

DISSERTATION

A NARRATIVE STUDY OF ETHNICALLY DIVERSE AMERICAN PUBLIC
SCHOOL FEMALE SUPERINTENDENTS

Submitted by

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School of Education

In partial fulfillment of requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Spring 2012

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ABSTRACT

A NARRATIVE STUDY OF ETHNICALLY DIVERSE AMERICAN PUBLIC SCHOOL FEMALE SUPERINTENDENTS

Historically, women, especially minority women, have been underrepresented in the American public school superintendence. Using a narrative inquiry approach, five ethnically diverse American public school female superintendents were interviewed to determine what life experiences led them to the public school superintendence, how they described their day-to-day experiences at this position, and what can be inferred from their narratives about how they would encourage, inform, and support other women seeking this position.

The data garnered through the narratives identify family, personal expectations, professional experience, concepts of power and influence, and advocacy for students as contributing factors that led each woman to the public school superintendence. While each of the women could only present her unique story, there were similarities and differences among the women's lived experiences, and with the research literature, that included their career paths, career patterns, barriers, leadership style, and reasons for exiting the superintendence. The women's day-to-day experiences indicated they were change agents who actively contributed both to the schools and the communities in which they served. Potential support for other women seeking this position emerged, including mentorships, spirituality, family support, and superintendent and board relationships.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am tremendously grateful to the women who graciously shared their life stories. I am humbled by their work and their dedication to children. To my advisor: I am grateful to Dr. Sharon K. Anderson, who shared her scholarly advice, her time, her insights and who, along this journey, became a friend. To Dr. James Banning: A special thanks for agreeing to become the methodologist in the middle of this project. Thank you for your realism, your infinite patience, and your love of qualitative research. To Dr. Linda Kuk: Thank you for guiding me through the literature review and teaching me that the literature does, indeed, determine the direction of research. To Dr. Toni Zimmerman: Thank you for agreeing to function as the outside member of my committee.

To my very special family and my in-laws whose love and support made this project possible. Thank you to my mom for taking care of the details of my life while this project was underway. Thank you to my brother, Bruce, for his unconditional love. To my many friends, but a special thanks to Barbalee for the weekly phone calls and gentle edits. To two important men in my life who did not get to see this project completed. To my late husband, Henry McNeil Isaacs, who was my greatest cheerleader, and my brother, Zane, whose gentle spirit always taught me to pause and enjoy God's creations and be thankful for the simpler things in life.

And finally, to my personal gift from God—My wonderful son, Steven, who is my hero.

DEDICATION

To Montrue Marable, my mother, who instilled in me the love of learning; To my son,
Steven Anthony Isaacs, whose encouragement and love support me every day.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were. Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee ... (John Donne, Meditation 17, Devotions upon Emergent Occasions).

Introduction

Meditation 17, by John Donne, indicates that all people have merit and their lived experiences are important in contributing to the holistic understanding of life. If one life, one voice, is lost, we all lose. This statement rings true for women's involvement in the public school superintendence. Current research and historical data indicate that women are significantly underrepresented at the administrative level of public schools in the United States, and until that issue is rectified, we are all diminished, and the bell tolls for us all.

Historically, women, especially women of color, have been underrepresented in the American public school superintendence. Since the inception of the public school superintendence, White males have dominated this administrative position (Chase & Bell, 1990). Blout's (1998) research on the history of the female superintendence indicated that throughout women's tenure in public education, they have made only modest gains in attaining this position. She noted that from 1910-1950 women comprised between 8.9% and 11% of all superintendence positions (local, county and state); between 1950 and 1970, the number of female superintendents declined to just 3.4%. According to a 1971

study of the American school superintendence, women represented 1.3% of public school superintendents (Knezevich, 1971). In 1992, the American Association of School Administrators conducted a study of the American school superintendence. This study determined that the percentage of women serving as American school superintendents was 6.6% (Glass, 1992). In 2000, in a sample size of 2,262 out of an estimated 12,604 superintendents in the United States, the AASA reported that 13.2% of the superintendents were women. A 2007 AASA survey, with a sample size of 1,338, indicated that women's representation in the superintendence was at an all-time high of 21.7% (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; Glass & Franceschini, 2007). In 2010, in a sample size of 1,867, it was determined that the percentage of women serving in the public school superintendence was 24.1% (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2010).

Shakeshaft (1989) noted that while women were underrepresented in public school administration, they have historically dominated the teaching profession. She stated that in 1905, women comprised 97.9% of the elementary teaching positions and 64.2% of the high school teaching positions. By 1950, women comprised 91% of elementary teaching positions and 56.2% of high school teaching positions. By 1985, women represented 83.5% of the elementary teaching positions and 50.1% of the high school teaching positions. The United States government census reports that today there are 6.2 million teachers, and of those, 71% are women (<http://www.census.gov>). Women are overrepresented at the classroom level, and notably underrepresented at the administrative level (Gupton & Slick, 1995).

In researching the history of the female superintendence, many reasons are identified as to why so few women have attained the highest administrative office. Women have encountered many barriers such as gender bias, sex-role stereotyping, male dominated school boards, lack of role models, lack of mentors, and maintaining balance between their personal and profession life (Alston, 1999; Beekley, 1999; Blout, 1998; Brunner, 2000; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Glass et al., 2000; Pavon-Nelson, 1999; Ortiz, 1982; Shakeshaft, 1989). These factors have caused women to seek the superintendence position later in life or not at all (Blout, 1998; Brunner, 2000; Shakeshaft, 1989). To better understand women's ascension to the superintendence and the factors that motivate them to seek this position, researchers are directly investigating female superintendents. Using personal narratives, researchers have attempted to discern how their lived experiences led them to this position and how their lived experiences have informed their practice (Barbie, 2004; Couch, 2005; Halloran, 2007; Kennedy, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

Research literature indicates an underrepresentation of women in the American public school superintendence. (Blout, 1998; Chase & Bell, 1990; Glass, 1992; Glass et al, 2000; Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Shakeshaft, 1989). Brunner (2000) noted that research has focused on white male superintendents with little attention being directed towards gender, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. Hansot and Tyack (1981) suggested, "Amid proliferation of other kinds of statistical reporting in an age enamored of numbers . . . data by sex became strangely inaccessible. A conspiracy of silence could hardly have been unintentional" (p. 13). According to Glass and Franceschini (2007), in 2007, 21.7% of the 14,063 superintendents in the United States were women. However, they

noted that only 6.2% of superintendents were identified as minorities, and of that percentage, superintendents of Hispanic origin comprised 1.4%; African-Americans held 2.0% of American superintendences, and American-Indians comprised 1.1% of the superintendent positions. Couch's (2005) research indicated only 1% of superintendents were Latina. Even though the Hispanic population is one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in the United States, the number of Hispanic males and females at the superintendence level remains small. Arnez (cited in Alston, 2000) and Revere (1986) indicated that in 1978 the number of African-American female superintendents was five. In 1982, there were 11 African-American female superintendents, 16 in 1983, 29 in 1984, and 25 in 1985. Dana and Bourisaw (2006) indicated that glass ceilings, resistant school boards, search consultants, lack of sponsorship and mentoring programs, and gender bias all contributed to the lack of women in the superintendent's position.

Research Questions

To understand the problem of underrepresentation of women in the American public school superintendence, researchers have conducted both qualitative and quantitative research. Researchers have studied individual women and same ethnic group female superintendents. However, in my research, a study was not found that investigated a group of ethnically diverse women superintendents to understand their lived experiences that led them to the superintendence and their experiences within the context of the superintendence. Therefore, to bring a group of ethnically diverse women superintendents together under one study would contribute to the literature concerning the female superintendence. Given the focus of this study, the following research questions were employed.

- I. What are the life stories of a group of ethnically diverse female superintendents that led them to the public school superintendence?
- II. How do they describe their day-to-day experiences in this position?
- III. Based on their experiences as female superintendents, what can be inferred that will encourage, inform, and support other women seeking and entering the superintendence?

Definition of Terms

Leadership: “Leadership has been conceived as the focus of group processes, as a matter of personality, as a matter of inducing compliance, as the exercise of influence, as particular behaviors, as a form of persuasion, as a power relation, as an instrument to achieve goals, as an effect of interaction, as a differentiated role, as an initiation of structure, and as many combinations of these definitions” (Bass, 1990, p. 19).

Qualitative Research: “is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures; collecting data in the participants’ setting; analyzing the data inductively, building from particulars to general themes; and making interpretations of the meaning of the data” (Creswell, 2009, p. 231).

Superintendent: The chief officer of a K-12 public school district.

Superintendence: the office of the chief officer of a K-12 school district having the authority to supervise district employees and direct the business of the school district.

Limitations/Delimitation

A limitation of this research may be my own professional and cultural bias. As a former superintendent, I acknowledge that my experiences, my values, and my beliefs as a middle-class, white female may influence the interpretation of the interviewing data. I guarded against this limitation by permitting the women I interviewed to comment on and revise their transcript. Another limitation may be the honesty with which women present their personal narratives about their lived experiences and how these experiences have informed their practices as superintendents.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this narrative study was to investigate the life stories of a group of ethnically diverse female superintendents and discuss the events that led them to the superintendence as well as to describe their day-to-day experiences in this position. As their stories emerged, I was also interested in the similarities and differences of their stories as compared to the research literature. From their stories, I found inferences that will encourage, inform, and support other women seeking and entering this position.

Investigator's Perspective

As a former public school superintendent, it has been my experience that men and women experience the superintendence differently. Bailey (2004) noted that because of the bias of accepted traditions and customs associated with men's and women's places in society, women face many challenges once they enter the superintendence. Women struggle to create legitimacy in their superintendence, their voices remain unheard, and their ideas are not readily accepted or perceptions validated (Brunner, 2000; Glass, et. al, 2000; Hansot & Tyack, 1981 Tallerico, 1999). The male superintendents with whom I

have worked practiced a hierarchical style of leadership characterized by top-down directives (Cooper, Fusarelli, & Carella, 2000; Gergen, 2005), exclusionary power (Blout, 1998; Coughlin, 2005), and autocratic control and competitiveness (Shakeshaft, 1989). My female superintendent colleagues practiced a collaborative, inclusive style of leadership distinguished by egalitarian, consensual, (Gergen, 2005; Helgesen, 1990, 1995), and interconnected relationships (Halloran, 2007; Wheatley, 2006; Wingard, 2005). I believe women still face barriers entering the superintendence, but once they enter this position, they are guided by a “web of inclusion” (Helgesen, 1995) leadership style allowing voices to be heard, valuing diverse opinions, and honoring hard work.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

“And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.” Anais Nin

Introduction and Background

Historical and current research documents the underrepresentation of women in the public school superintendence in the United States (Blout, 1998; Shakeshaft, 1989). Skrla (1999) found that men were 40 times more likely than women to advance from teaching to the top leadership role in the school district, and Alston (2000) indicated that women held fewer than 5% of the 15,000 chief executive officer positions in 2000. Grogan and Brunner (2005) noted that women outnumbered men in educational doctoral programs and were more current in their professional development than were men. They further found that 47% of women have earned their highest degree in the past ten years as compared to 36% of men. Of the 1,338 superintendents responding to a 2007 American Association of School Administrators (AASA) superintendent survey, only 21.7% were women, and by 2010, a similar survey concluded that the percentage of female superintendents in the United States had risen to 24.1% (Kowalski, T. J., McCord, R. S., Petersen, G. J., Young, I. P., & Ellerson, N.M. (2010). Glass and Franceschini (2007) further found that the number of minority superintendents in America was 6.2%. Couch (2005) cited a 2003 study conducted by AASA that found only 1% of the public school superintendents were identified as Latina. Studies by Grogan and Brunner (2005) and Shakeshaft (1989) reported that information on African Americans at the superintendence

level was difficult to locate, but they found that by 1978, 3.4% of administrative positions were held by minority women but not specifically at the superintendence level.

This chapter reviews the literature from an historical perspective as well as reviewing the literature concerning current demographics of female superintendents. The chapter also discusses the literature concerning the career paths that allowed women to access the public school superintendence, as well as the career patterns and the barriers they faced in attaining and maintaining this position. In addition, the chapter discusses the research concerning the social-psychological development of women superintendents and the leadership style they bring to the superintendence.

Establishment of the Public School Superintendence 18th/19th Century

In 1775, Congress passed the Land Ordinance Law that required states to reserve lot No.16 of every township for the maintenance of public schools, and state agencies were created to govern these lands and ensure their proper usage for schools (Blout, 1998). As the population of early America grew, states such as Massachusetts and Connecticut enacted laws that mandated taxes to support schools (Blout, 1998). Carella (2000) indicated that the local superintendence was established shortly after the state superintendence.

State Superintendents

As early as 1812, the first state superintendent was elected in New York. Fowler (2004) stated that, “The fight to establish common schools was a political struggle of the first magnitude, requiring that legislatures enact statutes establishing agencies, creating the superintendency, and—above all—taxing the citizenry to support schools” (p. 335). By 1850, every northern state had elected state superintendents. In addition, by 1880, 24

states had passed laws requiring the existence of state boards of education (Carella, 2000). Shakeshaft (1989) reported that by 1875, there were 29 state superintendents. The main jobs of these new superintendents were two-fold. First, they served as a conduit between the state legislature and local districts ensuring that state funds were properly distributed and districts were accountable for those funds. Next, superintendents traveled to school districts explaining laws and compliance issues (Blout, 1998). Colorado required that every two years, the state superintendent prepare a report for the Governor that detailed the state of the public schools. The first state superintendent of Colorado, Mr. W. C. Lothrop, provided a glimpse into the difficulties faced by these early superintendents in his First Biennial Report. His report delineated the challenges in acquiring quality teachers and paying them, attendance issues, corporal punishment, state licensing examinations for teachers, and communities unwilling to levy taxes to pay for schools. He wrote:

We are willing to vote bonds and taxes for railroads, because we expect they will increase our prosperity, and induce men of wealth and enterprise to become citizens of our Territory, but we are frequently too willing to levy small taxes for the support of schools. This is 'penny wise and pound foolish;' nothing is so ruinous to a town or state as a penurious policy in regard to schools. (First Biennial Report, Colorado, 1870, p. 26)

As the state superintendent's job became more complex, and the men in this position could not visit the school districts, county superintendence was created. The county superintendence was created to ensure that local school districts were in compliance with mandates from the state (Cubberly, as cited in Blout, 1998).

County Superintendents

Local communities elected county superintendents. The county superintendents served the dual role of representing the state's interest in monitoring the distribution and

spending of state funds, ensuring adherence to law, and reporting mandates, as well as presenting local educational needs at the state level (Blout, 1998). The job was demanding; many times the men who were elected were clergyman and lawyers who were not necessarily interested or trained in education but used the position to supplement their income (Blout, 1998). County superintendents were responsible for overseeing curriculum mandates, attendance, and truancy matters, budgets, personnel issues, and the orchestration of teacher institutes for the training and licensing of teachers. One of the most difficult jobs was that of facility management. In 1871, one county superintendent wrote:

The number of schools in the county is twenty. Of these one-half have log houses, which are generally very poorly furnished, and are always more or less uncomfortable. Nearly all of these are furnished with long, crudely constructed desks, at which the pupils sit upon benches of like length. A pail and stove are usually supplied, but beyond these nothing is found except an occasional black-board, small and almost useless. (First Biennial Report, Colorado, 1878)

While the county superintendence was an important position that attempted to deal with separate school concerns and solidify instruction across large distances, it was the position of the local superintendent that dealt with the day-to-day operation of the schools within the district.

Local Superintendents

Initially, local boards governed the individual schools within districts. However, as America grew and local schools became larger, school board members could no longer spend the time required to manage the schools as many of these men also held other jobs, and therefore, the position of local superintendent was established (Blout, 1998). Statutes did not require the position of local superintendent to be established; rather, local initiatives in each community were responsible for the public school position being

created (Nolte, 1971). Glass (1992) indicated that by 1860, 27 cities with school districts had superintendents. Buffalo, New York, and Louisville, Kentucky, were recognized as establishing the first local superintendence by 1837, and by 1870, 30 large cities had local superintendents (Carella, 2000).

As early as 1875, beliefs about only men serving in administrative positions prevailed, and there were laws restricting women from obtaining administrative positions. For instance, “Until 1858, in New Hampshire, men and women needed different qualifications to become school administrators” (Shakeshaft, 1989, p. 3); state and district superintendences were elected positions for which women could not vote until they won suffrage rights. In combining the statistical information of Hansot and Tyack (1981), Shakeshaft (1989), Blout (1998), and Glass and Franceschini (2007), it becomes clear that historically women have held the majority of the teaching positions, but they have never held the majority of the administrative positions.

Table 1

Women in Education 1905-2010

Women's Positions	Year 1905	Year 1910	Year 1928	Year 1930	Year 1950	Year 1970	Year 1972-73	Year 1982-83	Year 1984-85	Year 2007	Year 2010
Elementary Teacher	97.9%		89.2%		91%		84%	83%	83.5%	86%	
Elementary Principal	61.7%		55%		38%	19.6%		23%	16.9%	56%	
High School Teacher	64.2%		63.7%		56.2%	46%	46%	48.9%	50.1%	58.7%	
High School Principal	5.7%		7.9%		6%	1.4%	1.4%	3.2%	3.5%	26%	
Superintendent	0%	8.9%	1.6%	11%	9.1%	3.4%		1.8%	3.0%	21.7%	24.7%

Sources: Blout, 1998; Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Hansot, 1981; Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2010

Women’s Struggle to Climb the Educational Ladder

To understand the difficulties that women encountered in obtaining administrative positions and the causes of their underrepresentation at administrative levels, one must

first examine their struggles to become educators in a male-dominated system. As society in early America grew more complex, early colonial families who could afford a tutor for their children usually hired a male instructor. For the majority of male teachers, teaching was a temporary position, and as better paying jobs became available, male teachers left the teaching profession to pursue other more lucrative opportunities (Blout, 1998). Those families who could not afford a tutor taught their own children, and some women also taught neighborhood children. These neighborhood schools became known as “dame schools” (Shakeshaft, 1989). Eventually, communities saw a need to establish local schools and in the mid-nineteenth century, several states enacted legislation requiring school tax collection to provide education for children (Blout, 1998).

Between 1820 and 1830, America experienced an industrial revolution and a high level of immigration, resulting in two shifts. First, the majority of male teachers left the profession for higher paying jobs, and second, there was an influx of children needing to be educated (Shakeshaft, 1989). As there were not enough men to fill these positions, women were the most logical choice. However, some communities were reticent about hiring women as they viewed women as intellectually inferior, and according to Blout (1998), educated women feared they would give up social status if they entered the teaching profession. In a male dominated society, “Any work outside the home would have conflicted with the traditional expectations that they [women] manage their own households, thus pleasing their husbands and ultimately submitting to male authority” (Blout, 1998, p. 13). However, women wanted a vocation outside the home. For communities to defy tradition, they had to have strong justification to allow women to

work outside the home. This justification came in the persons of Katherine Beecher and Emma Willard (Blout, 1998).

Rhetoric of the Times

Katherine Beecher, founder of the Hartford Female Seminary in 1823 (and sister of Harriet Beecher Stowe), and Emma Willard, founder of the Troy Female Seminary in 1821, strongly advocated for women teachers (Shakeshaft, 1989). These women adamantly argued that,

Women should have dominion over the domestic sphere, and by extension, any work associated with the home. Because children were considered part of the domestic sphere, Beecher contended that it should be women's duty to care for and teach them. (Blout, 1998, p. 17)

Beecher's friend, prominent physician Dr. Benjamin Rush, advocated the necessity of allowing women to teach their sons. He spoke to the patriotic ideal when he suggested that women be allowed to teach. He stated that:

The equal share that every citizen has in the liberty and the possible share he may have in the government of our country make it necessary that our ladies should be qualified to a certain degree by a peculiar and suitable education, to concur in instructing their sons in the principles of liberty and government. (Blout, 1998, p. 13)

Dr. Rush's rhetoric did not challenge gender roles, but it supported the patriotic ideal of sustaining the democratic principles for future generations. Due to the shortage of male teachers, some communities did hire women as teachers during the early part of the nineteenth century. The second notable man to lend support was Horace Mann, the first secretary of education for Massachusetts in 1837.

Horace Mann, like Dr. Rush, understood the power of rhetoric, but more importantly, he understood the power of economics. Mann was a visionary, and he quickly understood that women were the key to educational success. He knew he had a

willing and ready work force, and he knew that he could hire women for a lesser salary than men. Therefore, to support women, he extolled the virtues that they would bring to the educational profession when he stated, “Their natural love for the society of children, and the superior gentleness and forbearance of their dispositions . . . lead them to mildness rather than severity, to the use of hope rather than of fear as a motive of action” (Blout, 1998, p. 18). According to Mann, these qualities made them ideal candidates for teaching. Yet, Mann had to speak to the sensibility of men and indicate that while women could be considered viable employees, they were no threat to males. Therefore, he also commented, “women’s affectional qualities outstripped their intellectual abilities, which made them quite suitable as teachers of the young” (Blout, 1998, p. 15). Blout also indicated that Mann felt:

Schools needed women teachers because they provided a cheap and readily available source of labor for the burgeoning common school enterprise. There were other benefits as well. Women would welcome the opportunity for independence; they would undertake teacher preparation in earnest; and once hired, they could easily be controlled, especially young, single women. (Blout, 1998, p. 6)

Hansot and Tyack (1981) also noted that Mann stated that women were “less intent on scheming for future honors or emoluments” (p. 10) than men. Out of economic necessity, at the turn of the nineteenth century, single women were permitted to enter the education profession, and they were paid less than their male counterparts. Shakeshaft (1989) noted that during the pre-Civil War era in Massachusetts, women were earning one-fourth of what their male counterparts earned. She also verified “in 1838 in Connecticut . . . men earned \$14.50 per month whereas women were paid \$5.75. In that same year in Massachusetts, men took home \$23.10 a month whereas women had to make do on \$6.49” (p. 26). Shakeshaft’s research further indicated that by 1880, 57.2%

of the teachers were women, and that by 1900, 70.1% were women. Blout (1998) reported similar findings when she stated, “In 1870, women held 60 percent of all teaching positions ... Three decades later in 1900, women held 70 percent of the teaching positions ... By 1920, the overall percentage of women educators peaked at 86 percent” (p. 36). Women not only found a new profession for their talents, they also dominated that profession. However, their rise in the profession did not come without obstacles.

Women in Teaching—A Monastic Life

Women faced many obstacles in the educational profession, including having to live with families and signing prohibitive contracts to obtain their positions. These contracts indicated the restrictions that were placed on these women. They had gained intellectual freedom, but they were still controlled by all male school boards. For instance, Shakeshaft (1998) cited research from 1936 that contained the following contract for female teachers:

I promise to abstain from all dancing, immodest dressing, and other conduct unbecoming a teacher and a lady. . . not to fall in love, to become engaged, or secretly married ... to sleep eight hours a night, to eat carefully, and to take every precaution to keep in the best of health. (p. 48)

Even with these conditions placed on them, many single women saw this as an opportunity to establish a profession outside the home, a means of supporting themselves, and a conduit to alleviate the financial burden of their families. So successful was their emergence into education that by 1905, females comprised 97.9% of elementary teaching positions and 61.7% of the elementary principalships. Further, women accounted for 64.2% of high school teachers and 5.7% of high school principalships (Hansot & Tyack, 1981). As women began proving themselves as viable, hardworking and dedicated, they

were also casting their eyes on the higher positions of the office of superintendent. As women gained the right to vote in local school elections, their confidence in their rights also grew, and this confidence gave impetus to one of the greatest events in American history: the women's suffrage movement.

Winning the Right to Vote

The women's suffrage movement was not an isolated, spontaneous moment in history. Women's activist groups had been working for years advocating equal rights for women on a number of issues, especially the right to vote in local school elections and to be elected to local educational positions. As these movements gained momentum, the men who had dominated the higher echelon of school administration began taking notice. The state and district superintendent positions were state elected offices, and since women were barred from voting in these elections, men had been electing men to these offices for years. Realizing that women would gain full suffrage, these men began campaigning for their offices to be appointed positions rather than elected positions, thus still securing their stronghold. Once full suffrage was achieved, women began winning state and county superintendent offices long held by men (Blout, 1998).

Women argued that since they comprised the majority of educational positions, they should be allowed to participate in school elections and be eligible to run for these positions. They argued that as single women, they were in control of their own property, and as property owners, they should have the right to vote in local elections concerning educational matters (Blout, 1998). So successful were they in campaigning for this right that by 1879, 16 states allowed women to hold elected school offices before granting them suffrage. Even New Hampshire, which had different qualifications for male and

female school administrators in 1858, granted women school suffrage rights in 1878. By 1896, there were 228 female county superintendents, 2 female state superintendents and 12 female city superintendents; by 1910, in 24 states primarily in the West and Midwest, female teachers had waged and won the right to vote in school elections (Blout, 1998).

Even before full suffrage was gained, Dr. Ella Flagg Young had been elected as Chicago's first female superintendent. In this role, she uncovered years of massive corruption. She discovered that the superintendent and school board of the Chicago school system had been receiving kickbacks from textbook publishers for years; they had been misusing school land for private, speculative ventures; there had been misuse of a National Education Association Trust Fund. The school board tried to dismiss her, but 4,000 women voters rallied for her, and she kept her job until 1915 (Blout, 1998).

Mrs. Angenette Peavey, the first state superintendent of Colorado in 1896, implied corruption in her biennial report to the governor when she stated, "The standard of teaching would be elevated just as soon as it was understood that a man or a woman was to be employed, not to pay a political debt, but to serve the public" (p. 9). Further, she indicated that state funds were misappropriated. She wrote,

In many instances the school fund is being wantonly and unrighteously wasted; men and women who have made a failure of their own lives and enterprises are to-day [sic] occupying these positions, and they are not only engendering factional differences, but are evading the law in every possible way in order to loot the treasury and rob the children of their rights, thereby menacing the life of our republic, for our safety depends upon the class of citizens who compose it. (Peevey, 1896, p.7)

Once women gained the right to vote, their numbers increased as county and state superintendents. Hansot and Tyack's (1981) research indicated that the number of female county superintendents had increased from 276 in 1900 to 857 in 1922, and by 1922, nine

states had already elected female state superintendents. Therefore, in these states, women were responsible for electing women to county and state superintendence. Shakeshaft (1989) noted, "Permitted to vote in school elections, members of women's groups and teacher organizations formed coalitions to ensure that female candidates would receive sufficient votes to win school elections" (pp. 13-14). Blout (1998) also cited an 1873 edition of the Kansas State Report that read:

As county superintendents, the verdict is that those [women] elected in this State have done their work faithfully and well, as well as the best and far better than many of the men. The superintendent hopes that this new field, as well as professional chairs in high schools and colleges, will remain open to all, male and female, in fair and honorable competition. (p. 52)

This was a new dawning for women that brought changes and legal challenges.

Even though women had won the right to vote in local elections, courts in some instances did not uphold their rights. As late as 1875, "the circuit court in Iowa ruled that Elizabeth Cook could not be Warren County superintendent despite the fact that she was elected by the citizens of the county" (Shakeshaft, 1989, p. 33). In another instance, the courts in Iowa voted in favor of a women's right to hold office. Julia Addington won the election for county superintendent, but her opponent filed suit declaring that as a woman she was not a citizen and therefore, she could not hold public office. However, the state attorney general ruled in her favor, and in 1876, Iowa revised its laws indicating that no one would be ineligible for any school office based on gender (Blout, 1998).

While it was a monumental victory for women to gain the privilege of voting in local school elections and to elect county female superintendents, the job itself was incredibly difficult. This job demanded traveling under difficult circumstances, a myriad of paperwork, and it was not financially rewarding. The county superintendent's position

was at the lower level of administrative positions, and many men did not seek this position because of its low pay and low status. Sometimes these courageous women were elected to this position by default. Unfortunately, history had given women the reputation of working harder for cheaper salaries, and therefore, their election was one of economics rather than valuing these women for their work.

A political scientist of the time stated that, “perhaps the salaries of county superintendents should be reduced to discourage men and therefore increase the number of women superintendents who were doing such excellent work” (Blout, 1998, p. 52). According to Shakeshaft (1989), no accurate records existed indicating how many women served as county superintendents. By the 1930s and 1940s, county superintendent jobs begin disappearing due to consolidation and closure of schools, and thus, women’s jobs in these positions also disappeared. Since no accurate records existed of how many women served in these positions, it is impossible to know how many women lost jobs. Yet, the one certainty was the decline of women in the superintendence.

Decline of Women Superintendents

Couch (2005) identified four reasons for the decline of women in the superintendence. First, as women gained full suffrage, the organizations that had supported these efforts disbanded. Second, before women gained the right to vote, the superintendent’s position was an elected position. After women gained the right to vote, legislatures turned this position into an appointed one, and therefore, men appointed men to this position, and thus, still kept women out of administration. Third, educational requirements changed to acquire this position, and universities limited the number of women in graduate programs, thus denying them access. Finally, consolidation of schools

limited the number of positions. Blout's (1998) research found that "The National Commission on School District Reorganization reported in 1947 that 104,000 local districts existed in the United States, though only a fraction employed superintendents" (p.123).

During the 1940s and 1950s, male teachers dropped by 56% due to World War II; school boards hired women to fill these positions (Shakeshaft, 1989). However, once men returned from the war, women were released from their positions so that men could be hired. Men returning from war were given government stipends to attend college and those that choose to study education quickly rose to the level of administrators. Further, colleges and universities limited the number of women that were accepted into educational graduate programs (Blout, 1998; Shakeshaft, 1989). However, the tumultuous 1960s would bring many changes that would support women's rights in employment, working conditions, and pay.

Under President John F. Kennedy's administration, the President's Commission on the Status of Women was established. The commission exposed the disparities in pay between men and women, and these findings gave impetus to the Equal Pay Act of 1963. In part, this law reads,

No employer having employees subject to any provisions of this section shall discriminate . . . on the basis of sex by paying wages to employees in such establishment at a rate less than the rate at which he pays wages to employees of the opposite sex. (Public law 88-38, Sec. 2 (d) (1))

Another law that attempted to ameliorate the inequality between the sexes in education was the Title IX legislation of 1972. This law indicated that, "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity

receiving Federal financial assistance” (Title IX, Sec. 1681 [a]). The very need for the enactment of this law revealed the inequities that existed in education. The strength of this law gave equal rights to women in the realm of education and allowed for federal penalties for non-compliance. Yet, even with the intervention of federal legislation, women remained underrepresented in educational administration throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

Hansot and Tyack (1981), Shakeshaft (1989), and Blout (1998) found that statistical information regarding the number of women and minorities in the superintendence during the 1980s and 1990s was severely lacking. As noted by these researchers, the lack of information during this time made it difficult if not impossible to discern if things were worsening for women or if the lack of information perpetuated the belief that things were better. The continued absence of women filling the superintendence would suggest the former rather than the latter.

Glass (1992) reported that the number of female superintendents in 1952 was 6.7%. By 1992, that number had dropped to 6%. Glass, et al.’s (2000) research indicated that in 1982, women held 7% of the superintendents’ positions. By 2000, that number had risen to 13.2% (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). Blout (1998) reported that of the four million professional educators in the United States in 1998, fewer than 2,000 of the administrative positions were held by females (Blout as cited in Glass et al., 2000). Glass and Franceschini’s (2007) report indicated that females held 21.7% of the superintendent positions. In 2010, Kowlaski et al. reported that women held a historical high 24.1% of the American school superintendences. While these numbers are encouraging, they still

presented a low number when compared to the number of women who are in the education profession.

Minority Women Administrators

Statistical information concerning minority superintendents is lacking (Alston, 2000; Couch, 2005; Ortiz, 1982; Shakeshaft, 1989). The minority ethnicity most written about in education is the African-American, and of those, little is known about the men and women of African descent who contributed to public education, especially those who served as administrators within segregated schools. Alston's (2005) research indicated that prior to the 1900s, it was illegal for African-Americans to learn to read, write, or attend school. However, during the period of enslavement, African-Americans clandestinely taught school between 12:00 am and 2 am (Collier-Thomas, 1982; Shakeshaft, 1989). Once African-Americans gained their independence, schooling became a priority. Collier-Thomas (1982) noted that according to the United States Census for 1890, 15,100 African-Americans were listed as teachers or professors. Of that number, 7,864 were identified as females. Collier-Thomas further indicated that by 1910 there were 22,547 African-American female teachers. Clifford (1982) reported that in 1900, 2% of African-American women were employed as teachers. Also in 1910, the average African-American school only operated for four months out of the year and no African-American schools offered course work beyond the seventh grade (Amott & Matthaei, 1991). Alston (2000) also noted that African-American female teachers taught in segregated schools for meager sums of money. Pioneering African-American women were not deterred, and many started private schools. So successful were they in the endeavor that by 1912, there were 14 African-American women's colleges. Amott and

Matthaei (1991) cited a 1904 article that indicated African-American women had raised \$14 million dollars, and these funds were used to educate children as well as 25,000 African-American teachers. Toppo (2005) reported that in 1954, “82,000 Black teachers were responsible for teaching as many as 2 million Black children” (p. 676). However, 11 years later that number was reduced due to the court case of Brown vs. Board of Education.

In Brown vs. Board of Education, the United States Supreme Court ruled that separate schools for African-American students did not mean equality of facilities and learning opportunities. This ruling paved the way for desegregation. The negative impact on this ruling was that segregation meant the consolidation of African-American schools, and many African-American lost their jobs. By 1965, the number of African-American teachers and administrators was reduced to 38,000 (Alston, 2005). By combining several research sources, Jackson (1999) was able to construct a chart that showed the number of African-American women superintendents from 1910 through 1996.

Table 2

Number of Women Superintendents and Black Women Superintendents

Year	# Districts	Number of Black Women Superintendents
1910	5,254	n/a
1970	10,380	3
1982	13,715	11 (Arnez)
1983	n/a	15 (Ebony)
1985	16,000	29 (Revere)
1989	11,007 ^a	14 (Bell and Chase)
1991	10,683 ^a	19 (Bell and Chase)
1993	14,000 ^b	32 (Jackson)
1995	14,000 ^b	45 (Alston)
1996	14,000 ^b	33 (Jackson)

^a Bell and Chase (1993) used only K-12 districts in their studies

^b Approximate Figures from AASA

In separate research, Revere (1986), Alston (2000), and Kennedy (2008) found that before 1956, documentation on African-American women in the superintendence was almost non-existent. However, one documented case of an African-American woman superintendent was that of Velma Dolphin Ashley who served as superintendent of Boley, Oklahoma, from July 1, 1944 until 1956. Velma's husband, Lillard Ashley, replaced her and served as superintendent from 1956 to 1976. During the 1970s, three more African-American women became superintendents in Connecticut, Illinois, and Washington, D.C.

Revere's (1986) research differed slightly from Jackson's (1999) when she reported that in 1978 there were five African-American female superintendents, rising to 11 in 1982, 16 in 1983, 29 in 1984, and 25 in 1985. Haven, Adkinson and Bagley (1980) reported that by 1978, only 3.4% of administrative positions were held by African-American females. However, in a separate study by Hodgkinson and Montenegro (as cited in Tallerico, 2000), they noted different results. They found that in 1980, only 1.0% of all superintendences were occupied by women. In 1988, that number had risen to 4%, and by 1998, that number was 12%. In combining the minority ethnicities of African-American, Hispanic, American Indian, and Asian or Pacific Islander, the numbers showed an increase from 2.2% in 1981-82 to 5% in 1998. In 2000, Glass et al. indicated that woman held 13.2% of American school superintendence. Of that 13.2%, the female superintendents in office were identified as: 91.6% Caucasian, 5.1% African-American, 1.3% Hispanic, 0.7% Native-American, and 0.7% were categorized as other (Glass, et al., 2000). By 2007, 6.13% of the superintendents in America were listed as minority. Of this percentage for both men and women, 1.1% of the minority superintendents were

American Indian or Alaskan Native, 0.2% were Asian, 2.0% identified as African-American, 1.4% were identified as Hispanic or Latino, and 1.4% were listed as other (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). The data show that there were only modest gains for minorities. Ortiz (1982) found that the majority of Mexican-American superintendents were located in large districts with large minority student populations. Couch (2005) indicated that with the Latino population being the fastest growing minority group in the United States, there should also be a rise in the number of Latinos or Latinas in the superintendence. Yet, this is not the case, as Latinos and Latinas are underrepresented at this level of public school administration. Clearly, research needs to concentrate on what areas can facilitate minorities wanting to seek this position. One area of research is career paths leading to this office.

Career Paths of Women Accessing the Superintendence

One factor that contributes to female underrepresentation in the public school superintendence is the career paths women have chosen. Researchers have indicated that the most typical path of women aspiring to the public school superintendence has been teacher, elementary principal, central office staff, and then the superintendence (Glass, 1992; Glass, et al., 2000; Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Grogan & Brunner 2005; Gupton, & Slick, 1995; Ortiz, 1982; Shakeshaft, 1989). However, Pavon-Nelson (as cited in Johnson, 1995) indicated that the most direct path to the superintendence is through the secondary principalship, and that elementary principals “showed the lowest mobility and fewest years of administrative experience when compared to the secondary principals” (p. 20). Tallerico (2000) commented that the “gates” to the superintendence are wide open for those who have had prior experience or who have served as high school principals.

The “gates” were only moderately open to those who have served as elementary principals. Edson (1981) found that serving in the elementary principal was rarely a path that led to the superintendence. However, more recent studies indicate that an increasing number of women are preparing for the superintendent position by choosing career paths that more directly lead to that position.

Brunner and Grogan (2007) indicated that of the 2,500 female respondents in her study, 50% had followed the traditional path of teacher, principal, central office, and finally the superintendence. She also found that of the 3,000 female central office personnel respondents, 40% were aspiring to the superintendence with another 70% indicating that they had completed or were completing their superintendence certification. However, choosing a career path and preparing for the superintendence is not a guarantee of obtaining the position.

Brunner and Grogan (2007) found that women of color had held more administrative positions than White women before they attained the public school superintendence. They indicated, “On average, White women described having had experience in four different administrative areas compared to five or six for women of color” (p. 112) before reaching the top administrative position. Yet, even with more experience, Brunner and Grogan also found that “women of color were twice as likely as White women to wait four or more years for a superintendency” (Brunner & Grogan, 2007, p. 113). Even with all of the experience, certification, and degrees, women are not assured of being hired. Ultimately, “gatekeepers” who are search consultants, search committees, and/or school boards have the final word in who will serve at this level.

Gatekeepers

Many school districts hire a search firm or a search consultant as part of a search committee process in hiring superintendents. Tallerico (2000) indicated,

From the school board's perspective, [a] quality search consultant is the person who best captures and represents its interests in the gatekeeping process. Ideally, the consultant advances or rejects candidates according to both formal and informal criteria defined by the school district. (p. 20)

However, Brunner and Grogan (2007) noted that search firms or gatekeepers play a significant role in whether women are hired. They found that only 23% of women in their study were hired by districts that used search firms. Riehl and Byrd (1997) also found that when search firms were used, "women's predicted probability of becoming a school administrator generally remained below that for comparable men" (p. 60). Glass, et al. (2000) also surveyed gatekeepers in their study. They found that fewer than 40% of the gatekeepers in their study indicated that they had worked with women's organization to actively encourage women to apply for the superintendence. However, once women were hired, many were hired in smaller districts and in the case of women of color, they were typically hired in districts that had a predominantly minority student population and/or in districts that were experiencing difficulties (Grogan, 2005).

Career Patterns

Another contributing factor to the underrepresentation of women is the limited geographic regions in which they are most likely to be hired (Gupton & Slick, 1995). Once women attained the superintendence, they tended to be overrepresented in rural areas and underrepresented in middle-sized districts. Glass (1992) and Tallerico and Burstyn (1996) found that more women than men practice in small districts (fewer than 300 students). However, more men than women serve in the middle range schools with

enrollment of 300 to 24,999 students. Women of color tended to be hired in troubled urban areas or older suburban areas as change agents. Venable (as cited in Jackson 1999), Alston (1999), and Grogan (2005) found that African-American women administrators served in poorly maintained and badly managed schools in urban school districts with high minority enrollment. Glass et al. (2000) noted that minority female superintendents served in economically depressed areas, and they were not likely to have an opportunity to serve in districts that had affluent communities. Jackson's (1999) research found that the same trends held true for Hispanic women. Hispanic women were more likely to be hired in areas with increased Hispanic populations. Jackson stated,

The school district, through the superintendent, relates to its community by demonstrating its improvement. This is especially obvious when Hispanic female superintendents are hired specifically to 'straighten out' the school district's budget, personnel, and association with the community members and groups. (p. 563)

In Grogan's 2005 study of women superintendents, she found that the majority of White women superintendents and women of color believed they were hired to be instructional leaders and change agents. She noted that African-American women superintendents were twice as likely as their White female counterparts to be hired in order to lead reform movements within the districts in which they were hired.

Key Barriers

Barriers for women accessing and maintaining the public school superintendence is a key issue. The educational literature documented a myriad of barriers that women encountered in accessing and surviving the public school superintendence. With only 24.1% of women serving in the superintendence (Kowalski, et al., 2010), the proverbial glass ceiling still exists for women (Washington, Jones, & Wilson, 2010).

Key to a female or minorities being hired by a district is the recruitment practices of the district. Glass (1992) found that among the 1,724 respondents from a sample size of 2,536, a little more than half indicated that their districts actively recruited minorities to the superintendence. In Glass's (1992) study, 43.8% of the women and 59.7% of minorities thought discrimination in terms of recruitment existed in the hiring process. In a similar survey conducted by Glass et al. (2000), 71.4% of the women and 46.9% of the minorities felt that school boards not actively recruiting women was a problem. Brunner and Grogan (2007) indicated that 86% of women of color and 73% of white women superintendent in their study felt that school boards did not actively recruit women. Not only was recruitment a barrier, but those who do not have an advocate or sponsor was identified as a barrier in accessing the superintendence.

Not having a sponsorship was identified as a key barrier to women attaining the superintendence (Alston, 2000; Mendez-Morse, 1999; Tallerico, 1999). Sponsorship was defined as a person within the field who would advocate for the female superintendent candidate. Mendez-Morse (2004) found that female administrators who lacked sponsorship and mentorship were hired to lead schools that were predominately minority student campuses, and these women found that they encountered racial and gender stereotyping. Glass (1992) suggested that sponsors have a tendency to hire those most like themselves and that meant a white, middle-aged male. He found that the "public school superintendent is easily the most male dominated of any of the executive profession ...because school board members [tend] to select superintendents who have ... the same type of background and professional experiences as their predecessors" (p. 39). Hudson (as cited in Tallerico, 1999) indicated "White males may be trusted even if they

apply through formal job routes, while blacks and women must first prove themselves and be known before they are considered for superintendencies” (p. 36). Women who were hired indicated that another barrier was the lack of role models and mentors once the position of superintendent was attained.

According to several studies, one of the greatest barriers White women and women of color encountered was the lack of role models and mentors (Alston, 2000; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Glass, et al., 2000; Kowalski & Stouder, 1999; Mendez-Morse, 2004; Tallerico, 1999). Mendez-Morse (2004) defined a role model “as someone whose characteristics or traits another person would want to emulate; a mentor was defined as someone who actively helps, supports or teaches someone else how to do a job so that she will succeed” (p. 561). In Brunner and Grogan’s (2007) study, they found that 90% of women of color and 71% of White women felt that lack of mentors was a key barrier in attaining the position as well as a concern once the superintendence was reached. Another barrier women identified was gender bias.

Gender bias has been a persistent problem for women before and during their superintendence (Blout, 1998; Hansot & Tyack, 1982; Shakeshaft, 1989). Researchers indicated that the existence of gender bias was due to cultural orientation of women (Banuelos, 2008; Blout, 1998; Shakeshaft, 1989). Bailey (2004) indicated that socialization structures within society may limit women’s ability to access and maintain educational leadership positions. Since men have historically held the majority of superintendent positions, women who enter this position are judged and held to the same gender expectations as their male counterparts. Yet, women struggle with the inevitable paradox. When they show the aggressive, hierarchical leadership style associated with

male leadership, they are viewed as too aggressive, and when they practice the collaborative, inclusive leadership style attributed to women, they are viewed as too passive (Bailey, 2004; Hansot & Tyack, 1981; Scott, 1989; Shakeshaft, 1989; Tallerico, 2000). Tallerico (2000) cited the gender bias discussion of a school member who questioned the hiring of a female superintendent: The board member stated, “Can she do discipline? Can she do budget? Can she be tough enough to do whatever needs to be done? You know, what the hell does she know if a damn school bus breaks down?” (p. 32).

Miller, Washington, and Fiene (2006) indicated that social scientists have developed three models to explain the reasons for the underrepresentation of women in the public school superintendence. The models posited have been called the meritocracy model (Estler, 1975), the individual perspective model or discrimination model (Schmuck, 1980), and the internal barrier model or women’s place model (Hansot & Tyack, 1981; Shakeshaft, 1989).

Similar to Gilligan’s (1982) research, the meritocracy model as described by Estler (1975), suggested that women’s social-psychological development is the reason for gender bias that is a persistent barrier for women. This model’s premise is that the most competent people have been chosen for the superintendence, and since men are predominantly chosen, then women must not be as competent. Tallerico and Burstyn (1996) suggested that the meritocracy model assumed that women are “not assertive enough; they don’t want the power; they lack self-confidence; they don’t aspire to line positions; they’re unwilling to play the game or work the system” (p. 643). This model noted that women are caught in a “Catch 22” position. If women displayed the traits

associated with transactional male leadership—assertiveness, competitiveness, hierarchical, and task-oriented management style—they were viewed as too masculine. However, if they exhibited those traits associated with transformational leadership—nurturance, emotionality, and a people orientation—they were seen as too passive. Miller et al. (2006) indicated this is a double bind of “Damned if you do, Damned if you don’t” (p. 222). They stated that “Thus feminine leadership traits, such as collaboration, alternative use of power, and people-and process-oriented skills, are too ‘soft’ for leadership; women displaying forceful, traditional male traits are too flawed as females to be leaders” (p. 222).

The second model that attempts to explain the underrepresentation of women in the public school superintendence is the discrimination model. This model attempts to explain the difference in male and female leadership styles not from a social-psychological perspective but from differences due to career opportunities that are available to men but not to women. Tallerico and Burstyn (1996) suggested that this model explained that women’s psychological attributes do not hinder them but that their limited opportunity to achieve the public school superintendence does. Hansot and Tyack (1981) indicated that in public school systems “women behave in self-limiting ways, not because they were socialized as females but because they are locked into low-power, low-visibility, dead-end jobs” (p. 7). In addition, the jobs that women have in public education typically do not lead directly to the superintendence. Glass and Franceschini (2007) found that the career path that leads to the superintendence is serving as high school principal. Yet, this job has historically been male dominated, and therefore, women have served in elementary principalships, as curriculum directors, and as assistant

superintendents before becoming superintendents. Miller et al. (2006) also noted that men who become superintendents have been in highly visible jobs such as the secondary principalship or coaching in which they had direct contact with the power structure of the community and have had more opportunities to network than women.

Another discriminatory issue is the gender selectivity of gatekeepers (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Tallerico, 1999). These researchers indicated that gatekeepers are typically male school board members or former superintendents who have become search consultants and sponsors from within the public school organization. These people ultimately control the selection of the superintendent. Research indicated that school boards and search consultants tend to hire people like themselves, White males, thus limiting the opportunities for qualified female applicants (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996). Miller et al. (2006) indicated preferential treatment explained the gender disparity in the superintendence. They further noted “women were isolated by the ‘good ol’ boys’ networks which reinforced the attitudes and philosophy of school boards. These school boards, who appoint superintendents, are composed largely of men” (p. 225).

Miller et al. (2006) referred to the third model as the women’s place model. This model suggested that society must take responsibility for the inequities between males and females in the public school superintendence. Blout (1998) and Shakeshaft (1989) noted that from women’s inception into education, there was androcentric bias.

Shakeshaft noted that androcentrism is

Viewing the world and shaping reality from a male perspective. It [androcentrism] is the elevation of the masculine to the level of the universal and the ideal and the honoring of men and the male principle above women and female. (p. 94)

Bell and Chase (1995) noted that because of stereotypical views of women as caretakers, and because males dominated educational administration, women must learn to use the power of the superintendent's position to prove they are capable leaders.

Power

A key issue that was identified in the educational literature was female superintendents' perception of power. Amedy (1999) suggested that power is the authority to make decisions, implement these decisions, and hand out rewards and punishment. Power for women can present challenges on several levels. First, as noted by Halloran (2007), "Power enables one to control the actions and choices of others, thereby making it a critical factor in leadership" (p. 42). Halloran further noted that one reason men and women use power differently is their socialization orientation. According to Halloran, men were socialized to be competitive and aggressive and women were not. Therefore, women entering the superintendence associated power with dominance and control (Brunner, 2000; Katz, 2003). Halloran also suggested that since the public school superintendence has traditionally been male dominated, women were expected to adhere to the traditional values of power as established by men. Rosener (1990) noted that during the "first wave" of women entering the superintendence, the women tried to emulate men in order to succeed. However, women were frustrated by this style of power as it was in conflict with their natural way of leading. Rosener noted that during the "second wave" of women entering the superintendence, women adapted to their own style of power. In her study, she found that females did not feel comfortable exercising transactional, hierarchical power, but women's form of power was "interactive" or transformational. With the use of transformational leadership, women derived power by empowering others. The female superintendents in her study indicated they practiced

power by encouraging active participation, and they indicated that collegiality enhanced performance. Rosener indicated that women leaders viewed their time with their staff as an investment in people. The women leaders also were willing to share information and power with others. Rosener indicated that power sharing accomplished several things. First, she found that it created loyalty “by signaling to coworkers and subordinates that they are trusted and their ideas respected” (p. 123). She further noted that empowering employees gave them a sense of being an integral part of the decision making process. Second, it kept the leaders well informed on issues before they became problems. Brunner’s (2000) study of female superintendents concurred with Rosener’s findings.

Brunner’s (2000) research about female superintendents’ perception of power indicated that women felt uncomfortable with the traditional use of power. In 2000, Brunner interviewed 12 female superintendents in the Northeast, Midwest, and Southeast regions of the United States. Her sampling included both urban and rural superintendents whose student populations ranged from 1,400 to 130,000. The superintendents were all Euro-American and their ages ranged from the mid-40s to late 50s. One of the research interests was how female superintendents perceived power. When Brunner asked the female superintendents to define and discuss power, she found the conversation occurred along two “trajectories” (p. 84). The first trajectory, which made the women in her study feel uncomfortable, was traditional power that was viewed as control, command, and domination over others. In defining power along these guidelines, Raymond (1986) stated that traditional power was regarded as, “Something to be avoided, something that corrupts, and something that is always used over and against others. ... Many women

having been victims of patriarchal power have assumed uncritically that power itself corrupts” (p. 193).

The second trajectory was the style of power women in this study used. Power in the second trajectory was defined as the ability to accomplish goals through the mutual exchange of interests and concerns among different groups within an organization. The women indicated that they practiced collective power, which they defined as increasing their ability to reach common goals that they would not have been able to reach individually. In her study, Katz (2003) used Rosener’s leadership instrument to conduct further studies on how women perceive power.

Katz’s (2003) study of 148 female superintendents found that leaders who got extraordinary results were those who exercised power by (a) challenging the process in identifying opportunities, experimenting, and risk-taking; (b) inspiring a shared vision; (c) encouraging and facilitating collaboration; (d) setting an example through modeling and planning small victories; and (e) building self-esteem through celebrating accomplishments. In conducting her research, Katz used a leadership instrument developed by Rosener that measured five sources of power. These powers were identified as

Legitimate power—having a position or title that carries authority; expert power—possessing special expertise that is in short supply and high demand reward power—the ability to reward and punish; referent power—having charisma or some personal attribute that other wish to emulate and coercive power—the ability to coerce. (p. 10)

Katz’s study found that female superintendents exercised power in the following order (a) referent power, (b) expert power, (c) coercive power, and (d) legitimate power.

Whether women were in large or small districts, they also felt that a key to power was

establishing a shared vision for the district and enlisting others to share and carry out this vision. However, the study found that the size of the district and the superintendent's years of experience had a great influence on their use of power. Women in the larger school districts used "challenging the process" and "inspiring a shared vision" more than women in mid-sized and smaller districts. Women superintendents in mid-sized school districts used power by "modeling the way." Women with three to five years of administrative experiences used "expert power" as a source of influence more than women with less experience in this position (Katz, 2003).

Leadership Style

A key issue in the public school superintendence is leadership style. Jim Collins (2001) stated a leader must be committed to producing the best long-term results. Linda Coughlin (2005) echoed this same sentiment when she sagaciously stated,

It is hard work to locate, clarify, articulate and reflect our values, and it is harder still to consistently practice those values as we grapple with life's demands, paradoxes, and polarities. Yet doing so is absolutely necessary work—work that fosters courage, fortitude and resilience to lead with conviction and impact especially when our resolve may be tested. (p. 13)

In addition, Sharpnack (2005) noted, "Leaders are in the context-shifting business. This is how they affect significant and lasting change. They are able, by instinct or training, to see that context drives process and structure" (p. 49). The literature indicated that male and female superintendents practice different leadership styles. Researchers indicated that men have traditionally used "transactional" leadership, and women have used "transformational" leadership (Barbie, 2005; Bass, 1985; Carella, 2000; Colflesh, 1996; Halloran, 2007; Katz, 2003).

In describing transactional leadership, Rosener (1990) indicated that male leaders “view job performance as a series of transactions with subordinates—exchanging rewards for services rendered or punishment for inadequate performance” (p. 120). Men were likely to rely on the power and authority of their position. Bass (1982) characterized transactional leadership as (a) goals are set with subordinates, (b) supervisors decide what performance standards must be met, and (c) telling subordinates what they did right and wrong. Bass further indicated that “transactional leadership is contingent reinforcement. The leader and follower agree on what the follower needs to do to be rewarded or to avoid punishment” (p. 121). The transactional leadership style is also associated with hierarchical leadership or a command and control style of supervision in which directives are issued from leaders to subordinates to be carried out (Kennedy, 2008; Rosener, 1990). Conversely, female leaders practice transformational leadership.

Rosener (1990) described women’s use of transformational leadership as helping employees give up self-interest for the broader goals of the group. She further stated that women leaders enhance employees’ self-worth by encouraging participation and shared power and information. Finding win-win situations is at the core of transformational leadership. In transformational leadership, the female superintendent’s key role is facilitating relationships, building communication networks, sharing power through a conduit of reciprocated information, and encouraging interaction among all groups (Helgeson, 1990; Kennedy, 2008). Barbie (2004) indicated that “feminine principles such as caring, nurturance, compassion, empathy, intuition, listening, interdependence, and inspiration are essential to the central player in the web-like structure of leadership” (p.

42). Helgesen (1995) called transformational leadership the “web of inclusion” (p. 19).

Helgesen indicated,

Since webs are circular rather than pyramidal, those who emerge in them as leaders tend to be people who feel comfortable being in the center of things rather than at the top, who prefer building consensus to issuing orders, and who place a low value on the kind of symbolic perks and marks of distinction that define success in the hierarchy. This preference on the part of web-style leaders infuses their organizations with a collegial atmosphere, which in turn enables people to focus upon what needs to be done rather than who has the authority. (p. 20-21)

She further stated that the web had distinct qualities that benefited women’s style of leading. Helgesen noted that webs operated by means of open communication across levels. Second, webs erased distinctions between origin and execution. Third, webs created lasting networks that distributed power of the organization. Next, webs served as a vehicle for constant reorganization and embraced the world outside the organization. Finally, webs evolved through a process of trial and error. Research indicated that the web of inclusion, transformational leadership practiced by females is due in part to their social-psychological development.

Researchers indicated that another key issue that influenced women’s way of leading was their social-psychological development (Barbie, 2004; Colflesh, 1996; Gilligan, 1982). Gillian’s (1982) research found that women defined themselves through relationships, and women judged themselves through “ethics of care” (p. 74). She noted that at the core of the ethics of care is a responsibility and interconnectedness to others. She stated, “When the concern with care extends from an injunction not to hurt others to an ideal of responsibility in social relationships, women begin to see their understanding of relationships as a source of moral strength” (p. 149). The ethics of care involves inclusion, sustainability, and honoring others. Colflesh (1996) found themes in her study

of the social-psychological development of women. Her study identified women's need for relationships and a sense of connectedness to others. In addition, she asserted that women needed to capture their own spirit of self and to be recognized for their individual abilities and competencies. Colflesh used Gilligan's earlier research as a backdrop to her study. She commented that Gilligan

Saw women's development as leading to a morality based on responsibility and relationships among people rather than an approach focused on the more masculine values of separation and competition. Unlike their male counterparts, women viewed their professional lives as intertwined with their personal lives and emphasized ongoing processes when they described those integrated lives. (p. 13)

Barbie's (2004) research concurred with that of Gilligan and Colflesh. Barbie indicated "interrelatedness, connectedness and caring are the lens through which women interpret their world; at the same time, work or working is important for identity and self-definition" (p. 24). Gilligan, Colflesh, and Barbie's research found that women's identities were defined by relationships and a standard of responsibility and care. Even though women are making gains in the public school superintendence and establishing their transformational leadership style, some have chosen to leave the superintendence.

Females Exiting the Superintendence

While no specific statistics are available on women leaving the superintendence, Glass and Franceschini (2007) indicated that the tenure for public school superintendents is relatively short. Glass (1992) reported that 6.6% of women were superintendents, and the average length of tenure was 6.47 years. He suggested that the average contract for a superintendent is three years; therefore, superintendents leave their office in the second or third contract period. In citing the work of Allan Ornstein, Glass's report noted that in 1990, of the 86 largest school districts' superintendents in the United States, 41 had

served less than five years and 22 less than one year. Glass et al. (2000) reported that 13.2% of the nation's public school superintendents were female. They also noted that of the four million educators in the nation, fewer than 2,000 women serve in executive leadership positions. The average tenure in the 2000 school year was up from the 1992 data, indicating that superintendents serve 8.5 years in the superintendent's position. Glass et al. (2000) noted that women were hired as change agents, and once this change was implemented, women tended to leave the district in which they were hired. In addition, women were more likely to leave a district due to changing school boards.

Glass and Franceschini (2007) indicated that the tenure rate for superintendents was 5.5 years. This was down 3 years from the 2000 report. In Glass and Franceschini's (2007) study, 63.5% of the superintendents had served 5 years or less in their current superintendence, and 50% of their respondents indicated that this was their first superintendence. Nationally, the yearly turnover rate for superintendents is 16.7%. This would mean that in any given year, approximately 2,348 superintendents are being hired. Of this number, approximately 509 would be women. This data suggested that in 2012 there will be a large number of superintendents leaving, relocating, or being hired for the first time.

In 1996, Tallercio and Burstyn conducted a study on why women exit the superintendence. They defined exit either as women who were non-renewed, or those who resigned voluntarily or under coercion. They located 20 women who had exited the superintendence from nine different states but only 10 of these women agreed to be interviewed. Their finding indicated that the district size and the nature of the superintendent's job played a large part in these women exiting the superintendence. As

noted by other researchers, women were mostly hired in small districts, or in the case of minority women, were hired in financially troubled urban districts with large minority populations. (Glass, et al., 2000; Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Ortiz, 1982). The superintendents in this study cited the many demands of the superintendence as one of the reasons for leaving. In Tallerico and Burstyn's (1996) study, one rural female superintendent wrote,

You know, everybody thinks the city districts are so difficult to manage. But when you're a superintendent in a small district and all by yourself, you have a lot of the same tasks. Not the numbers, of course, but the same tasks: regulations to the state. And you do it all yourself. In a larger district, you have several assistants to divide it up between. And most women going into the superintendence are going into those very small districts. ... But it's certainly not an easy job to start in a small district. (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996, p. 651)

Other issues in the rural superintendence that contributed to women exiting were multi-layered responsibilities and challenges. The women in Tallerico and Burstyn's (1996) study cited the lack of revenues, expanded job demands, physical remoteness from peers and support systems, lack of professional development training and demands on time as determining factors in their decision to leave. These superintendents indicated that 15 to 17 hour days were not uncommon. One woman lamented, "You're just so up to your ears in alligators that you don't have time for those activities that I had before in other jobs" (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996, p. 651). The long hours created an overwhelming sense of fatigue and took away from personal family commitments. These superintendents were not dissatisfied with many of the tasks they had to coordinate and facilitate, but they felt their training could be better utilized.

Another key issue that caused women in Tallerico and Burstyn's (1996) study to leave the superintendence was stereotypical images of women and their ability to lead.

Tallerico and Burstyn (1996) stated,

Our research suggests a pattern in which stereotypical images of what a socially acceptable leader looks like and does worked against many of the women, creating obstacles to trust, acceptance, and credibility and contributing to their feelings of stress and disenchantment with the job. (p. 654)

These women believed they had less credibility than men, and they felt they had to always be proving themselves as competent leaders.

In describing women seeking and then exiting the superintendence before the end of their careers, Beekley (1999) used the poignant metaphor of magical red shoes.

A young girl becomes enamored with a magical pair of red shoes. She puts them on against the warnings and disapproval of others, only to be danced to near death by these shoes. At last, she begs the executioner to cut off her feet and the shoes so that she may escape. The girl ends up a cripple and never again wishes for red shoes. (p. 161)

Beekley indicated that women seeking the public school superintendence may run the risk of dancing in red shoes. Her research indicated that the consuming nature of this job with its inherent challenges, gender bias, high visibility, and demands make it a dance that some women have chosen to sit out.

In requesting women to be part of her research, Beekley (1999) encountered the same issues as Tallerico and Burnstyn (1996). Beekley located 16 female superintendents from across the Midwest who had exited the superintendence voluntarily. Women who had left the superintendence were reticent about discussing their tenure. Of those women, 10 refused to be interviewed indicating that their experiences were "too painful to talk about" or they did not wish to "dredge all that up again" (p. 162).

Ultimately, four of the women agreed to be interviewed. These women faced many of the

same issues as any superintendent—school board relations, internal personnel conflicts, stress on family time and budget problems—but these women also felt that they experienced gender discrimination, marginalization, public scrutiny, and challenged credibility.

For the women in this study, discrimination came in the form of exclusion from networking opportunities, social events and open verbal attacks from male board members and male community members who resented females in a leadership role. Several of the women in the study suggested that authority and power were marginalized when the board refused to support them concerning personnel issues. A key issue identified by the participants of this study was the high visibility and public scrutiny of the job. One participant commented that she tired of living in a “fishbowl” and another commented that, “even if you would go to gatherings, you are always the superintendent—you cannot escape the damn role . . . I don’t care what you’re doing . . . you’re on. People quote what you say—it doesn’t matter what it’s about” (Beekley, 1999, p. 166). The women of this study chose to take off the magical shoes and leave the dance floor forever.

Summary

Discerning the reasons for the underrepresentation of women in the public school superintendence is a challenge. Women’s academic training and career aspirations are not enough in seeking and attaining the position. Statistics indicate that a woman is handicapped if she does not become a secondary principal as she climbs the career ladder. Yet, Grogan’s (2005) study may indicate that this will change because more women are aspiring to this position. Regardless of how well a woman prepares for the

superintendence, gatekeepers in the form of search consultants and school boards may be the biggest barrier to overcome. Certainly, one way to overcome this career bias is through sponsorships and mentorships. Gender bias has historically been a reoccurring problem for women.

Once women attain the superintendence they must be aware of the power of this position and through their transformational leadership style, use this power to empower others. While some women have succumbed to the pressures of this high profile leadership position, others embrace the vast opportunities that they have to make a difference in public school education.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

There is not one big cosmic meaning for all, there is only the meaning we each give to our life, an individual meaning, and individual plot, like an individual novel, a book for each person. Anais Nin

This chapter describes the research method chosen for this study. In addition, the chapter includes a discussion of qualitative research and the qualitative method of narrative inquiry used to complete this project. The chapter also explains participant selection, the data collection and analysis process, and the trustworthiness and confirmability for this study.

Introduction

The purpose of this narrative study was to investigate the life stories of a group of ethnically diverse female superintendents and describe the events that led them to the superintendence as well as describe their day-to-day experiences in this position. In addition, from their stories, I was interested in finding inferences that would encourage, inform, and support other women seeking and entering this position. For this study, I interviewed five ethnically diverse female superintendents. The research questions that guided this research were:

- I. What are the life stories of a group of ethnically diverse female superintendents that led them to the public school superintendence?
- II. How do they describe their day-to-day experiences in this position?

- III. Based on their experiences as female superintendents, what can be inferred that will encourage, inform, and support other women seeking and entering the superintendence?

Methodological Approach

Given the type of research questions posited, qualitative research was the most appropriate method to allow the women to tell their stories. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003), qualitative researchers seek to answers questions that stress how life experiences are created and given meaning. In addition, Creswell (2009) indicated that during the evolving process of qualitative research, the key idea is to learn from participants. To that end, the participants should be studied in a naturalistic setting that allows their unpredictable and unfolding stories to emerge and to evolve (Krull, 2011). In qualitative research, the focus is on the meaning that the participant places on the experience or issue under study (Creswell, 2007).

Key to the success of qualitative research is the researcher/participant relationship. Moustakas (1994) indicated that the participant/researcher relationship has a direct impact on the trustworthiness of the qualitative research. Moustakas suggested that there are three primary processes that contribute to the development of relationships during the data collection process. First, the researcher must be willing to immerse herself into another person's world non-judgmentally. In this stage of "Being-In" the participant's world, the researcher enters with the intention of understanding and unconditionally accepting the participants' perceptions. Moustakas suggested that in the second stage of "Being-For," the researcher is an advocate for the person's right to express thoughts, opinions, and ideas. Moustakas indicated that the stage of "Being-

With” involves a high level of trust and reciprocity in that “Being-With means listening and hearing the other’s feelings, thoughts, objectives ... there is in Being-With, a sense of joint enterprise—two people fully involved, struggling, exploring [and] sharing” (p. 84).

Another key characteristic of qualitative research is ethical standards. Smith (1990) noted that ethical standards in qualitative research involve a complex set of ideals governing how individuals should relate to one another in different contexts. Shank (2002) indicated that when using the qualitative method, one’s mantra should be the Latin dictum—*primum non nocere*: First, do no harm. Haverkamp (2005) noted that “What makes research ‘ethical’ is not a characteristic of the design or procedures, but of our individual decisions, actions, relationships, and commitments. (p. 147)

Another ethical issue is that of informed consent. Informed consent is the right of the research subject(s) to be informed about the “nature and consequences of the experiments in which they are involved” (Christians, 2005, p. 138). However, due to the emergent nature of qualitative research, it is impossible to identify “all elements that might be relevant to a participant’s decision to consent” (Haverkamp, 2005, p. 154). Therefore, it is the responsibility of the researcher to monitor consent and keep the participants informed of their rights. Further, a code of ethics should safeguard the participants’ privacy, and the participants and researcher should have a clear understanding about confidentiality. Lichtman (2006) encapsulated the researcher’s ethical responsibility when she stated, “Researchers observe not only participants but also themselves, which allows them to document how their presence affects the research process and its products” (p. 58).

The participants for this study were given the opportunity to decide the “natural setting” for their interviews. Three of the women chose to be interviewed in their offices; two of the participants were interviewed in their homes. A relationship was initially established through multiple phone calls. Once I met with each of the women, a rapport was established due to the fact that I had served as superintendent. Each of the participants felt comfortable discussing budget, mandates, personnel, and district issues with me. As part of the project approval process approved through Colorado State University’s Institutional Review Board, each participant signed an informed consent form, and the participants’ identities were concealed. To ensure anonymity, each woman in this study was given a pseudonym that was used throughout the project. The districts where these women are serving or have served as superintendents were not identified.

Narrative Inquiry

The qualitative methodology that guided this research project was narrative inquiry. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative inquiry is a means of defining one’s lived experiences through storytelling. The researcher becomes more than an inquirer who asks questions, and the participants do not merely answer questions. Rather, the researcher becomes a listener, and the participants become storytellers of their own lives (Riessman, 2008). Narrative inquiry, then, is a collaborative experience between the researcher and participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 2007; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Riessman, 2008). According to Chase (2005),

Narrative is retrospective meaning making—the shaping or ordering of experience. Narrative is a way of understanding one’s own and other’s actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, and of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time. (p. 656)

Narrative inquiry was used to understand the complexities of the lived experiences and the interpretation that the participants gave to their experiences. Chase (2005) indicated, “Narrative is about how one experiences the world and how one evaluates that experience” (p. 656). Narratives allow the participants to express emotions connected to events and even explore why they have chosen select events to share (Riessman, 2008). Further, narrative allows the participants to share those moments that have shaped their lives and allows them to understand the events and the social and cultural nuances that have shaped or added meaning to their experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Chase, 2005). Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) and Riessman (2008) noted that for the narrator, the process of narration is guided by the power of memories and the value of those memories may be complicated by a need to revise and edit the remembered past to coalesce with the identities of the present. However, as noted by Chase (2007), narrators “are accountable for the credibility of their stories, [and] narrative researchers treat credibility and believability as something that storytellers accomplish” (p. 657).

Since this study involved describing five ethnically diverse female superintendents and their stories that led them to the public school superintendence, narrative inquiry was used as the research method. This method entailed face-to-face interviews in order to collect data. Each of the interviews was digitally recorded and the subsequent transcriptions of those interviews allowed for an analysis of significant statements that evolved into themes. The narrative inquiry for this project was guided by open-ended questions in which the participants had the opportunity to share their life experiences. The narrative method allowed the women in this project to make meaning of

the events that led to their position as superintendents as well as an opportunity to reflect upon their day-to-day experiences.

Sampling

Purposeful sampling was used for this study. Creswell (2007) indicated that purposeful sampling involved selecting individuals for study because they could purposefully inform an understanding of the issue under investigation. Creswell further noted that participants selected in purposeful sampling need to have a story to tell about their lived experiences that directly relates to the investigation. Maxwell (1996) stated that there are several major goals in the use of purposeful sampling.

1. *The sample needs to be representative of the settings, individuals or activities under study.* For this study, I selected five ethnically diverse female superintendents who have practiced or are practicing the superintendence in both urban and rural settings with student populations ranging from several hundred to several thousand.
2. *The sample allows for the deliberate examination of questions presented at the beginning of the study and any additional questions that may evolve.* The participants for this study were chosen from the recommendation of professional colleagues and internet searches that allowed for representation of both urban and rural superintendents and a variety of campus sizes. The questions were open-ended, which allowed each woman to narrate her own unique story. As their individual narrations unfolded, other questions were naturally asked to help clarified or expanded their narratives.

3. *The sample allows for comparisons that will show differences and similarities among the participants.* During the data analysis process, the participants' stories of what led them to the public school superintendence, their day-to-day experiences, and the ways in which they would encourage, inform, and support other females seeking this position were compared for the differences and similarities in the emergent themes.

As no national data base exists for locating public school superintendents, I performed purposeful sampling by following leads from colleagues and identifying participants through internet searches. Several superintendents recommended female superintendents who they felt would be candidates for this study. These individuals were called, and three of the recommended candidates agreed to participate. The other two candidates were located through internet searches. In order to locate other possible participants, I accessed each state's public education department website. For these sites, I was able to obtain a list of names of superintendents in the state. I divided men and women's names, and I went to each district's web site that had a female superintendent. I made numerous phone calls, and through these phone calls, I was able to discover the superintendent's ethnicity and her interest in participating in this study. After following this process for seven states, I was able to locate the other willing participants.

Data Collection

In narrative research, the researcher is an invited guest into the lives of the participants, and the emergent stories from the participants allow the researcher into the identity and personality of each participant (Lieblich, Machiach-Tuval, & Zilber, 1998). Therefore, it is paramount that a relationship of confidentiality and trust be maintained.

To establish rapport with each of the women, I called each of them to introduce myself and my research. I asked each for a follow up phone call in which we would have more time to determine if they would like to participate. The subsequent phone call was lengthier than the first, as it allowed for more questions about their participation in the study.

I was acquainted with three of the women, the Native-American, the Hispanic, and the Caucasian as each of us had served as superintendents in the same state. I located the African-American on the internet. The Asian participant was suggested to me by a superintendent. All five women verbally agreed to participate in the study. Prior to my first visit with each of the women, I researched the websites where they had served or were serving as superintendents. During the first meeting, each participant was given a letter explaining the research and a university consent form to assist her in making an informed decision regarding her participation in the research study.

Each woman was interviewed beginning with a list of questions constructed by Dr. Nancy Colflesh. I obtained permission from Dr. Colflesh to use some of her questions for my interview (Appendix A). Due to the schedules of the women in the study, the interviews were scheduled over a three month period. I drove or flew to the women's campuses or homes. Three of the women were interviewed in their offices and two were interviewed in their homes. Each of the interviews varied in length due to the time constraints of the women and the extent to which they chose to share various aspects of their lives and their practice as superintendents. Two of the women requested that the interviews be conducted during two consecutive days, and three of the women wanted the interview to be conducted in one day. Each of the women agreed to follow up phone calls

to clarify or to ask additional questions once the transcriptions were complete. All of the women were called for a second or third interview. These phone calls ranged from thirty minutes to an hour. Two of the women were called a third time and these phone calls lasted an additional thirty to forty-five minutes. I took additional notes during these calls. With the consent of the participants, each of the interviews was digitally recorded. I listened to the tapes immediately after the interviews. The tapes were transcribed by a transcriptionist, and when the transcriptions were completed, I listened to the tapes again for accuracy. All of the participants were given an opportunity to review the transcripts for accuracy. Two of the women indicated that they did not wish to review the transcripts, and the other three did not request any changes in their transcripts.

Data Analysis

In narrative analysis, the researcher looks for themes and patterns in the narrative data through the process of coding. Seidman (2006) indicated that the researcher should wait to analyze and code the data until after all interviews are conducted. Seidman felt that waiting until interviewing was completed would “avoid imposing meaning from one participant’s interviews to the next” (p. 113). Creswell (2007) stated, “Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data ... for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding, and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data” (p. 148). During coding, the researcher should look beyond the obvious wording and think in terms of deeper meanings that the participants are presenting with their word choices. The deeper meanings within the wording and phraseology allow a commentary to develop that centers around emergent themes in the interviews (Riessman, 2008).

Riessman (2008) suggested that thematic narrative analysis be used to identify overarching themes within the narratives. Thematic narrative analysis guided this study. In thematic analysis, Riessman (2008) noted that the initial job of the investigator was to place the events of the narrative in chronological biographical order. Once chronological processing was complete, the researcher begins identifying master themes, patterns or underlying assumptions. In identifying themes, Riessman asserted that the researcher must concentrate on what is told rather than the telling. She noted that the researcher must look beneath the story and discern motives and emotions that drive the narrative forward. She stated that thematic narrative analysis is concerned with what is said rather than “how, to whom or for what purpose” (p. 54). Riessman indicated that in thematic narrative coding, the researcher begins coding by working with a single interview at a time and placing the events of the narrative in chronological order. After this is completed for each interview, the researcher identifies the underlying themes in each interview and codes them. After the coding is complete for each interview, the researcher compares the codes and looks for emergent themes.

For this research, I read each transcript several times and placed the narrated events in chronological order. Next, I analyzed each transcript for ideas and placed these into codes. I used N-Vivo and Microsoft Word for word frequency in the transcripts. Using word frequency allowed me to code and identify themes that were related to the research questions for each of the participants. The final step in the coding process was cross case analysis in which themes were compared. I identified codes that were common among the participants, and once compared, I used these to draw conclusions regarding the life experiences that led these women to the public school superintendence, their day-

to-day experiences in the superintendence, and what could be inferred that would encourage, inform, and support other women seeking this position. Confidentiality of the research participants was maintained through adherence to Colorado State University's Institutional Review Board standards and through the use of pseudonyms for each participant and geographic locations.

Trustworthiness and Confirmability

As noted by Patton (1990), in qualitative research "the researcher is the instrument" (p. 14). Therefore, in qualitative research the credibility of the research is based on the skills, honesty, and integrity of the researcher. Golafshani (2003) indicated that because there is an absence of a standardized testing instrument in qualitative research, then reliability of the research is based on quality. He noted that in qualitative research, the term validity is oftentimes replaced by the terms "credibility, neutrality, confirmability, consistency or dependability and applicability or transferability" (p. 601). He further noted that the term validity is closely associated with "terms, such as, quality, rigor, and trustworthiness" (Golafshani, 2003, p. 602). Creswell (2009) made a key observation about validity and reliability in qualitative research. He asserted,

Qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures, while qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher's approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects. (p.190)

I addressed issues of validity and reliability several ways. As required by Colorado State University's Institutional Review Board, each participant signed a consent form prior to the interviews. I established rapport and trust by discussing the parameters of the research prior to the taped interviews. A letter was presented to each participant that outlined the purpose and scope of the research project. Each participant was called

multiple times before my initial visit and after the conclusion of the interviews, and each participant agreed to follow up phone calls to clarify any information presented on the transcripts. Each woman was given the opportunity to review her transcript for its accuracy. Next, as part of a peer review process, I had both a person who is not involved in education and a superintendent from another state read the transcripts and my analysis. Neither of these people knew the identity of the participants, so participant confidentiality was maintained. Both of the readers discussed the transcripts and my findings. They concurred with my analysis.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

“Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough: Give the world the best you've got anyway. You see, in the final analysis, it is between you and God: It was never between you and them anyway.”

(In *Mother Teresa: A Simple Path*, compiled by Lucinda Vardey (1995), page 185).

Introduction

The purpose of this narrative study was to investigate the life stories of a group of ethnically diverse female superintendents and discuss the events that led them to the superintendence as well as to describe their day-to-day experiences in this position. From their stories, I was interested in finding what could be inferred that would encourage, inform, and support other women seeking and entering this position. In this chapter, demographic information about the participants is presented; the five female superintendents in this study are introduced and described using the data gathered from the interviews, the coding process is described, an analysis of the themes in each of the woman's stories is presented, and a critical review of the similarities and differences of the themes that emerged from the interviews is discussed. Pseudonyms were used in place of real names and other descriptors in order to maintain confidentiality. An analysis on the similarities and differences in the emergent themes for the women was also analyzed

Demographic Information

Five ethnically diverse female public school superintendents were interviewed using narrative inquiry to ascertain how their lived experiences led them to the

superintendence, their day-to-day experiences in this position, and what can be inferred from the narratives that would encourage, inform, and support other women seeking this position. Of the five female superintendents, two had served or were serving in rural school districts with less than 600 students. One had been a superintendent in a district of less than 600 and also in a district with 1,500 students. One superintendent was serving in a district of 1,240 students, and one of the superintendents had served in a large urban superintendence with 14,000 students.

Four of the participants were in their 50s, and one participant was in her 60s. Four of the women had earned doctorates. The professional educational experiences of the women ranged from 26 years to 40 years. Four of the women had served their entire superintendence in one district, and one participant had served as superintendent in two districts. Two participants had served in the superintendence for three years, one had served for seven years, and two had served for eight years. Table 3 represents each woman's profile.

Table 3

Personal Profiles

Name	Ethnicity	Age	Children	Level of Education	Marital Status	# Years in Education	# of Districts As Superintendent	# of Years as Superintendent
Katherine	Anglo	57	0	PhD	Divorced	34	2	8
Agnes	Hispanic	58	2	Master's Degree	Married	36	1	8
Anne	Native-American	65	1	EdD	Married	40	1	7
Susan	African-American	50	2	PhD	Married	26	1	3
Evelyn	Asian	55	2	PhD	Divorced	26	1	3

Table 4 represents the career paths of the women in this study. Three of the women were elementary principals, two were both elementary and middle school principals during their careers, two had served as high school principals, and two had served in central office positions. One of the participants did not serve in any public school administrative positions before becoming a superintendent. Numbers greater than one indicate that the participant had served in this position multiple times in either the same district or different districts.

Table 4

Career Paths

Name	Teacher	Assistant Principal	Elem. Principal	Middle School Principal	High School Principal	Central Office Position
Katherine	Sp. Ed Elementary/ Secondary	0	0	0	0	0
Agnes	Counselor Secondary/History/ Counseling	0	0	0	1	0
Anne	Elementary	0	1	1	0	0
Susan	Elementary	0	3	1	0	1
Evelyn	Secondary/History	2	0	0	1	1

Kowalski et al. (2010) divided districts into three groups according to enrollment sizes. A district with an enrollment of 300 or less was considered a small district, an enrollment of 301 to 24,999 was considered a medium size district, and a large district was 25,000 or more students. Using these guidelines, four of the participants served in medium size districts, and one served her first superintendence in a small district. Table 5 represents the district sizes, the free and reduced lunch percentages of the districts, and the student ethnicity distribution where each of the women served as superintendents.

Table 5

District Profiles

Name	Free/Reduced Lunches	District Size	African American	Anglo	Hispanic	Asian	Native-American
Katherine-1 st							
Superintendence	80%	130	0%	50%	50%	0%	0%
Katherine-2 nd							
Superintendence	100%	1600	0%	6%	0%	0%	94%
Agnes	50%	400	0%	50%	50%	0	0
Anne	100%	500	0%	50%	50%	0%	0%
Susan	79%	1240	48%	50%	2%	0%	0%
Evelyn	50%	14,000	0%	50%	48%	0%	2%

The Superintendents - Their Stories

The first research question for this study was—What are the life stories of a group of ethnically diverse female superintendents that led them to the public school superintendence? This section starts with Katherine telling her story and what events in her life led her to the public school superintendence. Her narrative is followed with the narratives of Agnes (Hispanic), Anne (Native-American), Susan (African-American), and Evelyn (Asian). The narratives of the women are arranged in the order in which they were interviewed for this study.

Katherine (Caucasian)

The interview with Katherine took place at her home in a remote, rural village of less than 50 people in a Western state. The homes in the village are scattered about on various sized properties where the eclectic, architectural styles reflect the individualism of the people who live there. Several of the homes are in various stages of abandonment and neglect, and rusted shells of cannibalized vehicles tell of years of vacancy. Other

homes reflect ownership pride with large white barns and well-manicured property. The seeming poverty of the village is in direct contrast to the rich scenery—to the north are majestic snow-capped mountains and to the south and west are rocky mesas.

Katherine's home is off a dirt road in the middle of a pasture that is surrounded by barbed wire fencing. Katherine's home is a two-storied, brown stucco, Spanish hacienda with a covered portal. I am acquainted with Katherine as she and I served as superintendents in the same state. Katherine is in her mid-50s and self-identifies as Caucasian. She has a light complexion, light blond hair, and is small in stature. She is casually dressed in Levis, tennis shoes, and an oversized red T-shirt. She has been retired for a year, having completed more than 30 years in education, eight of which were in the public school superintendence. Katherine holds a bachelor's degree in elementary and special education, a master's degree in special education, and a doctorate in school leadership.

Katherine's early life. Katherine indicated that she was born in Oklahoma and lived on a farm with her parents. Her parents divorced when she was five years old and her early life was one of constant traveling between her two parents' homes in two different states. She and her mother moved to another state where Katherine's mother worked as a seamstress and as a secretary at a military base. Her father also moved to another state and worked in the tire business. Both parents remarried and she has half-brothers and sisters. Her father had four more children with his second wife; her mother had two more children during her second marriage. Katherine indicated that throughout her growing up years, her primary duty for both families was taking care of the younger

children. She was the primary caregiver of her siblings even when she balanced school and an after school job. She commented,

When I was 15, I got my first out of the house, out of the neighborhood job, a real job at a feed store, actually. . . . I got this job, paid me minimum wage, and I worked there every day after school and on the weekends. And then right after I'd get off work, I'd rush to pick up one of my brothers at school and then be there for the next one to get home, and then I would take care of them and start getting dinner ready and everything.

She indicated that she had no illusions about the responsibility of raising children and this would impact her choice not to have children of her own. She also spoke about her difficult relationship with both step-parents. She stated, "My step-mother didn't particularly care for me because I was my mother's kid," and she hated her step-father's strictness, but in later years, she grew to love him.

She had vague memories of her early schooling years. Since her parents shared joint custody, she remembered going back and forth between parents and credited this with not having life-long friends. She recalled that her early schooling was "extremely traumatic" due to the upheaval in her life. She was with her mother during first grade through fourth grade, and she was with her father from fifth grade until half way through tenth grade. She then lived with her mother until graduation. She described her high school experience as positive. She became very competitive and was a majorette and played clarinet in the band. She indicated that she was driven to excel at everything she did. She described herself as a people pleaser, and she never questioned authority or the expectations her family had for her.

She indicated that questioning expectations set for her was never an option. Part of the expectation was earning good grades in school. She commented, "I wouldn't have dared, not have dared to come home with a bad grade, I mean, my parents would have

killed me.” Later in her life, Katherine realized that her mother’s expectations for her were high as her mother had given up her dreams to make sure Katherine’s dreams of going to college could be realized.

Katherine did not question male authority. She gave two poignant examples of not questioning male authority. First, her step-father chose which college she would attend, and a male, college counselor directed her area of study based on her gender and societal expectations of being a wife and mother rather than on her desire to pursue a degree in biology. She commented, “You know at that time there was no issue, no question, no discussion, I knew I was going to college.” She stated that her step-father insisted she attend a certain university because he felt drugs would be less prevalent on the campus. Katherine completed a bachelor’s degree in elementary education and special education. However, this is not the degree she wanted. She stated,

What I wanted to get it in was biology and the advisor at the time, down at the university told me that was not a good field for a woman, a young woman, that I needed to get a degree in education because that would serve me better as a wife and a mother.

When asked how that advice made her feel, she responded,

Ah, I suppose probably at that time I really didn’t like it, but I was a pleaser ... I was always about pleasing and making sure everybody was happy and that I was doing everything I was supposed to be doing. And when he told me that, I’m sure that I probably thought, well, okay, this is a person in authority.

Beginning of professional career. Shortly after graduating from college with a degree in special education, Katherine married. She noted that the expectations at that time were that the wife followed her husband’s career. Therefore, she and her husband moved to a metropolitan city where Katherine worked in a facility for the “profoundly and severely mentally retarded.” She described the working conditions as “a horrible

shock.” The buildings were in various states of decay, the adolescent boys displayed inappropriate sexual behaviors in the classroom, and some of the students were “literally lying on the floor in their own feces and urine.” As this was the only job she could find at the time, she stayed for two and a half years. Due to the children’s disabilities, it disturbed her husband and her parents to attend the various activities at this facility, and at their urging, Katherine resigned this position.

Katherine’s husband was involved in the family’s uranium mining business, and they moved to another location where uranium mining was prevalent. For the next several years, Katherine husband’s career required that they frequently move, and she was able to find work each time as a special education teacher within each of the public school systems. It was during this time that she began working on her master’s degree in special education and earning a diagnostician’s certification. Once she completed her master’s degree and obtained this certification, she resigned her job in public schools and began working at a teenage girls’ correctional facility in a metropolitan city. She indicated that she dealt with a lot of girls whose brains were damaged from “huffing glue and paints.” These girls ranged in age from 12 to 18. She stated that she enjoyed working with the students, but the correctional facility’s administration operated under a male-dominated, hierarchical system that she referred to as a “Very male, machismo operation there, and women were not treated well.” After several years, she left this job to start her own diagnostic testing company.

Building her lucrative, new business required a lot of travel, and she attributes the dissolution of her marriage to her frequent absences. She stated that she worked non-stop. She became very driven, and life for her at this time was “All about making money and

excelling and succeeding.” During this time, Katherine met a woman who became the director of one of the state’s regional education cooperatives (REC). The purpose of the federally funded cooperative was to supply ancillary special educational services to rural areas in the state. Katherine dissolved her diagnostic company to join this regional educational cooperative.

Katherine stated that working for the regional educational cooperative suited her perfectly. She liked change. She stated, “Part of my whole life, when I look back on it now, is that it’s really always been hard for me to be comfortable where I am.” She also indicated that she was driven to do well in this position. She commented, “I’ve always wanted to excel, to achieve more, to make more, to do more, to be more. It’s always been about what else can I do.”

At the REC, she was given many duties and the freedom to implement new programs. Her duties included providing diagnostic services to the rural schools, grant writing, co-managing REC’s budget, and starting pre-schools within each of eight communities serviced by this regional educational cooperative. She orchestrated the implementation of three and four year old pre-school programs for eight different school districts. The mission of the three and four year olds’ program was to test all the three and four years in each community. The children were given a series of physical and cognitive tests to determine which children were developmentally delayed in their skills. Those students who were found to be developmentally delayed were placed in a program to improve their skills before they entered kindergarten. She found the work challenging and inspiring. She particularly liked the freedom the job afforded her to meet different people, administer different projects, start new programs, hone grant writing skills, and

learn the intricacies of administration and budget. She liked the diagnostic testing work as this gave her a clear understanding of the learning problems students were having, and she felt that through her recommendations, goals and programs were implemented that helped struggling students. She felt her input at Individual Educational Plan (IEP) meetings had a significant impact on students' ability to succeed.

This job also afforded her many opportunities to work with each school's administration, and through this interaction, she knew she wanted to be a superintendent of schools. She did not want to be a principal because she felt this job was too structured and confining. She wanted to be a superintendent so that she would have the opportunity to influence an entire organization. She commented, "I always wanted to be the boss, and yeah, I just, it's hard being driven. It's just that drive." During this time, she began working on her public school administrative license at a local university.

It was also during this time that she was involved in a tragic car accident. On one of her trips to one of the communities served by the REC, she was involved in a vehicular accident that left her with a broken neck and crushed vertebra in her back. She was in a "halo" for several months and her boss brought work to her so that she could remain employed during her long recuperation. She worked with the REC for six years. After six years, the REC infrastructure was changing and Katherine became unhappy with her job. She indicated that she and her boss had a "falling-out," and her female boss was under a lot of pressure from her male bosses. Katherine left her REC job and began working for a boys' juvenile correctional facility.

The boys' juvenile correctional facility was a state run facility where juvenile offenders were sent once they were adjudicated by the courts. There were two parts to

this program. One part was the correctional facility that was run similar to an adult prison. The other part was the educational system for the offenders. Katherine worked as an administrator in the educational system. Her job was to ensure that educational and special education services were provided. She worked well with the superintendent, but she had difficulty working in a male dominated system. As she earned the superintendent's trust, he gave her more responsibilities and more authority, and she became the only female administrator in the facility. This caused resentment to build among the male staff members. When the male staff members were uncooperative, she had the backing of the superintendent, which created a hostile atmosphere. The more uncooperative the staff members became, the more the superintendent took away their programs and gave them to Katherine. She was in charge of the special education programs, the Title I programs, technology, woodworking, and discipline.

To retaliate against Katherine's authority, the correctional officers would refuse to send the students to the required educational services. She described it as a constant struggle with a lot of animosity. She commented,

You talk about male dominated system. ... The boys were not the issue. We got along great, it was those dad-gum men out there who were in charge of them as line workers, actually just the corrections guards or the administrators in the school, it didn't matter. They were all just very difficult. And to have a woman out there, they just couldn't see it.

In addition, during this time Katherine also became vocal about student abuse and some of the unethical behavior of the staff. She described her professional life as a "non-stop battle." She was very vocal about what she perceived as social injustices against the young men. She commented,

But I tell you the main thing that I had with the boys' school was the way they were cheating the boys and that's what really stirred the real problem that we had

because they were not doing right by the boys. I knew of issues of abuse by the vice principal out there and the principal I knew was [sic] doing a lot of unethical things. . . . There was just a lot of that kind of stuff going on that I knew about, but the main things was [sic] when I was trying to get what the boys needed. The education programs that they needed. These guys just fought me tooth and nail.

Despite the difficulties, Katherine, with the support of the superintendent, created an innovative daycare program. When the young men's families visited, the daycare program was used to care for the men's young children. The community also had access to this program. With this daycare program, young mothers in the community were able to attend college while their children were receiving services in this program. Along with the daycare program, Katherine also developed parenting classes for the inmates and the community. Through her grant writing skills, Katherine was able to hire teachers; establish a family and a resource center; teach parenting, discipline, and technology classes; and provide women, infants, and children (WIC) services for low-income families. Despite the difficulties, Katherine stayed for three years. She resigned her position to become the director of a state run facility for emotionally disturbed adolescents.

At the time Katherine resigned from the boys' correctional facility, the state was creating a separate facility for emotionally disturbed adolescents in a remote part of the state. The students were committed through the state's legal system to be at this new facility. She was hired as the director, and she was directly involved with the building of this facility. She commented, "I got to build that school from the ground up and that was just a blast. It was neat and so up my alley." She and her staff created the curriculum and the programs for each of the students who would attend the facility. Once the school was in full operation, there were 56 students ranging in age from 9 to 18 years old. The

emphasis of this facility was behavior modification and academics. Katherine served as the director of this facility for three years, but once the facility was up and running, she indicated that she grew bored with the job; this, coupled with an abusive second marriage that ended in divorce, caused her to want change in her life. She was accepted into a doctoral program in another state, and she left to pursue this dream.

Katherine completed her doctorate in higher education administration, but once she discovered the disparity in salaries between men and women at the university, she decided she did not want to be part of that system. She returned to her former state and applied for several superintendents' jobs but was not hired. To support herself, she became a grant writer. She approached a public school superintendent about writing a grant for a pre-school program for the school district. She got enough money to open a day care, pay her salary, and hire teachers for the day care program. She also received other grants for a family resource center that offered parenting classes, and she established a federally funded nutrition program for pregnant women, infants, and children (WIC). The program provided expectant women with nutritional care during their pregnancy and provided their children with nutritious food through the age of five. She also established technology and elementary reading programs with grant monies. She administered the various programs for three years, but she still wanted to be a public school superintendent. She applied for several superintendent jobs and finally was hired as a superintendent in a rural community.

First superintendence. She felt she was hired because they “saw in me right away a mover and a shaker, a go getter, and in fact, they hired me on the spot.” She felt that having a doctorate helped her obtain this job. She commented, “Men can get a

superintendence all day long with a master's degree but not a woman. So, I absolutely am positive that the PhD helped me.” The district in which she was hired was a very small district with approximately 20 staff members, 12 of whom were full-time teachers. There were approximately 130 students from K-12th grade. Katherine indicated the student population was 50% Caucasian and 50% Hispanic with no Asian or African-American students. This was a high poverty school with approximately 80% of the student population on the free and reduced lunch program. The total operational budget was approximately three million dollars for the district. She felt she was hired primarily for her grant writing skills. Through grant writing, she was able to start a community health center and a teen center. She indicated that she learned she had to use her clout and connections to seek legislative funding to build programs in the district.

In this district, she had to correct two major financial issues. One of the issues was that the business manager was using district funds to pay personal bills, and the other issue was a bus driver misreporting bus routes. The second issue was the one that led to her resignation. She discovered that one of the bus drivers was reporting mileage for a bus route he did not have and charging the district for this phantom route. This man was a third generation bus driver and well-liked in the community. During her investigation, Katherine found that this man had been misreporting his bus routes for years. The board agreed with her recommendation for dismissal; however, politically powerful members of the community sided with this man. The situation became very contentious; people tried to intimidate her by following her home at night and her personal life came under attack. She indicated that when the turmoil began affecting her personal life and the students, it was not worth it to stay in the position. She commented, “Because of the unrest that I

caused being who I am and sometimes it's just not worth it and eventually it affects the kids and then it isn't worth it." She resigned. She obtained her second superintendence on an Indian reservation in a Western state.

Second superintendence. Katherine felt that she was hired in the next superintendence as a change agent on an Indian reservation. This district was comprised of 390 staff members, 90 of whom were full time teachers. The total student population was 1,500 students. Six percent of the student population was Caucasian, 94% of the students were Native-American, and there were no Hispanic, African-American, or Asian students. All of the students were on free and reduced lunches. The school was state and federally funded with a total annual operating budget of 26 million dollars.

Once she realized the magnitude and severity of the problems facing this district, she realized she faced unique challenges. First, the board indicated that they wanted more accountability from the business manager and the human resources department. She found many problems with the finances of the district. The business manager had not been paying district bills in a timely manner. After working with the business manager with little success, she terminated her. Katherine also found that the district's human resource department was not conducting background checks. Again, Katherine worked directly with this department to bring the district into compliance.

The schools on the reservation had not met the No Child Left Behind criteria for adequate yearly progress (AYP) and therefore, the schools were classified as schools in corrective action, which meant that the state could take over control of the schools. Katherine implemented a new curriculum program that was researched-based and had an accountability component to it. Katherine indicated that the faculty resisted this program

because they did not want change, and they did not want to be held professionally accountable for their students' performance. She indicated that change was the most difficult thing to implement. She stated that initially she had the support of the board, but the board changed during her tenure. The terminated business manager became a board member and it was obvious that Katherine no longer had the support she needed to make necessary changes. Her contract was not renewed.

Agnes (Hispanic)

I was invited to the small community where Agnes serves as the district superintendent. She has been in this position for eight years. On the drive along remote county roads, I noticed the cattle and antelope grazing in the expansive pastures. This is one of the poorest counties in this state, reminding me that an educator once stated that this county's main exports were cattle and kids. The major interstate by-passes this town, so it is dependent on local commerce for its existence and the occasional tourist who stops for supplies. The town has one refurbished Victorian hotel, one bank, two gas stations, a small grocery store, a Catholic church, and an assortment of old and modern business buildings, each depicting a different era of architectural style. There are several dilapidated, vacant buildings along the main business street; several homes are interspersed with businesses indicating the town was built long before zoning regulations. The schools are located in close proximity to each other on the northeast part of town. The administrative offices are located on the high school campus.

I was acquainted with Agnes as I had sought her advice on occasion when I was a superintendent. We had arranged for the interviews to begin on a Thursday. However, as I drove to her office, which was located on the high school campus, I noted an absence of

vehicles. Upon entering the building, a custodian informed me that school had been cancelled due to a broken boiler. The custodian called the superintendent to let her know I had arrived. When I arrived at her office, I was warmly greeted and introduced to some of her staff. We entered her office, which was decorated with memorabilia from current and former students. A large, pink poster decorated one wall and was signed by her staff and students and spoke of the school's support of Agnes as she battled breast cancer. Other walls were decorated with certificates denoting degrees and professional development training. On her bookshelf were pictures of her two boys. In the middle of the room was a conference table, and she and I sat at this table to begin the interview. Agnes was dressed casually in jeans and a sweatshirt. She is a Hispanic woman with dark graying shoulder length hair. She is petite, and her brown eyes immediately glisten with warmth and compassion when she smiles.

Early life. The interview began with me indicating to Agnes that this was a narrative research project, and my first research question concerns what life events led her to the public school superintendence. She laughed and indicated that it was never her intent to be superintendent. She began her life story with a brief history of her parents. Her mother came from a very wealthy family who owned a vast amount of land. Her grandfather was the second richest man in the state. He had been married twice and had raised 16 children. He was very strict with his children.

Her father, Charlie, was very poor. She stated that her father's mother divorced her abusive husband at a time when this was not acceptable. Her grandmother had to support Agnes's father and his brother on her own. She stated,

I guess education was very, very important in my family because my father came from an extremely poor family. He was [raised by] a single parent ... I thought,

you know, she [grandmother] divorced in the times that women didn't divorce, but he [grandfather] was abusive, and I admire her for getting out of the situation and raising two boys by herself, and so they were poor.

Her mother and father, from very different financial backgrounds, fell in love, and her father borrowed a pair of dress pants, walked a long distance to her mother's family ranch, and asked for her hand in marriage. Her grandfather very emphatically told Charlie, "No!" Agnes' mother obstinately refused to let her father talk her out of the marriage. Agnes laughingly recalled a story in which her mother and grandfather had a heated argument concerning this relationship. Agnes' mother angrily left the house and was walking down a dirt road with her grandfather following her in a car pleading with her to have some common sense; he told her he would buy her anything if she would not get married. Agnes's mother won the battle, and when she turned 18 she dropped out of school to marry Agnes's dad. Agnes's mom did not finish high school, but her father did; he also served in the Army during World War II. Upon his return, he went to barber school to support his family. She indicated that both of her parents valued education and they wanted Agnes and her two older brothers to have a college education.

As a young girl, Agnes attended a Catholic school. She described the nuns as very strict. For example, as a first grader, the teacher accidentally gave Agnes the teacher's edition for her textbook. When it was discovered that Agnes had this book, she was severely reprimanded. She had no idea that her book was different from other students, and she felt that she had been wrongly accused of cheating. She remembered,

I was like, what's a teacher's edition? I mean I didn't know and the nun handed these out, right. She chewed me up one side and down the other, and I was like, well, I didn't know. She made it sound like I was cheating. She traumatized me . . . So I thought, I'll never do that to a kid.

Her father moved her to public school when she was in the third grade. When she began third grade, she was academically ahead of the other children.

During Agnes's eighth grade school year, her father died. Before he died, he made his children promise they would go to college. Her father did complete high school, but his dream of going to college was never realized. Therefore, a college education was his dream for his children. Agnes indicated that her father gave her tremendous self-confidence, and he believed that she could do anything. She reminisced, "In his eyes there was nothing I couldn't do, and I mean, the self-confidence he was able to give me. He just thought I was the sun I guess, the sun rose with me." She also remembered an incident from her childhood in which a young boy came to her house and stated that he had bet her father that he could out run her in a race. The race was on, and Agnes easily won. The young boy lamented, "I guess I gotta go pay your dad." In her father's eyes, there was never a doubt about the outcome of the race. For him, it was an easy bet on a daughter whose skills he never doubted. She further stated, "So, my dad thought I could do everything. I mean anything. He thought I did perfect, and so I guess he was the biggest impact on my life." As she recounted this story, she wept. It was a poignant moment that indicated both a tremendous sadness in her life and a father's dream for his children's education. As a tribute to this remarkable man, she and her brothers kept this promise and all were college educated. In a fitting tribute to her father, Agnes is now the superintendent of the school district from which her father graduated. His memory and his belief that she could do anything have had a strong impact on her belief that if people have a strong support system, they can accomplish anything. Her life is a testament to that belief.

In high school, Agnes was involved in school activities including band and choir. Upon completion of high school, she went to the state's largest university. She wanted to be a physical therapist, but was told by a counselor that she could not choose this profession. She stated,

Being from the Hispanic culture, and maybe a female as well is like, you always did what you were told and didn't question. You know, you obeyed ... I didn't question things, it was like, okay, when my counselor told me I couldn't be a physical therapist.

She was brought up not to question authority. Therefore, rather than becoming a physical therapist, she received her bachelor's degree in elementary education with a minor in bi-lingual education.

Beginning of professional career. Her first teaching job was in San Antonio, Texas, as a bilingual teacher. She felt that she got the job to "fill a quota" as a Hispanic female. The school was predominately comprised of poor Hispanic and African-American students. She commented,

These children, bless their hearts, did not come to school very clean and wore the same clothes all week, and things like this. I'll never forget, the second grade teacher was an elderly woman. I had real long hair, and she said you need, I'd suggest you put your hair up and I said why and she said because, she said, she'd brought a little girl to read at the reading table and you could just see the lice jumping.

As a bilingual teacher who was pulling children out of class to work with them, she felt this was not the job that she wanted. She wanted to be a teacher in her own classroom. She resigned after a year and moved back to her home town where she was hired as a third grade teacher. She began commuting at night to a university about an hour away to receive her master's degree in counseling. She commented, "I felt

counseling would probably be something that I could, you know, make use of and help my kids.” It was during this time that she met and married her husband.

Once she completed her master’s degree, the superintendent offered her the job of elementary counselor and Title I coordinator. She had this job for two years, and due to money shortages in the district, she was moved back into the third grade position. It was during this time that she gave birth to her first son. She was the third grade teacher for ten more years, when she was asked by the superintendent to become the high school counselor. She indicated, “High school kids actually were just like elementary kids, they’re just in big bodies. They still need TLC, but I did request that I would get to go to the elementary at least one day a week and do counseling.”

During the time Agnes was a high school counselor, the administration changed, and a new high school principal and superintendent were hired. They took away teachers’ keys, and teachers were forbidden to work at the school after school hours and on weekends. She indicated that trust was destroyed. For the first time in her career, she was called to the principal’s office and reprimanded for not communicating. She commented, “I was demoralized.” Agnes’ determination and dedication had never been questioned, and after Christmas break, she talked with the principal. She said, “I’ve given my heart and soul to this school, and I really don’t know what you’re talking about with communicating and working against you and everything.” The relationship was strained, and it was to impact her role as a mother.

At this time, Agnes’s youngest son was a senior in high school and she was made senior sponsor, which meant she had to accompany the class on its senior trip. In rural schools, the senior trip is “a rite of passage” in which students go on a senior trip without

their parents. However, she felt she had to go because the principal would write her up if she did not go. In addition, her oldest son was a senior in college, and he was being inducted into an honor society, but she did not go. She commented, "I was afraid to ask the principal for time to go, and to this day I regret that I didn't do that." She finally stood up to this principal's rigidity when she was told that she could not sit with her husband during their son's graduation but that she would have to sit with the faculty. She said to him, "I'm a Mom first, and then I'm a counselor, and I'm going to sit with my husband and watch my son graduate." The principal and the superintendent stayed two years and then both left at the same time.

Throughout Agnes's career in the school district, there were numerous superintendents and principals. Either the superintendents and principals were coming into this small district to gain experience before moving to larger districts, or they were retired administrators from out of state who were getting enough years for a second retirement. She did not feel that they had loyalty to the community. When Agnes saw the effect this instability had on the district, she decided that she would be an administrator to give the district continuity. She called the state department of education in her state and found that she only needed several college classes to receive her administrative certification. When the high school principal left, she was hired for that position. She indicated it was a difficult year as gang influence had entered the district, and she had to deal with constant fighting among students. The next year, the superintendent left and her staff persuaded her to apply for the superintendent's position. She was the search committee's choice, but the board did not hire her. The board hired an out-of-state person. She was "extremely hurt" that she did not get the job.

First superintendence. Due to unethical behavior, the superintendent who was hired was dismissed in March and the board asked Agnes to take over as interim and also fulfill her duties as high school principal. She agreed to do both jobs. When she reviewed the budget, she realized the district was in financial trouble, and she had to implement the district's reduction in force (RIF) policy. She released six employees. She terminated three ladies in the superintendent's office, a technology person, an elementary principal and an elementary teacher. She commented, "And so I started as the superintendent, not on a really good note, and, you know, it was tough." One difficult situation was the technology person would not give her the server passwords. She ended up having to crash the entire computer system and rebuild data. She described this as a "nightmare" for the district. This led her to cross-train all administrative personnel so that no one person could disrupt the entire school district's business.

During this first year as a superintendent, Agnes was very impressed with her special education director. She thought this lady would make a great principal due to her strong leadership skills. She did hire this lady as principal, but a mistake that she made, and one she identifies as one of the biggest mistakes of her career, was giving this lady a three year contract. The lady was a horrible principal. Agnes indicated that the "power went to her head," and her faculty found her too demanding. Yet, because of her three year contract, Agnes had to constantly mentor this woman to work effectively and collaboratively with her faculty. The professional relationship deteriorated, and the principal verbally attacked her during a board meeting. The relationship was so bad that Agnes was going to resign. The conflict escalated, and during the next scheduled school board meeting, the faculty, staff, and community attendance was so large the meeting had

to be held in the gym. The staff and community supported Agnes, and they were very uncomplimentary of the principal. After months of mediation, the principal resigned that first year.

Agnes indicated she learned many lessons that first year, even though it “was a living hell.” First, she was too trusting. She assumed people would be professional, ethical, and legal. This was not the case. By the end of the year, staff members began choosing sides on the elementary principal’s resignation, and Agnes lost a counselor, an English teacher, a special education secretary, and a day care person to another district.

Next, she learned that superintendents need mentors. She commented that she did not have anyone to call. She found that the superintendence was as equally challenging as it was lonely. She stated, “I felt like I was on the mountain by myself.” She did not have a network of superintendents who she could call, and the state offered no programs for beginning superintendents. She indicated that the support of her husband and her administrative staff got her through the first year. Even though her first year as a superintendent was difficult, she felt that she did the right things for the district.

Before her second year as superintendent she told her board she could not be the high school principal and superintendent. At the end of her first year, she was able to hire a high school principal. He turned out to be an excellent leader who worked with her throughout the rest of her superintendence. Throughout her eight years as superintendent, she hired at least five principals and approximately thirty teachers.

Last year was a difficult time for Agnes as she battled breast cancer. During the entire period of chemotherapy and radiation, she did not take extended time off work. She was diagnosed in February of 2008 and ended her chemotherapy and radiation in

February of 2009. She lost her hair and was ill during some of the more intense chemotherapy sessions, but she either came to school or was available through e-mails or phone calls. She wanted to model loyalty and caring even during the most difficult of times.

Anne (Native-American)

Anne served as a superintendent in a small, rural community that is nestled in a canyon surrounded by majestic mountain ranges. This community is supported mainly by tourism and is the gateway to several well-known ski areas and beautiful canyons filled with lakes and rivers that serve as family vacation destinations in the summer. Due to the remoteness of this community, Anne graciously asked if I would be her house guest during this interview. As I drove into this isolated community on a crisp, early February morning, a snowstorm was hovering over the nearby mountains. As the ominous snowstorm moved through the canyons, I was glad that I would be staying in Anne's spacious Southwestern style home. I was met in the community by Anne's husband and he escorted me to their home, which was located several miles outside of town. Anne and I were acquainted with each other as we had served as superintendents in the same state. The interview began in her living room that was decorated with souvenirs from her many travels to various countries; we had the added beauty of the magnificent snow-capped mountains through patio windows. As the interview began, I noticed that there was a lone antelope slowly walking and grazing in Anne's pasture, which was unusual as antelopes travel in herds. Anne noted that this antelope had been coming to her pasture for several weeks. Anne's husband, who had spent his career in forestry, indicated that either the antelope was old and had been rejected by the herd or was wounded and had sought

refuge in this isolated pasture. The antelope would come very close to the house and lie down in safety. As the interview progressed, I realized that the antelope would become a strong metaphor for Anne's life.

Early life. The interview began with me explaining that this was a narrative study, and my first research question concerned what life events led her to the public school superintendence. She indicated that she wanted to start with her ancestry as this had a strong influence on the direction which she took professionally. She indicated that she is bi-racial, and her father was of German ancestry. She indicated that her mother was raised on a reservation. She explained that the Ojibwe tribe subsisted on hunting and trapping animals. Once they were relocated to reservations, they were forced to learn agriculture. However, in the harsh Minnesota winters, they were not able to grow crops, and there was no game to hunt on the reservation land; therefore, many Indians starved to death. At this time, the Catholic nuns opened a boarding school, and Anne's mother, who was the oldest of thirteen children, was accepted into this school, which saved her from the horrible fate suffered by many in her tribe. Anne noted that at this time many of the Ojibwe mothers allowed their children to attend the Catholic boarding school because the children were assured of food and warm shelter. Even though Anne's mother would later talk about the intense loneliness of the boarding school, she stayed and received her high school diploma.

In contrast, Anne's dad only had an eighth grade education. He lived on a farm in rural Minnesota, and students who wanted to go to high school had to live in a boarding house in town. Her dad's family could not afford the cost of boarding for him. Therefore, after eighth grade, he was forced to drop out of school, and he earned a dollar a day

working on the family farm. Anne indicated that he wanted to go to school and resented that he could not continue his education. The educational background of Anne's parents made education a priority in their household. She indicated that school was always viewed as a positive thing. She commented that she still had her father's textbooks and school records. "These are important things to keep, so I think very early on, school was something that was part of the culture, something that was part of the expectation and very important." Even though Anne's father only had an eighth grade education, he joined the Navy during World War II and became a Navy pilot. Towards the end of the war, Anne's father met and married Anne's mother.

Anne went to the same school from first through eighth in a large city, but after eighth grade, her father relocated his family to another state so that he could purchase a small farm. She started high school and her sister, six years younger than she, attended elementary school in this rural community. She indicated that she felt racial discrimination because "I was the only child of mixed-blood there, I was the only one that was half, and this really was a community where people were pretty. They were all White people, and I really had to make my way." She further indicated that this negativity toward her only spurred her into learning and becoming more proficient in bi-cultural cues. One of the cultural cues in the White community was time. She commented that "the White man's culture was time, be on time, that wasn't necessarily something that went on in the Native culture."

She also learned from both cultures that it is important to know who was in charge and who had power. In the Native culture, the elders of the community were the "ones who [held] the culture" and one of their greatest duties was maintaining the

language of the tribe. One of the elder's duties was to teach each person how to pronounce words correctly in the native language. Anne's aunt was to play a pivotal role in maintaining the Ojibwa language. Anne's Aunt Winnie realized that the Ojibwa language was disappearing, and she was the first person to give the Ojibwa tribe its only written language. She phonetically transcribed each word of the Ojibwa language, thereby preserving the language forever.

Anne's Aunt Winnie was also to play a profound role in Anne's life as a role model. Due to the devastatingly harsh conditions of the reservation, Winnie ventured into the city seeking employment. She applied for a job at a laundromat only to be told they did not need her. She realized it was due to her ethnicity. Desperate for work, she told the owner she would work for one week without pay; if she did good work, she was to be hired. She got the job and worked there for twenty years. She also became an advocate for others venturing away from the reservation. She helped them navigate through the bureaucracy to find housing and other services necessary for survival outside the confines of the reservation. This had a profound effect on Anne as she, too, became an advocate for Indian children in her educational career. Through her relationship with her Aunt Winnie, she understood the importance of learning the cultural cues of both cultures.

In the Ojibwa culture, children are not instructed through direct instruction. They are taught through observation. Anne commented that in the Native-American culture,

You learn by, in the Native culture, from the mother. Everything I learned from her, I learned by watching. She never said, this is how you make bread. She never showed me how to sweep the floor—she never showed. I never got direct instruction. I just watched and then that's how, that's what the expectation was on how I was to do it.

It was in first grade that Anne would learn about cultural differences. She recounted that in first grade she did not understand direct instruction by the teacher. Therefore, as the teacher was walking around the classroom helping children, Anne began following the teacher around the classroom to observe what was being taught to the other children so that she, too, could learn through observation. The teacher, not understanding that Anne's culture required learning through observation, harshly criticized Anne in front of the other children by saying, "I wish some people wouldn't follow me around like a puppy." Anne was devastated. She did not understand what she had done to cause the harsh criticism. Throughout the rest of her schooling she learned to navigate through the nuances of her bi-cultural world.

Anne graduated from a small, rural school that had a graduating class of 45 students. She indicated that her parents did not have very much money. To save money for college, she worked in a restaurant and picked corn and cucumbers. Her father had planted 100 acres of cucumbers, and she would earn three or four dollars a sack picking the cucumbers by hand. It was hard work, but this is how she paid for her first semester of college. After her first semester of college, she had to drop out due to lack of funds. A friend told her that she, as a Native-American, was eligible for tribal funding. She contacted her Aunt Winnie who was able to secure enough tribal scholarship money for her to return to college and complete her bachelor's degree in social studies with a minor in history. After college, she married her high school sweetheart who had been in the military. She began applying for jobs, and she was hired by the Bureau of Indian Affairs to work at a Native-American boarding school in a Western state.

Beginning of professional career. Anne began her teaching career working with Apache children. Her husband was also hired at a nearby school as a technology coordinator. After teaching a year at this boarding school, Anne's husband decided to use his GI bill to pursue a degree in forestry. Anne resigned her job, and they moved to a university town where her husband worked on his bachelor's degree and she worked on her master's degree in guidance and counseling. Once she received her master's degree, she worked as a social studies teacher at a middle school. She taught approximately 120 students and indicated that 25% of these students were Navajo, 30% Hispanic, 5% were African-American, and the rest were White. She indicated that "White man's education" was not important to the Navajo children. She commented that for the Navajo child,

Education's always important for the children but it's what you learn, and maybe it isn't the book learning of the White man that's so important. Maybe it's knowing who your relatives are, and how you relate to them and stories and your language and your religion.

Due to the diversity of the school population, Anne and a group of teachers team taught. On her team were an African-American man, a White lady, and Anne. They all were dissatisfied with the textbooks, so they introduced cultural diversity into their classes through different lessons and guest speakers. Anne started a Native-American club in which they studied Native dances, created Native crafts such as bead work, and prepared Native foods. With the reinforcement of Native-American culture, Native parents began coming to school and Anne used this time as an opportunity to talk to them about a college education for their children. Anne taught for three years at this school, then she moved to a metropolitan city where she taught American history and Native-American studies at the high school level.

Anne was hired to diversify the history curriculum for this 1,500 student member high school in a metropolitan area. This was at the time of Martin Luther King's assassination and the district wanted to expand its history curriculum to include minority history. Each nine week period she taught the history of a different ethnic group to her high school seniors. She noted that this was the most "culturally diverse student experience ever." She indicated that many students could not read; therefore, she had to have many projects to teach different concepts.

When Anne returned to the classroom after having taken a year's sabbatical to be with her new born daughter, the district placed her in adult education classes in which she taught English to Cuban and Vietnamese refugees. She also worked in an alternative high school for pregnant teenage girls as a counselor and history teacher. After a brief job as a college counselor, she returned to the alternative school to establish job and college opportunities for these young mothers after they finished high school. Anne missed working with Native-American students, and she returned to a public school as a counselor for Native-American students.

Anne indicated that there were at least 110 different Indian tribes present in this metropolitan school system including Acoma, Aleut, Sioux, Apache, Blackfoot, Kat, Haida, Eskimo, Papago, and Ojibwa. She indicated that her counseling program served hundreds of Native-American students. At this time in her career, she began working on her doctorate. Through her doctoral work, she found that the most successful Native-American children in public schools were the ones who were bi-cultural. She commented,

You have to have strength in both (the White and Native-American culture); you know, you have to be well-grounded in your own. You can't feel alienated from your native culture; you can't feel like, you know, you're turning into a White Indian. And you have, you know, you have to, when you are with Native people

you have to feel like you can have, you can pass their cultural rules and when you're with Anglo people you have to feel like you can pass their cultural rules.

When Anne saw the effectiveness of counseling programs for minority groups, she moved to central office where she monitored K-12 counseling programs for the school district, and she served as the hearing officer for students who were about to be expelled from public schools. She was also finishing her doctorate at this time.

Once she finished the doctorate, she applied for a principalship. She became an elementary principal of a high-poverty, high-multicultural school. During her tenure, she established a preschool, a daycare program, a latch key program, parenting programs, a General Education Diploma (GED) program, English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, full inclusion classes, and after-school recreational programs for 500 students. She was so successful that she was chosen to open a new middle school in another district. She got to be involved in every aspect in building this new school. After several years, her school was designated as a blue ribbon school. However, Anne felt there was not much support from central office, and she resigned to become the Director of Human Resources of a college for American Indian Arts.

As the Director of Human Resources, she worked closely with the college administration to move this institution from a two year college to a four year college. She indicated that the federal government established a thirteen member board to oversee this college. These board positions were usually filled with political appointees who were appointed not because they understood the Indian culture and wanted to work hard for the success of the culture, rather these were "political pay back jobs." Anne left this job after six years to become superintendent of a small school district.

First superintendence. Anne's husband was in forestry and on several occasions she accompanied him to the northern part of the state. An influential rancher with whom Anne's husband worked was on the school board in this small, rural district of 500 students, and she was able to convince Anne to apply for the superintendence. She did not get the job, but once the job reopened she was hired. The district is a high poverty school with all students receiving free or reduced lunches. This meant that all students were designated by federal guidelines as below the national poverty line. She indicated that the student ethnic population was approximately 50% Anglo and 50% Hispanic. Her student population included local residents as well as the children of seasonal workers from the mountain resorts and from local ranches. She indicated that due to the economy and lack of jobs, and the opening of a charter school in her district, her school population declined during her tenure as superintendent.

Susan (African-American)

Susan is an African-American, rural school superintendent in a Southern state. The town in which this school district is located is dependent on tourism due to its historical significance. The town was once a major river port and large steamboats traveling the Mississippi River would detour down a narrow bayou and load and unload their goods. While the town is only a remnant of past glory, it still contains many palatial, Victorian mansions that now serve as bed and breakfast resorts. The town has restored its downtown buildings to reflect a serene charm and gentility of a bygone era. At various times throughout the year, the citizenry don 19th century attire, and the generated tourism dollars financially sustain the town. The gross receipts partially fund the school system.

The school system has one elementary, one middle, and one high school. The central office building is located near the high school that is in a heavily wooded area. I met Susan at the central office building where her office was located. I was greeted in the main foyer with a friendly smile and warm handshake. She was fashionably dressed in a green business pant suit and matching accessories. As she had been out of the office most of the day, we were stopped by several people who shared various pieces of information with her. It was an atmosphere of business and collegiality.

I accompanied her to her spacious office, which also serves as the board room. As we sat down at the table, I noticed that her office contained numerous certificates of her accomplishments and trainings. Her bookshelves contain a plethora of notebooks and the writing on their spines identifying them as state guidelines. There was a proud display of family pictures on her bookshelves and desk. Her desk was strewn with several stacks of papers and reports on which she is working. Susan explained that she has a bachelor's degree in elementary education, a master's degree in school administration, and a PhD in Education.

Early life. I explained that this study was a narrative study, and I wanted to hear her life story on the events that led her to the public school superintendence. She immediately indicated that she never aspired to be a superintendent. Her first love was teaching. Susan recounted that as a young girl, who was raised by grandparents, she would always play school. When cousins or her siblings came to visit, they would play school with Susan always taking the role of teacher. She laughed as she indicated that she did not know that she was an "at-risk" child until much later in life. Her grandparents did not have formal jobs, but they had a farm that was located in the woods about half a mile

from the main highway where they raised cows and pigs. Her grandparents also grew watermelons, peas, and corn. They did not have a car but relied on a wagon and a mule to go to town on Saturdays for “necessary supplies.”

She stated that her grandmother was a strong influence in her life. She described her grandmother as a hard worker, and Susan grew up believing that women were strong leaders because of their perseverance, hard work, and ability to multi-task. She commented,

My grandmother cooked, washed clothes, cleaned the house, did outside work and inside work, sat down with me to make sure I learned and completed my homework and didn't do any of it for me. Challenged me, and she was able to juggle all of those things. . . . I believe that women are multi-taskers.

Her grandmother also instilled in her the belief that through education, anything was possible. Every day before she went to school, her grandmother said, “Go to school, get an education, be sweet, and be somebody.” Further, she indicated that her grandmother regularly read a poem to her that had the line, “Hitch your wagon to a star, take a seat and there you are.” Her grandmother had been educated at Prayer Review Normal School. By today's standards, Susan stated that her grandmother probably had about an eighth grade education. Even with that amount of education, Susan stated that her grandmother taught at the local one room school as a young adult. Her grandmother was serious about Susan's education as indicated by a story that involved Susan getting a D in social studies in middle school. She remembered,

One time I got a D in social studies because I changed elementarys, and they did some redistricting. We stayed in the same house. [I attended] Art Elementary and the next year I had to go to Whitehorse, to the middle school. I couldn't go to Art, just because of redistricting, and I was trying to fit in and be popular and so, I had a D in social studies. She got her peach tree switch, and I never made a D after that!

Susan described herself as a good student with grades of As and Bs and graduated in the top ten percent of her class. However, as high school graduation approached, she realized there would be no money to go to college. She had been awarded a \$500 scholarship to a major university, but she did not have the rest of the money. Therefore, soon after graduation, she married her high school sweetheart. She stated that her father-in-law was on the local school board and encouraged her to go to college, but the money was not there. She regretted that her high school counselors did not counsel her on how to apply for financial aid.

Beginning of professional career. To supplement the family income, Susan worked both at the local mall and at a daycare. The daycare owner's husband brought her an application for a scholarship and had her fill it out. With this money, she began attending a local junior college. Once she finished her work at the junior college, she wanted to continue her education at the local university to work on her bachelor's degree. However, her husband did not support her dream to become a teacher, and they divorced. Even though she was a single parent, she continued working multiple jobs to support her daughter and also continue with her education. She met her second husband during this time and told him that compromising her education was not an option. He has remained supportive of her education throughout their more than 20 years of marriage. In 1990, she finished her bachelor's degree, and that same year, she started her first teaching job as a fourth grade teacher. Shortly after she began teaching, she encountered a situation that began her resolve to become a principal and correct what she perceived as injustices against children.

She encountered a young bi-racial (African-American/Caucasian) girl in the school hall crying uncontrollably. Upon further investigation, she found that the young girl has been raised to believe she was White. However, during a classroom activity on similarities and differences among children, her teacher had insisted in front of the class that she was African-American. The child was humiliated and devastated. Susan reported the teacher to the principal who she felt did nothing in dealing with the situation. She indicated, "That night, that was the turning point for me. I said, I'm going back to school, I'm going to be a principal and teachers ARE going to do the RIGHT THING." Three years later, she became the principal of the school where she had begun her teaching career. One year later, she began working on her doctorate in education. Ten years after she began her first teaching job, she was a principal of a second elementary school, and she had her doctorate.

After serving in this small district for several years as a principal, she moved to a medium size college city where she became a principal of a junior high school. She indicated that she would not have been considered for this job had she not had a doctorate. She felt that the doctorate legitimized her and opened professional doors. After three years in this position, she felt that she wanted to move to a central office position as a curriculum and instruction director. She applied for an assistant superintendent job in another city and was accepted. After three months of working as an assistant superintendent, she knew she wanted to be a superintendent. Through working with her superintendent, she realized she had some leadership skills that he lacked, which were relationship building and motivating employees. She felt she was a team and program builder, and she felt these qualities would serve her well as superintendent. She stated,

I wanted to be a leader, motivating the teachers to do what's right in classrooms. I wanted to work systemically to see all of these things that we've learned about in the classes. Does it really work? Can you really affect change in public schools? How does it happen? And what are the things that the leader does to make sure that change occurs? And how do you sustain it? And I thought, I can do this.

First superintendence. Susan began her first superintendence in a small, rural district, and she felt that she was hired as a change agent. She noted that when she was hired, the high school in the district was designated as a school in need of improvement. By the stipulations of No Child Left Behind, they had not made adequate yearly progress. She also had to hire a new high school principal. In her two years as superintendent, all campuses were recognized as having met adequate yearly progress. It is now her mission to have all schools in the district recognized as exemplary, meaning that all schools are not only meeting adequately yearly progress, but exceeding it in every content area.

The district had declining student enrollment and state money. This district had 1,240 students. She indicated that it was approximately 50% White students, 48% African-American students, and the other 2% was Hispanic/Other. Her operating budget was 10 million dollars. In conducting an internal, longitudinal audit, she found that while the district had continually experienced a decline in students, there had not been a decline in faculty. She stated that this could not continue and that through attrition she will not replace positions. She noted that over the last 10 years, her student population has been declining at a rate of approximately 30 students per year. She attributed this decline to loss of jobs due to a large construction facility closing in the area making the school the largest employer in the county. The loss of this construction company also meant the loss of a \$500,000 tax base—it hurt the school tremendously in terms of money and students. With the loss of jobs, the district's free and reduced lunch count was at 79%.

Evelyn (Asian)

Evelyn identifies as bi-racial and is a former public school superintendent. Her father is African-American, and her mother is Japanese. Upon retiring from the superintendence, Evelyn took a high ranking job in the federal government that deals with education on an international scale. I met with her in her government office. Due to recent global events, security was high, and I was checked and double checked. When I arrived at this facility, I was escorted to a building where I presented two IDs, and my person and belongings were scanned. I then walked to another building, where I was photographed and issued a picture ID that I was required to wear while in this facility. I was also told that my cell phone would not work while I was in this building. Evelyn met me in the main foyer, and we hurriedly walked through a maze of hallways and rode several escalators before arriving at her office. The blinds in the office were closed, so I had no idea where I was or what floor I was on in this building. Evelyn was in a temporary office, and therefore, there were not many books or personal belongings. Evelyn was dressed in a maroon business suit. After introducing ourselves and enjoying hot tea, we began the interview.

Early life. I indicated to Evelyn that this is a narrative study, and that I was interested in hearing her unique story of her life experiences that led her to the public school superintendence. Her story began with the struggle of her parents and their bi-racial marriage. Evelyn's father is African-American, and when he was young, he dropped out of school, ran away from home, and joined the Army. Evelyn indicated that her father wanted to be an infantry officer, but "Blacks were not allowed in the infantry." In addition, the Army was highly segregated, and Black soldiers were paid less than

White soldiers. While he was stationed in Japan, he met and married her Japanese mother. Her mother was “ostracized from [by] her family for marrying an American, number one, and a Black American at that.” Evelyn recounted that her mother’s first pregnancy was difficult, and her mother’s family, upon hearing that she could die, came to visit. They told her, “See, you’ve married an American, now you’re dying!” Even though the relationship was strained, the families were able to reconcile. Since Evelyn’s father dropped out of high school and never got the chance to go to college, and her mother only received a high school education, her parents insisted that their eight children receive an education and encouraged a college education for each of them. She remembered that each time her father went to Korea or Vietnam, he would have them shake his hand and promise that they would go to college if something happened to him.

Since her father remained in the Army for 33 years, the family moved a lot. Evelyn was the third of eight children, and she was born in Panama. She attended seven different schools during her school years. She also indicated that her family was poor since the only income came from her father. While there was little money, she stated that her father encouraged the family to stay together. They had virtually no contact with her father’s side of the family, and he never talked about them. She noted that one of the strong messages her parents gave to each of their children was “service to country, service to others, and service to family.” It was a message that was internalized by her and her siblings. She indicated that two of her brothers went to West Point, one of whom is a Major General and also an amputee from a service related injury, a sister is a nurse, a brother is a Foreign Service Officer, and another is a police officer. She felt that her service to others would be in the form of helping. She went on to say that she particularly

helped the “disadvantaged and [those] that are disenfranchised and particularly students of color. And maybe I’ve always been that way because of the discrimination I felt through my entire life.”

Professional life. After high school, Evelyn married and became a dancer for a theatre company in a metropolitan city. She also received a bachelor’s and master’s degree in Business Administration and worked for ten years in personnel administration for a savings and loan company. After 10 years of marriage, she and her husband had two boys, and Evelyn choose to be a stay at home mom until her children were in kindergarten. When her children were still young, she went back to college and became certified to teach history.

Evelyn accepted a job as a high school teacher in another city. Since she did not want to disrupt her sons’ lives, she commuted approximately three hours a day. Also, at this time she worked on her public school administrative certificate. She taught four years as a high school history teacher and then became an assistant principal at the same school. She remained in this job for two years before she accepted another assistant principalship in another district. This job was in an affluent area of a metropolitan city, and she felt that she was hired to add diversity to their leadership. She also commented that at the time there was not a single high school in this district that had a female administrator. She noted that the majority of the students did well on standardized testing, but those students who did not do well were students of color, and they were ignored. She resigned this position after one year, and she chose to take time off to complete her doctoral work. She returned to education as a high school principal in a metropolitan city,

but she still chose to commute from her home, which meant she commuted three hours every day. While she was a high school principal, her marriage ended in divorce.

Her first year as principal was difficult because the teachers went on strike. She stated that she would have to be in her office at 5 a.m. before the “strikers” would be on the picket lines. She stated the level of cultural toxicity was so great, that teachers turned on each other. She remembered, “Well, they [teachers] had baseball bats; they broke off windows, rear view mirrors. They scratched cars, they had signs. It was horrible.” She had to be an authoritarian leader. She further stated,

I do remember saying to my assistant principal, who was sitting in the corner crying, told him to get his ass up, get out on the picket line or get in the office and start working. But, I said, you can’t sit here and cry. We got so much work to do. I would only cry when I got home.

The strike lasted several weeks, but the bitterness was present throughout the rest of the year. She indicated that she made a difference as principal because she knew she had to be a change agent, a servant leader, a disciplinarian, and an advocate for both students and teachers who were there for the right reasons. She was able to change the culture by replacing half of the staff. This was an urban school with many gang related issues, and there was no discipline because “a lot of the teachers, a lot of them were afraid of the kids.” She wanted teachers who cared about students and would return a level of respect and integrity to the classroom. During her tenure, the school’s attendance rate rose more than 40%. One thing she did to improve attendance was call the parents at work. In addition, students who had been absent had to meet with her to discuss the reasons for their absence. She stated that test scores did not improve because of attendance. The schools’ test scores improved when she had caring teachers, teachers who were leaders in the classroom, and leaders in school administration. She wanted

accountability every day from every teacher. Next, teachers needed to be evaluated honestly. Without an honest, open dialogue on professional improvement, teachers were not going to get better. After her first tumultuous year, she left for 30 days to travel to Tibet to honor her Buddhist beliefs through the purification of meditation.

She wanted her students to know that she cared about them. She stated that having lived through discrimination, she could relate to the students who were marginalized. She stated,

I've lived through a lot of discrimination, and I've been called many different names, and it's sad. It hasn't bruised me much, it's made me tougher, but I think what people really need to realize is, it does make a difference when it's a person of color. It does make a difference. I don't care what people say, it does make a difference because I know the way that inner city school was with the minority majority, that kids embraced having someone that was a little bit more like them. And I was tough, yes, was I a disciplinarian, yes, but, I think they embraced that, and they embraced me because they knew I really cared about them.

As a symbol of her commitment to their improvement, she promised her students that if their state test scores came up 5%, she would shave her head! The scores came up 7%, and Evelyn, true to her word, shaved her head—"Shaved it down to the skin!" After her high school principalship, she became human resource director in another district closer to her home. It was "a stepping stone for an assistant superintendence and a superintendence." In this position, she handled all the district grievances, all the Title IX compliance issues, hiring personnel, and evaluating principals. She stayed in this position six years. After these six years of experiencing various administrative positions, she was ready for her first superintendence.

First superintendence. The first superintendence for which she applied, she was hired. This district was in another state and since her two children were out of high school, she took the position. This district was a high school district, which meant that

she only dealt with six high schools and one alternative high school. The student membership in these high schools was 14,000, and she was running a \$125 million annual budget. She indicated that the socio-economic status of the students ran the gamut from low to high. Depending on the school, the free and reduced lunches were as high as 50%. She liked working in a high school district, which she described as similar to New York's school district system, because it gave her a chance to focus on issues directly related to only high schools such as high school curriculums for reading and math.

She realized that she was hired as a change agent, and she noted, "The unfortunate thing with the change agent though is that they don't last long." Yet she understood, "They wanted change, they needed change. They needed to increase their test scores at a couple of the high schools." While she faced many challenges, some of which she could overcome, there were those that caused difficulty. One of the challenges she faced was giving the district a focus point, and she accomplished this through the development of a five year strategic plan.

The district had to establish goals and provide a means of getting there. She referred to herself as a "stat-inoid," and therefore, she looked at the data. By using the data as a justification for change, in three years all of the high schools had made adequate yearly progress. She noted that this was a difficult task as the attendance rates were poor due to the large immigrant population within the district. Since she had a huge immigrant population, the yearly student turnover rate was approximately 30%. She commented that the attendance was steady until March; then the immigrants would leave and return several weeks later and want to finish school. Evelyn was passionate about advocating for

the immigrant students, but this sentiment was not shared by the legislative body in this state.

The speaker of the house for this state wanted to devise a means to track immigrants so that they would not be able to attend school. Evelyn met with him in his office. She relayed that when she was in his office, she was seated on a couch across the room from his lavish desk. He did not greet her, but sarcastically asked her how much money she wanted. She proceeded to drag a chair across the room, place it in front of his desk, and move things on his desk where she could have a face to face conversation. She told him that she did not want money, but that she could not support his thinking on immigration. “He said, ‘Well then, you’ll go to jail’. And I said, ‘That’s going to make headlines across this country, won’t it? ‘Cause, I’ll go to jail.’” At the end of the conversation, he agreed to visit her district. Later, when she resigned her position, he wrote her a stellar letter of recommendation. She indicated that as superintendent, she had to play the political game. She noted, “I think I’m politically astute and have the savvy, but I don’t want to do it. I don’t want to kiss up to anybody. I don’t want to do that. I want to do what I think is right and right for kids and be an advocate for kids.”

Another challenge of her superintendence was dealing with the Native-American tribal council. Although only about 2% of the students were Native-American, the tribal council wanted a loud voice in the way she conducted school business. She indicated that a reservation encompassed part of the school district. She noted that in her previous jobs, she had dealt with many ethnically diverse groups including Cambodian and Laotian, but “I would have to say the Native-American, in my opinion, was the most difficult to, ethnic group, to work with.” The tribal council wanted decision-making power in

anything that involved Native-American students, including the expulsion of students. To improve the relationship with the tribal council, Evelyn attended tribal meetings. She noted,

I think we improved the relationship with the Native-American tribes. It wasn't just the Paswee Yake, but also the Arapahoe. I mean it was because I was the first superintendent in 100 years of the school district, one, that was female, two, that was a minority, and three, that ever visited the tribal council.

While she did visit with the council, she stated, "It was not easy" because they felt as though they were separate, and "in their mind, a separate nation. They just didn't care what the rules were." She indicated that even though the tribal council was frustrating to deal with, they did not have enough political clout to overturn any of her decisions regarding students. She did not acquiesce to any of their demands nor did she render privileged treatment to Native-American students, and they were expected to follow the same rules as other students.

Evelyn was a superintendent for three years when the board of education changed. When she was hired it was a 5-0 vote. During her last contract, the vote was 3-2, so she realized her time as a change agent was growing short. With the state fighting immigration, she knew she would resign. She never felt things should be about ethnicity or the country in which children were born, but about giving every child the best possible opportunities; when that was overridden with politics, she resigned.

Day-to-Day Experiences of the Superintendence

The second research question for this project was—How do they describe their day-to-day experiences in this position? The experience of the superintendence is inherently different for each of the participants due to the culture of the school, the student population, the urban or rural setting, the budget and a myriad of other issues that

are unique to that situation. In this section, each of the participants shares her individual perspective on the issues that she encountered in this position.

Katherine

Katherine believed that the day-to-day superintendence was about being a change agent who was under the guidance of the school board. As a change agent, she had to identify the needs of the schools through collaborative meetings and find the people and resources to fill the needs. They just didn't care what the rules were." She indicated that even though the tribal council was frustrating to deal with, they did not have enough political clout to overturn any of her decisions regarding students. She did not acquiesce to any of their demands nor did she render privileged treatment to Native-American students, and they were expected to follow the same rules as other students. She considered this a priority goal because she felt children needed to be in a safe environment with well-trained staff, and it gave women a chance to pursue an education. Next, she felt that providing day care facilities was a great partnership between the school and community. In addition, she was a strong advocate for school-based health care programs. Again, this was providing a valuable service for parents and students on the school campus, and it served as a strong conduit between the community and the school. In addition, she was able to procure legislative appropriation money to buy a building and renovate it after school programs for students.

She commented that the day-to-day activities of a superintendent were varied. She liked interacting with the students and faculty, and she derived happiness from the "small, little triumphs" that each day would bring. She liked connecting with faculty and finding funds for new projects. Also, the day-to-day operation of a school meant

collaborating with staff, students, parents, and community members, and there was always paper work. She felt that professional relationships were critical to operating an effective school. Therefore, she believed in collaboration with principals and staff members. She acknowledged that many decisions were hers to make, and she felt that to be informed was critical in making wise decisions.

She noted that the most difficult changes were internal changes. During her second superintendence, the district was designated as a corrective actions district, an official designation by the guidelines of No Child Left Behind. The students were underperforming on the state mandated testing, and most of the schools in the district were not obtaining adequate yearly progress. Therefore, there were staff changes in her office as well as within the schools, and after multiple conversations with the faculty, she spearheaded a change in the entire district curriculum. She indicated that there was dissention when she insisted, along with her principals, that there be more classroom accountability. Katherine commented that as a change agent, she understood that her tenure in this district would not be long as change is oftentimes difficult and unsettling, and the superintendent may be the scapegoat.

The most difficult aspect of Katherine's second superintendence was tribal politics. While the school district was regulated by the state, the tribal council had a considerable amount of power with the state department of education to influence the internal workings of the school. Katherine found it difficult to deal with the tribal council as they did not understand public education, and they wanted power over the school board. Within the tribe there were various clans, and some clans had more political

influence and power than others. There was constant friction among staff members who were members of various clans within the tribe.

She noted that on a day-to-day basis the budget was a concern. During her first superintendence, she was able to supplement the budget through grant monies. Even though she had a lot of money in her budget during her second superintendence, the regulations on how the money could be spent were a problem. Too often, the line items in which the money had to be placed were not necessarily where the money was needed. Even though she found the superintendence to be demanding, she would recommend women with strong leadership skills pursue this profession.

Agnes

Agnes narrated that everything about being a superintendent was tough because a superintendent was responsible for so many lives. She felt that each decision she made was for the students' benefit. She indicated that the day-to-day nature of the job meant a superintendent had to handle many complaints and problems. She stated that someone or something was always in "crisis."

All we do is hear complaints, problems and complaints. That's all you deal with on a daily basis—crisis. You know, from money to [water] leaks, athletics, busses not running, parents upset. I mean, it's just, you know, you're dealing with problems every day, never a fun, I mean you seldom get anything that's positive. It's all negative.

She indicated that on a day-to-day basis, she got to work with a good staff and great students. She said that it was rewarding to see students do well in activities, compete in athletic events, and graduate. She noted that when the school was doing well, it affected the whole atmosphere of the community. She stated that one of her greatest pleasures was visiting the elementary classrooms. She remembered an incident in which

she was visiting a third grade classroom where they were playing “math rodeo.” This was a math facts game in which a student would sit on a saddle that was mounted to a saw horse. The student in the saddle answered math questions (in this case multiplication tables) until he/she missed a question. Then someone else would sit in the saddle. The students wanted Agnes to be next in the “math saddle.” She quickly answered all the multiplication questions at which point one student turned to another and commented, “She’s really smart—that’s why she’s the boss.” These were enjoyable moments for Agnes and reminded her why she spent countless hours finding funds for classroom resources.

To deal with the day-to-day running of each campus, it was important to have a strong leadership team. When she became superintendent, there was no leadership team. She stated that the leadership team was not there to “sound off amongst ourselves,” but the team was there to help support each other’s efforts. She noted that one of the team’s greatest contributions to the community was building a new middle school. She indicated there were many behavioral issues with having a 6th grade through 12th grade campus. Therefore, she and her leadership team found funding to have 6th through 8th grades separate from the high school campus. She stated that with a leadership team, “I wasn’t the only one on the mountain. I had people there with me now.”

Part of the day-to-day operation of the school was ensuring that all components were in place to have a strong curriculum. She indicated that as a superintendent, this was one of the things of which she was most proud. In a small district, it was hard to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) because one student who functioned poorly could determine if AYP was met. She noted a superintendent’s job required that the

superintendent balance seeing the whole as well as the parts. She stressed that there had to be district wide momentum and continuity if there was to be seamless transitions for students. She did get help from the regional educational cooperative and an organization that emphasized helping rural districts in the northern part of the state. With their help and resources, she was able to incorporate a strong reading program known as Linda Mood Bell into the reading curriculum.

Next, to have an effective school on a day-to-day basis, teachers had to have on-going professional development. She believed that professional development supported continuous classroom improvement. The teachers had to have time to collaborate and build curriculum. She encouraged teachers to have students chart their own data so the students could understand where they needed to be in their learning. This process allowed Agnes to work with principals and teachers to identify and fill in gaps for each student's learning.

Agnes felt that on a day-to day basis assessment was important. Understanding assessment allowed the district to make data driven decisions. This, coupled with measurable academic progress (MAP) testing, helped keep teachers and students on track for the state testing. The MAP testing was conducted three times a year—at the beginning of the year to establish a baseline, a winter testing period to determine growth and needed intervention, and an end of the year exam to gauge any progress. An incentive to encourage students to do well on the test was assigning the same number of growth points they made on the test to their classroom grade. As part of the evaluation process for teachers, they were required to show how their students were doing academically and what interventions and strategies they were implementing for students.

Looking at her career, she stated that at first, she was very insecure as a superintendent, but through experience, she gained confidence. Gaining confidence in her ability to lead enabled her to work with her staff, students, and parents. Through these connections, she understood that the district needed strong reading programs and teachers who were willing to meet each student's individual needs.

She indicated that her counseling training helped tremendously. As a counselor she was a collaborator, and she felt that problems could be worked out through negotiating and doing the right things for the right reasons; she held this same belief as a superintendent. For some, it was hard to put personal concerns aside to do what was right for all, such as in the case of the elementary principal who she put on a three-year contract.

Anne

Anne indicated that the role of the superintendent in a small district was to provide leadership in a myriad of areas that include curriculum, learning, student transportation, federal programs, district safety, cafeteria management, charter school liaison, professional development and grant writing, partnerships in rural development, and rural revitalization among other day-to-day responsibilities. She felt that part of her responsibility was to develop innovative programs that would benefit both the school and the community. As part of her commitment to build innovative programs, Anne traveled to Australia to study a school-oyster program that saved a fledging community.

She commented,

And what we saw was so impressive. We saw communities that were dying, and the school thought of a project, where they were teaching children something, and it developed into an industry for that area. A way to sustain a town. . . . Now,

these now have become, actually, worldwide, big industries for Australia. It has really helped their economy.

When she returned to her district, she was instrumental in developing two innovative programs—a laser engraving program and a horse therapy program. These projects were “cooperative and collaborative.” Through mutual grants and sharing of resources, the school and community were able to offer teaching and learning opportunities to students.

The laser engraving technology program that she established was an attempt to teach students laser engraving technology. Anne’s vision for this program was to have a community member run the program through the school and train students in the use of this technology. Therefore, it could act as a community/school partnership program. Anne hoped that through this partnership, the program would be self-sustaining. She noted that it was difficult in small communities to find people who were willing to build a program and then stay long enough to make the program sustainable, profitable, and act as a learning opportunity for students.

The horse therapy program was a program in which the district utilized horses to reach their at-risk students and reduce unacceptable behavior in the school. Anne felt that giving students’ responsibilities in caring for the horses would “help mediate some of those problems that children may have,” and help students understand and develop constructive relationships. The district allowed a local rancher to use school property to raise and train horses. The community found funds to maintain the horses, and in return, the horse trainer would have at-risk students work with the horses to gain a sense of caring, self-esteem, work ethic, and responsibility. The program received national recognition for its innovative approaches to reaching at-risk and marginalized students.

The biggest challenge during Anne’s superintendence was the opening of a charter school in her district. Charter schools have their own budget and their governing board can hire and terminate teachers. However, they are still under the “control” of the district in which they operate. Once the charter school opened, the high school lost at least 100 students to the charter school, which forced Anne to lay off teachers. She indicated that the charter high school in her district forced her to cut 50% of the teaching staff. The relationship with the charter board was strained due to mistrust. She noted that it “was painful to see two really great communities fight with each other.”

Last year Anne resigned her position as superintendent. She indicated that the job was getting too repetitious. She stated,

I was starting to go to the same meetings, the same trainings; the schedule was getting too repetitious for me. . . . And, so, I think keeping it fresh for myself was probably, for me, as an individual, probably one of the hardest things, that was probably the most difficult thing.

She felt that she had a positive experience being a public school superintendent, and she indicated that she would encourage other women to seek this position.

Susan

Building relationships and communications was at the core of Susan’s day-to-day leadership style. On a day-to-day basis, Susan felt she had to be a role model, and part of her modeling entailed not coming to work early. She indicated that this sent a message that she trusts those that she has placed in positions of authority and trust. She commented that showing up too early sent the message that she was watching employees, and therefore, this would not support relationship building. She stated, “I’m just in the way; they don’t need me.” Once she arrived, she built on relationships by visiting each office in the central office complex, greeted people, and listened to their stories. She felt

this small act of civility paid huge dividends. People wanted her to listen to them and care about them as individuals. She noted that when people felt that she cared, they would work twice as hard. Her routine included collaborating each morning with the assistant superintendent and the district business manager and checking e-mails and phone calls. She checked in with each of the principals on the campuses to make sure schools were running smoothly. She noted that she wanted the principals to keep her informed on all matters. Parents were often surprised when they came to her office to complain, and she was armed with a good deal of information. She felt that honest communication was the backbone of an organization.

As a hands-on administrator, she made frequent visits to the campuses, and she made herself approachable and available. She stated,

Typically, I may have four or five back-to-back conferences with someone who's made an appointment. Might be a teacher, might be a parent, might be a custodian, might be a student, might be someone working on her doctorate you know it just depends. May have a couple of personnel issues that I have to call an attorney for to get clarification. Might, in the course of the day, talk to a board member.

She indicated that board relationships were tenuous and frustrating. She had a seven member school board, none of whom had a background in education. She stated that the most difficult part of her job was "working with seven individuals who don't have a clue." Even though board members went to trainings, they did not think like educators. In reference to board member thinking style, she stated,

Our brains don't think alike, so I have to write those agenda items so that they can understand, and I can give them all that I can give them, and then at the end of the day, become frustrated again because you don't agree with me because you were elected so you want to make everyone see that you're protecting them, or whatever it is, that can be frustrating, because you have seven people who are saying, "this is what we want," because they're hearing from the public, who, the majority of them are in another field.

She also noted that board members had a personal agenda whether it was a vendetta or a cause. With so many issues, the job of superintendent was multifaceted and demanding; in her state, the average tenure for a superintendent followed the national trend of five years.

She felt that on a day-to-day basis, two of her major jobs were listening and being seen. Whether it was personnel in central office, department heads in the various schools, the food service director, or a parent, they wanted to have a voice that was heard and valued. Sometimes the only resolution was that she heard their story, and they felt as though she cared about them as individuals. She indicated that she was at most functions. It was important for her to be visible as this sent the message of caring and involvement.

Evelyn

She commented that on a day-to-day basis, the superintendence was a busy job. She established a routine of going in early and responding to e-mails at the start of the day and at the end of the day, as she was too busy during the day to check. She felt very strongly that she had to be kept informed. Therefore, she held weekly meetings with her senior leadership team. She wanted everyone on the same page, and everyone should be receiving the same information from her.

Evelyn stated that in a large district there were different leadership teams, and therefore, conversations varied. For instance, she would meet regularly with the human resource department to discuss personnel issues. She felt these meetings were imperative because the board members would most likely hear about personnel issues long before they would hear about curriculum issues. She also met several times a week with her

deputy superintendent. The deputy superintendent was responsible for handling student related issues such as discipline and expulsion hearings. She also scheduled regular meeting with her facility management team. This team was responsible for the repair, maintenance, and building projects for the district. She stated it was a never-ending battle to keep the building in operating order. While she did meet with the curriculum, professional development, and assessment teams, these meetings were not held as frequently as the others.

One of the teams she met with was the alternative high school team. She was very proud of this team because she was responsible for creating the alternative high school for at-risk students; she also started a school for teenage mothers that also had a day care center. She noted this was not child care, but a day care center that was academically appropriate for the children. She remembered that when her job was too overwhelming, she would go to the day care center or one of the schools. She remembered,

If I got really down, I'd go and rock a baby. ... I would just go there and just pick up one of the babies, even if they were sleeping, and just hold it and rock it for a little while and then put him down and go back to work. Because it helps you refocus when, or where, if I was visiting a school, and our big schools also had day care centers for toddlers, so whenever I'd visit the classrooms and everything else, I always ended my day going to the day care centers.

Encourage, Inform, and Support Aspiring Female Superintendents

My third research question focused on gaining an understanding of the encouragement each participant would give to other women seeking this entering this position. The third research question states—Based on their experiences as female superintendents, what can be inferred that will encourage, inform, and support other women seeking and entering the superintendence? During the interviews, each woman spoke openly concerning women who would seek this position. This section presents

their discussion concerning how they would encourage, inform, and support other women who choose to become public school superintendents. The inferences that can be drawn from these discussions will be presented under analysis of themes.

Katherine

After having been a superintendent for eight years, Katherine indicated that she would be very selective in whom she would encourage and support as a female superintendent. She noted that a woman seeking the public school superintendence would have to be someone who is psychologically and academically strong and not “place bound,” because the tenure of a superintendent is historically short. She indicated that being a female superintendent is difficult because women are not as political as men, and the job is becoming more political. She would want to encourage someone who is family, community, and kid focused. She would encourage new female superintendents to seek out somebody that they could trust and talk to candidly as the job is very lonely and isolating. Also, she would inform females that as public figures their private life is no longer private.

Agnes

There were several areas that Agnes felt should be of concern to aspiring female superintendents. She stated that she would suggest any woman entering the superintendence to take care of their health because “this job, can literally make you sick if you don’t take care of yourself.” Second, a new superintendent needs mentoring. She did not receive mentoring, and she felt this was absolutely necessary to understand the demands of this job. She stated that new superintendents need to understand that a superintendent does not have much impact on the day-to-day activities in the classroom.

The classroom teacher has a lot more influence directly influencing lives than a superintendent.

She would encourage the new superintendent to have a personal belief system.

Agnes felt that a personal belief system gives the superintendent integrity and sustains her during the darker hours of this job. On her bookshelf was a plaque that read—

BELIEVE. She noted,

Religion plays a big part of my life ... And I just feel like, you know, believing, you know that what you're doing is the right thing and you're doing it, not for yourself but for other people. That, you know, and that's what education is about, is that you know, we're here to, it's kind of a giving profession, and we're giving of ourselves to make sure that these kids have what they need to make futures for themselves, and I guess that's, I hope that's still what people would say about me after I leave. You know, that I believe that this district can continue to do well.

Agnes indicated that female superintendents have to be willing to deal with the politics of the job. She indicated that men are much more adept at maneuvering through the politics, and women must learn to maneuver through the political aspects of the job as well. Part of politics is having good working relationships with the power brokers. She stated that part of the politics of the superintendence is knowing how to sell herself to the board and to the public. As distasteful as this may be, it is part of being effective.

She would encourage a female not to think in terms of gender when she enters the superintendence, but think of it as a job that needs to be done to make students better. She commented,

You're the superintendent, and you do your job and you, you know, we're the leaders and our job is, you know, making sure that we're providing the best education to kids, and I just feel like it doesn't make any difference if I'm a woman or it's a male. We all have the same role to make, that we're carrying out the superintendent's job.

She conceded that there are people who perceive women by their gender and treat them differently than their male counterparts. She commented that men seem to have an easier time dealing with the board and the community because they are males. Yet, even though women are perceived differently, they still must understand that they have a job to do, and it is their job to do it well regardless of external perceptions about gender abilities. She would caution a new female superintendent that women simply have to work harder to prove themselves.

Anne

Anne indicated that she would encourage women to become superintendents because it fits well with “women’s nurturing nature.” She indicated that female superintendents need to work together to establish a “conduit that leads [women] to a superintendence.” Further, she felt that current female superintendents need to nurture and mentor women within their districts who they have identified as strong leaders. She indicated that she would encourage women who seek the superintendence to obtain a doctorate. She felt that working on a doctorate would give women the confidence they would need to tackle large projects.

Anne would also encourage new superintendents to guard against naiveté and not be too trusting. She noted that a board member, who did not like her, intentionally set up a meeting that caused the entire board to be in violation of the open meeting act. This act requires that a quorum of board members cannot meet as a group to discuss school issue without a 24-hour public notice. Therefore, she would encourage a new superintendent to be astute regarding the law and staying professional even when she comes under attack by vindictive board members.

Anne stated that she would encourage new female superintendents in many areas of leadership. First, she indicated that new female superintendents needed to surround themselves with positive mentors. She stated that positive people help initiate ideas, support ideas, and follow through on projects. She also noted that mentors were important because superintendents need someone in whom they can honestly and candidly confide, and mentors help develop leadership skills. Mentors can help the new superintendent navigate through the overwhelming demands of this position. She would also encourage the female superintendent to learn from others. She noted that a new superintendent needs to take every opportunity to observe good leaders.

She felt that a spiritual side is necessary to feel a sense of community. She commented,

If you are a Christian and you do put your trust in God, you have to do that in the superintendence, because you can't solve everything. You can't do everything. You have to trust God that He'll make it work, and if you don't know the answer to that day, or you're really concerned or stumped, just say a prayer and ask for help and back off of it for a while. And lo and behold in the morning, there's the answer. . . . That's all you can do is put in a good prayer, and reflect a lot.

Susan

Susan felt that it was important for her to mentor women. She indicated that she has spoken to several women who she felt had leadership potential, but she stated that ultimately women have to make their own personal decision. She was currently mentoring her assistant superintendent, and she stated,

I bring her in, and I let her ride the ride with me. If it's something great, I'll let her know, if it's something bad, I'll let her know. And I'll explain to her, not so that she can get on 'my side,' but so that she can develop that leadership side.

Susan also mentored and encouraged women to enter administration through her presentations at the local, regional, and state levels. She felt that she was more than an

administrator to the district; therefore, she also was compelled to use her position to make a difference in women's lives. She noted, "You can make a difference in the lives of a lot of students and adults from this seat," and she does.

Evelyn

Evelyn would encourage other women, especially women of color, to enter the public school superintendence. However, she felt that women superintendents must possess higher college degrees to be taken seriously and gain a higher level of respect. She stated that the number one qualification would be having the PhD.

Well, we, definitely, number one have to get your PhD, because I don't care what people say, they'll hire a man that's been a coach that doesn't have a PhD, to be a superintendent before they hire a female minority, or female period, a woman with a PhD. I don't care what people say, I know they say that that's not true, but it's true.

Evelyn commented that she encouraged women frequently about entering the superintendence, but she also cautioned them that a woman will be more scrutinized than a man in ways ranging from the way she carries on a conversation to the way she dresses. She noted,

I tell them, you can't whine about how you don't have time, you can't. You have to talk, you have to be tough, you have to be thick-skinned because they'll talk about my hair color and my clothes, even though a man will wear the same damn suit every day. . . . And it is the way it is and a female superintendent will get more scrutiny than a man, your decisions will get more scrutiny.

She also spoke about the quiet strength, determination, and spirituality that women superintendents must possess. Along with strength, there must be tenacity and resilience. She credits her mother with developing these qualities in her. She indicated that her mother was the stereotypical, quiet Japanese mother who frequently quoted

Confucius or Buddha. She remembered a time when she was frustrated with writing her dissertation and was ready to give up. She related that she told her parents,

I think I'm just done, I'm tired. I can't finish. I just, I don't want to do it anymore. I don't care ... My mother comes over and she said, I guess you have to do harikiri, seppuku, you know seppuku. Where you kill yourself. . . . [He] says you must finish, I talked to your grandfather. Now, my grandfather has been dead for like 50 years, and she said I talked to your grandfather the other day, and he said you must finish. I did finish because she said I had to because my ancestors were all waiting for me to finish. My mom said, if you fall down seven times, you have to get up eight, and she told me I was a reincarnated samurai. . . . So whenever things got tough, that's what I think about.

According to Evelyn, each woman who aspires to the superintendence must possess her own brand of inner strength, and Evelyn would encourage women to understand that a portion of inner strength comes from a spiritual life. She would encourage aspiring female superintendents to have a spiritual life. She noted she is a practicing Buddhist, and she takes time to meditate every day. Anything that women considered therapeutic should be part of their day and add to their own spirituality. She stated that superintendents must find time every day for themselves.

She would also caution that being a superintendent is a lonely job. She commented that there are very few women with whom to network. She added that the adage of "it's lonely at the top" is true. Not only is there no network, but there are no mentors. Therefore, she would caution women seeking the position that they will have to learn the job on their own. Too, she noted that she would advise the new superintendent that sometimes, she will have to be a trailblazer and create new paths in uncharted territory with very little support. She commented that once when she grew weary of being the "pioneer," her father admonished her by saying, "If not you, who"? Who's going to stand up for the kids"? Yet, even with the pressures and uncertainty of

this position, a woman has to appear composed, intelligent, and knowledgeable because people are watching and evaluating her every move.

Emergent Themes

An analysis of the in-depth interviews with each of the participants revealed underlying themes within each of their narratives. Each of the interviews was transcribed, and from these transcriptions, codes were developed. The codes were then placed into themes as they related to each of the participant’s narratives (Table 6).

Table 6

Themes by Participant

Theme	Participants				
	Katherine	Agnes	Anne	Susan	Evelyn
Mobility	•		•	•	•
Support system		•		•	•
Sense of Fairness	•	•	•	•	•
Lack of Loyalty		•			
Family Support		•		•	•
Advocacy for Students	•	•	•	•	•
Building Programs	•		•		•
Leadership	•	•	•	•	•
Power/Influence	•	•	•	•	•
Lack of Mentor	•	•	•	•	•
Lonely		•			•
Board of Ed. Issues	•	•	•	•	•
Unions	•				•
Day Care	•				•
Community Involvement	•		•		
Curriculum Development	•	•			
Marginalized Students	•		•		•
Spirituality		•	•	•	•
Mobility	•		•	•	•
PhD	•		•	•	•
Male Dominance	•				▪
Mentoring Women	•	▪	▪	▪	▪

Assessments	▪	▪	▪	▪
Loyalty/Trust		▪		
Change Agent	▪	▪	▪	▪

Next, the themes were matched to the research questions that they supported (Table 7). The themes that did not support the research questions were placed under other emergent themes and also will be discussed in these findings.

Table 7
Themes Supporting Research Questions

Theme	Research Questions		
	1	2	3
	What are the life stories of a group of ethnically diverse female superintendents that led them to the public school superintendence?	How do they describe their day-to-day- experiences in this position?	Based on their experiences as female superintendents what can be inferred that will encourage, inform and support other women seeking and entering the superintendence?
Mobility	▪		
Support system	▪		
Sense of Fairness	▪		
Lack of Loyalty	▪		
Family Support	▪		▪
Advocacy for Students	▪	▪	▪
Develop Programs		▪	▪
Leadership		▪	▪
Power/Influence		▪	▪
Lack of Mentor		▪	
Lonely		▪	▪
Board of Ed. Issues		▪	▪
Unions		▪	
Day Care		▪	
Community Involvement		▪	
Curriculum Development		▪	

Marginalized Students		▪	
Spirituality		▪	▪
Mobility		▪	▪
PhD		▪	▪
Male Dominance	▪	▪	
Mentoring Women		▪	
Assessments		▪	
Loyalty/Trust	▪		
Change Agent	•	▪	▪

Emergent Themes Leading to the Superintendence

Katherine (Caucasian)

There were several themes from Katherine’s early life that emerged from her narrative that set the stage for how she would navigate her professional career. The first theme to emerge was that of male dominance. During her early years, she had a difficult relationship with her step-father. She noted that “My mother married somebody I couldn’t stand who I have now grown to love but at that time, I hated him.” She remembered that he was “very strict,” and the expectations for her were high. In terms of school performance, she indicated that expectations were always high. Her step-father also had a great impact on which college she would attend. In discussing college, she noted,

It was just expected of me. It was not a question. And I mean you know at that time there was no issue, no question, no discussion, I knew I was going to college. My step-father insisted that I go down to _____ because he thought that would be a better environment.

Once she arrived at college, the theme of male dominance again emerged when her male advisor discouraged her from pursuing a career in biology. Katherine wanted to be a biologist. This male advisor based his advice on her gender rather than her desire to

be a biologist. She acquiesced to male authority and changed her major. The emergent theme of male authority was also evident as she spoke about her marriage.

Katherine earned her degree in elementary and special education. Shortly thereafter, she married. Once again, the theme of male dominance was indicated in the belief system that the wife was supposed to follow the husband's career. During this marriage, Katherine moved a lot. She noted, "Basically, I spent those years following my husband around. As you know, at that time, it was pretty much where the husband's work takes you." At one point, they moved to an Indian reservation, and she remembered, "We moved out there in a mobile home in the middle of nowhere, and I burst into tears when we first went out there because it really was not where I wanted to spend a whole year of my life." When Katherine left public education and became a self-employed state certified diagnostian, the theme of male dominance continued.

Once Katherine became a full time diagnostician, she worked at a girls' correctional facility, which had a strong system of male dominance. This facility was run as a prison-like like environment for the adolescent offenders. The girls were housed in dorms behind a tall fence with barbed wire. She noted that she did not like this job because "It was the corrections department. . . . It's never about the kids. It's more the hierarchy of the adults, and it was very hard for women. That was a very male, machismo operation there and women were not treated very well." She noted that this was her first experience in her professional career with blatant professional discrimination against women. The next time she experienced this male dominance was at a boys' correctional facility.

During her tenure at the boys' correctional facility, she and the male superintendent were doing good things to rehabilitate young men. The superintendent was very supportive of Katherine's efforts to supply a quality educational environment and gave her carte blanche in establishing other programs that would contribute to the rehabilitation process. However, due to the dual purpose of this facility, there was conflict. On the one hand, the boys were in prison, and therefore, they were under the supervision of guards. On the other hand, Katherine provided for special education services as required by law. As identified by Katherine, the male domination issue arose because she was the first and only female administrator, and there were men within the facility that resented her authority.

In retrospect, Katherine noted that one of the main problems in this work environment was the lack of keeping the two parts of this system—the incarceration and educational components—separate. Once these two systems blurred, the hostility over responsibility became an issue. The residual and oftentimes petty effect was domination and power. For instance, when the correctional officers felt slighted, they would refuse to send the boys to the educational unit for required services. In the end, it was the boys who became the pawns in this power play. After three years in this contentious environment, Katherine resigned.

A second emergent theme that led her to the superintendence was a strong advocacy for students and her ability to develop programs that served both students and the community. While her special education training nurtured an affinity for special needs children during her teaching career, she advocated for all students. The theme was most prevalent during her tenure at the boys' correctional facility in which she developed

a day-care program that was utilized by both the prison system and the community. Along with the daycare program, she developed parenting classes for the inmates and the community. Through her grant writing monies she hired teachers; established both a family and a resource center; taught parenting, discipline classes, and technology classes; and provided Women, Infants and Children (WIC) services for low-income families.

She continued building programs during her administration at the school for emotionally disturbed adolescents. Not only did she supply the behavior modifications that these students needed, she implemented a credit recovery program for the older students that allowed them to graduate from high school. She also ensured that the ratio of teachers to students was never more than 1:8, and that each teacher had an aide.

Agnes (Hispanic)

One of the emergent themes that developed during Agnes's narrative was the strong emotional support she received from her father. Due to poverty, her father was unable to attend college. He made a personal commitment that his children would have the opportunity that was denied him. His dream for his children was that they would receive a college education. However, long before Agnes attended college, her father instilled a sense in each of his children that they could accomplish anything. She indicated that her father's belief in his children's ability was a foundation for their continued success in life. Agnes felt that a strong family support system contributed to her rise to the public school superintendence.

A theme that emerged during Agnes's narrative was the theme of fairness. During first grade, when she was wrongly accused of cheating by unknowingly having the teacher's edition of a textbook, she learned the lesson of fairness and making assumptions

when all the facts were not known. She indicated that this experience influenced her leadership style in a positive way. She commented,

I can't assume. I have to let people come and tell me, even when I get complaints from parents or whatever, board members. I always call the staff in and say, okay, tell me what happened. I have to listen to them. I can't just assume they were wrong and get all the information and then make my decision from there. Not just on surface stuff. I need to make sure that I check it thoroughly so that I make the right decision, not just accuse people of doing something that maybe it wasn't that way.

Another theme that emerged during Agnes's narrative was the theme of loyalty.

Agnes felt that throughout her career, she had been loyal to the district with her time and her commitment. As an elementary teacher, a counselor, and a principal, her focus was on making students better, and to that end, she admitted she spent an inordinate amount of time at school and, at times, placed her family second to serve others.

Her loyalty became apparent with several notable examples. First, when she left the third grade position after 15 years to become the counselor, she left all of her materials and supplies to the new teacher so neither the new teacher nor her students would have to start from scratch. When she became a high school counselor, she remained loyal to the younger students and only took the high school position if she could still serve as an elementary counselor once a week. Therefore, when her loyalty came into question by a new principal, she felt "demoralized" and was compelled to defend her sense of loyalty to the school. She stated that she had given her heart and soul to the school system, and she adamantly defended her character. Even though her character had been brought into question, she stated that she did not disrespect this administrator, but she worked hard to gain his understanding of her commitment to a district she loved.

One of the reasons Agnes chose to become a superintendent was because she saw the lack of loyalty among those superintendents and principals who came from other states or districts. Often in a small rural district, the by-product of constant administrative change was inconsistency and instability for the school district. During her tenure with the school district, numerous principals and superintendents were hired and released or they resigned, and she felt this had an adverse effect on the seamless function of the school district. With the lack of consistent leadership, there was no continuity in the district staff or its programs. With the lack of consistent leadership, people tended to be committed to their jobs, themselves, or each other but not loyal to the welfare of the entire district. Once she entered the superintendence and saw the severity of the problems, she described the district as “a royal mess.” Therefore, as she entered the superintendence, she hired those who shared her philosophy of loyalty to the district and the students.

Anne (Native-American)

The major emergent theme that emerged from Anne’s life experiences and led her to the public school superintendence was advocacy for students. This lesson came early in Anne’s life from her Aunt Winnie, who advocated not only for a written language for the White Earth Band of Ojibwas, but who became a liaison for those seeking to leave the reservation. From her Aunt Winnie, Anne learned that people must be willing to advocate for themselves. Her Aunt Winnie realized the injustice of not being hired due to racial discrimination, but she advocated for herself and through this act was able to help others. Anne commented, “She became a conduit for people that had to leave the reservation cause they were starving, too many helpless. She would help them find homes and

apartments because she knew how to do that.” In addition, Anne had to leave college after her first semester due to lack of money. It was her Aunt Winnie who was able to find her tribal scholarship money to continue her education. Anne took these life lessons and applied them to her educational career.

Throughout Anne’s career, she chose to live in areas where she could best serve Native-American and underprivileged children. In her job at a middle school, she and her group of team teachers created a diverse curriculum in which Native culture was taught. In her Native-American club she commented, “We had dances, and we smelled up the school with lamb stew, and we’d be cooking for the evening and making fry bread and the Native children were eager. . . . And so that was an expression of my culture.” She was an advocate for the Native-American culture and conveyed the message that Native-American children’s heritage was an important part of their identity that deserved celebration.

When Anne’s next career move brought her to a metropolitan city, she created a history curriculum in which each nine weeks a different minority’s history would be taught—Mexican American history, African American history, Native-American history, Irish history, and Jewish history. She commented, “It really was a hands-on approach, it had to be because they could not read the book. I had to work really hard. It was probably the most culturally diverse student experience I ever had.” She felt it was important to advocate for these students and create programs in which they could study their cultural heritage.

She also advocated for pregnant teenage girls in her role as counselor and teacher at an alternative school. She noted that during this time, pregnant girls suffered from

sexual discrimination. They were forced by the public school administration to drop out of school “When they started showing. . . . They were kicked out.” Therefore, Anne helped secure a Ford Foundation grant, and an alternative school was created for these young women. Along with core classes, the school had a nursery, child development and family living classes, a Mother and Infant care program, and a clinic. The girls were able to stay at this school their entire pregnancy, and receive a high school diploma. At the time Anne helped create these programs there were 125 girls. She stated that currently the school is serving approximately 400 young girls.

As an elementary principal, Anne continued to advocate for parents and students in a high-poverty, high-multicultural school. Again, as part of her advocacy for parents and students, she saw the needs of her school and her community, and she built programs to fit those needs. This school had a large population of migrant workers, and therefore, to meet the needs of this community, she established GED classes, a daycare program, a latchkey program, and a parenting program. For Anne, advocacy meant reaching both the parent and the child. She devoted much of her professional career to helping the marginalized and disenfranchised student. Once she established programs, parents became involved with their student’s education. Through her advocacy, she established a sense of caring and trust. These jobs prepared Anne to continue advocating for students and the community during her first superintendence.

Susan (African-American)

One of the emergent themes to emanate from Susan’s narrative leading to the public school superintendence was the importance of a strong support system. This theme was evident in her early years with the strong influence and sometimes formidable

“switches” of her grandmother. From her grandmother’s belief that dreams could come true as exemplified with the repetitive line, “Hitch your wagon to a star, take a seat and there you are,” to Susan watching her grandmother’s multi-tasking skills, Susan was surrounded by the belief that women were very capable, and education was the key to success.

Another pivotal person was her boss’s husband who was able to obtain a scholarship for Susan to attend a junior college. This support person changed the trajectory of her life. This scholarship allowed the unfolding of her academic career that ultimately led to the superintendence. Once she entered her master’s program, an astute professor became another support person who recognized Susan’s potential and influenced her in two areas. First, he initiated the idea of the doctorate, and he encouraged her to broaden her thinking by experiencing multiple jobs in multiple districts. Susan followed his advice, and she earned her doctorate and experienced six different educational jobs in five different districts ranging in size from 1A to 5A schools before obtaining her first superintendence. Susan noted that her strongest encouragement came from her family and confirmed that without them, the job would be impossible. She stated, “My mother encourages me. My husband encourages me. My kids encourage me. My girls probably encourage me more than anyone.”

Another theme to emerge leading to Susan’s first superintendence was her need to be mobile in her career. To get the experiences that she felt she needed required her to be willing to move, and a spouse who was able to make these transitions with her. Her narrative indicated that she worked in one district as a teacher for six years and as a principal for four year. She then moved to another district to serve as an elementary

principal for two years. She then moved to a 1A district as an elementary principal for two years, and then moved to 5A district to become a middle school principal for three years. At that time, she took another job in a large district as assistant superintendent for two years before becoming superintendent. These career moves were by design, and they afforded her the experience she felt she needed to be an effective superintendent.

A theme that was prevalent in Susan's narrative was her spiritual life. She noted that she was raised as a Baptist, and this has had a strong influence on her life. She noted that a strong metaphor for her is the light that emanated from Jesus. So powerful is this metaphor that a symbol of her leadership is the lighthouse. She stated, "I want to spend the night in a lighthouse, because lighthouses are symbolic to me. The light that Jesus provided for us along the pathway." She further stated that she believes that Jesus provided a blue print for leadership. She noted that he motivated people and indicated that people need to have faith in the captain of the ship. She referenced the Biblical passages of Matthew 8: 23-27; Mark 4: 35-41; and Luke 8: 22-25 in which Jesus and his disciples were on a lake when a storm arises. She commented,

When I'm launched out into the deep, I have to remember the passengers I have on board. I have to remember directions. I'm not good on the water with directions, but I'm a leader but I better get good or get a tool that's gonna help me cause I have people on board, and they need direction. And if it tosses to and fro, and I'm kinda like this myself with my demeanor, a lot can be going on, sometimes my people know and sometimes they don't. And on this ship, when Jesus was out and here comes the storm and the disciples and everyone's all up in arms, well what do you mean? You're asleep? Can you just do something? Sometime someone's asleep. Doesn't that make you mad? Why are you so calm about it: And this because inside, I know I have to be calm, I know I have to think, I know I have to pray, I know I have to make certain actions and I have to steer us in a direction so I don't tilt the ship over.

She commented that changing an organization could not be done without people supporting the vision and mission statements of the district. The community and school

had believed in her and her efforts to transform a failing school system. She indicated they are still not out of the storm, but the waters of change were getting easier to navigate.

Evelyn (Asian)

The prevalent theme to emerge from Evelyn's life story leading her to the public school superintendence was that she was hired as a change agent. Change meant something needed to be different from its current state, and agent meant that as a leader she had the ability to make those changes. The most poignant example of her role as a change agent came during her high school principalship.

She noted that she knew she was hired as a change agent, and she realized that "the unfortunate thing with the change agent is that they don't last long." As a change agent, she indicated that she had to be "pretty tough" because a change agent got a lot of criticism since some people did not want to change, especially if they had established their own comfort zone. Some people did not want change if they had gained their own power base in the absence of leadership within a dysfunctional school. Therefore, Evelyn stated that a change agent had to have "pretty thick skin" in order to make difficult professional decisions among resistant colleagues. She noted that a change agent cannot take things too personally. Most importantly, Evelyn realized that significant, lasting change meant changing attitudes and the culture of the school. Therefore, a change agent must make systemic changes and this means no rock unturned and no power base left untouched in turning a failing school into a commendable school. The dysfunction of this urban high school exposed itself during the strike in which colleagues were pitted against colleagues not for the benefit of children but for the personal gain of a one percent raise.

She needed to turn the focus back on the students. This meant the difficult tasks of releasing staff, revamping the curriculum, and holding teachers, parents, and students accountable for attitudes and behaviors.

Evelyn indicated that a change agent's job is to reclaim the responsibility to implement consequences for unacceptable actions. Without consequences, there are no boundaries and chaos reigns. She stated that she had to be an authoritarian and never let her guard down. She stated that when she arrived at this high school, the "culture was horrendous." Once boundaries were established, consequences were established, and there was accountability, the school's test scores rose, teachers reclaimed their authority, and students felt safe coming to school. She stated, "Student really enjoyed coming to school, and it was safe, which it happened . . . the year before Columbine. . . .It was a tough situation, and so I fit the mold better than I do in places that are more suburban." She felt this experience honed her leadership skills and gave her an understanding about the importance of advocating for quality education for all students but especially marginalized students.

The second theme to emerge from Evelyn's narrative was the theme of advocacy for students. While she felt she advocated for all students, she had an affinity for the marginalized and disenfranchised student; she indicated this was due to her own experiences with discrimination in her life. During her high school principalship, part of her advocacy for students was making them accountable for their actions, and she advocated for parents to be responsible for their student's attendance. Her advocacy meant accountability and boundaries that made everyone responsible. Through her efforts, behavior and test scores improved. She also advocated for immigrant students

during her superintendence. Her lesson to the state legislators was different did not mean less, and all children regardless of birth place deserve an education.

Emergent Themes Day to Day Experiences

Katherine (Caucasian)

Katherine continued to advocate for students and build programs as she entered her first superintendence. During her first superintendence, Katherine collaborated with the community to determine needs. She stated, “My biggest job as a superintendent . . . was finding the needs, seeing that this group of children need something, and going out and figuring out how to get it done and getting it done. That truly was my greatest joy.” Her first superintendence was in a rural community, and she quickly learned that the school was the backbone of the community. Therefore, she began collaborating with everyone to determine needs. She began discovering funding for needed services. She stated,

I started [a] daycare for the community, not just the kids and the school, but the community, because, you know these little rural communities, the school is the community, everything is together. We started a daycare in _____, we started a health center. . . . [We started] a teen center. We bought a building, got a legislative appropriation, bought a building, put in a soda fountain, big screen TV, pool table, a place for the kids to hang out. You know, you see the kids there, you see them in a safe environment. . . . My real joys were seeing the kids really benefit from those programs.

Another emergent theme for Katherine was her involvement in each of the communities in which she served. She felt that a superintendent must become directly involved with the community. She noted that she attended city council meetings and partnered with them to find funds as part of a rural restoration initiative in which older buildings within the community were restored so that part of the community’s cultural

heritage would not be destroyed. She was adamant that a superintendent must be part of the community in which she serves.

Agnes (Hispanic)

The theme that emerged from the experiences of the superintendence for Agnes was change. From the moment she became superintendent, she implemented many changes to make the district better. Once she reviewed the budget, she realized that the district did not have enough money for the next year; therefore, her first change was terminating six positions. Next, she implemented cross-training of jobs so that one person's termination would not disrupt the function of district business, as was the case of the technology coordinator who refused to turn over the passwords to district computers. Her next change, and one she regretted throughout her career, was giving a new principal a three year contract. From this experience she learned that although people were successful at one position, it did not mean they would have the same level of success in a different position. As a change agent, she learned that relationships tended to be capricious, and loyalty was oftentimes based on circumstances rather than trust.

During her tenure as superintendent, Agnes changed the grade configuration of the high school campus by opening a new middle school. The middle school students had been attending the same campus as high school students, and her leadership team was concerned with the age range of this education model. Therefore, she created a separate campus for these students. In addition, she implemented a new curriculum that centered on research based reading instruction, and she provided professional development to her staff in this new model. She noted that the district's reading scores did improve.

During Agnes' eight-year tenure as superintendent, she replaced 30 teachers and hired five different principals. As a tribute to her steadfastness, her district has continually met all state standards, and her students continue to meet AYP.

Anne (Native-American)

The theme that emerged during Anne's discussion of her day-to-day experiences in the superintendence was the building of community through innovative programs and trust. Anne felt strongly about partnerships between the community and the school. During her tenure as superintendent, her rural district lost students due to the poor economy and the opening of a charter school. Therefore, she felt that it was imperative that the school and community find ways to support each other. She studied rural revitalization efforts, and she began entrepreneurial programs such as the laser engraving program and the horse therapy program in which community members taught innovative programs to the students while building a profitable business as well.

She believed that each community has economic strengths, and each community and school district can work together to find those strength and partner to sustain each other. She noted that through school/community projects, schools need to concentrate on how learning can be relevant and beneficial for students, and the community can take the idea and develop the industry. She stated,

The key is to find an entrepreneur who will take the industry from where you started it, because we're educators, we have the expertise to know how to put together a scientific study that's going to wind up with giving us oysters. So, we know how to teach how to grow oysters, but we're teaching kids. We can't always totally have the industry going.

The programs that she created had to have a teaching component provided by a community member and a learning component for the students. Key to the success of

these programs was that the community member would run the program as a profitable business while providing instruction to the students.

Another theme to emerge during Anne's narrative was building trust within the community. Anne's greatest challenge in building trust concerned the charter school within her district. The school district in which Anne was superintendent covered 30 miles and three different communities. Many of these miles are through canyons that become treacherous during the winter months, and for those students at the far end of her district, it was sometimes too dangerous to travel to school. To alleviate some of the traveling problems for the younger students, a K-8 school was built in the middle community, and therefore, the farthest community would send their students to the middle community. However, the high school students still had to commute through the canyons to get to the main campus. Therefore, the community at the farthest end chose to start a charter high school.

Charter schools were under the governance of the district school board, but they also had their own governing board, and they had the right to hire their own staff. They also had their own budget, which in part was subsidized by the state with stimulus money. In addition, they were entitled to a portion of the federal funds that the district received. Anne realized that the charter school was a new reality for the district, and she realized the relationship could be adversarial or supportive. As the superintendent of the district, she made a concerted effort to be involved with all communities in her district. Part of her strategy was to be highly visible in all communities. To that end, she was at the charter school meetings and joined civic clubs in all communities, and she attended activities at all campuses. She commented,

I think what has been painful is, I was here before the charter school. The charter school started, they submitted the application the year I started. What was painful was to see two really great communities fight with each other and too, it didn't even have to be over the charter school. . . . They would just pick away at people and not be good. . . . It's too bad that we can't be friends. . . . And the reason the parents don't like each other, or the community is because of the scarcity of resources. They think they are going to lose their schools. I think it's very good that they have their own high school up there.

Anne realized that trust was fragile, and she continued to work hard to build the trust in both communities. She understood both communities were struggling economically and expressed a desire to work together to create projects that would strengthen both campuses and benefit student learning.

Susan (African-American)

The theme that emerged as Susan discussed her day-to-day challenges as a superintendent was the process involved in transforming a school system from a district under school improvement to an exemplary district. She noted that to change a failing school, a leader had to change people. For people to change, the entire culture of an organization had to change. Key to this change was having common goals, common language, and a united belief system. She commented,

I took the leaders to a leadership training so that they would know what systemic planning and changing culture really meant. To change the culture, you have to have common goals, common language. I can't talk one way here and you talk another way on your campus. You have to have common structures. . . . We created our beliefs together.

Change must be systemic and consequences must be in place for there to be total buy-in. When all of the components that make a school were critically scrutinized and people were given solid evidence of successes and failures and meaningful involvement in remapping the course, then change could be positive and meaningful. She sagaciously noted that when there was a consistent lack of leadership in a district, people became

“islands” apart from each other and apart from the district. Schools began to function independently from each other with no real district-wide focus. She commented that the root of failing districts could be directly attributed to lack of leadership.

In the past, [leadership] has allowed everyone to do what they want[ed] to do, you know, the old saying, hire good people and get out of their way? After a while, when *you're* [school leaders] out of the way, they tend to what *they* want to do. Good people having good intentions, doesn't necessarily mean they were doing all the right things for school improvement. . . . Those individuals run their little campuses as islands, and you can't do that. You have to have a district focus, district direction. [A] district road map for everybody to follow, and you have to hold people accountable and say, this is the direction we're headed.

She stated that she was hired as a change agent to transform a failing school district, and therefore, it was part of her job to work with her entire staff and community to determine a vision, mission, and core beliefs for the school. She stated, “I gave direction and stayed the course, which meant, monitor, inspect, follow-up, meetings-meetings-meetings, to talk about what we were going to do about it.” As part of the transformational process, she provided professional development for her staff that centered on matching objectives to teaching, and all stakeholders had to understand that schools are always in flux and continuous improvement process is just that—a continuing process that is constantly evolving and creating more opportunities to achieve more success.

Another component in the transformational process that emerged during Susan's narrative was monitoring each school's accountability systems. Susan indicated that she did make frequent visits to all the schools, and she specifically looked for documentation on teacher performance. Inside classrooms, she looked for the four pillars of good instruction: relationships, relevance, rigor, and results. She believed that she shared in the accountability of teachers “by believing in them, by talking to them by giving them

direction and then standing back to see if they're going to get it done and then motivating them and encouraging them.”

For Susan, a key component in the transformational process was communication and sharing information on a consistent basis. She firmly believed that part of the communication process was selling the positive image of the school by holding meetings with the public and reminding staff through constant messages about their purpose. She stated, “We let people know our vision, our mission, and we talk about our beliefs, and we talk about where we're headed and how we're going to get there. . . . It's what we live and talk about every day and that's made a difference and a change. And a change of attitude, a change of momentum.” Underlying Susan's transformational process was her belief that if people believe the school system was moving in the right direction and positive things were happening for students, the community would support the schools during difficult times. Therefore, she did not believe in sugarcoating reality. As part of the transformational process, she believed in sharing accurate information with her staff and community. With transparency, open communication, and clear information, she believed that everyone more readily realized the harsh realities that currently face education, and they were more willing to work with the school system to weather the storm together.

Evelyn (Asian)

The theme of advocacy for students that defined Evelyn's pre-superintendence would also be a theme in her day-to-day practice as a superintendent of a 14,000-member school district in a Western state. The children for whom Evelyn advocated were the children of illegal immigrants. She noted that these families were voiceless because they

“tried to stay under the radar. They don’t want to bring any attention to their family. Now, what we didn’t have is a lot of parental involvement. One, because they didn’t want to be recognized and, two, they were busy working.” Yet, Evelyn would fight for their human rights to be educated. It was a battle that was difficult as the legislative body of this state was opposed to illegal children being educated. Yet, Evelyn was not only thinking about a moral obligation, but she was thinking about the contributions these children could make in the future as educated adults. She resigned her superintendence, in part, because the immigration battle that she would lose. However, the real loss was the potential talent of the students who were denied an education.

Emergent Themes for Encouraging, Informing, and Supporting Aspiring Female Superintendents

Katherine (Caucasian)

An emergent theme throughout Katherine’s career was helping women get a better education so they could become educators and administrators. She noted that one of the driving forces for her creating daycare centers was to give women the freedom to pursue degrees. She stated, “You know, I always pushed women, and you know I think that’s another reason why I was so adamant about having daycares is because these women that were showing so much promise, and I’d say, ‘You need to go to school’.” She indicated that when she was the director of the facility that served emotionally disturbed adolescents she encouraged women on the staff to seek administrative positions. She recounted, “You know, that’s something [encouraging women] that I had did [sic] all along through my entire career. . . . I saw more women that had abilities; you know to do administrative jobs, but I always tried to mentor all of the women that I could.” She also remembered a specific woman who wanted to be a superintendent. She

took this woman through mock interviews, helped her write her resume and letter of interest, taught her how to negotiate a salary, and gave her confidence. The woman did become a superintendent.

She stated that women need to be more self-assured in their abilities. The superintendence is not out of reach. She advised women seeking the superintendence not to be place bound as a superintendent's job, historically, does not last long, and therefore, a woman must be willing to be mobile. She indicated that her life is a testament to this fact. She noted that a woman seeking the superintendence "has to be somebody that is pretty strong, and I also think it is somebody that can't be sensitive and can't let hurt feelings get to them too much and that's why I would be careful about whom I would mentor or encourage to be a superintendent."

Agnes (Hispanic)

One theme that emerged during Agnes's narrative was the need for new female superintendents to understand the balance between stabilizing a district and implementing necessary changes. A new superintendent is invariably a change agent. She indicated that change is best when it is perceived that it has come from the teachers. She commented, "It has to start with me but I kind of do it under the table, you know like trying to talk them into, like it's their idea, and that way they'll buy into it and they'll like to do it." However, sometimes a superintendent has to dictate change. The toughest change for teachers is change in curriculum because this directly impacts the dynamics of teaching and learning.

Another key theme for encouraging and informing aspirant female superintendents is that they will have to constantly prove themselves worthy of the

position. She noted that, “It’s sad to say, but females have to work twice as hard [as men] in these roles.” She indicated that society does not see women as leaders. She commented,

Not that I did a bad job, I just don’t think they believe in females. I don’t know if they’ll give a female an opportunity. I hope so, cause I think, in my opinion, we work twice as hard, and we take our jobs very seriously. Not that males don’t, don’t get me wrong, but I just feel like a woman, you know, we’re the housewives, we’re the mothers, we’re used to taking care of business and things like this, and I think we’re good leaders cause we’re used to doing, making sure things are done and things like this but people don’t, don’t believe it, don’t recognize it.

In working twice as hard as men, Agnes noted that female superintendents must have a personal and professional support system. This theme was evident throughout Agnes’s career. Initially, she credits her father with being a strong support system. Her family was also very supportive even through it meant they were sometimes placed second. She noted that the position of superintendent is a lonely job, and therefore, she would strongly encourage the new superintendent to establish strong leadership teams within the district and a strong networking system in which the new superintendent could seek guidance from other superintendents.

Anne (Native-American)

The key theme that emerged during Anne’s narrative concerning encouraging aspiring female superintendents was the belief that the superintendent had to be cognizant of the multifaceted nature of the public school superintendence. Anne noted that a successful superintendent needs to learn to navigate through the various facets with a positive attitude and an awareness of key players. One facet that she felt was critical to a superintendent’s success was her relationship with the board.

Anne would encourage new female superintendents to communicate openly and candidly with their board. To that end, she would encourage new superintendents to have the board evaluate each board meeting in terms of addressing agenda items, success or failure in addressing needs and challenges, and deciding if data driven decisions were made. She felt that the board then takes mutual ownership of the concerns of the district. She would also inform new female superintendents to recognize the efforts of the board through public recognition and awards. She noted that these people were oftentimes unsung heroes, and they, like all staff members, needed validation.

Another theme that emerged in encouraging new female superintendents, and one that Anne attributed to her Native-American background, was taking time to authentically know people. She commented, “It’s not their job to be comfortable with me, it’s my job to make them comfortable with me.” She stated that in her Native-American culture honoring people and knowing their background is paramount to communication. She stated,

I like to honor everybody. . . . Their presence, their respect, where they come from. I think that’s part of my Native-American heritage. You know . . . when you meet Native-American people, the first thing you need to do is tell them who you are, and who your mother and father are. That’s just a traditional thing you do, and it seems to be amongst all tribes. Or the Navajo will often say their clan. And it tells the person you’re speaking to, it gives them some important information about you.

Another facet of this multi-layered position that emerged during Anne’s narrative was the belief that the new female superintendent had to be aware that she will be judged differently than a male. To deal with this issue, Anne stated that she would encourage new female superintendents to be open and candid about what they bring to the position. She stated,

I think you have to transmit that authenticity ... They want to know, like I said, the Native-American way, people want to know who you are, so tell them up front, this is who I am, and help them become, and you have to, again, make them comfortable with you ... I'm a woman ... It's making people feel comfortable with your ethnicity, your looks, your handicaps, your strengths, your weaknesses.

Anne noted that a theme that had been prevalent throughout her life and especially in her superintendence is a female superintendent should surround herself with positive people. She commented, "You know, when you think about what leads you to this [superintendence], it's the people in your lives. Positive role models, positive people around you who help you." She indicated that it is the positive people who will nurture us and become our web of inclusion that sustains us during the darker moments of the job.

Susan (African-American)

The emergent theme for Susan encouraging women to seek the superintendence was establishing a paradigm shift in leadership style from managerial to collaborative. She noted that in the past, leadership consisted of a hierarchical order in which "things were swept under the rug," and "more men tend to show the management style, more women tend to show the instructional leadership style." She commented that women's leadership style should be one of collaboration that entails constructively listening, teaching, and modeling expectations. Yet, she would caution women that even with the best leadership skills some battles will be lost. She commented, "It is just a resolve that you have, that there is [sic] certain things you can't control and that's just part of it."

Evelyn (Asian)

Evelyn would inform aspiring female superintendents that women are held to a higher level of scrutiny than males in this position, and therefore, a female must be cognizant that she is a role model at all times. Evelyn indicated for a female to be

considered for superintendence, she has to have a PhD. Since this position has traditionally been male dominated, women have to present advanced credentials to establish a higher degree of credibility. She noted that school boards are still reticent about hiring females in general and especially minority females. As part of role modeling, women's personal appearance is also held to a higher level than men. Women are role models from their college degrees, to their personal appearance, to their interactions with people.

Another theme that emerged is that women must have a balanced life. Therefore, Evelyn indicated that while at work a female had to totally be immersed in her job. However, once she is away, she needs to find solace in her family, friends, spirituality, or hobbies. For Evelyn, spirituality was key to maintaining harmony in her life. She noted that this is a lonely job in which there is little camaraderie, and therefore women must find a sense of peace and belonging outside the work place in order to have healthy balance in their lives.

Other Emergent Themes in Participants' Narrative

Since qualitative research is dynamic, emergent, and evolving (Kruell, 2011), it lends itself to serendipity. While the unexpected information may not directly address the research questions, it contributes to the narratives of the women. The following are emergent themes that developed from the narratives of the women that give clarity and meaning to their experiences as superintendents.

Katherine (Caucasian)

Power and influence. Another emergent theme was power and influence. Katherine indicated that a superintendent must understand the levels of power and

influence in education to be effective, and this is a frustrating part of the job because each group of power players had its own agenda. She commented that as one of the main players in education, the state department of education was not necessarily an ally of the public schools. The state department of education had become more of a compliance and regulatory agency than an agency that supports and facilitates the public schools. She commented that the state department of education does not use its power to protect superintendents “in any way, shape or form.” She indicated that the state department of education was too interested in averting bad publicity and never understood the real issues that communities face. She stated, “You know the system is broken; the model is broken in this country. We have state departments who, they don't, not only do they not know what you're doing in your district, they don't care. They have no clue.” In addition, she indicated that powerful and politically influential teacher unions were interested in protecting jobs of both good and bad teachers, and due to their influence, schools are faltering. She commented, “That's why we don't have good schools, because we allow unions in, because their main focus is to keep jobs, no matter what.”

Another set of power players and very influential people are the board members who are many times neither professional educators nor do they have adequate educational qualifications to understand the subtle nuances of running an effective organization. Katherine felt that board members too often had their own agenda and were not in the job for the overall welfare of the district. She commented, “We let communities elect people to boards to run schools that don't even have a high school diploma or have their own agenda.” She noted that a superintendent spends an inordinate amount of time educating board members on the internal working of a school system, and even with the

professional development received by school board members, they do not always understand the intricacies of a school system.

Next, Katherine addressed the fact that laws and regulations were the intangible power players that restricted the changes a superintendent could implement. Consequently, the superintendent became a “fireman” who then spent a good deal of time putting out fires and became a manager of the district rather than a leader who was moving the district forward. She felt these factors hurt the profession, and in turn, teachers did not receive the respect that they deserved.

Katherine noted that a superintendent had to be very careful in using power and influence. She stated that while the title gives a person a lot of power and influence, it should never be used in a negative way. She commented,

I think you have to be real careful with your power, too, because you do have the power to ruin peoples' lives. You do. And I've ruined some, I know I have. But I always feel like I gave them the opportunity to fix it first before I had to do that, before I had to cost them their job or whatever. I always tried never to use power to hurt anyone or, you know in a negative way, I think and probably influence too, it can be negative. You can influence people in a very negative way if you're not careful.

Leadership style. Next, the theme of leadership emerged from Katherine's narrative. She indicated that her leadership style is one of being driven, and she admitted at times she left her faculty behind, and she could be too rigid when it became time to do things a certain way. However, she felt that her style was collaborative in that she welcomed new ideas. She liked getting people involved, but once the process of implementation began, she wanted it done with pride and getting the project right the first time. She stated that her leadership purpose was to provide opportunities for the teachers

to be successful since it is they who have the most direct impact of children's lives. She commented,

We know that a teacher, the teacher is the one thing that really makes an impact, teachers and parents, on a kid in the classroom. It's the teacher. So you know, do the best you can to get good teachers, help those teachers, keep your district solvent budget wise, I guess that's really kind of your purpose, just to kind of keep everything running.

She indicated that a large part of her leadership style was fostering meaningful professional relationships. First, she always articulated the district's goals and mission statements with all staff members. Then, throughout the year, she would have small group discussions to reinforce the goals so they were "out in front." She felt she was involved with the communities that she served, and she collaborated with parents and teachers. She commented that professional relationships should be developed around mutual respect. However, the mutual respect did not involve ignoring obvious problems.

Katherine also felt another key to professional relationships was the ability to communicate, and there had to be respect for differing points-of-view. Another key to having meaningful relationships was the willingness to mediate conflicts within the staff. While mediation was not always pleasant, she felt she was transparent with the process that she was following. For example, one of her principals did not like the curriculum that had been voted upon by the board. The principal refused to implement the program at her school. Katherine explained the process that had been followed and offered to supplement the program to make it more effective at the particular school. Katherine felt that part of professional relationship was to allow others a voice, but she wanted her leadership team to understand that a team mentality was necessary in running an effective district.

She indicated that her strength as a leader had been starting programs. Once each program was in place, she had to establish a new project to sustain her. Katherine commented,

It's the challenge of getting all the programs, getting the money, getting them started, getting them going. Well but then, now this is boring so now I need to do something else. Because I'm really much better at starting things and creating things but once it's going well, it's like, then it becomes mundane and you know, then I lose interest in it.

Katherine believed that as a leader, she had to promote positive change. Her superintendence started very positively, and she implemented many changes in both districts. However, she noted that as a change agent, her tenure would not be long term. She noted that many times the superintendent becomes the scapegoat when things go wrong, and the superintendent's private life cannot be shielded from public evaluation. In reviewing her career, Katherine felt that she made many positive changes.

In looking back over her career, Katherine felt she would have been more astute in working with her boards and understanding the balance between administrating and nurturing an effective school system and the demands of the board. She would also have been more transparent about her actions and the board mandates. She felt that this would have made her and the board more open and accountable to the communities in which she served.

Agnes (Hispanic)

Family. In a rural community, family life and public life are difficult to separate. Agnes indicated that because of the demands of the superintendence, her family was second. She stated that she had tried to reverse that role but had not been successful. She lived close to the schools, and she found herself checking on the facility at night. She

stated that she was a superintendent “24-7.” She said that she was incapable of having a private life. She indicated that she could only have a private life when she could get away from the community. She stated that the greatest impacts on her life have been the loss of her dad, the birth of her children, and her battle with cancer. Each of these in its own way made her a stronger person and let her understand that a superintendent’s true support network was family. Even though family oftentimes came second to her career, her family was her strength, her support system, and her solace during the more difficult moments of the superintendence.

Power and influence. Agnes indicated that the superintendent position is viewed as a power position, but she does not see it as power but as influencing people. Power carries the connotation of coercion, but influence means working with people collaboratively. She indicated that influence means that each teacher accepts responsibility for teaching each child. She stated,

We’re here to teach, and we have a responsibility to make sure that while these students are in these classrooms, you know, we’re going to do the job we need to do and teach these students the information that they need and make sure when they leave these classrooms, you know, that they’re proficient, and we’ve done our job. Bottom line, that’s what I hope I’ve shared with these teachers.

Leadership style. Another theme that emerged during her narrative was her collaborative leadership style. As a superintendent, she listened to all ideas and allowed others to have input, but ultimately, she had to be responsible for the decisions that were made for the district. She said at times she had to make decisions that were solely hers to make, and she did insist that a chain of command was followed. She allowed her principals to run their schools with little involvement from her, but she did want to be informed about any major issues. Communication and information were paramount in

running the district. She wanted all the information she could possibly have before making any decision. Due to the incident of being accused of cheating when she was in the first grade, she stated that she never assumed anything before she had all the facts. She indicated that she did not get a chance to visit classrooms much, but when she did visit, the principal of the school accompanied her into the classroom. She felt this was a courtesy to the principal, and it sent a message that the building administrator was in charge. Some of her happiest moments were when she interacted in classrooms with the children.

Another component that deeply affected her leadership style was her counseling background. She indicated that her counseling background made her a good listener and collaborator. Also, her counseling background in reality therapy reminded her that she must stay grounded in the reality of situations. She could not let herself get too emotional or take things too personally. She used her counseling skills to allow people to understand why they reacted the way they did. Her bottom line was to try to amiably resolve issues.

As a superintendent, she did not impose teaching strategies on teachers. She indicated that strategies only work if teachers saw the applicability. She stated that she did not micro-manage the schools or the teachers. She felt that change was accomplished best from the bottom up. She suggested that when teachers initiate change, the transitions were easier especially in the area of curriculum. She indicated that newer teachers embraced change more readily than veteran teachers.

Agnes attributed her strong leadership skills to her dad's influence in her life. She indicated that his greatest gift to her was her self-confidence. While her dad gave her

confidence, her Hispanic culture and her gender taught her invaluable lessons as well. She indicated that her culture taught her that “You did what you were told and didn’t question.” She indicated that she had wanted to be a physical therapist, but her counselor told her she could not do this; therefore, she chose another field of study. She stated that she raised her children to always question, but to do so in a respectful manner.

Agnes indicated that the superintendent must have strong relationships within the school. There must be a level of trust and transparency. She indicated that she was closest to her administrative team, which included the business manager and the principals. She noted that strong relationships allowed information to be shared honestly and candidly. However, an unproductive relationship could be devastating in a small school and a small community as people began choosing sides and interrupting the solidarity of the school. She commented that at times it was hard not to take things personally. She indicated that at times, she cried when she felt she had done her best to collaborate and negotiate and there was still not a positive resolution. However, she was careful to use the power and influence of the superintendent’s office wisely.

Anne (Native-American)

Power and influence. Anne believed that the superintendent has a lot of power to create necessary change in a district, and changes should be focused on creating programs that are supported by the staff, students, and community. She believes when a board hires a superintendent as a change agent, they collectively give the superintendent power to bring changes that will make the district better. She commented that she was hired as a change agent because the former superintendent was not a good fit for the community. She indicated that she never called herself a change agent. She felt that that might create

the connotation that she was there to fix something that was broken, and that could alienate people who felt they were working hard for their students. She felt that a superintendent lets the needs determine the change. Therefore, change meant continuous improvement that had been collectively identified. Power means empowering others so that they have direct involvement in the decision making process as well as a voice in problem solving.

When Anne was hired, she discovered that not only was there a tremendous amount of work to do in moving the district forward, but there had been embezzlement in the district. To remedy the problems, she used her power to empower others so that the needed changes would have buy in and the district could move forward with everyone on the same page. She commented,

Power is something you have to give away to get. And I think it's the same thing with influence. These are things you have to give away to get, so you have to empower people and give them the opportunity to solve their own problems and do it in their own way and if they come up with whatever the, you know the problem was, you know, a solution, you've got to acknowledge that and say, that was well done. It was done their way.

She felt that power was a tool she used to empower others. She used the power of her position to effect change and influence people. Her power entailed doing her homework and effectively bringing change both to the school and the community, giving others a voice, and working with her board. She used her power to bring people together to collaborate and communicate. Once communication was established, she then used her power to build collaboration among the school and community. With major decisions, such as revamping the math programs, she brought in numerous stakeholders and facilitated consensus building before presenting the findings to the board. Therefore,

through the process of shared power, it was never fully a board decision or opinion since everyone was involved before there was a vote, policy decision, or policy change.

Leadership style. Anne noted that her leadership style was based on relationships and communications. For instance, early in her career, she was teaching in a predominately Indian education program in a metropolitan city when a new school was built that placed this large Indian student population in an upper-scale white neighborhood. The white parents did not want an integrated school system. Ironically, one of the parents, who was a successful university basketball coach whose players were minority students, did not want his daughter attending school with minority students. He and his wife met with Anne and questioned whether their daughter's education would be diminished. Automatically, the assumption was that minorities would "water-down" the level of education. Another message was that some people fear diversity until they find that differences do not require carrying the connotation of superior/inferior. Anne stated, "I was apprehensive at first, I thought boy, I'm not going to measure up, they're going to think I'm a terrible teacher, you know, maybe these people think White teachers are better." Through listening, she established positive relationships that assuaged their fears of diversity. Through communication and building relationships she taught others that different does not mean less.

Anne found that leadership means advocating for students. While this leadership quality was always present in her leadership, it was honed during an incident at the middle school where she was principal. She learned that leadership means one size does not fit all, and she learned that rules and regulations that affect students should be flexible. She had been working with a young man who pushed the limits of the dress

code, but to save this student, the teachers and Anne “overlooked” some of the minor infractions to keep him in school. However, an assistant superintendent came to her school to evaluate her performance as principal, and he reprimanded her for this student not following the dress code; he insisted that this student be suspended. She could not get this assistant superintendent to understand that fair does not mean equal. Partly due to this incident, she resigned her position as principal. She applied for a superintendent’s position in another district.

She indicated that later she found that a superintendent must have leadership across the spectrum of education. She noted that as a superintendent, “You had to provide leadership for curriculum and learning, student transportation, federal programs, district safety director and cafeteria [coordinator]. You had to be the charter school liaison, professional development coordinator and grant writer.” She also indicated that the superintendent in a small, rural district has to be involved in the community’s rural development and revitalization initiatives. In this leadership role, a superintendent has to be willing to develop new and innovative programs that will sustain the school and in some respects the community.

She stated that positive relationships were key to her leadership style. She described her leadership style over the years as an evolving process of collaboration, communication, and building positive relationships. She felt this started at home with her parents being positive about education and supporting her activities at school. Her Aunt Winnie was not only positive but advocated for others and this is what Anne did as a leader in advocating for all students who had a desire to allow education to change their lives. For Anne, leadership also meant establishing an ethic of caring. Once others sense

this caring, they became part of the positive things she was trying to accomplish.

Faculty, students, and parents gravitated to Anne, for they sensed safety, much like the lone antelope in her pasture on that cold, brisk day in February.

Susan (African-American)

Power and influence. Susan commented that the superintendent's position has power, but this power should be used to empower others, and influence should be used to make others feel as though they were an intricate part of the organization. She stressed, "I've influenced a lot of people by believing in them, by talking to them, by giving them direction, and then standing back to see if they're going to get it done and then motivating them and encouraging them. It's all in the influence." She also noted that the real power was in the classroom in front of students. That was where the power to shape lives and influence people laid. She felt that power meant giving the teachers the tools they needed to influence students. She noted that her influence did not only come through her title as superintendent but also through her ability to show integrity in the "way I carry myself, the way I dress, the way I speak, the way I interact with different people." She felt that a large part of her influence was being a positive role model.

Leadership style. One of the recurrent themes throughout Susan's narrative was her leadership attributes. As part of her leadership style, Susan had the ability to set her goals and never waver in her tenacity to see a vision to its fruition, and she paid a great price for her dream to become a teacher. When others could not share and support her dreams, she took a different direction at the expense of terminating relationships as in the case of her first marriage. She indicated that a prerequisite for her second marriage was that her husband would support her dream of becoming a teacher.

For Susan, leadership meant being a consummate life-long learner. Yet, the ultimate goal was always improving the educational system so that children would be the ultimate benefactors of her efforts. Her life has been in the service of others. A prime example was the pivotal case of the little girl who was called “Black” by her teacher. Susan turned to administration to correct injustices for all children. She indicated that current female administrators should use their positions to dispel the myth that it is a man’s job. She stated that women need to have a passion for the job, but they also need to openly advocate for more women to seek higher administrative jobs. She emphatically believed that women do not promote themselves enough. Throughout her life, she has emulated those women who mentored her, starting with her grandmother. She remembers her grandmother being a multi-tasker, and she felt that women bring this attribute to the job. Too, she noted that the difference between men and women was that men show more of the hierarchical management style whereas women “tend to show the instructional leadership style.” She stated,

We’ve seen in the past with the management leadership style, things were swept under the rug. We’re seeing more now, where leaders are bringing people to the table. Women tend to sit you down and say, “Let’s talk about this.” Men say, “I just want you to get it done.” You know, either you are in the door or out the door. Where we [women] will constructively sit down, explain, talk about expectations, show our principals and teachers a different way to handle conferences with parents, conferences with students. We have more stamina when it comes to the big picture, the overall picture. Everyone inclusive, whereas a man is going to focus on transportation and athletics, from what I’ve observed.

Susan described herself as a collaborative, transformational, servant leader who is a cheerleader for her team. As a collaborative leader, she is all inclusive in creating school teams. She believes that all stakeholders need to be involved. The more buy-in that she has, the more likely the vision will materialize and be a tangible goal. As a

servant leader, she helps in all aspects of the district and the community. In particular, she fosters camaraderie in her leadership team by helping principals through difficult situations.

She embraced the fact that she was hired as a change agent. The board hired her to improve academic achievement for all students. She noted that for change to occur she had to create a mentality of “want it to happen to believe it can happen.” She accomplished this task by employing her four pillars of improvement. First, she returned “rigor” to the classrooms both for the teachers and the students. She met with the principals and indicated that she would do weekly “walk throughs” in each of the schools, and she wanted to see research-based instruction and teacher accountability. Second, she wanted to see positive “relationships” among administrators, staff, parents, and students. It was the core of her educational philosophy to establish a sense of community and mutual responsibility. Next, she wanted assignments not only to meet standards but also to be “relevant.” She felt that if information were relevant, there would be sustainability in learning, and she wanted interactive activities to support relevance in learning. Finally, she wanted to see results. Teachers were responsible for demonstrating measurable learning. This was accomplished through on-going assessment and providing time within teachers’ meetings to concretely discuss strengths and weaknesses in instruction. As part of the philosophy of change, she wanted the goals, mission, and value statements to appear throughout the school and in the classrooms. She stated that unless these were internalized, they would never be a priority. In addition, she wanted teachers to think of themselves not as teachers but instructional leaders. While this may seem like

semantics, she felt this carried a powerful message. Next, the entire school had to communicate a positive message to the community. She stated,

When I came, the district had a bad reputation for discipline, you name it. There were some good things going on, but no one was talking about it. So I had to be the cheerleader and the communicator, to go out into the public and say we're doing great things, we're doing great things, we're doing great things. I repeated it over and over and over, And I said it, here, inside our house we're doing it, over and over and over. Good things, great things, great things, we're moving from good to great and great things are happening and so what has really, I guess, impacted me is the fact that school leaders can make a difference; we can make a difference from this seat, if you choose to.

She stated that when a superintendent enters a toxic culture, she has "got to deal with waste management and you get rid of it and you set the new culture." She has found that culture is the hardest thing to change about school system. She believed,

We can change the climate. A school leader can go and put new bricks up outside and plant some flowers and change some paint on the inside of the building, buy new furniture and all of that. Those are strategies, but systemically, changing that culture is hard work. You have to change the mindsets of the people. Change the adults, then the adults then can change [themselves] and affect what happens for students. It makes all the difference.

She noted that creating a vision and mission statement were not enough. As a school leader, she had to help her leadership team develop a road map on how to get there. She stated that the vision was continuous school improvement through measurable student achievement, and the mission was the process and the checkpoints on the road map. She and her leadership team had copious meetings about what systemic planning and changing culture really meant for the district. She stated that, "to change the culture, you have to have common goals, common language." Further, she believed that "student success for all is built on change." She noted that as a superintendent change is inevitable, but it is something that can be guided and managed.

She used an analogy of leadership being akin to a ship on water. For her, leadership was not about staying on shore where it was safe, for her leadership was “launching out into the deep.” She stated, “When I’m launched out into the deep, I have to remember the passengers I have on board, I have to remember directions.” Susan was also a religious person, and she indicated that her belief system impacts her thinking on a daily basis. She explained,

Leadership, for me, is the same as it is and was for Jesus. I read a book years ago, *Jesus CEO*, and that book is still at my house, and it compares the things that Jesus did to leadership principles. . . . How Jesus motivated the people, how he taught the people, what he did about strategies. What strategies he used, things like that, and so walking as Jesus walked is leadership for me.

Personal life. She noted that a superintendent must strive for a balance between personal and professional life. She stated that she has developed personal goals for herself that included spending time with family and setting aside time for personal goal setting. She stated that a superintendent must identify personal relationships and protect those against too much intrusion. She noted that because of the high visibility of the job, her private life was never private. She stated, “You’re on, you have to be on your ‘A’ game 24/7.” Whenever citizens see her, they use it as an opportunity to discuss school business. She laughingly recounted that she never wore shorts to mow her front lawn, and when she was not “dressed a certain way” she would stay in her vehicle and send her teenage niece in to pick up needed supplies from the grocery store. In the eyes of the public, “We’re in the spotlight all the time.” A private life ceased to exist. She indicated that when she needed time to be a private person, she left town.

Evelyn (Asian)

Power and influence. The theme that emerged from Evelyn's discussion of power and influence was that it can be used to enhance or destroy lives depending on who had the power and how it was used. She believed that a single person or entity should not have total power. She quoted Lord Acton when he stated, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." She noted that too many people abuse power.

I don't think power is necessarily a bad word, it's how you use power, you know, if you use it wrong, I hate to say it, for evil, but there are some evil people. I'm, if I've learned anything, I have learned in my life, you know, I always look for the good in people, but you know, I tell you what, there are some people that are just plan evil. And I don't mean just mean and or bad, I mean evil. They do things just to make somebody else's life a living hell.

A theme that also emerged was that school boards do not use power wisely, most notably because they are not professional educators, and they do not understand educational issues. She suggested that school boards be abolished, as they are an antiquated concept that has served its purpose, and a new system of governing schools needs to be put in place. She stated, "I think we need to get rid of school boards. I think school boards are a hindrance to education. Now, who would really have the oversight? I don't know if a mayor is a good idea, but I think it's better than a school board." In addition, she felt that the criteria for becoming a school board member should be changed. There should be some educational qualification for serving on a school board.

Leadership style. Evelyn's leadership skills were instilled in her by her father whose mantra was "service to country, service to others, and service to family." This leadership philosophy was not only veiled in patriotism but responsibility to others, and it is a creed that defined Evelyn's leadership. Even though Evelyn's father and she

experienced the subjugation and intolerance of discrimination, they both chose not to be victims but survivors who made contributions to society. While she would not be defined by discrimination, so, too, in her career, she would not allow students to be marginalized by discriminatory attitudes. In her career, children would be defined by respect and dignity, and this would be accomplished through changing school culture. This philosophy was most apparent in her role as high school principal in an urban setting with an enrollment of 1,800 students.

During her first year as principal, Evelyn's leadership philosophy was service to others, and her mission was to turn a failing school into a successful school, but first she had to deal with the pervading internal toxicity in this school. She became a stalwart change agent. The toxic culture of the school became apparent during a teacher-union initiated strike. During the strike, teachers destroyed property and intimidated their colleagues who did not agree with their views. She addressed the destructive culture from several angles – She replaced teachers, addressed gang and vandalism issues, and changed the curriculum—a daunting task for the youngest principal in this metropolitan district.

Her leadership style would include cultural changes at the deepest levels; therefore, during her tenure at this school, she indicated that she replaced half of her staff. With those who remained, she reestablished collegiality and accountability through communication and constant evaluation. Underlying her leadership philosophy was,

A caring competent teacher in the classroom makes the number one difference. Number two is leadership . . . If we can change those two things, we can change education. . . . The fact of the matter is, kids will do what you want them to do if they know you care about them. . . .The other piece is accountability.

To that end, she wanted teachers accountable every day to all students regardless of their backgrounds. From the “student body president” to the “gang banger,” all students were to be respected and valued. For example, she noted that when she was evaluating an English teacher, the student body president came in late without a pass, and he was allowed to sit down. A moment later, a “gang banger” came into the room, and the teacher “reamed him.” She stated, “It must have been like an EF Hutton moment ‘cause all the kids turned around and looked at me, like, do you see?” It was this situational discrimination that she stopped through honestly evaluating teachers and making them aware of their attitude toward students. Not only did she demand change in faculty perceptions, but in changing students’ attitudes as well.

She noted that part of her leadership style was setting boundaries and making people accountable for their actions. Under the guise of “tradition,” students were openly engaging in property destruction. She stated,

They put super glue in the doors, door jams and so kids couldn’t get in or out. They built cement, you know a brick wall and walled up one of the doors. They toilet papered the trees. They took all the real estate signs from the neighborhood and stuck them in front of the school. They sawed off the top of the Ronald McDonald and put it on top of the school.

The students indicated this was “tradition,” and Evelyn retorted, “Slavery was a tradition,” and destructive traditions would stop, and there would be behavioral accountability. The repairs to the school were in the thousands of dollars and Evelyn took the money from the prom fund. Amid the protests, Evelyn cancelled prom and the destructive behavior ceased.

Another “tradition” at this urban school was the lackadaisical attitude toward attendance. When Evelyn arrived the average attendance was 45%. She changed this

culture by calling parents at work every day, and when students returned to school, they had to meet directly with Evelyn to check them back into school. Attendance went from 45 percent to 88 percent because parents became accountable for their children. She commented, “Even if they’re gang bangers, if they’re in school that means they can be helped. The ones that are gonna go straight to jail and that are truly criminals aren’t hanging out in a school.” However, attendance did not improve another area where Evelyn wanted accountability—in her school’s test scores.

Part of changing culture and serving students was improving test scores. She noted that district-wide, a third of the students could not read at grade level. This meant hundreds of students were going through the system ranked below proficiency in reading. The only way to change this trend was to address it, and to that end, she implemented reading programs and changed the entire curriculum at the school. Over the four years she was principal, the state standardized test scores rose 11 percent.

Part of her leadership style of service to others was teaching students’ self-respect. She understood the power of language in shaping character, attitudes, and sending the wrong message. Therefore, she did not tolerate cussing or discriminatory, racist remarks. She noted,

When kids, in class, are teasing another student, or bullying them or making a derogatory comment, you have to say something because kids are looking to you to protect them. . . . What I did all the time was correct students that used to say, I use to hate this, they would say ‘nigger’ to each other, you know, like a hello. . . . And I would say, do you know how much my heart and your grandparent’s hearts are breaking from you saying that word like that? Oh, we’re just kidding, I said, I don’t care. You’re not using it around me.

She stated that she has always been an advocate for children and especially “those that are disadvantaged and that are disenfranchised and particularly students of color.”

She commented, “And maybe I’ve always been that way because of the discrimination I felt through my entire life.” She felt that her primary leadership role was to advocate for students. She commented,

I wanted to make an impact on more than one and I wanted to make an impact on, not people who have the money and the funds, but kids who really need a voice and an advocate, and I just really feel like in schools sometimes, we, kids, children, don’t have the advocate they need. . . . So somebody’s got to be an advocate for them.

She commented that when she would be overwhelmed with the challenges and draining demands of advocating for students, her father would scoldingly say, “If not you, who? Who’s going to stand up for the kids?” Evelyn felt she was their voice. As a change agent and as an advocate for children, she felt her leadership role was being the caretaker of children’s futures.

Similarities and Differences in the Narratives of the Women

Profiles of the Women

While each of the narratives reflected the individual stories of each of the women, there were similarities and differences in the participants’ profiles, their professional experiences leading to the public school superintendence, and in their day-to-day experiences. There were also similarities and differences in how each would encourage, inform, and support other women seeking this position.

The first similarity among the participants’ profiles was that each of these women had a significant family support system. Agnes (Hispanic) and Evelyn (Asian) specifically noted that their fathers made a difference in their lives. Agnes indicated the greatest gift her dad gave her was self-confidence and the belief that she could do anything. She stated, “My dad thought I could do everything . . . He thought I did

perfect.” Evelyn noted that throughout her life, her father expected personal responsibility. She indicated there were times in her career when she was weary of being the trailblazer. Her father would admonish her by saying, “If not you, who? Who’s going to stand up for the kids?” For her father, it was about service to others, and he realized that one of Evelyn’s strength was her tenacity and her servant leader qualities. He never let her give up on the mission to others, especially when the others were marginalized and disenfranchised children who needed her as their advocate.

Katherine (Caucasian), Susan (African-American), and Anne (Native-American) credited the women in their lives with making a difference in their careers. Katherine indicated that her mother had given up personal dreams so that she could fulfill her dreams. She narrated that her mother was very driven to succeed, and yet, “She gave up her drive, her personal drive for me. I found out that she had to make a choice between something that she wanted to do and sending me to school, and she sent me to school.” In addition, the expectations were always high for academic performance. Figuratively speaking, Katherine commented, “I wouldn’t have dared, not have dared to come home with a bad grade, I mean, my parents would have killed me.” Susan related that it was her grandmother who instilled in her the importance of success, fulfilling dreams, and personal responsibility. Keeping focused through poems, “Hitch your wagon to a star, take a seat and there you are,” verbal encouragements, “Go to school, get an education, be sweet and be somebody,” and the power of the dreaded “switch” allowed Susan to obtain both the coveted doctoral degree and the public school superintendence. Anne’s (Native-American) support system was her Aunt Winnie. Her Aunt Winnie’s tenacity and advocacy for the underprivileged guided many of her career choices. Her Aunt Winnie’s

modeling advocacy in helping members of the tribe impacted Anne's decision to serve Native-American children in several states. The greatest gift, and one which Anne learned well from her Aunt Winnie, was the ability to learn and understand the nuances of two different cultures. So important was this lesson that Anne's doctoral dissertation focused on how understanding dual cultures allowed Native-American children to be academically successful.

Another similarity among the narratives was the women's social-economic backgrounds. Each of the women had grown up in homes with two parents or guardians, and each woman indicated that they were from limited financial backgrounds. In addition, none of the women's parents in this study had beyond a high school education. Katherine (Caucasian) indicated that her step-father owned a painting business and her mother was as seamstress and a secretary. As a teenager, she worked both inside and outside the home to have spending money of her own. Agnes's (Hispanic) father died when she was a young teenager, and her mother, who did not have a high school education, worked as a cook in the school cafeteria to raise her and her two brothers. Anne's (Native-American) father, who had an eighth grade education, worked on his farm, and her mother, who graduated from high school, was a housewife. Therefore, their only source of income was the selling of the various crops each harvest season. Anne noted that to raise money for college, her father allowed her to harvest and sell 100 acres of cucumbers; she also held a waitressing job at a local café. Susan (African-American) was raised by grandparents who did not have formal jobs, but supported the family through work on their small farm. She noted that her grandmother had the equivalent of an eighth grade education. She commented that she "grew up believing we were rich, and

I think that's good. Now, I know I was 'at risk' but nobody told me that." Evelyn (Asian) was one of eight children whose military father's earnings were the only source of income. She stated, "We grew up pretty poor because there were eight of us [children] and my father was enlisted. So, it was really, always tough times." Even though none of the women were from affluent families, they valued education, and they and their parents realized that a college education was a means to a better life.

A clear difference in their narratives was that some of the women received their education in multiple states while others remained in one state throughout their public schooling. Katherine (Caucasian), Anne (Native-American), and Evelyn (Asian) received their public school education in multiple states while Agnes (Hispanic) and Susan (African-American) received their education in a single state. Katherine was educated in two separate states due to the separation of her parents and their subsequent marriage to others. She noted, "I lived with my mom first and second grade, maybe third and fourth ... then with my dad for sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth and half of ten, then I went back with my mom, you know so I was back and forth." Anne began her educational career in a large city, but her father moved the family to a rural community in another state so that he could own a farm. She indicated that her graduating class in this rural community was small. Evelyn stated that due to her father's military career, she attended seven different schools. She indicated that her high school years were spent in one school. Those women who went to multiple schools believe that this was not a detriment to their education. They indicated that the expectations at home remained the same, and they were all expected to make education a priority.

The narratives indicated that the women always felt they would receive a college education. However, due to financial constraints, several of the women were not able to attend college immediately. In Anne's case (Native-American), she was forced to quit college after one semester due to lack of money. Susan (African-American) did not immediately attend college after high school due to lack of funding. Neither Anne nor Susan was told by her high school counselors that money might be available through other sources. Evelyn (Asian) did not immediately attend college after high school due to her marriage, and she received her college education later. Only Katherine (Caucasian) and Agnes (Hispanic) were able to attend college immediately after high school and finish in four years. All of the women in this study worked on their master's and doctoral degrees later in their careers. The four women with doctoral degrees, Katherine, Anne, Susan, and Evelyn worked on these degrees specifically to enter administrative positions within public education.

In summary, all of the women in this study were from low socio-economic backgrounds; they each grew up understanding the importance of education. Each woman had a strong family advocate to support them on their educational journey. Also, each of them understood personal sacrifice was necessary for success. To that end, four of the woman in this study experienced multiple jobs in different states before becoming public school superintendents.

Professional Life Experiences Leading to the Superintendence

There were a number of similarities and differences in their professional experiences that led these women to the public school superintendence. The most notable similarities were their mobility and their multiple work experiences. Katherine

(Caucasian) held eleven jobs in two states before becoming superintendent. She was a special education teacher (three districts), a diagnostician (one district and her personal business in multiple districts), administrator at a correctional facility, a director of a facility for emotional disturbed youth, a research assistant, an assistant at a regional educational cooperative (multiple districts), and independent grant writer. Katherine was the only participant who had not been a principal before becoming superintendent. In addition, she was the only participant who left education to start her own business, and then returned to education to become superintendent. She was a Fulbright scholar who had studied Japanese school systems, and she had published articles. In her first superintendence, she was hired for her grant writing skills as well as her skills to create new programs. In her second superintendence, she was hired as a change agent to improve Native-American test scores. She is the only one of the five participants in this study to serve as a superintendent in two separate districts, and in both districts, she was the first female superintendent ever hired.

Anne (Native-American) had also served in multiple positions in two different states. Her teaching career began with teaching Apache children history at a boarding school in a Western state. She had been a history teacher at a middle school. Once she received her master's degree in counseling, her career mostly involved counseling and creating programs for Native-American students in a metropolitan area in another Western state. She served as a counselor in a metropolitan area that established diversified curriculum and counseling, and she served as a teacher/counselor for an alternative school for girls. Before she became an elementary principal, she served as a college counselor, a college human services coordinator, and a central office coordinator

for a large public school system. Once she earned her doctorate, she served as both an elementary and middle school principal in two different districts before becoming superintendent of schools in a rural area. Anne is also a Fulbright scholar who studied schools in Africa, and through additional funding, she studied schools in Australia that joined their communities to established reciprocated entrepreneurial projects. She noted that she was hired as a change agent since there had been problems with the previous superintendent, and the board wanted to improve curriculum and testing scores within the district. She was the second female superintendent hired by this district.

Agnes (Hispanic) served her professional career in two different states in five different positions before serving as superintendent. She served as a bilingual teacher, an elementary teacher, an elementary counselor, a high school counselor, and a high school principal before becoming a superintendent in a rural area. She was hired as a change agent to stabilize and add continuity to the administration of her district. Agnes became the superintendent of the district where both she and her father attended public school, and she was the first female superintendent ever hired by this district.

Evelyn (Asian), like three of her counterparts, served her educational career in two different states. She is the only participant in this study who did not begin her career as a professional educator. She received her bachelor's and master's degrees in business and worked in the private sector for ten years before becoming interested in teaching. With the birth of her children, she chose to stay at home, and it was during this period that she became certified to teach history. Once her two boys entered public school, Evelyn became a high school history teacher. After four years, she became an assistant principal and served in this capacity in two different districts. One of the districts where

she served as an assistant principal was in an affluent community with very little diversity. She stated that the job was not challenging as the majority of the students were academically proficient. She indicated there were some students who were not proficient, and they were basically ignored. She felt that she was hired to bring diversity to the administration rather than because of her stellar credentials. She stayed one year before becoming a high school principal in an underachieving high school in a metropolitan area. She was a change agent, and through deep systemic change, she changed the entire culture of this school. She then served as human resource director, and saw this as a stepping-stone into a superintendence. She was hired as a superintendent in a metropolitan area in a different state. She was hired as a change agent to bridge the gap between minority students and White students in this metropolitan area. She was the first female superintendent of this metropolitan school district.

Only Susan (African American) had worked in one state her entire professional career. In addition, Susan was the only participant in this study who attended public school and obtained all of her college degrees in one state. She held six different positions in five different districts before becoming superintendent. Her experiences ranged from elementary teacher, elementary principal, middle school principal, and assistant superintendent. As a superintendent, Susan was hired as a change agent to improve test scores in a district that was designated as a district in need of improvement. She was the first African-American women ever hired in this district as superintendent.

Women's Narrative on Their Day-To-Day Practice in the Superintendence

Each of the women in this study felt that on a day-to-day basis they were change agents. Since each district is inherently different, each woman faced similar and different

challenges. For instance, Katherine (Caucasian), Agnes (Hispanic), Susan (African-American), and Evelyn (Asian) indicated that in the districts in which they were hired, the board wanted to improve the scores and narrow the achievement gap among the minority groups. Anne (Native-American) was hired to change communications between the community and the school by establishing partnerships. Each discovered that change is challenging and difficult.

Katherine, Agnes, and Susan indicated that in a day-to-day practice, systemic change was difficult, especially when it dealt with changes in classroom instruction. Katherine and Agnes noted that they met with their staffs and developed a process to improve curriculum, instruction, and test scores. Both districts implemented researched-based curriculums. Both women stated that they found that changing curriculum was difficult because it directly influenced what teachers taught, the order information was presented, and how students were assessed. Agnes noted that in her district veteran teachers were most resistant to change. In both Katherine and Agnes's districts, the key to change was teachers and students having accountability.

Katherine indicated that in her second district the schools were in corrective action. She and her leadership team identified one of the major problems as misaligned curriculum. The curriculum was not aligned to state standards either horizontally (across same subjects in the same grade) or vertically (from grade level to grade level). After a year-long search for a researched-based curriculum, the curriculum committee comprised of teachers, parents, board members, and administrators found a researched-based curriculum that fit the district's needs. The committee presented the curriculum to the board, and it was adopted. Yet this new curriculum change was not well-received by the

teachers once they realized they would be more accountable for the academic performance of their students. However, once the teachers were evaluated over their implementation of the curriculum, test scores improved. Katherine indicated that change was a process, and teachers were given a voice in deciding the curriculum, training in its implementation and held accountable for the results. Teachers had to be part of the selection process; they also had to be part of the accountability process. Teaching and learning had to be results-oriented.

Agnes (Hispanic) noted that when changes to the curriculum were made, it almost had to be a covert process in which she had to make teachers believe it was their idea. However, sometimes the directives had to come from her. Further, Agnes noted that on a day-to-day basis she had to be willing to listen to the leadership teams, the teachers, the board, and the community and make those changes that would make students better learners. She commented,

I hope . . . to instill in teachers that we're here to teach, and we have a responsibility to make sure that while these students are in these classrooms, you know, we're going to do the job we need to do and teach these students the information that they need and make sure when they leave these classrooms, that they're proficient, and we've done our job.

As a change agent, Evelyn (Asian) faced the daunting challenge of changing attitudes toward migrant children. She felt that all children deserved an education. Denial of education based on immigration status should never enter into any school's educational philosophy, and yet, in her state, legislators were adamant that illegal, immigrant children would be denied an education. She fought for these children, but the political process was against her.

Anne's (Native-American) duties as a change agent were different from the other women in this study. Anne was a change agent in involving the school in rural revitalization efforts. Hers was a dying community, and she was collaborating with the community to create reciprocated programs that would be mutually beneficial. In addition, she was the only one of the superintendents in this study to have a charter school within her district. Therefore, she had to maintain a relationship with the charter school in order for everyone to share in the limited revenue that would be beneficial to all students in the district. However, with a declining economic base and declining student enrollment, Anne's challenges were finding the right program that would generate funds for the community. The horse therapy program and the laser-engraving program were a start to saving a school and a community from extinction.

As an added challenge to their administrations, Anne (Native-American), Katherine (Caucasian), and Agnes (Hispanic) inherited internal strife in their districts. Anne began her administration needing to return trust and integrity to her district due to an embezzlement situation that occurred prior to her arrival. During Katherine's first superintendence, she discovered the business manager had been making unethical use of district funds and a bus contractor had been misreporting his bus routes. At the beginning of her administration, due to the mismanagement of funds, Agnes had to immediately implement the reduction in force policy and dismiss six employees to keep her district solvent. In her second administration, Katherine had to terminate the business manager due to ineptness in handling district funds, and she had to revamp the human resource department due to non-compliance issues. The second difference among the women was the way they built programs for students within the districts. Katherine

(Caucasian), Evelyn (Asian), and Anne (Native-American) built programs that served the school as well as the community and through these programs they were meeting needs as well as advocating for children. Katherine and Evelyn concentrated their efforts on meeting the needs of young mothers and teenagers. Katherine and Evelyn both built daycare centers at their schools for young mothers or teenage mothers who were returning to school. Katherine also build a community health clinic on her campus and renovated a downtown building for a youth center. Both women had exceptional skills at finding money to finance these projects. Anne’s programs centered on viable, entrepreneurial programs from which both the community and the school could benefit. All these women were not only contributors to the educational process, but were also involved in providing services that benefitted their communities.

Encouraging, Informing, and Supporting Aspiring Female Superintendents

The women in the study spoke opening about how they would encourage, inform, and support other women seeking this position. They indicated that more women need to seek the public school superintendence. Their encouragement and support came in the form of advice and cautions. The four women in the study who had PhDs—Katherine (Caucasian), Anne (Native-American), Susan (African-American), and Evelyn (Asian American)—stated that the PhD is an imperative credential for women seeking the superintendence because they felt the PhD gives female candidates credence. Katherine and Susan indicated that a school board is more likely to hire a man than a woman, so a woman’s credentials have to give her leverage if she is to be taken seriously. Katherine stated, “Men can get a superintendence all day long with a master’s degree, but not women.” Evelyn was also equally adamant that women needed the PhD.

All of the women noted that the job is a high stress job, and part of being a superintendent means taking care of oneself, both physically and spiritually. Agnes (Hispanic) noted that the job literally makes a person sick as noted by her personal battle with cancer. Agnes, Anne, Susan, and Evelyn indicated that part of taking care of oneself means having a spiritual self. Evelyn, a devout Buddhist, stated that she takes time each day to meditate, and during the more difficult moments of her high school principalship she went to Tibet for spiritual purification.

A critical component for success as a superintendent is a working relationship with the board. All five women had difficult boards, and two women, Susan (African-American) and Evelyn (Asian) felt that the model for electing school board members should be changed. Therefore, these women would encourage women seeking this position to develop a positive rapport, and if necessary become a proponent for changing the qualifications for anyone running for a school board position. Anne (Native-American) would encourage the new superintendent to develop a critique sheet for her board and hold them accountable for the decision making process and addressing district needs.

All the women in this study practiced a collaborative leadership style in which all voices were heard and respected, and this is a message they would send a new female superintendent to practice. Susan (African-American) noted that female superintendents are not managers; rather, they are inclusive leaders who create leadership teams in order to run schools effectively. Agnes (Hispanic) stated that once she developed leadership teams, she was no longer on the mountain by herself. However, all the participants noted that to be effective in this job, a female superintendent has to be tough-skinned and lead

with intelligence and knowledge. As Evelyn's mom stated, "If you're knocked down seven times, get up eight."

Inferences from Narratives on Encouraging, Informing, and Supporting Aspiring Female Superintendents

The third research question was – Based on their experiences as female superintendents, what can be inferred that will encourage, inform, and support other women seeking and entering the superintendence? Although each woman spoke candidly about encouraging aspiring female superintendents, inferences can also be drawn from their narratives. Each of the women had different experiences in her superintendence based on her background, the size of the district where she served, her relationship with her board, parents, students, and the community. These experiences impacted her views concerning how she would encourage other women seeking this position. The following are the inferences that can be drawn from their narratives regarding how they could encourage, inform and support other women seeking the public school superintendence.

First, all of the women indicated they would encourage women vying for the superintendence to have a positive mentor. The inference is the job is difficult and challenging, and many times the superintendent needs guidance and someone in whom she can confide and place trust. Several of the women indicated that they had mentored women who they thought would be good candidates for this position. Katherine stated that she mentored several women on her staff. She stated, "I always pushed women." The inference, especially with the word "pushed," is that Katherine wanted to challenge women and have them understand that they can succeed in this position if they are willing to work hard and make sacrifices.

Susan (African-American) noted that she is currently mentoring her assistant superintendent. She stated she involves her in the positive and negative aspects of the job so that she understands the opportunities and challenges of this position. She stated, "I let her ride the ride with me. If it's something great, I'll let her know, if it's something bad, I'll let her know." Susan also stated, "Through a lot of mentoring, I've encouraged other women. . . . This is a good place to be. You can make a difference in the lives of a lot of students and adults from this seat." The inference is that a woman seeking the position needs to understand the positive and negative aspects of this job and have a realistic view of the demands of the job while understanding that this is a powerful position in which there are opportunities to influence and change lives.

As part of the mentoring process, the women indicated that they would mentor women not to be too naïve and about the necessity of having "tough-skin." Anne (Native-American) indicated that she would mentor women not to be naïve. She noted that she was too trusting when she entered the superintendence only to find that not all people have honest, ethical intentions. The inference is that the new superintendent cannot be too trusting. Therefore, along with several women in this study, she cautioned that she would mentor the new female superintendent to be "tough-skinned." The inference is that there will be challenging situations, and a superintendent cannot take them too personally. As Evelyn (Asian) noted, "You can't whine . . . You have to be tough, you have to be thick-skinned." Katherine (Caucasian) noted that she would be very selective in whom she would mentor. She stated,

I would be much more selective now in who[m] I would encourage . . . I think I would be more realistic about what it's like . . . I would encourage women to be superintendent, but I think it has to be somebody that is pretty strong, and I also think it [has to be] somebody that can't be sensitive and can't let hurt feeling get

to them too much. And that's why I would be careful about who I would mentor or encourage to be a superintendent.

Four of the women in this study have earned doctoral degrees, and they strongly stated women seeking the superintendence needed a doctorate. Katherine (Caucasian) and Evelyn (Asian) were very emphatic that women needed a doctorate to be considered viable superintendent candidates equal to male candidates with master's degrees. Katherine indicated that without the PhD, she would not have been considered for a superintendence, and Evelyn felt strongly that school boards are more prone to hire a coach with a master's than they are to hire a woman. Several inferences can be made from these narratives. First, there is an inference of gender discrimination in the hiring process, and the hiring process for men and women is not equal. If the selection process were a level playing field, and both a man and a woman only had a master's degree, the man would be chosen for the position. The inference is that the hiring process is not a level playing field, and therefore women must have greater credentials than a male to be considered for the position. The women's narratives indicated women are held to a higher standard than their male counterparts, and the doctorate offers an element of credibility and legitimacy.

While Anne (Native- American) also felt the doctorate was necessary, there were several inferences from her discussion on women obtaining the PhD. She commented, "And when you finish your dissertation, you know how to manage a huge amount of information ... Projects don't scare you, you can do it ... We need to encourage women, get your doctorate, that gives you a lot of confidence." The inferences in Anne's narrative are two-fold. First, as superintendents, women will handle large projects, and some of these projects will be daunting. The process of completing the PhD helps women with

large projects. Anne felt the PhD is not only a process of obtaining an advanced degree, it is also a process that trains women to handle large amount of information over an extended period of time, and then assimilate and synthesize this material to create an end product. Therefore, the second inference is that women can transfer this process into large projects involving the school district, and therefore, the doctorate gives women confidence to accomplish big projects successfully.

Last, the women in this study would encourage new female superintendents to understand that they are probably being hired as change agents, and a change agent's tenure is usually short. Therefore, the aspiring superintendent needs to understand that her tenure in any district may be temporary. In their preparation for the superintendence, all the women in this study had served in several districts. The inference is that it is necessary for the aspiring superintendent to be mobile.

While the participants in this study would encourage women to seek the superintendence (all indicated that they have and would continue mentoring women), their comments were filled with statements and comments of awareness and caution. The overall inference is that this is a demanding position, and women need to educate themselves before entering the position and once there, they need a support system to help them through the process.

Summary

The narratives of these women suggested they were five ordinary women who have had extraordinary careers. Even though each woman grew up in different parts of the country, and each woman experienced different circumstances, they each had similar family structures and certain character traits that led them to the public school

superintendence. Each of the women in this study was raised under difficult financial circumstances. Yet, each of the women had strong parental support systems. None of the parents or guardians of these women had a college education, and four of the women had parents or guardians who had less than a high school diploma. Among all of these women, education was emphasized at home. All of these women expressed that college was always a family or a personal expectation. Each of the families and the participants had to make personal sacrifices and face daunting challenges to receive a college education.

Once the participants in this study obtained their college education, all of them catered to marginalized students or communities. Two of the women chose to spend their careers exclusively in rural America, two served both in rural and medium sized communities, and one served in two metropolitan areas. All of the women served in several different districts before becoming superintendent. They became strong advocates for children, and each of them was involved in building programs within the school and/or the community.

As change agents and advocates for children, each of the women in this study faced major challenges during her administration. The challenges ranged from personnel issues, curriculum revision, financial difficulties, building facilities, ethical issues, and underperforming schools; yet, each of these women was able to meet these challenges, and each of the school districts where these women served was able to improve. Two of the school districts received state and national attention for their innovation and improvement.

The women believed that a transformational leadership style was crucial to the success of their schools. To that end, each of the women's priority was establishing leadership teams, and each felt that they had to have reciprocated partnerships within their communities to build trust, accountability, and mutual advocacy for the students. All of the women in this study advocated for children in different capacities throughout their careers. Each expressed that her background of servant leadership translated into better learning communities and better academic performance by students. They all felt that the strongest influence on students was the teacher in the classroom. They indicated that their job was to be behind the scenes finding resources and helping create programs for the success of students.

CHAPTER 5: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN NARRATIVES AND RESEARCH LITERATURE, RECOMMENDATIONS AND EPILOGUE

“What we value determines who we are.”

Introduction

Current research shows that women are still underrepresented in the American public school superintendence; yet, they are making gains in obtaining this position. According to the Glass (1992), 6.6% of America’s 14,063 public school superintendents were women; in 2000 that percentage had risen to 13.2%; in 2007, the percentage of female superintendents was 21.7%; and in 2010, 24.1% of the American public school superintendents were women. The five women in this study chronicle their own personal struggles to obtain and survive in this position. Each of the participants in this study narrated the important events that led her to the public school superintendence. This chapter discusses how each woman’s story is similar or different from the research literature in terms of career paths (the jobs they held leading to the superintendence), career patterns (the geographical regions where women are most likely to be hired), change agents, power, leadership, key barriers, and the reasons some of the participants left their superintendence.

Similarities and Differences of the Participants to the Research Literature

Career Paths

A 2010 survey of 1,868 superintendents conducted by Kowalski et al. supported earlier findings (Glass, 1992; Glass, et al., 2000; Grogan, M., 2005; Gupton, & Slick, 1995; Ortiz, 1982; Shakeshaft, 1989) that the most frequent career path for women who have become superintendents has been teacher, elementary principal, and a central office position. None of the women in this study reflected the research profile. Katherine (Caucasian) had not held any principalships or central office administrative jobs before becoming superintendent. Katherine had been a special education teacher, a diagnostician (both in public schools and private practice), a special education coordinator at a boys' juvenile facility, a director at a facility for emotional disturbed youth, a supervisor at a regional educational cooperative, and a grant writer before becoming superintendent. Even though she did not match the research literature profile, she stated that she had begun thinking about preparing for a superintendence early in her educational career. She felt that her positions at the boys' correctional facility, the director's position at the facility for emotional disturbed youth, and her position at the regional educational cooperative prepared her for understanding fiscal management, advocating for students, and honing her grant writing skills. In addition, she felt that her ability to evaluate the needs of the school and the community and find monetary resources to create programs that served both the school and community made her a strong superintendent.

While Katherine had an extensive background in managerial jobs, not rising through the traditional educational ranks may have hindered both her understanding of school board politics and her ability to identify the power brokers within the community.

She noted that in retrospect she would have made the board's directives more transparent so they would have shared in the responsibilities and consequences of decision-making. She was the first female superintendent in both districts where she served as superintendent.

Agnes (Hispanic) was an elementary teacher, an elementary counselor and a high school principal before becoming superintendent. Although Agnes' career does not match the research profiles presented in several studies by the American Association of School Administrators, she does fit Pavon-Nelson's research (cited in Johnson, 1995) that indicated high school principals are more likely than elementary principals to be selected as superintendents. Of the superintendents in this study, Agnes was the only one hired as an inside candidate. Yet, even as an inside candidate and the search team's choice, the board did not select her for this position on her first try. Once she was selected, she became the district's first female superintendent.

Anne (Native-American) was a teacher, district counselor of Native-American children, an elementary and middle school principal, a college counselor, and the director of human resources at a Native-American fine arts college before becoming superintendent. Of the participants in this study, Anne was the only one whose career also took her into higher education. She and Agnes (Hispanic) were the only two candidates who had a master's degree in counseling, and both attribute counseling strategies with their ability to be transformational leaders. Agnes noted that her counseling skills allowed her to work effectively with her school board. Due to her counseling background, Anne understood the value of honoring and validating people's work. Therefore, she noted that she not only provided training for her board members, but she nominated them for

various awards. In addition, through her board evaluation system, she brought a degree of accountability and responsibility to the board. Therefore, the school board was not only developing policy, but it shared in the implementation and consequences of those policies. Anne was the second female within her district to serve as a superintendent.

Susan (African-American) did not match the research literature concerning career paths for female superintendents. She served as an elementary teacher, elementary principal, a middle school principal and assistant superintendent before applying for and being chosen for a superintendence. However, she did fit another research profile that found that minority female superintendents are hired in districts that are economically depressed (Glass, et al., 2000). In addition, she matches Grogan's (2005) research that found women of color are hired to be instructional leaders and change agents. While she was not the first woman to serve as superintendent in her district, she was the first African-American female to serve in this position.

Evelyn (Asian) does not fit the research profile because she did not serve as an elementary principal. However, according to Pavon-Nelson (as cited in Johnson, 1995), she improved her chances of being a superintendent because she served as a high school principal. In this study, Evelyn served as a superintendent of the largest district with 14,000 students. She, too, was the first female superintendent for this district.

In addition, the participants in this study did not mirror Brunner and Grogan (2007) research that found "women of color were twice as likely as white women to wait four or more year for a superintendency" (p. 113). In this study, the reverse of Grogan and Brunner's study was true. The women of color were hired in a shorter period of time than Katherine, the Caucasian participant. Susan, the African-American, was selected as

superintendent the first time she applied for the position while Agnes (Hispanic), Anne (Native-American), and Evelyn (Asian) were chosen the second time they applied. Agnes applied in the district where she served as a teacher and principal. Initially, she was not the board's candidate. Later in the year with the termination of the superintendent, Agnes was asked to serve as interim superintendent, and she became the superintendent the following year. Anne applied a second time to the district that did not accept her first application. A board member was advocating for her acceptance. Katherine indicated that she applied multiple times before she became superintendent.

Brunner and Grogan's (2007) research indicated that women of color served in five or six administrative areas before becoming superintendent as compared to White women who held four positions before becoming superintendents. From this research, we would assume that within this project, the one White participant held fewer administrative positions before becoming a superintendent than those of the other four participants. Katherine (Caucasian) held two administrative positions (boys' correctional facility, director of facility for emotionally disturbed youth) before serving as superintendent. However, Agnes (Hispanic) held fewer jobs than did Katherine because she only served in one administrative position (high school principal) before her superintendence. Anne (Native-American) held three administrative positions (elementary principal, middle school principal, central office coordinator) as compared to Katherine's two. While Anne held more administrative positions than Katherine, she does not match the research career path of five to six positions before entering the superintendence. Susan (African-American) held four administrative positions—elementary principal in two districts, middle school principal, and assistant

superintendent. Therefore, she, like Anne, held more positions than Katherine but less than the research indicated by Brunner and Grogan (2007). Evelyn (Asian) also held four administrative positions (assistant principal – 2 districts, high school principal, and director of human resources) prior to becoming a principal. Thus, she held more positions than Katherine but less than the research career path noted for women of color.

Career Patterns

Gupton and Slick (1995) found that a factor contributing to the underrepresentation of women in the superintendence is the limited geographic regions in which they are most likely to be hired. Their research found that women are most likely to be hired in rural areas. Tallerico, Burstyn and Poole (1993) concurred with these findings when their study revealed more women than men practice in districts with fewer than 300 students. They further indicated that more men than women serve in districts with enrollments of 300 to 24,999 students, and women of color tended to be hired in troubled urban districts. Katherine (Caucasian) and Agnes (Hispanic) match the career pattern research profile. Katherine's first superintendence was in an area of fewer than 300 as was Agnes's district. However, Katherine's second superintendence was a middle range district that served 1,600 students. Anne (Native-American), Susan (African-American), and Evelyn (Asian) all served in middle range districts. Anne's student enrollment was 550, Susan's was 1,240, and Evelyn's district was 14,000 students. Susan and Evelyn were hired to improve achievement scores in their troubled districts. Neither Katherine's second district nor Anne, Susan, and Evelyn's districts fit the career pattern profile in terms on student population; however, Susan and Evelyn fit the profile in that they both were hired to improve troubled school systems.

Change Agents

Grogan and Brunner's (2005) research found that women felt they were hired as change agents. Her research also indicated that African-American women were twice as likely to be hired to lead reform movements than their White female counterparts. All of the women in this study emphatically indicated they were change agents in each of the district they served. They were change agents in a myriad of areas including stabilizing district finances and personnel, building programs both inside and outside the school, acting as a liaison between the school and community, improving test scores, closing the achievement gap among their diverse populations, and advocating for marginalized and disenfranchised students. They all matched the research findings that stated women were primarily hired as instructional leaders and change agents (Grogan, 2005). Evelyn (Asian) felt so strongly about being a change agent for children that she eventually resigned her position in part because of the state's stance of denying educational opportunities to the children of illegal immigrants.

Power

Amedy (1999) indicated that power is the authority to make decisions for an organization, and Halloran (2007) stated that power allows a leader to control the "actions and choices of others" (p. 42). Rosener (1990) suggested that when women entered the superintendence, they were expected to lead like men whose leadership style was hierarchical, competitive, and aggressive. Men's power was steeped in command and control in which directives were issued and obeyed. Rosener indicated this was not women's natural way of leading. Women's way of leading was transformational. According to Rosener, transformational leadership included women empowering others

by encouraging active involvement in decision-making. She noted that women used transformational power to invest in people and promote collegiality that in turn enhanced job performance. The women in this study indicated that power should be used to build networks among all stakeholders and build a system where all people experienced involvement in the organization.

All of the women in this study indicated that they used the power of their office to transform the school system. They noted that their power was to instill an understanding of the importance and significance of education for everyone. Both Susan (African-American) and Anne (Native-American) indicated that power meant empowering teachers and entrusting them to do their jobs. Katherine (Caucasian) echoed this same belief when she stated, “We know that a teacher, the teacher is the one thing that really makes an impact ... on a kid in the classroom. So, you know, do the best you can to get good teachers, [and then] help those teachers.”

They noted that for power to be effective, everyone has to be involved in creating a direction and following that direction. Susan stated that power is making people believe great things are possible. She noted that before leaders can use their power to effect change, they need to establish a belief system within the school. She stated, “ I truly believe that, if you work with systemic planning, your district can flourish, and you can turn some light bulbs on where they had been turned off or burned out.”

Leadership Styles

The research literature indicated that the most prevalent leadership style among women leaders was transformational leadership (Helgeson, 1990; Kennedy, 2008; Rosener, 1990). Rosener (1990) indicated transformational leadership included

relationship building, collegiality, establishing communication networks, and sharing of power. Helgesen (1995) called women's leadership style a "web of inclusion" in which leaders felt comfortable being at the center of the organization rather than at the top. She noted that the strength of this model was consensus building through collaboration and each voice within the organization was valued. She posited that this model allowed all people in the organization to focus on needs, processes, and results in an atmosphere of collegiality and reciprocated respect. All the women in this study matched this leadership model.

All the participants in this study describe their most prevalent leadership style as transformational. Each of the participants felt she was hired as a change agent; therefore, each felt part of her job was to transform their districts through collaboration with their staffs and community. Katherine (Caucasian) and Evelyn (Asian) worked with the community to build day care programs. Katherine also built a teen center and a community health center, and Anne (Native-American) worked with her community to build a laser engraving program and a horse therapy program. Agnes (Hispanic) worked with her community to build a new middle school. Before Susan became superintendent, the district had not met adequate yearly progress for several years. In collaboration with her staff and community, they build leadership teams and redesigned the curriculum. After three years, her district was designated as an exemplary district. These women indicated that transformation is not always easy

Key Barriers

One of the key barriers identified by the research literature was the lack of mentors and sponsors for women seeking the public school superintendence (Alston,

2000; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Glass, et al., 2000; Kowalski & Stouder, 1999; Mendez-Morse, 2004; Tallerico, 1999). Mendez-Morse (2004) defined mentor “as someone who actively helps, supports, or teaches someone else how to do a job so that she will succeed” (p. 561). Mendez-Morse (2004) indicated that a sponsor was someone within education who would advocate for the female superintendent candidate. All of the women in this study indicated that they lacked mentors during their superintendence and only one, Anne (Native-American) indicated that she had been sponsored.

Without a mentor during their first year in the superintendence, the experience was difficult for all the women in this study. Agnes (Hispanic) described her first year without a mentor as, “Initiation by fire,” “A living hell” and, “I felt like I was on the mountain by myself, and I was.” Anne stated that because of her Fulbright scholarship, she was able to connect with other superintendents across the country, and they informally mentored each other. She noted that her conversations dealt with how female superintendents manage their own lives while serving in this position. Anne was the only participant that had an internal sponsor to advocate for her acceptance as superintendent. Susan (African-American), Katherine (Caucasian) and Evelyn (Asian) stated that they did not receive formal mentoring, but through their association with professional colleagues they were able to network and talk with other superintendents.

The research literature indicated that women in the superintendence experience gender bias (Blout, 1998; Hansot & Tyack, 1982; Shakeshaft, 1989). The gender bias that these women experienced in this study was in the form of higher expectations for them as compared to their male counterparts. Agnes noted that she did not think her board would hire another female because they do not believe in female administrators. Evelyn

commented that the gender bias she saw was women were held to a higher standards in multiple ways. Katherine, Anne, Susan, and Evelyn commented that female candidates are expected to have a PhD. Evelyn also noted that women are held to a higher standard in their demeanor, and people are constantly scrutinizing and judging them. She stated that women cannot complain about the time commitment of the job, women have to be thick-skinned, and they are judged by their professional attire, whereas men are not.

The research stated another barrier for women were “gatekeepers,” who tended to hire or recommend for hiring people with the same background as them. These historically have been white males, thus limiting the opportunities for qualified females (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996). Katherine, Agnes, Susan and Evelyn were the first females to ever serve as superintendents in the districts in which they were hired. Anne was the second women ever hired in her district.

Exiting the Superintendence

Research showed that the reasons women leave the superintendence are varied. Glass et al.(2000) found that women were typically hired as change agents, and once the changes occur, women left the districts in which they were hired. Studies found that women left due to problems balancing family and work, expanded job demands, time commitment to job, or a changing school board. For those female superintendents in rural areas, they cited physical remoteness, lack of support systems, lack of professional development, and overwhelming demands of the job.

Three of the women in this study had left their superintendence. Katherine (Caucasian), Anne (Native-American) and Evelyn (Asian) have all been away from the public superintendence for one year. Of these three women, Katherine was in full

retirement. Upon leaving her superintendence, Anne had served as an assistant superintendent in another state, and Evelyn was employed in a government position that dealt with educational issues. Katherine indicated that she left her first superintendence under duress as she had terminated the contract of a bus contractor for unethical work practices. She left her second superintendence when the board changed, and she no longer had their support. This was also true for Evelyn, who left her position due to the state's stance on educating immigrant children; her board also changed, not giving her the support she needed to do a credible job. Anne indicated that she left her job because she grew bored with the position. Each of these women felt that she had done a credible job as superintendent and they felt the changes they made let the school system in a better position than when they arrived.

Summary

There were similarities and differences in the narratives of the women and the research literature concerning career paths, career patterns, change agents, power, leadership, key barriers, and the reason some of the participants left their superintendence. The research literature noted that women obtaining the public school superintendence typically served as teachers, elementary principals and held a central office position before becoming a superintendent. None of the women in this study matched this research profile. Next, the research literature indicated that the career patterns for most female superintendents was serving either in small rural areas or, in the case of minority female superintendents, serving in troubled urban areas. Only Katherine (Caucasian) and Agnes (Hispanic) matched the research profile as both served in districts of less than 300 students. In addition, the research literature noted that female

superintendents were hired as change agents. All the women in this study fit this profile, as each woman viewed herself as a change agent. Next, the literature suggested that women viewed their leadership as transformational, and each woman used her power to empower others. The women in this study matched these findings as each used her power to transform her district by building networks among staff and community. The research literature identified an array of barriers for women entering the superintendence. For the women in this study, the key barrier was lack of mentorship. The research noted that women left their superintendence for various reasons. Three women in this study left their superintendence. Katherine (Caucasian) and Evelyn (Asian) resigned their superintendence because their boards changed, and they no longer felt they had the support they needed to continue being effective. Anne (Native-American) indicated that the job grew too repetitive.

Recommendations for Future Research

Finding females superintendents for this study was made difficult as a national database does not exist concerning American public school superintendents; therefore, there are no national archival records of the men and women who have previously served or are serving in this position. In addition, the only information that the state departments of education release are the names of the districts, the name of the superintendents, phone numbers, and e-mail contact information. For this research, literally hundreds of phone calls and dozens of hours were spent in locating female superintendents as each district in several states had to be individually researched. For instance, through internet searches and phone calls, I found that Texas had more than 1,000 superintendents; of those, 233 were female and only six were minority female superintendents. The American

Association of School Administrators commissions a publication concerning the state of the American superintendence every decade. This is an extensive study that presents a myriad of facts concerning the American superintendence, and yet, the editors admit that even they do not know the exact number of American superintendents since there is no national database (Kowalski et al., 2010). This research could have been made easier if either state departments of education or the federal department of education would mandate statistical information be kept of superintendents serving in public schools. Therefore, a recommendation for future research would be exploring the viability of establishing a national database that would contain information regarding superintendents.

All of the participants in this study indicated they did not have a mentor while serving in the superintendence. They all felt that mentoring would have made them more effective leaders. Therefore, a recommendation for further research would be exploring how states or local districts mentor and train new superintendents to handle the many duties of this position.

Research needs to continue to determine how women can continue to access the American superintendence. While women over the past twenty years have made gains in accessing the superintendence, research needs to continue to determine what factors allow women to attain this position and what factors allow them to be successful.

Epilogue

As I ponder the lives of the many women throughout history who became teachers, mid-management administrators, and superintendents, I realized it was their battles and sacrifices that laid the foundation for future women to be superintendents.

Yet, the battles and sacrifices that current female superintendents face are no less significant than those fought by their predecessors.

The women's stories resonated with my own experiences. Similar to the women in this study, I came from a middle-class family and a great emphasis was placed on education. Like the women in this study, my career path did not match the research literature. I was a teacher, middle school principal, elementary principal (in several districts in different states) before become a superintendent. I did become superintendent in a small district, and therefore, this matched the research literature that indicated women are more likely to be hired in smaller districts. I was hired as a change agent, and I was a transformational leader. Similar to the women in this study, a key barrier was the lack of a mentor. I had a positive relationship with my school board, and I was re-hired. However, I chose to resign my position as superintendent to pursue a doctorate. As a superintendent of a small district, I faced a huge financial crisis in which I had to seek emergency supplemental funding from the state. I also faced the greatest challenge of my professional career when I averted what could have been a catastrophic school shooting.

The important thing to take from this project is how we, as superintendents, can facilitate other women seeking this position. Key to the new superintendent's success is mentorship. We must formulate a process whereby new superintendents receive the mentoring they need to navigate the nuances of the superintendence. To that end, I would advocate at the state level for a committee to connect new superintendents with veteran superintendents. There should be mandated meetings and trainings for new superintendents ranging from budget, law, personnel, evaluations, facility management,

school board relations, and crisis intervention to name a few items. When there is collaboration, everyone gets better and no one needs to be on the mountain top alone.

When I was superintendent, I kept a small plaque on my desk that read: “Children are the living message we send to a time we will not see.” Many times, I would silently ask myself what is the message I am sending into the future? As I reflect on the lives of the women in this study, the message is clear. We send a message of caring and of hope.

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APPENDIX A: LETTER

Nelda - I share your concern!!!

We are trying to hold a weekend experience for women leaders here in Michigan. Perhaps we should do the same in YOUR state.

Do use my interview protocol. But, please send me your findings. I am VERY interested in what you learn!

Nancy

Quoting "Isaacs,Nelda" <nalisaacs@CAHS.Colostate.edu>:

>

> Dr. Colflesh,

> I am a doctoral student at Colorado State University, and I am
> currently working on finishing my doctoral studies. My research
> studies center on minority female superintendents. As a former public
> school superintendent, I have been concerned about the absence of
> women at this top administrative position. As part of my research, I
> read Dr. Jo Barbie's dissertation, and she and I have met for lunch
> on several occasions to discuss our work. She indicated that she had
> requested your permission to use your interview and question protocol
> in her study. I would also like to request your permission to use
> your interview and questions protocol in my study.

> I have been a classroom teacher, a principal at all levels, director
> of instruction, federal projects coordinator and superintendent. Upon
> finishing my doctoral studies, I hope to return to the
> superintendence.

> If you would like to speak with me about my project, I would welcome
> a call or an e-mail. My number is 970-988-5011, and my e-mail
> address is: nalisaacs@cahs.colostate.edu.

>

> Thank you,

>

> Nelda L. Isaacs

>

>

>

>

>

>
> Nelda L. Isaacs
> Doctoral Student
> School of Education
> Colorado State University

Isaacs,Nelda

To:colflesh@msu.edu

Sent Items

Wednesday, March 10, 2010 11:07 AM

Dr. Colflesh,

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I have been a classroom teacher, a principal at all levels, director of instruction, federal projects coordinator and superintendent. Upon finishing my doctoral studies, I hope to return to the superintendence.

If you would like to speak with me about my project, I would welcome a call or an e-mail. My number is 970-988-5011, and my e-mail address is: nlistaacs@cahs.colostate.edu.

Thank you,

Nelda L. Isaacs

Nelda L. Isaacs
Doctoral Student
School of Education
Colorado State University

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

(I will be using some of Dr. Nancy Colflesh's interview protocol. I have received permission from Dr. Colflesh to use the questions that she developed for her doctoral studies).

Research Questions

Tell me your story on what led you to the American School superintendence.

What stories can you share that would describe your day-to-day experiences in this position

Based on your position as a superintendent what stories can you share that will encourage, inform and support other women seeking this position?

Introduction for Participant:

You will also be asked to expand on your life and educational experiences prior to becoming superintendent. The focus of my study is your life experiences that led you to the superintendence and your experiences in that position. So, your life experiences will serve as a starting point for our continued exploration during the rest of the interviews.

1. I am interested in learning more about your background: When and where you were born, who your parents were, stories about your siblings, birth order, your parents' occupations. I would like you to expand and clarify the information with personal situations and stories about your life experiences.
 - What was that growing-up experience like for you?
 - How did your position in the family affect your sense of who you were during your growing-up years?
 - How was that for you?
 - How does your own family fit into this picture of your life?

2. What was your school experience like for you?
 - If you were to share a memorable story about your K-12 school experience, what would it be?
 - How did that experience impact you?

- Do those experiences affect your practice of school leadership? In what ways?
 - How did you feel about these different levels of education (elementary/middle and high school)?
3. How did you become a teacher? A principal? A superintendent?
- What, from your earlier life and educational experiences, informed these decisions?
 - What were others' responses when you made these choices?
4. How has your experience as a superintendent impacted your thinking about school leadership?
- In a positive way? For example . . .
 - In a negative way? For example . . .
6. Many people speak of critical life moments/events/experiences that impacted them for the rest of their lives.
- Identify the critical moments that stand out most for you.
 - Did these critical events serve to impede or propel your future decisions and choices?
 - Do the lessons or messages from these critical moments ever creep into your practice as a school leader? In what way?
8. Are there other pertinent information and stories that we have not covered that you would like to share about this part of your life?
1. Tell me about the relationships in the school district.
- How do you develop and maintain relationships with central office administration, principals, staff, students, and parents?
 - What are key aspects to these relationships?
 - What are some examples of the strongest, most productive relationships?
 - Give me an example of what you have done when a relationship was not productive or healthy.
 - How do these relationships work in your drawing of the school district as an organization?
 - Would you say that caring is an ethic in your school

- district?
 - Can you give an example?
 - What experiences from your life inform your view and efforts with relationships in your school district?
2. Do you see yourself as a change agent in your school district?
- How does that view of your role as a change agent manifest itself in your work?
 - How do you think about school improvement in your school district? What have you been working on this year?
 - How successful has it been? What about next year?
 - What would be an example of something you have done to make change happen in your school district?
 - What about a change that failed? How did you and your staff get going again?
4. What has, in your life and work, enhanced your learning as a school leader?
- What has hindered your learning as a school leader?
5. How do you think your staff sees (saw) you as a leader?
- How do you see yourself as a leader?
 - How do you want to be seen as a leader?
6. Have you changed as a leader since your first year as a superintendent?
- In what ways?
 - What/who influenced those changes?
 - What changes, in your opinion, lie ahead for you as a leader?
7. Two of the components of leadership are power and influence. How do you define these two terms?
- What was a time when you exerted your power and influence to create change in curriculum, teaching, and learning?
 - What went well in that process?
 - What meaning did it have for you?
 - What lessons did you learn from that experience?

8. What is the hardest part of the work for you?
 - How have you struggled with it?
 - What is the easiest part?
 - What makes it easy?
9. How have you come to define leadership for yourself?
10. Are there stories of other women leaders that have impacted your beliefs and values as a leader?
11. Are there any other stories or experiences about your work as a school leader that you want to share with me before the end of this interview?
12. Given what you have said about your life before you became a superintendent, and given what you have said about your work now, how have you come to understand leadership in your life?
 - What sense does it make to you?
13. Would you encourage other women to become superintendents? Why?
 - Suppose you know a promising candidate, what would you say to her?
 - What qualities would be important for her to have to be successful?
 - What hurdles and challenges should she be prepared to overcome?
14. Given what you have said about life and work, what unique contribution do you believe you have made to the field of school leadership because you are a woman superintendent?
 - If you could to the superintendency all over again would you do it differently?
 - How?
19. As you consider your work as a superintendent, what were your greatest strengths? What was an area of your practice that was not so strong?
 - What did you do to accentuate those strengths?
 - How did you compensate for those not-so-strong areas?

20. Let's continue your lifeline to include your personal life during your tenure as a superintendent.
- What were some of the critical events or experiences in your personal life that were happening simultaneously during your superintendency?
 - Did they shape your development and work as a school leader?
 - In what way?
21. As you consider your life and leadership work, what are some of your feelings?
- What are you most proud of? What have been your greatest accomplishments?
 - Of what are you the least proud? Ashamed of? Guilty of?
 - What are you most angry about?
 - What are you most accepting about?
 - What have you been most frustrated about?
22. Are there other examples of sense-making about your life and work that you want to add to the end of this interview since it is our last formal time together?
23. How has this research experience been for you?
Any major learnings?
Any implications for your thinking and practice as a school district leader?