity as the individual refined and solidified leadership attributes from the feedback of mentors, social networks, and subordinates prior to the creation of a coherent leadership identity (Ibarra, 1999; Lord & Hall, 2005; Zheng et al., 2021). When the leader role and the associated behaviors, values, and expectations became internalized into the personal identity and overall self-definition with the individual seeing and thinking of themselves as a leader, the leadership identity formed (Day & Sin, 2011; Zheng et al., 2021).

The co-construction of leadership identity through a process of iterating identity discovery to clarify and develop acceptance of leader–follower relationships was proposed by DuRue and Ashford (2010) as a dynamism model to counter the portrayal of intrapersonal, one-directional, and static descriptors of leadership identity development. Conceptualizing leadership identity across three levels of self-construal: individual, relational, and collective (DuRue & Ashford, 2010) aligned to theorizing by Zheng et al., (2021) that the personal history, social forces, and leader role claiming bolstered and sustained the creation of a leadership identity. Positive leadership experiences required interpersonal relationships within a social context where the leader ties personal and group success to the investment of energy into the collective organization (Day & Harrison, 2007). Leadership identity development within this vein aligned with social identity theory of leadership (Day et al., 2013; Day & Harrison, 2007; Epitropaki et al., 2016).

Professional Identity

The concept of identity was unpacked to provide context to personal, work, and leadership identities. The next layer of identity to unpack was professional identity. The literature review, specifically this section encompassing professional identity, was the foundational bedrock (Merriam, 2009) for this study. It began with a discussion of the elusive definition of professional identity. Although professional identity was not easily defined or fully agreed upon, it was defined substantially enough to act as a marker to build understanding of how professional identity was constructed. The construction of professional identity was an active, complex, and evolving process involving a dynamic series of inputs and influences that involve not only the individual, but a collective of cognitive influence and socialization (Caza & Creary, 2016; Ibarra, 1999; Kasperuniene & Zydziunaite, 2019; Trede et al., 2012). After construction, professional identity in medicine and educational leadership was explored to provide context from two of the larger contributing areas of studies.

To round out the literature review, the next section included discussion of the measurement tools and previous research studies. The review of literature brought to light a limited availability of professional identity measurement instruments, especially in regard to measurement of professional identity of educational leaders. There was greater hardness of qualitative research studies relating to educational leaders to glean insight and guidance from, especially in the methodology of case study.

Definition

There was a myriad of definitions for professional identity due largely in part to the diverse application across many professional disciplines and the context of the usage by the organization, researcher, or theorist. The descriptor "constellation of attributes" (Caza & Creary,

2016; Dobrow & Higgins, 2005; Ibarra, 1999; Scribner & Crow, 2012; Slay & Smith, 2011) provided an image of specks of light in a vast sky that was seen by different vantage points, and it was through these vantage points within the profession that the professional identity was formed.

Fitzgerald (2020) conducted a concept analysis to clarify the term professional identity due to the lack of a clear, explicit definition in the literature within the health-related fields. The concept analysis revealed the following themes across the literature: actions and behaviors; knowledge and skills; values, beliefs, and ethics; context and socialization; and group and personal identity. Within the framework of the identified themes, Fitzgerald provided a conglomerated definition of professional identity:

the ability to perform the functions of the profession; knowledge, as evidenced by education and/or certification; identification with a community of practice and with the values and ethics of the profession; and personal identification as a professional within an identified professional group. (p. 470)

The essence of professional identity illustrated a commitment to the profession and development of self-concept and demonstration of actions that aligned with the philosophy, characteristics, and expertise articulated by self and others in that role or occupation (Caza & Creary, 2016; Cowin, et al., 2013; Dobrow & Higgins, 2005; Healy & Hays, 2012; Slay & Smith, 2011; Trede, et al., 2012). The basis of professional identity was associated with a particular profession, role, or occupation in an organization or society. The focus of understanding professional identity can narrow within a particular organization down to the individual positions or more globally from the perspective of understanding professional identity across the span of examples.

Professional identity was studied across various occupational fields and professions for varied reasons and desired outcomes. The literature review revealed concentrated areas of professional identity research, especially in the health-related fields to include physicians, nurses, physical therapists, dentists, and counselors (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Chin et al., 2020; Cowin, et al., 2013; Cruess, et al., 2015; Fitzgerald, 2020). In the area of educational administration, the study of professional identity was limited and mainly focused on school principal identities in case studies (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Crow et al., 2017; Lucena et al., 2021a; Moral Santaella, 2020). Several of the studies were associated with an International Successful School Principalship Project (Lucena et al., 2021a).

Construction

Understanding how individuals constructed professional identities informs organizations and post-secondary institutions, thus preparing the professionals to fortify, embrace, and create experiences and environments, which lend to professional identity construction. Enriching theory on professional identity construction had potential for all types of organizations and increased the strength, benefit, and function of the professionals (Brown, 2015; Caza & Creary, 2016; Cowin, et al., 2013; Cruess, et al., 2019; Pratt et al., 2006) along with career success (Slay & Smith, 2011). Professional identity construction was a specific iteration of identity work, referring to the identity formation, involving the dynamic role of experimenting and interacting within the organization and with group members to create self-meaning through cognitive and behavioral tactics (Caza & Creary, 2016; Cerulo, 1997; Ibarra, 1999) alongside the "'doing' and 'being' among professionals" (Pratt et al., 2006, p. 255).

Socialization contributed to the professional identity construction of the individuals providing a key period of identification and internalization of the norms and values of the

profession establishing expectations for the behaviors and attitudes (Caza & Creary, 2016; Öhlén & Segesten, 1998). The communities and social environment within the organization can be a source of positive effect and connection to professional growth (Fitzgerald, 2020) establishing a continuing "interactive life-long process characterizing human development" (Öhlén & Segesten, 1998, p. 722).

The socialization process created the acceptance and sense of belonging within and among the group providing a strong determinant to formation of a professional identity (Chin et al., 2020). The identity construction research outlined socialization as the process of eliciting multiple stakeholders to provide a mechanism to negotiate the active process of situating professionals in the environment within a basis of mutual interaction and contextualization of the work place (Caza & Creary, 2016; Chin et al., 2020; Ibarra, 2003; Lucena et al., 2021b; Zheng et al., 2021). The socializing agents, such as mentors, colleagues, supervisors, and developmental networks, provided feedback and practice to validate and support self-assessment as part of the professional identity construction (Caza & Creary, 2016; Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006).

Dobrow and Higgins (2005) defined developmental networks as a conceptualization of mentoring involving a number of people who provide both professional and psychosocial support to increase the self-knowledge and exploration to influence deeper professional identity formation. The socialization and interactions within the organization were reciprocal in building the professional identity between all involved; the social groups contributed to not only a sense of belonging, but also to forge the construction and challenges of assumptions and practices (Chin et al., 2020; Lucena et al., 2021b; Scribner & Crow, 2012). The interactions with the institutions and professional associates created opportunity for self-awareness and reflection to

understand the demands of the social and contextual elements of the profession (Jackson, 2016).

Ashforth and Schinoff (2016) state,

Individuals may follow their heart (affect), hands (behavior), or head (cognition) into internalizing the identity. Assuming that their initial enactments and narrative receive feedback and social validation from colleagues and others, individuals come to feel more comfortable, emboldening further enactments (p. 128),

highlighting the input of socialization in professional identity construction in organizations.

Research directed the post-secondary institutions preparing professionals and the organizations to provide preparatory actions and explicit learning opportunities to develop professional identity. These actions needed to create an understanding of the workplace culture, skills, and knowledge requirements through authentic experiences (Trede et al., 2012). There needed to be an immersion in the professional world through mentorship and interactive social group engagement for individual agency development balanced with academics, training, and structured communication that was collaborative and evaluative with feedback to measure growth (Ibarra, 1999; Tan et al., 2017; Trede et al., 2012).

An example from the medical field known as Miller's pyramid, which is an assessment of clinical skills, competence, and performance, has been amended by researchers to add an 'is' layer at the top of the pyramid as the identity layer (Cruess, R. et al., 2016). The pyramid moves along the continuum from know (knowledge), knows how (competence), shows how (performance), does (action), and finally is (identity) signifying the physician demonstrates the attitudes, values, and behaviors expected to "think, act, and feel" establishing professional identity (Cruess, R. et al., 2016, p. 181). The development of the professional identity through

active engagement in the new role provides the vicarious and experiential learning for adoption and consideration of alternative courses of action (Ibarra, 1999; Trede et al., 2012).

The cultivation of professional identity was theorized to be one of the functions of mentoring and internships (Dobrow & Higgins, 2005). These discrete actions provided relationship development to influence growth and helped the developing professional and student increase self-knowledge due to the relational perspective formed and expertise shared (Dobrow & Higgins, 2005; Ibarra, 1999) when there was mutual trust and care for the mentee's professional growth (Chin et al., 2020). The greater variety of role model opportunities allowed for the individuals to define not only what they aspire to be, but also what was not conducive to the personal identity allowing greater autonomy on creating possible selves and establishing the behaviors, values, and dispositions that moved them forward in the profession (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Chin et al., 2020; Ibarra, 1999). Mentorship and role modeling provide a platform for feedback and mechanisms to calibrate reactions through the interpersonal interactions to build competence and understanding of the possibilities and aspirations available to them (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Caza & Creary, 2016; Chin et al., 2020).

Constructing professional identity is an evolving process (Fitzgerald, 2020; Ibarra, 1999; Kasperuniene & Zydziunaite, 2019) that incorporated not only the present, but also the past and the future as all the experiences and knowledge collapse to provide opportunity for reflection and dreaming. There is continuous motion in the construction of professional identity, and thus quantifying, the identity attachment will not be constant as it is influenced by psychological and tangible benefits that can only fully be judged and internalized by the individual (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Caza & Creary, 2016; Ibarra, 1999; Scribner & Crow, 2012). The journey of professional identity was one of transition where minds can change and move toward or away

from the initial plan (Ibarra, 2003), yet along the journey, there were constants in the professional identity context:

First, it is likely to be the case that, in becoming a professional, one starts to develop knowledge, sets of skills, ways of being and values that approach being identical to those held by other members of the profession one is part of. Second, in doing so one becomes different, and perhaps significantly so, to those others who are not part of one's profession. Third, one identifies oneself with one's profession. That is, a person identifies him or herself as a member of that category of people that make up the profession. This professional membership thus becomes part of one's identity. (Trede et al., 2012, p. 380)

Professional Identity in Medicine

A concept analysis conducted by Fitzgerald (2020) included the analysis of 60 reviewed sources from in the health-related fields to provide clarity, definition, and a common understanding of professional identity. Description of a model, borderline, and contrary case of professional identity in a nurse was described illustrating the impact of the following attributes: actions and behaviors; knowledge and skills; values, beliefs, and ethics; context and socialization; group and personal identity (Fitzgerald, 2020). These professional identity attributes were evident in research outside of the health-related fields (Caza & Creary, 2016; Crow et al., 2017; Dobrow & Higgins, 2005, Ibarra, 1999) and the "case" examples provided a conceptual framework to build exemplar examples within other profession studies to contribute to an increased understanding of professional identity development.

Contributing to the research on identity construction through a theoretical model of the interplay of work and identity learning cycles in professional identity customization, Pratt et al. (2006) outlined the findings of a six-year qualitative study involving medical residents to show

how the two cycles worked together evolving resident physicians in a boot camp atmosphere. The juxtaposition of integrity violations coupled with sources of customization and validation created a match between who they are and what they do as physicians created work-identity integrity and perceived competence (Pratt et al., 2006).

The process of socialization involved is not static but interactive with social group influence being significant including the venue of role models providing a forum for new physicians to find the fit that is congruent with whom they are across personal, work, and professional identities (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006). "We [Pratt et al.] believe that our findings hold not only for socializing physicians, but also for training most other (if not all) professionals" (Pratt et al., 2006, p. 258). The interplay of career/role transitions, socialization, and identity work would translate to the school administrator role as they complete internships during licensure procurement with a supervising administrator.

Barbour and Lammers (2015) conducted a review of past professional identity measures and generated empirical evidence of the constructs of belonging, attachment, and belief as important indicators to measure alongside the organizational and institutional factors relating to a particular profession. The development and analysis of the 44 item questionnaire provided to a national sampling of physicians was contextualized to being a physician, but intentions of extending the results to provide recommendations and theorizing for the broader venue of research was addressed to "engage with the richness of qualitative approaches to the study of identity" (Barbour & Lammers, 2015, p. 19). Barbour and Lammers (2015) construe that a multidimensional and multilevel approach to measurement of professional identity would benefit other profession and institutional studies by incorporating the universalities of professional identity's belonging, attachment, and beliefs to the specificity within the "distinctively entwined"

(p. 19) personal, organizational, operational, and institutional ideals held important by professionals in a field.

Professional Identity in Educational Leadership

A "valuable antidote" was the term used by Scribner and Crow (2012) to describe the contribution of understanding educational leaders' work through the concept of professional identity to appreciate the influences, behaviors, and knowledge within the role of educational leader. The professional identity of school administrator was dynamic and improvisational, intertwining the existing values, beliefs, and practices that drive the individual, whereas role of educational leader was more scripted and static (Crow et al., 2017). The perceived professional identity of educational leader relied not only on the educational leader's connection with the social groups and stakeholders, but included the interplay of their perception of the educational leader creating a dependency on the interactions and perceptions of these belonging groups (Caza & Creary, 2016, Cruz-González et al., 2021).

School administrators follow a career pattern within the field of education from one group membership to the next with increasing responsibility, expectations, and organizational system knowledge; this work role transformational process shaped by external influences follows a path of negotiation that is reflective and directs the professional identity construction (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Moral Santaella, 2020). The career pattern for leaders in public education usually moved from teacher to principal evolving from the previous identity of teacher to professional identity (*habitus*) of school leader by encompassing the constituents of professionalization, preparation, and practice (Bøje & Frederiksen, 2021).

Having a strong and positive sense of professional identity was seen as an important characteristic of school leaders (Cruz-González et al., 2021, Lucena et al., 2021b).

Understanding what drove the educational leader along the path of change and identity development was synthesized from multiple dimensions of input (narrative, epistemic, emotional, historical and cultural, and political); in a series of revision, affirmation, rejection, and revision interactions (Crow et al., 2017; Moral Santaella, 2020) providing insight to how the educational leader responded to the complex nature of education reform and societal expectations (Scribner & Crow, 2012). "Delving deeper into the identity dimension is presumed to be critical for extracting those elements that are key to understanding how school leaders build an identity oriented toward successful educational practices" (Cruz-González et al., 2021, p.173).

Professional Identity Quantitative Measures

Researchers, across multiple fields, expressed there were a limited number of validated measurement instruments to assess professional identity, with most instruments designed specifically to a profession (Scanlan, 2018). The number of instruments highlighted in this literature review were a small sampling available from studies within the reviewed literature. The examples were included to provide context and serve the broader purpose of understanding how other professional fields or programs measure professional identity. One quantitative measuring instruments relating to school principal identity was uncovered as part of this literature review that warranted inclusion.

Professional Identity and Engagement School (PIES)

The Professional Identity and Engagement School (PIES) was developed by Puglia (2008) as part of a study to investigate how professional identity develops in counselors enrolled in a master's level preparation program. The study focused on professional identity through the lens of agreement with the counseling philosophy, beliefs about the counseling profession, and professional engagement (Puglia, 2008). The instrument design was reviewed and validated as

part of the study with further research needed to broaden the factor analysis and develop additional "instrumentation to isolate the components of professional identity would be helpful" (Puglia, 2008, p. 80). The PIES instrument, originally consisting of 56 questions, was later refined by the Puglia after an exploratory factor analysis (Healey, 2009).

Professional Identity Values Scale (PIVS)

The quantitative study of Healey and Hays (2012), in the counselor field, placed importance on the cultural and gender roles' influence on the appraisal of professional identity development, professional values, and engagement. The study utilized the Professional Identity and Engagement School (PIES) and the Professional Identity Values Scale (PIVS), for both males and females, to determine if professional identity related to level of professional involvement. The authors contended, "that the philosophical beliefs and values ascribed to by individual professional counselors as part of their professional identity may be influenced by factors that may include societally defined gender role expectations, personal values, and engagement in professional activities" (Healey & Hays, 2012, p. 56). Healy (2009) stated that PIES was "the only available instrument currently available to gauge profession identity" (p. 25), and within the study it was used as a validated scale in conjunction with PIVS as a dependent variable for the statistical analysis. The PIES and PIVS instruments were designed for the counseling field and could serve as a model for other professions, especially for school administration since there were no similar instruments found in the literature.

The development of PIVS evolved not only as a measure for professional identity, but also as an instrument designed to capture the counseling philosophy and values, as defined by female counselors (Healy, 2009; Healy & Hays, 2012). The results aligned with other research findings of gender difference in professional development and engagement among male

counselors, who scored higher, indicating a gender influence that would have implication in the counseling field beyond professional identity studies (Healy & Hays, 2012).

Professional Identity Scale in Counseling (PISC)

Within the field of counseling, there has been a focus on understanding the professional identity of the practitioners and how the identity is formed and cultivated to fulfill the roles and responsibilities of the profession (Healey & Hays, 2012; Puglia, 2008; Woo & Henfield, 2015; Woo et al., 2018). Woo and Henfield (2015) developed the Professional Identity Scale in Counseling (PISC) from a review and synthesis of the literature on professional identity to create a conceptual framework consisting of six factors: engagement behaviors, knowledge of the profession, attitude, professional roles and expertise, philosophy of the profession, and professional values. After content validation and examination of the PIVS and PIES instruments in relation to item development, the PISC was provided to 385 participants, from various counseling fields, for construct validation followed by validity measures lead to findings the PISC scale was internally reliable to assess professional identity in the field of counseling (Woo & Henfield, 2015).

Concerns that the PIVS was too lengthy for research study, the original 62 item scale was reexamined and shortened to a 16 item four factor version: professional knowledge, professional competency, attitude toward profession, and engagement in counseling (Woo et al., 2018). The short version (PISC-S), was described more as a tool to support initial measurement of professional identity in development of counselors and not comprehensive enough to measure the complexity and multifaceted aspects of the counseling field programming (Woo et al., 2018).

Professional Identity Five-Factor Scale (PIFFS)

The survey instrument, named Professional Identity Five-Factor Scale (PIFFS), was developed as part of a study conducted by Tan et al. (2017) to establish a valid construct to measure professional identity of students enrolled in a post-secondary institution to understand the effectiveness of preparation of emerging professionals. The instrument included items that covered five dimensions of professional identity: knowledge about professional practice, experience with the profession, having the professional as a role model, professional self-efficacy, and preference for a particular profession (Tan et al., 2017). "We consider these [five dimensions] essential to the development of their professional identity, the professional self with the commitment to perform competently and legitimately" (Tan et al., 2017, p. 1507).

The PIFFS scale was developed to support formal education institutions to measure if graduates have alignment to the worldview, knowledge, and professional values of the practitioners in their field of study supporting professional identity as a desired outcome (Tan et al., 2017). The PIFFS was not considered profession-specific and proposed that it would contribute to a more robust measure of professional identity when layered with operational and contextualizing qualitative studies of a profession and the educational programming designed to develop the professionals of the field (Barbour & Lammers, 2015; Healey & Hays, 2012). The PIFFS has application to future studies in educational leader professional identity development due to the non-specific type instrument applicability to be combined with profession-specific data collection through other measures such as interviews, narrative stories, and focus groups (Tan et al., 2017).

Professional Identity Swedish Principal Survey

Extending the theoretical constructs of the dimensions of identity: professional, personal, and situated or socially located suggested by Crow et al. (2017). Nordholm et al. (2023) developed and validated an instrument to measure principals' professional identity. The survey was completed by over 1200 Swedish principals; based on the factor analysis conducted, the questions specific to the professional identity dimensions indicated a strong correlation to connect and strengthen the relationship between practice and theory (Nordholm et al., 2023). Several of the dimension questions were situated in the context of the Swedish educational system. Further research expanding the context to different national, regional, and local school societies, along with complementing the survey with qualitative design measures, such as interviews and observations, would provide deeper exploration of the formation of professional identity situated in differing contexts (Burke & Stets, 2009; Crow et al., 2017; Crow & Møller, 2016; Nordholm et al., 2023).

Professional Identity Qualitative Measures

The utilization of case study methodological processes to study professional identity from varied angles (Cruz-González et al., 2021; Lucena et al., 2021a; Moral Santaella, 2020; Scribner & Crow, 2012) represented a substantial amount of the literature review involving qualitative studies relating to the topic of professional identity within the nexus of educational leadership. In addition, case studies of various professions were included to provide perspective to the intricacies and power of case study to contextualize professional identity (Merriam, 2009) across professions and areas of study. Other types of qualitative studies were included to provide depth in how professional identity could be studied across research methods and professions.

Professional Identity Educational Leadership (K-12) Case Studies

As part of a larger research study, at the University of Granda (Spain), a comparative analysis of the professional identity of two principals from the social-justice leaders dimension used a grounded-theory methodology composed of semi-structured interviews and naturalistic observations analyzed through the lens of the Leadership Learning Model: leadership strategies, setting direction, developing people, refining and aligning the organization, and improving the teaching-learning program (Moral Santaella, 2020). The results of the study emphasized the importance of moving beyond the knowledge traits of leadership to go deeper into the personal approach of the successful principal across the complexity of educational reform to glean insight on how to improve disadvantaged schools through the actions of the educational leader (Moral Santaella, 2020). The study methodology provided me insight into the professional identity traits of the studied principals and their impact; however, it did not provide insight to how the principals formed the professional identities.

Two case studies involved the category of gender, alongside professional identity, to tease out the influences, barriers, and nuances of being a female has on the development of professional identity of a school principal. Cruz-González et al. (2020) dove deeper into the life story of a female educational leader in a disadvantaged school in Spain to explore the duality of the identity dimensions that remain and change overtime. Møller (2003) accessed the life histories of a group of female educational leaders studied through multiple rounds of interviews in England, Ireland, Norway, and Denmark, as part of a larger study on how school principals framed their professional identities and the external and internal accountability influenced their work and leadership decisions. The life stories of the participants were important to both studies charting the complexity of understanding the development of professional identity as a interplay of construction and reconstruction of the life histories (Møller, 2003; Mpungose, 2010; Slay &

Smith, 2011) and to examine "the times and spaces of that have built the professional and personal trajectory" (Cruz-González et al., p. 171). Supporting action to the development of the professional and leadership identities in women were identified in the conceptual framework created by Ely et al. (2011) which outlined that the following principles should be part of a women's leadership program: situate topics and tools in an analysis of second-generation gender bias, create a holding environment to support women's identity work, and anchor participants on their leadership purpose.

A leader in a small school reform setting (failing school) was the participant for a case study of the multiple professional identity influences on a school principal. Scribner and Crow (2012) spoke to the limited scope of the study and how it can be expanded to include educational leaders in a variety of settings and contexts such as turnaround schools (thriving schools) and educational leadership levels. Interviews, structured to elicit stories and openness, were conducted over a two-year period and were supplemented by observations and documents to identify identities (roles) employed by the educational leader (Scribner & Crow, 2012). The research forecasted the need to provide mentorship, leadership experience, and coursework to develop a self-sense of values and beliefs to enrich a professional leader's identity and support the demands of negotiating trust and political capital in a reform setting (Scribner & Crow, 2012). A related case study of a mid-sized Canadian school district focused on role identity development through a framework for the socialization of new administrators incorporated similar needs (induction role learning, ongoing mentorship, and teaching the goals of the organization) for preparing a new administrator (Grodzki, 2011).

The external perspectives of other agents on the professional identity of the school principal were considered as part of an exploratory study gathering data from in-depth interviews

and participant observations (Lucena et al., 2021b). The voices of the interviewees were analyzed from three emerging areas of discourse: the identity of the principal from the vision of others, the barriers found to the development of pedagogical leadership, and the proposals for improvement from external perspectives (Lucena et al., 2021b). The development of identity was related to the internal standards and external feedback of the others as it forms how one sees self and is seen by others (Crow et al., 2017; Ibarra 1999, Rodriguez et al., 2021b; Scribner & Crow, 2012; Slay & Smith, 2011); there was an importance to understanding the "social process by which others attribute identities to an individual as it was the identities that an individual attributes to him or herself" (DeRue & Ashford, 2010, p. 631). Revealing the disagreement of the way an educational leader identifies, assumed identity within the educational environment, and how others define attributed identity (Crow & Møller, 2016; Real & Botía, 2018) could create a growth mechanism to fortify how an educational leader struggling to meet external expectations could build their professional identity by addressing areas of disconnect (Lucena et al., 2021b). Positive experiences that incorporate peer commitment to leadership course action increased the professional identity and search for "additional developmental opportunities" (Day & Sin, 2011, p. 547).

Professional Identity Qualitative Studies Outside Educational Leadership

According to Slay and Smith (2011), their study of professional identity construction, using the narratives of 20 prominent African American journalists to understand the negotiation between professional and stigmatized cultural identities, contributed a new perspective of redefinition rather than adaption (Ibarra, 1999) as a construct for professional identity construction. Exploring the redefinition model, the early influences and professional experiences contributed to the professional possible selves which were defined into the professional identity

through redefinition tasks of redefining occupation rhetoric, redefining stigma, and redefining self through a racial identity (Slay & Smith, 2011). The authors spoke to the significance of using narrative analysis as a methodology to expand the interdisciplinary conversations around careers and organizations pertaining to professional identity construction due to the value and rich history of narratives in sociological research. In a case study of academic staff from a higher education institute Calvert et al. (2011), explored how professional identity is sustained and reproduced through the dilemmas and demands negotiated within their field. The research utilized the narratives of participants through discussion groups to derive meaning about the decision-making process influences from forces of self and system. Narratives are expressions of the identities of the individual and are a means of telling the stories and contextualizing the interactions of self-concept and social institutions to construct professional identity (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Clarke et al., 2009; Crow et al., 2017; Lucena et al., 2021b; Slay & Smith, 2011; Zheng et al., 2021).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) established the primary constructs and a provisional list of codes that were derived from the information, categories, themes, studies, and frameworks found during the literature review (Saldaña, 2021) narrowing the study of identity to the substantive focus and purpose (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) of this professional identity study.

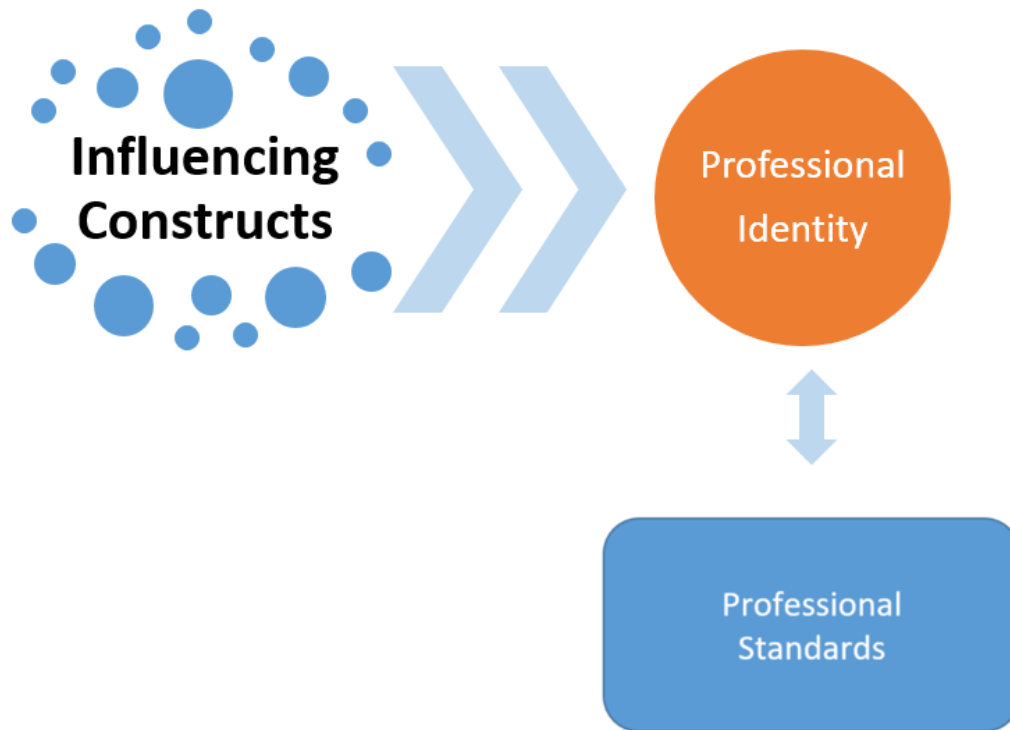
Drawn from the literature the following constructs were identified as influential to the construction of professional identity: personal identity, work identity, and professional standards. The term professional standards was used in the conceptual framework to represent terminology addressed in chapter one regarding how educational leaders were defined, held accountable, and

guided in their profession and expectations. Within the literature review, professional standards were referenced more globally as the practices, attributes, norms, community of practice, dispositions, and performance expectations of the organization, system, or institution discussed (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Caza et. al., 2016; Cruess, R. et al., 2016; Fitzgerald, 2020). The visible representations from several studies served as a model of structure and content (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Cruess, R. et al., 2016; DuRue & Ashford, 2010; Pratt et al., 2006; Slay & Smith, 2011) for the conceptual framework presented in this study.

According to Cruess et al. (2016), "identities are never fixed, as an individual can re-create their identities at any time during their lifetime as personal and professional circumstances change" (p. 642). Professional identity is under constant influence of the constructs of professional standards, work identity, and personal identity. Although these constructs may have influence on each other, this study was only focused on their influence on professional identity development. Figure 1 illustrates the directional influence on professional identity from the influencing constructs as well as the professional standards. The level of effect and impact the influencing constructs (represented by the varied size circles) and professional standards have on professional identity varied depending on the context and contributing traits that impact each construct.

Professional identity is not only shaped by external influence [constructs] through negotiation process but through the reflexive nature of the self. The self can transform professional identity consciously and the transformation may be due to motivation of self-improvement, to emulate a powerful role model or to prove worthiness. (Moral Santaella, 2020, p. 151)

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



Each of the constructs were deductively identified from the literature review in preparation to support the methodology of the study which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Components of developing professional identity:

- identity formation – builds knowledge and skills identified with the profession
- doing and being among professionals
- active engagement in the new roles either vicariously or experientially within the profession
- identification and internalization of the norms and values of the profession
- understanding and incorporation behaviors and attitudes in the profession
- acceptance and sense of belonging within and among those in the profession

- socializing agents, such as mentors, colleagues, supervisors, and developmental networks which help give feedback and serve as role models
- increase the self-knowledge, self-reflection and exploration of the profession
- interactive social group engagement within the profession.

Professional Standards:

- develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high quality education
- act ethically and according to professional norms
- strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices
- develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment
- cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community
- develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel
- foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff
- engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways
- manage school operations and resources
- act as agents of continuous improvement (NPBEA, 2015).

Summary

This study of professional identity began with establishing a foundational understanding of identity to layer upon the complexity and varying attributes that compose one's professional identity. Through the review of literature, a single defining description of professional identity was not discovered, but a glimpse into the contributing elements and influences were uncovered

providing a richer vision and connection of the array of inputs to professional identity. Personal, work, and leadership identity were intertwined into professional identity each playing a part in the composite. The development of professional identity was contextually based through the dynamic interactions and influences of socialization and experiences, skill attainment, norms and values within the community of practice, and exploration of self within the profession.

The primary interest of this study was professional identity of educational leaders but to enlarge the knowledge base, a reliance on literature highlighting other professions was required. The medical and health related fields provided a useful source of studies involving both qualitative and quantitative research as well as examples of quantitative measurement instruments. Qualitative case studies, relating to educational leadership and other professions, especially illustrated the power of interviews and narrative as a way to uncover what influences professional identity. The influences described throughout the literature review explicated the conceptual framework shaping this study.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

The purpose of this research was to understand how educational leaders develop their professional identity. This chapter outlines the qualitative research approach, research questions, data collection and data analysis. Educational leaders from a public school system participated in a qualitative journey that involved interviews and concept mapping to provide data that was analyzed using an inductive approach. The exploration provided insight and allowed the researcher to contribute to the professional world that has supported her. Why and made such an impact on her identity.

Research Questions

This study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. How do educational leaders describe their development of a professional identity?
2. How do educational leaders describe the professional standards in their professional identity?

Qualitative Research Approach

For this research, a basic qualitative research approach (Merriam, 2009) was used to study how educational leaders describe their development of professional identity. "Qualitative methods permit the evaluator to study selected issues in depth and detail" (Patton, 1990, p. 13). Merriam explained, "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 457). The basic qualitative study approach allowed for the exploration of how educational leaders construct their professional identity from their own dispositions, experiences, perceptions, and organization realities for the purpose to understand and explain (Patton, 1990). Researchers Lucena et al. (2021b) acknowledged qualitative study as a useful and adaptable means to integrate real-life research context allowing a deeper delve into the construction of

identity. The complexity of professional identity formation framed within the reflexive: narrative, epistemic, emotional, historical and cultural, and political dimensions described by Crow et al. (2016), spoke to a qualitative approach to capture the salience of identity construction for each individual. The dimensions transcend across the unifying characteristics of leadership and were intertwined into each participant's experience, behaviors, internal struggles, and trajectory as part of the social context of professional identity development that went beyond static skills (Crow et al., 2016). The "symbolic interactionism" (p. 147) used by Moral Santaella (2020) as a descriptor of professional identity constructs to be studied further, reinforced the research calling of a qualitative approach to support understanding perspectives and meaning that the participants bring to the study through the narratives of their experiences (Creswell, 2007).

The underlying structure and scaffolding that framed the study laid within the concepts and theories detailed in the literature review and the conceptual framework (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), representing the parallel relationship of professional standards as a guide alongside the essence of professional identity. I strove to uncover and interpret the meaning from the educational leader descriptions of their professional identity development capturing the beliefs, behaviors, commitment, and defining experiences to explore their perspectives and influences. "Qualitative studies can be directed by a conceptual framework, suggesting a deductive thrust, or driven more by the data itself, inviting an exploratory, inductive lens" (Milas, 2023, p. 302); the study had an exploratory focus utilizing inductive analysis methods.

Participants

Purposeful sampling was used for this research study to solicit participants who were an information-rich source (Patton, 1990) to illuminate how educational leaders develop professional identity. The sample selection was intended to yield insight, information, and

understanding that best fulfilled the study's purpose with an intentionally situated sample (Merriam, 2009). The participants were familiar to the researcher, which provided a level of relationship and prior knowledge that supported the collection of data. The familiarity and context assisted in the data collection process. It also created a layer of relational ethics to be enacted to safeguard the process alongside protection of the relationships and vulnerability of the participants (Cain et al., 2023). The typology of the sample was convenience in the broad sense due to the ease of accessibility to the participants and site artifacts, but the setting and participant selection was purposeful in regards to the interest of the researcher and alignment to the purpose of the study (Creswell, 2013). Professional identity as a whole was not unique to the participants or school district; it could be studied and has been studied in school systems across the globe.

I had a level of connectedness to these participants and the setting, therefore engagement in reflexivity was required. As defined by Cain et al., (2023), "reflexivity is the process of turning inward in an effort to recognize and take responsibility for the various ways in which one is situated within the research" (p. 343). Armed with this definition and utilization of the reflexivity questions, aligned to each step of a research project, I was self-reflective and attuned to the beliefs and identities that shape this research.

Participants were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: 1) they held either a building leadership or district leadership license, 2) they served in an administrator role during the 2023-2024 school year, and 3) they served in another leadership capacity prior to the current administrative role. The leadership roles recognized as administrative for the study included: assistant school principal, school principal, athletic directors, district directors, superintendent, and special education coordinators. The qualification of serving more than one role within the district was based on limiting the study of leaders to those that have advanced up the hierarchal

ladder within the same district. Each participant had their own unique experiences that influenced their professional identity construction, but a common thread for all participants was employment within the same district that hired them into a position of greater hierarchical leadership status. This common thread provided an opportunity for the researcher to analyze the data to look for characteristics that participants shared across their experience and professional identity construction. The decision to look at individuals who moved from one position to another of greater hierarchical status within the organization was inferred to represent that there was a belief in the leadership capabilities of the participant from someone other than themselves. To move to a greater position, it was assumed, the participant had to apply for the position indicating a belief in self that the person was a qualified candidate for the position.

The number of possible study participants in the setting meeting all criteria was 28. Administration structure at each attendance center level: elementary includes one principal; middle school includes one principal and two assistant principals; and high school includes one principal, two assistant principals, and one athletic director. The district office administrative structure includes a superintendent, executive directors, and directors. District does not have an official principal pipeline program or apprenticeship mechanism. Ten volunteers were selected to participate in the study who represented a variety of work experience, representation across genders, and administrative experience greater than three years. Seidman (2019) spoke to the enormous power the stories of even a small number of participants can provide when interviewing a sample of participants who have experienced "similar structural and social conditions" (p. 60). During the data collection and analysis stages, I looked for saturation and rich rigor to know if there was enough breadth in the sample size and number of interviews to create a deep compilation of data to pull from (Tracy, 2010).

A list of the educational leaders was obtained within the district that identified position title and location. The list was cross-referenced with known information, available through directory history of previous positions within the district. Leadership positions were eliminated that did not require a building or district leadership license. Final selection of participant candidates was determined by the researcher to get a cross-representation of characteristics based on: level of positions across attendance center types, a range of years of experience in an administrator position(s), and gender representation. As notification of participant interest was received, a list of possible participants to contact was generated across the three characteristic areas to get a cross-section of participants. I did contact the potential participants as a doctoral student using the university email, not district employee.

Each participant volunteered to be part of the study and had prior knowledge of the researcher's leadership status in the district. A vital layer in the participant selection was the willingness of the participants to dedicate the time and have the interest to tell their stories Cruz-González and Viseu et al. (2021). The site for the study was a school district serving approximately 7,000 students in a city with a population of 50,000. Multiple school sites for elementary, middle school, and high school students are present in the district. A contingency plan to reach out to other school districts in the geographical area was in place if the number of participants was not reached. The contingency plan was not needed, due to 19 of the 28 participant candidates indicating interest in participating.

After receiving the 19, ten volunteers were contacted to be enrolled in the study. The participants could be classified by the following characteristics: currently serving in an elementary, secondary, or district level administrative positions; having administrator experience greater than three years of experience; and being male or female in gender.

Protection of Human Subjects

Prior to beginning the research study with human subjects, Kansas State University Institutional Review Board approval was obtained and district requirements were understood and permission granted. Protocols were put in place to ensure compliance of any law, mandate, or regulation. The protection for human participants is always at the forefront of a study involving people. The level of intentionality and specificity of ensuring respect and dignity of the participants was raised to a higher level of scrutiny and expectation due to the researcher's administrative position. The nature of the study was not evaluative of the participants' positions, performance, or impact on the organization. The research was conducted outside of any employment obligations and was completely voluntary, and each participant was assigned a pseudonym to help protect their identity. Identifiable statements were not included in the dissertation. Each interview was conducted in a quiet space of the participant's choosing to allow them to feel comfortable. Interviews were audio taped for transcription purposes. The audio recordings and transcriptions were kept on a password protected computer which only the researcher has access. Any hard copies of transcripts were kept in locked file cabinets in the researcher's office. Participant could withdraw from the study at any time and their data would have been deleted from the study.

Participation in the research study was voluntary. Initial contact with participant pool was done through a recruitment email (Appendix A) allowing the candidate to indicate interests on their own terms to eliminate perceived coercion if the request was made in-person. The correspondence clearly identified the outreach was being made as a personal request to illicit participants as part of the completion of the researcher's dissertation. The email explained that participation was voluntary and identified the inclusion and exclusion criteria of participants to

situate why they received the request. The overall purpose of the research study was outlined including a brief summary of procedures highlighting the interview process and estimated time commitment the participants could expect. Next steps were communicated for those interested in participating in study or inquiring for more information. Direct contact was made with each individual that made an inquiry to provide greater information about the research study and participant expectations. Due to the colleague relationship that existed prior to the study, transparency and sincerity was highly regarded. Confirmation of participation was made utilizing a consent form (Appendix B). The participant provided a signed copy of the consent form to researcher prior to any participation enrollment in the study.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was incorporated as a component to contribute to my ability to refine instructions, interview questions, and concept map protocol. Conducting a pilot study increased research quality as well as "enhancing reliability and validity" through the explicit description of how the pilot study impacted methodology or data collection instrument modifications due to the gained insight (Malmqvist et al., 2019, p. 3). No attempt was made to collect data for the main research study from the pilot study, the intent was to build capacity of the researcher to understand the effectiveness of designed interview questions, to get the depth of response sought, and to gain feedback from pilot study participants regarding how to frame the concept map process (Glesne, 2011). Two administrators who met the selection criteria were contacted as pilot study candidates. Their role in the study allowed the researcher to test interview questions and elicit clarification on instructions and interaction mechanisms to be used with participants. At the conclusion of the pilot study, the interview questions (Appendix C) and data collection protocols were refined. The interview questions were modified in the following ways: four

questions were rewritten for clarity, one question was moved in the series to be asked earlier, and one question was eliminated. The pilot participants recommended that looking at the professional development transcript was not necessary, nor something they would do to create their concept map. Therefore, the directions to review their professional development transcript prior to creating the concept map was eliminated from the protocol.

Data Collection

This research study used two types of data to gain insight into the professional identity of educational leaders. Qualitative semi-structured interviews in a conversational world set the stage for connecting the value of the inter-change of views through the wandering together of conversation and the back and forth dialogue involved in talk between people: "conversations are therefore a rich and indispensable source of knowledge about personal and social aspects of our lives" (Brinkmann, 2023, p. 210). Data was collected during two rounds of interviews. Data was also gathered from concept maps. Concept maps helped the participant make connections between experiences and learning to develop their professional identity (Pegg, 2007). The third way data was to be collected was through document analysis in anticipation of participants identifying records, documents, or artifacts as sources of information. Only three items were referenced by the participants, these did not become part of the data analysis process.

Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection source for this study, because they provided a structure through interview questions to focus the conversation. They also allowed the opportunity for greater flexibility of direction and a chance to engage the interviewee in the process of sharing descriptions of how they experienced the world of educational leadership. In-depth interviews allowed for the participants to reconstruct their lived

experiences to develop understanding from their point-of-view, not to control their meanings or predict the experiences (Seidman, 2019). Within this study, the purpose of the interviews were to illicit knowledge on how the participating educational leaders developed their professional identity; to obtain descriptions of the participant's beliefs, values, motives, and experiences; to create a glimpse into the life world of the participants to get a sense of their perspectives; and to interpret the information shared through the process of interview to gain insight into the influences that developed the professional identity of the participants (Brinkman, 2023). According to Bhattacharya (2017), for qualitative research, "the best interviews are those that help generate rich, thick descriptive stories, which contribute to an in-depth understanding of the topic of study" (p. 132.) The semi-structured approach allowed the participants to share their stories.

Interview techniques were important to develop. "The quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely depending on the interviewer" (Patton, 1990, p. 279). The ability to let an individual tell their story while also providing invitations to expand on details was common in qualitative interviews and the types of interviews the researcher has conducted. The crucial skill of listening was a mainstay in the interview scenarios as well (and these skills have been practiced for decades by the researcher). Descriptors of the types of interviews were not unknown me, therefore attention was placed on understanding the nuances relating to qualitative research.

The decision to conduct semi-structured interviews with an interview guide of questions, generated from the professional development survey measures highlighted in the literature review, conceptual framework constructs, and professional standards for educational leaders, for the first round of interviews allowed for a more systematic and comprehensive approach since

the interviews will be conducted across multiple participants. This course of action forced more purposeful decisions on what questions to ask but also allowed me the freedom to keep the interview more conversational and flexible to sequence and adjust wording in response to information gathered from each question (Patton, 1990). It was important to establish rapport with the participants and to prepare for the participant to share things they might not intend to tell (Patton, 1990) requiring the researcher to be prepared to reinforce the protections of confidentiality and ability to withdraw information from the data collection.

Interview Process

The semi-structured interviews were conducted in a location chosen by the participant. Prior to the interview, during the process of establishing consent and describing the study, I provided a definition of professional identity and described the type of questions to allow the participant to have time to contemplate the topic and reduce stress of the unknown. Each interview began with a statement to outline how the information would be used and a reminder that the participant was under no obligation to answer a question or provide any information that the participant did not feel comfortable releasing or sharing.

Each in-depth interview was face-to-face and audio recorded, then transcribed using Notta an online audio transcription service. During the interview, notes were taken to capture nuances in the moment that would not be captured by the audio recording to add to the complete richness of the process;

In face-to-face interviews people are present not only as conversing minds, but as flesh and blood creatures that may laugh, cry, smile, tremble and otherwise give away so much information in terms of gestures, body language, and facial expressions. Interviews thus have the richest source of knowledge available here, but the challenge concerns how to

use it productively. In most cases, how people look and act is forgotten once the transcript is made, and the researcher carries out her analyses using the stack of transcripts rather than the embodied interaction that took place. (Brinkman, 2023, p. 215)

The initial interviews were limited to approximately 60-90 minutes, to balance the need for in-depth dialogue and balancing the diminishing returns of going beyond the time where energy and comfort can be sustained (Glesne, 2011; Seidman, 2019). A second less structured interview, with only a few questions, was conducted to explore the concept map and any remaining questions. Once transcription was completed, the researcher identified areas to clarify during the second interview, where needed, and discussed identified portions of the transcription with the participant for member checking.

Concept Map

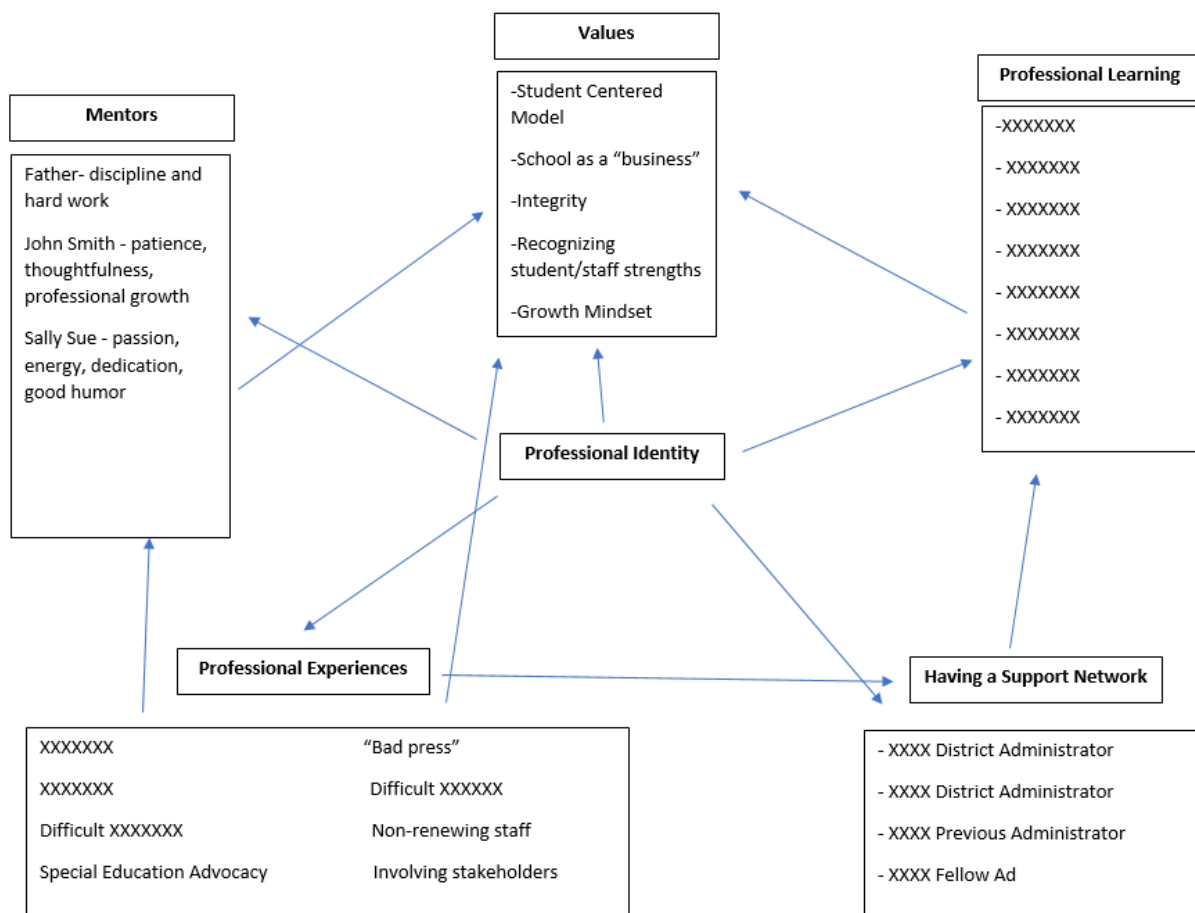
Qualitative research allowed for researcher and participants to gain understanding and make connections during the study of a phenomenon. Utilization of concept mapping as a reflective tool for the participants to connect the influences and life experiences that helped developed their professional identity provided for a more individualized participation than through interviews alone (Wheeldon, 2011). Concept maps engage "complex cognitive structures within the brain" (p. 8) to assign meaning and make sense of the interrelationship of life experiences (Hill, 2005). The concept maps served as a "means of gathering more unsolicited reflections, providing a visual snapshot of experiences" to "help researchers to refine subsequent data collection strategies" (Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009, p. 79).

Concept Map Process

The participants were asked to create the concept map (Appendix D) within a few days of the initial interview to allow time to reflect and process what they shared during the interview.

The participants were encouraged to capture key points they shared during the interview into their concept map to make connections between the experiences and influences (Yelich Biniecki & Conceicao, 2015) on their professional journey as an educational leader. The participants provided a copy of the concept map to the researcher. The participant-generated "[concept] maps allow for the identification of concepts and connections based on how the participant frames their experience" (Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009, p. 73) providing a triangulation check of researcher connections. A modified participant concept map is provided as an example below in Figure 2. It was modified to protect the participant's identity by leaving out specific professional learning at the school district and names mentioned. Another analysis check of the connections was the process of engaging the participant in discussion of the concept map through an unstructured interview to contextualize the information prior to further analysis. The concept map alongside transcription memos of the interview were used to engage in critical analysis between the researcher and participant to clarify understanding and further elaborate or frame meaning (Wheeldon, 2011; Yelich Biniecki & Conceicao, 2015) as well as a method of member checking.

Figure 2. Participant Concept Map



The researcher utilized the completed concept maps as an artifact to review based upon information shared during the interviews. The concept map review helped triangulate the data and provided confirmation of statements as well as providing context and meaning during the data collection and analyzing process.

Documents

In describing the typical use of documents and artifacts in qualitative research, Glesne (2011), stated they can be used for content analysis, providing rich description, raising questions, and supporting or challenging interview data. Participants were invited to share any documents

that they deemed as informing or exemplifying their professional identity and that they felt comfortable sharing, as part of the initial plan for data collection. The participants did not readily have ideas in mind of what type of documents to provide and the questions the participants asked regarding invitation to share indicated worry on their part if they could not produce any documents. I did not want to create any distress or introduce any power dynamics with the participants to provide the documentation; therefore, the document share invitation was discontinued after the first three interviews.

Data Management

For the task of collecting data, the researcher created mechanisms to manage and organize the data from the onset of collection as suggested by Grbich (2010), to not get overrun by data without having gathered important details along the way. The transcriptions of the audio recordings was completed by the researcher to capture the benefit of knowing the data intimately, access for memoing, and to ensure confidentiality (Bhattacharya, 2017; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 1990). Grbich reiterated the message by providing example approaches researchers might use in preliminary data analysis to track the data and stay attuned to gaps and emerging trends: questioning one's own assumptions; comparing data to one's own experiences, findings from literature review, and theoretical and/or conceptual explanations; gain different perspective by reading data in varied orders; group or chunk data into segments; write analytic memos to incorporate ideas, questions, and recalled information; and use trial presentation forms to bring to light alignment of or missing data. Memo writing also "frees your mind for new thoughts and perspectives" (Glesne, 2011, p. 189) by allowing you to capture the analytic thoughts to safeguard the information for future analysis.

Creation of fact sheets, as described by Grbich (2010), were created after each interview to identify the demographic components of the data, such as date and source, the major interest or issues emerging and aspects that need to be investigated or clarified further. These actions were conducted to bring to light any research bias stemming from the information gathered.

The interviews were transcribed using an automated system, Notta, that converted the audio to text with segmented time stamps at hesitation points in the audio. The transcripts were then reviewed for accuracy, the main corrections were for words that were not transcribed correctly and artificial breaks in the transcription that disconnected units of meaning. All personally identifying information was replaced with a pseudonym or terminology that was generic and no longer identifiable to an individual. The corrected transcripts were then reread and marked for key information of interest and relating to the study.

The researcher created a profile of each interview as mechanism to capture the overall essence and understanding of the narrative (Figure 3). In addition to the profile, key terms that were repeated or terms that represented a repeated concept were listed and captured as a memo. The purpose of creating the profile was "to shape the material into a form" (Seidman, 2019, p. 128) to be shared with the participant as a member check. Prior to the second interview, the profile and key terms were read to the participant and brought them into the data review process and allowed them to interact with the information shared from their narratives. The profile was an initial capturing of information and internal processing of the narrative. It did not replace the more structured analytic process of coding and served as a triangulation point for the developed themes. The profiles were reread from the perspective of applying the themes to the data capture within the profiles as a point of triangulation.

Figure 3. Participant Profile Example

Example Interview Profile

Desire to be intentional with next steps and move into leadership. Had an example to see the type of leader wanted to be and the type of leader did not want to be. Got an opportunity to provide leadership and felt since of pride that drove...forward. Took...frustrations...experienced from leader in the past to do things a different way and develop the type of role model she wants to be. Strongly focused on servant leadership to be connected and tuned in to what ... people are feeling. Developing a climate where individuals let you know how they feel. People know you are available and approachable. Importance of being open and paying attention. Experienced tough times and division. Resource of mentorship and resource of crucial conversations provided support, but in reflection there were probably times of not knowing who to lean on. Although some experiences were tough turned out to be valuable to the learning. Individuals have served as mentors to challenge thinking and provide ways to tackle issues differently. Love for the job – kids, community, and staff. Feels good about what has been built together and recognizing the growth along the way and celebrate. Always learning and growing and taking things to the next level to evaluate differently not dwelling on the way things were done. Presence and accountability along with paying attention is what gets things moving and accomplished. Not about telling, but also about making suggestions. Focus on creating a welcoming environment that recognized what is needed and communicating. District office helps with the why and common language to be focused on at the building level to support. Supporting growth of staff with leadership opportunities. Development of clarity is comforting and having the ability to partner it with the concept of being okay to try and make mistakes that is where the learning takes place. The job is tough and how do you focus on where you are successful and not only focus on the frustrations. Not just doing to do, but knowing the why something is done and that drives the change. Response has changed over time and conversations are different more toward problem solving approach.

Key Words from Transcript

Accessible	Growth
Accountability	Intentional
Approachable	Personable
Attention	Perspective
Change	Practice
Clarity	Practice
Community	Purposeful
Compartmentalize	Servant
Culture	Support
Encouragement	Together
Experiences	Trust
Feel	Tuned in
Focus	Why

As collection of data transpired, the researcher engaged in the analysis process. The practice of memo writing was used to support the process of condensing and synthesizing textual data to work in conjunction with coding to "formally monitor and develop" ideas and understanding to "sustain complex inquiry, a space to draw connections between quotations, documents, or codes" (Mihas, 2023, p.304). A data alignment chart was created (Appendix E) to

stay cognizant of the conceptual framework and professional standards relationship to the research questions as the interview and concept map data collection occurred. Memoing was used to engage in reflexivity to capture the self-reflections throughout the research process, especially in the area of how the researcher was reacting to participant responses and during data analysis (Cain et al., 2023) "The subjectivity of the researcher and the complexity of the analytical and interpretive processes require considerable transparency" (Grbich, p. 474). Subjectivity was not a negative influence on data (Bhattacharya, 2017). Instead, it was something to be cognizant of to continually reflect and address the values, beliefs, and assumptions brought to the process of analyzing data.

Data Analysis

The process of analysis was complex and ongoing as the researcher made data accessible and sensible, transforming the data into meaning and understanding (Glesne, 2011) beyond the individually distinguishable concrete and abstract bits (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) that make up the whole. The recursive and dynamic nature of data collection and analysis supported the researcher in discovering and exploring the professional identity, and although specific plans and direction were established, shifts happened due to the exploratory nature of this qualitative study and how understanding, meaning, and findings unfolded (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Member checks were conducted at various points during the research, after concept map completion and during second interview, providing layered access points for participants.

The analysis strategies that were used in the study grew from the qualitative literature and were implemented with the caveat that the data and analysis process was driven by the sheer act of collecting and analyzing data. To summarize broadly, the data was reduced to meaningful segments of data that were coded; coded data was categorized looking for the prominent themes

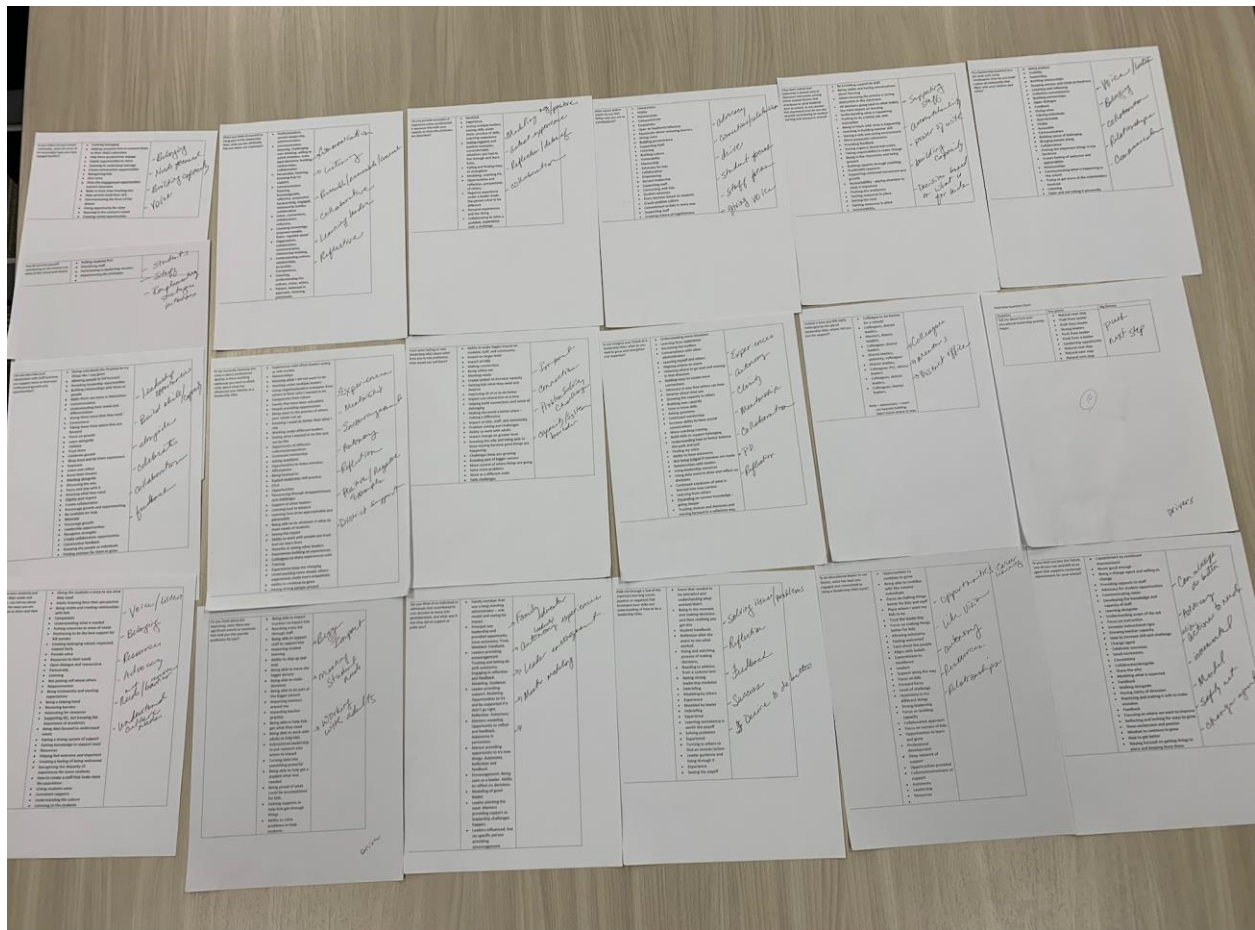
and patterns; these were positioned across the literature and within the study to develop understanding and connections. The process did have a life of its own with ebb and flow between tension and harmony as it challenged the researcher to think critically and openly never forgetting the purpose of the study, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested a continuous process of looking at the big picture (forest view) and the particulars (trees) to not lose sight in the analysis process.

According to Saldaña (2021), pre-established codes for studies about identity are essential, yet due to the multitude of ways it is defined, it is critical that the utilization of priori codes requires "deep thinking" (p.93) before applying the codes to data. To attune to the perspectives and actions of interview participants, in vivo coding and values coding were recommended as first cycle coding methods followed by focused coding and pattern coding for the second cycle of coding as an initial analytic strategy (Saldaña, 2021). In vivo coding was a method suggested for researchers learning to code and captures the language of the participants in their own words (Saldaña 2021). Coding values, attitudes, and beliefs compose an integrated system of coding called value coding useful to qualitative research where participant actions and experiences are captured through interviewing (Saldaña, 2021). For this study, the values, attitudes, and beliefs were not the focus, outside of how they informed the participants' professional identity development, the categories and themes as an outcome of the coding was of importance. The types of codes used developed through the analysis process, but as a new researcher resources outlining code types was referenced for structure and guidance. As codes were developed and the analysis moved to categorizing and constructing the coded data into the salient reoccurring themes (Saldaña, 2021; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and data sets in the process of pattern coding moving from the first cycle coding into "more meaningful and parsimonious

units of analysis" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 322). According to Bhattacharya (2017), the close work with the data does not cause themes to emerge, it is the thinking and organizational characterizing of data into segments that support the researcher to develop in-depth understanding.

The highlighted transcripts were notated with data codes for further analysis. The transcripts were color coded by participant and analyzed through three main lenses to pull out meaning. The first lens was by question to understand the magnitude of each question and garner preliminary insights. Participants' responses were collapsed into a separate document for each question and processed one question at a time. For each question, in vivo codes were recorded in a chart then reread as a group documenting memos of meaning as preliminary jottings (Saldaña, 2021). Figure 4 is a picture of the data documents and handwritten memos. By processing responses to each question from all participants together it created greater familiarity with the data and detaching information from individual participants for analysis of the units of meaning.

Figure 4. Data Questions and Memos



The conceptual framework components were organized into a chart and the researcher went back to the notated transcripts to pull units of meaning from each participants across the entirety of the interview. Shifting the analysis process from the lens of the question to the lens of the conceptual framework through a spiral of data reflection, notating, and classifying. As the participant transcripts were analyzed each meaningful chunk was recorded under a conceptual framework component heading. The researcher completed the process with each participant transcript before moving to the next participant. Each participant response was color coded to provide a visual representation of each individual's responses across all of the conceptual frameworks components. Figure 5 is a picture of the color coded chart representing the professional identity components across the top, and each cell below represents a data code. The

Figure 5. Professional Identity Components Data Coding

66

The professional standards were organized into a chart by overall standard category. The same process of analyzing each participant's transcript in its entirety was completed recording each meaningful chunk under the standard category keeping with the same participant color coding pattern as used before. Figure 6 is a picture of the color coded chart representing the professional standards across the top and each cell below represents a data code. For each main standard category the data was categorized further into the standard element statements to provide a deeper analysis of how the standards were described by the participants.

By returning to the participant transcripts for multiple rounds of analysis through different lenses, it provided opportunity to uncover the smaller increments of nuance and isolate the meaningful units independently from a particular participant for the granular view required to address the research questions. These steps contributed to ensuring the researcher was not blinded by personal knowledge of the participant to provide greater objectivity when identifying the findings.

Figure 6. Professional Standards Data Coding

The next step was to classify the coded data and move to broader categories and themes as a way to "winnowing the data, reducing them to small, manageable set of themes" (Creswell, 2013, p. 186). This process was completed by reviewing the coding sequences from the

conceptual framework and standards practices into major categories that were then organized into themes. After several reiterative rounds, there were 21 categories created from the coded data which were aggregated into five overall themes. Each of the themes will be described in context, in the findings section, aligning them to the conceptual framework and professional standards.

Background and Role of the Researcher

According to Marshall and Rossman (1999), qualitative researchers must overcome the challenge that personal interest will not bias the study and to do this, the research must use the literature review to move beyond the tacit theory of one's personal understanding and coalesce related formal theory, models, and concepts to frame and focus their study. In many qualitative studies, "the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, findings are inductively derived from the data, and the end product is richly descriptive" (Merriam, 2009, p. 457).

Researcher Subjectivity

I bring nearly 20 years of living within the professional identity of public school administrator to the study. The first administrative position was a supportive role that worked alongside school and district administrators providing insight into the dispositions, qualities, knowledge, and expertise required in the positions. It was during this time that I was developing the professional identity that would propel my progression up the hierarchy of public school administration and the attainment of required licensure and education to move from one administrator position to another. At each new level, I was not naïve of the need to strengthen my skill set and continue my cognitive understanding of the complexities of each administrative position.

Over the last 10 years, as an administrator, I would return to the memory of applying for the first administrator job and wonder how I ever had the courage to apply and step away from the teacher world I knew. What factors provided the confidence and drive to continue to move up the administrative ladder? What were the defining opportunities, experiences, and individuals that contributed to the pursuit? Another reality that I experienced in my role as a building and district leader was the lack of administrator candidates to hire. This phenomenon is not unique, across the state of Kansas and other states, job openings for administrators are plentiful and there are limited numbers of candidates to fill the positions.

As an educational leader closing in on the end of my career as a public school administrator, there is a desire to contribute to the understanding of what it takes to nurture the potential in individuals to embark on an administrative career path. The need for school administrators to be in the pipeline to fill the positions of retiring administrators is a looming crisis. As a researcher, my contribution can be actualized by adding to the knowledge base of professional identity and how it influences the career trajectory from teacher to school administrator to district administration.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness strategies and practices, discussed by Creswell (2007), were included in the procedural processes and framing of the research to offer recognition of the need to establish trust, accuracy, and credibility. The selection site of the study was known to the researcher through a prolonged career in the district and immersion in the culture, reducing distortions or misinformation that could be introduced by researchers without the familiarity to the setting (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Triangulation of data from the literature review, interviews, and concept map provided corroborating evidence and enriched the analysis (Creswell, 2007;

Merriam, 2009; Patton, 1990). The practice of member checking to solicit participant interaction with the data and findings was implemented in several ways: 1) participants were asked to questions when clarification of meaning was required, 2) interview participants were offered the opportunity to reflect using concept maps to identify gaps or misalignment of meaning, and 3) participants were asked to respond to the participant profile and term descriptors to validate the "the accuracy and credibility of the account" (Creswell, 2007, p. 209). Utilization of rich, detailed, thick descriptions provided readers necessary weight of language to transfer information to other settings and make connections beyond the study (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009).

One determinant of quality in qualitative research is how the researcher plans to meet assurances set forth by the umbrella institutions and organizations. According to Cain et al. (2023) it is important to anticipate any challenges and think beyond the "bounds set by those gatekeepers" regarding ethical considerations (p. 338). The research was conducted within the public school district the researcher was employed. Glesne (2011) refers to this type of setting as "backyard" and speaks to the "heightened consciousness of potential difficulties" required while also supporting the important and valuable role backyard settings provide (p. 43). For this study, thinking through how to handle any sensitive information shared was of importance and being aware of the power dynamics that a participant may perceive due to the researcher's administrative position.

Summary

This qualitative study engaged the educational leaders through interviews and concept map creation to explore their professional identity development. The leaders' participation was voluntary and protected by the researcher's purposeful actions to understand the dynamics of my

own subjectivity as it interplayed within the data collection and inductive analysis process.

Utilizing the process of a pilot study and document management strategies, I was situated to efficiently collect and record effectively to protect the information and time of the participants. I understood from a personal nature the influences and expectations involved in the profession of educational leader and aimed to embrace the internal knowledge to fully explore the information, descriptions, and complexities the participants shared about their professional identity.

Chapter 4 - Findings

The purpose of the study was to understand how educational leaders develop their professional identity. This chapter addresses the findings of the research study. There were five major themes made up of 21 categories that emerged from the data which addressed the research questions.

Findings

The participant descriptions of influencing constructs and professional standards derived from interviews and participant-generated concept maps provided an understanding of the dispositions, experiences, perceptions, human interactions, and organizational realities of the educational leaders in this study. The participant data was analyzed and the findings were organized into 21 categories and associated to five themes. Each theme and category will be presented through an overview description followed by participant examples that exemplify the category and contribute to understanding the overarching theme.

Table 1. Overall Themes and Categories

Theme	Categories
1. Capacity creating opportunities	• Autonomy • Immersion in the Position • Preliminary Experiences • Processing with Others • Professional Development
2. Drivers toward the mission	• Advocacy • Overcoming Challenges • Collective Commitment • Increasing Impact • Power of Education
3. Establishing desired culture	• Alongside (With) • Belonging • Trust • Voice

4. Influencing socializing agents	• Colleagues • Encouraging Leaders • Mentors • Role Models
5. Living aspired dispositions	• Listening Collaborator • Reflective Learner • Supportive Leader

Capacity Creating Opportunities

The theme of capacity creating opportunities encompasses the following categories: 1) autonomy, 2) immersion in the position, 3) preliminary experiences, 4) processing with others, and 5) professional development. As the participants described the opportunities that contributed to their educational leadership capacities there was an ever present interweaving thread of the school world experiences encountered as they performed in their leadership role. The type of leadership role, school level, or location did not matter, the rich descriptions came from the telling and unfolding of the daily and ongoing interactions and experiences with staff, students, families, other leaders, and community. The participants expounded on their current realities and exposed the need for continued experiences as critical to the continuation of their growth and capacity building. Within the experiences, the importance of autonomy was triumphed as allowing the individual to seek out their own solutions and develop their confidence to make decisions. The sense that they were being viewed as leaders and allowed to act as a leader reinforced their self-efficacy in knowing they had the skills and dispositions for leadership, and which was also reinforced by leadership experience encountered prior to any official leadership position. Another referenced capacity building influence was the power of processing with others and how those thinking and reflecting sessions contributed to their learning, perspective, and

emotional state. The collaborative processing was associated across all leadership levels to evaluate situations, not as a mechanism of judgement, but as a positive interaction serving as a means to learning from lived experiences. An additional source for learning and increasing leadership capacity was contributed to professional development opportunities for continued exposure to research and best practices to meet expectations of the profession.

Autonomy

The ability to make decisions, self-direct, and perform in the role of leader through experiences in an autonomous way contributed to the confidence and future vision of leadership positions. There were comments about experimental active engagement in leadership through the reins given from another leader to take a project forward. Several participants commented: "having the freedom to try new things" (Phil); "he was the overseer, but I ran it" (Luke); "a big part of that is he was able to see that I can make decisions and kind of move on" (Amy); and "gave me the ability to know, you are going to try this, you are going to do this, we might fail, but let's go for it" (Sue). Several of the participants used the word trust when describing times when they had latitude to move independently, "[the principal] let me do and support moving this forward as well and kind of gives me that wiggle room of just trusting me" (Amy) and "one thing that he just let us, you know, figure it out...trust and just the ability of us to provide the leadership" (Kim). Participants spoke to the autonomy as current principals to make decisions at the building level within the larger district system: "trust us to go take on the things that need to happen our building" (Sue); "good environment to work in, you have the autonomy to run your building...we are not micromanaged" (Bob); and "trust the leadership that's happening at all of our buildings to get what's best for those kids" (Luke). The connection of how the feeling of trust

from autonomy impacts the confidence to perform and make decisions as an educational leader was exemplified by Sue who provided:

That the trust was there and to stop second guessing myself in that and reflect later on. So often we have to make so many decisions as a leader in the building that if I'm not confident in my decisions, it won't work.

Immersion in the Position

Living the life of an educational leader provides the infrastructure, experiences, and confidence required to perform the duties, react to the demands, and make decisions in the capacity of leader. For many of the participants, the immersion sounded like learning the hard way with the payoff of being prepared for the next similar endeavor: "it wasn't all of the sunshine roses, it was not, but I learn from all those opportunities and so that was important to me that's how that helped me" (Luke); "putting yourself in an uncomfortable situation so that you can continue to grow, definitely something, and still doing that" (John); "it was kind of like trial by fire, but in the end it was valuable for me" (Tom); and "wow, sometimes you learn things the hard way and that was definitely the case" (Sue). There was also a sense of on-the-job training where the participants were developing an understanding and the ability to incorporate the behaviors of educational leader into their daily actions, as signified by (Luke):

Be strong, be assertive and trust yourself to go and so I think just going through the experiences that happen that you know, school can only prepare you for so much with it where we're getting your feet wet and then learning from those is what really can grow you with that.

The experiences supported identity formation by learning the skills needed for the position, such as "next time that I came into one of those situation, I did better" (Phil); "understanding more and

more situations that might arise...learning from each day that there is something that happens" (John); and "there is something every day or at least every week that I am like I have never experienced this before" (Bob). The enormity of the position was captured by Mary who provided a glimpse of not only the number of decisions an educational leader must make but also the toll it has:

What I have never been prepared for is just how many decisions don't have a good answer. It is do you want this bad option or this bad option. And so, I never really had been prepared for that and unfortunately there's a lot of decisions made that are like, okay, well, I am not going to sleep on it either way. Very rarely is it black and white.

Preliminary Experiences

Before the educational leaders entered into official leadership positions the opportunity to build their capacity for future roles came from various interactions that gave them a glimpse into leadership and realization that their path in education was going to change. For many it was the act of leading within the school, such as "department head at middle school, that is kind of when I started developing those leadership skills" (Phil) or leading during their professional learning community (PLC) time, "move things forward when decisions needed to be made it hit me like, okay, so this is kind of what leadership is sometimes" (Amy) and "communicate in a way that helped people understand and impacted what they did in their practice, that kind of validated that and maybe I did have what it took, that and the passion that I had" (Luke). Others got the opportunity more suddenly when they needed to step in and take over for another leader and found success in that, "made me feel good that I do have something here and I can be proud of this and so that's when I really wanted to explore it and have that leadership license and see where it would go" (Sue) and "gave me an opportunity to go to a different building and see

different challenges and I think I wouldn't say I was like super high functioning but it gave me a different perspective which was a good thing" (John).

Processing with Others

Educational leaders see the value of other leaders in contributing to their capacity to process and reflect on their performance in how they handled situations. Many see the debriefing as an opportunity to learn, "some of the biggest learning things would be is when I get to sit down with some of our like our district administrators and be like okay this is what I did, how could I have done it better" (Betty) and "even when I messed up, they picked me up and helped me see the positive in it and learn from it" (John). The power of learning from others that have already lived through a situation, "learning experience of people that have unfortunately been through situations like that before or dealt with it from their current spot, of having that debrief time to learn about this is what I did" (Amy) and "having colleagues that have been through those experiences to walk through them" (Bob). For some it was the vicariously engaging through colleagues experiences' to make sense of their own: "I can do this, we can find supports to help get through it, and that's really what is was. It was just talking to people that have been through stuff like that before" (Tom); "I could call and say okay here's my scenario because the systems that were in place at one school weren't in place over at the other school" (John); and "conversations with other administrators is really what can grow to kind of get that mindset of what needs to happen" (Bob). Another outcome from the processing involves being accepted and the knowing that their actions align with the profession, "just working through those and knowing it was difficult and feeling good about the decisions that you are making can help you sleep okay and helps build the confidence" (Mary).

Professional Development

The fostering of continuous learning to build the capacity of the educational leaders were hallmarked by references to specific professional development opportunities. I am familiar with the professional development referenced and found similarities across the participants. No particular professional development topic will be identified to protect the anonymity of participants due to the specificity to the district. Appreciation and worth of professional development in general was illustrated by the following participant statements: "district level, it's been so strong with staff development and building capacity" (Amy); "there are always opportunities to learn and grow" (Phil); "there is professional development that is designed towards administrators, which I appreciate" (Mary); and "district has been great in providing some of that training" (Sue). These participant statements capture the power of professional development investment for educational leaders, "training we did with (PD name) was huge because when I figured out the gap we had in our building, I was shocked" (Tom) and "all of that (PD name) has helped add to what I know and want to believe" (Luke). The only references to professional development opportunities that were not associated with the district of the participants related to the instructional and mentor coaching training, these were interwoven into discussion of using the skills gained from the training to support teachers in the classroom and in the act of mentoring administrators outside of the district.

Drivers toward the Mission

The theme of drivers toward the mission developed from the following data categories: 1) advocacy, 2) overcoming challenges, 3) collective commitments, 4) increasing impact, and 5) power of education. There was no definition of an all-encompassing mission the participants shared, but there were fundamental action areas that created a vision of driving toward common

educational goals which would act to support academic success and a climate of shared purpose. The participants embraced their role to advocate to ensure all constituents in their circle of influence and impact were provided access to a quality learning environment and the resource of rigorous instruction to provide opportunity for success and removal of barriers. The participants recognized the challenges of creating and maintaining a coherent system and that there was no possibility of meeting the challenges without the collective collaborative efforts of staff and family to overcome obstacles and commit to the work. As educational leaders, they had the leverage to empower many toward pursued outcomes and all participants embraced their increased impact capacity as a characterizing trait that guided them to a leadership position. Each verbalized the power of education as a mechanism for change and betterment, and their commitment to creating opportunity by being a driver of the forces, resources, and people within their educational environment.

Advocacy

Educational leaders enact the mission of the school through advocacy for students and pursuit of resources to meet the needs. The participants referred to removal of barriers as a mechanism of advocacy: "we are going to get rid of that barrier...so how do I advocate and shift the way we provide services at [school name]" (Betty); "passionate that we have to work really, really hard for some kids to help them learn because there are those barriers" (Bob); "those gaps are so, I mean they are big...we have to do something to help this child" (Luke); and "make decisions that put resources where the students that are likely going to need them, those additional resources, the most" (Kim). There was an overall acknowledgement to needing to act for students that are behind others in either access or resource, "the number one thing for me has always been the kids, and probably the underserved kids, the at-risk kids, and wanting all kids to

achieve and succeed" (Bob); "just committed, to help kids be their best selves and just really loving these kids enough to do whatever it takes" (Tom); "there is definitely a different experience that some kids come with than others" (Luke); and "how do we make sure we position kids the best that we can for success" (Kim) bringing forth the need for a community of care and support for students. Engaging in the decisions and actions which promote advocacy for students to have what is best for them as part of the school system, "I am going to create a school that my kids can go to and feel good about...treat kids like they are your own and be student-centered" (Mary) and "you are doing what is best for the student...a value that should lead every decision" (Bob).

Overcoming Challenges

There is a responsiveness that is required to address and overcome challenges facing school systems. The educational leaders often referred to themselves as being the driver as well as the encompassing 'we' as the driver to keep what is important at the forefront of what they strive for and act upon: "we are making our decisions based on what will be best for them [students] in the long run and not what is easiest for us now, then we are going to be okay, and we will going to be in a good spot" (Mary); "reminding ourselves of who we and why we were doing what we were doing and how this all fits together" (John); "decisions that I try to make is students first, we have all those things we want our students to grow. We want our faculty to grow, but in schools our number one priority is kids" (Sue); and "making every decision that we make weighing against okay how does this improve what is happening in the classroom for students" (Kim). Rising to the challenge of promoting and ensuing academic success and well-being of each student was addressed by several participants, "understanding the urgency of what we have got to do, I mean truly. There is a sense of urgency of we have to [increase effective

instruction]" (Amy); "we want them [students] to achieve at their greatest potential academically, behaviorally, social emotionally, and I just think being committed to that, if you are not committed to that, I don't know if you can be successful at all" (Bob); and

as the leader, you have to set the tone, set the tone for the importance of, you know, you have to make that important for the teachers to make that important you have to give them the resources, the training, the vision, all those different things to make sure that they're equipped with what they need to educate kids. (Kim)

A few participants expressed the difficulty of overcoming challenges in statements of reality: "how do we keep this high level [social emotional . . . but not let that drop as we are starting to focus now on [academics]" (John); "if we don't figure out a system, there is going to be a real problem" (Phil); and

You have to have a solid vision and a solid ethics about what you're about because there will be days where it feels like you are walking away from, you know, from a dumpster fire and you just kind of have to remember the mission and what your trying to do even though it didn't work. (Mary)

Collective Commitments

Expressions of collectively working together to promote academic success provided a foundation to honor the efforts of staff and celebrate the joint accomplishment of progress toward a goal: "anything we decide to focus on, it gets better" (Phil); "I love the community we've built together and that is not just me we really have built it together, fantastic teachers, a great lead teacher" (Tom); "we will continue to work through that but the good piece is I have good professionals good teachers working through that with me" (Sue); and

I am proud of the collaboration we had from everyone. I mean, we knew we had, we had never really put that great of a focus on it and we put a lot more focus on it last year and it wasn't just me coming up with a plan and doing it by myself. There was a lot of people around the table . . . coming up with ideas of how can we make this more, how can we make this more important for students. (Bob)

As the participants described bigger systems' goals, they emphasized the power of togetherness to sustain and implement, "trying to achieve what the, you know, the district mission is in our own setting within our four walls and then just implementing the different initiatives that we have...with as much fidelity and as much energy as possible" (Bob) and "engaging in that conversation and then drawing decisions that we are taking back to what our community told us [during the district visioning process] that is what builds that collective commitment to what is happening in the district" (Kim). Relating how they applied a collaborative visioning process at the building level John stated,

conversations together when we were developing a vision or developing the mission is kind of that key and bring all stakeholder, parents, or community people, site council, PTA, that's like, that's who we had everyone be a part of [development] . . . what we ended up doing was powerful because our community came back together to really look at it.

"First thing is it is not about me, it is about trying to figure out what we can collectively do to make things better for students", this statement by Kim along with others reinforced the accountability to be shared by the leader and the teachers to band together to improve practice and outcomes, "I will take responsibility for that but, you know we need to change. We can right the ship . . . where we need to improve and be honest with ourselves" (Luke); "this is what we

are going to do, I like this, we are together figuring things out and problem solving together" (John); and "here are the things that we said were going to drive us" (Bob). The commitments made by the collective create a strong professional community, which the educational leaders tend to through their actions.

Increasing Impact

A reoccurring term used or referenced by all participants was impact, specifically having an increased impact as an educational leader in relationship to their previous positions in education. The personal toll that accompanies the responsibility of increased impact was captured by Amy who provided:

Now I can affect changes for hundreds of kids. I like having that bigger impact and I think just making sure that they (future leaders) always remember the good things about it because some days are tough and some days are exhausting and just keeping that remembering why you do what you do.

Each of the participants recognized the circle of influence increased as they transitioned from the classroom to greater leadership roles: "exciting to think of bigger picture than just my little tiny classroom" (Tom); "ability to have a bigger impact the ability to solve problems at a different scale rather than just classroom problems" (Bob); "I think for me it was I wanted to move beyond the classroom and impacting . . . to a bigger venue" (Phil); and "kind of spurred me to be like, okay, but there's something more out there. Like there's bigger things that we can do and have a bigger impact" (John). Leveraging the influence and skills of teachers to widen the impact of their leadership efforts was explained as an instrument of extended reach, "finding ways that I can impact the teachers to impact the students because unfortunately I cannot go reach every single student, but if I can reach every staff member has a better chance of reaching all the

students" (Sue) and "I feel like I can make a bigger impact because I can get to the student side of it and I could get the staff side" (Bob). Impact was not only in reference to having greater access to greater numbers of constituents, it was also about the stewardship of making a difference: "I wanted to impact people at a different level . . . I wanted to make a difference and I felt that I had the skill set to make a difference" (Luke); "I think the decision for me was I could have a bigger impact on more students, staff, and the adults" (Phil); and "what drew me to leadership, is because of the impact, you can complain about the world, or you can try to make a difference" (Betty).

Power of Education

Education has the power to provide access, overcome barriers, and create change for the students. Educational leaders are the conduits to support the system in making that happen. A few of the participants eluded to the overarching ways the system influences opportunity: "we need to improve teaching and learning so kids can leave us and do better at the next level" (Amy); "super passionate about ensuring that kids have the guaranteed curriculum in every hour, every day, and that they have good delivery of that, that they had a fighting chance" (Luke); and "how do we make sure we position kids the best that we can for success" (Kim). Education is seen as a way to better the community: "I want this community to be better because I care about the people in it, and I truly believe education and public education specifically help shape that" (Sue); "I feel like (education) is the only thing that can really strengthen your community, not the only thing but one of the greatest things you have in your community" (Amy); and "to make the world a better place, is that one interaction at a time, because we can't change the whole world, but we can change it one step at a time" (Betty). Lastly, Luke spoke to how education can give tools beyond academics to break free of barriers:

I don't want kids to back down, I want them to have the perseverance, so that is a big value for [me] and that's where my passion is, I don't want people to feel cheated just because of barriers that you have, because they could be overcome.

Establishing Desired Culture

The theme of establishing desired culture developed from the following data categories: 1) alongside (with), 2) belonging, 3) trust, and 4) voice. The educational leaders established the norm of cultivating a community that works together and respects what others contribute to the conditions and climate of the system. Understanding the contributions requires the educational leaders to be emerged into the habits of the daily lives of staff and attend to their perspective. The participants seized opportunities of interaction to be responsive and available to families, extending the invitation to communicate that they belonged and were worthy of the attention. Through the exchanges, the educational leaders acted to build trust and provide voice to promote a culture of access, fair treatment, acceptance, and recognition of diversity of experience. The culture building practices of the participants illustrated their purposeful commitment to an inclusive community of care and support for students as well as an environment of collective learning and trusting working relationships with staff.

Alongside (With)

The educational leaders valued perspective taking and recognized the need to understand what happens in a school on a personal side by engaging directly with staff as they implemented what was being asked of them. All of the participants described needing to be with their people, "being willing to be part of that as the leader and being willing to do things with people" (John) and "this is a journey that we are taking together I want to walk alongside you . . . just learn together and it is so I can validate" (Sue). The actions to be alongside provided mutual

commitment to create a community of practice where importance is placed on learning together and being respectful of what is being asked: "I have got to be willing to dig in and learn the same things that staff is learning, because otherwise you get too far away and you simplify things" (Kim); "the power comes from when people are doing, when people are choosing something and we are doing it together" (Betty); "I think I have got to be directly involved in understanding what should be happening in the classroom and supporting teachers" (Phil); and

being with my teachers, as I said earlier, not being separate from them. So I have got to be in the classrooms. I have got to be meeting with the teachers. I have got to know what it is like to live their daily life, because we only know our perspective. (Sue)

Several of the participants described the culture building aspects of demonstrating they were on equal ground with their staff not someone just to observe, but to model and experience what others experience: "important that I model it and that I am in touching it, so if I am just talking it, that is not the same....I have to be in the trenches, I guess, walking along side" (Phil); "when I do professional development, remind myself, like, I am being the role model that I want to have in teachers" (John); and

you've got to be with your people if they don't feel like you're with them if they feel like you are above them or on the outside of them you've got to be with them to keep the culture to keep it going. (Luke)

Seeing the act of walking alongside as empowering and visibility as an invitation to be part of the professional learning collaborative that builds community, "I value collaboration, I value people walking alongside me, helping to make decisions, I value empowering staff to walk alongside and be part of the decision making process" (Betty) and "being out and about and being visible and building those relationships" (Sue).

Belonging

Meaningful engagement by educational leaders benefits the individuals involved by creating a sense of belonging through access to a supportive, caring learning environment that values and honors students by welcoming them and their families. When the participants alluded to or chose the term value, it was used to show importance of the individual as part of the system: "I value my people, I value listening, I value commitment to your students and your colleagues because that's how we're going to come along together, that culture piece" (Betty) and "treat everybody with dignity and respect is very important to me" (Luke), value also used as an assumed feeling of the individuals the participants associated with the result of their actions: "how do you make sure that no matter what your circumstances are that you really feel valued and respected and that you are being treated fairly" (Phil) and

they feel valued and respected because you have taken the time. And so whether that is the parent or the staff member or the kid, if you are not connected to them, then you can't make good decisions because you haven't grounded it in reality. (Sue)

Creating relationships through access and connection as an invitation to being part of decisions and learning environment: "we pride ourselves on family relationships. So ensuring that like I am outside every morning, and parents will wave me over to the car . . . being visible to the parents so that I am always accessible to them" (Betty); "for me it is about those connections and the connections relationships . . . where I want to do what I can to help you make it better, we are going work together to do this" (Luke); and "really trying to build those relationships you know and not that dismissals a fun time but it is a great time to be out there with those families and be seen" (Sue). Seeing connection as a means of extending an olive branch to positive connections was exposed by Phil who provided:

knowing something about them, knowing something about their kids, connecting with them in a non-judgmental way, just being very friendly no matter to who and even perhaps a parent that you've had some challenges with but trying to be very welcoming. The descriptions of specific actions by the participants communicated their understanding that relationships benefit the culture, but it only happens through purposeful behaviors as described by Tom, "belonging, I think that supports what really has to happen in order for kids and families to feel safe and learn and for staff to feel good about what they're doing." The ultimate dividend to creating a sense of belonging is harnessing the power of parents to be part of the student's learning:

create belonging with our families and staff matters, students matter, family matter because families are who are supporting kids when they go home so trying to get them into the school so that they can understand meaningful ways that they can be a part of their child's educational life. (Kim)

Trust

Articulated in various ways was the value of trust as a means to cultivate the type of working and supporting environment the educational leader were tending with their behaviors. Trust was generated by their actions: "an open policy to where my teachers trust me and feel comfortable with me . . . felt comfortable to come say that to me. So just being very transparent, very available, and very tuned in" (Tom); "what we say together stays with me and I just need to be trustworthy and honor that other person no matter how I feel" (Amy); and

people have to know kind of where you are going to stand on things. I think that's definitely that integrity that you do what you say you are going to do and that people aren't questioning where you are going to land on something. (Kim)

Staff and family having trust in them as leaders, provided a gateway to comfort, openness, and appreciation to support conversations and expectations: "I can focus on [scaling up] and get them to embrace really what they are good at they are going to open up to some of the other things, especially if they trust me" (Luke); "we can be honest so it truly is the fact that they trust you, you know and they think you are authentic because people can pick out bullshit" (Phil); and "I want them to trust me and I want them to know . . . I am here for you and your family in our community and that it is important" (Betty).

Voice

The professional practice of providing a platform for individuals to be heard was described by the educational leaders as a tool for openness and reflection. Creation of a community which invites and embraces collaborative examination develops an empowering culture, which fosters buy-in and seeks understanding. When referring to parent voice, it was defined as a way to elevate and bring them into conversations: "we have parents and kids that do not have a voice and I wanted to be that person to give them that voice" (Luke); "powerful way where parents have voice so they help drive what is, what are some parent engagement things you would like to see at our school" (John); and

they have to understand that they have a seat at the table, they have, it is the voice. They have to understand that what they have to say is just as important than what I have to say.

We truly, there is equity there. (Betty)

"We did it together, it took us two months, but everybody, everybody bought in, and them having a voice in each of the four steps that we took. They had voice, so it became theirs" (Betty) and "I felt like I was just doing something to mark a box and now I feel like it is doing something where they have voice now" (Tom), both of these participant descriptions speak to creating buy-

in and pride in accomplishment due to engaging others. The act of giving voice is beyond just allowing someone to speak, it is about understanding what needs the stakeholders are actually expressing: "learning to kind of step out of my what's just black and white world stepping into their world that's very emotional" (Tom); "I've got to be approachable, I got to be open, and I got to be paying attention, not frustrating my teachers on a daily basis and not even knowing" (Sue); and "open dialogue knowing what people need" (Phil).

Influencing Socializing Agents

The theme of influencing socializing agents developed from the following data categories: 1) colleagues, 2) encouraging leaders, 3) mentors, and 4) role models. The leaders encountered by the participants were categorized by the type of influence and context of the relationship. All of the participants, except one, named specific leaders who either inspired, suggested, or directed them to pursue a leadership position. The leaders were agents that impacted the professional identity of the participants and helped them form connections to the profession through galvanizing interactions and exchanges of ideas. The colleagues provided an interactive social group to engage, commiserate, and process with who had the background and context the participants needed for self-reflection and exploration. Participants included stories about role models describing the knowledge, skills, and lessons learned from the observations and moments shared between them. Mentorship was associated with richer descriptions that signified impact and internalization of the dispositions, learning, and guidance gained from those leaders. The dynamic relationships and interplay of involvement with other educational leaders were a source of support and influence that contributed to the formation of who the participants are and aspire to be.

Colleagues

Educational leaders are surrounded by student and staff constantly, yet the positions can be lonely with the weight of responsibility and decision-making that falls to the leadership position. This was expressed in terms 'silo' and 'island' directly, but indirectly it came through descriptions of needing to turn to and reach out to others for solace and collegiality. The two primary ways the participants described their peers were as a source of support and as a network of peers living the same type of professional demands. In regards to support, the following are example statements: "I would turn to people, the people that like my peers" (Luke); "utilizing them for different types of scenarios" (John); and "I know I can reach this other person and I got different people that can help and support" (Betty). For participants that work in a secondary environment the peer support referenced was in the same building: "I lean a lot on [in building colleagues] we are a good combination of different skill sets and we joke with each other we get along with each other and they're probably my closest companions" (Bob); "the most challenging times and probably just the three of us collaborating and talking and getting through" (Amy); and "I would say definitely my colleagues in this [school] I could turn to them with pretty much anything" (Mary). When described as like agents to collaborate with the encounters were characterized as purposeful to gain knowledge or insight: "we would bounce ideas off of each other" (John); "I'll call and say, okay here's my scenario, like let's talk through it" (Bob); "I guess I feel pretty lucky that if it's something that's just kind of like a minor irritant, I'll reach out to [principal colleague] for those types of things" (Mary); "each one of those people [colleagues], knowing what their strengths are, asking them, okay, what about this" (Betty); "colleagues that you can process that [event] with because every day is a new day" (Sue); and "ability at instructional leadership or administration meetings to kind of meet and network with other folks

to learn what they have" (Bob). The appreciation of having a network of colleagues within the district was heartfelt, as described by (Amy):

we have the support of each other, and you don't have that everywhere else that you go, and knowing that people are going to help me as a person, as a mom, as a leader, as a colleague, as a friend, that's the way we change the world, is by having each other's backs.

Encouraging Leaders

Journeys, depicted by the educational leaders to their current positions, did not start off with leadership as the road map. All but one of the participants spoke to leaders that encouraged them to think about their future in a different way through provided opportunity, idea planting, and direct encouragement to apply. A couple of participants did speak to specific leadership positions that would be considered leadership building blocks within a school system, such as academic coach, department chair, and coordinator. These referenced positions included the actual person and event that was the turning point to moving outside the classroom. Although the participants were the ones that had to make the leap of faith to take the chance, their reflections indicated they saw the new roles as opportunities and laying the groundwork to their future identity: "when somebody saw leadership capacity in me and gave me a chance to do something beyond classroom teaching" (John); "multiple times where somebody else gave me an opportunity when I didn't realize that I was needing it" (Kim); "said hey you might think about this when otherwise I probably wouldn't have" (Phil); and "I have had a lot of really great people that have allowed me to have opportunities that I am just thankful for because I would not have necessarily known that was the path I was going to take" (Amy).

Mentors

Advice and guidance from specific educational leaders, which were not named as colleagues, were interwoven throughout the descriptions of experience by the participants. The influence of the mentors was depicted as something that stayed with them into their current position as a guiding force: "perspective to kind of help me through the process and understand . . . so that has its been helpful to validate like my feelings and understanding" (Phil); "if you want a friend, get a dog . . . I just remember thinking, well, that's probably good advice" (Kim); "someone I really admire to follow and we have very similar philosophies, but okay to disagree about something and talk through things . . . helped me" (Amy); and "I sometimes still ask myself what would [leader] say" (Tom). Capturing a reoccurring theme of valuing mentorship by new and experienced leaders, John tied it back to promoting leadership growth, "more support, no matter how experienced you are with more support, we can grow leaders."

Role Models

Emulation and admiration of behaviors deemed as aligning with educational leadership were described by the participants. These role models inspired, provided insight to what a leader does, and exemplified skills or dispositions to be obtained. "I always appreciated that having folks that you admire or that you really respect, I think just visiting with them and learning from them will help get you to the right spot" (Bob); "I just felt like I had pieces of that in me and I thought, okay, and I learned from that" (Luke); and "I knew that I did have that capacity and I saw strong leaders around me" (Amy). Several participants referenced working under numerous leaders and how that created a depth of knowledge about leadership from multiple dimensions and perspectives to influence their own identity decisions: "I worked under three different principals, all three very different, but I can take bits and pieces from each one of them to try to

help make who I need to be within myself" (Mary); "all three of them were very different leaders but all three of them had at least one trait that I am like I need that trait" (Bob); and

their [leadership] differences helped form who I became because each one of them is very, very different and each person has a very different strength and a very different passion. And so working under all of them helped me hone what would be my style.

(Betty)

The participants also characterized negative role models and the powerful impact on their development to know what they did not strive to be and the intentional compensations they have made to not follow that pathway: "it like hurt, and I just like the different perspectives to even think about that so unfortunately, like some of those events, just like seriously, I could do this job . . . at least I could improve on some of this" (Phil); "even though it was a negative experience, it definitely made me want to be intentional on what kind of a leader I was" (Tom); "ways that I was treated that I didn't feel were necessarily fair . . . how I was treated by that person made me understand how to maybe not treat others" (Amy); and "I would see different things along the way, and I would also see things that I thought you know what that's not for me and that is not going to work for me" (Luke).

Living Aspired Dispositions

The theme of living aspired dispositions developed from the following data categories: 1) listening collaborator, 2) reflective learner, and 3) supportive leader. The narratives of the participants illuminated dispositions they embodied through their behaviors and decisions providing insight to the internalized norms and values they associated with educational leadership. Purposefully listening to constituents was foundational to the nature of the leaders and examples of listening across constituent groups of students, families, community, and staff

were provided in some dimension. All participants associated listening with the additional intent of being responsive and reciprocal to the information and perspective learned through the communication exchanges. Listening through a perspective taking lens, also aligned to the reflective learner disposition highlighted by the participants. Learning and reflection were coupled throughout the descriptions of events that caused the participant to weigh and shift their own actions and thoughts. In the doing of the job of leadership, many opportunities for reflection revealed themselves to the participants and they capitalized on these as learning moments. The participants saw their own growth as a mechanism of forward movement to being a more accomplished and impactful leader. One way to be impactful was by supporting students, staff, and families including attending to the needs and obligations associated with creating an environment that promoted success and caring. Support actions were a symbolic guarantee from the leader to constituents that their job priority was not to benefit them as individual leader, but to serve as an underpinning pillar to sustain the foundation of collective commitment within the educational community.

Listening Collaborator

The educational leaders all espoused listening to constituents as critical to the development of the learning environment and that they acted as a purposeful listener. Their words coupled listening with next steps where they were a collaborative partner or cooperating venue to move beyond just listening to hearing and acting upon the input and needs heard. "Fully listen and hear what people say and you have to be able to connect to all different levels and styles of people and listening to what they say so that they feel heard and validated" (Betty); "good listener to have a good vibe of the concerns of your parents of your students and of your teachers" (Tom); and "able to listen and know and help people understand, parents understand,

that you truly want to be their partner" (Luke) all of these participant statements represent the listening part, but they also allude to that it takes more than just listening to validate and understand. The next part of the equation is being a collaborator, being able to go beyond self and questioning your own perceptions of where you really are and how to move forward: "what questions do you have and I am trying to hear the underlying message of the questions . . . stopping and listening to them" (Bob); "you can't get so far out in front that people aren't with you. And so I think that communication and that listening and being able to respond is critical" (John); and "if I never would have taken the time to listen and ask the right questions to back it down to the root of what they felt like they needed" (Kim). Therefore, the disposition of listening must be coupled with actually seeing was captured by Mary who provided "open up your eyes that everything is not just the way that you see things" and collaborating to bring things into focus.

Reflective Learner

Vulnerability was shown through the educational leaders' representation of their skills, thrills, and spills of leading. They reflected and revealed their learning curve and stumbles along their professional path as well as rejoicing when speaking of progress and gains made with staff, students, and families. The specific context for the reflection and learning varied across the participants, but there were pauses in thought with retrospective expressions: "not viewing having to step back as a sign of weakness, but viewing that as, okay, this really is a sign of leadership strength" (Kim); "having the sensibility to reflect and to be purposeful with your thinking" (Amy); "the vulnerability that you have to have, huge amount of openness" (Sue); and "not sure that has been something that I have entirely been successful at" (John). When actions did not go as planned, these were expressed as nudges to step back and evaluate from a wider

perspective to move forward: "sometimes we do have to challenge one another but I think in order for me to be a bigger change agent I have to be more vocal" (Luke); "when we started, I thought that I was in pretty good shape . . . but after going through the session that we had a couple weeks ago, oh, this is a lot harder and a lot more detailed" (Mary); and "even though is was high quality in the moment for the session, there was no follow through, so it wasn't really high quality" (John). Reflecting on the missteps provided foreshadowing to embracing the opportunity to use it for learning: "you messed up, but what are you going to do about it helped me reflect, so that then the next time that I came into one of those situation, I did better" (Betty); "put myself out there though, and showing that I'm human too. And I can do hard things, it helps you grow" (Amy); "feedback all over the entire thing that I really kind of needed to start over, but it made me better" (Kim); and "I loved the learning that took place because it opened my eyes in a whole different way" (John).

Supportive Leader

A pattern of support was exemplified in the descriptions of practice by the educational leaders to align resources and opportunity for students, families, and staff. As the participants described the frameworks for collaboration in their environment and systems in place to engage and give voice, the message of supporting different perspectives was heard. Many of the participants used the term support to name what they believe is a fundamental responsibility of a leader: "I have always seen myself as their support. My job is to make sure they have what they need to do their job" (Tom); "I want my teachers to feel supported. I want my parents to feel supported and heard" (Luke); "really thinking about the best place to work and grow and things like that, is that means that I need to make sure I find ways to support our staff. When things are going rough, what can I do" (Sue); and "I work for my staff because it is my job to advocate and

support them how they need. And I am only as strong as what they are" (Betty). The term servant leader was used by two participants, "happy teachers help kids learn and feel important and feel connected. So just my job is more of a servant type leadership of providing so that they can go out there and do their thing" was shared by Tom. All of the participants expressed a dedication and commitment to be the provider to meet the needs of their constituents, this statement from Sue, illustrates just how far the participant would go, "servant leadership might be the piece of it, of not being above anything, where if somebody happens to throw up on the tile, go grab the mop and help clean it up."

Theme Alignment

The five themes 1) capacity creating opportunities, 2) drivers toward the mission, 3) establishing desired culture, 4) influencing socializing agents, and 5) living aspired dispositions align to the influencing constructs and the professional standards identified within the conceptual framework for professional identity development. These themes served as overarching structures to discuss professional identity development and to anchor each influencing construct and professional standard. Within the themes, there is a convergence of evidence to answer both research questions, but for purposes of clarity each research question will be discussed independently aligning the conceptual framework to the relating primary themes.

Professional Identity

The following themes address research question 1: How do educational leaders describe their development of professional identity? To address this question, the themes are aligned with the components of developing professional identity as listed in the conceptual framework:

Table 2. Theme Alignment to Professional Identity

Components	Themes
identity formation	• capacity creating opportunities • influencing socializing agents • living aspired dispositions
doing and being among professionals	• capacity creating opportunities • influencing socializing agents
active engagement in the new roles either vicariously or experientially within the profession	• capacity creating opportunities • influencing socializing agents
identification and internalization of the norms and values of the profession	• capacity creating opportunities • drivers toward the mission • establishing desired culture • influencing socializing agents • living aspired dispositions
understanding and incorporation behaviors and attitudes in the profession	• capacity creating opportunities • drivers toward the mission • establishing desired culture • influencing socializing agents • living aspired dispositions
acceptance and sense of belonging within and among those in the profession	• capacity creating opportunities • influencing socializing agents
socializing agents, such as mentors, colleagues, supervisors, and developmental networks which help give feedback and serve as role models	• capacity creating opportunities • influencing socializing agents
increase the self-knowledge, self-reflection and exploration of the profession	• capacity creating opportunities • drivers toward the mission • establishing desired culture • influencing socializing agents • living aspired dispositions
interactive social group engagement within the profession	• capacity creating opportunities • influencing socializing agents • living aspired dispositions

Each category within the theme will be described through an aligned component to highlight key findings.

The theme of capacity creating opportunities addresses all nine of the components of professional identity. One exemplar component will be aligned to each of the five categories found within the theme. *Identity formation* was described when the educational leaders were

provided *autonomy* to make leadership decisions based on their own knowledge and skills.

Understanding and incorporation of behaviors and attitudes in the profession was described through *immersion in the position* as the educational leaders recounted times when they had to slow the reaction to a teacher or parent and listen allowing the voice and perspective guide leadership behavior. *Active engagement in the new roles either vicariously or experientially within the profession* was described through the *preliminary experiences* provided to the participants to engage with leadership experimentally through leading PLCs and school improvement groups where the role of leader was assumed before any formal leadership role was obtained. *Interactive social group engagement within the profession* was described as times of *processing with other* educational leaders to gain guidance, understand decisions, and evaluate implementation of practices. *Identification and internalization of the norms and values of the profession* were described when the educational leader applied *professional development* learning to understand why purposeful actions were needed to increase student belonging.

The theme of drivers toward the mission addresses three of the components of professional identity. Each component will be aligned to a category or categories found within the theme. *Identification and internalization of the norms and values of the profession* was described in examples of acts of *advocacy* for students and families to ensure access was provided to resources to remove barriers; and in the reflections about *overcoming challenges* and how the educational leaders' actions and decisions must be based on what is best for students. *Understanding and incorporation of behaviors and attitudes in the profession* was described when the educational leaders told about *collective commitments* made as a result of collaboration supporting structures they applied to harness the dedication of staff to accomplish common goals. *Increase the self-knowledge, self-reflection and exploration of the profession* was

described when the educational leaders shared how the desire of *increasing impact* was one of the main reasons they went into leadership.

The theme of establishing desired culture addresses three of the components of professional identity. The components will be aligned to a category found within the theme. *Identification and internalization of the norms and values of the profession* was described by the purposeful actions put in place to create an environment of *trust* where staff, students, and family knew what to expect and what was valued at the schools; and when the educational leaders signified providing *voice* was a given in how they interacted with others to really hear what was being said even when it might not be what they wanted to hear. *Understanding and incorporation of behaviors and attitudes in the profession* was described through examples of how the educational leaders enacted ways to be *alongside* their staff as they participated in new learning or application of skills to validate their perspective. *Increase the self-knowledge, self-reflection and exploration of the profession* was described when the educational leaders discussed how they created a sense of *belonging* by understanding their own biases and reactions to staff or families and how they had to move beyond those feelings to not alienate and welcome everyone.

The theme of influencing socializing agents addresses all nine of the components of professional identity. One exemplar component will be aligned to each of the four categories found within the theme. *Doing and being among professionals* was described through the narratives where *role models* were seen as guiding individuals the educational leaders worked alongside to learn from and interact with as they processed and debriefed incidents within the school setting. *Acceptance and sense of belonging within and among those in the profession* was described as opportunities that *encouraging leaders* provided to them before they knew

leadership was their path indicating a belief in their leadership capacity and recognition as part of the leadership group. *Socializing agents, such as mentors, colleagues, supervisors, and developmental networks which help give feedback and serve as role models* was described in the appreciation the educational leaders had for their *mentors* and recognition of the inputs provided to grow them. *Interactive social group engagement within the profession* was described as the educational leaders touted the need for *colleagues* as a resource to engage with and be challenged by for their own growth and support.

The theme of living aspired dispositions addresses five of the components of professional identity. One exemplar component will be aligned to each of the three categories found within the theme. *Understanding and incorporation behaviors and attitudes in the profession* was described when the discussions of communication and decision making forced them to be a *listening collaborator* by taking an active role of slowing down and really hearing what was being said and then reacting to show they heard the concern. *Increase the self-knowledge, self-reflection and exploration of the profession* was described during introspective moments when the educational leader demonstrated the characteristic of *reflective learner* with a pause and reframing of an event into a learning example. *Identity formation* was described through examples of *supportive leader* actions, like modeling, pitching in to help, or coaching, to ensure they were meeting needs of those they lead.

Professional Standards

Professional standards are the foundational understandings, actions, beliefs, and dispositions which ground educational leaders and guide them to effectively lead to support academic success and well-being of each student. The following themes and categories address

research question two: How do educational leaders describe the professional standards in their professional identity?

Table 3. Theme Alignment to Professional Standards

Professional Standards	Themes
develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high quality education	• capacity creating opportunities • drivers toward the mission • establishing desired culture • influencing socializing agents • living aspired dispositions
act ethically and according to professional norms	• drivers toward the mission • establishing desired culture • influencing socializing agents
strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices	• drivers toward the mission • establishing desired culture • living aspired dispositions
develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment	• drivers toward the mission • establishing desired culture • living aspired dispositions
cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community	• drivers toward the mission • establishing desired culture • living aspired dispositions
develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel	• drivers toward the mission • establishing desired culture • living aspired dispositions
foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff	• capacity creating opportunities • drivers toward the mission • establishing desired culture • living aspired dispositions
engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways	• capacity creating opportunities • drivers toward the mission • establishing desired culture • living aspired dispositions
manage school operations and resources	• capacity creating opportunities • drivers toward the mission
act as agents of continuous improvement	• capacity creating opportunities • drivers toward the mission • establishing desired culture • influencing socializing agents • living aspired dispositions

Each category within the theme will be described through an aligned professional standard to highlight key findings.

The theme of capacity creating opportunities addresses five of the professional standards. One standard will be aligned to each of the five categories found within the theme. *Develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high quality education* was described when the educational leaders recounted the times when they were *processing with others* about how to transform their 'acts of just doing' to purposefully aligned actions to move the mission forward. *Foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff* was described through the *preliminary experiences* that the educational leaders had to engage with their teaching colleagues as first opportunities to build their leadership capacity. *Engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways* was described through *immersion in the position* as the leaders identified real-world ways they were accessible to families and invited them into the school. *Manage school operations and resources* was described as having the *autonomy* to make decisions for their schools based on the needs they identified to meet outcomes. *Act as agents of continuous improvement* was described in the application of *professional development* through modeling and coaching as they supported their teachers with implementation.

The theme of drivers toward the mission addresses all ten of the professional standards. One exemplar standard will be aligned to each of the five categories found within the theme. *Act ethically and according to professional norms* was described as the underlying foundation for *overcoming challenges* and keeping the direction and focus always on what was best for students and removing barriers. *Strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices* was described as the educational leaders outlined times when *advocacy* for

resources and actions were based on the student and family needs over personnel desires.

Develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment was described when the educational leaders spoke to attaining greater success for students through the *power of education* in regards to high quality instruction as the means. *Develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel* was described as a direct strategy for *increasing impact* by the educational leaders to indirectly influence student learning. *Foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff* was described by the educational leaders in the ways they developed mutual accountability through *collective commitments* of staff to achieve collaboratively set goals.

The theme of establishing desired culture addresses nine of the professional standards. One exemplar standard will be aligned to each of the four categories found within the theme. *Cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community* was described in various actions of working *alongside (with)* staff, students, and families to address an issue, understand perspective, and promote shared responsibility. *Engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways* was described in deliberate acts of recognizing, inviting, and partnering to create a sense of *belonging* for families and their students. *Strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices* was described as times of transparency and vulnerability to build *trust* between school and family to not marginalize or dismiss concerns and struggles. *Foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff* was described in the opportunities afforded to constituents to have *voice* in decision making and direction setting for issues that impacted them.

The theme of influencing socializing agents addresses three of the professional standards. One standard will be aligned to each of the four categories found within the theme. *Develop,*

advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high quality education was described in the discussion of *role models* as a strong source of direction and knowledge to navigate and lead within their own school. *Act ethically and according to professional norms* was described in the high regard paid to the educational leaders' *mentors* that served as inspiration, forthrightness, and comfort during their leadership development. *Act as agents of continuous improvement* was described as the engagement with colleagues to debrief and reflect about the appropriateness of actions and reactions to events experienced; and in their reflections about ways *encouraging leaders* allowed them to be directly part of school improvement efforts giving them the chance to perform as a leader.

The theme of living aspired dispositions addresses eight of the professional standards. One exemplar standard will be aligned to each of the three categories found within the theme. *Engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways* was described during the stories of when the educational leader had to put their perspective to the side and act as a *listening collaborator* by using two-way communication to allow open dialogue to drive decisions. *Act as agents of continuous improvement* was described when the educational leader decomposed their own actions into missteps and next steps for doing better illustrating traits of a *reflective learner*. *Develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel* was described as how the educational leader embraces the role of *supportive leader* to grow the skills and abilities of staff by providing ongoing professional development that they engage with as well to be alongside their staff.

In summary, the chronicles of the daily life, decisions, journeys, and learning laid the foundation for understanding the professional identity of the educational leaders. The findings in this study demonstrate how the influencing constructs and professional standards inform the

development of the professional identity of educational leaders; appendix F provides summary tables of each theme illustrating the professional identity constructs and professional standards alignment. The interrelatedness of the educational leaders' descriptions of the development of their professional identity and the standards within the professional identity is captured utilizing the themes as a connection point. The significance of the findings will be discussed to provide meaning and identify how this study provided access and knowledge to understand a foundational attribute, professional identity, of educational leaders.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

This basic qualitative exploratory research study engaged educational leaders in descriptions of their practices, aspirations, understanding, and implementation of expectations associated with the professional standards and development of their professional identity. The closure of the study provides an opportunity to describe next steps and honor the energy and efforts of the individual leaders involved by recognizing their words, insights, passion, and dedication as a resource, which informed and illuminated implications for practice and recommendations for future studies.

The findings of the study were examined through the literature review, which served as the guiding foundation that informed and shaped the study. Drawing out the connections and grounding them in research, the findings were substantiated using the conceptual framework which encompassed professional identity and professional standards as they related to this study. The implications for practice were discussed to acknowledge the learning gained from the study has meaning and potential to change how school systems engage, support, preserve, and grow the critical commodity of educational leaders. Followed by discussion of recommendations of future research to create the opportunity to think beyond the study boundaries and explore how to extend the reach of the knowledge of professional identity development to other contexts and influences. Finally, the study ends with conclusions to bring full circle the journey, learning acquired, appreciation for educational leaders, and ideas for future to propel further development of professional identity.

Interpretations of Findings

The themes generated from the findings derived from the descriptions of professional identity development and professional standards within the professional identity were developed to support answering the following research questions.

1. How do educational leaders describe their development of professional identity?
2. How do educational leaders describe the professional standards in their professional identity?

The five themes outlined in the previous chapter were developed through analysis of the data to create a meaningful and manageable representation of the totality of the data to use as a source for extrapolation and exploration of the findings to understand relationship to past research and future considerations. The themes of Capacity Creating Opportunities and Influencing Social Agents are discussed independently in this section from the context of the individual themes due to number of concrete associations to the literature review. The three remaining themes are discussed in a broader context as they relate to the literature review and their conceptualization in the professional standards.

Capacity Creating Opportunities

Development of professional identity happened through the capacity building opportunities encountered and embraced by educational leaders. Through the immersion in the position, the educational leaders substantiate their understanding of the profession and ability to react and maneuver to the shifting leadership demands faced on a daily basis. The participants of the study described their professional identity capacity building through similar lenses found in the literature relating to K-12 school systems; where the context of experience was of importance, but the greatest learning came from the ability to internalize in preparation for future

application of acquired knowledge and skills (Crow et al., 2016; Cruz-González et al., 2021; Møller, 2003; Moral Santaella, 2020; Real & Botía, 2017; Scribner & Crow, 2012). The authentic leadership experiences and autonomy to act in the schools, either as a provisional leader or as the positional leader contributed to building confidence and ability to adopt and enact a course of action (Ibarra, 1999; Trede et al., 2012) creating a sense of trust in themselves as educational leaders.

There was significant merit contributed to accessing and processing with other educational leaders as a way to validate their own decisions and practices, as well as an external measure to gauge their performance as an educational leader against the norms and standards of behavior accepted by professional peers (Sahlin, 2023). The challenges they faced as leaders were seen as rites of passage to better understand the complexities of leadership and as a mechanism of experimentation to establish their professional identity based upon how they adapted and negotiated the circumstances (Ibarra, 1999; Slay & Smith, 2011). As part of networking and debriefing interactions with other educational leaders, the exploration of self-knowledge coupled with the vicarious descriptions of shared experience influenced a deeper professional identity formation (Dobrow & Higgins, 2005; Ibarra, 1999) through construction and test of the assumptions and practices (Chin et al., 2020; Lucena et al., 2021a; Scribner & Crow, 2012) held by the participants.

Influencing Socializing Agents

Development of professional identity happened through the impact of influencing socializing agents, such as colleagues, encouraging leaders, mentors, and role models had on the educational leader. The importance of other leaders to the professional identity development of the participants was profoundly felt in their descriptions, exhilarations, and proclamations of how

they influenced and guided the participants. The term socialization was never used by the participants, but the exchanges, realizations, reflections, and interactions indicated a cultivation, acceptance, and assimilation that would specify the process of socialization as they described their doing and being among professionals (Pratt et al., 2006). The construction of their professional identity through the building blocks of inputs provided a dynamic series of interactions and collective engagements with the socializing agents creating a cooperative and introspective process (Caza & Creary, 2016; Ibarra, 1999; Kasperuniene & Zydziunaite, 2019; Trede et al., 2012). The other leaders represented group members that helped cultivate identity formation beyond just being in the role of leader, they also helped to create self-meaning and association with the profession through opportunity of dialogue, observation, examination, and reflection (Caza & Creary, 2016; Ibarra, 1999).

When referring to colleagues, the emphasis was on the power of collaboration through purposeful dissection of events and decisions, either as a sounding board exchange prior to or a debriefing after to explore the need for further development of skill, celebration, or investigation for future. By challenging the practices, execution, and thinking in a reciprocal manner, the development of relationships, trust, and sense of belonging between the educational leaders (Chin et al., 2020; Lucena et al., 2021b; Scribner & Crow, 2012) provided support and safety to grow their capacity in a non-threatening manner. The creation of a developmental network to provide a structure for self-assessment, practice, validation, and feedback underwrites professional identity development alongside other leaders (Caza & Creary, 2016; Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006), also contributing to the cohesion of congruent behaviors and beliefs across the educational system.

Being seen by others as a leader and worthy of encouragement along with opportunities to act and be among leaders allows for the identification and internalization of the behaviors, dispositions, and values of the profession (Caza & Creary, 2016; Öhlén & Segesten, 1998), thus providing a strong determinant of association and acceptance to the profession and influencing the identity formation (Chin et al., 2020) of the educational leader. The participants associated several descriptors to mentors and role models, seeing them as individuals to admire and follow as well as resources for growth, contemplation, and forthrightness to expand their abilities and journey as leaders. They represent a calibrating force to grow competence and vision for their aspirations and interactions signifying the attributes they value (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Caza & Creary, 2016; Chin et al., 2020) as well as how they are seen by other leaders aligning their identity within the socialization processes of the profession (DeRue & Ashford, 2010).

Drivers toward the Mission, Establishing Desired Culture, and Living Aspired Dispositions

Development of professional identity happens through the influence of the professional standards that inform, guide, and influence the educational leader. Attributes of the professional standards were found throughout the descriptions of the educational leaders and captured as findings, primarily in the following three themes: drivers toward the mission, establishing desired culture, and living aspired dispositions. These themes will be discussed more holistically in terms of practices, attributes, norms, behaviors, dispositions, and performance expectations of the educational system; paralleling how the standards were globally referenced in the literature review (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Caza et. al., 2016; Cruess, R. et al., 2016; Fitzgerald, 2020). Each of the professional standards were described in some manner by the educational leaders through the terminology, actions, rationales, and interactions they identified as the expectations,

beliefs, and roles they aspired to as the educational leader; the standards set direction for the educational leaders and directly influence the profession through the expectations (NPBEA, 2015). Although this study does not focus on the effectiveness of the educational leaders within the study, hallmarks from the standards associated with effective leadership were heard in the participant descriptions of their professional identity development. Found within the theme findings were the beliefs in collective commitments through collaboration and empowering the organization; working with and alongside constituents; creating belonging through supportive, caring relationships; establishing trust through openness, transparency, and honesty; and providing voice by creating a sense of invitation, appreciation, and perspective taking. All of these beliefs and characteristics are found in descriptions of effective leadership (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; Grissom et al., 2021; Gurr, 2017).

Each educational leader described seeking the trajectory of leadership to have a greater impact, indicating the aspiration to make a difference and adoption of the professional identity of leadership (Day & Sin, 2011). They understood their circle of influence in their professional role and the need to harness internal and external factors to shape the outreach and ability to meet the needs of students, families, and staff from a system and personal perspective (Crow et al., 2016; Fullan, 2010). The identity dimensions of collaborator, listener, reflective, learner, and supporter were found in the narratives of the participants indicating the educational leaders were trying to extract and make meaning of practices oriented toward the norms and values of successful practices (Cruz-González et al., 2021; Hattie & Smith, 2021) associated with their professional identity. As the participants described their advocacy to reduce barriers, increase equity, promote greater access, and allocate resources for needs they understood the power of education as a change agent and they framed their professional identity within the standards illustrating a

dedication to the "expectations, ethical values, ideology, and conduct" (Jackson, 2016, p. 840) associated with being an educational leader.

The connections between the themes and literature review authenticate the descriptions of professional identity development and position the professional standards as integral to the overall representation of the educational leader. Educational leaders build their capacity through discrete influences of experience and interactions as they navigate their internal drive and external expectations to establish a culture that supports the personal and broader mission they aspire to as educational leaders. From here, the implications for practice provides the next steps to discern how to channel what was learned from the educational leaders in answering the research questions to a tangible arena accessible by the consumers within a school system or other organization.

Implications for Practice

Three main areas of practice will be discussed from the context of informing leaders within a school system on how to: support and grow current leaders through dialogue and access, infuse the repository of professional standards as a resource to enhance expertise, and harness the power of leaders within the system as developers of the professional identity of the next generation of educational leaders. Two of the greatest commodities to be utilized by the practices already exist within the school system, the plentitude of challenging varied experiences and the educational leaders within the system. These practices are based on the premise that professional identity development is ongoing and is important as it serves to frame, connect, and organize all of the experiences, knowledge, behaviors, beliefs, and aspirations of the educational leader allowing them to make the nuanced decisions and actions associated with leadership.

Professional Identity Support and Growth

All of the educational leaders involved in this study articulated that sheer experience was a critical attribute to their capacity as leaders. Experience alone did not necessitate impact it was the coupling of experience with socializing agents, autonomy, variation, and reflection. To support and grow the professional identities of leaders, a systematic approach to collaboration for these professionals is vital. There needs to be a balance between formal opportunities and the permission to network on their own with other leaders. It will not suffice to just schedule a time for leaders to interact, there will be required groundwork to foster relationships and knowledge of socializing agents to maximize the exchanges. Knowing the strengths and backgrounds of other leaders allows for differentiation and alignment of contribution to the needs of the developing professional identity. Working to establish a network of educational leaders within the system to be used as resource allows educational leaders to widen their safety net to support times when they need input to bolster and reinforce their professional identity.

Systems leaders need to create a community of practice (socializing agents network) for the educational leaders that is based on a deep understanding of the skill sets of each leader involved, as well as the establishment of trusting relationships that foster transparent and vulnerable dialogue about the practices to the degree that there is mutual benefit and forecasting to future experiences. Formal collaboration opportunities or forums designed to celebrate how leaders applied their skills to solve a problem or had successful outcomes based on their leadership actions need to be facilitated by district/system leaders as a means of recognizing professional attributes and dispositions associated with expertise. Forums created with other leaders to discuss and dissect real-world examples support the need to process and immerse vicariously those leaders into the varied conditions and experiences to strengthen capacity and

preparation for encountering or transferring into their own context. Professional development for educational leaders is another opportunity when socializing agents networks can be fostered by allocating time for leaders to process the new learning with others. Increasing the interactions between leaders focused on application of professional practices in a non-judgmental learning environment, relationships and trust will be formed over time.

Another component of the community of practice is the purposeful mobilization of the socializing agents network during times of crisis, as well as periodic access to maintain relationships and opportunity to dialogue about ongoing demands experienced by educational leaders. Bringing the educational leaders together to debrief after a crisis or stressful event allows them to build their collective capacity and supports the aspired dispositions of reflective learner and listening collaborator. These would be times that transparency and vulnerability can be encouraged and demonstrated to build trust, especially if the system can establish the leaders involved had the autonomy to address the challenge that were faced. Beyond spontaneous events, a systemic approach of planned opportunities allows for the capacity creating influence of a socializing agents network to be provided in a more reliable pattern to develop professional identity. A system should backward map reoccurring or system-wide events that would benefit from collaboration between its leaders. Examples of such events could be changes in accreditation regulations, district initiatives, teacher evaluations, monitoring instruction, engaging parents, and planning for professional development. Allowing the educational leaders to collectively evaluate practice, plan approaches, and prepare for change management as a community would allow them to align and build their attributes, values, and actions as professionals.

The questions from the study could be modified as conversation starters to be used as part of the socializing agents network to connect the educational leaders through personal story and engage in conversations that provide insight to their professional identity development. The following interview questions (see appendix C for the full list of interview questions) would be low-risk questions to learn more about their colleagues' backgrounds and influences:

- Tell me about how your educational leadership journey began?
- If you were talking to new (leadership title) about what drew you to the profession, what would you tell them?
- What is your WHY as an educational leader?

If you are the system leader, the following questions could be modified to learn about what is important or needed by the educational leaders in your system:

- What values and/or beliefs do you feel define who you are as a professional?
- As you imagine your future as a (leadership title), what do you need to grow and strengthen your expertise?
- As an educational leader in (name location), what has kept you engaged and committed to being a (leadership title) here?

As relationships develop among educational leaders, more challenging questions about practice and decisions could be used to deepen the scenarios and level of reflection. The social validation and receiving narrative feedback fosters internalization of identity and emboldens leaders to further their actions (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). The commonality and diversity found among the leaders could lead to richer more cognitive discussion and serve as a measure for other leaders to know who to involve when debriefing or planning around a particular issue.

Knowing that professional identity is developed through the influencing constructs surrounding the educational leader, the opportunity to expand access to new environments and encounter inputs not normally found in the circle of influence is essential to diversifying experience and increasing the plasticity of thinking. Networking beyond people as agents of socialization to visualizing the entire system as opportunity to expand knowledge, experience, and perspective. A system could create observation times for educational leaders to visit schools with different demographics, grade-levels, or programs to create dialogue and perspective between colleagues about commonalities and challenges in other contexts. Larger systems could expand outside of schools to the district office and invite school leaders to observe and engage with district leaders as they contemplate decisions that impact on a greater scale, such as district-wide initiatives, budgeting, resource allocations, and operations.

Understanding the life of an educational leader is already fully occupied with the demands of the position, it will be essential to strategically consider how to benefit the individuals involved and incorporate ways the endeavor does not compound any vulnerabilities of the leader. The interpersonal relationships and investment of energy into the collective organization requires positive leadership experiences to bolster and sustain the social and professional ties (Day & Harrison, 2007; Zheng et al., 2021). To help align those strategic considerations of support to foundational and guiding principles of leadership, the professional standards (NPBEA, 2015) will be discussed in the next implication for practice.

Professional Standards to Enhance Expertise

As the educational leaders described their professional identity, the professional standards were infused within their narration. The standards associated with a profession are considered part of the indoctrinating resources to understand what it means to be a member of

the profession as they speak to the norms, beliefs, and attributes that lead to acceptance by the socializing agents network of the profession (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016, Fitzgerald, 2020). Systems leaders should evaluate their organization's usage and knowledge of the professional standards as a resource to determine areas of strength and growth, from the organization perspective and individual educational leadership pursuits, as a practice within the continuous improvement process. "The standards can guide the operationalization of practice and outcomes for leadership development and evaluation" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 6) as they become part of the information and vernacular of accomplishment in the district and function as foundational resource to set direction and accountability.

Although all of the professional standards for educational leaders were described during the study by the educational leaders, the elements within each standard were not fully captured, and it is within those details that effective actions can be completely actualized and substantially influence professional identity. The professional standards relating to this study were "organized around domains, qualities, and values of leadership work that research and practice indicate contribute to students' academic success and well-being" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 6) serving as repository of descriptions of what an effective leader should exemplify and strive toward. There is a level of innate and instinctual attributes found within the standards, but through deeper cognitive engagement and reflection with the socializing agents networks, the standards can serve as a beacon that gives direction and a measure of viable and guaranteed processes and interactions experienced by the constituents within and engaging with the organization.

System and individual educational leaders need to utilize the professional standards as a guiding document to enhance professionalism and expertise. The professional standards outlined by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015) consists of ten standards

supported by descriptors of the work necessary to meet the standard. There are a total of 83 descriptors that illustrate what effective leaders should tend to promote academic success and well-being of each student. It would not serve an educational leader or system to address all of these at once as it would overwhelm and not allow focus. Engagement with the educational leaders to identify areas of growth and substantiate strength within the standards will provide opportunity to access and reflect upon the "salient dimensions of the work involved" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 8) to perform the standard. These dimensions would be a foundation and measure for developing the professional identity of the educational leaders; creating a consistent, accessible, agreed upon research-based framework which supports individual growth and elevates educational outcomes to a higher level.

One way for a system to implement the practice of using professional standards would be to use them as a resource in the needs assessment process to inform, measure, and guide actions of the system and educational leaders. From direct observations, and the assumption that my organization is not unique, the utilization of professional standards is most likely not part of the normal collection of resources and driving documents used with educational leaders. If that is the case, a system would start with overarching domains of the professional standards to develop familiarity and utilize the dimension descriptors as anchors for discussion about current and desired states within the district and at the school level. The purposeful interaction with the professional standards during leadership trainings, review of district and school data, evaluation of programs, plans for engaging family and community, or adoptions of policies are just some of the ways the standards can serve as a model for the educational leaders within a system. Professional standards can serve as the aspiration and model of comparison. For instance, do the artifacts and processes in the system and schools that are in place to communicate vision,

mission, and core values align with the descriptors and expectations of the standards? Are the educational leaders in the system allocating energy and resources to actions that are indicated by the standards as effective practice? These type of questions activate deeper thought about actions and outcomes of educational leaders and should be part of their professional community discussions. This enactment of critical attribute analysis and application of professional standard to the experiences and contexts of the educational leader will further develop the professional identity of the educational leaders within the system to support their ability to advocate for students and resources, harness the power of education, increase impact, and overcome challenges.

Leaders as Developers of Professional Identity

Professional identity is probably not a term educational leaders would use in conjunction with descriptions of the expectations and characteristics they attribute to who they are as a leader. Before this study, it was a term that I had not heard, although I believe I understood its essence as my why. As the educational leaders describe their practices, thoughts, and values that influence how they tackle challenges, establish direction, and prioritize energies they were illuminating their professional identity (Caza & Creary, 2016; Cruess et al., 2016). Each of them contributed influence, either through direct action or subconsciously, to another educational leader who impacted their path and professional development. How the influence was actuated varied, the constant was that there was an influencing act, accidentally or calculating, that the educational leader interpreted as the push. The push happened as a means of encouragement, opportunity, or experience opening their eyes to leadership in some capacity. For a system to harness the power of its leaders to develop other leaders, then chance must be removed from the equation and specific activities need to be designed to build the pipeline of future leaders.

The concept of a building a pipeline of leaders is not new; there are many studies of the effectiveness of leadership pipeline programs available to a system to investigate for a more complex and comprehensive approach (Wang et al., 2022), than what will be described in this section. Of the educational leaders involved in the study, only a few referenced a formalized program or pipeline of leadership development. Where they put their energies of description was toward the real-world experiences, open leadership positions that were suggested to them, and mentor/role model relationships that sparked their leadership journey. All of these were informally occurring and involved the socializing agents and interactions that already existed in their environments. Therefore, a system can start small and think about outreach to potential leaders through incremental steps to begin formalizing leadership encouragement.

Designating periodical times each year as part of the socializing agent networking to brainstorm ways to provide leadership opportunities to promising staff. These opportunities need to include a level of autonomy and decision making, as this was valued by the educational leaders in the study. The routine practice should be exposing all staff to the professional standards for educational leaders to cultivate a community of practice that examines and explores decisions through the perspective that everyone is a leader as they work to ensure academic success and well-being of students. Identify ways to relinquish control by the formal leaders and create opportunities for teachers and developing leaders to take the reins to build their capacity and collectively commit to the continuous improvement process in the school system.

All of the educational leaders in the study spoke to the importance of fostering relationships with staff to establish the desired culture where working alongside and providing voice lead to a greater sense of trust and ownership in addressing and overcoming challenges. Designing job-embedded ways for staff to practice leadership skills and to have authority over

projects reduces the weight on leaders while building capacity of others. To encourage participation, a mechanism of recognition of informal leaders by the system would substantiate and honor the commitment and value of contribution, elevating the professional community status and highlighting the kind of work that is important to the mission and vision of the system. The recognitions with accolades from the formal leaders about the outcomes could provide the push that contributes to the development of the professional identity of seeing self as a leader.

Cultivating the type of organization that sees accepting a leadership position as a celebration, no matter the circumstance, and leveraging the power of relationships to encourage pursuit of open leadership positions through conversation and reassurance. The system should evaluate how it is promoting and advertising leadership positions within before it communicates outwardly to emphasize the expectation and belief that growing staff for positions is seen as a critical and worthwhile endeavor. When internal candidates are hired, is there widely shared communication to honor the attributes of the new leader? Providing prominence to the experiences and achievements earned while working within the district. As individuals earn higher degrees that open doors for more formalized leadership roles, are these individuals seen as potential future leader candidates to grow under the guidance of existing leaders? Are school leaders asked by hiring committees or human resources for candidate names within the district so they can reach out and encourage them to apply for open positions? The most powerful aspect of the practice of seeing leaders as developers of professional identity is that the access, knowledge, and expertise are already within the system and these can be harnessed by asking questions and seeking opportunities of engagement with potential leaders. Systems should evaluate their practices for recruitment, internship, field experience, and mentorship to leverage existing socializing agents networks to grow potential leaders.

Recommendations for Research

This study focused on the influencing constructs of professional identity independently from other identities, such as personal identity and work identity, even though these identities could also impact professional identity development. In the narratives of the educational leaders, there were references that indicated their leadership journey had unique attributes associated with their personal identity and development of work identity. These were not highlighted in the findings to protect the anonymity of the participants. Within their stories and examples they shared, there were cognizant differences that provided insight concerning the burdens they bear that were not expressed by other participants. As districts look within their demographics of employees, the professional standards for educational leaders can provide guidance to the types of actions, values, and responsiveness to support the professional identity development of all staff. A broader study targeted to a more heterogeneous group of educational leaders would allow for exploration of the impact of personal identity attributes in relation to professional identity development.

The study participants all represented educational leaders that made at least one hierarchal leadership position move within the district and the participants represented varied years and type of experience. The greatest variation in the findings between elementary and secondary experiences were descriptions by elementary principals that addressed a lack of access to a socializing agents network within the same building. The isolation found within their narratives provides an avenue to further explore; to understand how working within a school without other administrative support impacts development of their leadership capacities.

The literature review did not uncover a professional identity survey that aligned to the focus and purpose of this study. As an extension, the categories and themes could provide a

preliminary structure to develop survey questions regarding the professional identity of educational leaders. The Professional Identity Five-Factor Scale (PIFFS) instrument is based on five dimensions of professional development that align to several of the main findings in this study: experience within the profession, having a professional role models, and professional practice (Daniëls et al., 2019; Tan et al., 2017). Utilization of a survey to gather baseline data across participants would have strengthened the interviewing process of this study to illicit richer descriptions due to the ability to start the interviews with introductory background to the professional identity of the participant.

Knowing the importance of strong leadership in schools, an extension of this study would be to investigate the themes and categories from the lens of the research on effective principals. A starting place would be the study commissioned by the Wallace Foundation that reviewed two decades of research to identify three overlapping realms of skills: instruction, people, and the organization; and four classes of behaviors: engaging instructionally focused interactions with teachers, building a productive school climate, facilitating productive collaboration and professional learning communities, and managing personnel and resources strategically (Grissom et al., 2021). There are parallels between the descriptions of the participants in this study and the classes of behaviors outlined, specifically from the perspective of establishing desired culture, living aspired dispositions, and drivers toward the mission themes. Research of these in tandem would lead to more impactful implications of practice to develop professional identity from a more targeted lens of the effective principal.

Conclusion

I embrace a deep appreciation of the power of education and the importance of the educational leaders who bravely persist and thrive in the complex and dynamic world of a school

system. The candor, vulnerability, and trust that was brought forward by the ten participants contributed significantly to the quality of information and knowledge gained from the study to foster a better understanding of educational leaders' professional identity development and integration of professional standards in real-world application and interactions.

The preconceptions and ideas that existed before the study began hold true at the end in that I believe in the magnitude of effective leadership. The investment into understanding how to nurture leaders' growth and sustain connections to the profession of education leadership is of high prominence and a worthwhile endeavor. The interview process was a cathartic experience for me that created increased connection to the education leaders through their accounts of how they became leaders and the influencing events, people, and experiences that shaped their professional identity. The narratives of the educational leaders in the study reinforced the reality of the demands and complexities they encounter. Situating even deeper the need of the educational system to cultivate and maintain the leaders within and implement ways to grow new leaders, which are fortified with the capacities, mindset, and support to fearlessly step into the educational leader profession.

Through the descriptions of educational leaders, I was able to understand the development of their professional identity. In essence, I learned about their WHY. In their final interview, I asked them "what was their why for being an educational leader?" and every response aligned with one of the five themes of professional identity. They know who they are as leaders, they have a professional identity that encompasses all of the influencing constructs and professional standards. Each of them has their own identity that is unique to them, as well as the cohesiveness of the dispositions, attributes, and norms that unites the profession of educational leader together in supporting the success and well-being of students. To impact educational

leaders, you must support their success and well-being by tending to their professional identity development through opportunities: to deepen their capacity to accomplish their mission, to engage with other leaders, and to allow them to establish themselves as the leaders that they aspire to be.

References

- Alvesson, M., Lee Ashcraft, K., & Thomas, R. (2008). Identity matters: Reflections on the construction of identity scholarship in organization studies. *Organization (London, England)*, 15(1), 5–28. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508407084426>
- Ashforth, B. E., & Schinoff, B. S. (2016). Identity under construction: How individuals come to define themselves in organizations. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 3(1), 111–137. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-041015-062322>
- Barbour, J. B., & Lammers, J. C. (2015). Measuring professional identity: a review of the literature and a multilevel confirmatory factor analysis of professional identity constructs. *Journal of Professions and Organization*, 2(1), 38–60. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jpo/jou009>
- Bhattacharya, K. (2017). *Fundamentals of qualitative research a practical guide*. Routledge.
- Branch, G. F., Hanushek, E. A., & Rivkin, S. G. (2013). School leaders matter. *Education Next*, 13(1), 63–69.
- Brown, A. D. (2015). Identities and identity work in organizations. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 17(1), 20–40. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12035>
- Browne-Ferrigno, T. (2003). Becoming a principal: Role conception, initial socialization, role-identity transformation, purposeful engagement. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 39(4), 468–503. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X03255561>
- Burke, P. J. (2006). Identity change. *Soc Psychol Q*, 69(1), 81–96. <https://doi.org/10.1177/019027250606900106>
- Burke, P. J., & Reitzes, D. C. (1981). The link between identity and role performance. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 44(2), 83–92. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3033704>

- Bøje, J. D., & Frederiksen, L. F. (2021). Leaders of the profession and professional leaders. School leaders making sense of themselves and their jobs. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 24(3), 291–312.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2019.1591515>
- Brinkmann, S. (2023) Qualitative interviews. In R. Tierney, F. Rizvi, & K. Ercikan (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of education*. (4th ed., pp. 210-218). Elsevier.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-818630-5.11022-X>.
- Cain, L.K., Williams, R. E., & Bradshaw, V. (2023) Establishing quality in qualitative research: trustworthiness, validity, and a lack of consensus. In R. Tierney, F. Rizvi, & K. Ercikan (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of education*. (4th ed., pp. 336-350). Elsevier.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-818630-5.11032-2>.
- Calvert, M., Lewis, T., & Spindler, J. (2011). Negotiating professional identities in higher education: Dilemmas and priorities of academic staff. *Research in Education (Manchester)*, 86(1), 25–38. <https://doi.org/10.7227/RIE.86.3>
- Caza, B. B., & Creary, S. (2016). The construction of professional identity. In A. Wilkinson, D. Hislop, & C. Coupland (Eds.), *Perspectives on contemporary professional works*. (pp. 259–285). Edward Elgar.
- Caza, B. B., Vough, H., & Puranik, H. (2018). Identity work in organizations and occupations: Definitions, theories, and pathways forward. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 39(7), 889–910. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2318>
- Cerulo, K. A. (1997). Identity construction: New issues, new directions. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 23(1), 385–409. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.23.1.385>

- Chin, D., Phillips, Y., Woo, M. T., Clemans, A., & Yeong, P. K. (2020). Key components that contribute to professional identity development in internships for Singapore's tertiary institutions: A systematic review. *Asian Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 10(1), 89-113.
- Clarke, C. A., Brown, A. D., & Hailey, V. H. (2009). Working identities? Antagonistic discursive resources and managerial identity: Constructing identity in organizations. *Human Relations (New York)*, 62(3), 323–352.
- Cowin, L. S., Johnson, M., Wilson, I., & Borgese, K. (2013). The psychometric properties of five professional identity measures in a sample of nursing students. *Nurse Education Today*, 33(6), 608–613. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2012.07.008>
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. (2nd ed.). SAGE.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. (3rd ed.) SAGE.
- Crow, G. M., & Møller, J. (2017). Professional identities of school leaders across international contexts: An introduction and rationale. *Educational Management, Administration & Leadership*, 45(5), 749–758. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143217714485>
- Crow, G., Day, C., & Møller, J. (2017). Framing research on school principals' identities. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 20(3), 265–277. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2015.1123299>
- Cruess, R. L., Cruess, S. R., & Steinert, Y. (2016). Amending Miller's pyramid to include professional identity formation. *Acad Med*, 91(2), 180–185. <https://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.0000000000000913>

- Cruess, S. R., Cruess, R. L., & Steinert, Y. (2019). Supporting the development of a professional identity: General principles. *Med Teach*, 41(6), 641–649.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2018.1536260>
- Cruz-González, C., Lucena, C. L., & Segovia, J. D. (2021). A systematic review of principals' leadership identity from 1993 to 2019. *Educational Management, Administration & Leadership*, 49(1), 31–53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143219896053>
- Cruz-González, C., Viseu, S., & Segovia, J. D. (2020). Research of professional identity of female school principals through life stories. *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social and Community Studies*, 16(1), 163–179. <https://doi.org/10.18848/2324-7576/CGP/v16i01/163-179>
- Daniëls, E., Hondeghem, A., & Dochy, F. (2019). A review on leadership and leadership development in educational settings. *Educational Research Review*, 27, 110–125.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2019.02.003>
- Darling-Hammond, L., Wechsler, M. E., Levin, S., Leung-Gagné, M., & Tozer, S. (2022). *Developing effective principals: What kind of learning matters?* Learning Policy Institute.
- Day, D. V., & Harrison, M. M. (2007). A multilevel, identity-based approach to leadership development. *Human Resource Management Review*, 17(4), 360–373.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2007.08.007>
- Day, D. V., & Sin, H.-P. (2011). Longitudinal tests of an integrative model of leader development: Charting and understanding developmental trajectories. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 22(3), 545–560. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2011.04.011>

- Day, D. V., Fleenor, J. W., Atwater, L. E., Sturm, R. E., & Mckee, R. A. (2014). Advances in leader and leadership development: A review of 25 years of research and theory. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 25(1), 63. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2013.11.004>
- DeRue, D. S., & Ashford, S. J. (2010). Who will lead and who will follow? a social process of leadership identity construction in organizations. *The Academy of Management Review*, 35(4), 627–647. <https://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.2010.53503267>
- Dobrow, S. R., & Higgins, M. C. (2005). Developmental networks and professional identity: a longitudinal study. *Career Development International*, 10(6/7), 567–583. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13620430510620629>
- Dutton, J. E., Roberts, L. M., & Bednar, J. (2010). Pathways for positive identity construction at work: four types of positive identity and the building of social resources. *The Academy of Management Review*, 35(2), 265–293. <https://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.2010.48463334>
- Ely, R. J., Ibarra, H., & Kolb, D. M. (2011). Taking gender into account: Theory and design for women’s leadership development programs. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 10(3), 474–493. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2010.0046>
- Epitropaki, O., Kark, R., Mainemelis, C., & Lord, R. G. (2017). Leadership and followership identity processes: A multilevel review. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 28(1), 104–129. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2016.10.003>
- Fitzgerald, A. (2020). Professional identity: A concept analysis. *Nurs Forum*, 55(3), 447–472. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nuf.12450>
- Fullan, M. (2010). *All systems go: The change imperative for whole system reform*. Corwin.
- Gee, J. P. (2000). Identity as an analytic lens for research in education. *Review of Research in Education*, 25, 99–125. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732x025001099>

- Geijssel, F., & Meijers, F. (2005). Identity learning: the core process of educational change. *Educational Studies*, 31(4), 419–430. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03055690500237488>
- Gini, A. (1998). Work, Identity and Self: How We Are Formed by the Work We Do. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 17(7), 707–714. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1017967009252>
- Glesne, C. (2011). *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction, 4th Edition*. Pearson.
- Grbich, C. (2010). Qualitative data management (Vol. 6, pp. 463–474).
- Grissom, J. A., Egalite, A. J., & Lindsay, C. A. (2021). *How principals affect students and schools: A systematic synthesis of two decades of research. Research Report*. Wallace Foundation. <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/principalsynthesis>.
- Grodzki, J. (2011). Role identity: At the intersection of organizational socialization and individual sensemaking of new principals and vice-principals. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, (127), 1–47.
- Gunnulfsen, A. E., Jensen, R., & Møller, J. (2022). Looking back and forward: a critical review of the history and future progress of the ISSPP. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 60(1), 5–20. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-04-2021-0088>
- Guthrie, G. (2010). *Basic research methods: An entry to social science research*. SAGE Publications.
- Hattie, J., & Smith, R. L. (2021). *10 mindframes for leaders: The Visible learning approach to school success*. Corwin.
- Healey, A. C. (2009). *Female perspectives of professional identity and success in the counseling field* (thesis).

- Healey, A. C., & Hays, D. G. (2012). A discriminant analysis of gender and counselor professional identity development. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 90(1), 55–62. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1556-6676.2012.00008.x>
- Herman, R., Gates, S. M., Arifkhanova, A., Barrett, M., Bega, A., Chavez-Herrerias, E. R., Han, E., Harris, M., Migacheva, K., Ross, R., Leschitz, J. T., & Wrabel, S. L. (2017). *School leadership interventions under the every student succeeds act: Evidence review. Updated and Expanded. Research Report. RR-1550-3-WF*. RAND Corporation.
- Hill, L. H. (2005). Concept mapping to encourage meaningful student learning. *Adult Learning*, 16(3–4), 7–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/104515950501600302>
- Hogg, M. A., Terry, D. J., & White, K. M. (1995). A tale of two theories: A critical comparison of identity theory with social identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 58(4), 255–269. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2787127>
- Ibarra, H. (1999). Provisional Selves: Experimenting with image and identity in professional adaptation. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(4), 764–791. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2667055>
- Ibarra, H. (2004). *Working identity: Unconventional strategies for reinventing your career*. Harvard Business Review Press.
- Ibarra, H., & Petriglieri, J. L. (2010). Identity work and play. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 23(1), 10–25. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09534811011017180>
- International Successful School Principals Project. (2015) *International successful school principals project (isspp): multi-perspective research on school principals*. <https://www.uv.uio.no/ils/english/research/projects/isspp/brochure/isspp1709-brochure-final.pdf>

- Jackson, D. (2016). Developing pre-professional identity in undergraduates through work-integrated learning. *Higher Education*, 74(5), 833–853. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-016-0080-2>
- Johnson, J. L., Adkins, D., & Chauvin, S. (2020). A review of the quality indicators of rigor in qualitative research. *Am J Pharm Educ*, 84(1), 138–146. <https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe7120>
- Kasperuniene, J., & Zydziunaite, V. (2019). A systematic literature review on professional identity construction in social media. *SAGE Open*, 9(1), 215824401982884. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019828847>
- Lammers, J. C., Atouba, Y. L., & Carlson, E. J. (2013). Which identities matter? A mixed-method study of group, organizational, and professional identities and their relationship to burnout. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 27(4), 503–536. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318913498824>
- Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2020). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership revisited. *School Leadership & Management*, 40(1), 5–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2019.1596077>
- Leithwood, K., Seashore, K., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *Review of research: How leadership influences student learning*. Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement. <https://hdl.handle.net/11299/2035>.
- Levin, S., Scott, C., Yang, M., Leung, M., & Bradley, K. (2020). *Supporting a strong, stable principal workforce: What matters and what can be done*. Research Report. Learning Policy Institute.

- Lord, R. G., & Hall, R. J. (2005). Identity, deep structure and the development of leadership skill. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 16(4), 591–615.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2005.06.003>
- Lucena Rodríguez, C., Cruz González, C., & Domingo Segovia, J. (2021a). Researching the professional identity of school principals through case study. *The International Journal of Organizational Diversity*, 21(2), 47–59. <https://doi.org/10.18848/2328-6261/CGP/v21i02/47-59>
- Lucena Rodríguez, C., Cruz González, C., & Domingo Segovia, J. (2021b). The identity of principals as school leaders: An exploratory study from external perspectives. *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies*, 17(1), 31–43.
<https://doi.org/10.18848/2327-008X/CGP/v17i01/31-43>
- Malmqvist, J., Hellberg, K., Möllås, G., Rose, R., & Shevlin, M. (2019). Conducting the pilot study: A neglected part of the research process? Methodological findings supporting the importance of piloting in qualitative research studies. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18, 160940691987834. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919878341>
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (1999). *Designing qualitative research*. Sage.
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2017). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. Langara College.
- Mihas, P. (2023). Qualitative research methods: Approaches to qualitative data analysis. In R. Tierney, F. Rizvi, & K. Ercikan (Eds.) *International Encyclopedia of Education*. (4th ed., pp. 302–313). Elsevier. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-818630-5.11029-2>

- Moral Santaella, C. (2020). A comparative study of the professional identity of two secondary school principals in disadvantaged contexts. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 19(2), 145–170. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2018.1513152>
- Mpungose, J. (2010). Constructing principals' professional identities through life stories : an exploration. *South African Journal of Education*, 30(4), 527–537.
<https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v30n4a387>
- Møller, J. (2003). Gender and leadership identities — Negotiated realities for women as school principals. *Improving Schools*, 6(3), 23–44.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/136548020300600305>
- National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015). *Professional standards for educational leaders*. https://www.npbea.org/wpcontent/uploads/2017/06/Professional-Standards-for-Educational-Leaders_2015.pdf
- Nicholson, N. (1984). A theory of work role transitions. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 29(2), 172–191. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2393172>
- Nordholm, D., Arnqvist, A., & Nihlfors, E. (2023). Principals' identity - developing and validating an analysis instrument in the Swedish context. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 26(2), 185–200.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2020.1804621>
- Novak, J. D., & Cañas, A. J. (2006). The Origins of the concept mapping tool and the continuing evolution of the tool. *Information Visualization*, 5(3), 175–184.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.ivs.9500126>

- Öhlén, J., & Segesten, K. (1998). The professional identity of the nurse: concept analysis and development. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 28(4), 720–727.
<https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2648.1998.00704.x>
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. (2nd ed.). SAGE.
- Pegg, A. E. (2007). Learning for school leadership: using concept mapping to explore learning from everyday experience. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 10(3), 265–282. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603120701257412>
- Peshkin, A. (1988). In search of subjectivity—One’s own. *Educational Researcher*, 17(7), 17–21. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X017007017>
- Pratt, M. G., Rockmann, K. W., & Kaufmann, J. B. (2006). Constructing professional identity: The role of work and identity learning cycles in the customization of identity among medical residents. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(2), 235–262.
<https://doi.org/10.5465/AMJ.2006.20786060>
- Puglia, B. (2008). *The professional identity of counseling students in master’s level CACREP accredited programs*. (Publication No.3324071) [Doctoral Dissertation, Old Dominion University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.
- Ritacco Real, M., & Bolívar Botía, A. (2018). School principals in Spain: An unstable professional identity. *International Journal of Educational Leadership and Management*, 6(1), 18-39. <https://doi.org/10.17583/ijelm.2018.2110>
- Ruggirello, A. (2022). *New research points to a looming principal shortage*. Wallace Foundation. <https://wallacefoundation.org/resource/article/new-research-points-looming-principal->

shortage#:~:text=A%20staggering%204%20out%20of,cite%20for%20accelerating%20th
is%20decision.

Sahlin, S. (2023). Professional development of school principals – how do experienced school leaders make sense of their professional learning? *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, e174114322311682.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432231168235>

Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. (4th ed.). Sage.

Scanlan, J. N. (2018). Evaluation of the construct and internal validity of the Professional Identity Questionnaire: A Rasch analysis. *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal*, 65(5), 395–404. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1440-1630.12489>

Scribner, S. P., & Crow, G. M. (2012). Employing professional identities: Case study of a high school principal in a reform setting. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 11(3), 243–274.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2012.654885>

Seidman, I. (2019). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. (5th ed.). Teachers College Press.

Sinek, S. (2011). *Find your why: How great leaders inspire everyone to action*. (2nd ed.). Portfolio/Penguin.

Sinek, S., Mead, D., & Docker, P. (2017). *Find your why: A practical guide to discovering purpose for you or your team*. Portfolio/Penguin.

Slay, H. S., & Smith, D. A. (2011). Professional identity construction: Using narrative to understand the negotiation of professional and stigmatized cultural identities. *Human Relations (New York)*, 64(1), 85–107. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726710384290>

- Stahl, N. A., & King, J. R. (2020). Expanding approaches for research: Understanding and using trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Developmental Education*, 44(1), 26–28.
- Stets, J. E., & Burke, P. J. (2000). Identity theory and social identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 63(3), 224–237. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2695870>
- Stevenson, H. (2006). Moving towards, into and through principalship: Developing a framework for researching the career trajectories of school leaders. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 44(4), 408–420. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230610676604>
- Stone-Johnson, C., & Weiner, J. (2022). Theorizing school leadership as a profession: A qualitative exploration of the work of school leaders. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 60(4), 386–402. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-05-2021-0112>
- Stryker, S., & Burke, P. J. (2000). The past, present, and future of an identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 63(4), 284–297. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2695840>
- Tan, C. P., Van der Molen, H. T., & Schmidt, H. G. (2017). A measure of professional identity development for professional education. *Studies in Higher Education (Dorchester-on-Thames)*, 42(8), 1504–1519. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2015.1111322>
- Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight “big-tent” criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(10), 837–851.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410383121>
- Trede, F., Macklin, R., & Bridges, D. (2012). Professional identity development: A review of the higher education literature. *Studies in Higher Education (Dorchester-on-Thames)*, 37(3), 365–384. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2010.521237>

- Vough, H. (2012). Not all identifications are created equal: Exploring employee accounts for workgroup, organizational, and professional identification. *Organization Science (Providence, R.I.)*, 23(3), 778–800. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1110.0654>
- Wang, E. L., Gates, S. M., & Herman, R. (2022). *District partnerships with university principal preparation programs: A summary of findings for school district leaders. RAND Principal Preparation Series. Volume 3, Part 4. Research Report. RR-A413-6*. RAND Corporation.
- Wheeldon, J. (2011). Is a picture worth a thousand words? Using mind maps to facilitate participant recall in qualitative research. *Qualitative Report*, 16(2), 509–522.
- Wheeldon, J., & Faubert, J. (2009). Framing experience: Concept maps, mind maps, and data collection in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8(3), 68–83. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690900800307>
- Woo, H., & Henfield, M. S. (2015). Professional identity scale in counseling (PISC): Instrument development and validation. *Journal of Counselor Leadership and Advocacy*, 2(2), 93–112. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2326716X.2015.1040557>
- Woo, H., Lu, J., & Bang, N. (2018). Professional identity scale in counseling (PISC): Revision of factor structure and psychometrics. *Journal of Counselor Leadership and Advocacy*, 5(2), 137–152. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2326716X.2018.1452078>
- Yelich Biniecki, S. M., & Conceição, S. C. (2016). Using concept maps to engage adult learners in critical analysis. *Adult Learning*, 27(2), 51–59. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1045159515604148>

Zheng, W., Meister, A., & Caza, B. B. (2021). The stories that make us: Leaders' origin stories and temporal identity work. *Human Relations (New York)*, 74(8), 1178–1210.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726720909864>

Appendix A - Recruitment Email

Email sent from Kansas State University email address.

(Name of Recipient)

You are receiving this email as an invitation to participate in a research study I am conducting as a Kansas State University doctoral student. In the email below, I have outlined general information about the study and I have attached a copy of the consent form for your review.

Title of Study: Exploration of professional identity development of PK-12 educational leaders in a public school system

The purpose of this study is to understand how educational leaders develop their professional identity. In general, professional identity can be thought of as the individual's association and abilities regarding the knowledge, skills, performance, beliefs, values, and dispositions of a specific profession. For this study, professional identity is explored through the lens of educational leader as the profession. The learning gained from the study will allow the researcher to cultivate thoughts and practices that will be used to guide, encourage, support, and maintain educational leaders. You are being asked to participate in the research due to your educational leader position in a public school system.

Involvement in the study would include participation in two face-to-face interviews and completion of a concept map. The two interviews would last approximately 60 minutes each. The location, date, and time of the interview would be selected by you. Completion of the concept map will occur after the first interview (directions will be provided). Once the concept map is completed the second interview will be conducted. The projected timeline is to conduct the interviews prior to March 2024.

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw from the study at any point. Your participation will not be disclosed and your identity will be kept private. No

personally identifiable information will be attached to information you provide. All participants will be given a pseudonym and the district will not be named in the research.

As a current educational leader, the perceptions and descriptions of the experiences and influences involved in your professional identity development are a valuable resource to this research to explore and gain meaning from. Participating will give you an opportunity to reflect and share about your own professional journey and highlight the important contributing factors.

Thank you for considering being part of the research. If you have any questions, need more information about the research, or would like to volunteer for the study please feel free to contact me by email or phone (785-577-6283).

Sincerely,

Shanna Rector
Doctoral Student
Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education

If you have any concerns or problems regarding the research, you may contact:

- Dr. Royce Ann Collins, Professor and Principal Investigator
Phone: 913-961-4255 or Email: racollins@ksu.edu

Inquiries about your rights as a research participant can be directed to:

- Lisa Rubin, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects,
203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224
- Brad Woods, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance,
203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224

Appendix B - Consent Form

PROJECT TITLE:

Professional Identity Development of Educational Leaders

PROJECT
APPROVAL
DATE:

01/17/2024

PROJECT
EXPIRATION
DATE:

01/16/2027

LENGTH OF
STUDY:

6
months

PRINCIPAL
INVESTIGATOR:

Dr. Royce Ann Collins, Professor

CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):

Shanna Rector, doctoral student

CONTACT DETAILS FOR
PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS:

Dr. Royce Ann Collins, 913-961-4255,
racollin@ksu.edu

IRB CHAIR CONTACT
INFORMATION:

Lisa Rubin, Chair, Committee on Research Involving
Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State
University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224;
Brad Woods, Associate Vice President for Research
Compliance, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State
University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:

The purpose of this research is to understand how educational leaders develop their professional identity.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED:

If you choose to participate in the research you will be involved in two face-to-face interviews with the researcher in a location you determine. The first interview will last between 60 – 90 minutes. The researcher will ask you a series of questions about your professional identity development. Your responses will be recorded using an audio recording and then transcribed into written form by the researcher. You will have opportunity to review the interview transcript for accuracy.

Following the first interview, you will create a concept map to document events you feel are important to your professional identity development. You will receive an information sheet with directions on how to create the concept map and you will determine the amount of time to dedicate to the concept map completion. The concept map will be provided to the researcher.

After the researcher has reviewed your concept map a second interview will be conducted and questions will be asked pertaining to the concept map information and to explore additional information you want to share about your professional identity development. The second interview will be in a location you chose and should last less than 60 minutes. You will have an opportunity to review the second interview transcript for accuracy.

The researcher will ask for copies of documents or artifacts that you believe have importance to your professional identity development. You will only be asked to share documents you are comfortable providing. All identifying data will be removed.

BIOLOGICAL SAMPLES COLLECTED (Describe procedure, storage, etc.):

None.

Whole genome sequencing will not be included as part of the research

Not Applicable.

RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED:

There are minimal to no risks associated with this research.

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED:

The interview and concept map creation process has potential benefit to provide an avenue for reflection on your educational leadership career and experiences. These reflections could help you understand your own career journey more deeply and provide celebration to your accomplishment as an educational leader.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY:

All participants will be given pseudonyms. You will not be identified in the research. The district you are employed by will not be identified in the research. The researcher will transcribe the interview responses. There will be no personally identifiable information attached to the information you provide. All electronic documentation will be maintained in a secure location requiring a password and physical documentation will be stored in a locked office space and cabinet. Upon conclusion of the study, all physical documentation will be converted to an electronic version and the physical copies will be shredded.

The information or biospecimens collected as part of the research, even if identifiers are removed, will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

IS COMPENSATION OR MEDICAL TREATMENT AVAILABLE IF INJURY OCCURS? ☐ Yes ☒ No

Terms of participation: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

(Remember that it is a requirement for the P.I. to maintain a signed and dated copy of the same consent form signed and kept by the participant).

**PARTICIPANT
NAME:**

**PARTICIPANT
SIGNATURE:**

**WITNESS TO
SIGNATURE:
(PROJECT STAFF)**

DATE:

DATE:

Appendix C - Interview Questions

- Tell me about how your educational leadership journey began.
- As you think about the beginning, were there any significant events or moments that told you this was the profession for you?
- Can you think of an individual or individuals that contributed to your decision to move into administration, and what was it that they did to support or guide you?
- When you think of yourself as being part of the (leadership title) community of professionals, what are the attributes that you deem are important?
- Can you explain what assisted you in building your capacity to meet the attributes you described?
- Envision a time you felt really challenged by the job of (leadership title), what helped you through to continue on or where did you turn to get support?
- Walk me through a few of the important learning events (positive or negative) that developed your skills and understanding of how to be a (leadership title).
- As an educational leader in xxx district, what has kept you engaged and committed to being a (leadership title) here?
- What values and/or beliefs do you feel define who you are as a professional?
- As you imagine your future as a (leadership title), what do you need to grow and strengthen your expertise?
- It has been stated that leadership is second only to classroom instruction among school related factors that contribute to what students learn at school, as you ponder that statement how do you see yourself contributing to student learning and success in school?
- As a (leadership position) you get work with many constituents, how do you build a sense of community that aligns with your mission and vision?
- As you reflect on your school community, what are some of the meaningful ways you have engaged families?

- How do you see yourself contributing to the mission and vision of the school and district?
- Can you describe your interactions with staff and how you support them in their own professional growth and opportunities?
- As you look out into the future, how do you see yourself as an agent that supports continued improvement for your school?
- Visualize your students and imagine their needs and diversity, can tell me about some of the ways you are responsive to them and their families?
- If you were talking to new (leadership title) about what drew you to the profession, what would you tell them?
- As we conclude, knowing this study is about professional identity is there anything additional you want to share today about what has influenced your identity as a (leadership title).
- What is your WHY as an educational leader?
- If you left the district tomorrow, how would you want to be described?

Appendix D - Concept Map Directions

Create a concept map to highlight and connect key influences and experiences that you believe have contributed to your professional identity development.

The concept map should illustrate connections from your perspective, there is no prescribed number of connections that need to be included. The concept map will be used as part of the second interview process.

Once the concept map is completed, contact Shanna Rector to arrange a time for the second interview. Bring the concept map to the interview.

Use the back side of this paper to create the concept map or create one electronically.

Appendix E - Data Alignment Chart

Conceptual Framework	Research Questions	Interview Questions	Concept Map & Documents
Professional identity • Identity formation – builds knowledge and skills identified with the profession • Doing' and 'being' among professionals • Active engagement in the new roles either vicariously or experientially within the profession • Identification and internalization of the norms and values of the profession • Understanding and incorporation behaviors and attitudes in the profession • Acceptance and sense of belonging within and among those in the profession • Socializing agents, such as mentors, colleagues, supervisors, and developmental networks which help give feedback and serve as role models	1. How do educational leaders describe their development of a professional identity?	• Tell me about how your educational leadership journey began. • As you think about the beginning, were there any significant events or moments that told you this was the profession for you? • Can you think of an individual or individuals that contributed to your decision to move into administration, and what was it that they did to support or guide you? • When you think of yourself as being part of the (leadership title) community of professionals, what are the attributes that you deem are important for the profession? • Can you explain what assisted you in building your capacity to meet those attributes?	

• Increase the self-knowledge, self-reflection and exploration of the profession • Interactive social group engagement within the profession		• Envision a time you felt really challenged by the job of (leadership title), what helped you through to continue on or where did you turn to get support? • Walk me through a few of the important learning events that developed your skills and understanding of how to be a (leadership title). • If you were talking to new (leadership title) about what drew you to the profession, what would you tell them? • As an educational leader in xxx district, what has kept you engaged and committed to being a (leadership title) here? • What values and/or beliefs do you feel define who you are as a professional? • As you imagine your future as a (leadership title), what do you need to grow and strengthen your expertise?	
---	--	---	--

		As we conclude, knowing this study is about professional identity is there anything additional you want to share today about what has influenced your identity as a (leadership title).	
Professional standards - Develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high quality education - Act ethically and according to professional norms - Strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices - Develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment - Cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community - Develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel	2. How do educational leaders describe the professional standards in their professional identity?	- It has been stated that leadership is second only to classroom instruction among school related factors that contribute to what students learn at school, as you ponder that statement how do you see yourself contributing to student learning and success in school? - As a (leadership position) you get work with many constituents, how do you build a sense of community that aligns with your mission and vision? - How do you develop and support a rigorous and aligned curriculum in the school? - As you reflect on your school community, what are	

• Foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff • Engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways • Manage school operations and resources • Act as agents of continuous improvement		some of the meaningful ways you have engaged families? • How do you see yourself contributing to the mission and vision of the school and district? • Can you describe your interactions with staff and how you support them in their own professional growth and opportunities? • As you look out into the future, how do you see yourself as an agent that supports continued improvement for your school? • Visualize your students and imagine their needs and diversity, can tell me about some of the ways you are responsive to them and their families?	
--	--	---	--

Appendix F - Theme Alignment Tables

Theme One	
Capacity creating opportunities	
Categories	
Autonomy Immersion in the position Preliminary experiences Processing with others Professional development	
Professional Identity Constructs	Professional Standards
• Identity formation • Doing and being among professionals • Active engagement in the new roles • Identification and internalization of the norms and values • Understanding and incorporation behaviors and attitudes • Acceptance and sense of belonging within and among • Socializing agents which help give feedback and serve as role models • Increase the self-knowledge, self-reflection and exploration • Interactive social group engagement	• Mission, Vision, Core Values • Professional Community for Teachers and Staff • Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community • Operations and Management • School Improvement

Theme Two	
Drivers toward the mission	
Categories:	
Advocacy Overcoming challenges Collective commitments Increasing impact Power of education	
Professional Identity Constructs	Professional Standards
• Identification and internalization of the norms and values • Understanding and incorporation behaviors and attitudes • Increase the self-knowledge, self-reflection and exploration	• Mission, Vision, Core Values • Ethics and Professional Norms • Equity and Cultural Responsiveness • Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment • Community of Care and Support for Students • Professional Capacity of School Personnel • Professional Community for Teachers and Staff • Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community • Operations and Management • School Improvement

Theme Three	
Establishing desired culture	
Categories:	
Alongside (with) Belonging Trust Voice	
Professional Identity Constructs	Professional Standards
• Identification and internalization of the norms and values • Understanding and incorporation behaviors and attitudes • Increase the self-knowledge, self-reflection and exploration	• Mission, Vision, Core Values • Ethics and Professional Norms • Equity and Cultural Responsiveness • Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment • Community of Care and Support for Students • Professional Capacity of School Personnel • Professional Community for Teachers and Staff • Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community • School Improvement

Theme Four	
Influencing socializing agents	
Categories:	
Colleagues Encouraging leaders Mentors Role models	
Professional Identity Constructs	Professional Standards
• Identity formation • Doing and being among professionals • Active engagement in the new roles • Identification and internalization of the norms and values • Understanding and incorporation behaviors and attitudes • Acceptance and sense of belonging within and among • Socializing agents which help give feedback and serve as role models • Increase the self-knowledge, self-reflection and exploration • Interactive social group engagement	• Mission, Vision, Core Values • Ethics and Professional Norms • Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community • School Improvement

Theme Five	
Living aspired dispositions	
Categories:	
Listening collaborator Reflective learner Supportive leader	
Professional Identity Constructs	Professional Standards
• Identity formation • Identification and internalization of the norms and values • Understanding and incorporation behaviors and attitudes • Increase the self-knowledge, self-reflection and exploration • Interactive social group engagement	• Mission, Vision, Core Values • Equity and Cultural Responsiveness • Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment • Community of Care and Support for Students • Professional Capacity of School Personnel • Professional Community for Teachers and Staff • Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community • School Improvement