

Tough and competent: An autoethnography of secondary school redesign in Kansas

by

Jay Scott

B.S., Baker University, 1993
M.S., Emporia State University, 2003

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Educational Leadership
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Abstract

Beginning with the 2017-2018 school year, the Kansas State Department of Education implemented the Kansans Can School Redesign project (Redesign, hereafter) with the aim of fundamentally changing teaching and learning. The project was borne out of the feedback Kansans from across the state provided about what they believed education should be for current and future preK-12 students. The purpose of this qualitative study was to make meaning, from my lens as a coach, of secondary school leader experiences as they led their school through the Redesign process. This qualitative research study is an autoethnography where the researcher observes the interactions of key players and then, from the researcher's perspective, shares the resulting impact on the culture by blending storytelling with research literature. Qualitative data was collected from field notes and observations of the school leadership team meetings and interviews with building principals.

Through an analysis, the degree to which the school Redesign team balanced two leadership skills, acting as change agents and providing order to the change process, had a major impact on the culture within the school. Focusing too much on challenging the status quo with little consideration for structure and order, or vice versa, resulted in a lack of trust and ownership of the results of the Redesign process by the adults (teachers and community) and students. Those school Redesign teams that skillfully balanced disrupting the traditional environment of school while also providing order through predictable routines and protocols, were able to increase trust and ownership by the adults and students in the school.

Keywords: Kansans Can School Redesign project, Redesign, school Redesign team, change agent, order

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Co-Major Professor
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Acknowledgements

In the summer of 2017, Dr. Randy Watson and Dr. Brad Neuenswander made me an offer I could not refuse. They wanted me to not only be the secondary Redesign specialist at the Kansas State Department of Education, but to also chronicle the work I would do as a coach to courageous, visionary schools wanting to redesign their current model of teaching and learning. I want to thank Dr. Watson and Dr. Neuenswander for providing me this opportunity and for their constant coaching, mentoring, and leadership throughout these last five years.

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Dedication

This research study is dedicated to those who lived and led the Kansans Can School Redesign project, the building principals and teacher leaders of the Mercury, Gemini I, Gemini II, Apollo, Apollo II, and Apollo III cohorts. It was an honor to serve as your coach and to walk alongside you through Redesign. For all the late nights, the hard conversations, the research, the community meetings, the planning meetings, and, of course, the laughs, this is your story. It is my hope the lessons learned from this ground-breaking work will serve you well in your career and life; you've certainly earned it. The *action* you took and *courage* you showed to improve education for Kansas students is precisely the type of *action* and *courage* this country is built upon and needed now more than ever. Thank you for taking a leap of faith to secure a better future for our Kansas kids.

“When all is said and done, there is always more said than done.”

-Aesop

“It is better to fail in originality, than to succeed in imitation.”

-Herman Melville

Chapter 1 - Journey to the Moon

From this day forward, Flight Control will be known by two words: “Tough” and “Competent.” Tough means we are forever accountable for what we do or what we fail to do. Competent means we will never take anything for granted.”

- Gene Krantz (former NASA Flight Director)

Introduction

As they all filed into the Landon State Office Building on a scorching day in July, you could see that the heat was not going to wilt their confidence and excitement. As I stood holding the door for the recently chosen Mercury school leaders, both superintendents and building leaders, you could see the immense pride and a glimmer of anxiousness as they strode into the State Board Room and took their respective seats. Each superintendent of a Mercury school district sat in one of the Kansas State Board member’s chairs, a rare occurrence, especially when Dale Dennis, former long-time Deputy Commissioner at KSDE, was around as he was famous for being highly protective of the Board room. On this day, these superintendents were given the choice seats because they were representing the first cohort of schools chosen to be in the Kansans Can School Redesign project. Much like the first press conference where America got to meet the seven Mercury astronauts for the first time, the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE hereafter) staff, including myself and Tammy Mitchell, my elementary Redesign colleague, had planned out the reveal of the first class of Mercury Redesign schools to the entire state of Kansas. Along with the superintendents front and center, there were legislators, building principals from Mercury schools, State Board members, KSDE leadership, and, of course, the media. As I looked out at the spectacle, I tried to read the superintendents’ faces, curious as to what they were thinking. Some seemed like they were nervous, fidgeting in the

swivel chairs, most likely due to the cameras set up across the room. All major news media outlets were present, including Topeka, Lawrence, and Kansas City news channels. Although every superintendent on the panel had presided over many local school board meetings and more than likely spoken to the local media, there was palpable tension in the air. That often is the case when you are heading off into uncharted territory.

Not all the superintendents were nervously anticipating this press conference. A few seemed nonchalant to the point of appearing bored with the event. I distinctly remember thinking to myself either those superintendents did not have a clue what this whole Redesign project was about, to which I thought “join the club,” or they simply didn’t care. Or they were trying to appear calm, cool, and collected, much like their demeanor in a school board meeting or at the negotiations table, to mask their genuine feelings of fear, anxiety, and excitement. Either way, if they wanted to appear disinterested, they were succeeding.

As the press conference began, each superintendent was able to make a statement about why their schools had decided to apply to be a Mercury Redesign school. Most repeated a scaled down version of what their schools had indicated as to why they wished to redesign, the dissatisfaction with their students’ outcomes or a strong desire to stay on the cutting edge of education. I think a few had re-watched the original Mercury 7 press conference, trying to one-up one another with these semi-dramatic, patriotic sentiments aimed at stirring the emotions and winning the hearts of the hundreds of Kansans listening in (probably more like tens than hundreds). Still others were cautious about the words they spoke, staying guarded and almost non-committal; legislators were in the room and some of the savvier superintendents never want to have something they say in public used against them and other educators across the street at the Capitol. After each of the seven superintendents made a statement, the media was allowed to

ask a few questions, which was a bit awkward because, at that point, the media probably knew just as much about the Kansans Can School Redesign project as the district leaders. As the conference ended, I crossed the room to speak with one of the high school principals I would be working with and coaching during the next school year and beyond. After I had congratulated this principal for being selected, he asked, “so we’ve been accepted into the project, what’s next?” to which I responded:

“That is a great question” and...

“We will figure it out together.”

This moment reminded me of what President Kennedy stated in his famous speech committing the United States to putting a man on the moon in the decade of the 1960’s, “at this point, we don’t know how we’ll do it but we are going to do it” (“Houston, We Have a Problem,” 2022). I remember at the time thinking the principal walked out maybe more anxious than when he walked in, but hopefully excited about the possibilities that lay ahead.

My topic, originated from my work as a specialist working with secondary Kansans Can Redesign schools, (referred to as “Redesign” schools hereafter) arose out of a deep desire to share a narrative of the Redesign schools’ experiences from my perspective. I worked with multiple secondary schools, specifically the building leader, in Kansas to “redesign” their systems. Each school was engaged in redesigning around the four Redesign principles: personalized learning; real world application; student success skills; and family, business, and community partnerships. I am interested in making meaning of the shifts, challenges, and successes secondary schools experienced during the Redesign process based on my observations from the position of an outside coach.

Rationale

The Kansans Can School Redesign Project has its origins in the Kansas Children – Kansas’ Future Community Conversations which occurred during the 2015-2016 school year. Those conversations and the subsequent feedback from over 2,000 Kansans elicited the largest qualitative research study ever done in education in Kansas (Neuenswander, 2018). The main lesson learned from the feedback was that we had grown into a “state of imbalance” in K-12 education, focusing heavily on academic achievement to the detriment of students developing critical social-emotional skills necessary for future success (Neuenswander, 2018). In response to “what Kansans told us,” the Kansans Can School Redesign project was born. The Kansas State Board of Education decided the Redesign project would be the rocket to transport our state’s educational system to the moon. An initiative of this magnitude and scope had never been done before in Kansas, where the goal is for every school district to redesign their system that leads to Kansas K-12 achieving the vision of leading the world in the success of each student, our version of a “moonshot.”

In my position as secondary school Redesign specialist at the Kansas State Department of Education (referred to as “KSDE” hereafter), I am the only person with a state-wide lens who can craft a narrative of the experiences of secondary schools redesigning their systems. Schools engaged in Redesign are tasked with developing a new shared vision for their students, setting goals to leverage the new vision, and then researching and implementing new strategies that connect to the four Redesign principles, mentioned in the introduction. In my role as a coach for 22 secondary sites and consultant for all other secondary sites, I have led, participated in, and observed multiple Redesign discussions with the building leader and the school-based Redesign team, made up of teacher leaders, either on-site, at regional workshops, or virtually. Through my

lens as the secondary school Redesign specialist, I am working to make meaning of these discussions, the resulting changes at the school, and the impact my coaching has had on the process of redesigning the school, if any.

While many would place the school Redesign project in the category of school reform, the uniqueness of this work sets this project apart from other reform efforts. First, this is a statewide project initiated and facilitated by a state department of education. Generally, these types of initiatives are run by other entities besides the department of education in a state. The department of education may fund innovative projects such as this through grants or other funds but usually not work directly with schools. Second, the schools selected to be part of this project volunteered and were not provided any extra funding or given any waivers from current state education regulations, which begs the question, “who would volunteer for that?” These schools desired to improve student outcomes by re-thinking, re-imagining, and redesigning teaching and learning without the incentives of waivers or funding from the state. Third, this project was born from the Kansans Can Community Conversations (Community Conversations, hereafter), where stakeholders from across the state provided feedback to create a new vision for Kansas schools and Redesign is the work to achieve that vision. The public were the authors of a major school reform effort for a state, making Redesign a first in Kansas and unique to other school reform efforts.

This autoethnographic (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2010) study focuses on school redesign but differs from other research studies in terms of scope. The Redesign project is led by KSDE at the state level with an eventual goal of all 286 school districts in Kansas going through the Redesign process, as wide as the scope of work can be. The four Redesign principles- personalized learning, student success skills, real world application, and family, business, and

community partnerships-that must be addressed by each school are unique to Kansas and came about from the Community Conversations. Schools volunteer to be involved in the Redesign project and there are no incentives available such as grant dollars or waivers from any state regulations or policies. All these factors make this research study unique as compared to other research studies on school redesign. Lastly, I am the only one who can share a first-hand account of the happenings in secondary schools in Redesign from my position as a secondary redesign coach.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this autoethnography study is to understand and make meaning of my experiences with secondary schools in the Kansas Can School Redesign project. My unique role as secondary redesign school coach provides an entrance to understanding the experiences, the relationships, and the interactions of key players through the Redesign process as well as key forces in place shaping such a process - all would otherwise be much less possible, if not impossible, for a typical outsider-researcher. This project intends to connect the Kansas secondary school redesign story to the core leadership responsibilities identified in the Balanced Leadership framework (Goodwin et al., 2015).

Research Questions

1. How has my coaching role as Secondary school Redesign specialist from KSDE fostered the development of core leadership responsibilities, identified in the Balanced Leadership framework, in building principals and the School Redesign team (SRT) across secondary schools in the Redesign process?

Specifically, there are four core leadership responsibilities discovered via a pilot project that will be the entry points for this autoethnographic project:

- Culture
- Change Agent (including 1st and 2nd order change magnitudes)
- Focus
- Flexibility

Operationalization of Constructs

Kansans Can School Redesign Project: The process by which schools go through to transform their system to be focused on four principles; student success skills; real-world application; personalized learning; and family, business, and community partnerships. The process was developed by the KSDE Redesign team, and the four principles were developed based on the feedback from over 2,000 Kansans during the Kansas Children – Kansas’ Future Community Conversations.

Kansas Children – Kansas’ Future Community Conversations: The discussion meetings that took place during school year 2015-2016, led by Dr. Randy Watson, Commissioner, and Dr. Brad Neuenswander, Deputy Commissioner, where they asked Kansans from 27 different communities questions regarding the characteristics of a successful young adult Kansan and K-12’s role in producing that type of successful individual. The feedback from those discussions served as the basis for the State Board of Education forming a new vision for K-12 education in

Kansas Student Success Skills: The academic, cognitive, technical, and social-emotional skills needed to be successful in life after high school graduation. These skill sets were identified by the Kansas State Board of Education when they developed the profile of a successful Kansas high school graduate in 2016.

Personalized Learning: Places the whole child at the center of instruction. It is informed by strong educator/student/family/community relationships to provide equity and choice in time, pace, path, place, and demonstration of learning. This Kansas definition was developed during the summer of 2019, by a collaborative group of educational organizations across the state.

Real World Application: Project-based learning, internships, and civic engagement makes learning relevant, all strategies prioritized by the Kansas State Board of Education.

Family, Business, and Community Partnerships: Partnerships are based on mutually beneficial relationships and collaboration. This principle was developed based on feedback from the Kansas Children – Kansas’ Future Community Conversations and then prioritized by the Kansas State Board of Education.

Kansans Can Redesign Schools: Elementary and secondary schools who voluntarily apply and are accepted into the Kansans Can School Redesign Project. This project began with school year 2017-2018 and includes six cohorts of schools: Mercury, Gemini I, Gemini II, Apollo, Apollo II, and Apollo III.

Moonshot: The Kansas State Board of Education’s realization of their vision which is to lead the world in the success of each student. The benchmarks to reach to achieve this vision include 75% of all students reaching either level 3 or 4 on the Kansas state assessments, 95% graduation rate every year, and 70% - 75% of all students, two years after high school graduation, either have earned an industry-recognized certificate with labor market value, an associate degree, or enrolled for a second year of college.

Culture: A Balanced Leadership responsibility that fosters shared beliefs, a sense of community, and cooperation (Goodwin et al., 2015).

Change Agent: A Balanced Leadership responsibility where the leader is willing to and actively challenges the status quo (Goodwin et al., 2015).

1st order change: One of the magnitudes of change, a 1st order change is a rather minor change that is seen as an extension of the past (Goodwin et al., 2015).

2nd order change: One of the magnitudes of change, a 2nd order change is significant change that represents a complete break from past practices (Goodwin et al., 2015).

Focus: A Balanced Leadership responsibility where the leader establishes clear goals and keeps those goals at the forefront of the school's attention (Goodwin et al., 2015).

Flexibility: A Balanced Leadership responsibility where the leader adapts his or her leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable with dissent (Goodwin et al., 2015).

Introducing My Personal and Professional Subjective Self

While autoethnographies are inherently subjective and my subjectivities are woven throughout this dissertation, the purpose of this subjectivity statement is to inform you, the reader, more about personal and professional self. As a qualitative researcher, it is inherent to disclose the positionality and subjectivity one brings to the work. As Gannon states, “we do not speak from nowhere” as we all bring certain values, dispositions, and experiences to any sort of written communication (Jones et al., 2013, p. 229). It is important to “discuss assumptions, beliefs, and values that inform the way you make meaning” (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 23) when engaging in qualitative research. With human beings, there is no such thing as being totally value-neutral; we all have values and involuntarily bring those values to bear on any interaction we might have (Bhattacharya, 2017) which leads to levels of subjectivity being ever-present in qualitative research.

Another characteristic of qualitative research is the “always unfinished quality” due to the researcher’s constant struggle for deeper understanding (Jones et al., 2016, p. 230). As Gannon remarks, “I want to move closer to the details of things, whilst not foreclosing on meaning” (2016, p. 230). It seems to be that in qualitative research, where going deeper into underlying layers of a research topic always seems to elicit a new meaning or learning (Jones et al., 2016, p. 230). This represents the persistent gap between the “subject who speaks and the represented subject spoken about” (Jones et al., 2016, p. 232). Qualitative research attempts to close the gap by focusing on relationships with participants, high-quality data collection, and high-level analysis, all of which are informed by positionality (Bhattacharya, 2017), reinforcing the notion to be transparent about the subjectivities all researchers have when interpreting and analyzing qualitative data.

I chose this research topic for a variety of reasons, the main one being I felt responsible to tell the story of Redesign at the secondary school level in Kansas. A school improvement project of this size and scope had never been done before at the state level in Kansas and what took place cried out to be captured. Being selected as the secondary school Redesign specialist, a newly created position, allowed me to have a unique perspective from which to observe, interpret, and analyze the events occurring within schools as they transformed their systems. To be able to do my job and simultaneously work through this research study was a unique opportunity. This dual approach to my work in this space has been mutually beneficial; completing research while supporting schools as they redesign has deepened my understanding of their lived experiences which has helped me improve in providing support and guidance to our pioneering school Redesign teams.

I thought I had entered a new dimension. As I sat in the classroom trying to listen to the adults scattered around the room, I remember sitting very close to my father and not having a clue as to what was being discussed. The classroom was low-slung on the highest floor of the education building on the campus of Fort Hays State University and was filled with smaller chairs, each with a half desktop barely large enough for a notebook. And it was stuffy. While the class met in the “cool” of the evening, that did little to deter the July heat from floating up to the top floor of the building, producing a stifling heat that proved to be too much for the air conditioning to handle. I remember large rotating fans in each corner of the room that hummed along, making it even harder to hear what the teacher and the adult students were discussing. Not that it would have mattered; I had finished the 5th grade that May and now I was in a class with future or current school administrators, trying to hide behind my dad so the “teacher” wouldn’t call on me. My father was renewing his school administrator license and he needed a few credit hours, so he signed up for this school leadership course. It was a summer evening and my dad, offhandedly, asked me if I wanted to tag along with him to his class. I’m not sure why I acquiesced; maybe my dad worked so much, and I wanted to spend time with him, or maybe I just wanted to get away from the farm for one night. Either way, there I was sitting in a classroom...in the summer...when I was eleven years old. Now this was 1982, so the technology in the room amounted to a projector where the professor placed clear plastic sheets and wrote notes that each student then copied into their notebooks. Intermittently, the professor would pause in writing notes and ask questions of the class. During these moments of discussion on best practices in school administration, I remember being terrified that I would have to answer a question or be asked my opinion, which is ludicrous to think of now since this was a master’s level course in education that apparently used a different language, complete with a heavy dose

of inexplicable acronyms. *But that was always my experience in the classroom, on the edge of my seat and anxious I would be called upon to speak.* I still have that same feeling in every meeting and conference session that I attend as a professional; I'm not sure when that anxiousness began but I do know it has never subsided. Luckily, I made it through the class without having to speak although I did have to nod my head a few times in response to the professor or others asking me if I was enjoying myself. And I enjoyed the experience, mainly the attention from the adults in the room but also how thoughtful, earnest, and genuine those people seemed to be. That was most likely the first time I thought about becoming an educator. As I think back to that evening, I wonder if my father had a deeper motive than just having me attend with him. Knowing my dad, he was intentional about involving and coaching me in the science and art of education.

From my earliest recollections, "school" has been a major part of my life. My father and mother were both educators, my dad a long-time middle school principal and my mom a long-time elementary teacher. My family prioritized education, just behind faith and family, and my parents modeled for my older brother and I how important an education is for the common good and what it means to give back to others. Both my brother and I became educators as well, continuing the family tradition. At a high level, I have a great sense of responsibility to share my insider knowledge of the most courageous secondary schools I've been fortunate to be associated with through the Redesign project. I see it as a way of giving back, both to the schools who have bravely taken on the challenge to redesign but also, utilizing the Redesign schools' experiences, influence other schools to improve their educational system so Kansas students are better prepared for their future.

When it comes to my general attitude toward education, I have always defaulted to challenging the status quo of teaching and learning; that is another reason I selected this subject to research. I am not sure where this attitude comes from, whether it is from the stubbornness I feel when someone makes remarks like “that can’t be done” or “that will never work” regarding reform in K-12 education or if it’s a byproduct of thinking about and discussing often a utopian school where students are eager and ready to engage in learning that matters to them each day. I find myself constantly in search of a better way to educate young people so that they look forward to learning, feel challenged to grow and, at the same time, feel supported by teachers who care about them and their futures. I know this is all a bit cliché but this chasing after the ideal school experience has always been a driving force for me and certainly for the schools in the Redesign project. Researching how schools design this nirvana learning environment is an incredibly exhilarating experience and a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Education has always been a major focus for my family. Growing up in southwest Kansas with two parents who were educators, all my older brother and I really knew was “school,” while either physically at school or at the dinner table every evening. Teaching and learning consumed our lives growing up, whether it was attending school events, hanging with my dad at his school on weekends while he prepared for the next week, or helping my mom grade her 2nd graders’ work, there was no part of my life not engaged in education. Other than a short stint when my father tried his hand at farming, all my memories growing up were centered around school. So, it makes sense that both my brother and I ended up in the family business; my brother is a teacher and coach at the middle school level in Kansas and me, after fifteen years as a teacher and administrator, now working at the Kansas State Department of Education. Having parents that were lifelong educators and now making education my professional focus, provides me a depth of

understanding and insight into how today's schools operate and potentially how school can be transformed to meet the ever-changing needs of today's students.

My experience in Career and Technical Education (CTE) and more specifically, with the Individual Plan of Study (IPS) initiative in Kansas provides another layer of knowledge and understanding when working with secondary schools in the Redesign project. Both CTE and the IPS have a strong alignment with the principles of Redesign developed in 2018, most especially personalized learning and real-world application. For secondary school students, co-creating an individual plan of study with an advisor at school is a foundational piece of a personalized learning plan. Career and Technical Education promotes application-level learning activities where students can “show what they know” in a real-world context. I spent five years as the state's CTE director, overseeing the implementation of an individual plan of study for every secondary student in Kansas. That experience and work prepared me well for leading the secondary school Redesign project with both CTE and the IPS playing major roles in secondary schools transforming their system.

Although I had a lifelong exposure to education, that exposure was limited to small, non-diverse school environments. From my experience as a student, I had a very limited perspective as to what school entailed. Every other student and teacher in my small elementary, middle, and high schools looked just like me in terms of race. My first experience in going to school with students of color was in college. As a teacher and administrator, I worked in large, suburban schools in northeast Kansas with very little racial and socio-economic diversity. With all this taken together, at times it can be difficult to empathize with and relate to the challenges large and/or highly diverse schools would face through the Redesign project.

Another factor that could lead to a higher degree of subjectivity is the length of time I've been out of the classroom and school setting. I have worked at the Kansas State Department of Education since 2012, and even though I have done quite a bit of research on the subject of school improvement, the action research done by teachers and administrators every school day far surpasses my own knowledge and skill set. While I stay current with system-level strategies and structural changes in schools that create improved student outcomes, this gap between theory and practice must be accounted for when interpreting and analyzing data.

Leading an innovative school reform project is generally not a role for the Kansas State Department of Education. Many educators across the state consider KSDE to be compliance-centric, where KSDE ensures children are fed at school, students with special needs receive the support in which they are entitled, state dollars are spent in accordance with state statutes, and schools are accredited. Typically, these are the major functions of not only KSDE, but the majority of state departments of education across the nation. The bureaucracy and structure of departments of education usually lead to a plodding pace and slow responsiveness to changes in the educational environment. The KSDE Redesign project was completely out-of-character for a state department of education in that it was focused on supporting innovation as opposed to adhering to state statutes and policies through compliance measures. This was a major shift by KSDE and could possibly have influenced Redesign schools as they adjusted to perceiving KSDE as a driver of innovation instead of a driver of compliance with foundational structures in K-12 schools. At times, schools sheepishly queried, "can we do *this*?" as they ventured out of the status quo and into creativity and innovation. This paradigm shift of KSDE encouraging, even demanding, schools to think and act differently flew in the face of how KSDE and schools had

interacted in the past. Subjectivity grew from schools being expected and encouraged to redesign and transform their system by the same organization that accredits schools.

Theoretical Perspectives and Framework

As I pondered the theoretical perspective of this qualitative research study, I often think back to what Crotty (1998) stated, “any of the theoretical perspectives could make use of any of the methodologies, and any of the methodologies could make use of any of the methods.” (p. 12). The differences between theoretical perspectives and methodologies (especially theoretical perspectives) seem to be so nuanced as to blur all the lines of demarcation between them. This creates a situation where definitive declarations are difficult to make but it does serve one well to think deeply about the theoretical perspectives, the methodologies, and the methods as it increases understanding and clarity towards the research purpose.

The epistemological perspective that guides my research purpose is social constructionism where “the terms by which the world is understood are social artifacts, products of historically situated interchanges among people” (Gergen, 1985, p. 267). I seek to co-construct meaning of social “interchanges” between those on a school Redesign team. Social constructionism requires us to take a “critical stance toward our taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world and ourselves” (Burr, 2015, p. 2). In my role as secondary school Redesign specialist, I see myself constructing meaning based on interactions between school staff involved in Redesign through my own lens as both a researcher and participant, albeit my role as a participant varies depending on the situation. While *constructivists* are much more meta-cognitive, focusing on what is happening in the minds of the participants, social *constructionists* “focus on what’s happening between people as they join together” (Sommers-Flanagan & Sommers-Flanagan, 2018, p. 1). My observations of the actions of the school

Redesign teams (SRT's hereafter) and the resulting actions by others inside and outside the school are much more aligned with social constructionism. One method to do this is to embed myself into these schools, getting to know the key players (school Redesign team) and to coach and guide their Redesign effort. As Fish (1990) emphasized, "it is only by inhabiting them, or being inhabited by them, that we have access to the public and conventional senses they make" (p. 186). By embedding myself into the school Redesign team, I was able to focus on the context and the individual differences that existed among the key players during social interactions. It is "to offer the inquirer's construction of the constructions of the actors one studies." (Schwandt, 1994, p. 240). I had many actors to study in the Redesign project.

This meaning making of the interplay between school Redesign team members and my influence as a coach was predicated on the existing culture in the school. As Geertz (1974) shared, "culture is best seen as the source rather than the result of human thought and behavior" (p. 44), so, regardless of what I observed in the interactions of key players in each school, until I could grasp the culture in the school, meaning-making would be difficult. Culture represents a set of control mechanisms, such as rules, protocols, plans, which regulate behavior. It is from this culture that thoughts and actions arise, thoughts and actions I was first viewing and trying to make sense through my own lens. This caused me to question whether my observations were accurate knowing they were informed by my culture, not the school's culture. This questioning of my own observations came from the realization of what Crotty stated that "constructionism is the marriage of objectivity and subjectivity" (1998, p. 43). As a qualitative researcher, calling out my own subjectivities while achieving as much objectivity as possible is the aim.

This autoethnography will be defined by two main theoretical frameworks; coaching (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2017) and leadership through change (Goodwin et al.,

2015) . The coaching was the action of this research, manifested by change theory (Goodwin et al., 2015), most specifically transformational change. I will briefly touch on both coaching and change theory by way of introduction in this chapter followed by an extensive literature review, with accompanying stories aimed at bringing the research to life, throughout the rest of this dissertation.

Under this social constructionism perspective, a basis for this research will be “interactions,” both those I have with participants, of which I will interpret, and those between participants, of which I will observe. This basis speaks to my theoretical framework of the influence my coaching had on these “interactions” between the school Redesign team members and others in the broader school community. Coaching can be defined as “a collaborative helping relationship, where coach and client (“coachee”) engage in a systematic process of setting goals and developing solutions with the aim of facilitating goal attainment, self-directed learning, and personal growth of the coachee” (Stober & Grant, 2010, p. 3). The aims listed in this definition of coaching align tightly with the aims of the school Redesign initiative. My position of secondary school Redesign specialist at KSDE put me in a unique position to coach the school Redesign teams across the state. Generally, schools pay for consulting or coaching services from outside organizations. Since I work at KSDE, my coaching services were available to the school Redesign teams at no charge. I was not their direct report, and I did not answer to the school Redesign team. My position at KSDE is more of a middle-level leadership position so it was in this context I coached Redesign schools, from a middle-level in their system as well. In other words, I could not rely on any authority to coach; rather, I relied upon influence to cause school Redesign teams to set goals, develop strategies to leverage those goals, and to grow

professionally through the process. I will delve deeper into the research behind coaching to influence in the second chapter.

The essence of the Redesign project is transformational change to the current model of teaching and learning. This involves educators challenging the status quo of teaching and learning, acknowledging the system needs to change, and embracing new methods to learn and implement in the classroom. In their seminal research on school leadership, *Balanced Leadership for Powerful Learning*, Goodwin et al. (2015) identified three key components effective school leaders address: establishing a clear focus, managing change, and creating a purposeful community. These three components serve as a basis for Redesign school leaders' experiences as they led their schools through a major change process. The school leaders sought to strike a balance when to challenge the status quo and when to maintain it, which is often the difference between effective and ineffective leadership (Goodwin et al., 2015). School leaders face difficulty in motivating teachers to want to learn and implement new practices because of teachers generally not being risk-takers, preferring to stick with what is known, and a system that perpetuates stagnation through valuing compliance and autonomy over creativity and collaboration (Wagner, 2001). Throughout the second chapter, I will discuss more research regarding transformational change in education and the inherent difficulties that exist for school leaders bent on improving and sustaining better outcomes for students.

Methodology: Autoethnography, Writing, and Story

The methodology for this research study is autoethnography. By definition, autoethnographies “use personal experiences to examine and/or critique cultural experiences” (Jones et al., 2016, p. 22). By sharing my personal experiences of coaching Redesign schools, both good and bad, I can give their collective experiences a voice, working from insider

knowledge (Jones et al., 2016). Hesitation on my part comes from being viewed as selfish or navel-gazing by choosing autoethnography. I must stay vigilant to telling the secondary schools' collective experiences, including changes in culture and structure, *through my lens* but also blending in my personal experiences *in the moments* when interacting with the school Redesign teams. Autoethnographies can include the perspectives of multiple subjects, not simply the perspective of a single subject (Jones et al., 2016). I am committed to creating a compelling narrative of the Redesign schools' experiences through my lens as an autoethnography, not as an autobiography. As Jones et al. state "autoethnographic texts typically feel more self and socially conscious than autobiographic works; the intent to describe cultural experience marks this difference" (2016, p. 23). By using autoethnography, I can tell the story of how my coaching influenced a Redesign school's cultural shifts as they progressed through transformational change using my personal experiences interacting with a school Redesign team. Autoethnography and why I selected it as my methodology will be further explained in the third chapter.

One of my goals with this dissertation is to try to make it interesting to the reader. By using story blended with qualitative research, it is my hope to captivate anyone who would bother to read this dissertation. Denzin & Lincoln (2018) discussed the "triple crisis of representation, legitimation, and praxis" (p. 17) which argued that qualitative research could potentially be the solution to those issues that had befallen traditional quantitative research. The crisis of representation referred to the inability of researchers to directly capture the lived experience, legitimation identified the problems with the existing criteria to evaluate research, and praxis was all about effecting change in the world. Qualitative research and specifically, autoethnography, addresses those crises with the specific aim of detailing the lived experience

and its cultural impact on the world through a blend of research and storytelling. To that end, one method to create more interesting, engaging narrative is to use writing as a method of inquiry itself. Richardson opines that most qualitative writing is largely boring (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2018). Unlike the clean lines and clarity of a quantitative study, a qualitative study “carries its meaning in its entire text” (Richardson & St. Pierre, , 2018, p. 960), in other words, one would need to read the entire study, not simply review the abstract. As Richardson and St. Pierre (2018) state, “writing is thinking, writing is analysis, writing is indeed a seductive and tangled method of discovery” (p.967). As I write the narratives of secondary school leaders and how they led through their respective school Redesign project, I want to use both creativity and analysis to craft a full picture of my coaching interactions with school leaders and the results of those interactions. It is my hope to immerse the reader “in the moment” as much as possible. I discuss autoethnography in more depth in chapter four.

Methods for Data Collection and Analysis

As a supplement to my own lived experiences as a Redesign coach, a primary data source for this qualitative research study will be the journal observations I have made after interactions (on-site or virtual meetings) with the building leader and/or the school Redesign team. I have multiple observations in a journal for each Redesign school I coached directly, recorded via voice-to-text in the car on the drive home or to another school. These field notes began with the inception of the Redesign project in August of 2017. My observations are made from my role as an *active member*, where, at times, I take on the role of leading or participating in some activities of the school Redesign team while, at other times, I am only an observer (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2010). My role was not limited to only observing but it was also not my role to fully participate in the interactions of the school Redesign team. With these field notes, I will code, categorize,

and then identify trends of my observations in reference to the Balanced Leadership framework (Goodwin et al., 2015) which will be detailed in chapter four. Once that is complete, I will share those trends with participants in focus groups to authenticate the data and further strengthen and deepen this critical inquiry.

In addition to my field notes, other artifacts I gathered to support this inquiry are documents curated over time about the school Redesign initiative in Kansas. As Redesign began, me and Tammy Mitchell, elementary school redesign specialist, did extensive research into the existing models of school transformation across the world. We visited innovative schools in the U.S. We created slides and gave multiple presentations to stir interest and begin to tell the story of Redesign in Kansas. We developed a process of Redesign with multiple resources, blending design thinking and *The 4 Disciplines of Execution* (McChesney et al., 2012). We have also created a coaching model for Redesign used by our KSDE Redesign team and educational service centers across Kansas. These documents will provide further context to the narrative and lived experience of school Redesign teams and myself.

A major part of my analysis of the qualitative data will be coding. As part of a pilot project I completed where I interviewed three secondary Redesign principals about their leadership practices through Redesign and most specifically during the COVID-19 pandemic, I utilized coding of the interview transcripts to analyze and synthesize their responses into major categories aligned with four of the Balanced Leadership responsibilities (Goodwin et al., 2015). Generally, I did a first round of In Vivo coding mixed with concept coding to develop a new theory (Saldana, 2015) of leading through change. After the first round of coding, I wrote several analytic memos through an open coding approach. From memo-writing came categories and trends I curated into a concept map based on the qualitative data provided by the three Redesign

principals. To distill the key practices of Redesign principals leading through both Redesign and the pandemic, I then completed a second cycle of focus coding that eventually led me to identifying a few major categories aligned with four Balanced Leadership responsibilities (Goodwin et al., 2015). These categories, borne from the pilot project, provides a more focused, informed perspective as I began to autoethnographically analyze the historical data I gathered over the last five years in coaching Redesign school leaders. The pilot project and what I learned from it will be outlined deeper at the end of the second chapter.

Limits and delimitations

Knowing there is no such thing as a perfect research study, I want to identify limitations that exist to help frame this autoethnographic study. I will outline both limitations (those out of my control) and de-limitations (those within my control). The reason to identify these is to give you a deeper understanding and context of this research study looking at Redesign schools' experiences, cultural and otherwise, as they progress through a redesign effort and the influence my coaching had on those experiences from my unique perspective.

The first limitation I want to denote is my own unique perspective. The lens through which I observed and participated in interactions with school Redesign teams is highly subjective and "tuned to my frequency" through years as a student in school, then as an educator in schools, and now in a supportive role for educators at KSDE. My interpretations of interactions are informed by my own educational experiences over the years and that is a limiting factor in this study. I think this is especially limiting when cultural shifts in a school, slow and subtle, are a major area of study.

Two de-limitations that exist are certain schools were selected to be part of the school redesign project and, additionally, I worked closely with a limited number of secondary schools

for this research study. To apply to be part of the Redesign project, a school must have completed the following:

1. Achieve an 80% approval from staff in the building to join the redesign project.
2. Secure a letter of support from the local teacher professional organization.
3. Secure approval from the local school board.
4. Agree to serve as a demonstration site for other schools to visit once your school has “launched” a newly redesigned system.

There have been many educators in schools across the state that would like to join the Redesign project but cannot meet all the criteria above for various reasons. Also, I coach only a subset of Redesign schools (the initial cohorts of Mercury and Gemini I schools), mainly due to time and resource constraints. I would like to work with all Redesign schools, and while I provide professional development training, I only work with a smaller cohort of Redesign schools as an active member.

As an active member - part observer, part participant - my role is limited. I am not a full member where I would more completely embed myself in the school Redesign team. I met with school Redesign teams twice a month for the initial year in Redesign and then moved to a monthly interaction for subsequent years. This limited the depth and breadth of my observations as well as my influence. This was done intentionally as one of the aims in my role as a coach is for schools to be self-directed and able to sustain the transformational changes made without my direct coaching.

The last two limitations identified are both related to others’ perceptions of my selected methodology and the Redesign project in Kansas. Autoethnography as a methodology is associated with qualitative research. There has been criticism that qualitative research isn’t *true*

research as compared to quantitative research. Critics claim, since qualitative research involves the affective side of research and contains a certain level of subjectivity, it does not make strong, clear findings or further the knowledge and understanding in a certain research topic like a quantitative study can do. To add another layer, even qualitative researchers criticize autoethnography as a self-centered, fortune-telling methodology as it relies more on the researcher's subjective perspective than the participants.

Additionally, educators in Kansas have varying perceptions of the Redesign project. Some believe it is an attempt to completely dismantle everything about our educational system, others see it as a “flash-in-the-pan,” “this too shall pass” initiative, just like all the other initiatives that have been introduced in the past but failed to deliver on their initial promise. There are some educators who experience a bit of professional jealousy of the schools in the Redesign project and react to this bout of jealousy with unfounded criticism. Also, some of the Redesign schools have faced intense community scrutiny for the changes they have implemented in their schools, giving critics of Redesign even more ammunition.

Possibilities

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study but equally important to identify the possibilities. This study matters to the future of education in Kansas, most specifically to the futures of our Kansas students, everyone's top priority. The narrative of how Redesign schools took on the challenge of redesigning their system to personalize learning, provide real-world application learning experiences, partner with families, businesses, and the community, and develop the students' skills in more areas than academic serves as the foundation for a new era in Kansas education. Simply put, this is a story, blended with research, which *must* be told. This research can inform current educational practices, incite many more

educational topics worthy of research in the future, and shape future educational policy at both the state, local, and possibly the national level.

Many groups of educational stakeholders will benefit from this study. It will provide insight into the experiences of how schools “do” school, with a focus on the process schools followed and the cultural shifts taking place as the process unfolded. Sharing insider knowledge, this study should be beneficial to all secondary educators across the state and to cause them to challenge the status quo of teaching and learning they currently employ. Additionally, this research should inform and impact institutions of higher education, specifically teacher preparation programs. As Redesign schools continue to innovate and make incremental improvements in teaching and learning, a new mindset towards education at the system level will continue to evolve and this should have a resulting effect on how prospective teachers are prepared and developed for this new era of education in Kansas. Lastly, this study will matter to professional educational organizations serving our schools in Kansas, including the educational service centers, the Kansas National Educators Association, the United School Administrators – Kansas, the Kansas Association of School Boards, and the Kansas State Department of Education. This study matters to all those organizations as it will inform their own redesigning effort to serve and support our Kansas schools in the future. I will discuss the coaching implications from my perspective to inform school leaders as they redesign moving forward.

One question has always haunted me as an educator, whether in my time as a teacher and a coach, an administrator, and now at KSDE, “how can we make it, so every student *wants* to come to school because of an intense desire to learn?” I am not sure it is a blessing or curse, but I have convinced myself that there is always a better way to do something, most especially teaching and learning. This constant questioning and analyzing can frustrate and annoy my

educational colleagues as it is a never-ending journey. This study matters to me because, at the heart of it, Redesign is about a mindset constantly in search of a better way that is dismissive of the status quo. It matters to me even more so because it allows me to collaborate, learn, and grow with school Redesign teams that share this mindset.

I selected my research topic, the influence of coaching on Redesign schools, and methodology, autoethnography, for two reasons. One, if I chose not to tell the story, then one of the most significant bodies of work in education in Kansas would never be shared in its entirety. I have always felt a strong responsibility to share this research, not at all for myself but more for the schools choosing to take on this immense challenge. Autoethnography fits well with sharing these experiences, most especially cultural shifts in schools. While the Redesign schools are taking on the challenge, this leaves them very little time to tell their own story of redesign, so I want to be able to do that for them, staying as true and accurate to what has taken place as possible. By looking at the influence coaching has on Redesign schools and the school Redesign team, this can assist the practice of coaching in schools through learning about my peak and valley experiences supporting schools going through the same trials, tribulations, and successes.

Summary

Just as my mother and father coached me in the art and science of education, I have had the distinct honor and privilege to coach and learn from secondary principals in Redesign schools from 2017 to 2022. From that day in July 2017 when the Redesign schools were announced to the last cohort of Redesign schools wrapping up their initial planning year in June 2022, it has been an incredible learning experience, both what works and what does not, for myself and I hope for those participating. I have witnessed countless moments of excitement, pain, exhilaration, sadness, frustration, and collegiality that can only be derived from struggling

through a difficult process together. I have had conversations with school administrators that are full of euphoria and excitement about what is taking place in their building in terms of student learning experiences and teacher leadership but also meetings that are full of frustration and, at times, tears because of dissension amongst staff or strong resistance from parents. Through this autoethnography, I will attempt to bring you, the reader, into those moments, using storytelling in the context of coaching theory and frameworks, such as Balanced Leadership (Goodwin et al., 2015).

While this research took place through my role at the KSDE, this dissertation is more about my own experiences and learning than it is about the Redesign project across the state. There was a great deal of build-up and excitement about Redesign, a novel idea and first-ever state-level push in Kansas to make substantial changes to the traditional, entrenched model of school. However, the crux of this research centers around my coaching of secondary school Redesign leaders, not simply an endorsement of the Redesign project, as in all schools should be traveling down the Redesign path. On the contrary, there were many instances where a secondary school leader would question joining the Redesign project in the first place. There were times I questioned whether the Redesign process was the best approach to school reform that leads to better student outcomes. These instances will be shared so that the reader is presented a balanced perspective on Redesign. Telling the whole story of coaching secondary school leaders through Redesign requires transparency about the real experiences, the good, the bad, and the indifferent so that you, the reader, can glean an authentic understanding of what transpired through my unique perspective and experience in coaching secondary school Redesign leaders.

Chapter 2 - A Story That Needs to Be Told

“Can you come in once you land in Kansas City?” It was mid-afternoon on a Friday and Dr. Watson had called me just before boarding a return flight from Philadelphia. Since we were getting back later that evening and it was Friday, I questioned Randy about the reason to meet up so late. He simply told me it was something that could not wait until tomorrow. I had just attended a conference of state education officials regarding personalized learning, a topic I had been interested in during my time as the career and technical education director at the KSDE. I had agreed to attend the conference prior to interviewing for the newly created secondary school Redesign specialist position. Although the position was attractive to me, I was not sure I really wanted it since it would require a great deal of time on the road and both of my sons were at the age where they were involved in every activity possible. In fact, Dr. Neuenswander had told me that the two redesign specialist positions (elementary and secondary) would have a shared cubicle and no offices since those two people would be out on the road working in schools much more than coming into the Landon Building. Since the secondary position was what I considered a dream job, I had interviewed for it but was honest in the interview that I was not sure it would be a good fit for me due to all the time away from home and my family. As it turned out, I was not the first choice for the position. It was announced at the State Board of Education meeting, while I was in Philadelphia, that another person had been hired. So, it was interesting that Dr. Watson was calling me a few days later on my way back to Kansas about coming in to discuss an urgent matter. I hustled to Topeka from the airport to find Dr. Watson and Dr. Neuenswander waiting for me. In a weird twist, the first choice for secondary school Redesign specialist had backed out of the job and now Randy and Brad were asking me to step into that role. This elicited many different emotions for me, excitement, indignation, and apprehension. But mostly

excitement. The indignation came from not being the first choice, although I do not blame the interview committee; I was non-committal during the interview since the travel would cut heavily into time with my family. Of course, it is presumptuous of me to think that could be a major reason I came in second, it could have been for a number of other reasons. Regardless, the opportunity fell in my lap, so I took the weekend to think through the offer and, once I reconciled time devoted to the new position and time with family, I accepted the position. With this new position, I had to begin getting a broader understanding of the Redesign process.

What Makes Kansans Can Redesign Unique?

From that slightly inauspicious beginning to the current day, all the major players in Redesign, such as teacher leaders, principals, and myself, have evolved right along with the Redesign process. The processes and the dynamics between the people involved are unique. The process to Redesign was largely based on change processes that were usually only utilized by non-education organizations, such as engineering (Simon, 2019) and business (Dunne & Martin, 2006) focused on rapid change and innovation, two topics rarely attributed to schools. The relationship between the KSDE and Redesign schools was unprecedented. First, the KSDE had never initiated a project at the state level focused on transformational change through innovation. Secondly, projects such as Redesign are out-of-character for state departments of education. Generally, education state agencies focus on accountability and compliance related to student performance, the use of state and federal monies, and following all state laws regarding education. With Redesign, the KSDE initiated a school reform project and set out to provide support (coaching) directly to schools volunteering to participate in the initiative. On the rare occasion when a state education agency would initiate a school reform project, the support would consist of awarding grant funding and possibly waivers from existing state policies or rules to

schools so some of the barriers to innovate could be mitigated on a trial basis. The support provided by the KSDE Redesign team (the two Redesign specialists at the start) did not include any waivers from state regulations or extra funding. The support was all couched in *coaching* schools through a rapid change process aimed at improving student outcomes through innovative teaching and learning practices. It was unprecedented for both the KSDE and schools to be working together so closely in a school reform initiative. As I stated previously, considering the uniqueness of the Redesign project and all the transformational work completed by the Redesign schools, the story, blended with research, must be told. That has been the enduring thought for me as an autoethnographic researcher; as the only person who could complete this research and tell the story of secondary schools redesigning, I have a responsibility to share the experiences of the courageous Redesign schools from my unique perspective as their coach. This thought has fueled me from start of this research.

In this chapter, I first walk through relevant literature which was gleaned from the Community Conversations; however, this is not an extensive literature review - yet. Through the autoethnographic process, I will be incorporating an ongoing literature review in the narratives found later in this autoethnography. There is little new literature brought into this research, rather, the existing literature on school improvement is presented and analyzed. However, the existing literature is presented in a new way; blending design thinking, change theory, and disciplines of execution. These narratives are part of the autoethnographic writing process and serve as an analysis of my lived experiences and personal data related to coaching secondary school Redesign leaders, which will be described in greater detail in the next chapter. Through this chapter, I want to articulate how this autoethnography on school redesign serves as an extension of our then-Deputy Commissioner Dr. Brad Neuenswander's (2018) autoethnography

on the building of the Kansans Can initiative from the Community Conversations which will be described in greater detail in this chapter. My research picks up where Dr. Neuenswander leaves off. His research captures the beginning of the Community Conversations tour to the building of the Kansans Can Vision, State Board of Education Outcomes, and the definition of a successful high school graduate in Kansas. Once those pieces were in place, the Redesign project began as the strategy to employ to “take us to the Moon” and actualize our shared vision. That is precisely where my research begins, when the Redesign project was launched, and is informed by, and an extension of, the research done by Dr. Neuenswander.

After articulating the literature that guided the initial redesign effort, I then explain a pilot project in which I utilized Balanced Leadership (Goodwin et al., 2015), where four areas of focus were identified within their framework to guide my autoethnographic work moving forward. This is important to outline here, because it informs the methodological decisions explained in further detail in chapter four. Additionally, because of my emphasis on the research question on coaching, I will end this chapter with an explanation of relevant literature on this topic, as well as relevant topics related to systemic change and change theory.

The feeling of heading down the right path was palpable. It felt like the surface had been leveled and now concrete was being poured for a strong foundation. It was 2015, and Dr. Randy Watson, the newly appointed Commissioner of Education, had, as his first step, announced he and Dr. Brad Neuenswander would be embarking on a barnstorming tour of Kansas communities, focused on finding out what Kansans wanted to see in their schools in terms of student skills developed and fostered. A tour of this magnitude had never been done in Kansas education so it was exciting to think of what Kansans would share to serve as the impetus for change in preK-12 education. I attended and participated in several of these tour stops, especially

in the business/industry tour, which came about due to a lack of business/industry members through the initial Community Conversations. Little did I know that what I was participating in and listening to, would become the basis for my work for the next five years as well as the basis for this dissertation.

Kansans Can School Redesign: A Background

As we pulled into the small parking lot just off downtown in a mid-sized town in central Kansas, I did not have a good feeling. We had driven for three hours from Topeka to convene a “Community Conversation” with business and industry leaders in the region and we were the only car in the parking lot. I told myself it is still early but deep down, I felt like we might have no one show up. The site was an old restaurant that had been converted into a meeting space which was more on the narrow side with more dim lighting. I could imagine it was like every other mom-and-pop restaurant back in the day. Small, everyone sitting close to one another, which was fine because everyone who showed up was on a first-name basis with everyone else. Newly refurbished to be a community meeting space, it was clean with well-appointed furniture. To me, the place still yearned to be a restaurant but, like so many other small businesses in Kansas, it was not in the cards and not sustainable. With that as the context, Dr. Watson, Dr. Neuenswander, and myself walked into the meeting room.

The purpose of holding this meeting was to gather feedback from business and industry members about what they envision a successful young person in Kansas to be and how school could change to produce more of such young people. All these visionary discussions were critically important to help us rethink and redesign preK-12 education in Kansas, at least we thought they were important. By this point, Dr. Watson, and Dr. Neuenswander had done several of these events, with a great response and good feedback from which to build out the new vision

for Kansas education. I had tagged along on a few of the stops and found them to be enlightening, inspiring, and full of fruitful dialogue amongst the participants. So, to have no one arriving in this small meeting space with ten minutes before the start time was both disconcerting and confusing. Did we forget to send the invitation? No, it was sent as confirmed by Randy's assistant. Did we send the wrong date or time or location? No, the invitation had all the correct information. As we reached our peak of anxiety and wondering if anyone would show up, a few people trickled into the room. As the meeting started, we had three people as participants and then one more showed up a few minutes late. All were dressed as if attending a ball game, that is, very informally. There was coffee, tea, and water made available and all in attendance went right for the drink table. Two of the participants were small business owners, one of which was also a local school board member, and the other two were from non-profit community organizations. We made light of the light showing and moved on through the presentation and discussion. One attendee was highly engaged, sitting forward in her chair, while the rest leaned back in their chairs and appeared to be mildly interested or at least relieved for the break from the routine of a normal workday. We made the best of the meeting and, overall, the participants gave us solid feedback on how education needed to change to establish a thriving economy in Kansas.

As the momentum started to build as each of these events took place, this Community Conversation drove home the point that there were pockets of the state that had very little interest in sharing their thoughts on what skills today's students need to be successful and how to create schools that teach those skills effectively. The main advertisers of these meetings were school personnel so maybe the word did not get out broadly or the timing was not conducive to business and industry members attending. Either way, this was water thrown on the fire these discussions had created in terms of re-imagining and redesigning our preK-12 school model. Many times,

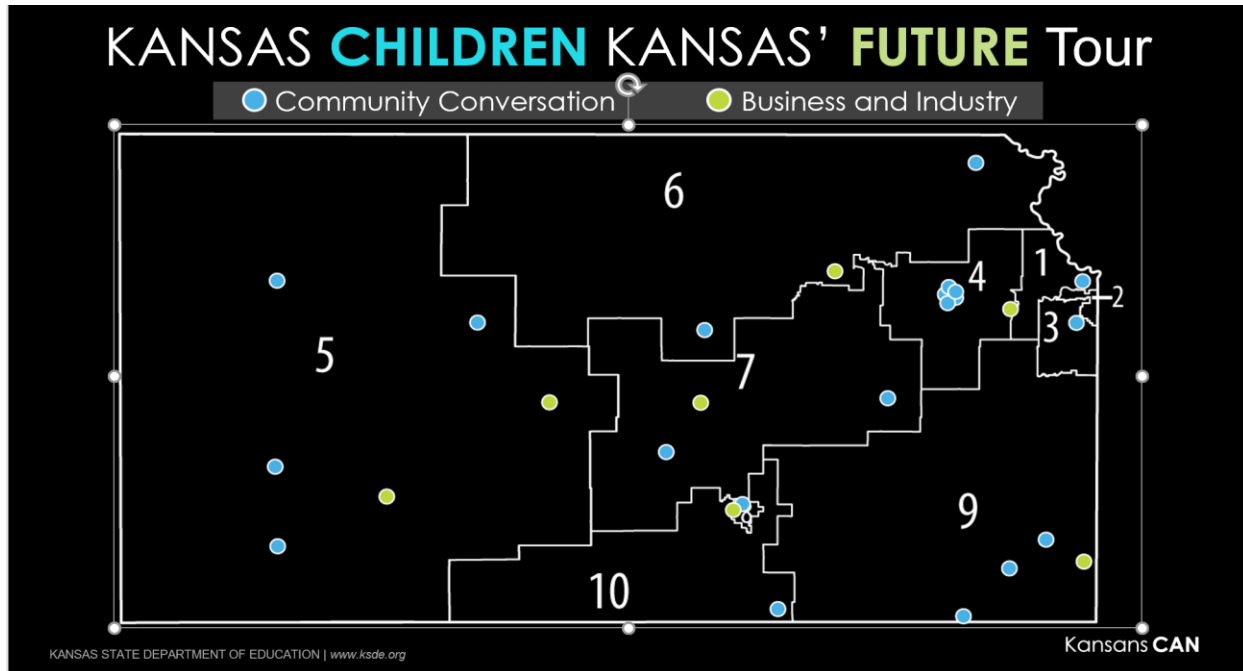
people refer to the Community Conversations as the driver for reforming schools in Kansas but that does not mean there aren't potholes or construction delays in moving down the road. This community discussion was an example of the mindset the KSDE would have to confront directly to truly reform schools so that more students launch into the postsecondary world successfully.

Community Conversations

The genesis of the Kansans Can School Redesign project was the Kansas Children Kansas' Future Community Conversations Tour (Community Conversations hereafter) in 2015 and 2016. As described previously, Dr. Watson and Dr. Neuenswander traveled across the state to 27 different communities (see Figure 1), inviting anyone who had an interest in improving education to attend. What was learned from these Community Conversations represented the foundation for the Redesign initiative, so it is important context to provide the reader. As I write about the Community Conversations, I will include "stories from the road" with Dr. Watson and Dr. Neuenswander on the main points pertinent to the Redesign project. I was able to occasionally tag along on the tour and participate in the conversations with Kansans across the state. Nearly 2,000 Kansans showed up, including parents, students, educators, and business/community leaders, and answered three questions:

1. What are the attributes of a successful young adult in Kansas?
2. What is K-12's role in fostering the development of those attributes in our K-12 students?
3. What is higher education's role in developing those attributes? (Neuenswander, 2018)

Figure 1. Kansas Children Kansas' Future Tour, 2015-2016



Note. The plot points are the locations of each of the Community Conversations and meetings with Business and Industry. The numbers signify the State Board of Education Regions.

Reprinted from the [Kansas Can - Presentations \(ksde.org\)](http://www.ksde.org), 2016.

The responses to these questions are what the entire Kansans Can initiative is based upon and formed up the largest qualitative research study ever done in education in Kansas (Watson, 2016). The responses serve as the foundation from which Kansas K-12 education can be reimagined and rebuilt. All aspects of the Kansans Can initiative derived from these Community Conversations including the shared vision for K-12 education in Kansas (to lead the world in the success of *each* student), the profile of a successful Kansas high school graduate (academically, cognitively, technically prepared for their future as well as employable, and civically engaged), the outcomes or goals that will leverage the vision (social-emotional learning, kindergarten

readiness, individual plans of study, high school graduation, postsecondary success), and the core principles schools would design their systems around (real-world application, student success skills, personalized learning, and family, business, and community partnerships).

From packed rooms full of passionate, opinionated community and business leaders sitting at the front of their chairs to just a few participants meandering in as the meeting starts and making meager attempts to engage in the topic of improving student outcomes, the Community Conversations were a representation of the factions that exist in every school – community meeting that takes place in every school district across the state. There were those in attendance it seemed for the most virtuous reasons; to truly help the youth in their community find a better path. One former local school board member mentioned his disappointment with his own ability to affect change while on the board but was not about to give up and that was exactly why he wanted to engage in these discussions. There were those who showed up with an axe to grind due to past negative experiences in school. One young parent who had been dissatisfied with her young child’s learning experience at the local school, used the open discussion portion of the meeting to complain at length about the injustices in her daughter’s school, as if she complained loudly enough, surely the Commissioner of Education would have to take action. There were some who were there out of a sense of obligation rather than commitment, including educators, due to their position in the community and their heart was not really in the discussion. And there were many passionate, driven educators in attendance who were excited and hopeful to begin reimagining a future of “school” where each student felt valued and had the opportunity to become their best self through a personalized path through preK – 12. The energy from these teachers was palpable; several commented how the current model was only going to continue to frustrate students and educators. Despite the differences of those in attendance, it was

invigorating knowing each person had the opportunity to share their opinions so that, in the end, one could state with fidelity that “this is what Kansans told us they’d like to see in their schools.”

As the Community Conversations began, I was in the position of assistant director at the KSDE overseeing Career Technical Education (referred to as CTE hereafter). Even though I was heavily involved in supporting schools with setting up rigorous CTE Pathways for their students, I had an intense interest in the Community Conversations and what Kansans from Liberal to Leavenworth valued in terms of student success skills. I was able to observe how Dr. Watson and Dr. Neuenswander engaged community members in the discussion on K-12 education and was even allowed to facilitate parts of the discussion occasionally, which was an honor for me.

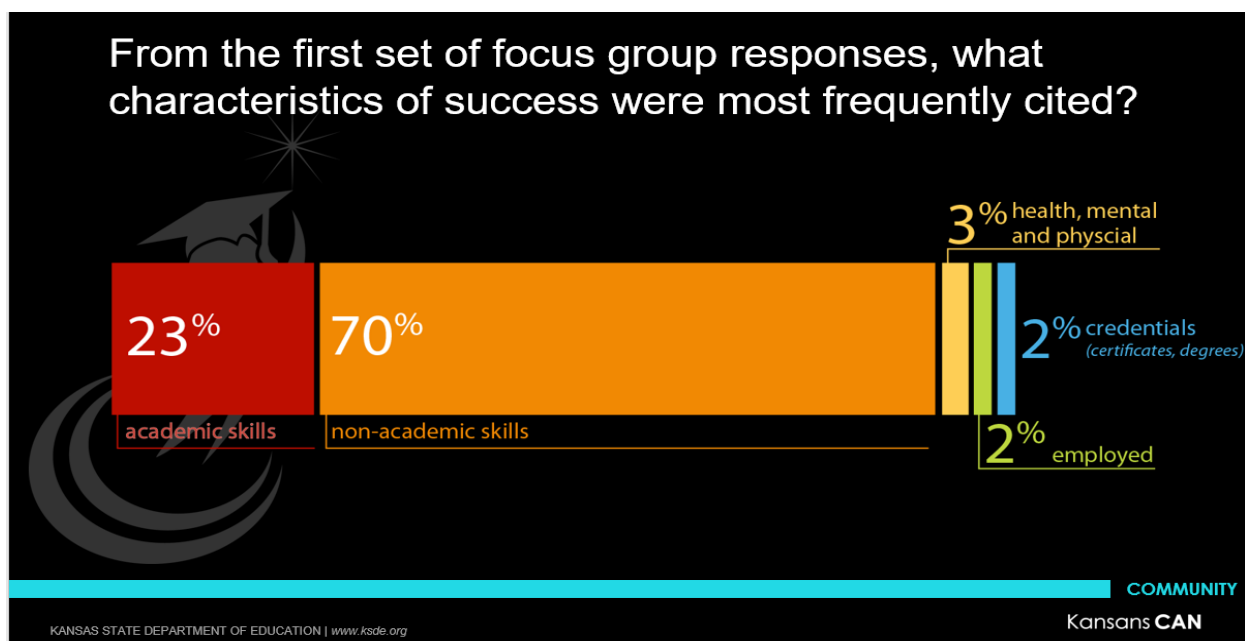
What I observed during those sessions, aside from a few lukewarm meetings, was the high level of engagement and excitement from the participants. I also observed a collective sense of hope from the people, anticipating positive changes long overdue in our schools and grateful for the opportunity to play a part in shaping the future of education in Kansas. It was in this environment that people discussed their responses to the questions of the attributes, characteristics of a successful young Kansan and then K-12 and higher education’s role in fostering those attributes in students. Looking back on the core questions during the Community Conversations, next I will walk through each question and the collective responses.

Kansas, We Have a Problem!

“Houston, we have a problem.” I knew the line was coming yet, when it landed, it still stirred up a mix of emotions. Dr. Watson was showing a clip from the movie *Apollo 13* as part of a Community Conversation and Tom Hanks as Jim Lovell had just looked into the camera and uttered the famous saying in response to a malfunction on board the latest Apollo ship on April 13, 1970. Lovell wasn’t the originator of that saying; Jack Swigert, command module pilot, made the statement, which was actually, “Okay, Houston, we’ve had a problem” but it wasn’t heard clearly back in Houston so Lovell repeated the phrase (*Apollo 13 Flight Journal - Day 3, Part 2: “Houston, We’ve Had a Problem,”* 2021). The screenwriters of *Apollo 13* changed the verb tense to make the quote more dramatic and the change has stuck to the point where the phrase is often used today when something goes wrong. In response to the on-board technical issue, NASA engineers immediately began creating solutions for the problem. Working feverishly over the next few days, the group came up with a solution to ensure the ship didn’t burn up on re-entry. Dr. Watson shared this particular clip to illustrate that there was a problem in preK-12 education; the current model had largely been in place for decades, yet the rest of the world had changed dramatically, including unprecedented levels of access to information in the palm of one’s hand. Still, lecture-style instruction where information is delivered by the teacher and learned by the student was prevalent in schools, leading to a misalignment between how schools operate and how students learn in the Information Age. In essence, Dr. Watson was saying “Kansas, we have a problem” and hoping for those in the room to share their thoughts on how educators could re-align and redesign teaching and learning with the same type of urgency those NASA engineers felt so many years ago.

To begin to re-think the current model of education in Kansas, the first community conversation question was: what are the attributes of a successful young adult in Kansas? To this first question, over 2,000 Kansans identified a myriad of skills they felt were most critical to a student's future success (See Figure 2). Nevertheless, non-academic skills (social-emotional, employability, or soft skills) were cited 70% of the time (Bush, 2016). The results were somewhat surprising considering approximately 65% of the respondents were educators who typically focus their time and effort on developing academic skills in students, due in part to academics traditionally being valued more highly than other skill areas.

Figure 2. Characteristics of Success from Community Conversations, 2015



Note. Responses to this question were written by participants during the Community Conversations. Reprinted from the [Kansans Can - Presentations \(ksde.org\)](http://www.ksde.org), 2016.

These results proved to be the most significant in setting a new direction for education in Kansas. Prior to the Community Conversations, if the question of “what is the focus of K-12

education?” had been posed to anyone on the street, the majority would most likely answer with a more modern version of “reading, writing, and ‘rithmetic.” The same question asked of educators would elicit a response that math and reading state assessments were the focus, mainly due to the *No Child Left Behind* federal legislation. An overwhelming majority of approximately 2,000 Kansans participating in the Community Conversations prioritized non-academic skills over academic skills for future success. It wasn’t hard to conclude preK-12 in Kansas was in a state of imbalance (Neuenswander, 2018) and was in dire need of a new direction that would restore the balance between academic and non-academic skills. These results provided the permission to create a new vision for education in Kansas, “authorized” by educators and community members from all across the state.

K-12's Role in Producing Students with These Skills - We Can't Do That, Can We?

During a break at one of the Community Conversations, I struck up a conversation with a well-respected, veteran administrator about what the group had discussed regarding the attributes of successful young people. We started off talking about students with adverse home lives, the increased pressure schools are facing in setting those students up for success, and how social-emotional skills were critical for those students as it is quite difficult to learn math concepts when your basic human needs are not being met consistently. We then transitioned to advanced students and how, in many cases, school is not challenging for them. Those students often lose interest and resolve to “play the game” of school well so they can move on to a postsecondary environment that will challenge their intellect and skills. The administrator remarked that a group of their students could most likely pass the final for many of their classes within the first few weeks. When I asked why not allow students to “test-out” of a particular class in that situation, the administrator looked surprised and said, “we can’t do that, can we?” I asked him what state

regulation or policy would not allow his school to advance students through courses for which they already know and can do the standards. He responded with “seat time” or the length of time a student had to attend a class to earn a full unit of credit (generally 120 hours) (Kansas Secretary of State - KAR Regulations, 2021). His answer did not surprise me, but it should have. In Kansas, since July 1, 2005, students could be awarded credit “based upon demonstrated knowledge of the content of a course or subject, regardless of the amount of time spent by the student in the course or subject (Kansas Secretary of State - KAR Regulations, 2021). This conversation took place in 2016 and the idea that “seat time” was the only avenue for a student to earn credit was still deeply entrenched in the fabric of K-12 education. As I shared this with the administrator, you could see the wheels turning in his mind, not that he was questioning what I was saying but *how* a school could allow students to earn credit when they demonstrate the knowledge and skills of a course and not have to be held back by the outdated idea of seat time. Interactions like these take place quite often and they always beg the question, “do we (KSDE) need to be more explicit in what schools can and can’t do or are schools hesitant to make changes that they can’t envision how to make?” This is often the question we ask ourselves when thinking of a change in practice; how do we do it? A better first question when considering making a change is *why* and that was the point of the Community Conversations; establishing clearly why a change was needed to preK-12 education.

The second question posed to attendees of the Community Conversations was, “what is K-12’s role in fostering the development of the attributes of a successful young adult in Kansas?” The responses to this question formed the basis for what types of learning experiences our K-12 schools should offer and how school should be structured (See Figure 3). The graphic

below represents a consolidation of the responses into six descriptors of what Kansans want to see in K-12 schools:

Figure 3. What Kansans Want to See in Schools - Community Conversations, 2015

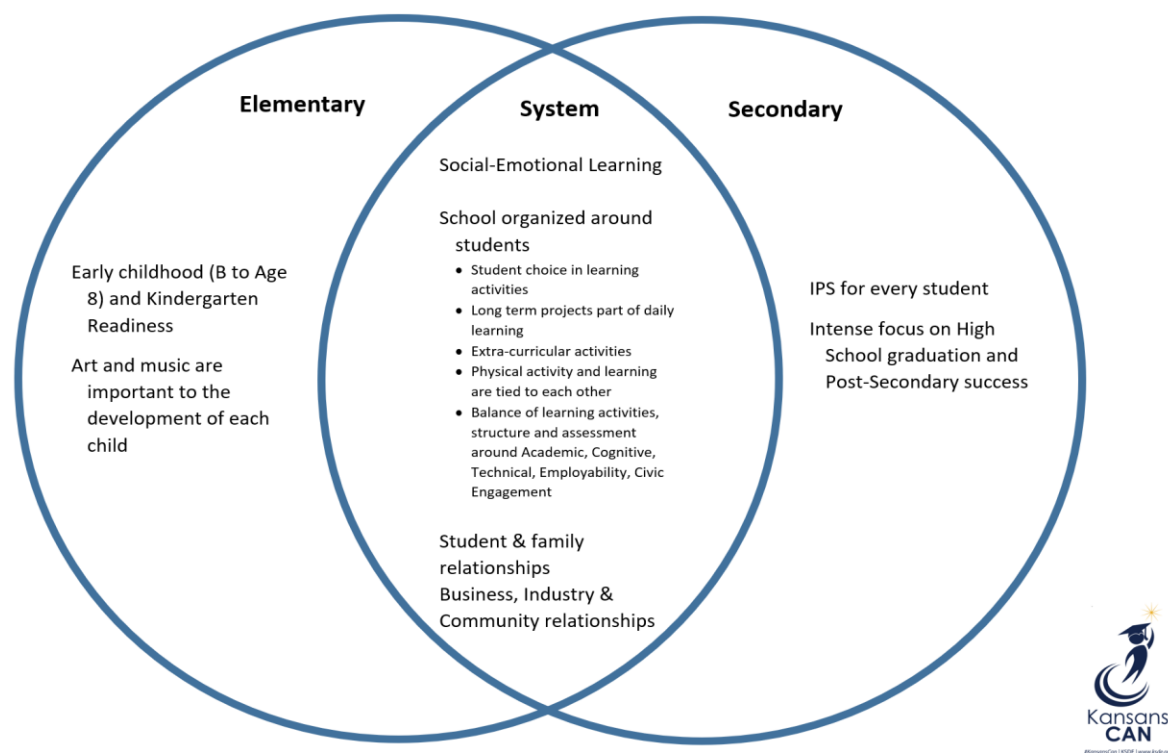


Note. The responses to the question of “What should be K-12’s role in producing students with the attributes of a successful young adult in Kansas?” were collected during the Community Conversations. Reprinted from the [Kansans Can - Presentations \(ksde.org\)](http://ksde.org), 2016.

While the first question responses formed the basis for Kansas’ Vision, which is to lead the world in the success of each student, and the profile of a successful high school graduate, the responses to the second question formed the basis for the Kansans Can School Redesign project. To give Kansans what they wanted to see in their schools so that the vision could be achieved, K-12 schools would need to change. This was the first major indication schools needed to be redesigned in Kansas. During the summer of 2017, the Redesign project began to take shape

based on what Kansans articulated they would like to see in their schools. Since there would be both elementary and secondary school redesign efforts, a Venn diagram (See Figure 4) was developed to show schools involved in Redesign what aspects of “school” needed to be addressed at both elementary and secondary levels as well as those aspects that were system wide. This was not a part of Dr. Brad Neuenswander’s research on Community Conversations and really served as a line of demarcation from his research to mine.

Figure 4. Initial Redesign Framework, 2017



Note. This Venn diagram was created in late summer 2017 by the author and Dr. Tammy Mitchell to share with the Mercury cohort of Redesign schools. The content listed was in response to what Kansans wanted to see in their schools as outlined in the Community Conversations. Reprinted from the [Kansans Can - Presentations \(ksde.org\)](https://www.ksde.org/presentations), 2017.

This framework served as the connection between what Kansans shared in the Community Conversations and what schools were tasked with doing in Redesign. This diagram was the driving force for schools during the initial year (2017-2018) of Redesign. Curiously enough, this diagram only lived for the initial year. By the end of that first year, the diagram had become a list of items for schools to check off. Even though the visual itself showed integration, many school Redesign teams viewed each of the ideas listed as isolated pieces to implement. One school took it as far as to form up teams for each of the ideas listed on this diagram. This more literal approach to the feedback from Kansans all over the state could have been due to several factors; the short timeline (one year to plan and then implement the next year), pressure from community, parents, and district office administrators who were eagerly anticipating seeing the new changes made, or not taking the time to draw connections between what is presented before jumping into the work of implementation. This diagram was a good place to start as it represented what Kansans wanted to see in their schools, but the early returns led us to do a Redesign of our own, within KSDE, after the initial year so that schools could more easily see the connections that existed.

One issue was the need to further define what was identified in the framework. The first cohort of Redesign schools would often ask for more depth in the aspects listed. They would ask questions such as “What is meant by social-emotional learning and what does that look like?” and “What does it mean to be ‘kindergarten ready’?” Additionally, the Mercury and Gemini I schools were charged with addressing all the Redesign concepts listed on the original Venn diagram (Figure 4 above) and this proved to be exceedingly difficult with only one year to plan before launching a newly redesigned system. There were multiple questions from the schools, such as how many of the Redesign concepts needed to be addressed in their plan (answer: all of

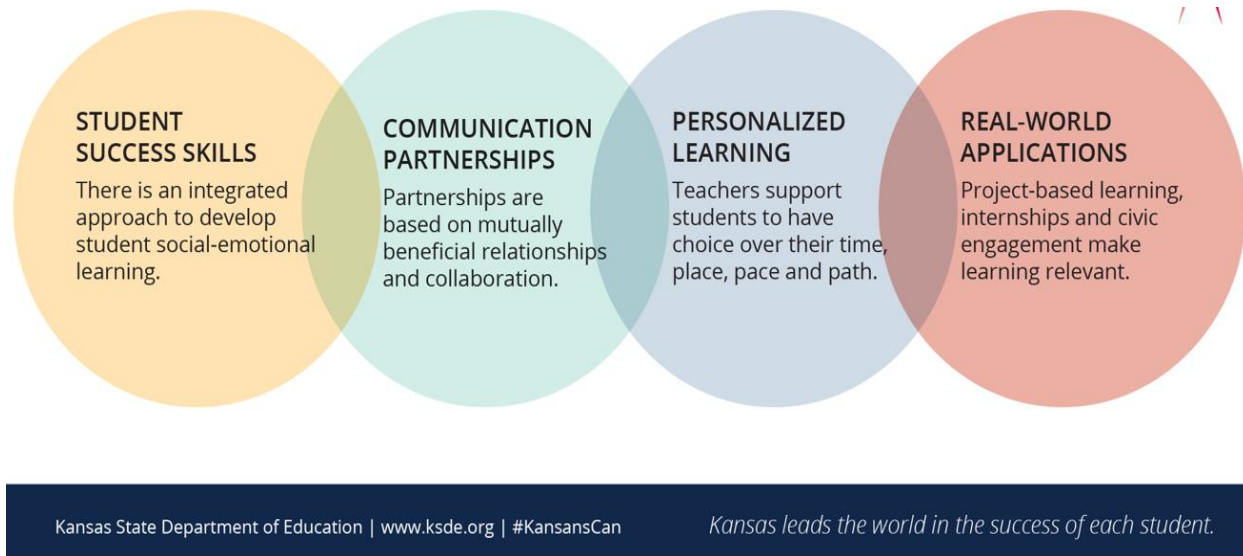
them) or what would happen if not every concept was included. Based on the logistical challenges expressed by the initial schools, there was a need to clarify and condense the original framework down into more manageable categories while also keeping the crux of what Kansans said they wanted in their schools fully present. Those questions drove the KSDE to develop the four Redesign principles during the summer of 2018, one year after the initial year of Redesign, and they have remained in place throughout the Redesign project and will be a major part of the accreditation process in the future.

The redesign principles were critical in providing the framework to move the initiative forward. Once the initial year of School Redesign (2017-2018) was in the books, the Redesign team huddled with Education Elements, an educational organization specializing in personalized learning, to develop a regional support model for Redesign. As the meetings began, it became clear there was not much clarity to the focus of Redesign, with the profile of a successful graduate (five skill areas), the state outcomes (five areas), and now the cluttered Redesign framework schools were using to transform their system. All these targets were good and were put together with the best of intentions based on the Community Conversations, but Redesign schools were left wondering where to focus. As the saying goes, “to be clear is to be kind” so the group decided to condense the original Venn diagram of Redesign, which was based on what Kansans told us were the type of learning experiences they wanted to see in schools. The newly condensed version (See Figure 5) featured four core principles of Redesign around which schools would design their systems.

- Personalized Learning
- Student Success Skills, with an emphasis on social-emotional learning
- Real World Application

- Family, Business, and Community Partnerships (Bush, 2018)

Figure 5. *Kansans Can School Redesign Principles, 2018*



Note. The four Redesign Principles were formed based on what Kansans said they wanted to see in their schools, from the Community Conversations, that were research-based. Schools were tasked with developing strategies that aligned with these principles as they worked through the Redesign process. Reprinted from the [Kansans Can - Presentations \(ksde.org\)](http://ksde.org), 2018.

Beginning with the 2018-2019 school year, Redesign schools were tasked with changing their system to revolve around these four core principles of Redesign. These principles were an amalgamation of the research from the Community Conversations as well as what the initial cohorts of Redesign schools (Mercury and Gemini I) were planning to launch in terms of student learning experiences.

What is Higher Education’s Role in Producing Students with These Skills?

As a follow-up to the question of K-12’s role in producing successful students, those in attendance at the Community Conversations were also asked what role, if any, institutions of

higher education should play in the development of the success skills identified from the first question. The feedback to this question centered on reform to postsecondary policies around admission criteria, transfer of credits, and the increasing cost of higher education. While this was important feedback, it was not as seminal to the redesign of our K-12 schools. Those calls for postsecondary reform were the same as what had been shared for several years prior, so there was much more urgency around what was shared by community members regarding the first two questions (attributes of a successful 24-year-old, the role of K-12 in fostering those identified skills).

Waiting for Christmas

Once the Community Conversations wrapped up, this began a time of anticipation and impatience, like what young people experience as winter approaches and the Christmas lights began appearing on people's homes. With so many across the state taking part in the discussions around successful young people and how education needs to change, the analyzed feedback was a gift to be unwrapped to begin the Redesign of schools across Kansas. Not many a day went by that I did not inquire of Dr. Brad Neuenswander the progress being made in preparing the Community Conversation data to be released. I think Brad felt like the annoyed parent who tires of the incessant wonderings of their children about the gifts under the Christmas tree. Even though it might have been annoying to some, for me there was this palpable feeling of excitement of what was going to be unveiled. For all those educators who would often think, "there has to be a better way", this was the time when permission would be granted to think, act, and teach differently in a way where each student found value in their education. Gratefully, the State Board of Education was similarly impatient for the data to be released so they began analyzing the preliminary data to start building out a new vision for education.

Shared Vision

The group “authorized” to develop a new vision for preK-12 education in Kansas was the State Board of Education and, once the Community Conversations wrapped up, Board members and Dr. Watson immediately set about creating a compelling, shared vision to galvanize schools across the state. In October 2016, Dr. Watson unveiled the vision at the KSDE Annual Conference to one of the largest crowds in its history, generating buzz and excitement. During his keynote speech, Dr. Watson informed the audience the new vision “wasn’t created in a conference room at KSDE, rather it was created by all the Kansans attending the Community Conversations” (Watson, 2016). This statement legitimized the new vision and all the work to take place to reach the vision. The State Board of Education’s new vision was “Kansas leads the world in the success of each student” (Bush, 2016). This vision statement was indeed a shared endeavor, compelling, bold, and, if realized, preK-12 education in Kansas would reach a level never before seen. The new vision was not simply a nice sound bite; the State Board developed metrics that would track our progress and let us know if we had realized the vision. The main metric was termed postsecondary effectiveness. Essentially, student success would be measured past high school graduation by examining how Kansas students perform two years after graduation (Postsecondary Success, 2016). This was a new approach and one that involved a certain level of controversy, in two ways. One, schools would now be expected to embrace student performance after they exit the school, and two, postsecondary effectiveness was defined as performance in higher education, not including those students who were headed off to the military or the workforce. It was not that those routes were not important or would not lead to success for young adults, rather, research out of Georgetown’s Center on Education and the Workforce predicted that over 70% of the jobs in Kansas would require an additional credential

to a high school diploma by the year 2020 (Carnevale, 2013). The study found the national average for the percentage of jobs requiring higher levels of education than high school to be 65% (Carnevale, 2013). Kansas' percentage (71%) ranked seventh highest in the nation at the time, which was a good indicator for the state in terms of the future economy. At that time in Kansas, approximately 40% of high school graduates were attaining the educational credentials needed for over 70% of the jobs in Kansas (Carnevale, 2013). This gap between the educational level reached by high school graduates and the educational level required by employers in the near future reinforced the idea Kansas preK-12 education had to change to meet the needs of the labor market and students could eventually support themselves and possibly a family. By combining labor market research with what Kansans shared in terms of what success was in young adults during the Community Conversations, a powerful and compelling rationale for the need to rethink and revamp our current preK-12 model of education was created.

Profile of a Successful Kansas High School Graduate

The State Board of Education did not stop with a shared vision. They took the qualitative data from the Community Conversations, specifically the question of “what are the attributes/characteristics of a successful young adult in Kansas?” and developed a profile of a successful high school graduate. Based on all the academic and non-academic characteristics identified, the State Board created this:

A Successful Kansas High School Graduate has the: *1) academic preparation, 2) cognitive preparation, 3) technical skills, 4) employability skills, and 5) civic engagement*, to succeed in postsecondary education, in the attainment of an industry-recognized certification, or in the workforce, without the need for remediation (Bush, 2016). If Kansas was going to lead the world in the success of each student, it was critical to have a clear target for schools. This

profile was a conglomeration of what Kansans identified as the most important skills for K-12 students to learn by the time they graduate and provided schools clarity with what success looks like.

Early Evolutions in Kansans Can Redesign:

Figuring Out the System, Process, and My Role

I sat down in my new space and looked at the computer screen, wondering what my next step was. It was late spring of 2017, and I had recently been named the new secondary school Redesign specialist at the KSDE and charged with leading the Redesign of middle and high schools across the state. I had no idea where to start and I sat there staring blankly ahead, thinking about working with a handful of brave secondary schools starting later in the summer. It was an odd feeling because, by that time, the Community Conversations had wrapped up and the State Board of Education had looked at the data from the tour of communities and created a shared vision, a profile of a successful Kansas high school graduate, and outcomes or goals that would drive preK-12 in reaching the vision. Redesign was seen as the major strategy to achieve the Board's goals and reach the vision of leading the world in the success of each student. So, the table was all set, everybody was in their seats, the food served, and now it was time to dig in and do the work.

But what was the work?

What does redesigning the teaching and learning in a school look like?

I had to answer those questions and do it quickly so there would be some semblance of what the schools needed to do beginning in August. In that moment, not unlike many moments I have had in writing this dissertation, a mix of emotions –

anxiety,

insecurity,
excitement,
anticipation,

welled up in me and very much clouded my mind. It was in this moment that I did what schools would do throughout the Redesign process; stop thinking, start doing.

The System of Redesign

Building out the operating system of Redesign was the first order of business. Tammy Mitchell, my elementary Redesign colleague, and me spent several days covering the large windows in our shared cubicle space, mapping out how we would select, coach, and communicate with the initial cohort of Redesign schools. We put so many large post-it notes on our windows, the Landon building facilities department had to tell us to scale it back. We shook our heads to show we understood and proceeded to continue to map out the system of Redesign on the windows. Many of our sixth-floor colleagues would stop by to read through our brainstormed lists of ideas, ranging from logistics (we quickly became experts in Kansas geography) to expectations for Redesign schools. All this planning was important, however, it would all be irrelevant unless there were Redesign schools willing and able to courageously rethink, reimagine, and redesign their current model.

What If No One Volunteers?

This question haunted Tammy and I for the first few weeks after the announcement of the Kansans Can School Redesign project. In spring 2017, the KSDE began promoting the Redesign project to schools across the state before we were named as Redesign specialists. Schools had to apply to be part of the project and meet specific criteria, such as at least 80% of staff had to approve joining the project, gaining support from the local teacher professional organization, and

accepting that there would be no waivers from any existing state education regulations or any extra funds to be part of the project (Bush, 2016). Fast forward a few years; Tammy and I are presenting to a collaboration of state departments of education focused on innovation and, when we shared with them the Redesign criteria to be eligible for the project, they could not believe any school would have wanted to join. With the rigorous application process as well as ambiguity with the Redesign process and what would be expected, we were leery of how many schools would apply. In the end, there was nothing to worry about as there were twenty-nine school districts encompassing fifty-eight schools that applied to be part of the Mercury cohort. Redesign was referred to as Kansas' moonshot for education, so the space race analogy was adopted, including limiting the initial cohort to only seven districts, a nod towards the seven Mercury astronauts. From those twenty-nine districts, seven were selected and announced in the late spring of 2017.

We took off from Topeka early in the morning, headed to ACT headquarters in Iowa City. This was my first time on the "state plane" that Mr. Dale Dennis, then Deputy Commissioner here at KSDE, had always talked about using to fly to locales like Liberal and Pittsburg. It had been years since KSDE had had that kind of access to the state plane, so this was somewhat of a rare occurrence. Dr. Watson and Dr. Neuenswander had invited Tammy and I to travel with them to meet with the ACT team so Randy could share what we had learned in Kansas from the Community Conversations. The plane was small but big enough for the four of us to swivel in our seats to be able to face each other. As we got up in the air, Randy asked how the Redesign project was progressing. We had just named fourteen schools as part of the inaugural Mercury cohort. We had selected those fourteen schools from a pool of fifty-eight who had volunteered and met the criteria to be selected, which was no easy task. Getting at least 80%

of a school's staff to agree to apply for a school improvement project with unprecedented scope and size is very difficult. I think of my time as a school administrator and the level of disagreement over things like changing the lunch schedule; how in the world could a school get 80% approval to transform the teaching and learning in a building? So, to have to turn away forty-four willing schools hungry to change was difficult as well. As Tammy and I shared this with Randy and Brad, they both pondered how we might be able to still work with those that had applied but weren't selected. Simply telling such willing schools to apply again the next year would have been a major mistake. The more we talked, the more we came around to the idea of how we could engage those forty-four schools in Redesign. We decided we would ask those schools if they wanted to be part of the Gemini I cohort. Tammy and I would meet with those schools every other week virtually. Where we would meet with the Mercury schools in-person every other week, Tammy and I would begin "Zooming" (before Zoom became the staple it is today) with the Gemini I schools. We framed out the project during the flight to Iowa City and, by the time we touched down, we had a plan for the second cohort of Redesign before the first cohort had even begun in earnest.

It was for good intentions as the schools were eager to join the project and motivated to change, but the planning for how the Gemini I cohort would proceed was rushed and not thought through well. At that time, virtual training and support were largely in the infancy stage so Tammy and I had to quickly bone up on how Zoom worked and how we could provide the same level of support to the Gemini I's as the Mercury schools were receiving. This development was a major concern for me as we began preparing our support and training program. Those concerns were largely realized as the year unfolded. Where we were very much connecting and building relationships with the Mercury schools through frequent in-person meetings in their schools, the

every-other Friday, one-hour virtual meetings with over forty schools paled in comparison to the support provided to the Mercury cohort. To this day and most assuredly as you read this, I retain feelings of guilt over how we supported the Gemini I schools in that first year. To those schools' credit, they worked diligently to make changes and address the principles of Redesign identified through the Community Conversations. One decision we made that helped was we gave Gemini I schools the option to take two years to plan before "launching" their respective Redesign plans, whereas the Mercury schools, as part of being in the first cohort, had to agree to plan for only one year before launching. Even with that concession, it still felt like having a classroom full of eager students but only really teaching to a quarter of them.

Teacher-led, Administrator-supported

As we (Tammy and I) met with the initial school Redesign teams, it became clear that it would take a different leadership approach to redesign a school and then also sustain the changes made. The core school Redesign team was made up of at least one building administrator and generally 3 to 4 teacher leaders. Tammy and I met in-person and virtually with school Redesign teams every other week of the school year.

After meeting with school Redesign teams and observing how decisions were made, the term for the type of leadership required in Redesign was "teacher-led, administrator-supported." The basic idea was if a school was going to be centered around the four Redesign principles, teachers needed to be in the driver's seat at the school level, not at the classroom level as usual. To allow teachers to lead change at the school level, supportive and skilled administrators who knew how to support teacher leaders was critically important. Additionally, if the changes made were spearheaded by teachers, the likelihood of those changes being sustained was much greater

than dynamic administrators leading a change effort and then leaving for another position, taking the impetus for the change with them.

In November of 2017, I was in a meeting with a Mercury school's Redesign team, and they were stuck. The school had done well in progressing to the point where staff could begin researching strategies they could implement that would align with the Redesign principles and leverage student performance in a positive direction in each goal area. This school had collaboratively identified three goal areas based on the largest gaps in student data and it was time for teacher teams to dig in and begin researching strategies. The only issue was not all staff felt like volunteering to be part of an investigation team. I had questioned the school Redesign team whether asking for volunteers was the right approach. They had responded that, since they had a 100% approval vote to join Redesign, the assumption was all staff would be eager to be on a goal area team. What the school Redesign team was realizing was that the initial excitement to redesign was wearing off and it was now starting to feel like actual work which led a few staff to remain silent when the ask went out to join an investigation team. The school Redesign team was frustrated, including the principal who, up to this point, had done a masterful job of sharing leadership with the school Redesign team. We ended the meeting with the principal considering making joining a goal area investigation team a requirement for each staff member. The school Redesign team was fearful of the backlash in response to this reversal. We adjourned without a clear path forward other than there was an all-staff meeting next week where the idea was to break into goal area investigation teams.

I checked in with the principal the next week after the all-staff meeting, curious as to how the day went. The principal had decided to make the unilateral decision to require each staff member to be part of at least one goal team. He felt like this was the type of support his hard-

working school Redesign team needed and reasoned the news should come from him alone so disgruntled staff would focus their criticism on him as opposed to the teacher leaders. When the time came for the principal to announce the new expectation, one of the teacher leaders from the school Redesign team stood up and gave what the principal referred to as “the business” to the staff. This teacher leader was also the head football coach so giving this kind of “instruction” was natural to him. In so many words, he shared with the staff that, for the sake of their students, each one of them was expected to agree to join an investigation team. This teacher leader ended his comments by sharing that if each staff member couldn’t find it in them to join a team, then they should find another school to teach. After that, each staff member joined at least one goal area investigation team and the day was a major step forward for this school in Redesign. The principal relayed to me how proud he was of the teacher leader, the school Redesign team, and the rest of the staff. From that point on, this school was successful in developing solid redesign plans and the subsequent launch of those plans the following year. This was a shining example of what can happen when teachers own the work of school improvement and administrators support teachers taking the lead.

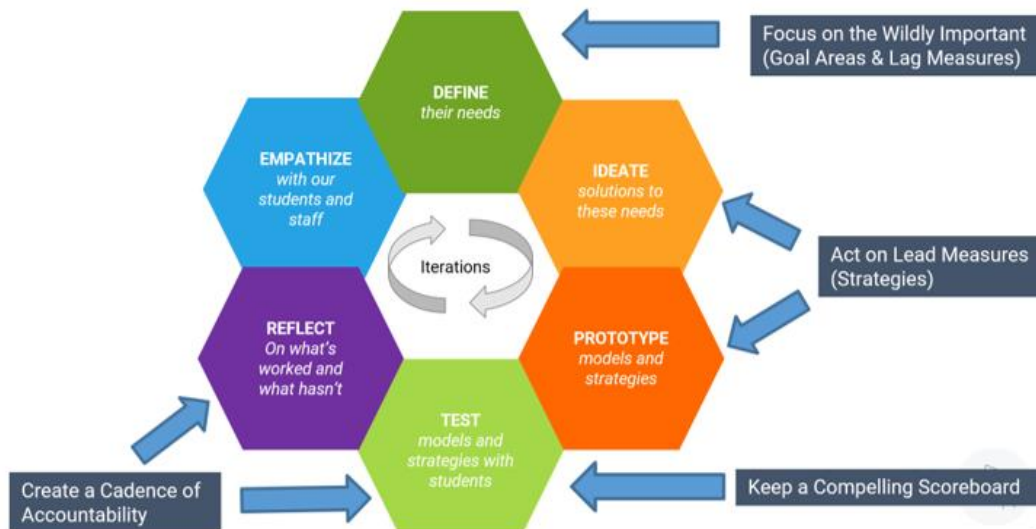
The leadership exhibited by a school Redesign team, both inside and outside the school, was both unique and familiar. It is safe to assume that none of the building and teacher leaders involved in the Redesign of the learning environment had ever attempted to accomplish something of this magnitude in their educational careers. Because of this, there was no road map for how to lead a school through a complete redesign, which created unique dynamics between the members of the school Redesign team as well as their interactions with the broader staff and school community. Within this uniqueness, school Redesign teams would utilize traditional leadership practices, albeit applied in the context of school redesign. This flattening of the

traditional hierarchical approach to school improvement caused administrators and teacher leaders to, at times, struggle in clarifying their role in leading the charge of Redesign (Lambert, 2007). This confusion led to a change in the dynamics of staff meetings, where teacher leaders, not the principal, were facilitating meetings where decisions were made. The Redesign process revealed gaps in the power dynamics of a school and forced school leaders to analyze the decision-making processes in place while, at the same time, feeling pressure for decisions to be made at a rapid pace to keep up with the timeline to launch (one year for Mercury schools, two years at most for Gemini I schools).

The Process of Redesign

As Tammy and I began planning for the initial year of Redesign, we concluded that if we wanted schools to think and act differently, we would need to choose a process for schools to follow that did not have its roots in education. I had begun using the tenets from the business improvement book, *The 4 Disciplines of Execution* by Chris McChesney while in my previous role as the Career and Technical Education director at KSDE. The rules to follow in the book were identifying what was most important to an organization, formulating strategies that leverage what's most important, monitor progress, and stay accountable (McChesney et al., 2022). While the disciplines were fundamentally sound and provided a solid process to improve in virtually any industry, they did not encourage the type of creative thinking we knew schools would need to employ to redesign the teaching and learning in their school. We decided to develop our own Redesign process by blending the 4 Disciplines of Execution and the stages of Design Thinking (see Figure 6 below). In the four disciplines, we had Lombardi and an intense focus on executing Redesign strategies, but we also needed Da Vinci and creativity so schools could design a model that could personalize the learning experience for each student.

Figure 6. The Redesign Process: Blending Design Thinking with the 4 Disciplines of Execution, 2019



Note. Visual representation of the process Redesign schools followed. The colored hexagons represent the phases of design thinking while the rectangles represent the 4 Disciplines of Execution. The two processes were blended into one to guide the Redesign effort in each school. Adapted from “Statewide School Redesign: Integrating Design Thinking and the Four Disciplines of Execution as a Continuous School Improvement Process” by J. Liang, T. Mitchell, and J. Scott, 2020, *Journal for Cases in Educational Leadership*, p. 3. Copyright 2020 The University Council for Educational Administration.

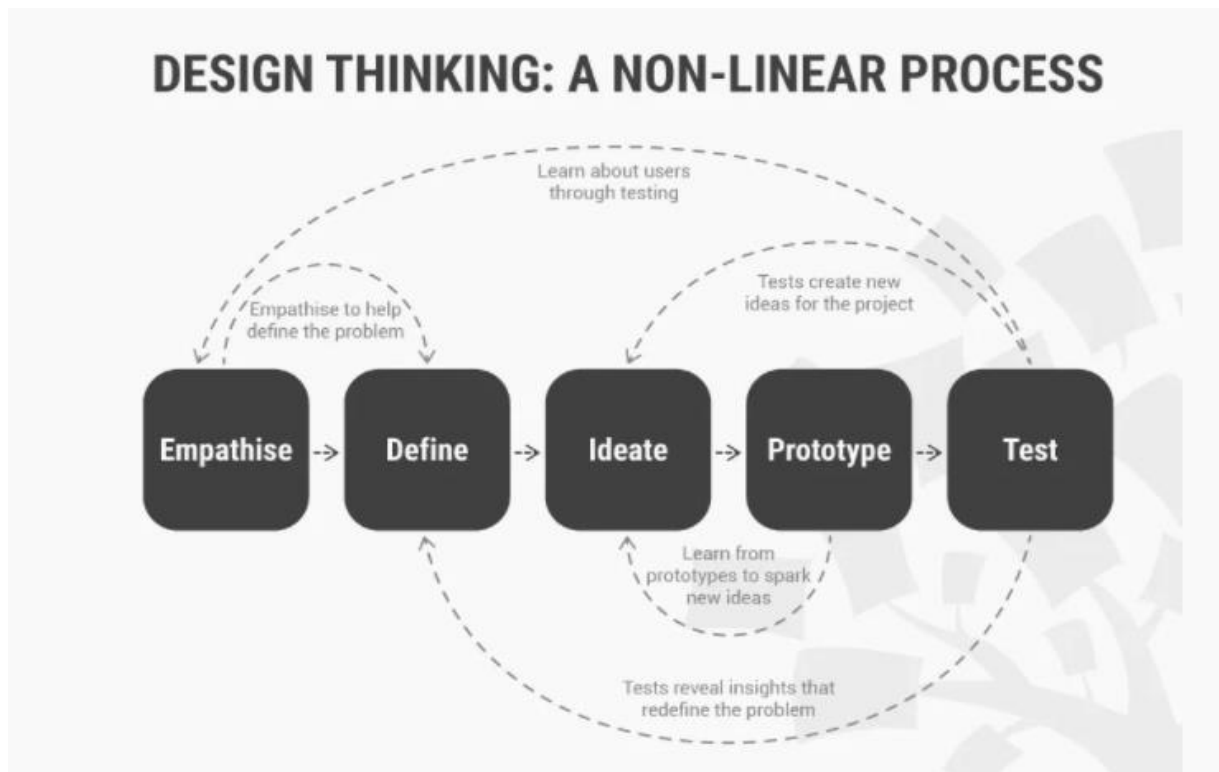
Design Thinking

The KSDE Redesign team, one year after the project’s inception, discovered design thinking as a conceptual model schools could use to rethink the learning experience for students. One of the attractive characteristics of this model, in addition to the focus on creativity and innovation, was that it did not have roots in education. Design thinking began in the engineering

world but quickly became a crossover improvement process that could be utilized in any industry to solve any wicked problem. In the past, typical school improvement processes led to refining, or tweaking, the traditional educational system, resulting in incremental changes. The expectation for schools involved in the Redesign project was to challenge the status quo of every aspect of schooling, so it was critical to search outside the education world for an approach to change the system and allow educators to take a fresh perspective to school improvement. For the purposes of this literature review, design thinking is included to provide as much context to the reader as possible in terms of “how” school Redesign teams went about the process of redesigning their school.

Design thinking was figuratively a breath of fresh air to educators as they began to redesign their school. Generally defined as an analytic and creative process, design thinking engages a person in opportunities to experiment, create, and prototype models, test those models, and redesign (Razzouk & Shute, 2012). Being part of the Redesign project, school Redesign teams were given the freedom to think differently about teaching and learning and design thinking provided a platform from which educators could start from. In essence, design thinking refers to how designers see and how they consequently think (Liu, 1996). The non-linear process (See Figure 7) features five stages: empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test (Dam & Siang, 2020).

Figure 7. 5 Stages in the Design Thinking Process, 2020



Note. This is a more in-depth visual of design thinking showing the five stages and the flow of the process, including descriptors. Schools would use this process to Redesign. Adapted from “5 Stages in the Design Thinking Process” by R.F. Dam & T.Y. Siang, 2020, The Interaction Design Foundation.

Design thinking is human-centered thus, in the case of Redesign, a student-centered approach was taken, starting with empathizing with the student experience. In design thinking, one must continually consider how what is created will respond to human needs (Razzouk & Shute, 2012). The first stage of design thinking is to empathize with those who are engaged in the process that needs improvement. Empathizing involves designers “to set aside their own assumptions about the world in order to gain insight into users and their needs” (Dam & Siang,

2020, p. 1). The Define stage involves analyzing the insights gathered and synthesizing that data into a clear, concise problem statement. Once the human-centered problem has been identified, the next stage in design thinking is “ideate,” where teams will generate multiple ideas to address the problem. This stage is often referred to as the “brainstorming” phase and the goal is to generate as many innovative ideas as possible. Next is the experimental stage called “prototype”, where designers build out models or prototypes of what the new product or solution would look like or how it would operate. In the school world, a prototype would be a strategy formulated to address a student area of need, for example, project-based learning in response to low student self-efficacy. The prototypes are drafted and, “one by one, they are investigated and either accepted, improved and re-examined, or rejected on the basis of the users’ experiences” (Dam & Siang, 2020, p. 2). Lastly, during the “test” phase of design thinking, the prototypes are implemented and tested to determine their effect on the user’s experience. Sticking with the previous example of project-based learning, teachers would implement a project-based learning unit into their instruction and measure the impact of that solution by surveying students on their confidence levels with the content before and after the unit, as an example. Often the test phase leads back to other stages in design thinking, such as redefining the problem or a deeper level of ideation. The function of design thinking is non-linear in nature as stages may be running concurrently or one phase, like the test stage, may lead directly back to the prototype stage for refinement of the proposed solution (Dam & Siang, 2020). One other general characteristic of design thinking is that it focuses on system, not individual, issues. The process may begin with individual issues but expands to treating problems as system problems with opportunities for systemic solutions (Razzouk & Shute, 2012). This was evidenced by school Redesign teams

having each staff member empathize with one student and then combining all the feedback to identify trends that pointed to system-wide issues.

Once the major student issues were identified, schools would then define the goal areas they would focus on through the Redesign project. This would complete what Kolodner and Wills (1996) termed as the *preparation* phase of design thinking, where designers learn what to focus on and what is relevant. School Redesign teams could then move on to the ideate step of design thinking, where strategies addressing the goal areas were brainstormed and then prototyped and tested on a small scale. This phase of the work is called “assimilation” where designers make sense of the proposed strategies and look at the data generated from the use of those strategies (Kolodner & Wills, 1996). As the school continued to prototype and test strategies, the school Redesign team, in collaboration with the rest of the staff, began to make decisions on which strategies would eventually be implemented during the second year of Redesign and how to go about developing support for the implementation of those strategies. Kolodner and Wills (1996) described this phase as a time for planning and being guided strategically by the vision and goals set by the building. In other words, all the strategies being prototyped and tested were evaluated against the vision and goals of the Redesign effort.

Design thinking was an important process for school Redesign teams to adopt and utilize when working with the rest of the staff. What starts as a cloudy idea about how teaching and learning could be different, becomes crystallized into a clear and complete image of a redesigned school (Razzouk & Shute, 2012). Taken all together, design thinking served as a strong foundation from which schools could build out a new and improved system. However, design thinking would have never been as effective had the schools in Redesign not first shown an intense dissatisfaction with the current student outcomes, acknowledging that the present model

was not serving each student as it should, and deciding to not simply discuss the issues but to act. This was the impetus to begin with design thinking (Razzouk & Shute, 2012). As schools have progressed in Redesign, they continue to use design thinking to improve the strategies, now applying the steps of the design thinking process in a non-linear fashion in response to the feedback from students and teachers.

A Special Issue Dedicated to Kansas Redesign in *Educational Considerations*

In the summer of 2020, after the pandemic had caused a shutdown of Kansas school buildings, Dr. Debbie Mercer (2020), Dean of Education at Kansas State University, had organized a group of researchers to share their findings on a variety of educational topics related to the Kansans Can School Redesign project. This was a pivotal moment in education, not only in Kansas but across the world, as COVID-19 wreaked havoc on teaching and learning in the traditional brick-and-mortar school. This moment carried even more significance in Kansas because the 2019-2020 school year was the third year of the School Redesign project and it was slated to be the year Redesign schools would start to see improvement in student outcomes. The Mercury and Gemini I schools had planned and implemented various Redesign strategies over the previous three years and were set up to evaluate the impact on student learning during the spring semester of 2020, but COVID-19 had other plans. However, as you will learn from these Redesign-related articles, we found that redesigning your school was tremendous prep work for dealing with the effects of a global pandemic. Redesign schools were able to adjust and adapt more quickly to a new model of teaching and learning while students and teachers were confined to their homes. A few of the articles submitted to Dr. Mercer addressed how Redesign schools dealt with the intense and rapid effects the pandemic wrought on education while others shined a light on nuanced aspects of Redesign or provided a case study of Redesign's impact on their

schools. What follows is a summarization of those articles to allow you the opportunity to learn from others who were integrally involved in the Kansans Can School Redesign project.

In *Kansans Can: Redesigning Education in Kansas* Commissioner Randy Watson (2020) provides the backdrop to the School Redesign project, using the space race analogy to provide context to what is being done in Kansas education. He outlines the steps taken leading up to that point in time (summer 2020), including what the State Board of Education tasked him with doing, the Community Conversations, and then the beginnings of School Redesign.

In *What Does a Successful 24-Year-Old Look Like? Reflections from the State Board of Education*, Jim Porter (2020) discusses one of the driving questions that served as the basis for the development of the Kansans Can Vision the State Board of Education created in 2015. Mr. Porter captures the essence of the School Redesign project when he shares that for years, schools were created and then students were “fit” into how the school operated. What Kansas is attempting to do through Redesign is to flip this concept and “fit” the school to the student’s talents, ambitions, and capabilities.

In *Kansans Can: Redesigning Schools*, Dr. Brad Neuenswander (2020) analyzes the qualitative data from the *Kansas Children, Kansas’ Future: Community Conversations* that served as the basis for the Kansans Can School Redesign project. To the question of, “what are the attributes of a successful, young Kansan?,” Dr. Neuenswander shared that approximately 70% of the responses from parents, community members, and educators, were classified as non-academic skills, for example, persistence or integrity, while the rest of the skills mentioned were academic in nature. Coming off a period in education where academic skills were the focus in the *No Child Left Behind* federal legislation, this data compelled the State Board of Education to seek a balance between the teaching of non-academic and academic skills. To that end, the State

Board determined that the traditional school model needed to be redesigned, focused on developing the most critical non-academic and academic skills in students to prepare them for their futures after graduation.

In *Leadership During Change*, Dr. Mischel Miller (2020), Executive Director of the Kansas Educational Leadership Institute, surveyed Redesign school and district leaders about their experiences of leading through a transformational change process. The basic premise of this article is the lack of leadership skills to ensure teachers feel safe and confident when implementing new learning strategies. Without a safe environment to test new strategies, change efforts rarely are successful and sustained. Dr. Miller posed several Redesign-related questions on a variety of leadership topics including communication, a collaborative culture, strategy implementation, and attending to teachers' professional development needs. These leadership skill areas are critically important to any change effort and growing the capacity of our school and district leaders in these areas is necessary for improving student outcomes in Kansas.

In *Redesign: A Case Study of Change in a Kansas School District*, Fred VanRanken and Lori Goodson (2020) discuss the Redesign effort at USD 240 Twin Valley. USD 240 has two K-12 buildings, and both were engaged in the Kansans Can School Redesign project from the beginning, as a part of the Mercury cohort, the first schools selected for the project. This case study chronicles the journey of Redesign in Twin Valley from the vantage point of the superintendent at the time, Mr. Van Ranken, assisted by a researcher, Lori Goodson, professor at Kansas State University. Mr. Van Ranken discusses why Twin Valley desired to be part of the Redesign project, the mixed reactions from staff and parents initially, and how Redesign is "not one thing, rather a collection of strategies, tactics, and tools to improve student outcomes" (Mercer, 2020). Twin Valley's Redesign was focused on a set of student, parent, and staff tenets

that had been developed prior to joining the Redesign project. Those tenets served as the driving force for all decisions made in terms of the new strategies being implemented. As Redesign strategies were put in place, Mr. Van Ranken discusses the ebb and flow of acceptance and resistance by staff, parents, and community members. Ultimately, the most important change taking place is that of a shift in mindset of staff and the school community to acknowledge the challenges to students learning but then consider solutions through a new perspective.

In this case study of USD 482 Dighton's Redesign, *Our Moonshot: Dighton Public Schools*, Kelly Arnberger (2020) outlines the steps taken along the way as a Gemini I school district. Mr. Arnberger, superintendent of USD 482 at the time, discussed the cultural shifts that took place because of being part of the Redesign project. Where the elementary school naturally redesigned to be more student-centric through project-based learning, the junior-senior high school struggled to clearly define why they needed to Redesign and then how to make fundamental changes in how teaching and learning took place. After identifying priorities to guide the Redesign process, staff in both buildings made significant changes that resulted in students being able to have more choice in how and what they were learning, which had a major impact on the culture of the school district. Once Dighton was able to determine a clear purpose and vision for redesigning, they were able to attach their actions to a shared vision of student success.

In *School and Community Relations in the Kansans Can School Redesign Project*, Dr. Tammy Mitchell (2020) outlines one of the key principles of Redesign, developing and expanding family, business, and community partnerships to leverage improved student learning outcomes. For a school to Redesign, especially one in a small community, it is imperative to engage all stakeholders because generally, the school holds the identity of the town. Once a

school was formally accepted into the Redesign project, the first step in the process was to engage both internal and external stakeholders in a vision-setting process, where parents, staff, and business/community members could share their opinion on the definition of a successful student and how the school needs to change to produce more successful graduates. Schools had to be transparent as to why they wanted to redesign, devise new ways to engage their school community in a two-way dialogue around what they would like to see in their school, and develop a communication plan that consistently engages and/or provides updates to all those engaged in the redesign process. Dr. Mitchell outlines recommendations for school leaders that includes fostering a collaborative school culture, balancing transformational and instructional leadership, and developing and executing a comprehensive communication plan to keep families, business, and community members apprised of the progress in Redesign.

Another Redesign principle schools were tasked to build around was personalized learning. In *Individual Personalized Learning*, Dr. Judy Hughey (2020) shares the multiple definitions of personalized learning as well as its importance to engaging today's students. Utilizing the advanced technology capabilities in schools, including digitized curriculum, learning applications and management systems, the potential to personalize learning for each student has never been higher. Dr. Hughey also outlined the need for personalized professional development for teachers, based on their needs and interests. One example of personalizing professional learning for teachers is the advent of micro-credentials which are "bite-sized learning activities or professional development experiences that can be stacked to create a tower of knowledge or expertise (Hughey, 2020). An example of a micro-credential is the Individual Plan of Study (IPS) credential, which educators can earn to be able to guide students more effectively in the development of a robust, personalized learning plan from the middle grades

into the student's post-secondary plans. Personalized learning, whether for students or for teachers, is attainable now more than ever before with the technological advances in education software and needs to be a priority to re-engage students and re-invigorate teachers.

If Kansas is to lead the world in the success of each student, we must also lead the world in the success of each teacher. In *Kansans Can: Redesign Professional Learning and Re-licensure*, Dr. Paul Erickson (2020) studied the impact attaining a micro-credential had on the self-efficacy and collective efficacy of teachers. Educators who completed a micro-credential in Individual Plans of Study (IPS), were given pre- and post-surveys to determine the effect on the participant's confidence in teaching IPS development to both students and fellow educators as well as the confidence level the participant has in their peers' ability to guide students with their IPS. Dr. Erickson outlines the implications of creating a suite of micro-credentials for teachers to earn and to be able to use those micro-credentials as a method for re-licensure. Personalizing learning for educators and providing a variety of professional learning opportunities, aligned with the Kansas State Board of Education Outcomes, can help grow self- and collective efficacy, a critical piece of the puzzle in leading the world in the success of each student.

Career and Technical Education (CTE) aligns with each of the Redesign principles, most especially real-world application so students can see the relevance in their learning. In *Case Study: Career Pathways in Rural Kansas Redesign Schools*, Dr. Audrey Herbst (2020) focused her CTE Pathways research around two fundamental questions, one around the innovations rural high schools use to scale CTE, and two, the challenges rural high schools face in guiding students in completing postsecondary credentials. In this research study, three rural Redesign junior-senior high schools are compared in terms of implementation of CTE Pathways as part of their Redesign project. Despite challenges of limited resources, especially a scarcity of qualified

teachers for the more nuanced CTE Pathways, all three schools found innovative methods to create several CTE Pathways aligned with the interests of their students, such as offering online coursework to allow their students more access to learning about the jobs of today and tomorrow.

– *Mr. Jay Scott*

When the Governor of Kansas closed schools in March of 2020 due to the impending effects of the coronavirus, not only was teaching and learning drastically disrupted but also the Kansans Can School Redesign project. In *Redesign Resiliency during the COVID-19 Pandemic*, Jay Scott (2020), discusses how the Mercury and Gemini I cohorts of Redesign schools adapted “redesigning” while schools were shut down during the third year of their Redesign effort. This was to be the year all those involved in Redesign would have answers to the questions around the effectiveness of this major school transformation project. Now the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) and schools had to move quickly to adapt to teaching and learning virtually. To assist schools in adapting, KSDE spearheaded a project to develop guidance that was called Continuous Learning. The research in this article was curated through asking educational leaders in secondary Redesign schools how their experience in Redesign affected their transition to Continuous Learning, the teaching and learning initiative while schools were shut down in the spring of 2020. The main themes from the responses were that, by and large, their schools were able to adapt more quickly to this disruption due to the collaborative culture solidified while redesigning, the resiliency of the staff which had been strengthened during the stress of early phases of Redesign, and the familiarity with the design thinking process which is effective in highly complex, intangible environments such as teaching and learning through a pandemic.

In *Post-pandemic to Post-secondary Success*, Dr. John Heim (2020) chronicles the evolution of state education policy, beginning in the 1990's when school funding was largely a local school board responsibility and accreditation was based on certain aspects of school being in place at a minimum level, such as courses offered, and special education services provided. In 1992, new laws were passed in Kansas that moved accreditation from being input-focused to student outcome-focused and also shifted the majority of the responsibility for school funding from the local board of education to the state legislature. During the *No Child Left Behind* federal education law in the 2000's, accreditation in Kansas remained based on student performance outcomes but shifted to a singular focus on academic performance in English language arts (ELA) and math as measured by state assessments. This model stayed in place for over a decade until the emphasis on math and ELA became a detriment to the development of the whole student, wearing thin educators and parents alike. In 2014, the Kansas State Board of Education charged our new Commissioner, Dr. Randy Watson, with finding out what Kansans valued in terms of skills students needed to acquire through their K-12 education journey. Through the Community Conversations, Kansans shared their definition of student success that represented a much more balanced cross-section of skills (employability, technical, academic, cognitive, and civically engaged) that served as the basis for the new vision for education in Kansas. The focus moved from academic skills to preparing students holistically for their postsecondary path. This new vision for student success required a new vision for teaching and learning, the Kansans Can School Redesign project. Three years into Redesign, the pandemic struck, taking the focus off school improvement to how to teach and learn virtually while school building doors were locked. While the pandemic set Kansas education back, it forced all educators to re-think how teaching and learning should be in order to lead students to postsecondary success. As the effects of the

pandemic fade into the background, Kansas has the opportunity to double-down on postsecondary preparation through thinking anew about how “school” should operate and continue to Redesign.

This autoethnography is adding to the growing literature on school Redesign in Kansas by contributing a deeper analysis of change leadership, and some transparency about my experiences as a coach trying to help leaders work through the Redesign process. To extend this body of literature, I will attempt to make meaning of the approach taken by school leaders as they maneuvered through the Redesign process and the impact my coaching had on the schools’ progress.

Coaching through Redesign

The main role I played in leading the secondary school Redesign effort in Kansas would best be described as a coach. In this section, I will delve into the historical context that shaped how I coached, with the space race in the 1960’s serving as the backdrop. Coaching will be defined, as well as differentiating coaching from mentoring. I will share the research concerning coaching school leaders using a coaching framework. Within that framework, I will discuss the importance of school leaders balancing certain leadership responsibilities and how coaching can impact that balancing act. The specific areas of school leadership presented in the context of coaching includes how to establish a clear focus, managing change, and creating a collaborative culture within a school. All these leadership “moves” will be shared in the context of my coaching approach throughout the Redesign project.

What is Coaching?

A variety of definitions for coaching exist, but, for the purposes of context, Cook (2009) defines coaching as, “the process of accelerating an individual’s progress to achieving personal

and organizational goals” (p. 11). Another definition of leadership coaching is “a development process involving a one-on-one relationship between a coach and client who is seeking to develop and improve his or her leadership skills, knowledge, and mindset in order to effectively lead his or her organization” (Ezaki, p. 47, 2015). Gallwey (2001) referred to coaching as unlocking a person’s potential to maximize their performance and that it is more about the coachee learning as opposed to the coach teaching. For this study, coaching is a process whereby the coach assists the coachee to develop the mindset, the skill set, and the attitude to successfully lead their organization (school) in achieving its goals and aspirations. The coach’s purpose is to expand the principal or SRT’s capacity to obtain the desired results and to facilitate growth and development (Hargrove, 2008). Increasing the capabilities of school leaders involves the coach acting as a critical friend by asking open-ended questions that causes the individual or group being coached to reflect on their current practice and also challenging assumptions that leads to the individual or group committing to new possibilities (Reiss, 2015). Principals have little time to focus on what is wildly important in their weekly schedule. The increased scope of the principal’s work as well as heightened accountability for student outcomes, forces the school leader to choose between competing values, those things that are urgent versus those things that are important. Coaching done well can allow principals a few hours each month to focus on the important objectives of the school and to develop a clear action plan to achieve those objectives. In other words, coaching can be used as a tool; a catalyst for change (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978).

While executive coaching has been on the rise for years now, it is relatively new for school and district leaders. A theoretical framework that seems to align with the type of coaching I do with principals and SRT’s in Redesign secondary schools, is the model from Wise and Jacobo (2010) focused on coaching that leads to school transformation. The purpose of the

coaching in this model is to develop a transformed, self-sustaining school culture (Wise & Jacobo, 2010), which is precisely the aim of school redesign in Kansas. The coach works collaboratively with the principal on four main areas: 1) *Vision*, 2) *Management*, 3) *Leadership*, and 4) *Stakeholders*. Through the Redesign process, principals will lead a visioning process, provide leadership through change, engage stakeholders, and instill order and structure to what can be a very chaotic change environment. According to this theoretical framework for coaching school leaders, the coach partners with the principal to focus on those four priority areas that lead to a school transformation that will be self-sustaining and independent of who is in the principal's chair. Coaching takes place from the coach to the principal and then from the principal to staff, students, families, and the community with the aim of creating a shared vision for successful student learning that becomes the central focus and responsibility of all stakeholders. The transformation takes place as all stakeholder groups grow in their leadership capacity through the coaching that begins with the principal until a shared leadership approach is firmly in place. The principal must coach to increase the leadership capability to change while also providing the structures, routines, and protocols involved in management to ensure there is consistency and order to the transformation process (Wise & Jacobo, 2010). There are many parallels from this framework to the coaching I will be involved with, specifically increasing change leadership capacity that leads to a sustained school transformation, all centered on a shared vision of student success.

Coaching vs. Mentoring

Although coaching and mentoring are more similar than they are different, it is important to differentiate between the two practices. Mentoring has to do more with the mentor sharing his or her own past experiences and imparting wisdom to another while a coach utilizes inquiry and

discovery to help the coachee find his or her own creative solutions to the challenges they are facing (Reiss, 2015). While there is an element of mentoring in coaching, for instance when the coach would pass down knowledge to the coachee at their request, however, coaching is not solely dependent on a more experienced person sharing their expertise with another (Whitmore, 2010). Rather, “coaching requires expertise in *coaching* itself, not the subject at hand”(Whitmore, p. 14, 2010). I had to constantly remind myself that my role was to listen, explore, acknowledge, and help Redesign schools to develop their own solutions and actions as opposed to sharing unsolicited advice from my own experiences as a teacher and administrator.

Even though my job title was secondary Redesign specialist, it would have more appropriate to be referred to as a coach. At times, I was a consultant, guiding based on research I had studied, or a mentor, imparting knowledge in relation to my experiences as a teacher and administrator. Most often, when meeting with a Redesign school leader, it was a coaching session where I would use open-ended questions to explore the challenge facing the school leader to help that person arrive at a potential solution on their own. This was partly due to my experience as a coach and teacher in the past, but also out of necessity. A consultant or a mentor would have some expertise to share to be effective and, with Redesign being a nascent project, there was no experience to share. The limited research on change theory I had done in the summer of 2017, prior to beginning the Redesign project, served as the only knowledge I could share with schools. In essence, I was coaching the *person* and attempting to build his or her skill in overcoming adaptive challenges associated with redesigning the school, not the *challenge* the person was facing.

The adaptive challenge I was trying to overcome was I had never had any coach-specific training, so I was reverting to what Tschannen-Moran et. al. (2017) referred to as a “tell-and-sell

approach”, where I would recount my school leadership or coaching experiences from the past and give advice as to how I would handle similar situations they were facing. The obvious fault with this approach was my assumption that the educational environment of my past experiences was like the environment the Redesign school leaders were working in. Additionally, a major aspect of Redesign was for the school to change the current environment to a model that would lead to higher levels of student success and that model would have to be created solely by the staff in each Redesign secondary school, not by a specialist from the KSDE. What was needed was a school leadership framework to be used as a basis for coaching Redesign school leaders.

My Personal Approach to Coaching

It really started with a history lesson, which came natural to Dr. Watson being a former social studies teacher. Tammy Mitchell and I, along with Dr. Neuenswander, were invited to Dr. Watson’s office in the late spring of 2017, for two days of Redesign “orientation .” The entire idea for Redesign was shaped by the Community Conversations, so what followed was something we had been looking forward to for some time. As we sat around the large monitor in Randy’s office, I was at once excited to learn more about the context of my work moving forward and anxious to get started planning out what I was going to do in the fall with secondary schools. It reminded me of when I was a teacher sitting through in-service days at the beginning of the school year. Yes, it was important to learn new content yet the focus getting into your classroom to plan for when the students would arrive. Nevertheless, I settled in as Randy kicked off the morning with the story of the Space Race, beginning with the advent of the Mercury project when the first American astronauts were selected to be the first to land on the moon. He talked about the courage and hubris it took for the former fighter pilots to take on this massive and dangerous challenge. He spoke about the political furor at that time, with the Civil Rights

movement causing unrest and conflict on American soil, while the Soviet communists were building up their nuclear power across the globe. America needed something to put the “united” back in the United States. That “something” came from President Kennedy’s challenge to land a man on the moon within the decade of the 1960’s. This was a galvanizing moment for the United States and served as the dawning of the Space Race. This was somewhat of a review from Randy because, by this time, we had already selected the schools for our own Mercury project of school redesign and had used the Space Race analogy to set the context for the Redesign initiative. After this re-setting of the context, Dr. Watson then discussed the dynamics of the relationship between the first cohorts of American astronauts and the Flight Director. Randy began talking about Gene Krantz, one of the early Flight Directors at NASA, and best known for how he reacted to the tragedy of the Apollo 1 astronauts. During a launch rehearsal in the actual Apollo 1 capsule on January 27, 1967, a cabin fire resulted in the deaths of all three crew members, dealing a major blow to the momentum of winning the space race and calling into question NASA’s ability to get the United States to the moon and back. In the aftermath of the tragedy, Krantz famously pulled all of flight control together and promised that from this point forward, NASA would be “tough and competent” in all aspects of the astronaut program. It was those words that Dr. Watson challenged us to live out in the Redesign project, tough enough to push the schools and hold them to a high standard while being competent in our coaching.

As I thought about more about the role I would play with secondary Redesign schools, my mind kept going back to my career as a sports coach. I loved the challenge of helping, guiding, and teaching young people to improve their skills, whether it be in how to shoot a basketball or how to handle adversity. It seemed that sports coaching would be highly analogous to the type of coaching I would be doing with principals and teacher leaders, seeking to help,

guide, and teach leaders to improve their skills related to improving outcomes for their students. The increased popularity of coaching in education has risen in relation to the increased accountability and pressure schools have experienced in terms of improving student outcomes over the last three decades (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2017). Coupled with research that shows leadership coaching has a positive impact on school practices (Knight, 2008; Reiss, 2015; Robertson, 2008), more schools are linking up their leaders with coaches. With the onset of standards-based education and high-stakes testing, the focus of improvement efforts was on teachers and their instructional strategies, specifically in math and reading, which caused many schools to respond by creating positions for instructional coaches (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2017). However, that focus has now shifted to redesigning schools to create more relevant, meaningful learning experiences for the students of today. The role the school leader plays in this reform effort has now moved to the forefront of school improvement, which has resulted in the advent of leadership coaching (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2017).

Diagnosing What Is Most Important

Just as President Kennedy established a clear focus with his speech at Rice University in 1962, “land a man on the moon and return within this decade” (“We Choose to Go to the Moon,” 2023) each Redesign secondary school was coached to start redesigning by creating a shared vision and then student performance goals to establish a crystal-clear definition of success. McChesney et al. (2022) termed this as what is “wildly important” as opposed to what is urgent, which is referred to as the “whirlwind” (p. 20). With the whirlwind of school leadership being particularly strong, it can be difficult to devote time to what is truly important. This is why I stressed to the school leaders the importance of taking time to engage with multiple stakeholder

groups in developing a shared vision and goals so that, when changes were eventually implemented, this was done through a collective desire and commitment. In a study involving successful school superintendents, the first theme they identified related to school improvement was the importance of a clear, compelling vision statement (Dolph & Grant, 2010). However, the superintendents went further to mention that the process of engaging stakeholders and rallying the school community around a common purpose was more important than the actual vision statement and goals (Dolph & Grant, 2010). This component of developing a clear focus was difficult because, while the school was having vision- and goal-setting conversations with stakeholders, the whirlwind in school continued unabated. I will delve more deeply into this component in the next chapter.

Transforming the Model

It all made so much sense...until it didn't. What was discussed, developed, and shared with all stakeholders in the school community in the spring that elicited much excitement and anticipation had devolved into a contentious, divisive issue that became a standing item on the local board of education agenda by the fall of the same year. Fed up with the arbitrary nature of the traditional letter grade system, Polamalu High School had begun researching standards-based grading as part of their Redesign effort. The staff had concluded that letter grades expressed little in terms of what students knew or could do since the letter grade was based on various aspects of student performance such as completing work on time, behavior, even generosity (bringing in supplies for the teacher for extra credit). Certainly, a letter grade reflected *some* of what the student learned, but, depending on the teacher, other elements of student performance were applied that caused the Polamalu staff to reach the conclusion that, if they wanted a more valid, true measure of student learning, they needed to base a grade *only* on what the student knows and

can do in relation to the standards of each course. A sub-committee of staff members was organized and commissioned to research best practices in standards-based grading and then produce a recommendation to the rest of the staff in early winter.

Being Polamalu High School's Redesign coach, I was excited about this decision to investigate standards-based grading. This was a prime example of Redesign; a staff so discontented with the current system that they chose to act and develop a more student-centric approach to student learning. While I encouraged this move, I pushed the school Redesign team to consider competency-based grading (where related standards are consolidated into higher, fewer, action-oriented competencies) but that was a few more steps down the Redesign road. The investigation team completed their research and successfully presented their recommendation of changing from the current grading system to one that is based on standards. The recommendation was met with overwhelming approval by nearly all staff members (it is a high school staff after all), and so the decision was made to fully build the standards-based grading system as well as an implementation timeline to be shared with the students and families later in the spring.

As the time for the big "reveal" neared, Polamalu staff diligently and carefully prepared how the new standards-based grading system would be explained to students and families. The planning team went to great lengths as to how they would build the case for replacing the current grading system with one that would be a more true, accurate measure of student learning. They planned multiple examples and scenarios to prove the point the traditional grading system was not effective and how expressing student learning as it relates to the standards was going to help students be more successful in life after high school. All the extensive planning and thought that went into how to message this change paid off as those who attended the event largely expressed support, enough to warrant moving ahead with implementation in the fall.

Throughout the rest of the spring and summer, Polamalu High School continued to prepare for implementing a new standards-based grading system by meeting as a whole staff to align their expectations for students learning the standards. They refined the standards down to the most essential and developed the manner of how student learning would be expressed, such as level 1 through level 4 or “developing, approaching, meeting, exceeding.” The staff maintained their excitement about this major shift in how they would operate and spent countless hours over the summer to fine-tune the new grading system. As the beginning of the school year approached, the staff reported feeling more energized, more aligned, and more together than at any other time during their teaching careers. As their Redesign coach, I was hopeful and more than a little proud of the staff for how they were managing this major change to benefit their students’ learning.

As the school year began, the staff took extensive time in explaining the new grading system to the students, replete with examples and rationale for the change. For the most part, Polamalu students embraced this new model with as much enthusiasm as one could expect from teenagers regarding how they would be graded (very little). In the very least, the students seemed indifferent to the change. This is how the next few months went until it was time for progress reports to be shared with students and families. While there had been a few grumblings from students and families about how the new grading system was confusing prior to progress reports, the staff did not have any significant concerns, concluding it was normal complaining about school. So, when the first email received by the principal of a parent complaining about the new progress report came in the day after progress reports were sent home, there was no real cause for concern. After that one email grew into twenty by the end of the day, followed by another thirty emails or phone calls the next day, the Polamalu principal and staff’s level of concern grew

to an all-time high. It was not just the volume of complaints; it was the degree of dissatisfaction expressed by parents, ranging from complete confusion around how to interpret what a level 2 in Algebra I means to accusing the school of ruining the educational future of their student. Within a few days, many students and parents revolted against the new grading system, calling for the school to immediately go back to the traditional grading system. The mob mentality was in full effect and local board members were being inundated with complaints about the new grading system that everyone had supported seemingly from the genesis of the idea. One can predict what followed; angry community meetings, angry board meetings, families threatening to take their student to surrounding schools or creating a home school. A few teachers who were supportive from the beginning changed their opinion under pressure, claiming they never philosophically agreed with standards-based grading and effectively joined students and parents railing against the change. To their credit, a core group of Polamalu staff clung tightly to the new grading system in place, adapting it in response to constructive feedback, and believing deeply that this system would eventually lead to better student outcomes. However, over the course of a year and a half, the critical voices and opinions won out and the school board voted to return to a traditional grading system.

While my negative experience as the coach for this school paled in comparison to that of the staff, it was extremely difficult to observe this controversy unfold. What started out so promising, exciting, and inspirational became disappointing, maddening, and endlessly frustrating. As their coach, you can only reassure a group they are doing the right thing by students and that if there isn't any pushback on the Redesign changes implemented, a school really isn't redesigning. I offered multiple times to come out and meet with families that had concerns to reinforce that this was part of the Redesign project and that the KSDE wanted

schools to be making such changes, but the school Redesign team felt like this would only add fuel to their critics' fire. I knew the staff had to own the outcome; this was their Redesign but, as their coach, I had to own my part of the mess as well and try to figure out how I could serve the staff better through the process.

As I reflected on where things went off the tracks in this situation, I was reminded of what the research states regarding managing change; it is often mismanaged because the magnitude of change is misinterpreted. Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) identified two types of change; first-order and second-order. The two types are differentiated by how individuals *perceive* a change. A first-order change is perceived to be an extension of the past and can be managed with existing knowledge and skills. A second-order change is a break from the past and requires new skills and knowledge to manage the change. Problems arise when the leader or leaders perceive change differently as do those entrusted to implement the change. A classic example of this is in the example above where a Polamalu High School wanted to change from traditional grading to standards-based grading. Whereas one teacher perceived this change as first-order or the next logical step forward, another viewed it as something foreign that would require months, if not years, to learn and adapt to. Additionally, and most likely the core of the problem in this situation, parents initially perceived the switch to standards-based grading to be first-order but then, when their students' grades were posted on an official transcript, perceived it as a second-order change and a threat to their students' future. Leading through change is quite difficult and it takes time and thoughtful action to manage the perceptions of those affected by the change.

Mismanaging change can, and often does, happen to the best school leaders. If a school principal receives high marks from staff and students yet chooses the wrong leadership practices

for the kind of change being implemented, this can adversely affect student performance (Goodwin et al., 2015). In the example of the Polamalu switching over to standards-based grading, the strategies employed for a first-order change that were effective would not be effective for a second-order change and vice versa. This is evidence for the importance of a school leader to be flexible with the leadership strategies used when managing change. This is the leadership responsibility of flexibility, where a school leader adapts her or his leadership behavior to fit the current situation, ie. first-order or second-order change, and is comfortable with dissent (Goodwin et al., 2015). Whereas a more empowering, shared leadership approach might work better for second-order change that requires new knowledge and skills, that same approach for a first-order change, no matter how skillfully applied, would not be effective since the change can be successful using current knowledge and skills. The change from a traditional grading system to one that is standards-based is a highly complex change that would require copious amounts of collaboration and reflection. The Redesign high school trying to make this change did quite a bit of collaboration and reflection as a staff but did more information sharing with the broader school community. Information sharing is more appropriate for a first order change, so when students and parents were finally affected by the change (the new grade report) no amount of information sharing would help resolve their concerns. This was a second-order change and the school leadership was not anticipating the sudden increase in the magnitude of the change. Employing a more direct leadership style, which information-sharing lends itself to, was not an effective leadership behavior in this example, leaving parents and students perceiving this was a change being done to them. This mismatch of leadership to the magnitude of change generally ends in the change being unsuccessful (Freedman, Anit & Somech, 2021). The next chapter will feature a more in-depth look into the importance of flexibility when managing

change, particularly second-order change that usually is accompanied by innovation, a hallmark of Redesign.

Safe Spaces

“Let’s not forget where we’re going, folks!” It was February at Hines Middle School, a Redesign school, and one of the teacher leaders on the school Redesign team had reached his limit. The team was discussing how to pilot test a variety of Redesign-inspired strategies researched by the staff over the fall and winter and the discussion was getting bogged down in the intricacies of each of the strategies. The Hines staff had proposed nine different strategies to the school Redesign team right after the holiday break and now the school Redesign team had to decide if and how each of those strategies would be pilot tested in the upcoming spring. The team was discussing the merits of each strategy as well as the difficulty level in implementing each strategy in the springtime...in a middle school. Most of the team wanted to try to pilot-test each of the strategies, reasoning the staff would be upset if only a few of the strategies were tested after all the research and effort. A few of the Hines team argued that it would be a huge mistake to try to take a trial run with each of the nine strategies, as that would leave everyone, staff, and students, overwhelmed, frustrated, and with diminishing returns. The discussion ground down to a standstill until one teacher leader had had enough. He loudly reminded the team of what they had led the staff and broader school community through in the late summer and early fall. The Hines school Redesign team had worked extremely hard at collaboratively creating a new shared vision for the school, giving much-needed direction and purpose to the work of teaching and learning. Now, as the team teetered on the edge of diving back into their old form of trying everything under the sun in terms of initiatives, this teacher leader was adamantly upholding the new vision for what student success looked like and imploring the

others in the room to follow suit by focusing on only two or three of the most important strategies aligned with the student skill areas in the shared vision. It seemed that every school Redesign team had a pivotal moment, and this was Hines Middle School's. They had reached a crossroads; would they fall back into the old habit of trying it all, leading to frustration, resentment, and mediocre results at best, or forge a new path forward focused on a few key strategies that, with the staff's best effort, potentially would lead to high levels of student performance never seen in the school? The staff had reached this decision point before and had always chosen the former. The difference in this situation was that the Hines staff had done the important work of developing a shared vision of what success looks like for a student "graduating" from this middle school. They were now armed with a clear picture of the skills and attributes they wanted students to acquire as they progressed through their time at the school. This new focus was the critical factor in the school Redesign team's next step, allowing them to sift through the strategies before them and selecting only the few that would yield the best results in relation to the profile of a successful student. As the school Redesign team contemplated this passionate plea, one could sense much of the tension leave the room, replaced with a renewed sense of purpose. Heads started to nod and there were affirmations for what the teacher leader had shared.

At Hines Middle School, they had collaboratively set concrete, high goals and expectations for all students, giving them much-needed focus and purpose. But until those goals and expectations are internalized by all staff and students and serve as the decision point for every significant move a school makes, then, over time, the goals lose their luster and can be swallowed up by the whirlwind. This internalization and ownership of the goals of a school is a major factor in the culture that exists in a school (Goodwin et al., 2015). In this case, the school

had worked *collaboratively* to create a shared vision of student success including high goals. Teachers, support staff, students, and families had equal opportunities to engage in the development of the vision and goals. This was an important first step in building out a more purposeful community. It required the school leader to not simply talk about shared leadership but put it into action. What Heifetz and Linsky (2002) describe as “holding environments,” where all stakeholders in a school community can openly discuss the realities and perceptions of the current state of their school and subsequent ideas to improve, captured Hines’ experience. By providing the school community the opportunity for these “safe space” discussions, the school leader and the Redesign team started to build the self-efficacy of those engaged, thusly, building up the collective efficacy of the staff knowing it wasn’t just their vision for the school but the greater school community. More efficacious schools are more likely to accept and embrace challenges, put forth a greater effort, and comprehend the benefit of persistence (Miskel & Hoy, 2002). All those attributes are needed to redesign the teaching and learning practices in a school and are essential to the culture of a school.

The Kansans Can School Redesign project was unprecedented in the state and possibly the nation, mainly because it was an innovative school reform effort initiated and supported by a state department of education. This initiative was out-of-character for a state education agency that generally focus on accountability, policy, and compliance. Additionally, the scope of the project included all public and private accredited systems in Kansas, representing roughly half a million PreK through 12th grade students. The research from this study, curated from my perspective as a state department of education official responsible for coaching the first cohorts of secondary Redesign schools, is unique based on the contextual nature of the Redesign effort. The relationship between state departments of education and the schools they serve generally

does not include descriptive language, such as “innovation” and “challenge the status quo .” I am the only researcher that can bring to life not only the changes that schools made but *how* they made those changes, including the stories and research behind the interactions, behaviors, and discussions that led schools to make transformational changes. The coaching theory combined with change theory, including identifying what is wildly important, managing perceptions of change, and engaging stakeholders, along with the push from the state education agency for schools to think and act differently, adds up to a unique educational research study.

Summary

This chapter provided the foundations of the Kansans Can School Redesign project, including the relevant literature regarding coaching, mentoring, and leadership responsibilities. Beginning with the qualitative data from the Community Conversations, school Redesign was developed, including the system, process, and my specific role as a coach. Coaching and mentoring literature was compared, further clarifying the role both played in the Redesign project. My approach to coaching was presented along with associated literature into effective leadership in schools journeying through a transformational change process. Going deeper into the Balanced Leadership responsibilities in the next chapter, I will explore the literature that informs the findings of a pilot project conducted with three secondary Redesign principals as they navigated the redesign process taking place in their schools.

Chapter 3 - A Pilot Project: Exploring the Intersection of Redesign and Balanced Leadership

While interviews are not always part of the research process in writing an autoethnography, in the spring of 2021, I conducted a pilot study where I interviewed three secondary principals currently leading schools formally engaged in the Kansans Can School Redesign project, to inform this autoethnographic research. This pilot study served two purposes: one, to compare the leadership approach taken by principals in Redesign before the pandemic versus during the pandemic, and two, identifying which, if any, of the Balanced Leadership research (Goodwin et al., 2015) responsibilities were common among the three principals' leadership styles before and during the pandemic. The results of the pilot study allowed a deeper analysis of the experiences of principals leading their school through the Redesign process while also dealing with the adaptive challenges brought on by the pandemic.

My main source of data from this pilot project came from two rounds of interviews with the selected Redesign principals. I utilized interviews that were formal semi-structured blended with a natural conversational approach. I had many previous collaborations with all three principals, and I knew a great deal about their leadership journey through Redesign. The questions I used were curated from the beginnings of Redesign, when schools applied to join the formal Redesign project, up to and through redesigning amid a global pandemic. Over the course of five months, I interviewed each principal individually on two different occasions and then had a member check group meeting at the end of the pilot project to give the principals an opportunity to reflect on their individual responses and make meaning out of their shared experiences collectively. Their individual and group responses were categorized into descriptive,

example, structured, and contrast-type answers before I began coding for the emerging themes generated by their perceptions of the leadership experiences through Redesign.

Interviews

The participants I selected for pilot interviews were three current secondary school principals, all leading their respective buildings through the Redesign project. All three principals began the Redesign process during the 2017-2018 school year and were still working diligently to redesign their buildings. I used the following criteria when selecting these three Redesign building principals to ensure a mixture of perspectives and lived experiences: 1) strong commitment to the Redesign process, 2) members of the original cohorts of Redesign in Kansas 3) level of influence amongst Redesign colleagues (high), 4) secondary school 5) size of school (wanted a cross-section of small, medium, large-sized schools), 6) gender, and 7) size/type of community (rural, medium-sized city, large metro area). Principal 1 was female and leading a small junior-senior high school (1A) in a small rural community. Principal 2 was also female and leading a medium-sized high school (4A) in a community of approximately 10,000 residents. Principal 3 was male and leading a large middle school in a large metropolitan area.

Prior to beginning interviews, I applied for and was granted approval by the institutional review board (IRB) to complete this pilot project involving interviewing human subjects. I conducted three to four rounds of virtual interviews where each principal was interviewed individually via Zoom for approximately one hour. I used a mix of formal semi-structured and natural conversational interviews. Formal semi-structured interviews were used since I would prepare questions ahead of time and always ask those questions for consistency and comparison of responses (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 127). Natural conversational interviews were selected because invariably, each principal would expand on an answer that took the conversation to a

different topic and we would stay with that topic for some time and simply converse. After each interview, I took the auto-transcript from Zoom and added the responses to NVivo to begin coding their answers. I completed two rounds of coding and writing analytical memos in between and after each round (Saldana, 2015). The types of interview questions I utilized were a blend of descriptive, example, structured, and contrast questions (Bhattacharya, 2017, pp. 132–134). I asked for examples as part of the interviews to add further context and deepen my understanding.

In my role at KSDE as secondary school Redesign specialist, I served as coach to all of these principals. As I observed, listened, consulted, coached, interacted, and interviewed each of the three principals, they viewed me as a coach, consultant, and confidant. However, since I work at KSDE, they also saw me as an accountability partner, a resource for technical questions regarding a myriad of topics such as auditing, special education students, contact time with students, and professional development for their staff. In all those roles, there was a possibility the principals may not have felt comfortable sharing certain information, especially if it was negative, regarding their Redesign project because I was their coach or because they thought it might reflect poorly on the perception of their building in the context of Redesign and accreditation (even though accreditation is at the system level). Withholding information would have certainly impacted my interpretation and analysis of the data collected but these three principals were open, honest, and transparent about the challenges they faced in their buildings and/or communities.

Balanced Leadership

While I may not have been directly applying the work of these scholars at the time, the school leadership framework that most closely aligns to my coaching efforts of secondary

Redesign schools is the Balanced Leadership Framework (Goodwin et al., 2015). After the meta-analysis done by the researchers of the original Balanced Leadership study (Marzano, 2003) found twenty-one school leadership responsibilities, and the resulting sixty-six leadership practices that had a positive impact on student learning, the Balanced Leadership Framework was created to organize this information and assist school leaders in putting this research into practice (Goodwin et al., 2015). The framework includes three components (See Figure 8) that encompass all twenty-one responsibilities and sixty-six practices; establishing a clear focus, managing change, and creating a purposeful community (Goodwin et al., 2015).

Figure 8. *Balanced Leadership Framework, 2015*



Note. The three pillars of effective leadership through change are creating a focus, managing change, and building a purposeful community. Redesign leaders focused on leadership responsibilities that addressed each of these pillars as they led their school through Redesign.

Adapted from “*Balanced Leadership for Powerful Learning*” by B. Goodwin, G. Cameron, & H. Hein, 2015, p. 8. Copyright 2015 by McREL International.

Here, I discuss each of those major areas of the framework, including related stories from Redesign, and then begin narrowing down to the four leadership responsibilities that were

identified to be utilized most by three Redesign school leaders as they led their schools and teams through the beginnings of Redesign, which would include educating students during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research came from a pilot study I completed to inform my broader research questions and will be highlighted in the next chapter.

I would often ask myself vexing questions after meeting with or observing a school Redesign team meeting such as, “Have I given them enough guidance to help them move forward?” or “Have I given them too much guidance, limiting their discussion and ownership of the progress?” While there never seemed to be an answer to those questions, one thing became clear as I observed the interactions and discussions among the school Redesign teams: their progress was dependent on their collective efficacy, their belief they could actually succeed in leading the Redesign change. In *Balanced Leadership*, Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) found that there existed a “substantial relationship between leadership and student achievement” (p. 4). In this well-known meta-analysis of 30 years of research into school leadership, the authors outlined twenty-one leadership responsibilities (See Table 1) that had an impact on student learning.

Table 1. *Balanced Leadership Responsibilities (Waters et al., 2003)*

Responsibilities	The extent to which the principal....	Avg. r	N Schools	N Studies	95% CI
Culture	Fosters shared beliefs & a sense of community & cooperation	.29	709	13	.23-.37
Order	Establishes a set of standard operating procedures & routines	.26	456	17	.17-.35
Discipline	Protects teachers from issues & influences that would detract from their teaching time or focus	.24	397	10	.14-.33
Resources	Provides teachers with materials & professional development necessary for the successful execution of their jobs	.25	570	17	.18-.34
Curriculum, instruction, assessment	Is directly involved in the design & implementation of curriculum, instruction, & assessment practices	.16	636	19	.08-.24
Focus	Establishes clear goals & keeps those goals in the forefront of the school's attention	.24	1109	30	.18-.29

Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, assessment	Fosters shared beliefs & a sense of community & cooperation	.24	327	8	.13-.35
Visibility	Has quality contact & interactions with teachers & students	.16	432	11	.06-.25
Contingent rewards	Recognizes & rewards individual accomplishments	.15	420	7	.05-.24
Communication	Establishes strong lines of communication with teachers & among students	.23	245	10	.10-.35
Outreach	Is an advocate & spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders	.28	478	14	.10-.35
Input	Involves teachers in the design & implementation of important decisions & policies	.30	504	13	.21-.38
Affirmation	Recognized & celebrates school accomplishments & acknowledges failures	.25	345	7	.14-.35
Relationship	Demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers & staff	.19	497	12	.10-.24
Change agent	Is willing to & actively challenges the status quo	.30	479	7	.22-.38
Optimizer	Inspires & leads new & challenging innovations	.20	444	9	.11-.29
Ideals/beliefs	Communicates & operates from strong ideals & beliefs about schooling	.25	526	8	.17-.33
Monitors/evaluates	Monitors the effectiveness of school practices & their impact on student learning	.28	1071	30	.23-.34
Flexibility	Adapts leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation & is comfortable with dissent	.22	151	2	.05-.37
Situational awareness	Is aware of the details & undercurrents in the running of the school & uses this information to address current & potential problems	.33	91	5	.11-.37
Intellectual stimulation	Ensures that faculty & staff are aware of the most current theories & practices & makes the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school's culture	.32	321	5	.22-.42

Note. Each of the 21 leadership responsibilities listed have shown a positive correlation (expressed as effect size or “r” – third column) with student achievement. The higher the effect size, the higher correlation between the leadership responsibility and student achievement. Also listed is the 95% confidence interval (CI) range which yields a predicted range of effective size and the number (N) of schools as participants and studies completed. Adapted from “*Balanced Leadership: What 30 Years of Research Tells Us About the Effects of Leadership on Student Achievement*” by T. Waters, R. Marzano, & B. McNulty, 2003, p. 4. Copyright 2003 by McREL International.

In total, the average effect size for all twenty-one responsibilities is 0.25 with a range of 0.15 (Contingent awards) to 0.33 (Situational awareness).

While using these leadership responsibilities at the right time and in the right context can lead to higher student achievement, the opposite holds true as well. If one or more of the responsibilities is applied at the wrong time or in the wrong context, marginal or negative student achievement can occur (Waters et al., 2003). As the school Redesign teams began to meet, it was critical for them to develop a game plan for how and when to approach change with all stakeholders. While all twenty-one leadership responsibilities, when applied correctly, are correlated with better student outcomes, it was not feasible to assume each school Redesign team would be able to address each responsibility in all scenarios, and this also doesn't mean I was coaching this specific research at the time, even if I was doing things that correlated with the findings. Regardless, it was much more likely and rational for each school Redesign team to select a few leadership responsibilities that would most leverage the vision and goals each school would eventually develop.

Knowing each of the twenty-one Balanced Leadership responsibilities have a positive impact on student achievement, principals and the school Redesign teams, over the course of the years of redesigning and dealing with COVID-19, more than likely used most, if not all, twenty-one responsibilities to some degree. However, as I reflected on my field notes, my experiences, and the coded responses from the principals in the pilot study, a few of the Balanced Leadership responsibilities stood out as those that principals and school Redesign teams leaned into the most to lead their respective schools through the choppy waters of redesigning the learning experience for students. Not that principals and school Redesign teams did not utilize most or all the twenty-

one responsibilities, but there were four of the leadership responsibilities that school Redesign teams utilized the most over time. Through my analysis I found that those four responsibilities were culture, flexibility, focus, and change agent. Below I offer a synthesis of my findings in this project while drawing connections to relevant literature as well.

Culture

School culture is not only defined in many ways but also impacts all aspects of school, from the cleanliness of the building to student performance. Educational researchers often adopt an anthropological approach, defining culture in terms of the traditions, values, beliefs, even the common language a group of educators shares (Hargreaves, 1995) . Waters et al. defined culture as “fostering shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation” (2003, p. 6), viewing culture as an action verb as opposed to a noun. In a study of school culture in 2020, Atasoy defined school culture as “the character of the school as it reflects deep patterns of values, beliefs and traditions that have been composed over time” (2020, p. 258). The “character” of each secondary Redesign school was challenged to a great degree as the school Redesign team led the process to question not only what they were doing as a school but also why and how. This investigation delved deeply into the school’s beliefs, values, and traditions, shedding light on the current culture that had formed over time. This was an important undertaking as school change initiatives that do not account for school culture generally fail because culture impacts a school’s readiness for change (Stoll et al., 2006).

With school culture occupying the center of a school change process, it was important for the school Redesign teams (SRT) to show the connection between culture and other aspects of school in need of change. School culture determines what is valued and what differentiates one school from the next. Much of the initial work of school Redesign in secondary schools involved

identifying what was wildly important in terms of student performance. Every secondary school in the Redesign project was dissatisfied to a certain degree with certain student outcomes or found they were chasing after metrics that had run out of relevance, leading to prioritizing better student performance in key areas, which required a change in the school's culture. One of the principals remarked,

“Frankly, we were disgusted with our graduation rate as it lagged well behind the state average. We had finally reached our limit of what we could tolerate without doing something about it and that’s why we were so excited to join Redesign.”

Gaziel (1997) found that school culture was an essential factor in student achievement. The meta-analysis used to create the Balanced Leadership framework, a school leader focused on developing a positive learning culture resulted in a 0.29 effect size on student outcomes (Goodwin et al., 2015). To add nuance, in schools where a major focus of the culture is teacher collaboration, student performance was high (Demirtas, 2010). This reinforces the idea of a school Redesign team (SRT), led by those who are closest to the students, the teachers, collaborating consistently to progress forward in Redesign. One of the major developments of school Redesign was the realization that schools did not build in enough teacher collaboration time, or the collaboration time lacked intentionality. Through the Redesign process, many secondary schools increased teacher collaboration time, usually through a professional learning community, or repurposed the existing teacher collaboration model. One of the pilot project principals described how,

“Once we re-purposed our PLC’s (professional learning communities) with an intense focus on our academic goal, our culture improved. For the first time in a long time,

teachers looked forward to PLC time because they were collaborating on what mattered most.”

In this way, school culture has a critical role in fostering positive behaviors in teachers through more purposeful collaboration (Tabak & Şahin, 2020), starting with the SRT and spreading to the rest of the staff.

Redesign secondary schools were tasked with developing a different leadership model to transform the school. This model was referred to as “teacher-led, administrator-supported, everyone-owns,” building on a shared leadership approach that featured the teachers developing the solutions to the challenges that were hindering student learning. One of the secondary Redesign principals in this pilot study mentioned that when teachers are leading the development of solutions,

“they’re not afraid to try something, because it’s a safe culture.”

The teachers were more empowered through this approach. This principal went on to say that the teachers, over time, “get used to trying it and know if it doesn’t work, they can change it again.” In each school Redesign team, there was a “pilot” and a “co-pilot,” both teacher leaders, guiding the team through the Redesign effort. There were two reasons for this approach; one, teachers should be the solution-providers since they are most knowledgeable of the students’ experiences, and two, for sustainability of the changes made. One principal recalled,

“If I didn’t have the two teacher leaders carrying the torch for Redesign, we would still be floundering in the model we were stuck in before. Their leadership has been the catalyst for the positive changes taking place now.”

Many times, a dynamic administrator leads the charge, changes the culture, and student learning improves only to have that work undone to a degree when the administrator moves to another

position. The shared leadership model theoretically should decrease the chances of this happening due to the elevation of the teachers' collective voice and choice in reimagining teaching and learning at the system level rather than just at their own classroom level. Hattie (2008) found through his meta-analysis study that when school change initiatives are "top-down" or led by administrators, the resulting changes have a much lower impact on student learning. Because of this finding, flattening the hierarchy of school leadership and creating a more flexible organizational model can lead to a collective mindset that is more open to change and development (Lieberman, 2005).

Many factors contributed to these cultural shifts through Redesign, including the school staff voting to join the school Redesign project, dissatisfaction with current levels of student performance, and external forces like the pandemic. As the saying goes, "adversity doesn't create character, it reveals it," and I observed this to be true as school Redesign teams laid bare their existing culture and determined how to change it. Although the natural inclination was to change aspects of the school with the "stroke of a pen," in other words, through transactional leadership, the SRT's knew it would require transformational leadership which is much more complex and adaptive. As Atasoy (2020) states, "transformational leadership is more effective on the school culture and all sub-dimensions of organizational change than transactional leadership" (p. 268). As we discussed the impact the pandemic had on the Redesign effort in their schools, one principal summarized how she had to move from a transformational leadership approach she had adopted during Redesign to a more transactional model during the pandemic. She indicated,

"We empowered the teachers so deeply during Redesign (transformational), I had to remind them that they couldn't make every decision moving forward, that the administrators would be making decisions as well. But during the pandemic, the staff

reverted to relying on me to make decisions (transactional) because every day the pandemic created challenges that needed to be solved immediately and the teachers were so exhausted, they just wanted to be told what to do.”

School Redesign teams would painstakingly plan messages and activities for staff, families, and the community as Redesign moved forward, staying vigilant and cognizant of the underlying culture shifts they wanted to see happen. A key to this process was building trust. As one principal stated,

“I think it helped build that trust in the staff, through strategic planning and involving as many staff as possible at the front end of the Redesign project, and so when it came time for the pandemic, teachers were more willing to dig in and figure out the best way forward.”

This was highly adaptive work and those school Redesign teams who kept culture at the forefront of their minds ultimately reaped the benefits as the Redesign unfolded, seeing stakeholders’ attitudes, beliefs, and values begin to shift toward a more student-centric model.

Flexibility

When a school staff actively challenges the status quo of everything they do and are about, people invariably will experience a wide spectrum of emotions and lessons learned along the path of change. The ability to be flexible as a school Redesign team was incredibly important. Waters et. al (2015), defined flexibility as being able to adapt different leadership styles to fit the situation as well as being comfortable with dissent. I identified two leadership styles that school Redesign teams balanced to lead their school through the Redesign effort, transformational and instructional leadership. Transformational leadership includes setting a vision, goals, and thinking differently about how teaching and learning can take place

(Agyemang Adarkwah & Zeyuan, 2020; Bass, 1999; Curtis et al., 2011; Yang, 2013).

Instructional leadership is important because implementing new teaching strategies, both school-wide and in the individual classroom, takes attention to detail, aligning curriculum, instruction, and assessment, collaboration, and accountability (Cuban, 2013; Glickman, 1989; Murphy & Lick, 2005).

Transformational Leadership

In many ways, transformational leadership was the most effective style to adopt to redesign a school. One word most often associated with the Kansans Can School Redesign project is innovation. School leaders who are more transformational are more connected and closer to their staff, which results in teachers perceiving the school's climate to be more supportive of taking risks and implementing innovative practices (Moolenaar et al., 2010). School leadership requires flexibility and while it is true all leadership approaches have an impact on teachers and students' academic achievement, transformational leadership is considered to be "the most efficient in reforming and restructuring schools" (Gyasi et al., 2016, p. 10). Transformational leadership creates the conditions to raise the level of student performance to new heights (Yang, 2013). Those "conditions" include an emphasis on a democratic, collaborative approach, involving more teachers in the decision-making process through shared leadership (Sanzo et al., 2011). A principal, in discussing how to engage teachers in the process, stated, "I'm trying to get everybody on board. I'm trying to sell this new school that we can have, and that I believe that it's going to be great for kids." Leaders who are able to develop a "shared vision and goals, attend to the social needs of individuals, and provide intellectual stimulation are perceived to support the fertile ground for innovation to develop" (Moolenaar et al., 2010). At the heart of Redesign is the idea of flattening the organization and

elevating the voice of those closest to the students to determine the best solutions moving forward. One key aspect of teachers voicing their ideas, at the system level, for providing better learning experiences for students is they must trust that it is safe to suggest different practices. Transformational leaders, in addition to creating the conditions in which innovation can occur, also support “a psychologically safe environment for personal vulnerabilities to be shared” (Moolenaar et al., 2010). “Teacher-led, administrator-supported” became a calling card for Redesign. As one principal shared,

“My school Redesign team has been key in keeping us grounded on where we need to be, and I've really empowered them and tried to build capacity through them to be that pulse of their teachers.”

This phrase captured the approach of the school Redesign team; to use a comprehensive, transparent decision-making process and considering more information and alternatives by listening to a variety of shareholders (Hariri et al., 2014). Teachers working in an environment where transformational leadership is being exercised are more committed and motivated to accomplish what it is they are being asked to do (Raman et al., 2015). Through a variety of challenges (COVID, parent pushback), teachers’ commitment and motivation were certainly tested, but if they felt as if they were part of creating a new manner of teaching and learning, they were more likely to stay committed.

As the school Redesign team began to meet and work through the initial year of Redesign, much of how they led was modeled by the building principal. In many cases, it was the principal convincing and then reassuring the teacher leaders they could elevate their collective voice and lead the rest of the staff through this challenging process. In this regard, principals were being transformational leaders, showing the ability to “inspire others to look

beyond their own personal interests and elevating their sense of achievement and well-being for those with a vested interest in the school improving” (Bass, 1999). The traits of transformational leadership include exhibiting idealized influence, instilling confidence, respect and trust in school Redesign team members, acting as a role model, and expressing faith in school Redesign team members (Crowne, 2019). Additional traits that align even more closely with the Redesign process include challenging the process, speaking to the heart in addition to the mind, and empowering staff through shared vision and trust (Curtis et al., 2011). Transformational leaders raise the level of consciousness about the importance of organizational goals and by inspiring the staff to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of reaching those organizational goals (Marks & Printy, 2003). School Redesign teams took on a transformational leadership style by empowering the rest of the staff to create a shared vision, set building goals, and overall, raising their collective voice in advocating for change to improve student outcomes.

Instructional Leadership

In many ways, instructional leadership was the main approach utilized by principals and building leadership teams prior to the school Redesign project beginning. Instructional leadership has been in place since the 1980’s, during the effective schools movement and focused on the principal’s role in maintaining high expectations for teachers and students, supervising classroom instruction, coordinating the school’s curriculum, and monitoring student progress (Barth, 1986). However, the early version of instructional leadership, one in which the role of instructional leader fell solely on the principal, fell far short of the ideal (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). An adaptation to the principal as the sole instructional leader that is still in place today is a shared instructional leadership approach. In essence, the principal becomes the “the leader of instructional leaders” (Glickman, 1989, p. 6). Shared instructional leadership is based on active

collaboration between the principal and the teachers on curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Using this model, the principal seeks ideas, insights, and expertise of teachers in those areas. The teachers and the principal share the responsibility for professional development, curriculum development, and ensuring fidelity of instructional strategies (Marks & Printy, 2003). This shared instructional leadership model aligns with the approach taken by school Redesign teams as it was an inclusive concept and focused on empowering teacher leaders by investing resources and building their capacity to lead the rest of the staff as teaching and learning was transformed in the school.

A blending of both instructional and transformational leadership is necessary to redesign a school, improve learning experiences for students, and to sustain those efforts. This is what Marks and Printy call “integrated” leadership, where the transformational influence of the school Redesign team combines with the shared leadership actions of all staff (2003). Whereas transformational leadership places an emphasis on vision building and a clear and enduring sense of purpose for the organization, the model lacks a focus on teaching and learning (Marks & Printy, 2003). Instructional leadership is a shared approach that is action-oriented and moves a school staff forward in reaching goals and actualizing the vision (Marks & Printy, 2003) that wouldn’t be in place if not for taking a transformational approach. Transformational leadership builds organizational capacity while instructional leadership builds individual and collective competence (Marks & Printy, 2003).

Focus

“I think we should hit the pause button on Redesign.” That statement was made by a veteran teacher in a Redesign school as the 2020-2021 school year began amidst a raging pandemic. He was giving his principal unsolicited advice. The teacher reasoned that, with all the

restrictions on students and teachers due to COVID, that “we need to go back to what we know” and put Redesign on the shelf for a year. To which the principal replied:

“Absolutely not, Redesign is what carried us through last spring (when schools were closed due to COVID), and it will be the mindset and the process of Redesign that will help us to navigate this year successfully. If anything, we need to step on the accelerator with Redesign, not tap the brakes.”

This school had created a shared vision, mission, and goals back when they first began the Redesign effort, putting them on a path with clear student learning goals on which they could focus their collective energy and resources. Defining and clearly articulating a common vision, mission, and clear, high goals is one aspect of a high-achieving school (Goodwin et al., 2015). This was a defining moment for this school as the principal was reinforcing the clear focus, they all had worked hard to identify together. This principal along with the staff had invested in the Redesign process, believed they were on the right path, and were not going to allow COVID or any other obstacle stand in their way. One principal explained a seminal moment during the throes of the pandemic when the staff called a teachers-only meeting,

“The pilot and co-pilot came to me to ask if it was ok to call a teachers-only meeting to clear the air about how Redesign was not going away just because the pandemic was hitting us so hard. I said, “go for it.” Every teacher was in there and it got a bit heated, but they finally agreed that all the work they had done for Redesign was not going to be deterred because of all the restrictions COVID had brought on. They decided they would be stubborn on Redesign goals and then rely on the process they learned through Redesign to be flexible with the methods.”

This leadership responsibility would be classified as one that is “say easy, do hard.” Focus is establishing clear, measurable goals and keeping those goals “in the forefront of the school’s attention” (Goodwin et al., 2015, pg. 14). This responsibility would be important in all aspects of life and seems to be one that is most important as a school transforms itself and seeks to sustain that transformation. There are so many variables involved, so many decisions to make, in teaching and learning every day a school’s doors are open. If teachers and staff do not have a strong focus on clear, system-wide goals, all the work can be swallowed up by the whirlwind, leading to teachers focusing on what they as individuals value instead of zeroing in on what’s most important to the school improving. Focus is important as it permeates every aspect of teaching and learning, allowing teachers to make decisions based on what will leverage the system goals on student performance.

Having established what focus is as a leadership responsibility and why it is important, now let’s turn to *how* to establish a focus in a school. Fundamentally, school leaders should embrace the notion that each educator in their school plays a part in using data to improve student learning (Kowalski et al., 2008). Upon that recognition, school Redesign teams took action in two ways: first, establishing high, clear, and measurable student-centered goals in an inclusive, collaborative manner and second, fostering a culture of understanding, valuing, and using data often to accelerate student learning towards those goals.

In terms of developing student performance goals at the school level, school Redesign teams engaged the entire staff in the process, including student learning data, demographic data, school process data, and shareholder perception data in order to accurately pinpoint student achievement goals (Bernhardt, 2017). By gathering the “full picture” of the school’s current state in terms of students and their performance levels, school Redesign teams engaged multiple

groups that had a personal stake in seeing the school succeed, *including students themselves*. One principal described how the staff realized they were only thinking of what needed to be done for the students as opposed to what they needed to hear from the students.

“We were only seeing the students as benefitting from the new Redesign strategies instead of seeing that they needed to participate if it was going to be student-centered. We had a “duh” moment before we decided to really start to talk to our students in an intentional way about what they needed to improve their learning.”

In order to maximize results, school Redesign teams limited the number of student performance goals (Reeves, 2020; Schmoker, 2004) and focused professional development on those specific areas aligned with those goals (Kowalski et al., 2008). During the process of setting these goals, school Redesign teams embraced the idea of using data to identify what student skills were most in need of improving, not to lay blame at the feet of a group or an individual (Kowalski et al., 2008). To that end, data should be presented as a tool for identifying areas of improvement, not as a weapon that elicits blame and punitive action (Bernhardt, 2017; Kowalski et al., 2008; Park & Datnow, 2009; Reeves, 2020). Another consideration is the advent of DRIP (data-rich, information-poor) in schools (Wilhelm, 2011) where teachers are adept at finding and analyzing data but struggle to see the connection between the data and how to adjust their instructional practices to leverage the school’s goals (Moore, 2013; Wayman, 2005). Focus is all about winnowing the data down to the most critical factors to consider, and that work initially started with the school Redesign team. When teams of teachers, like those initiated by the school Redesign team, are engaged in the process of analyzing data to identify, prioritize, and address student learning, leadership is distributed throughout the organization (Lange et al., 2012), which increases the likelihood of improvement and sustainability.

Although school Redesign focused on data-based decision making and student-centered strategies, a major piece of each school's Redesign puzzle was culture. There are many facets to a school's culture, including how school staff approach the use of data to drive instruction. It is inherent school leaders instill a culture of curiosity that values data and consistently uses data to inform decisions (Park & Datnow, 2009; Sutherland, 2004). Every educator's innate curiosity should be stoked and informed by data related to student outcomes. One challenge to building a culture of data-based teaching and learning is how time was utilized to allow teachers to collaborate on instruction, driven by data. The school leaders who valued the responsibility of "focus" created pockets of time for teams of teachers to meet and dive into student learning data. It was important enough to change the daily schedule as well as the professional development plan to allow more time for teachers to collaborate. Indeed, how schools structure their professional development days reflects what they value (Murphy & Lick, 2005). To establish a data-driven culture, processes of curiosity and professional discourse are built into the routines of the weekly schedule (Lange et al., 2012). This practice fostered trust by allowing teams of teachers to make decisions based on data, thus building collective efficacy and ownership (Schmoker, 2004). However, to effectively grow the capacity of teachers to make real-time instructional decisions based on data, these collaborative teams were provided with clear expectations and norms by the school leader to ensure discussions did not get off the rails. By allowing teachers time to analyze data, school Redesign leaders conveyed the message that collaboration is the key to improving student learning (Eaker & DuFour, 2009). Increased time, clear expectations, and a focus on collaboration were solid first steps in creating a data-based instructional culture in the secondary Redesign schools.

Change Agent

This section begins with the relevant information I found related to being a change agent as it relates to Balanced Leadership, however, this connected to a broader field so I will also draw connections to those scholars, as well. At its most basic level, Kansans Can School Redesign was about challenging the current model of education so this particular role was critical to begin with and then sustain going forward. Wagner describes successful, sustained transformation change as “action theory” where new methods, informed by theory, are put in to practice and improved through trial and error (Seashore, 2009). Goodwin et al.(2015) defined the leadership responsibility of “change agent” as being “willing to and actively challenging the status quo” (p. 4). The willingness was there for most staff in each school since they gained at least 80% approval to join the Redesign project in the first place. If an affirmative vote could be viewed as being willing to challenge everything that has to do with teaching and learning in a school, then each building in the Redesign project was collectively acting as a change agent. However, the challenge to questioning the status quo is to maintain that type of mindset, especially when certain elements of the Redesign effort become controversial, and where there is an ongoing commitment to inquiring how teaching and learning are progressing in a school.

“We had major momentum and motivation at the beginning of the Redesign project, feeling like we finally had the permission to make changes we had only dreamed of prior. As the Redesign effort progressed and we started to implement new strategies, we started to get questions from students and parents, and we started to lose our focus and momentum. That’s when we started to get bogged down. It reminded me of the Mike Tyson quote, “everybody has a plan until they get punched in the mouth.”

One major factor in taking on the role of a change agent is for the administration to empower teachers to lead at the system level. Fostering teachers' collective efficacy, the common belief they have the skills to improve student outcomes, has been shown to have one of the highest effect sizes on student achievement (Hattie, 2008). One way to create this paradigm shift and flatten the organization in terms of leadership through change is to create a professional learning community. The model of learning communities has been in place for several years although with a focus on classroom level improvement, not system-level change. A professional learning community focused on system-level change can put "emancipated and powerful teachers at the core of the reform process, shift the focus away from administrative leaders and toward all professionals as leaders" (Seashore, 2009, p. 133). A major benefit from this approach is that it leads to sustainability of the changes being implemented. Engaging teachers in the change process generally leads to them "owning" the changes being implemented and increases the likelihood of those changes being sustained even if there is turnover in administration. While collective teacher efficacy has shown promising results, Seashore found that support from the principal coupled with facilitation of the learning was necessary to foster teachers' ownership of the improvements (Seashore, 2009).

The balance between empowering teachers to lead and exercising authority and direction was delicate for the school Redesign team, most especially the building leader. There were times when the building leader would step back to allow the discussions to be directed by teachers and then other times when the principal would step up to ensure their Redesign effort was staying on track. One principal discussed how difficult it was to ascertain how she needed to show up to lead,

“At the beginning of Redesign, it was like I had to unlearn everything I knew about how to lead school improvement. It seemed as if I couldn’t find the right balance and ended up freezing up, unsure of how I could help. After a time, I figured out a better balance by committing to leading from the back and only taking the direct approach when an idea would be offered up that wasn’t directly aligned to our vision and goals. I became the supporter of the process and the guardrails.”

It was very much situational awareness of what needed to happen, especially until the school developed a shared vision that provided direction for all involved. To promote the transformation, Redesign school principals worked to spark intellectual curiosity around issues of reforming the school and crossed boundaries to challenge the learning culture, identifying areas of deficiency, and challenging the staff to develop solutions (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Schein, 2010). This manifested itself when having teacher-led discussions concerning the attributes of a successful student in the school, the destination or vision of the school, and the goals that would leverage the vision. This was when the principal and the school Redesign team would play more of the supportive role, encouraging as many teachers’ voices as possible. Paradoxically, effective leadership must sometimes be directive to transform the school. Both supportive and authoritative approaches were utilized depending on the situation and sometimes used together, combining to create effective learning environments and professional communities (Huberman & Miles, 2013).

Another way in which this supportive/authoritative leadership dynamic can be expressed is through the concept of transformational and transactional leadership. Oterkiil and Ertesvag (2014) identified transactional leadership as being focused on management, in this case managing the implementation of the Redesign changes the staff decided to put in place, while

transformational leadership is focused on change. While transformational leadership can be widely shared across the school (Leithwood et al., 2004), transactional leadership provides the consistency and order that leads to a positive climate necessary for teachers to participate in collaborative decision making (Stigler & Hiebert, 2009). In essence, for teachers to act as transformational leaders, the principal, in conjunction with the school Redesign team, must take on the role of transactional leader at times. These findings provide support to the argument that transformational leadership practices, designed to foster a collaborative culture, in combination with transactional leadership practices are necessary for a positive learning environment for both teachers and students and lead not only to successful change efforts, but also to sustainable change (Oterkiil & Ertesvåg, 2014). Finally, when the principal sets up the conditions for collaboration and shared decision making by multiple shareholder groups toward a common vision and goals, the result is a more effective school (Sergiovanni, 2007).

During the summer of 2017, Tammy and I were feverishly learning as much as we could about innovation in education as we prepared to hit the road to coach the Mercury and Gemini I schools in the fall. We did exhaustive searches every day to find out what school or state was taking an innovative approach and what, if any, of that approach could we integrate into the Redesign project. Frankly, and especially at the secondary level, what we found left much to be desired. Past student internships and flexible schedules, there did not seem to be much in the way of innovation in education. Which was exactly why Kansas needed to Redesign; if we were going to see unprecedented levels of student success, we knew it would require different and innovative practices in our schools. At one point we decided it was not serving us well to research what schools or states were doing in the way of innovation, and that eventually the Redesign project would set the bar for innovative new methods for teaching and learning. Instead

of focusing on “what” other schools were doing, we transitioned to focusing on “how” schools could reimagine and redesign. That was when we came upon design thinking and the 4 Disciplines of Execution (McChesney et al., 2022), where creativity meets hard-core rules to execute. This was a defining moment for us as it gave us a process we could teach from with our eager Mercury schools. As we began meeting with Redesign schools in late summer, the blending of these two processes, most often found outside the field of education, became part of our mantra with schools, “focus on the how, not the what.” Educators are problem solvers; it's in their DNA to want to jump over how to do something right to what to do. Through Tammy and I finding this blended process, we unknowingly were aligning with the four responsibilities of culture, flexibility, focus, and being a change agent. The process allowed for schools to create a more student-centric culture, adopt a more flexible, personalized learning environment, narrow down to focus on a few high, student-centered goals, and challenge the status quo. Those four responsibilities will be the focus of the remainder of this dissertation.

Chapter 4 - Making Meaning

The purpose of this autoethnography study is to understand and make meaning of my experiences with secondary schools in the Kansas Can School Redesign project. My unique role as secondary school Redesign specialist provided entrances to understanding the experiences, the relationships, and the interactions key players engaged in the Redesign process as well as key forces in place shaping such a process - all would otherwise be much less possible, if not impossible, for a typical outsider-researcher. In this chapter, I outline the fundamental aspects of this research, including the epistemological approach, the theoretical framework, and

autoethnography. I will delve into what autoethnography is as an approach and why I chose to use autoethnography for this study. I will also explain how I proceeded with a deeper autoethnographic data analysis after the pilot project alluded to in the previous chapter as I coded my observations and field notes associated with secondary Redesign schools' experiences. In other words, here I work to provide a clear understanding of the autoethnographic project which occurred following my pilot study which informed the development of the final two chapters.

Research Question

- 1) How has my coaching role as secondary school Redesign specialist from KSDE fostered the development of core leadership responsibilities, identified in the Balanced Leadership framework, in building principals and the School Redesign team (SRT) across secondary schools in the Redesign process?

Epistemological Approach

Social constructionism, as a theory, was first introduced in 1966 by sociologists Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman in their book, *The Social Construction of Reality*. Berger and Luckman were both influenced by other “thinkers” of the time, like Karl Marx and George Herbert Mead. Both Berger and Luckman proposed that society exists as both an objective and a subjective reality; that “Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product” (1966, p. 61). The argument is humans construct society (its meaning), then we go learn about it which brings in objectivity, and then finally we use our subjectivities to interpret events/interactions within the social world that we constructed (Cunliffe, 2008).

One of the key tenets related to this original argument that has been carried forward is that we *construct* meaningful reality, as opposed to *creating* it. Crotty (1998) poses that “in the constructionist view, as the word suggests, meaning is not discovered but constructed” (p. 42).

One could argue the Redesign project was constructed by our Redesign team at the KSDE, which gave the project meaning and then we set about working closely with school Redesign teams to objectively find their vision of where they wanted to go as a school. All along the journey, we constantly interpreted events and interactions by the school Redesign team, applying our own subjective lens to what was taking place. This blending of objective and subjective reality is one of the main tenets of social constructionism, where “objectivity and subjectivity need to be brought together and held together indissolubly” (Crotty, 1998, p. 43).

A second key tenet of this epistemological approach is another example of two concepts inextricably linked. Within a constructed society, culture exists. Culture is “a set of control mechanisms - plans, recipes, rules, instructions - for the governing of behavior” (Geertz, 1974, p. 44). Geertz (1974) stated “culture is best seen as the source rather than the result of human thought and behavior” (pg. 53) as cited in Crotty (1998). In other words, the premise is that a group of people brought together for a common purpose (society) interprets everything through the lens of culture, which impacts both the doing and the thinking of that collective group. If one can accept that a school represents a society, then it follows that the society would also include a unique culture that drives the actions and the thinking of that particular school. One of the major aims of Redesign is to transform the way educators think and teach, thus, a transformation of a school’s culture. This transformation does not take place without construction. The players, in this case educators, construct the meaning of the society (school) and then go about interpreting the new meaning through the lens of the existing culture. If new meaning is constructed, then the thoughts, beliefs, and actions of the school will be changed or adjusted to fit with the new meaning. This objective of Redesign, transforming a school’s culture, aligns directly with a social constructionist approach.

Social constructionism fosters a critical spirit in those who utilize it as an approach. With constructionism, the focus is on “the collective generation and transmission of meaning” (Crotty, 1998, p. 58). This “collective”, or society, works together to construct the meaning of their environment, which inevitably leads to conflict due to different viewpoints and interpretations from individuals within the society. Adopting a critical viewpoint while meaning is constructed can be challenging. Crotty (1998) poses two aspects of the process of social constructionism that make it a difficult endeavor. One, taking a critical stance requires a society to overcome the concept of “reification,” where people tend to take “the sense we make of things’ to be ‘the way things are” (p. 58). Falling back on common statements such as “that’s just the way we do things” or the infamous “that’s the way we’ve always done it,” is simply human nature. That does not make it any less paradoxical; when challenging the status quo to try to build new meaning people will often revert back to what is comfortable and known, what William Blake (Crotty, 1998, p. 59) refers to as “mind-forg’d manacles.”

A second obstacle identified by Crotty (1998) to the critical viewpoint taken by the collective in social constructionism is the concept of sedimentation, where layers upon layers of interpretation serve as the bedrock of the cultural context (p. 58). Instead of engaging with and studying current realities to construct a new meaning, people will simply “build upon theoretical deposits already in place” (p. 58). All of these “sedimented cultural meanings” (p. 58), build up societies to end up “living on top of a culture that has already become false” (Sorokin, 1959, p. 100). The Redesign schools certainly struggled with overcoming both reification and sedimentation as they sought to significantly change the manner in which teaching and learning took place in their school.

Why Qualitative Inquiry and Autoethnography

My research purpose and questions sought to understand my experiences as a secondary school Redesign specialist working with school Redesign teams at a deep level. Qualitative research is specifically designed to provide a deep and holistic understanding of why and how things happen, which aligns directly with my research inquiry. Through direct observations and interviews, the data collected was interpreted and analyzed to make meaning of the interactions between myself and the school Redesign teams as those teams worked to redesign their school. Qualitative research in education, similar to what I proposed, began in the 1950's when researchers like Henry (1965) first took a critical view of elementary classrooms where practices were used to elicit competition among students. In England, qualitative research in education came about as the "new sociology of education" was on the rise, where studies focused on the "hidden curriculum" of social interactions in the classroom (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). As researchers in the U.S. and England began to deeply understand the socio-cultural phenomena taking place in classrooms, qualitative inquiry continued to expand into other disciplines in education. With this research study, I sought to understand my experiences working with schools that are redesigning, specifically how and why things happened in relation to the existing socio-cultural context within the schools.

Methodological Framework - Autoethnography

The term autoethnography was introduced by the anthropologist Heider in 1975, based on his study of the Dani people and their culture. Heider (2009) defined "self" as not the ethnographer but, rather, the participants. Hayano (2008) had a different context to autoethnography; he studied his "own people," a card-playing club, and identified his "self" in the culture that existed in that club. This was the first introduction of autobiographical content in

ethnography. There have been a variety of contexts for which autoethnography serves as a logical methodology. From Reed-Danahay's (2021) three types of autoethnographic writing; native anthropology, ethnic autobiography, and autobiographical ethnography, to Ellis and Bochner's (2011) extensive list of labels with an autoethnographic orientation, autoethnography has its roots in anthropology, starting out with a narrow focus on participants and their culture and now splitting into a number of nuanced labels that still fall under the umbrella of autoethnography.

Autoethnography is a highly diverse methodology with multiple contexts available to apply to your research and writing. However, as a broad approach, there are some general characteristics to keep in mind when it comes to autoethnography. As Chang (2016) mentions, when writing using autoethnography as a methodological approach, it is like "stringing discovered gems together in an intriguing pattern so that the finished product will sound cohesive and interesting" (p. 139). That is one of the most attractive qualities of autoethnography; the challenge of taking qualitative research and actually making it interesting to the reader, while also including structured, coherent cultural analysis and interpretation. Additionally, the questions the researcher should be answering at a high-level are more "how is..." and "why is..." as opposed to "what is" (Chang, 2016, p. 139).

Chang (2016) describes autoethnography as "combining cultural analysis and interpretation with narrative details" (p. 46). In the case of autoethnography, the narrative details involve the "self," or from the perspective of the researcher. This self-narration is in the context of the culture of which the researcher either becomes a part of or observes from afar. Ellis and Bochner (2011) introduce an additional context by defining autoethnography as an "autobiography that self-consciously explores the interplay of the introspective, personally

engaged self with cultural descriptions mediated through language, history, and ethnographic explanation” (p. 742). However, Ellis and Bochner (2011) go on to conclude autoethnography transcends autobiography by “connecting the personal to the cultural” (p. 739).

With roots in the field of anthropology, autoethnography involves varying degrees of storytelling. What differentiates autoethnography from other self-narrative genres is the focus on cultural analysis and interpretation (Chang, 2016). The analysis and interpretation are the qualitative research aspects of autoethnography. While there are many differing views of autoethnography among scholars of this particular methodology, all agree one of the basic tenets is that “culture and individuals are intricately intertwined” (Chang, 2016, p. 44).

Autoethnography allows qualitative researchers to bring their personal stories to their research studies (Reed-Danahay, 2021). However, it is not simply focusing only on self, but “about searching for understanding of others (culture/society) *through* self” (Chang, 2016, p. 49). As cited in Chang, Duckart (2013), refers to this as looking into one’s self and also a lens to look through to understand a societal culture. Another characteristic of autoethnography is the primary data comprises the researcher’s personal experiences, either captured through field notes, observations, or interviews from the researcher’s role as a participant or observer.

According to Chang (2016) autoethnography serves three purposes: 1) it presents a more “friendly” research method to both researchers and readers, 2) it increases cultural understanding of both self and others, and 3) potentially it can transform the researcher and others to “work toward cross-cultural coalition building” (p. 52). All three of those purposes had relevance to my research topic, especially the methodology being more interesting to read as one blends storytelling and the research. I learned a great deal about the culture and the dynamics of school Redesign teams in secondary Redesign schools as well as my role as their coach. I was

simultaneously anxious and excited as I told the story and autoethnography offered the best avenue to do so, building upon Dr. Neuenswander's autoethnographic study on how a state department of education can engage thousands of stakeholders across the state to transform teaching and learning, as previously mentioned.

Pitfalls of Autoethnography

There are things to keep in mind when using autoethnography as a methodology. Chang (2016) mentions five pitfalls to be wary of and I will list each and break them down but, overall, with the growing interest in autoethnography as a research method, "criticism is lurking" (p. 54). There are research experts who question the academic rigor and validity of autoethnography as a methodology. I would imagine this has to do with the storytelling nature of the writing as well as higher-than-normal levels of subjectivity, which stands to reason considering one of the foundational aspects of autoethnography is "self" in the culture being studied.

In fact, that is the first potential pitfall Chang (2016) identifies; focusing too much on self and not nearly enough on others. I will admit, at times, I felt selfish in choosing autoethnography. It would have been easy to simply spend all my time in self-introspection and, therefore, limiting that which autoethnography is all about, the interconnectedness of others in the cultural context (Chang, 2016).

Another pitfall with autoethnography to avoid is focusing too much on the storytelling side of the research and not nearly enough on cultural interpretation and data analysis. It was vitally important to stay focused on my research purpose and questions, ensuring I added enough research analysis of the culture to undergird the storytelling aspect of my research.

A third pitfall is an over-reliance on my memory of moments, events, and experiences as the main source of data. Of course, there will be data from my memory that will serve as

essential pieces of the puzzle, however, those memories will be more of the mortar than the brick. As Chang (2016) states, “memory can censor past experiences” (p. 55). This was a challenge I needed to pay particular attention to as my research reached back five years by the time I will have finished this study. The field notes and journaling I completed back then was critically important, as were my memories of my experiences working with Redesign school leaders and their teams, but I relied more heavily on what was written down and recorded throughout my data analysis and analytic memos. As Chang (2016) alludes to, multiple sources of data can only enhance both the accuracy and the validity of the autoethnographic writing.

The fourth pitfall to avoid has to do with ethics and, more specifically, confidentiality of my research participants. Since I was the sole researcher, informant, and author, it was tempting to “claim full authorship and responsibility” as the research came from my autobiographical lens (Chang, 2016, p. 55). The question of “Do they own a story because they tell it?” was important to ponder as an autoethnography (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). It was important the confidentiality of my participants was protected as many of the stories involved a school leader and the school Redesign team (SRT) leading transformational change in their school, which put them squarely in the eye of the criticism storm from various stakeholder groups, like staff members, parents, students, district office personnel, and local board members. Redesigning a school is time-consuming, energy-draining, laborious work. For the story of how schools redesign and its impact on culture through my lens, my participants needed to feel assured their identity would remain anonymous if I expected them to be forthright and forthcoming about their experiences. To that end, in all the narratives regarding schools, I have used pseudonyms for the names of the secondary Redesign schools.

The fifth and final pitfall to be on alert is the broad use of the term “autoethnography.” It could be used to describe a variety of qualitative research inquiries across multiple disciplines (Chang, 2016). To avoid confusing fellow researchers and readers, it was important to clarify the type of autoethnography I planned to use. As a methodology, autoethnography has many applications so it was important to distinguish the brand I used so readers could grasp fully the context of my research and writing. I would not have wanted readers to mistake my research study for an autobiography, memoir, or other type of narrative inquiry.

Styles of Autoethnography

Concerning the types of autoethnographic writing, Chang (2016) discusses four styles; descriptive-realistic writing, confessional-emotive writing, analytical-interpretive writing, and imaginative-creative writing. There are numerous other nuanced styles of autoethnographic writing but I believe Chang encapsulates many of those styles within these four larger categories.

With descriptive-realistic writing, the idea is to compose “realistic descriptive narratives depicting places, people, experiences, and events as accurately as possible with minimal character judgement and evaluation” (Chang, 2016, p. 143). The writing is meant to invite the reader to be able to see the place, event, and people as vividly as possible. Bochner and Ellis (2011) encourage researchers to include as many descriptive details as possible to fully develop the story. The idea is to describe your behaviors and experiences in the cultural context with as much detail as possible, without including your own opinions or evaluations. This will allow you later on to be able to more clearly analyze the data and interpret how you and others intersect in the culture.

In confessional-emotive writing, the author depicts the “personal agonies” (pg. 145) she or he is going through that are generally hidden from public view (Chang, 2016). This type of

writing exposes the vulnerabilities of the author and possibly others in the culture being studied. In its best form, this type of writing can appeal to readers and generate empathy, speaking to the heart of the reader. However, as Chang (2016) points out, confessional-emotive writing can elicit poor reviews because this “pouring out of the soul” can be seen as more of a self-centered act with the personal burdens taking center stage over the cultural analysis and interpretation (p. 145)

The third style of writing in autoethnography is analytical-interpretive, blending two actions, analysis and interpretation, generally found in any qualitative research study (Wolcott, 1999). Wolcott (1999) also added a third action, description, to form the “trinity” of this style of writing. By doing so, this aligns with autoethnography. Analysis and interpretation are germane to any qualitative study; including descriptive writing provides additional context and color to the writing and pushes it into autoethnography if a balance exists between the three actions. Through analysis, specifics are identified, and connections are made, with interpretation, meaning making of those connections, and finally, with description, both the analyzed and interpretive data are made to come alive with color, context, and details to tell the whole story.

The fourth and final autoethnography style of writing is imaginative-creative and represents the style that deviates the most from scholarly academic writing. Common forms of this style include poetry, drama, and fiction which opens up imaginative-creative to an inordinate amount of criticism from reviewers for mixing fiction with nonfiction, deficient levels of cultural analysis, and eschewing conventional academic methods (Chang, 2016, p. 148). A highly creative and uninhibited style, imaginative-creative writing interprets issues based out of autobiographical data and connects them to the cultural context.

Considering these four distinct styles of autoethnography, the form most aligned with my approach was analytical-interpretive but also informed by realistic-descriptive modes as well. There were many shifts in the culture of the secondary schools I studied so analysis and interpretation were important so the reader could visualize a fuller picture of what transpired. Additionally, using descriptive language blended with interpretations added another dimension to the human experience of Redesign and breathed color and life into the story. Simply analyzing and interpreting my experiences and interactions with the school Redesign teams without using descriptive language would have severely limited the depth of the research.

Standards for Critical Analysis Practices

The standards this autoethnography will be evaluated against are from Richardson and St. Pierre (2018) Creative Analytic Projects (CAP) in ethnographies (p. 1418). Following are the four standards and how this autoethnography will meet each of them:

1. Substantive contribution: This standard focuses on three aspects; the level of understanding of the social life the research outlines, a deeply grounded scientific perspective, and a true account of the cultural shifts taking place. In telling the story of my experiences in Redesign secondary schools blended with the Balanced Leadership framework, it was my hope to impart to the reader a deep understanding of the interactions that took place and the meaning of those social exchanges in the context of culture. It is the truest account of secondary schools redesigning in Kansas from my unique perspective as the only researcher who can truly tell how and why these events took place.
2. Aesthetic merit: This standard is concerned with the creative practices within the text, more specifically how the writing invites interpretive responses. It was my

hope readers found this narrative inquiry to be interesting, open to multiple perspectives and interpretations, and creatively crafted together in a manner that draws the reader into the text and held their interest.

3. **Reflexivity:** This standard centers on the author being self-aware and self-exposed enough to invite the reader in while also bringing to life the experiences of those studied. Since this is an autoethnography where the producer and the product are intertwined, I strived to be highly transparent with my subjectivities as well as my own self in the text. I hoped the reader could form a point of view based on my own unvarnished self-reflections. It was my ethical responsibility to share with the reader as much about my experiences in the context of self and others.
4. **Impact:** This standard focuses on its effect on the reader, whether it is able to stir emotions or challenge thinking. I also hoped this autoethnography would appeal to the reader's head and heart. I know that both myself and the participants in this study were affected emotionally and intellectually so the same should be true of those who read it if I captured how and why things happened in a compelling, intellectually stimulating manner. I certainly hoped to inspire others to challenge the status quo of teaching and learning through reading this narrative inquiry.

Theoretical Framework - Balanced Leadership and Coaching

The theoretical framework for this study was the Balanced Leadership research completed by McREL (Waters et al., 2003), identifying twenty-one school leadership responsibilities that have a significant impact on student achievement. This was the third meta-analysis research study done by McREL, with the first two meta-analyses studies focusing on curriculum, instruction, and school practices that are associated with student achievement. With

Balanced Leadership, McREL focused on reviewing 30 years of research in school leadership and constructing a framework that outlines the knowledge, skills, and dispositions leaders need to positively impact student achievement.

The Balanced Leadership study was built from three areas; an analysis of 30 years of school leadership research, a literature review of theories on leadership, and the years of practical experience as school leaders by the three main researchers (Waters et al., 2003). Leaning on those three bodies of knowledge, the research team was able to develop a framework for school leaders to understand how they can effectively implement and execute the twenty-one key leadership responsibilities from the study. The following narrative includes the major findings of the balanced leadership research study, the characteristics of first and second order change (See Table 2 below), and leadership responsibilities aligned with the magnitude of change (first or second order).

One major finding of the school leadership study was the significant relationship between leadership and student achievement (Waters et al., 2003) with the average effect size being 0.25. Quantitatively, the researchers found that if principals would improve their leadership ability in all twenty-one responsibilities by one standard deviation from the mean (50th percentile to 84th percentile), that would correlate with student achievement improving 10 percentile points higher (50th percentile to 60th percentile).

While the researchers found a positive correlation between these leadership responsibilities and student achievement, they also found the opposite to occur. When principals focus on the wrong school practices or miscalculate the magnitude of the change resulting from the practices implemented, student achievement declines (Waters et al., 2003). If principals improperly identified and focused on practices that did not address, or only slightly addressed,

the true needs of students or they misidentified the magnitude or “order” of change and failed to adjust their leadership practices accordingly, these instances had a negative impact on student achievement.

As the research team reviewed the literature on school leadership over the previous 30 years, they found many researchers (Bridges, 2009; Fullan, 2007; R. A. Heifetz et al., 2009; Rogers, 2010) studying how to lead a school as it implements new ideas, reach the same conclusion; not all change in schools has the same impact or magnitude. The degree to which the change affected stakeholders collectively and individually varied from large impact to small or no impact. This prompted the research team in this school leadership study to categorize change in two ways based on the magnitude of the change; first order and second order.

Table 2. *Characteristics of first and second orders changes (Waters et al., 2003)*

First order change	Second order change
An extension of the past	A break from the past
Within existing paradigms	Outside of existing paradigms
Consistent with prevailing values & norms	Conflicted with prevailing values and norms
Focused	Emergent
Bounded	Unbounded
Incremental	Complex
Linear	Nonlinear
Marginal	A disturbance to every element of a system
Implemented with existing knowledge & skills	Requires new knowledges and skills to implement
Problem- and solution-oriented	Neither problem- nor solution-oriented

Implemented by experts	Implemented by stakeholders
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Note. This table denotes the characteristics of each magnitude of change, first- or second-order. The magnitude of change is determined by the individual going through the change and is based on the perception of that individual. Adapted from “*Balanced Leadership: What 30 Years of Research Tells Us About the Effects of Leadership on Student Achievement*” by T. Waters, R. Marzano, & B. McNulty, 2003, p. 7. Copyright 2003 by McREL International.

In Table 2, one can see the criteria that differentiates first-order from second-order change. As referenced in chapter two, one of the most complex aspects with first and second order change is that not all changes represent the same order change for an individual or the collective group. Leaders who assume that a change will have the same effect or be interpreted in the same way by all stakeholders run the risk of selecting practices for first order change when it is second order change for most of the school community, resulting in implementation difficulties and, most importantly, a negative impact on student achievement. Leaders would be wise to evaluate the implications a new practice represents to individuals and the organization before proceeding forward with implementation.

First order changes, for both individuals and groups, are consistent with existing values, beliefs, and norms. Within those cultural guardrails, first order change creates perceived advantages for individuals and stakeholder groups that share a common interest or purpose. First orders change can be implemented utilizing current resources and existing knowledge. Additionally, this type of change is seen as necessary and possibly overdue by most stakeholders and there is agreement on how the changes should be implemented.

Second order change is a higher magnitude of change for either individuals or most stakeholders. A change is second order if it lies outside the current values and beliefs of the organization, and it is not immediately obvious how it will make teaching and learning better for teachers and students. It is a change that requires new learning, knowledge, and skills to effectively implement and, oftentimes, represents a different model of schooling never considered before. What makes this type of change even more complex is that some will consider it a first order change and be ready to implement immediately while others, in the same group, will see it as second order and resist implementation. Whether the change represents first or second order in magnitude, effective school leaders understand both, selecting the appropriate leadership responsibilities required to implement the change, and effectively applying those responsibilities with great timing and skill. One important finding by the researchers is principals may only need to effectively use a few of the twenty-one leadership responsibilities to implement a first order change, while they must utilize all twenty-one responsibilities with skill when successfully leading a second order change.

The research of this study breaks down into two distinct categories: interviews and observations. The observations came from my interactions with Redesign school leaders and their teams over the course of five years as they progressed through the phases of Redesign, and I documented those interactions through consistent journaling and field notes over that time. These observations and journal entries formed from my interpretations of the actions and conversations of the key players in each school's redesign effort, focused on the cultural shifts taking place within the school. Research sites included both on-site observations in each school as well as individual interviews via virtual meeting. Field notes and voice recordings were utilized after an on-site visit while driving back from the school visit.

On-site Observations and Field Notes

When making observations to collect data, I was on-site with each principal and the school Redesign team (SRT) in their building. I maintained an “active membership” where I would sometimes play a role in the activities in the school (facilitating discussions, leading professional development) and sometimes I simply observed from the sideline (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 140). Staff (and some students) were aware of my role as an observer and sometimes participant. I made several on-site visits previously to each building and recorded my observations after the visit concluded, using talk-to-text with my phone to record my observations. An on-site visit usually involved both sit-down meetings with the principal and sometimes members of the school Redesign team (assistant principal, counselor, teacher leaders) and tours of the building and classroom visits. At times, I would jot down observations or questions I would have on my phone but most data would come from my talk-to-text observations as I would drive to my next stop. This data served as historical data but also data to supplement the data from interviews. I continued with on-site visits, making observations, and recording them, then going back to those historical observations and coding responses in NVivo. All observations were password protected and housed on my phone in a notes app that dated back to September 2017, and I considered this my researcher journal.

A Priori Coding

During coding, the focus was on the four Balanced Leadership (Goodwin et al., 2015) responsibilities as identified through the pilot study I completed with three Redesign principles outlined in the previous chapter. This research focus was helpful to contextualize the large amount of data I had collected from on-site visits and coaching moments with secondary school principals and their Redesign teams. Without this lens to analyze the data, making meaning

would have been extremely challenging. The pilot study had its intended effect; to inform the sense-making of the larger qualitative research data.

As Saldana explains “Quantitative analysis calculates the mean. Qualitative analysis calculates meaning” (2015, p. 10). To make meaning out of a large amount of data, qualitative researchers must break the data into smaller units. Bhattacharya refers to this as “chunking” the data and it allows the researcher to get a closer look at the raw data for more in-depth analysis (2017, p. 149). One method to begin making meaning out of qualitative data was coding. A code is generally a word or short phrase that “captures the essence” of a datum (Saldana, 2015, p. 4). Whether the data collection was through field notes, interview transcripts, or observations in a journal, coding was a convertible method that was effective with any form of qualitative research. However, “coding is just *one* way of analyzing data, not *the* way” (Saldana, 2015, p. 3). Whether to code or not was a personal choice and was utilized only if using codes was appropriate for the research study undertaken.

If coding led to breaking the data into the smallest unit, then categorizing was the next level up of qualitative data analysis. As exhaustive coding transpired, through assigning codes and then re-assigning codes, the data could be distilled into a category, which is simply a set of similarly coded data with shared characteristics (Saldana, 2015). Patterns emerged through the coding process and, through further analysis, became categories. Saldana terms this as “synthesis,” combining different things to make a new whole (2015). Through synthesizing codes into categories, the next level of analysis was a theme. Themes are a phrase or a sentence that captures the essence of all categories and thus, all codes. A theme is arrived at through qualitative inquiry and thinking deeply about the patterns emerging as the data is read and re-read, coded and re-coded. While it may seem like this process moves along in a clean, linear

fashion, it is a jagged line full of fits and starts. Patterns may emerge within the first round of coding or not emerge at all until well into a second round of coding. Well-established themes could naturally appear to the researcher in the middle of analysis or not until the write-up starts. The process was highly iterative, constantly condensing and expanding the data to make meaning of the school Redesign teams' experiences.

For this research study, the main tool I used was NVivo, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software program. NVivo allowed me to upload the interview transcripts to begin to analyze and code the data. Additionally, the program enabled me to categorize the codes, write analytic memos, and eventually create concept maps of the codes, categories, and themes. Just because it is in my nature, I did use paper and a pen to reconfigure and condense categories during a second round of coding but, other than that, I utilized NVivo exclusively to analyze the qualitative data gathered.

For my first round of coding data from my first round of interview transcripts, I used eclectic coding, which features a mix and match of different coding methods (Saldana, 2015) as I was unsure of what I was looking for initially. The major coding method was In vivo coding but I also utilized concept coding with a dash of descriptive, even though Saldana recommends not using descriptive at all with interview transcript data as "topic-based nouns" are not as human-based as the actual words used by participants or gerunds (2015, p. 78). I found that using a blend of mostly In vivo (actual words) with topic-based nouns allowed the data to condense and categorize more effectively. The purpose of this autoethnography study was to understand my coaching experiences with secondary schools in the Kansans Can School Redesign project and specifically for this more nuanced study, how school leaders utilized different Balanced Leadership responsibilities (Goodwin et al., 2015). Since Redesign was a new educational

initiative, I chose an In Vivo coding approach, to allow for a new theory (Saldana, 2015). The theoretical framework for this study was the Balanced Leadership Framework for school leaders (Goodwin et al., 2015). Using an open approach theory, and one of its associated coding methods as the major method (In Vivo), was most appropriate as I began analyzing the data from school leaders about their interactions with staff and students as Redesign continued during the pandemic.

Once the first cycle of coding was completed, I began scouring the data and composing analytic memos for the data I found most relevant to my research question. These analytic memos turned out to be a major part of the narratives in chapters five and six, as I would compose stories from my observations. This led to me revising my concept map I had created from the first round of coding. What occurred was that the balancing of the leadership responsibilities, Change Agent and Order (Goodwin et al., 2015), came to the surface as significant factors in the principal and the SRT leading their school through a change effort. Once I had clarified the concept map, I began to look for themes and connections in the context of those two leadership responsibilities. This was the point when I was able to identify more nuanced categories under each responsibility and wrote an analytic memo that included both story and research. As Saldana (2015) states, “It is memo-writing that is the engine of grounded theory, not coding” (p. 164) and I would agree, summarizing and analyzing the data provided me a clearer picture of the major themes appearing. Once I completed a first round of analytic memos, I used those memos to generate new categories and to do code-mapping. Writing memos allowed me to see how “codes seem to cluster and interrelate, forming a category” (Saldana, 2015, p. 54).

During the transition between first and second cycle coding, I revisited the coding from the first cycle and then began to categorize the codes broadly. At this point, I was simply using my own intuition as opposed to any specific method. One quote that resonated during this time was from Stake (1995), “Good research is not about good methods as much as it is about good thinking” (p. 19). I kept this in mind as I started to categorize the first cycle codes, the next logical step as I analyzed the data. I would classify this categorizing as “lumping” or “coding the codes” which is combining larger units of data together under one category (Saldana, 2015, p. 229). To take it a step further, I noticed codes fit into more than one category and decided to leave them in the multiple categories to see if they could be associated after the second cycle of coding. Lastly, I spent time code mapping to bring some further structure and order to the data (Anfara & Mertz, 2014).

As I pondered the second cycle of coding, one goal I had was to condense the categories and associated codes as much as possible. Saldana (2015) refers to this as “developing a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization...” (p. 134) and, with the work I had done in categorizing during the transition, I had hoped to refine and define the categories and codes to a deeper level through the second cycle of coding. As Saldana (2015) refers to it, I wanted to reorganize and condense the data into a “main dish” (p. 235). I began re-coding and looked for themes or concepts that were similar throughout the data. If I found related concepts, I would bold the phrase or sentence, re-code, and then lump the similar concepts together. The second cycle coding method I employed was focus coding, which aligns with the open coding theory I was using. Basically, I created new (and fewer) categories “without distracted attention at this time to their properties and dimensions” (Saldana, 2015, p. 240). If I noticed that a particular category had more codes than other categories, I did not give that any credence,

choosing instead to identify the concepts that I thought were most relevant to my research question and theoretical framework (my coaching influence). Once I had re-coded the data and created new categories, I went back to the codes and reviewed the language or concepts I had bolded. Based on that language, I re-categorized once again, using paper and a pen initially and then using NVivo, to narrow down to three categories, which I felt captured the essence of the data most relevant to my research question.

After second cycle coding was complete, ending up with six categories, I re-ordered my concept map to align with those categories. Instead of simply considering the six categories, I then created “categories of categories” (Saldana, 2015, p. 278) by analyzing the subcategories under each main category, shuffling some around and doing a bit of re-naming of the subcategory. This led to another revision of the concept map, reconfiguring the major categories and sub-categories to represent my findings most accurately. Once the concept map was finalized, I then went back to the analytic memos I had written and reconfigured those based on the concept map. Again, these memos were a blend of story and research from my observations and field notes. I revised the memos and then created transitions from one subcategory to another, as well as writing introductions and summary conclusions.

Ethical Considerations

Concerning the ethical considerations involved in my research study, I followed the guidelines laid out by Tullis for autoethnography (Jones et al., 2016). The first guideline was to acknowledge the potential for personal or professional harm to self and to stay vigilant in minimizing risk while maximizing the benefits of your participants. Secondly, I contacted the IRB for information regarding how to protect the institution, other researchers, yourself, and your participants. I already submitted to the IRB and was granted approval to do the interview

portion of my research. The third guideline was to secure informed consent from participants, and I completed that step as well. Fourth, I reassured my participants they could drop out at any time, no questions asked, reinforcing the voluntary nature of their participation. Fifth, I completed member checks where preliminary findings or autoethnographic narratives were shared with participants to check for accuracy in content and context. The sixth guideline was to never present or publish anything from the study you would not freely share with those mentioned in the text. This guideline did not apply as I used pseudonyms to protect the identity of all participants and schools. The last guideline was to not underestimate the afterlife of a published study. Once published, anyone would have access so, as one presents findings, it is important to keep multiple audiences in mind to comprehensively present the narrative and, again, use pseudonyms to protect the identity of my participants. In terms of the findings I shared, I did merge parts of multiple stories from multiple secondary Redesign schools to form a comprehensive narrative to protect the identity of the school and its staff.

Summary

The intended purpose of this research study was to be able to understand and make meaning of the experiences, interactions, and relationships of key players in secondary school Redesign projects. This qualitative research study looked at the interactions and the key forces shaping the process secondary schools would follow in their redesign journey. The methodological framework I chose was autoethnography so that the element of storytelling could be infused within the research. In my position, I was the only person who could tell the story of Kansans Can School Redesign and the cultural shifts occurring in secondary schools from my unique perspective as the developer, implementor, and coach of the Redesign program. Analytical-interpretive autoethnography aligned well with this research as I would analyze the

interactions of secondary school Redesign teams through my lens, making interpretations of the impact those interactions had on the culture of the school. Also, I have always felt responsible to tell the story of secondary school Redesign since it was an unprecedented school reform initiative, aimed at reaching the highest levels of student success ever in Kansas. Schools showed great courage and a willingness to go to great lengths to improve the learning experiences for their students. Balanced Leadership (Goodwin et al., 2015) served as the theoretical framework with great depth into school leadership through high magnitude change, which was at the heart of school Redesign. Through field notes and journal entries from my time observing and interacting with school Redesign teams and principals, as well as the data gathered from interviews with three school Redesign principals, the research brought to light the story of secondary school Redesign in Kansas.

Chapter 5 - Oh, the Irony

“I feel like we’re doing everything right so why are we not making progress?” The question was one I had been both anticipating, and dreading. It came from a principal at Harris Middle School, an original Mercury school that was very intentional and committed to the Redesign effort. I knew this question was coming because this principal had, with good intentions and trust, followed the Redesign process as it was presented. The school Redesign team at Harris had been in lock step with the execution side of Redesign, identifying clear, high goals, selecting evidence-based strategies, implementing those strategies, and measuring the impact. Yet, the Harris staff was at odds over some of the strategies being implemented, which was having a major impact on evaluating the impact of the strategies. In response, I offered up a feeble, “you have to trust the process,” a line that I had used throughout the tough times of Redesign and was equivalent to telling someone to hang in there.

Harris Middle School is a building with grades 6 – 8 and a student population that is highly diverse and transient. Harris is one of many middle schools within a large school district, and it is widely known as the most diverse and the highest percentage of low-income students among all the middle schools. The staff at Harris was very excited to Redesign. They saw that their student population was uniquely different than the other middle schools in the district and wanted to pioneer new methods of teaching and learning that would be more effective and culturally responsive to a student body that was increasingly disengaged from the traditional teaching being utilized by most of the staff. In short, the adults in the building sensed they had to make significant changes, or the building would devolve into utter chaos. For all the right reasons, Harris joined the Redesign project and, for the first time in a long while, there was some semblance of hope for re-engaging students in their learning. The staff was invigorated by the

prospect of gaining ownership and control of the learning environment, as opposed to what the district mandated, or parents desired.

As Harris Middle School began their initial year in Redesign, referred to as the “plan year,” there existed a sense of euphoria amongst the staff that this was their opportunity to break the chains of the traditional model of teaching and learning they had been operating under and to strike out anew, charting a new course for their school. At this point, the culture of the school, which had always been more of a gritty, underdog mentality, now was shifting towards being more innovative and experimental that embodies the spirit of a turnaround school. The group leading this effort, Harris’ school Redesign team (SRT) including the building principal, had to capitalize on the positive movement in their culture by becoming a team focused on the Balanced Leadership responsibility of being a change agent. By definition, a change agent means one is willing to actively challenge the status quo (Goodwin et al., 2015). This was exactly what the Harris SRT was doing; showing the willingness to consider new and better ways of doing things, attempting to operate at the edge versus the center of the school’s competence, and leading a change initiative with uncertain outcomes (Goodwin et al., 2015, pg. 46). As their coach, I strongly encouraged the Harris principal to continue down the second-order change path even though there was no clear destination, other than they had to decide what strategies to implement this year and then implement or “launch” those strategies in the next school year. My coaching focus at this point with Harris was to promote all action towards changing the status quo while also reminding them that there was an urgency to this work. As Harris’ Redesign plan year began, there was a high degree of excitement and uncertainty as they challenged all aspects of the learning environment. That exuberance for Redesign was on full display at early meetings of

the SRT and with the full staff. The Harris SRT made the decision to meet with me every other week on Friday afternoons after school. Yes, you read that correctly.

Middle school teachers wanting to meet after school...

on Fridays...

to discuss school improvement.

After a long week of teaching, grading, lunch duty, and dealing with the latest teen angst, the teacher leaders, and administrators of the SRT eagerly met to discuss the future of Harris Middle School and how they could create a culture of learning where each student thrives. If that doesn't speak to the excitement and anticipation of redesigning teaching and learning, I don't know what does. I remember those meetings fondly where new ideas surfaced, tension ebbed and flowed, and laughter was the rule, not the exception. We met in the school library after all students and staff had left for the weekend, which gave our meeting atmosphere a similar feel to the movie "The Breakfast Club," only without the vandalism and dancing. Where the characters in the movie were discovering more about themselves and growing closer to each other through self-discovery, each of the SRT members at Harris were re-discovering their passion for teaching and student learning, sharing their ideas, and bonding over this challenge to redesign their school.

In the middle of the planning year, Harris, still riding high in change culture, began to feel the effects of losing their norms, standard operating procedures, and routines. The SRT still had a bounce in their step coming to the Friday afternoon meetings and all-staff gatherings remained critical of the current model coupled with healthy and robust brainstorming of ideas to make Harris a better learning environment. However, I began to sense a growing undercurrent of resistance in a few of the staff members I observed in SRT and all-staff meetings. Whether it be withdrawing from the discussion, shifting in their seats, or asking pointed, leading questions,

there were instances where staff members were starting to form negative opinions about Redesign. In *Balanced Leadership*, Goodwin et. al (2015) identify the structures, rules, and procedures of a school as the practices involved in the leadership responsibility of order. All the operating procedures and norms around school improvement were under scrutiny as the Harris SRT continued to push the staff to think and act differently. As the coach, I continued to push the Harris principal to fly as high as possible to escape the immense gravitational pull and comfortability of traditional teaching and learning. As the culture of change increased, order eroded, causing an unsettled feeling to permeate the entire school, including the students. I observed that some SRT members had grown increasingly reserved over the course of a few Friday meetings. It is hard to presume why they were withdrawing from the planning discussions, but I suspect they began to internally question where the Redesign was headed but did not want to voice their concerns for whatever reason. Conversely, a few staff members became visibly agitated during SRT and all-staff meetings, expressing their frustrations with a perceived lack of progress and questioning the decision-making process around Redesign. I remember one highly contentious SRT meeting where one teacher leader did not utter a single word the entire meeting, and there were only eight people in the meeting. During this same meeting, one teacher leader dominated the discussion by questioning all the proposed strategies in the context of how those changes would align with the negotiated agreement. At the height of the tension, this staff member had responded to how a particular strategy would work with, “the union will never go for that,” stifling the discussion as everyone thought through the ramifications of what was stated. These increasingly vocal teachers were growing impatient and frustrated with the lack of order brought on by the focus on second-order change.

My coaching response to this groundswell of opposition at Harris Middle School was to double down on the principles of execution. This adjustment in coaching reeked of irony; Redesign was perceived to be this transformation of teaching and learning, a complete overhaul filled with second-order change resulting in students lining up outside the school entrance every day eagerly anticipating what is to come, like going to a concert of their favorite performer. Now, once the change discussions began to lose their luster, here was the Redesign coach introducing the idea of following a set of hard-edged rules for execution to restore order. This rather sudden and ironic change in coaching was brought on by two factors that coalesced simultaneously. One, instead of embracing tension to make change happen, I wanted to calm the waters for a smoother journey. Two, I was sticking with what I knew best and that was how to execute well. You coach what you know through experience, and I knew much more about order, planning, and executing than leading through a major change effort. From my experiences as a secondary science teacher, an athletics coach, and an administrator, I was well-versed in the science of teaching and learning. Every day of my professional experience in middle and high schools involved planning, executing, and monitoring learning experiences, whether it was a lesson plan on the difference between meiosis and mitosis, a practice working on the difference between man-to-man and zone coverage, or a parent meeting on the difference between disruptive and good classroom behavior. I remember spending a disproportionate amount of time planning out the perfect football or basketball practice and then being intensely focused on executing the practice so that it ran smoothly and on time. The *science* of teaching and learning was at the center of my preparation as a teacher, coach, and administrator. Planning, implementing, and monitoring progress were some of the foundational aspects one learned in their education programs. But there was another foundational piece of teaching and learning; the

art of education. That was a skill I was missing, how to convince humans to change their behavior for the better, which was at the heart of Redesign. In the rush of trying to ensure the Redesign process ran smoothly and remain on track, I did not stop to question how effective my coaching might have been in the context of helping the SRT to manage the personal transitions through change among the staff. In essence, I was not willing to do what I was asking schools like Harris to do which was to embrace tension, dismantle old habits, engage in new behaviors, and manage the feeling of incompetence that is associated with any second-order change initially (Goodwin et al., 2015, pg. 48). As the rest of Harris' plan year progressed, more and more of the focus was on the "launch" or implementation plan for the next year and less on re-thinking teaching and learning. As I reflect now on that time coaching Harris and specifically working with the principal, while being an agent of change and instilling order are generally diametrically opposed, balancing both would have been the preferred method, however, the urgency and the tension seized the moment, forcing an imbalance where structure and order won out over challenging the status quo.

Harris Middle School launched their Redesign plan the next school year following their initial year, as was the requirement for the first cohort of Mercury schools. The strategies that were part of their launch plan had all been tested late in the spring of the planning year. All the strategies that showed enough promise on a small scale were to be implemented during the launch year. As the year began, there was a mix of excitement and apprehension with the new Redesign plan. Even though Harris had pilot-tested all the strategies they were launching back in the spring, there was still uncertainty among some staff that this was the right direction, causing doubt to seep into the minds of the staff. The SRT spent a great deal of time putting together the implementation plan and sharing it with all staff over the summer, which built more anticipation

and excitement than usual for back-to-school. Harris Middle School was following all the rules of executing a plan full of strategies that were not intended to follow the “rules” or traditions of education. That is precisely why, in the middle of their launch year, the Harris principal asked me:

“Why are we not making progress?”

As I reflect on that question now, it seems clear to me that the staff at Harris was not allowed enough time to re-think, re-imagine, and then manage their personal transitions to the new strategies before implementation or restoring order. Because of the accelerated timeline KSDE had put in place, teachers at Harris were feeling less ownership for the chosen Redesign strategies. The group that showed the most ownership was the Harris SRT and the principal, which is typical of school improvement where the leadership team makes the decisions on the strategies, charges the teachers with utilizing those instructional strategies, and then monitors progress. The manner in which Harris Middle School was leading this effort aligns with one of Lambert’s (Lambert, 2007) archetypes in school improvement, archetype three, where there is low participation but high skillfulness. The principal and teacher leaders act as a skillful leadership team that is reflective and innovative, however, there exists pockets of strong leadership and strong resistance and overall coherence in the school is very weak (Lambert, 2007). The Redesign process was to flatten the school improvement process to where teams of teachers were the researchers, developers, and owners of the strategies being put in place for Redesign. The intent was to create a high leadership capacity school where a significant number of staff as well as parents and students become skillful leaders and a shared vision is created collaboratively, leading to coherence throughout the school (Lambert, 2007). With the limited time, Harris had done what most, if not all, schools would have done; reverted to what is known.

As their coach, I did the same thing, reverting to what I knew best, executing a plan and restoring order. This was a classic example of what Tschannen-Moran et. al. (2017) referred to as taking the “tell-and-sell” approach, where influencers in a group share what they know to convince others, even though those influencers question the validity of what they share. This premature move to rein in the change process had a direct impact on the staff’s collective efficacy, which led to stalled progress once the Redesign strategies were up and running.

To the Harris SRT and staff’s credit, after a rough start to their launch year, they engaged as an entire staff in reminding each other why they chose to Redesign initially and re-affirmed that every staff member felt the need to change the learning environment to be one that is more responsive and relevant to their students. While the exuberance of the previous year was demurred to an extent during Harris’ initial all-staff meeting to kick off the launch year, mainly due to the reality of trying to implement new strategies that may or may not be effective, all staff were nodding their approval when the principal asked if everyone agreed things needed to change to improve student outcomes. This was a seminal moment and one that grounded Harris staff in their shared vision as they prepared for an uncertain year. Once the staff reset and got back on track, they began scrutinizing the strategies they had implemented and made minor and major adjustments based on student data throughout their launch year. By the end of the year, Harris Middle School’s culture had changed to be what they had wanted from the start of Redesign, one where there is a collective mindset of innovation, a pioneering spirit, and a gritty determination to embrace their uniqueness and to do what is in the best interests of their students. A respected, accomplished, and veteran teacher, spoke with me towards the end of the launch year and confided in me that after the first semester, he had decided to resign because of the direction the school was headed. It was after an end-of-the-year wrap up session in the library

and I could tell he had something to share but was apprehensive thinking it wasn't worth it. After some small talk, he decided to be transparent with me.

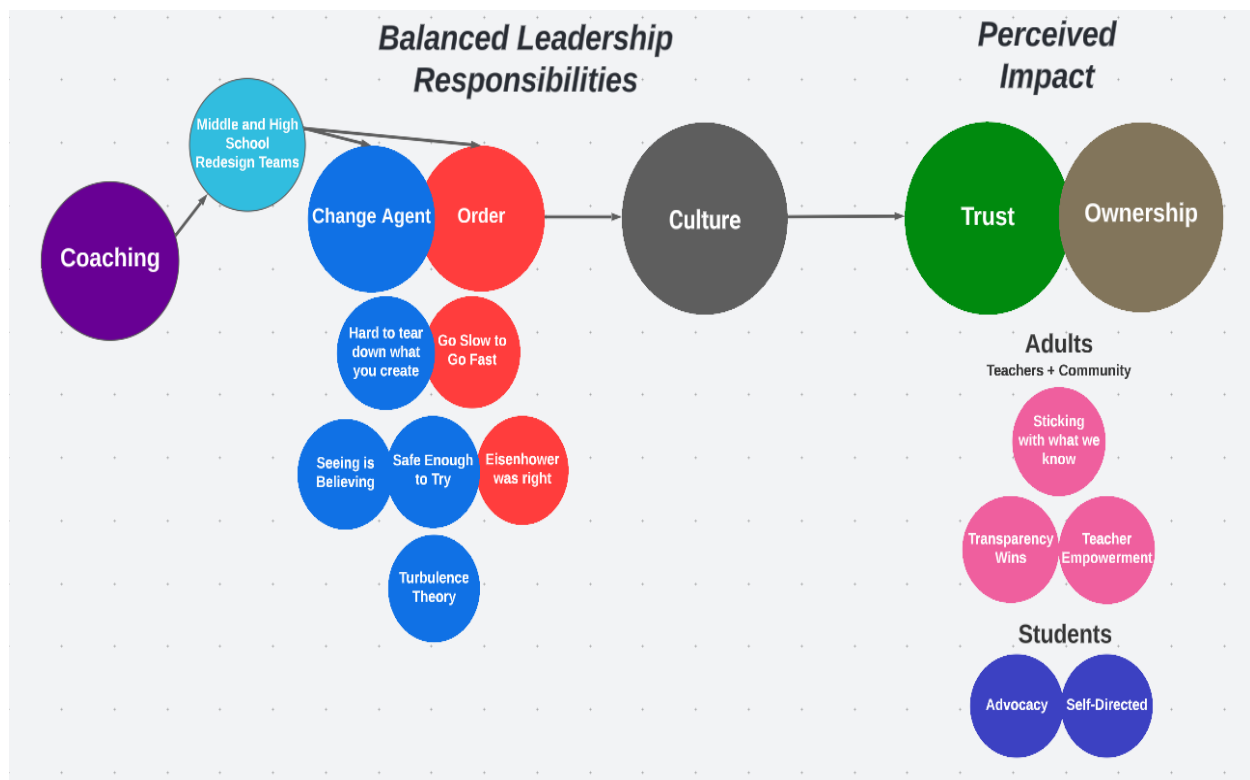
"I was done in the middle of the year. My whole career has been at this school, marked by multiple initiatives that never delivered on their promise. Redesign was different; I saw the potential to re-invent myself as a teacher because we had the permission to be the authorities in making changes. Initially, I was excited to spend the last few years here teaching in a manner that I had envisioned when I was just starting out as an educator. But then we had a few pessimistic staff members start to intentionally undermine the Redesign effort. I think we were strong enough to overcome that subversive element but when we implemented the new strategies, it was so overwhelming and made me feel like a first-year teacher again. I simply didn't have the energy to see it through."

He was frustrated with a lack of ownership by his fellow teachers and that he was, for the first time in many years, feeling incompetent when using the new strategies. However, once the staff came together to reaffirm why they wanted to Redesign to improve their students' learning, it became permissible to struggle and learn new teaching methods. His students responded well, seeing their teacher model what true learning looked like and it became permissible for them to fail and then learn from it. This teacher was adamant; he had never felt so energized at the end of a school year, never felt more excited in anticipation of the next school year and would never want to be teaching in any other school besides Harris. I thought to myself, now that is what Redesign is all about-excitement for learning, ownership of learning, and a collective determination to continue learning despite the inevitable obstacles. In the next several paragraphs, I will share my findings of how other Redesign secondary schools attempted to

achieve the aim of Redesign by blending the leadership responsibilities of being an agent of change while also providing enough structure and order to sustain the change process.

As I reflect on this story and my experiences as a coach with other secondary schools in the redesign process, two polar-opposite Balanced Leadership responsibilities (Goodwin et al., 2015), acting as a change agent and also providing order to the learning environment, bubbled up to the top of how principals and SRT's approached and how I coached the Redesign process. The balance the school Redesign team and I struck between these leadership actions had a major impact on the culture in the school (See Figure 9), specifically in the level of trust and ownership exhibited by both the students and adults in the Redesigned learning environment.

Figure 9. Redesign Leadership and Its Perceived Impact on Culture, Trust, Ownership, 2023



Note. Visual representation of how my coaching focused on school leaders acting as a change agent and simultaneously providing structure and order to the Redesign process. The degree of balance between those two leadership roles had a perceived impact on the culture of the building which then effected both the trust and ownership exhibited by adults and students. Created by the author, 2023.

For the remainder of this chapter, I offer stories that show the tensions experienced by school leaders, teachers, and myself as a coach trying to work through the redesign process while ebbing and flowing between being a change agent, and simultaneously creating order.

Change Agent - Safe Enough to Try

I have always been a proponent of using analogy to teach. The only issue is that I am fairly limited in terms of my knowledge and experience in other fields besides education and sports to the point where people who have worked with me for years roll their eyes whenever I begin a thought with how famous coaches would teach concepts to help us think through a solution to an educational challenge. So, when the building leader of a small, 7-12 secondary Redesign school, Bradshaw Junior-Senior High School, was hesitating on having his staff research and implement new Redesign strategies, I decided to switch things up. Instead of talking through how Andy Reid begins each week of the NFL season with a blank slate in terms of offensive plays for the Chiefs gameplan, I chose a business analogy. I shared with him that back when cell phones were first coming out Nokia was a major player in the market. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Nokia was at its height in the nascent cell phone industry and maintained their market share until 2008 when the first iPhone was produced. Nokia engineers implored the CEO to make substantive changes to their phone, but he was not interested, thinking their current

model could compete with the start-up from Apple. Over the next few years, Nokia came out with a new version that did not deviate much from the original Nokia phone. During that same timeframe, Apple came out with multiple versions, each with significant changes to the look and functionality. Two years after the iPhone was released, Nokia was nearly non-existent in the cell phone market. After this collapse of Nokia, the dumbfounded CEO was asked why this had transpired and he stated he did not know as they had not done anything wrong. They had meticulously planned out the new version to compete with the iPhone, only releasing the new phone once the engineers felt like the new features were perfect and ready for the public. Apple took a much different approach, releasing multiple versions in a short timeframe and *planned for change...*

not perfection (Kim, Anthony & Gonzalez-Black, 2023).

Apple's process was much more responsive to the user's rapidly changing needs and wishes while also taking calculated risks in releasing the new versions before every "i" was dotted and "t" crossed. Apple embraced the mantra that it was *safe enough to try* (Kim, Anthony & Gonzalez-Black, 2023) and it led to the iPhone dominating the cell phone market from its inception.

The Bradshaw principal was partial to the Nokia approach. He wanted to make sure any new Redesign "features" were planned out perfectly before implementation. The Bradshaw staff was ready to begin testing new strategies they had researched but the principal wanted to hold off implementation until the perfect plan for each strategy was in place. The staff was planning for change, while the principal was planning for perfection. I understood where the principal was coming from; typical school improvement involved selecting new strategies in the late spring after a period of research, putting together an implementation plan over the summer, providing

professional development to all staff at the beginning of the school year, and then monitoring progress of the strategy over the course of the year. Re-evaluating the strategy would happen at the end of the year with any changes being planned for the next school year. This was the Nokia approach to school improvement, not doing anything wrong by following a tried-and-true process that failed to respond to the rapidly changing needs of the students. To help the Bradshaw principal manage his personal transition to a more rapid responsive model of school improvement, I coached him to adopt a “safe enough to try” mindset when thinking of when to give the staff the green light to implement new Redesign strategies. I attempted to act as a catalyst for change (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978) and emphasized the nature of Redesign was for the state to provide permission to make substantial changes to the traditional model that so many educators clung to tightly.

From my perspective as a coach, educators are two things in addition to being devoted to helping others: risk-averse and extensive planners. Those two attributes seem to be in the DNA of every teacher to a certain degree. Much of the whole concept of Redesign stands in direct opposition to the nature of educators, where the need to think and act differently in terms of teaching and learning requires a certain level of risk-taking as well as the willingness to "try on" something new without the perfect implementation plan in place. I struggled as a coach to get educators to let go of that fear of changing practice and the resulting impact on student learning. Acknowledging that educators are intensely aware they play the key role in student learning and that any teacher would never want to jeopardize students learning by trying some half-brained new instructional strategies, how have we progressed from a lecture-based model to an application-based model where students are at the center of the learning as opposed to the teacher at the center? Bottom line, teachers decided to respond to the changing needs of students.

Education has evolved and changed over the years to improve instruction and learning and Redesign is simply another movement in that evolutionary process. But convincing skeptical teachers that this was the right step forward requires patience and the willingness to play a long game. Even if Redesign teams could identify something as *safe enough to try* (Kim, Anthony & Gonzalez-Black, 2023), enticing them to implement the new strategy before the perfect implementation plan was in place was equally difficult.

Order - Eisenhower was Right but Only If Score Is Kept

The planning side of Redesign was natural to the school Redesign teams in secondary schools. Educators are adept at planning since that is the main function of teachers when class is not in session. In my own experience as a teacher and a coach, I enjoyed putting together a solid lesson or practice plan. I recall spending hours planning out single lessons or practices down to the minute which, in retrospect, seems a bit obsessive-compulsive knowing once the lesson or practice began, there would invariably be significant adaptations based on how students or players were learning and applying the concepts I was teaching. As I reflect on my approach to teaching, I am reminded of Dwight D. Eisenhower's famous quote:

"Plans are useless, but planning is indispensable" (Eisenhower, 1957)

President Eisenhower stated this during a speech in 1957, at a National Defense conference, invoking the idea that you can put together an extensive, perfectly tailored plan but, when the fighting starts, one must be committed to adapting the original plan to accommodate for an ever-changing environment. Adapting the original plan in the moment can be described in one word, execution. This side of Redesign, where staff begin to implement new strategies, adjust, and deviate from the original plan, I refer to as "execution" and it was by far one of the most difficult aspects of Redesign for schools to master and to coach people through.

Once Redesign secondary schools had developed a shared vision, goals, and researched a few key strategies for each goal, the next step in the Redesign process was to implement, in a limited fashion, these new strategies. I referred to this step as “pilot-testing,” which was a novel but critical concept for the success of their Redesign effort. This meant teachers would “try on” a strategy on a short-term basis to determine if it would have a positive impact on student learning or not. Although some would argue that good teachers do this “pilot-testing” naturally, others, who are usually louder, would refer to this as “experimenting with students” resulting in a deleterious effect on “our kids.” This action research step was a challenge; teachers were fearful of the pushback by students and parents as well as, in many cases, having to learn new skills to pilot-test the new strategy fully. One of those new skills was keeping score, a main component of executing with excellence and one of the four disciplines of execution as outlined by McChesney (2022) in his book of the same name. While the concept of keeping score is more than familiar, suggesting that teachers keep score on the impact of a particular strategy they are pilot testing is more of a foreign concept. Most educators associate the concept of keeping score with summative assessments, like semester grades or state assessments. In this case, I challenged the SRT to expect each teacher pilot-testing a new strategy to keep track of the impact the strategy was having, if any, on student learning. For example, if the mathematics department in a high school was implementing project-based learning as a new strategy, the staff would need to develop a weekly or bi-weekly way they could evaluate the effect of project-based learning on student achievement. This might look like tracking student performance on weekly formative assessments on math standards that serve as the basis for student projects or monitoring student progress on social-emotional skills, such as perseverance or self-regulation, through bi-weekly surveys. This practice was not familiar to most teachers, and while some teachers would do this

naturally as an individual, it was especially a foreign concept to be keeping score in teams, particularly in content-driven secondary schools.

During the launch year (second year in Redesign), a major activity of secondary Redesign schools was the process to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies implemented. While educators are well-practiced at assessing student learning, they are not as experienced in assessing the impact of a strategy. In one secondary Redesign high school, Swann High School, the concept of keeping score was instrumental in the successful implementation of a strategy. Swann staff had implemented an advisory time during the school day where students focused on setting learning goals as well as, depending on the day, time to explore careers, practice employability skills, and could travel to teachers for targeted assistance in specific academic content areas. This was not a new strategy; a seminar or advisory period is a well-established strategy. However, this strategy was new to Swann High School and, after researching how other schools had configured their advisory period, the investigation team overseeing the school's social-emotional goal area decided to be more intentional and structured with the topics students would focus on during this part of every school day. One of the areas of student performance the staff had identified as an area to address was self-regulation. Students were increasingly off-task and distracted during class time, leading to poor academic performance as well as a general apathy toward learning. One Swann teacher, in an all-staff meeting prior to their launch year, commented that the students "lacked ownership and needed to find a purpose for learning." This was evidenced by a decline in student grades, formative assessments, summative assessments (ex. ACT scores) and increased behavioral issues. The social-emotional learning investigation team decided to focus on helping students to set personal learning goals and then monitor progress on a weekly basis. The advisory time presented a perfect avenue for student goal setting

and progress monitoring to occur. The idea was to have students set weekly learning goals or tasks to accomplish during the first advisory period of the week. Advisors, who were teachers working with students in a non-content manner, would assist students in setting goals, monitor those goals during the week, and then have students report out their progress during the last advisory period of the week. How students would track their progress was simple; individual students would write three learning goals for the week, each goal on a separate sticky note, and place them on the left side of a large wall display in their advisor's classroom. As students progressed through the week and completed their learning goals, they would move their learning goal from the left side of the display to the right side. I was able to observe an advisory session once and I was impressed by how much time and effort students put in to developing their personal learning goals for the week. One Swann student remarked how satisfying and empowering it was to be able to work at a pace that worked for her and the gratification and feeling of accomplishment associated with moving learning goals from left to right. By the end of the week, the overall goal was to have all the student learning goals moved to the right side of the display, denoting completion of their individual learning goals.

This type of score boarding proved to be effective in terms of students learning to set achievable goals, monitoring progress, reflecting on progress, and being held accountable. Posting goals in a public manner creates a healthy level of public accountability as opposed to accountability only from the advisor. The Swann staff made sure students did not put their names on the goals to protect the identity of each student. Having their anonymous goals posted proved to be effective in terms of students progressing and achieving their personal learning goals. Students would comment how they did not want to be "left siders" by the end of each week. Students began to show more ownership in terms of completing tasks and meeting deadlines. As

this focus on goal setting grew, not only was the accountability increasing within each advisory group, but it began to grow school-wide to the point where advisory groups wanted to compare their level of achieving goals each week. Neighboring teachers would challenge each other to see that each of their students reached their goals. Staff meetings were filled with light-hearted debates about whose advisory did well the week before and who might be front-runners for the upcoming week. Advisory time was always the first topic on the staff meeting agenda because teachers were eager to compare their students' goal attainment progress from the week before. The Swann principal decided the scoreboards within each advisory were not enough and decided to make a school-wide scoreboard to keep the healthy competition going. A digital scoreboard was created on a large monitor in a prominent spot, showing each advisor's students collective rate of completing their learning goals at the end of each week. The SRT reported that students would stick around after school on a *Friday* to see how their advisory compared to others across the school. While the idea for this strategy began with the social-emotional investigation team, once it was implemented by each advisor, the students quickly began driving the results. They were the ones pushing each other to manage their time more effectively which, in turn, had a major positive impact on each student's self-efficacy, the student body's collective efficacy, and, ultimately, student academic success. All from a strategy that involved a few minutes each Monday and Friday, and some sticky notes.

In terms of the coaching points around this concept of keeping score, there are a few examples that stand out in the example provided above. Measuring student progress in a public manner changes the dynamics of the game of school (McChesney et al., 2022) by posting aggregate student data (advisory class data in this case) and being careful to never post individual student data publicly. This is effective in two ways; one, it shifts students' minds from

producing work for an audience of one (teacher) to an audience of their peers, other teachers, and parents and, secondly, this practice of keeping score is highly engaging to all students and teachers as they now have tangible evidence on a weekly basis of how they are progressing (or not). By keeping score on a more frequent basis, gone are the days when students and teachers must wait a semester or all year to see the fruits of their labor on summative assessments, such as the state assessments or a student graduating. These frequent, public progress checks provide students and teachers a sense of control and influence on the results of the distant summative assessments that are the basis for evaluating student learning and learning practices (McChesney et al., 2022). Keeping score on the effectiveness of the strategies employed allows all those involved to *predict* performance on the end-of-year type assessments. At Swann, overall student academic performance on the MAP assessment improved from the beginning of the year to the end. A major aspect of this success was Swann's commitment to monitoring the impact of their goal-setting strategy throughout the pilot test and my diligence as their coach to continue to push their thinking on keeping score.

Turbulence Theory and Being a Change Agent: Coaching Leaders to “Dig the Dip”

I was invited to attend a full-day professional development event at Greene schools (two of which were Redesign schools in the Gemini I cohort) to listen to Dr. Buddy Berry, superintendent at Eminence (KY) schools. Dr. Berry had transformed the culture at Eminence (where he grew up) and is a highly sought after educational speaker who knows a thing or two about making and sustaining change in schools. He had many stories of change to tell throughout the day but one stuck in my mind as particularly relevant to Redesign schools and their journey. Dr. Berry does not like to fly and to solidify his point, he *drove* from Eminence to Greene the night before this event to avoid flying. However, as part of his work, he does have to

occasionally jump on a plane. Prior to one of his cross-country flights, the pilot made the announcement that the skies were perfectly clear from departure to destination and to sit back, relax, and enjoy a smooth flight. About halfway through the flight, the plane hit some minor turbulence, the kind that usually would not awaken those sleeping. The same thing happened a few times during the flight prior to reaching the destination. Dr. Berry vividly remembered being highly annoyed with the bumpiness of the flight as he exited the plane and voiced his annoyance to a few of his fellow passengers who felt the same. Fast forward to another flight across country for Dr. Berry where the pilot forewarned everyone on board that there was the possibility of storms and quite a bit of turbulence as they made their way to their destination. True to form, there were a few times during the flight where there was quite a bit of strong turbulence, the kind where the bottom drops out, loose items hit the floor, and everyone startles awake. The turbulence on this flight was markedly more than the first flight yet, as Dr. Berry and others exited the plane, the attitude was markedly different in that they were much more satisfied with their experience.

Why was that?

Regardless of what the pilot stated prior to taking off, why would passengers be more satisfied with a much bumpier ride as opposed to one that was smooth. According to Dr. Berry, this could be attributed to his “turbulence theory,” where people’s perceptions of an experience are highly dependent on their *expectations* of the experience itself. Where the first pilot overpromised and underdelivered on a smooth-as-glass flight, the second under promised and overdelivered on what turned out to be a more-than-average turbulent ride.

As I sat in the Greene auditorium listening and taking notes, Dr. Berry explained when he first came to Eminence as superintendent, they were a low-performing school system, well below

the state average in academic performance in reading and math. He had come home to Eminence after working at the Kentucky State Department of Education, specifically working with districts in Eminence's predicament. In one of his first board meetings, Dr. Berry expressed his confidence that Eminence would turn around and end up being one of the highest-performing districts in the state in terms of academic performance. Quickly following that statement, he told the board to prepare themselves because:

"It will get worse before it gets better ."

Three years later, Eminence had indeed gotten worse, with single-digit percentages of students reaching proficiency on state assessments in reading and math. Dr. Berry was preparing for the end-of-the-year board meeting where he would present this atrociously poor academic performance data. He relayed that part of this preparation including packing up his belongings in anticipation of the board giving him his walking papers. When the time came at the board meeting, Dr. Berry shared the data to the board and then held his breath for their reaction. As he presented the data, he noticed board members shaking their heads in acknowledgement and ownership of what Dr. Berry was presenting. After he finished, the board president addressed Dr. Berry and remarked that, while these results are horrifically bad, and they would all have to do much better:

"You told us this was going to happen."

This was not a board lowering their expectations for student performance, rather, this was a board digging in for the long game of turning around a culture of learning needed to far exceed the highest levels of student performance. Three years later, Eminence did just that, becoming one of highest-performing districts in the state in reading and math.

In my experience as a coach to secondary Redesign schools, the “turbulence theory” was critical to any school aspiring to reach unprecedented levels of student performance. Whether the school was underperforming or performing well but battling complacency, they all had visions of reaching new heights in student achievement. Part of my coaching with schools in the year prior to implementing Redesign strategies was to forewarn all constituents that, most likely, student outcomes will decline as new strategies are implemented. In a large Redesign high school, Stallworth High School, this was a difficult message to share with stakeholders as the main reason Stallworth wanted to redesign was poor academic performance. When I shared this guidance with the SRT, the principal slumped in his chair as if to say, “you really expect me to share that message?.” I felt for the principal and the SRT because they saw Redesign as a way to revive the Stallworth staff, students, and community. Now they were being asked to share a difficult message that would most assuredly deflate many who cared about the students. However, this mantra is reinforced by research around what is referred to as the “implementation dip.” An implementation dip is “a decline in performance and confidence as one engages in an innovation that requires new skills and new understanding” (Fullan, 2007, pg. 49). For those amid change, most especially educators, accepting and acknowledging the reality of a decline in performance in their work is extremely difficult. A dip in teaching performance may correlate with a decline in student performance which goes against the moral purpose of teachers (if they have one) who are entrusted to help students learn and grow. In terms of coaching Redesign secondary schools, I encouraged schools to “dig the dip”; if there was a decline in student performance, that was proof the school was indeed making significant changes. As I was visiting with a superintendent about true Redesign involving a dip in student outcomes, she replied sarcastically, “well I’m sure that reasoning will be all the board (of education) will need to hear

to continue to support Redesign.” Anytime there is a decline in student performance, it is cause for concern but when it can be attributed to significant changes that will eventually lead to higher student achievement than ever before, it can be embraced.

Another difficulty to overcome is the common fear of change, especially when it involves a change in behavior which was expressly what redesigning would require. Black and Gregerson (2002) found that some would rather do the wrong thing competently than do the right thing incompetently. There were some teachers I worked with who would consistently express their resistance to change by remarking that they just wanted to go back to the way it was before Redesign. For each one who resisted change, two problems existed; one, a social-psychological fear of change and, two, the lack of technical skills to make the change successful (Fullan, 2007).

How should a building leader focused on educational reform and improved outcomes for students respond to those who want to maintain the status quo? I would coach the principal to ask the resistor if she or he were satisfied with the current state of student performance in their school, which elicited a response in the negative and hopefully the realization of the necessity to change their current practices in order to improve student outcomes. But this was rarely, if ever, enough to curb the resistance. If I were afforded another opportunity to coach building leaders through Redesign, I would spend more time discussing the different leadership styles a principal could employ to overcome resistance to change and a commitment to grinding through an implementation dip. Fullan (2007) identifies two styles to blend in order to successfully manage change and an implementation dip: affiliative and authoritative. Affiliative is about focusing on the person, not the change process, and building emotional bonds, relationships, and overcoming conflict while authoritative involves adhering to a strong moral purpose with vision, enthusiasm, and optimism (Fullan, 2007). Using situational awareness, principals and Redesign teacher

leaders who could successfully balance affiliative and authoritative styles stood a better chance of successfully implementing and sustaining change. I would also de-emphasize the time it takes to implement Redesign strategies. Our expectation in Redesign was schools would have a single school year to plan their changes and then “launch” or implement those changes the next year. There is an urgency to improve student outcomes but not allowing enough time for teachers to overcome their natural fear of change and to build the technical skills needed to implement the change can lead to frustration and poor implementation. Being flexible with the timeframe to Redesign, based on the capacity of staff to manage change, would have been a better course of action. After the initial Mercury cohort, there was latitude given to schools in terms of the timeline as we at KSDE realized this rushing of the process was not effective. Every cohort after Mercury were coached to launch when they felt like everything was in place to implement effectively, which in most cases was a two-year process.

Change Agent - Hard to Tear Down What You Create

People do not like the feeling that something is being done to them, especially when it comes to their child’s education. A major aspect of Redesign is developing a vision for student success, as in the knowledge and skills schools desire their students to have acquired by the time they graduate. One of my main points in coaching Redesign secondary schools was the concept of:

“It is hard to tear down what you are a part of creating .”

In other words, engage as many stakeholders as possible in developing the definition of student success for your school. Whether a middle school or high school, clearly defining the profile of a successful student is the first step in Redesign. With the high degree of change inherent in Redesign, it is important to hear from as many staff members, students, families, and

community members as possible so that when the imminent confusion and criticism that always accompanies high-level change begins, a school can go back to “this is what you told us you wanted” to subdue pushback to an extent. Schools that would rush through this vision-setting step by engaging their staff deeply but with cursory involvement from others, would run the risk of overwhelming criticism that would put their Redesign plans in jeopardy.

One of the Redesign secondary schools, Wagner Middle School, took this concept of collaboratively building out a new vision of student success to a high level. The Wagner school Redesign team (SRT) developed a wide-ranging plan to develop a new definition for student success. The team decided they would take the lead on engaging the staff, families, and community members, while student leaders would take the lead on engaging fellow students in the process. Before the start of the discussions, the SRT developed a few vision-setting questions that would be asked repeatedly in every one of the subsequent focus groups, whether made up of community members, staff, or students. Having the same questions answered by multiple groups would help funnel the qualitative data down to the most critical skills students needed to acquire by the time they moved on from Wagner Middle School to high school.

One of the first moves toward engaging others besides staff was the decision by the Wagner SRT to add a parent to their team. This was the only SRT that I coached that took the step of having a parent as a permanent member. It turned out to be a critical move as the parent would often lead parent meetings to introduce the changes being made in relation to Redesign as well as to dispel fictitious information, ie., the rumor mill, which churns day and night for schools making high-level changes.

Wagner Middle School was looking for more ways to develop leadership in their students, so they formed a new student government group, complete with a competitive

application process. Student leaders were selected and then received leadership training from their teacher sponsors. The student leaders' first order of business was to convene focus groups of three to four fellow students at lunchtime to discuss the common vision-setting questions. The Wagner SRT surmised that the student body would be more honest and forthright, maybe even more serious (hard to fathom with middle school students), with their answers if the questions were posed by their peers. The initial round of focus groups yielded little in the way of substantive ideas or comments that would help the school identify a vision for student success. For example, one of the vision-setting questions for this Redesign school was to "describe a perfect day of learning for you" which elicited several answers related to sleeping, eating, and socializing and wanting more time for all three activities. In response, the student leaders decided to do another round of focus groups, switching facilitators, and adding more context to the questions with the hope of more thoughtful responses while ignoring the frivolous answers. It worked. When students realized that the staff and the student leaders were serious about making changes to create a better learning environment, the students provided deeper, thought-provoking, and fresh responses that the school Redesign team could utilize in setting a shared vision for the school. The student leaders learned valuable lessons by persisting, adapting, and not accepting superficial answers from their peers. Putting this Redesign element (student government) into action was a quick win for the SRT as the student leaders gained valuable experience in leadership and the entire student body was able to actively engage in setting a vision of success.

The SRT spent time engaging the rest of the staff, parents, and community members in the vision discussion, convening multiple meetings to accommodate as many stakeholders as possible. Once the SRT felt like they had provided opportunities for every stakeholder, including

students, to provide feedback, they then analyzed the data to identify trends to build out a true, *shared* vision. The goal was not only to build a vision for student success but to mobilize the school community to actualize the vision and embrace their part in causing that to happen. And when the inevitable criticism that always accompanies high-level change occurred, the SRT could remind the critics that this is what the community wanted.

While Wagner Middle School excelled in building a shared vision by engaging multiple stakeholders, this was exception, not the norm. I found it difficult to coach schools how to engage their school community in these types of future-forward conversations. Again, we teach what we know, and I had a front-row seat to the Community Conversations, so I relied on those experiences to share with Redesign SRT's the technical aspects of effective vision-setting discussions, such as developing two to three discussion questions, analyzing qualitative data and sharing the findings with the same stakeholders who provided feedback as way to verify what was shared. While this was sound coaching, there was very little offered in terms of the art of drawing stakeholders into the discussion for two reasons; one, educators (myself included) do not learn the engagement strategies needed to convene effective meetings of stakeholders, and two, I did not have the deep knowledge of the community needed to truly engage the school community and neither did some of the SRT members. These types of engagements, what Heifetz and Linsky (2002) referred to as "holding environments", are meant to be open forums aimed at developing solutions to the most critical issues, yet, if there is not a depth of knowledge of those in attendance, it can be difficult to create a safe environment needed to share open, transparent feedback which is essential to an effective shared vision.

Order - Go Slow to Go Fast....But Make Sure You Go

One of the more common occurrences as Redesign began in the fall of 2017, was the Mercury schools wanting to dive right into what Redesign strategies they would eventually implement. There was this palpable sense of urgency to begin researching new teaching and learning methods right away. This was a natural inclination for the first cohort of schools to Redesign; for many, it was the first opportunity to challenge the status quo and try something new, which always brings excitement, plus the extremely wide guardrails put in place for Redesign, seemed to leave everything on the table to be possibly changed. In addition to this expected reaction, educators are collective “fixers;” when they sense something needs to change to improve student learning, they want to act quickly to implement a more effective strategy.

In response to this initial reaction by Redesign secondary schools to accelerate the design aspect, I began using the mantra of:

“Go slow now to go fast later.”

In his book *Start with Why* Simon Sinek (2009) tells the story of some American automakers traveling to Japan to observe how the Japanese orchestrate their production line. As in America, the last step in the Japanese assembly line is to place the vehicle’s doors on the hinges, with one distinct difference. In America, an assembly line worker uses a mallet to tap the doors into place to ensure a tight fit but in Japan, this is not a practice they follow. When the Americans inquired as to why the Japanese do not ensure the doors fit correctly at the end, the Japanese stated that they design the doors to fit perfectly at the *beginning* of the process, not at the end. In other words, the Japanese engineered the outcome they wanted from the very start of the design process (Sinek, 2009). If the doors did not fit perfectly, it was because there were design flaws from the beginning. In America, if the doors do not fit perfectly at the end, bring out the mallets,

taking more time, energy, and resources. In this example, vehicles made in Japan take less time and resources to make and are more likely to last longer (Sinek, 2009). Where Japan spends the most time and energy is in the design phase, developing a clear vision of what a successful vehicle looks like once the build is complete. In other words, the Japanese car industry knows the concept of “go slow now to go fast later .”

The contrasting approaches taken by the American and Japanese auto industry is an appropriate metaphor for how schools were Redesigning at the beginning. Like American car makers, some wanted to jump right in and start building without having a precise, clear vision for what success looked like for students, where other schools adopted the Japanese assembly line approach and took the time to develop a crystal-clear vision of student success before beginning the build. Many organizations follow the former approach; they rush into building and end up having to develop short-term “fixes” that lead to additional energy, time, and resources being used because they failed to start with a clear end in mind (Sinek, 2009). As secondary schools began their Redesign, I found myself in a situation I hadn’t anticipated; coaching schools to slow down and take the time needed to identify a clear destination in terms of student success before determining what strategies they would implement to reach that objective.

Once it was established that the starting point to Redesign was developing a clear vision of student success, I coached secondary schools on the importance of beginning with the end in mind to build a transformed and self-sustaining culture (Wise & Jacobo, 2010). After an exhaustive process of gathering feedback from all stakeholders on the most critical attributes for students to be successful, the time came for the school Redesign team (SRT) to create a vision statement which represented the research they had accumulated. Lambert High School went to great lengths to engage stakeholders in developing a new vision of student success. Their SRT

developed three discussion questions to draw out people's thoughts on what defined success for Lambert graduates and those same three questions were used in every engagement. It was the way Lambert engaged stakeholders that was impressive. The SRT empowered student body leaders to engage the most prolific thought leaders in the community – the crew that drank coffee together at the local diner every morning – in the vision-setting discussion on Saturday mornings.

High school students...

Talking with adults...

About what student success means...

On Saturday mornings.

The Lambert SRT decided to gather input from the community at the largest community event – Friday night lights. The team grabbed the microphone at halftime of a home football game, explained why they were seeking feedback and then asked all attendees to scan a QR code posted throughout the stadium to access the questions and answer when the time was right for them. The SRT posted the QR code in the school in prominent locations so that students and parents could access the questions and provide important feedback to help create the new vision for Lambert High School throughout the school year. By the end of the year, the Lambert SRT had a wealth of feedback to analyze and then create a shared vision, curated through an exhaustive process. In the end, the vision statement was created and shared with the entire school community with the tag line of “this is what you told us you wanted to see.”

According to McChesney (2022), a vision statement should be concise, bold, compelling, and, most importantly, measurable. Most of the Redesign secondary schools were practiced at creating a mission statement, which is not the same as a vision statement. A mission statement is

something that drives the daily work in an organization. In short, school mission statements are why the school doors are open every day. A vision statement speaks to the future. It is where the school seeks to go in terms of preparing students for their next step in their educational and/or career journey (Croneberger, 2020). The first iterations of vision statements from Redesign secondary schools were eerily like their existing mission statements, which were typically longer and more general in terms of how the school would prepare “global citizens for an ever-changing world,” for example. I coached secondary schools to dismiss the notion of a mission statement and start anew looking at the feedback they had in front of them to develop a vision statement that would be bold, memorable, and measurable. Lambert High School’s vision was certainly bold, memorable, but lacked a measurable component. When I asked the Lambert SRT how they would know when they reached their vision, blank stares were the only response. School Redesign teams would look quizzically at me when I would mention their vision statement would need to be measurable. I would remind them that an aspiration-only vision statement is self-defeating; if one doesn’t know when they have reached their destination, then their vision statement becomes simply words on a page, a nice sound bite with no substance. This was a challenging part of the Redesign process because it takes time to design success on the front end, however, the schools that were intentional with developing a clear vision statement that could be measured were set up well to execute their plan, once it was developed, and sustain progress over time despite challenges.

For the purposes of studying the different experiences of Redesign secondary schools based on their commitment and intentionality in developing a vision statement that would serve as the driver of their future work, I wanted to share my findings of two Redesign secondary schools. One, Blount High School, simply changed a few words in their existing mission

statement before beginning to research other strategies while the other, Greenwood Junior-Senior High School, spent an inordinate amount of time in developing a new vision statement based on the feedback they had gathered from staff, students, parents, and the community. Before I begin with Blount, I want to be clear. As their coach, I shared in the successes and failures of all the Redesign secondary schools. It is the old coach in me that takes the lion's share of the blame when things don't work out and grants the schools the credit when they find success. As I discuss different schools' experiences, know that this is not an indictment of school Redesign teams and the schools themselves. It is more a reflection of the impact my coaching had on the schools.

In working with Blount High School, from the start, I inwardly questioned their motive to Redesign. By all intents and purposes, they were a successful school. Students graduated at a high rate and their graduates were largely successful in their postsecondary pursuits, at least in terms of college-going, persistence in college, and earning either certificates or degrees. Some of the schools in similar situations wished to join Redesign to stay on the cutting edge or simply wanted to be part of a pioneering-type initiative. Regardless, the work of Redesign is difficult so schools must be very committed to the process and that usually happened when they had a clear and compelling reason as to why they wanted to be part of the effort. With Blount, when I would talk about going through the vision-setting process as the first step in Redesign, the response was a nod of the head as if to say, "we got it, but we don't need to do it." The Blount SRT never did engage in the vision-setting process and, thus, jumped right into researching strategies to implement as part of their Redesign. Following that course of action, the school eventually implemented a few school-wide strategies that no longer exist today, which means Redesign had little to no impact on this school's improvement process. On a visit to Blount, the principal took me on a tour of the building during a time when they were implementing Redesign strategies.

When I asked about how many strategies were being utilized and how the staff was measuring the effectiveness of the strategies, the principal shared they were implementing one strategy as a staff and showed me the “scoreboard” for the strategy, which turned out to be a regular-sized piece of paper with the data on the effectiveness of the strategy in very small font. And it was posted in a room in the school where there was not much traffic. This was a prime example of a school going through the motions of Redesign instead of intentionally doing the work with a clear purpose. They were left trying to hammer doors to fit and ended up stopping production altogether because there was no compelling “why” or a vision to work towards.

On the other hand, Greenwood was determined to use Redesign as a springboard forward from the very beginning. They had a clear, compelling reason to join Redesign; as a small school, enrollment was dropping and there was an overall apathy towards learning from students and families that was not present 20 years ago. Student demographics and town dynamics had changed. With the identity of the town wrapped up entirely in the school district, not only did the school staff see the necessity to join Redesign, but the community at large also saw the need. From the beginning, this was a community-wide effort. It was a natural next step for Greenwood to begin having Community Conversations to define what student success looks like. This was the optimal time for the school to Redesign and the school Redesign team fully engaged the staff, students, and broader community in the process. The Greenwood SRT was intentional with the questions they asked, knowing that focus would pay dividends later in developing their own unique and clear vision of student success. The SRT held several focus groups to answer their vision-setting questions and had a plan as to how the feedback would be analyzed and synthesized before the focus groups began meeting. They executed the plan well. While the SRT did not have as many participants attend as they would have liked, especially from the

community, they had the sense the feedback received was representative of all the different factions in the community and was extensive enough to move forward in creating a vision statement. The Greenwood SRT engaged the rest of the staff in the analysis and synthesis of the feedback, resulting in a concise, easy-to-recall, vision statement that defined student success in a meaningful and measurable way. While Greenwood school has had many ups and downs throughout its Redesign journey (administrative turnover, community criticism), their vision and goals are still firmly in place today. This school and the community are committed to what they created together as evidenced by the high engagement levels at not only athletic events but parent-teacher conferences and board meetings. Any meeting within the school begins with the vision, reminding everyone why they committed to change and giving purpose to all school-related conversations. The Greenwood school community has developed an enduring vision for student success. They have lived this quote:

“Be stubborn about your goals, but flexible about your methods .”

This school embraced the notion of “go slow to go fast” by being intentional about the vision-setting process. Once the vision was in place, the school had a much clearer understanding of where they wanted to go and used this understanding to make informed decisions about the strategies they would put in place to achieve the vision. They never needed someone to hammer the doors to fit at the end, they had already designed the strategies to fit from the start.

Change Agent - Seeing is Believing

On the technical side of Redesign, there were criteria a school had to comply with to be officially accepted into the project. The one criterion that raised eyebrows the most was at least 80% of the staff in a school had to approve of joining the Redesign effort. Not only did it peak people’s interest, but it was also the hardest task to complete for schools interested in

redesigning. In my time as a teacher and an administrator, I would venture to guess that if we were to have voted on every major initiative as part of school improvement, very few would result in over 80% approving of the move. Imagine a high school wanting to change their master schedule and requiring at least 80% approval from staff to do so; that high school would very rarely, if ever, change their master schedule even though the current schedule was outdated and no longer conducive to an optimal learning environment. Even on their best day, it is difficult for schools to gain 80% approval on major changes. Anticipating Redesign to be a difficult endeavor was the main reason to set the proverbial bar high for schools to volunteer. On the front end, a pronounced majority of school staff had to agree to be willing to challenge the status quo in their school at a level never seen before. To add to the difficulty, Redesign was unprecedented so there was no institutional knowledge for staff to base their vote upon. Yet, in the first year of Redesign, there were twenty-nine schools that applied for seven spots in the inaugural Redesign cohort, Mercury. Most of those twenty-nine schools had a staff approval rating of 95% or higher to apply for the Redesign project. This spoke to a collective desire to make fundamental changes to the learning environment. It was evident that if these schools were selected, this would create high levels of excitement and momentum among their respective staff. A major aspect of successfully Redesigning was how to sustain that excitement going forward, building up enough momentum to be able to slog through the difficult times that lay ahead, but also to accelerate when the wind was at your back.

During the difficult times in secondary Redesign schools, a common response from some staff was to distance themselves from their original vote to redesign. In essence, when the going got tough, it was tough to stick by an affirmative vote. Some staff would make comments such as, “this isn’t what I signed up for” or “if I would have known it would be like this, I wouldn’t

have voted ‘yes’” and those comments were justified, especially for the Mercury schools who were the pioneers defining school Redesign in Kansas. These reactions usually came about when the school began proposing new strategies to implement as part of their overall Redesign effort which was towards mid-November. The first few months of the Redesign process were spent creating a shared vision and setting goals. Once those major pieces were in place, it was time for staff to team up, research new strategies, and then propose the most promising strategies to the entire staff for their feedback. I referred to these teams as goal area investigation teams (GAIT) where each staff member served on at least one team focused on one of the goals set by the school. Each GAIT was charged with researching strategies that would most leverage student improvement in that particular goal area. For example, if a Redesign secondary school identified a goal area of improving their students’ career readiness, one team of teachers most interested in that goal area would research strategies to implement that would help prepare students more fully for their future careers. At some point, resistance along the lines of “that’s impossible” or “there’s no way I’m going to do that” would surface from staff members.

Concerned this pushback was going to derail the Redesign effort or, in the very least, delay its progress, I coached school Redesign teams to delve deeper into the research with those skeptical staff members. This coaching point was based on the premise of “seeing is believing .” In her book, *Asking the Right Questions*, Holcomb (2009, p. 17) impresses on change leaders to start the process “anywhere that is a place people are interested .” For many resistant staff members, that place of interest was seeing how other schools approached teaching and learning differently. These school research trips were an example of building leaders managing personal transitions during second-order change, specifically prioritizing “symbolic events” like visiting other schools (Goodwin et al., 2015, p. 67). From the beginning of Redesign, I had continually

asked SRT's why certain strategies in their school were being used and to what effect. This continual questioning of the current strategies was to challenge assumptions that would then lead to new possibilities (Reiss, 2015), which was a fundamental aspect of redesigning a school. Part of my coaching through this time was to challenge the GAIT to find examples of schools where the strategy in question was successful and to go make a visit and invite the most skeptical staff members to attend.

At Woodson High School, this continual questioning of why they were using certain strategies led to a significant change in their building schedule. After several internal conversations and multiple visits to other high schools in other states, the proposed strategy involved creating a more flexible schedule, one that would be more like a college or a professional workplace schedule that would familiarize high school students to a postsecondary environment. The students at Woodson lacked confidence overall as they headed out into a postsecondary setting after graduation. This general lack of self-efficacy could be attributed to several factors, including family expectations, but also the tightly structured daily schedule the students were made to follow. The research team surmised that many of the decisions students had to make after they graduated were made for them while attending high school. The very sudden reality of having to make their own decisions on time management, whether graduates were entering the world of work or attending college, was overwhelming to many students, leading to poor decisions and a general disillusionment with where they were headed in life after high school. To better prepare students for any type of postsecondary setting, the research team wanted to switch from a highly structured schedule complete with bells signifying when to move and down to the minute periods of time (for example, 3rd hour is from 9:36 to 10:28) to one in which the students would have to practice prioritizing their time to be able to meet all of the

learning expectations placed on them. When the goal area investigation team (GAIT) proposed a more flexible schedule that did not involve bells, some of the teachers reacted with incredulity. They simply could not fathom not having bells to signify when everyone in the school needed to move, even though virtually every other industry in the world, besides K-12 education, has never had any use for Pavlovian-like bells. Of course, this was the reaction. All high school teachers were former students, conditioned by years of following a tightly structured daily schedule not only as youth but also for their entire professional career.

As a response to this resistance, the Woodson school Redesign team had identified schools in other states utilizing a flexible schedule that mimics a postsecondary setting. So, they set up a few out-of-state trips for school Redesign team leaders and the most skeptical staff members to observe these unique high school schedules in action. According to the school Redesign team, once the resistant teachers were able to see more flexible daily schedules at work and speak with teachers who raved about the advantages to both students and staff the different schedules provided, one could sense the walls these staff members had built over years around the idea of a traditional schedule start to crumble. Observing how teachers were able to be in control of their own daily and weekly schedule because the students were taking more ownership in prioritizing their time was enlightening and exciting. When these groups would return home, the most excited staff members to share were the ones most resistant to the flexible schedule in the first place. The adage “seeing is believing” proved to be true in this case and catapulted Woodson High School’s entire Redesign effort. Not only did this create a collective mindset regarding the master schedule, it unlocked staff members’ minds to ideas from the other goal area investigation teams. This proved to be a critical move made by the school Redesign team that solidified the support needed to eventually implement the new flexible schedule and many

other new innovative Redesign strategies. By using the premise of “*seeing is believing*”, Woodson was able to create and sustain a great amount of momentum through the planning stage into the implementation stage.

Implications for Future Coaching and Research

Just as the Kansans Can Community Conversations revealed the need to balance academic learning with social-emotional learning, I learned through coaching Redesign secondary schools that balancing the leadership responsibilities of Change Agent and Order is critical to successfully planning, implementing, and sustaining transformational change, the kind of change that demands the adults to think and behave differently in a school and the kind of change that has major implications for a school’s culture. The degree to which school leaders balanced these two diametrically opposed responsibilities had a profound impact on the culture of the school in terms of collaboration, decision-making, and managing change. The desire to give in to the gravitational pull of the traditional learning environment is strong and will pull even the most ardent change agents back into what is familiar and known if an imbalance occurs. The findings presented to you, the reader, are what I observed from my unique position as an “outside insider”, through my lens as a coach to Redesign secondary schools and are meant to be lessons learned when fundamentally changing teaching and learning to improve student outcomes. The perceived implications on the culture of these Redesign secondary schools are linked to striking the right balance between these two leadership responsibilities, as evidenced by the decisions made by the principal and the SRT, which were influenced by my coaching. Factors that need to be addressed when finding a good balance between pushing for change and providing structure in schools include the collective efficacy of the staff, the compelling reason

or reasons to change, teacher ownership, and the timeframe from planning, to implementing, and eventually sustaining the changes being put in place.

As a coach, I learned that balancing my approach has major implications on the leadership and resulting culture of a school. There were two continuums to balance: coaching for change versus for order and coaching with patience versus urgency. With the high degree of potential change taking place in a Redesign school, there was an intense need for strong change leadership from me as the coach, to the principal and the SRT. That need was present from the start of Redesign and I found myself focusing much of my research and study in change theory (Fullan, 2007; Goodwin et al., 2015; Lambert, 2007) through the beginning of the Redesign project. As the work progressed in the Redesign schools and became more chaotic and difficult to contextualize in a way educators could see themselves teaching, I began to focus more on coaching the SRT into providing more structure, bringing some much-needed order into the project. As I reflect on that timeframe, I overcorrected and focused my coaching too much on restoring order (McChesney et al., 2022) for two reasons; one, my experience as an educator had been rooted in order and structure, and two, I observed people I cared about, the staff in our Redesign secondary schools, really start to struggle to keep the project moving forward due to the uncertainty inherent in any change effort, and I wanted to rescue them from the tension and upheaval Redesign had caused in their school. My overcorrection in coaching had a stifling effect on the SRT in terms of the ideas brought forward (too traditional) and the behaviors of the staff (too much like the existing model). In retrospect, just as a good teacher allows the learner to wrestle with content, supporting them in using critical thinking to solve complex problems, I needed to balance coaching change and order. One of the major factors in the Redesign process I observed was how teachers and school leaders reacted when trying to implement a second-order

change that involved learning new behaviors. Leading and supporting teachers as they work through the incompetence stage is critically important and coaching school leaders through their own feeling of incompetence is at once challenging and complex and I simply did not have the skill set to coach how to manage through the incompetence phase. Exacerbating this gap in my coaching was another overcorrection. At the beginning of Redesign, one of my coaching mantras was “go slow to go fast,” encouraging schools to intentionally crawl through the vision setting phase, knowing the vision set for a school should be the North Star for years to come and needed a thorough and shared “build” to be effective and long-lasting. There was patience in the beginning, but the undercurrent of urgency was always lurking under the surface. While coaching SRT’s to take the time needed to complete the vision, there was pressure to “go fast to go fast” from KSDE and the public. One perception of Redesign is that it would be the proverbial “silver bullet” to education and schools would show gains in student outcomes quickly. In the middle of the initial Redesign year, I began to feel pressure to ensure schools would launch on time and my response was to coach the urgency associated with Redesign, a critical mistake. If I were to have lobbied successfully for more time for schools to plan before launching, that would have potentially resulted in more time, as a coach, to focus on change management, more time to coach teachers to brainstorm, research, and innovate, and more time to determine the best structure and order needed to implement and sustain new Redesign strategies. Exhibiting more patience and a focus on change management throughout the Redesign process would have allowed for teachers to turn incompetence to competence resulting in a healthy, innovative school culture.

As KSDE moves from building-level Redesign to district-level design, it will be critically important for coaches working with district leaders to balance change management with order,

and patience with a sense of urgency. Transitioning Redesign from building- to district-level was the plan from the beginning of the Kansans Can Redesign project in 2017. Rather than continuing to refer to the project as Redesign, KSDE will now embed Redesign into the Kansas Educational Systems Accreditation (KESA, hereafter). KSDE moved to a district-level accreditation model beginning in 2017-2018, the same year school Redesign began. KESA and Redesign have run on parallel tracks for the last six years and, beginning with the 2023-2024 school year, will be blended to form one model featuring the Redesign principles and process, and the main criteria from KESA for district-level accreditation. This conglomeration of Redesign and KESA will hopefully result in improved student outcomes across the state and would serve as a “next step” to research in the chronology of Kansans Can. In chapter six, I will delve more deeply into the implications for coaching school districts in this blended model of Redesign and KESA.

Chapter 6 - Trust & Ownership

As I toured the school, listening to the principal talk through the most recent shift in school culture, the thought on repeat in my mind was this was a school I would want my sons to attend. I realize it is akin to a teacher declaring their favorite two or three students of all time, but I could not help myself. Webster High School had a strong focus on creating a student-centered

learning environment in all aspects of the school, from classroom instruction to the physical design and layout of the building. The principal would remark about changes in curriculum or even the paint color and invariably lead with “this is what our students told us they would like to see.” I observed students across all grade levels working together in robotics teams, preparing for an upcoming competition at the national level, students running a business within the school that was entirely the doing of a core group of students, from inception to construction (well, they had some expert help here) to marketing to the day-to-day operation. We walked through the cafeteria that had a new coat of paint to freshen up the look, suggested by, you guessed it, the students. The library had recently been renovated to make it more modern, moving the books to the walls and filling the space with study tables that included flexible seating and multiple charging stations (well of course) that resembled a Starbucks as opposed to a traditional school library. During this time, there were at least two classes meeting in this space doing collaborative work and several students independently studying. Compared to the school libraries of my youth where any human noise was scrutinized and frowned upon (some should have been most certainly), this was much louder and chaotic, however, the hum of the students was purposeful, curious, and natural. There was even, dare I say, laughter that was not admonished. It was palpable; this was a spot students wanted to be in order to focus, communicate, and learn. According to the principal, a major factor in this being an attractive area of the school for students was that the students had suggested the idea, drafted a design for the space, applied for and received grant funds for the project, and spent the summer serving as project managers, along with the principal, overseeing the construction. Bottom line, there was a high degree of ownership from the students, not only in the physical environment, but also in what and how they were learning. I attribute this to the adults at Webster High School defaulting to “yes” when

students would make suggestions. This response was not the Webster staff agreeing to do the work; it was authorization for the students to move ahead and make the idea come to fruition. There were other aspects of the school where students were in the driver's seat, and this led to a more collaborative, trusting, and inspiring culture.

Webster High School was a Gemini I school that was well established as a good school in a good district. Their reasons for applying to be in the Gemini I cohort were to continue down a path of innovation, build upon a strong culture of student-centered learning, and to improve the reputation of the school so that those from small towns around Webster would want to send their children to enroll in the district. Webster could boast of a very engaged community that always supported the school district. Webster High School had a robust internship program established through partnerships with a variety of businesses and organizations in the community. The school was recognized nationally for its character education program as well as a STEM program that has several teams competing at the state and national level in robotics. All of these strong pieces were in place prior to Webster High School joining the Redesign effort. The school staff saw Redesign as an opportunity to reach another level of excellence in teaching and learning. By continuing to refine their culture of empowering students to own not only their individual learning but also all aspects of the learning environment. Webster High School students felt *trusted* by the adults in the school as evidenced by how the students were driving the Redesign effort. The staff showed high levels of collective efficacy and trust in each other, often partnering together to create unique learning experiences for students from scratch. Another strong indicator of trust was the fact that only three teachers in the entire district were part of a teacher's union. Representatives from the teaching staff would meet with the board of education and administrators to negotiate contracts without the need for outside representation. Obviously, high

levels of trust existed throughout the district and the broader school community, and this had a tremendously positive impact on the student experience at Webster High School.

In the previous chapter, I explored how my coaching influenced school leaders and SRT's in balancing being a change agent while also providing order through Redesign, a transformative process (See Figure 8). My coaching included an emphasis in the beginning on the importance of setting a mutually created vision that was universally known and understood. This vision-setting step was then followed by coaching SRT's to lead staff through researching, selecting, and then implementing Redesign strategies intended to leverage the building's goals. Once the strategies were "launched" my coaching focused on leading through change and the implementation dip in student performance. All these steps of the Redesign process required the SRT to be an agent of change while also providing structure and order to the work of Redesign. To the degree those two responsibilities were balanced had a major impact on the culture within the school. What follows are my findings from Redesign secondary schools as they relate to the impact culture has on trust within and outside a school. To redesign well requires a high level of trust from all corners of the school community and, when trust is not present, both the staff and students have a diminished learning experience. I will also explore the connection between trust and ownership of the learning by both students and the adults.

Adults – Sticking with What We Know

"You want me to do what?!?" This was a typical response by some teachers in secondary Redesign schools when the SRT would introduce the idea of an advisory program where each teacher would serve as an advisor for a small number of students in a non-content area manner. This strategy was attractive to Redesign schools as it would align with two Redesign principles: personalized learning and student success skills with an emphasis on social-emotional skill

development. The core idea centered on advisors building relationships with their advisory group so that each student would know they had one adult in the building they could go to if they needed support. During advisory time, advisors would support students by checking on their progress with the Individual Plan of Study (IPS hereafter), in academics, and development of specific social-emotional skills, such as goal setting. For some teachers, adjusting to this model was a simple transition because they were already naturally playing the role of advisor for students without a formal advisory program in place. For others who were more content area-focused, they did not see it as part of their job as teachers to help students develop more fully in all areas. These teachers would share that this was the role of the counselor. It was their belief, if they were a math teacher for example, their role was to teach students math and nothing else. This example gives the reader a peek into the challenge of leading through change where perception most often trumps reality.

The power of perception is immense when a school is going through a transformative process. Whereas one teacher perceives a change, such as implementing an advisory program, as a natural next step, another would see it as a change that requires an entirely different approach to teaching. This is a classic example of the two types of change; first-order where the change is perceived as an extension of the past and second-order where the change is perceived as a break from the past (Goodwin et al., 2015). This indicates the difficulty leaders face in managing change as each staff member's perceptions may vary from one change to the next. It is critical for a school leader to correctly discern if the magnitude of change is either first order or second order for the majority of staff to employ leadership strategies that will assist the staff in managing the change. Heifetz and Laurie (1997) added to change theory with their groundbreaking research on technical problems, which can be solved with existing knowledge and

skills, and adaptive challenges, which require new knowledge and skills to solve. School leaders, in this case the SRT, need to analyze each change being implemented through the lens of the magnitude of the change (1st or 2nd order) and the type of challenge the change creates (technical or adaptive). Overall, the changes secondary schools were making in Redesign were largely perceived as second order and were highly adaptive in nature, eliciting many similarly incredulous responses such as “you want me to do what?!?” from staff when the SRT was introducing planned changes.

My coaching response to this resistance in making changes was to utilize inquiry and discovery to help the building leader and the SRT to develop their own solutions to help staff with their personal transitions. To do this, it takes patience and suppressing that voice in my head to step in and share what I think they should do to manage the change process. Instead of falling prey to the SRT’s desire for me to “just tell us what to do”, I would try to coach through focusing on the process and the Redesign principles, asking cultural and engagement questions as opposed to sharing my opinion (Reiss, 2015). This caused angst and frustration but, in the end, the SRT needed to own their leadership actions through the process to build their efficacy.

Faced with this dilemma of staff pushing back against Redesign, something the entire staff had agreed to initially, yet continuing to make progress, building leaders had to choose a leadership approach that would be effective in successfully implementing the different Redesign strategies the goal area investigation teams had researched and selected to be part of their change effort. Goodwin, Cameron, and Hein (2015) categorized two leadership styles, directive and empowering, that capture those utilized by Redesign secondary school leaders. As resistance from staff members persisted, Redesign building leaders would adjust their leadership style depending on the environment. The leadership style most aligned with Redesign was an

empowering approach, where the building leader empowers the SRT to drive the effort and the SRT empowers the rest of the staff by charging them with researching, developing, and implementing Redesign strategies. However, when staff members would question and resist the Redesign changes, building leaders, at times, had to adapt by taking a more direct leadership approach. The building leaders who could adapt their leadership style depending on the moment were more effective in terms of keeping the Redesign effort moving forward.

In the example provided, where a staff member was being defiant in implementing an advisory program, was that a time to be directive or empowering? Either way it was a pivotal moment in the school's Redesign journey. What transpired was the SRT needed the support of the principal to address this resistant staff member directly, which is exactly what happened. The principal met with the complaining staff member, reminded him of why the school joined Redesign and their newly established vision of student success, to which the advisory program was a high leverage strategy. The principal in no uncertain terms explained that all staff members would become advisors charged with supporting students in non-academic endeavors. While the staff member still did not agree with the new program, he acknowledged his desire to help students be successful and to remain an integral part of the staff. Ironically, over time, this staff member became one of the best advisors on staff once he embraced the purpose and method of the program. This story exemplifies the Redesign mantra that the process should be "teacher-driven, administrator-supported ." The SRT needed the principal to shift from empowering to directive to quell a staff member's attempt to disrupt the implementation of a strategy that became a signature of Redesign in this school.

Adults - Teacher Empowerment

A major aspect of any school improvement process is the professional development provided to teachers with the aim of improving student performance. Typically, district and building administrators would decide the direction schools would go, align professional development around the instructional strategies, and then empower teachers to implement the strategies selected by those in administration. In Redesign, the expectation was to challenge the status quo so traditional school improvement and the associated professional development were scrutinized in terms of impact on student learning. To be clear, the scrutiny was focused on the decision-making around both school improvement and professional development. What direction should the school go? What strategies will need to be implemented to move in the right direction? In terms of coaching, I implored the secondary Redesign schools to “flatten the organization” and create a decision-making structure where each staff member had an equal voice concerning the school’s vision and the subsequent instructional strategies implemented. The premise of this *flattening* was that the experts (teachers) should drive the Redesign effort. Lambert (2007) asserted “school change is a collective endeavor” that requires “leadership that redistributes power and authority” (pg. 2). By realigning power and authority, school change takes place through shared learning around a common vision that leads to collective action and responsibility (Lambert, 2007). This coaching point led to the phrase I uttered often throughout the Redesign project, that this endeavor should be “teacher-driven, administrator-supported .” Basically, the teaching staff would be empowered to establish a direction and then research and implement strategies as opposed to having that done for them or to them. This led to the concept of a school Redesign team (SRT), led by a “pilot” and “co-pilot,” in keeping with Redesign being our version of President Kennedy’s moonshot, who were teacher leaders and were charged

with directing the Redesign initiative in their school. Holistically, this was not a new concept; many schools operate in this general structure through a building leadership team. However, there were differences such as rethinking every aspect of teaching and learning as opposed to continually refining what already exists and teachers taking a more active role in guiding their peers through a major change process. One of the examples I used with the SRT as a litmus test was that if a stranger were to walk in on an SRT meeting and observe for a few moments, that person should not be able to discern who the principal is with any certainty, which would be evidence that the hierarchical structure, in terms of decision-making, had been flattened.

This different decision-making approach to school improvement was proffered for two main reasons; one, the teachers are the experts who are closer to the students than any other staff so they should largely be the determiners of how the Redesign effort would go and, two, based on the premise that it is “hard to tear down what you are part of creating”, the changes made in the school would be sustained if teachers were the main developers. High turnover in administrative positions leads to more instability in the direction schools go and the methods employed. Often, a new administrator brings a new vision for teaching and learning which may or may not align well with what was previously in place. When administrators move on, many times the vision and methods go with them, and the school is left to start anew. If teachers create, implement, and thus believe, in the vision, the strategies, and the process of improvement, then those critical pieces will be sustained regardless of turnover in administration.

This new approach to school improvement, where teachers are in the driver’s seat and administrators provide support, was applied differently in each secondary Redesign school. For some building leaders and teachers, this was a natural progression of the structures already in place. In other schools, both building leaders and teacher leaders expressed confusion about their

role since parts of the role of the principal were now passed on to the SRT. This overall confusion manifested itself in a variety of ways in secondary Redesign schools. One school, Shell Middle School, stood out as an example of how this shift towards empowering teachers to lead in different ways had an impact on their Redesign progress. Shell MS had utilized a traditional model of leadership prior to Redesign where the principal, in accordance with the superintendent and district office, was the main driver of the school improvement process. As I began to meet with the Shell SRT, it was clear that the concept of “teacher-driven, administrator-supported” was not going to be embraced by either the principal or the teachers. Their approach was to adhere to the status quo in terms of decision-making around school improvement; the decisions and the process would be directed by the principal. As a coach, it is important to strike a balance between pushing teams forward, pulling them back, and allowing them space to continue on their current path. With Shell, I decided to keep pushing for teachers on the SRT to take on more of a leadership role, not to infringe on the principal’s role, but to enhance the impact and sustainability of the Redesign effort. When I would meet with the SRT every other week during the school year, I would observe the discussion being dominated by the principal. The teachers rarely brought up new ideas or expanded on ideas brought forward by the principal. One could attribute this dynamic to a few reasons; one, this was how this school leadership had been operating for several years and they were comfortable in their roles or two, as a group, they were not responding to my coaching so the principal would simply placate me during our meetings and then they would do it their way upon my departure. My intuition is they were operating in this manner due in part to both reasons. People are excited about the prospect of major change, until it affects how they do their work on a day-to-day basis. It was clear to all Redesign schools there was an expectation to make significant changes to teaching and learning,

knowing these changes would require a change in behavior. Yet, when the unease of change sets in, people often revert to what is comfortable. I think this was part of Shell's SRT and how it was approaching Redesign. I also think there was a degree of uncertainty, even suspicion, that an outsider like me could understand their school, their students, their staff, their community enough to be able to coach them through the Redesign process. This general suspicion by educators of those who work for the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) is nothing new. I had experienced this reaction many times during my tenure at KSDE and will undoubtedly continue to experience instances such as this in the future. However, I admit I was surprised at this reaction by a secondary Redesign school since the context of the Redesign initiative, described by many as KSDE giving permission to schools to transform the way teaching and learning took place, would potentially lead to KSDE being seen in a different light as opposed to being seen as a compliance-centric bureaucracy where innovative ideas go to die. Regardless the reasons, the Shell SRT seemed to be stuck.

To get Shell Middle School back on track, I set up a meeting with the principal and the superintendent to share my concerns. Again, I was continuing to push the idea of teacher leaders in this school taking on a more pronounced leadership role in their Redesign effort. To that end, I suggested to the principal and superintendent that I meet with the SRT without the principal being present to allow the teachers more of an opportunity to share their thoughts and ideas. Both agreed and so I set up a virtual meeting between myself and the members of the SRT excluding the principal. As the meeting began, I could sense a high degree of tension from the teachers. I would ask questions about what ideas they had to personalize learning for students, for example, which would elicit no response and a collective shrugging of shoulders. If any of the teacher leaders spoke, it was to regurgitate what had been discussed by the principal at earlier meetings. I

want to be clear; the principal was talented, highly respected, and had good ideas, however, if the only ideas brought forward come from one person, no matter how bright that person might be, the odds of the school maximizing the impact of the Redesign effort would be very low. In response, I kept pushing these teacher leaders, with little to no success, to share their thoughts on potential strategies for their Redesign effort. Towards the end of the meeting, one teacher asked me why the principal was not part of the meeting. I shared that I had asked the principal and superintendent if I could meet with only the teacher leaders of the SRT to check the pulse of the teachers on their progress in Redesign. The teacher responded that, personally, she felt like they were making adequate progress and that the SRT, including the principal, was on the same page. With that, I ended the meeting, still searching for methods to engage the SRT in more effective manner. Two weeks passed when I received a call from the superintendent and principal regarding feedback from one of the teacher leaders in the meeting. The teacher had shared with the superintendent that she felt like having the meeting without the principal was inappropriate and that I was inferring that the teachers were being muted by the principal during SRT meetings. She also went on to share that I was trying to undermine the principal and drive a wedge between the principal and the teacher leaders. I assured them both this was not at all my intent; I was only seeking more engagement and idea generation from the teacher leaders. I apologized to both for the misunderstanding and eventually was able to apologize to the SRT and clarify my intentions in-person. The Shell SRT continued to function in the same manner as before and completed the initial planning year of Redesign with a solid plan for implementing strategies school-wide as part of their Redesign project.

I spent a great deal of time reflecting on this issue of teacher empowerment and how it could be fostered through the school improvement process. In terms of coaching, I made the

mistake of pushing too hard, to the point of alienating the SRT from this school. With the requirement of Redesign schools having one year to plan before “launching” their Redesign plan, I was feeling pressure to ensure each school stayed on track and that pressure manifested itself in a rush to judgement that the teacher leaders were not taking the lead in directing the Redesign effort. In retrospect, a better coaching move would have been to focus on the actual progress the SRT was making instead of being hyper-focused on how the teacher leaders were engaging in the process. Simply because they were not voicing their ideas more during meetings did not mean they were not engaged or did not have ideas. What I found out was the SRT had all been at this school together for a long period of time and there was a high level of trust amongst the staff, especially with the principal. I made the mistake of focusing too much on how the group was working together and it led to a poor decision to meet with only the teacher leaders. As an outsider, I developed perceptions that were unfounded. As Henry Ford stated, “success is 99% failure” and the lessons learned from this mistake were to be clearer about why it is important for teachers to be empowered through a major change effort and to be open-minded to the method a school chooses in doing so.

Adults - Transparency Wins

The emotional reaction to Redesign by adults outside the school, namely parents and a few community members, varied wildly across the schools. In the beginning, communities seemed excited because the teachers were excited. As the process grew more difficult and there were more questions than answers around the changes taking place, parents would start to question teachers and administrators as to the rationale for implementing Redesign elements. This questioning was natural and expected; in many cases, communities have their identity wrapped up completely in the school, especially in the smaller communities. When Redesign

was promoted as rethinking and challenging all aspects of teaching and learning, some parents perceived this approach indicated their school was broken and in need of a fix. Others were excited to be on the cutting edge of innovation in education and fully supportive of the school making transformational change as they had grown disenchanted with the current model of schooling. Of course, there were parents and community members who were indifferent to the changes, as they were disengaged or simply trusted the school with educational decisions. The general response from the community and parents to the Redesign effort was borne out of the value the community placed on education and the reputation of the schools involved.

One of the first steps in making any change is recognizing and acknowledging that there is a need to do so. In Redesign, schools had to have at least an 80% approval rate from the staff to apply to be part of the project, however the community and parents may or may not have been part of the decision to join the effort. The local school board had to vote to approve as well so there was some level of community involvement but the level of transparency as to why a school would desire to make transformational changes was left up to the school and district. To add to the difficulty in sharing the rationale to make large change, there was not much context from KSDE around what Redesign entailed, other than we were looking for schools who wanted to make substantial change in accordance with what Kansans told us they wanted to see in schools from the Community Conversations and to accelerate progress towards the State Board of Education Outcomes. The responsibility of informing the community and parents about Redesign and why they wanted to go that direction was on the school and the district. The level of support or active resistance a school experienced was heavily reliant on the degree of transparency and reasoning provided by the school and district to parents and the broader community on the front end of their Redesign effort. Through coaching, I focused on ensuring the school understood

their data (I consistently brought the school's state data to the conversation with the SRT) and that one of the most important factors in successful and sustained change is identifying the magnitude of change and adjusting your leadership approach accordingly (Freedman, Anit & Somech, 2021). With some of the Redesign secondary schools, they were transparent with their data, and they picked their spots to accelerate or decelerate depending on the capacity of the staff and the community to embrace the changes being implemented. Those schools were able to successfully implement and sustain Redesign changes. The schools that were more guarded or less than transparent with their families and/or misdiagnosed the magnitude of change for staff, struggled with implementation of Redesign strategies.

In the experience of Bradshaw Middle School, the lack of transparency around the need for change magnified the resistance from the community throughout the implementation of their Redesign. This was a school and a district that had a sterling reputation in Kansas. Parents and community members value education and proudly tout the quality of their schools. Bradshaw Middle School applied to be part of the Redesign effort indicating a major reason was to stay at the forefront of educational innovation. However, their student performance data showed an additional reason. Academic performance, as measured by state assessments in English language arts and math, had declined over the previous two years and the district's graduation rate had stayed steady around the state average. To Bradshaw, this was a major reason to Redesign but how would this be received in the community? Overall, the community's perception of the quality of the education being provided was higher than what the student performance data was showing which eventually led to questions from the parents and community as to why the school needed to Redesign.

The first step in the Redesign process is to develop a collective why for undertaking this challenge that leads to creating a vision of student success. During this developmental stage, I implored SRT's to engage as many stakeholders of the school as possible, including parents, community members, and students. This step was a struggle for most school leaders as they did not feel prepared to facilitate discussions on the future of their school with people other than the teachers. The Bradshaw principal and SRT desired to follow the process with fidelity so when the prospect of engaging their parents and families in the vision-setting discussion was introduced, they grew quiet and pensive, trying to imagine how they would do such a thing. After several SRT meetings where I had asked how the community discussions were going, the principal spoke to me privately and admitted they had not begun meeting with their stakeholder groups because they did not know how to begin. The principal talked through how they already engaged families through the traditional ways, including Open House, Site Council, and Parent-Teacher Conferences. He and the SRT were apprehensive to make any changes to their existing family engagement events, such as having families discuss what future student success looks like, or schedule new events with the sole focus of building out the vision for the school. The principal reasoned that since their community already had a high opinion of Bradshaw, having discussions such as those involving future improvements would confuse parents and make them question why Bradshaw needed to change. Additionally, it is the natural inclination for school leaders to not show the full scope of student performance data that is declining, especially in a community that values education and holds a high opinion of their schools. Without full transparency from the beginning of the Redesign effort, confusion and frustration from the community is on the horizon. As a coach to these Redesign secondary schools, the most difficult aspect in providing guidance came when parents and community members began pushing back

on the changes being implemented by the school. I was not equipped with the knowledge or experience to help school leaders navigate parent concerns and resistance. The school leaders were very practiced at fielding and managing parent concerns but usually in the context of their own child, not with school-wide strategies and curriculum. With Bradshaw Middle School, the lack of transparency regarding declining student performance led to parents questioning why the school would need to Redesign, which abbreviated and stalled progress Bradshaw was making in terms of implementing new strategies for teaching and learning. From my unique position of being an “outside-insider,” I was able to observe how the SRT managed the parent criticism that eventually boiled over at a few very tense, difficult local board meetings. I will never forget the day I became aware a local news station was at Bradshaw that morning, requesting to interview the principal and superintendent about a controversial online learning platform being implemented at the school. A few parents had taken issue with some of the curriculum being used to teach their children and had done so very persuasively over social media. The press had caught wind of the controversy and had descended upon Bradshaw the day of a local school board meeting. The Bradshaw principal spoke briefly with the media station and then prepared his statements that justified the implementation of the learning platform to the local board of education meeting that evening.

By the time I arrived home that night, the Bradshaw board meeting had already started. All their board meetings were live streamed, so I was able to watch the proceedings. When I logged in, my heart sank. The board meeting had to be moved to the gym because so many Bradshaw parents had decided to attend. There were several parents who had indicated they wanted to share their thoughts during the open forum, so many that the board president had to shorten each speaker’s allotted time so that each community member would get the chance to

share. As I listened, there were a few parents who were proponents of the new online learning platform because it allowed their child to personalize her or his learning, moving at a pace that worked best for the individual students. Of course, there were many more opponents than those in favor of the learning platform. Those against indicated they did not trust the organization that developed the learning platform and did not believe the curriculum aligned with their values as parents. Wild assumptions and accusations were shared from multiple parents with children at Bradshaw. The principal tried to defend the decision he and his staff had made to implement the new learning platform so students could learn at a personalized pace while the functionality of the platform allowed teachers to be more in the facilitators role and provide individualized instruction. The principal did an admirable job in sharing the rationale and protecting his staff from much of the criticism, however, the opponents were so convinced they were right in their assessment of the new learning platform, they were not willing to listen to any rationale. Many were loud, aggressive, and visibly agitated, challenging the local board to immediately shut down the learning platform. All I could do was watch as Bradshaw's Redesign effort was unraveling. I felt helpless watching the principal and his staff be verbally attacked by parents who previously supported the school.

While the parents waged war on a particular strategy Bradshaw had put in place, the underlying current was a lack of trust from the parents since the question of "why Redesign?" was never fully addressed. One year before all of this transpired, I presented our state data to a local education advisory board for Bradshaw made up of board members, civic leaders, and parents, those who would be the most engaged in education in the community. I was surprised to know that was the first time many in the room had considered our state data. I had to provide a fundamental explanation for the data points we emphasize in Kansas so this was a concerning

development, knowing if they do not understand the state data, how could they begin to understand their district's data? To not disclose, at a deep level, the current state of student performance with your constituents is a dangerous omission. Once you build up enough dissatisfaction, not only among the staff but also the broader community, with the current student outcomes, then it is much more palatable to making changes because people realize the gravity of the situation. By not painting the full picture of why a school needs to make changes, it makes it much more difficult to implement and sustain those changes. Parents feel misled, trust breaks down, and chaos then ensues. While sharing the disturbing data is a difficult and uncomfortable task on the front end, it pales in comparison to the pain, confusion, and frustration a school must go through to mitigate the damage due to a lack of transparency on the back end.

Student Advocacy – “Not Good Enough”

In one Redesign secondary school, Bleier Junior & Senior High (grades 6 – 12), students advocated for their own learning needs, moved through the standards in a content area at their own pace, and developed higher expectations for their future education than existed in their own families. It all started one year before Bleier decided to formally apply to be in the Redesign project when a few junior students started voicing their dissatisfaction about the instructional methods employed by their teachers. Now, you might be thinking that teenagers complaining about teachers is a not a novel concept and you would be correct. In my days as a teacher and an administrator, there was not one day that passed without complaints from students. The difference at Bleier was the context of their objections and the way they expressed their opinions. They did not share the typical protestations of teenagers in school such as how the content is too difficult, the teachers too rigorous in their expectations, and the food lousy. This group of students were sharing with their teachers how they deserved a better, more relevant learning

experience than the current model. They were advocating for more personalized learning and doing so directly to the teachers in a respectful manner. Yes, they were asking, en masse, for more rigor and for higher teacher expectations for their learning and growth. As I was visiting classrooms at Bleier one afternoon, I spoke with a few seniors about their plans for next year. Both students were planning on enrolling in college but did not feel prepared by Bleier. They mentioned the low expectations by their parents, their teachers, and the local school board for their learning was a major factor in both students feeling ill-prepared for postsecondary education. Despite little assistance from the school or from their own families, both students had enrolled in dual-credit college courses during their senior year to prepare them for the next phase in their education. The students had advocated for themselves to all who would listen in the school to insignificant effect. They took matters into their own hands and now felt they were gaining ground on their future endeavors, despite what they saw as Bleier's attempts to keep them in town for the rest of their lives. My first reaction was amazement at the initiative, maturity and self-awareness these students exhibited followed by the realization that this type of student-initiated change effort was exactly why Redesign was in place.

This example of students advocating for their own learning began a chain reaction that resulted in a philosophical change in teaching and instruction at Bleier Junior & Senior High School. Based on the students' concerns, the teachers began to completely re-think and re-vamp the instructional methods they employed. The staff began to dig into the standards in each of their content areas, organizing them in a progression that students could understand and work through at their own pace, as long as there was a pace. Shifting the responsibility from teachers to the students in terms of delivery of the standards would take time but the staff felt like they owed it to the students to pursue this standards-based, student-driven approach. A small group of

staff members went to visit another school that had implemented a similar model to the one they were thinking about. This school had begun a project-based learning academy where students could choose to take core classes in a project-based environment. By developing and completing their own projects that addressed each standard for the course, students in the academy would complete courses in their timeframe. Teachers were there as facilitators, accountability partners, and cheerleaders. The students did all the work on a timeline they developed. A project was not complete until the student had presented their project to their peers and teachers, most specifically showing the alignment between what they learned and the standards. As Bleier staff spoke with teachers and students, they were amazed at the ownership level of the students for their work. The project-based academy students felt more in control of their learning yet still supported by teachers when they needed assistance or guidance. Their work was not for an audience of one which is typical of the traditional classroom with formative and summative assessments that only the teacher will evaluate. The students' projects were presented to their peers, teachers, and, in some cases, community members and parents. After the culminating presentations, the projects were displayed on the walls of the academy for all to see. The Bleier staff were excited about what they observed and prepared to share with the rest of the staff when they returned.

When the visiting team returned to Bleier and presented to the staff, their excitement and optimism about the project-based learning model was quickly vanquished by the reaction of a few staff members who were overtly against this new approach to teaching and learning. These staff members may have voted in support of the Redesign effort at Bleier, but that support was only in place until it required them to change their teaching methods. Every Redesign secondary school had one or two staff members who fell into this category of wanting change in the school

but not wanting to change their practice. While this initial resistance stunned the Bleier SRT for a short time, they were not about to abandon the idea due to a couple of detractors. They decided to pilot test their own project-based academy on a small scale with only a few teachers and a few students who the SRT thought would be interested in this new model for teaching and learning. The staff decided to retrofit their own academy using space in the library/media center, complete with cubicle-like spaces for each student, rolling white boards and a small makerspace. The teachers who were going to be teaching in this project-based environment placed their content standards on large posters on the walls for easy access and tracking the students learning. The Bleier SRT decided to begin the project-based academy model, on a small scale, with the start of the next semester with a select few teachers and students. The students involved in the project-based academy were given the option of earning either math or English credit through this new method of teaching and learning.

Students - Self-Directed

As the pilot test of this project- and standards-based model began at Bleier, while awkward at first, the students and teachers quickly grew to love this more flexible, personalized approach to teaching and learning. The Bleier students felt free to go at a pace that worked for them plus they were applying the standards to a project of their own choosing, one in which they had a high degree of interest. The Bleier teachers felt free as well, coaching the students from selection of the project to the unpacking of the standards, to applying the standards, and to presenting their findings to an audience of teachers, other students, and parents/community members. As the Redesign coach, I was granted the opportunity to listen in on a few presentations as well and found the presentations to be enlightening and enjoyable. While their presentation style was a bit rough (they are teenagers after all), the ownership and excitement of

completing a project where they applied the standards from start to finish seemed to fill the students with confidence and a stronger sense of self-efficacy. The teachers developed rubrics for each standard that they used to evaluate the student's learning while, at the same time, students would also use to self-evaluate. By the end of each project, the student had put much more time into evaluating and reflecting on their own learning as opposed to relying heavily on the teacher, an audience of one. Once the project was completed, the teacher would assign a final rating of learning, based on the performance levels on the standards rubrics and award credit to the student. From my unique vantage point, the line between teacher and student became blurry in terms of who was the learner and who was the evaluator of the learning. The students were more critical of themselves when they would self-assess as opposed to the teacher when evaluating the student's learning. Additionally, within this self-directed, self-paced model, the students would receive a large amount of time one-on-one with the teacher, where both parties could go in-depth on where the student was currently and wanted to go in completing their project. This led to a high degree of synchronization, trust, and more of a partnership between the students and teachers at Bleier.

My greatest challenge in coaching Redesign schools through this type of transformative change in teaching and learning was to help keep the momentum going forward from when the idea for the strategy was hatched to implementation and hopefully seeing the strategy through to measure impact on student learning. That is a rather long process with many struggles and doubts along the way, so it was imperative for me to remind the SRT of their collective why and shared vision in order to re-surface the excitement they had when they were able to see a strategy working effectively in other schools and re-assure them that they were on the right path.

The other coaching strategy I employed was a high degree of visibility. In the first year of Redesign, I traveled to each Redesign secondary school once every two weeks. This was a good cadence of accountability, especially when staff are pilot testing a strategy and frequently checking for implementation and impact. Since the SRT knew “that guy from the agency” would be in-person and inquiring about the progress of the strategies being implemented on a small scale, they were more focused on monitoring the effectiveness of the strategies so they could answer my questions. In working with many school leaders, to a person, when asked what the most effective aspect of my coaching through this process was, all answered that it was knowing I would be there in-person every two weeks and the associated accountability. With this high degree of visibility came a level of trust between me and the principal and SRT. The SRT trusted that I knew who they were and was in the room when they were making critical decisions in moving forward. The SRT also knew the questions I was going to ask so they began to trust in the cadence of accountability I provided to keep them on the correct path. The trusted relationship fostered between me and the SRT had an impact on the trust being developed between the SRT, staff, students, and broader school community. With a high level of trust, students are more likely to engage and own their learning, which is ultimately the desired state. Redesign was seen by these secondary schools as the method to reach this state of students taking control of their learning experience.

Implications for Future Coaching and Research

As I reflect on my experience as a coach to several Redesign secondary schools and the outcomes I observed, good or bad, my thoughts always come back to one critical aspect of school improvement that determined the direction of a school’s attempt at Redesign....trust. While it is widely known and accepted that the level of trust within a school and its community

is a major factor in the success of the students within the school, some have referred to trust as the “foundation of school effectiveness (Cunningham & Gresso, 1993), very few studies of trust in school have been completed. It is assumed trust is a key factor, leaving no need to study its impact in schools or maybe it is because trust is hard to define in the context of school.

According to Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (1998), trust is “a general confidence and overall optimism in occurring events; it is believing in others in the absence of compelling reasons to disbelieve” (pg. 344). More specifically, Brewster and Railsback (2003), identified five components commonly used to measure trustworthiness; *benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness*. While all five are critical to trustworthiness, two of the elements stand out in the context of secondary school redesign. *Reliability* refers to the “extent to which you can depend upon another party to come through for you, to act consistently, and to follow through” (Brewster & Railsback, 2003, p. 10). As schools progressed through the Redesign process, the principal had to rely on the staff to drive the work of school improvement and the staff had to rely on the principal to support them through the hills and valleys of continuous improvement, especially when the broader school community challenged their ideas. *Openness* has to do with “how freely another party shares information with others” and is “crucial to the development of trust between supervisors and others in the organization, particularly in times of increased vulnerability for staff” (Brewster & Railsback, 2003, p. 11). The degree of openness between the principal to the community and the principal to staff, mainly at the beginning of the Redesign process, played a major role in the support for Redesign from stakeholders throughout the project. The schools that were explicit and transparent with the reasons they wished to Redesign, including the student data, built the trust needed with each other and their community to withstand the pending trials and tribulations inherent in any major school change effort. From

my perspective as an “outside-insider”, the schools where trust levels were high, staff, students, and families showed more ownership in the outcomes of the Redesign effort, as evidenced by the sustained focus on reaching the shared vision of student success that was collaboratively created.

As I look back on the Redesign work done by secondary schools and my coaching efforts, I ask myself if I was able to build up enough trust with principals and SRT’s throughout the process. Was I open and transparent enough with why KSDE decided to start the Redesign project? Was I open and transparent about the outcome being largely unknown? Was I open and transparent about my own limitations and experience as a Redesign coach? When one feels incompetent, it can be difficult to be open and transparent about one’s deficiencies, especially when you are the coach or expert and expected to know how to guide people through a change process. Regardless of expertise level, transparency is key to building trust and I would be more transparent with those I coached in retrospect. With reliability, did I follow through on what I stated I would do to support principals and SRT’s? Was I consistent with my support and coaching or did I send mixed messages? Was I dependable? Could the principal and SRT count on me for support and guidance? Consistency, dependability, and following through are critical actions in developing trust with educators, especially those who are challenging the status quo when they know that will lead to their decisions being challenged by their own stakeholders.

One of the calling cards of school redesign in Kansas was it needed to be “teacher-led, administrator-supported and everyone-owned .” To operate in that manner, a leveling of the power dynamics was necessary to allow the experts, teachers, to drive the Redesign effort. Based on Lambert (2007), all staff “has the potential and right to work as a leader” (p. 312), so the redesigning was about tapping into every staff member’s capacity to lead. To some schools, this was a natural process; to others, it was difficult to conceptualize how it would work. As a coach,

I tried to model this “flattening” of the organizational chart by simply being a participant in the SRT meeting. I tried to not be viewed as the expert or authority when it comes to Redesign (who was?) but rather another voice in the room discussing how the school could reach their shared vision. Of course, there were times I had to be more directive and clarify the expectations of being a Redesign secondary school, but, for the most part, I sought to be another educator in the room brainstorming methods that would improve student outcomes. By taking on this collaborative approach, the hope was that the SRT and broader staff would be empowered to drive the process which would, in turn, create a sustainable model moving forward. As a coach, I tried to balance empowering the SRT with a more directive approach (Goodwin et al., 2015). Being more direct meant being highly visible, which was basically every other week on-site with the Mercury secondary schools, to guide and support. High visibility was an important factor in building a trusting relationship as well as providing strong, consistent accountability. Out of all the coaching strategies employed, building principals and SRT’s consistently shared the most effective was the accountability brought on by the frequent and regular on-site visits.

As I referenced at the end of the previous chapter, building-level Redesign and district-level Kansas Educational Systems Accreditation (KESA) have run on parallel tracks since 2017 and now are being blended together. In essence, KESA will become Redesign at the district level and the coaching that took place with schools in Redesign will now move to school districts. This is the next step and research opportunity in the journey of the Kansans Can initiative, which began with the Community Conversations (outlined in chapter two) in 2015, which led into school Redesign for five years and now is a combined KESA/Redesign model that will be in place for the near future. For those who will serve as coaches for school districts in the next chapter of continuous improvement, the ideal of trust needs to be a focus in working alongside

district leadership teams. I shared my reflections as a coach of secondary Redesign schools and want to take a step further to outline the implications of my findings as they relate to the future of school improvement in Kansas.

Building trust as a coach for district leadership teams will hinge on being open and reliable, however, there will be challenges that need to be acknowledged and planned for when serving in the role of a third-party coach to a school district. One of those challenges is the “greening” of district leadership currently taking place in Kansas. It is no secret that superintendent positions are turning over at an alarming rate. One plausible reason for the high degree of turnover is a highly charged and divided political environment that leaves many current superintendents disenchanted and also prospective superintendents apprehensive about moving into the position. As veteran superintendents retire or move into another field outside of education, there is a lack of interest and experience in being a superintendent. This leaves many school district boards of education taking desperate measures to fill their top leadership position, including promoting teachers directly to the superintendency without the necessary preparation or hiring an interim superintendent to allow for more time to find a quality candidate. While these practices do work well in some cases, this leaves school districts feeling unsettled and struggling to sustain improvement efforts. As a third-party coach to a school district, it is important to acknowledge you might be working with someone in the superintendent’s chair who has little to no experience as a superintendent and struggling with what to do and who to turn to. Establishing credibility and reliability through consistent and focused communication, whether it be in-person, virtual, or written, will be an important first step. As was mentioned previously, the secondary Redesign schools consistently identified the frequent check-ins as the most effective strategy in keeping the school on track and I suppose a district leader would give the same

response. By consistently showing up and allowing a district leader to focus on what is most important (not what is most urgent), a coach can gain the trust of those she or he serves, especially those new and inexperienced to the superintendency.

The second challenge to coaching school districts through this blended model of KESA and Redesign are the barriers to being transparent and open from coach to district leadership. Both Redesign and KESA had mixed reviews in terms of process and outcomes. School Redesign was viewed by some as a “flash in the pan”, another in a long line of school transformation efforts that failed to deliver on its promise. Others saw Redesign as long overdue and were eager and committed to changing the teaching and learning in their school. Many educators in Redesign schools felt like they finally had permission to make substantial changes to their practice and how the school functioned. Of course, many educators were indifferent to Redesign, preferring instead to stick with what was comfortable and known. There were secondary Redesign schools that moved too far ahead of their community in terms of making changes, which resulted in public backlash that damaged the overall process and resulting outcomes. Other schools, and their communities, embraced the Redesign effort and made substantial positive gains in school culture as well as student outcomes. KESA is perceived in the same manner but for different reasons. Some systems viewed accreditation through KESA as an exercise in compliance, as if continuous improvement, which is at the heart of KESA, is something the state mandates that a district must do. KESA was just another product of the bureaucracy at the state level so the districts with this dim view of accreditation simply looked at KESA as a report that must be filled out. Doesn’t every district in the state desire to improve? KESA is the model for districts to continuously improve and there were several districts reporting that KESA has had a major impact on aligning all buildings in the district to common

vision, common goals, and common practices being utilized to improve. Regardless of how an educator might perceive Redesign and KESA, blending those two models together brings the baggage from both into the future and any coach of a district moving through KESA must be ready to be open and transparent about the successes and failures of both models if that coach wants to establish credibility and trust on the front end.

The same can be stated for the district leader to be open and transparent with staff and the community about the current state of student outcomes in the district. I documented the struggles buildings went through when the SRT refused to be completely transparent with their student outcome data for fear of criticism and/or to protect the image and reputation of the school. It seems even riskier to be completely open and transparent around subpar student outcomes at the district level, especially with the political climate where every public statement made by public officials seems to be picked apart by those looking for an opportunity to pounce on a perceived slight or injustice. As an “outside-insider”, the coach is in a precarious situation when a district leader chooses the path of least resistance and isn’t completely forthcoming with student outcome data. I struggled mightily with how to implore a school leader to be completely transparent, so the staff and community had a clear picture of the current state of student outcomes. As I reflect on those circumstances, I believe the coaching move to make is to model the behavior you are wanting to see, such as presenting to the staff and community to share student data at the state level. It would be an interesting research study to compare and contrast districts where the superintendent is up front and open about the gaps in student performance versus those who choose to pick and choose the data shared with the school community.

The third challenge to coaching Redesign at the district level is maintaining the “teacher-led, administrator-supported” approach to the change process. In building-level Redesign, it was

easier to coach this premise since the teacher leaders were part of the school Redesign team and there was direct contact every time I checked in with a secondary school. Being one layer removed from working directly with teacher leaders may present challenges for a coach to help the district understand and adhere to the notion that teachers should be in the driver's seat of the improvement process since they are closest to the students. Initially, when I introduced the idea that Redesign should be led by teachers and supported by administrators, there was a great deal of confusion about *how* roles would need to adapt to operate in this manner. In secondary Redesign schools where they were committed to empowering teachers to lead at the building level, over time you could sense that the teacher leaders were starting to take the lead more within the SRT and with the rest of the staff and the building leader was able to support the teachers' leadership development through coaching. What would be the conditions, set by the district, for teachers to feel empowered to research and experiment with different instructional practices and then to take ownership of the results? What are the coaching strategies to entice district leadership to support the blended model of Redesign-KESA instead of simply allowing one building in Redesign to take their own path? The coaching strategies must include change management, where a balance between challenging the status quo and providing enough structure and order is achieved. There must be urgency to the changes being made across the district but also patience to allow for teachers to make their personal transitions, moving through the stages of incompetence to deep implementation and impact, and eventually competence followed by improved student outcomes. Providing district-level support for teachers to lead and own the change process will require coaching that focuses on managing change while providing order to the process.

Tough and competent. Those two words always came to my mind when I would question my coaching methods with Redesign secondary school principals and SRT's. You must be tough and competent at feeling incompetent to Redesign your school. There were countless times when I would encourage downtrodden Redesign principals by reminding them that, yes, to redesign is difficult, most likely the hardest work you would have to do as an administrator, but that they were tough enough to stick with something their staff and students ultimately desired, memorable teaching and learning experiences. I would also tell them they may feel incompetent at times (I know I did), but every time they were working through how to motivate the SRT or help a hesitant staff member manage their personal transition or explain to a parent or student why the school decided to Redesign, they were building a level of competence many others in their position would never reach, setting themselves apart as the most tough and competent group of educators anywhere in the state. Experience is the greatest teacher and Redesign was full of unique experiences for everyone involved. It is my hope that the lessons learned from Redesign would provide examples of how to curate a student-centered culture that elicits trust in the adults and students in the school and community. There is no finish line to Redesign, it is an ongoing process and way of thinking our state needs to sustain if we are serious about leading the world in the success of each student, just like the seriousness required to land a man on the moon.

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