1-2020

What's Love Got to Do with Educational Leadership? A Case Study in Principal Practice

Dessynie Edwards

Israel Aguilar
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Juan Manuel Nino

Recommended Citation

Edwards, D., Aguilar, I. & Niño, J. M. (2020). What's love got to do with educational leadership: A case study in principal practice. Journal of Texas Women School Executives, 5(1), 28-45.

What's Love Got to Do with Educational Leadership? A Case Study in Principal Practice

Dessynie Edwards, Ph.D.
Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi

Israel Aguilar, Ph.D.
University of Texas - Rio Grande Valley

Juan Manuel Nino, Ph.D.
University of Texas - San Antonio

Abstract

The pressure to close the student achievement gap compounded by federal mandates and laws forces principals to hyper-focus on accountability as one of the major technical aspects of the profession; however, principals who can balance the technical (systems world) with the relational (lifeworld) and facilitate authentic care over aesthetic care, are warranted so that the achievement gap can be understood for what it really is, an opportunity gap. Thus, it's important to document the processes, strategies, dispositions, or beliefs of school leaders who employ authentic care so that principal preparation programs can teach these as skill sets for preservice leaders and other in-service leaders. The researchers conceptualize the leader´s processes, dispositions, and beliefs of professional love as acts of authentic care. This critical case study highlights the efforts of one female principal whose work is informed by her racial and/or gendered identities and social justice orientation. Social justice leaders who exercise professional love, can facilitate authentic care to maintain the lifeworld of an organization. The purpose of this qualitative critical case study is to understand the following research questions and use the findings as a heuristic to inform principal practice and preparation: what specific processes, strategies, dispositions, and beliefs does one school leader use to establish an environment conducive to meetings the needs of faculty and staff while also assuming responsibility of the technical aspect of the profession? How does a principal´s identities as a woman and/or woman of color inform her work?

Keywords: principals, preparation programs, care, social justice, love

Introduction

State and federal accountability guidelines force schools to privilege high test scores as the sole measure of academic success (Waite, Boone, & McGee, 2001). As a result, schools become preoccupied with standards and the technical aspect of teaching and learning in order to remain in compliance with local, state, and federal performance targets. While standards and assessments may be necessary for accountability purposes, these metrics often perpetuate the achievement gaps used to define the performance bands of students, in the first place. As such, principals who can balance the *systems world* (Nelson, S., de la Colina, M., & Boone, M. 2008) with *the lifeworld* (Sergiovani, 2000) and facilitate *authentic care* over *aesthetic care*, are warranted so that the achievement gap can be understood for what it really is, an opportunity gap. Thus, it's important to document the processes, strategies, dispositions, or beliefs of school leaders so that principal preparation and principal development programs may access and teach these aspects to support skill-development for both preservice and in-service leaders.

Statement of the Problem

Accountability measures effectively highlight performance differences on standardized tests, but minimally address the differentiation needed and required for diverse student populations to ensure progress. Schools around the country have begun to operate more than ever before from a technical, rational viewpoint, which stresses the importance of workplace coordination, predictability, and accountability for compliance. Yet, operating from this viewpoint often comes at the expense of excellence (Ingersoll, 2003), relational aspects and human capital development. To this end, educational leaders are also tasked to support and develop teachers and staff so that they effectively meet the needs of diverse learners, while also prioritizing standards and meeting accountability targets. However, in the maintenance of an accountability hyper-vigilance, there is limited attention given to specific actions or efforts (i.e. processes, strategies, dispositions, or beliefs) a leader employs to create the conditions and an environment that promotes and achieves excellence, beyond efficiency. When there is so much emphasis on the end-products rather than the processes, school improvement is not achieved, while also creating dissonance for social justice.

Purpose and Research Questions

The dual purposes of this qualitative critical case study is to understand the following research questions and use the findings as a heuristic to inform principal preparation and development programs: what specific processes, strategies, dispositions, and beliefs does one school leader use to establish an environment conducive to meetings the needs of faculty and staff while also assuming responsibility of the technical aspect of the profession? How does a principal´s multiple and intersecting identities inform her work?

Literature Review

Accountability in Schools

The pressure to close the student achievement gap compounded by federal mandates and laws (ESSA) forces principals to hyper-focus on accountability as one of the major technical aspects of the profession. Nelson, de la Colina, and Boone, (2008) found that some principals identify the need for increased knowledge related to the technical management applications of school leadership, such as budgeting, materials and resource allocations, transportation, campus

operations and discipline management to effectively focus teaching and learning. This perspective raises an interesting question for principals: is organizational performance and social interaction more impacted by technical management or direct human relations? Principal preparation programs, too, must grapple with this question to teach aspiring leaders and to develop effective principals who can also advocate for social justice (Hawley and James, 2010).

While accountability is paramount for school compliance, it should be noted that schools are not fixed binary spaces in which students either pass or fail, without any other efforts to diminish this binary relationship. Instead, schools are fluid contexts where teaching and learning are always dynamic (Ellsworth, 2005), as human actions and emotions are at play within this supposed binary scope. Yet, according to hooks (2003), "Emotional connections tend to be suspect in a world where the mind is valued above all else, where the idea that one should be and can be objective is paramount" (p.127). And while romantic love is often discouraged in the workplace, the authors contend that professional love by leaders should not be dissuaded in schools. The construct of professional love is a pairing of an ethic of care (Noddings, 2007) and justice (Starratt, 1991). Thus, the authors purport that professional love actualized by principals has purpose and a place in effective school leadership.

Wheatley (2006) writes, that if we are machines, controlling us makes sense, but because we are not machines, it is "suicide" to try to control humans (p.25). According to Max Weber (1947), the efficiency of a bureaucracy may propel an organization's ends; however, "the rigidity, inflexibility, and inhumanness created by rationalization locks humans in an iron cage" (p.31). The excessive paperwork inherent in accountability, creates rigidity, inflexibility, and inhumanness, which are characteristic of organizations that stress the importance of workplace coordination and accountability for the success of collective enterprises and these current school practices reflect an obsession with testing to measure students' learning (Biesta, 2011; Waite, Boone, and McGhee, 2001). However, leaders, specifically school leaders, who build relationships with others by providing attention to the relational aspect of the profession sustain life within the organization (Wheatley, 2006). Additionally, Wheatley (2006) offers a new paradigm of leadership, one which challenges the traditional forms of absolute knowledge and certitude that hinder organizations from becoming ones of human possibility and creativity. This paradigm invites humans to interact and evolve, as opposed to ensuring humans blindly accept structure and predictability as a way of being.

Love and Leadership

According to Crawford (2009), emotionalizing organizations brings out new interpretations and understandings, for emotions serve as lens to view leadership and influence organizing actions. Moreover, Crawford's 2009 research contends that leadership is more than just management or administration, it is inseparable from emotion. Leaders in schools today must possess a clear sense of the true and evolving purpose of education and more saliently, be cognizant of educational leadership ambiguities. Although the role of a principal is mostly ambiguous, it is often carried for the maintenance of the status quo. Therefore, principals must negotiate technical management within instructional leadership in addition to cultivating relational components, such as the construct of love in practice (Nelson & Aguilar, 2011).

Thus, it is important for leaders to understand how to care and how their leadership identity or other identities support or not support an ethic of caring. For example, Waite, Nelson & Guajardo (2017), faculty in principal preparation, who model self-study by employing

autoethnography for research, ask, "Who are we as people, leaders, and/or educators? What are our responsibilities?" (p. 200). These faculty members understand their own individual identities and how these influence their teaching and preparation of school leaders. As such, by understanding their identities, and how these identities inform their desire to exhibit a social justice orientation and an ethic of care, these faculty members are in a better position to prepare school leaders for professional love and an ethic of care through a social justice research agenda. While it has become imperative that school principals engage professional love for effective leadership, Nelson, de la Colina and Boone's (2008) study of four novice principals over four years suggests that the current climate of efficiency and accountability is contributing to the socialization of principals who focus on the technical aspects of administration rather than the relational aspects of leadership. Nelson et al. (2008) and Sergiovanni (2000) cite that the "systems world" (accountability) cannot possibly drive the "life world" (people) in schools.

Waite and Nelson (2005) explicated how school organizations are entrenched within the bureaucratic hierarchy of state agencies. Because of accountability, they view principals, as agents of the state who need to mediate between the welfare of the individual—whether that be an individual student, teacher, parent, or whomever—and that of the organization. Waite and Nelson (2005) further purport that administrators may privilege the organization over the individual, but they suggest that leaders and supervisors who exhibit agency are less prone to such manipulation and hegemony. Supervisors, who do not occupy administrator line positions, have more degrees of freedom. Unlike administrators, supervisors are more apt to follow their individualized professional dictates and their own moral compasses.

To exhibit professional love requires individual agency. In another study by Day, Harris and Hadfield (2001) administrators who were most successful in school improvement were those who used morality, emotion, and social bonds to stimulate staff motivation and commitment. This research suggests interdependencies are possible and effective when principals operate from a care perspective. Another study completed by Ackerman and Maslin- Ostrowski (2004) observed that while principals do well to help others, there was room for emotional fall-out or burn out.

Care

Moreover, the challenge to care about faculty members and students individually is illustrated by the conceptualization of two conflicting forces at play within schools, authentic care and aesthetic care (Valenzuela, 1999). According to Valenzuala (1999), aesthetic care refers to care for an individual based on adherence to procedural aspects of organizations such as structures, norms, rules, and duty. Therefore, one who demonstrates aesthetic care does so with a universal, technical, and rational logic, rather than being motivated by what is good for individuals based on their individual differences (Noddings, 2007).

An overemphasis of aesthetic care can marginalize individuals who do not meet the standards, do not fit the norm, or those who do not follow the rules. Aesthetic care of this kind is often juxtaposed with authentic care, which is care based out of love or regard for individuals as unique beings (Noddings, 2007). As such, authentic care can be best understood as a care for learning, a care for individual learning needs, and a care for the indvidual's subjective reality. While educators and educational leaders may display both forms of care or embrace one form of care over another, educators ought to recognize the tension between both types of care and

how strict adherence to *the systems world* perpetuates aesthetic care while *the lifeworld* cultivates authentic care (Sergiovanni, 2000).

Using Noddings' (2007) model of an ethic of care, society as a whole can create a guide of action long enough to restore ethical interactions between humans as spontaneous acts. She maintains that for caring to be naturally occurring, individuals must model care as being genuine. We must demonstrate in our behavior and our practice, that we care. Noddings (2007) refers to "dialogue" as a means by which we evaluate the effects of our attempts to care. Furthermore, "practice" is necessary if we want to produce people who will care for one another. Through interactions, she further asserts that we can all learn cooperatively and to care for each other (Noddings, 2007). Finally, "confirmation", as an act of affirming and encouraging the best in one and others, allows trust and continuity to form long lasting relationships.

Thus, the ethic of care is easy for one to demonstrate because care is in fact a matter of principle: "Always act so as to establish, maintain, or enhance caring relationships" (Noddings, 2007, pp. 223). The ethic of care is valid and relevant to school leaders today because it "guards against exploitation by emphasizing moral education. [It] binds careers and cared-fores in relationships of mutual responsibility" (Noddings, 2007, pp. 225).

Identity and Leadership Preparation for Social Justice

In addition to helping preservice and in-service leaders understand accountability; love, and an ethic of care within schools, has relevance for the recruitment, mentoring and retention of women and leaders of color in educational leadership. However, according to Tillman (2004) universities, colleges, schools, and departments of education have played a major role in perpetuating the dominance of White men in administration and have generally failed to provide adequate support, (an ethic of care) for aspiring leaders of color in professional preparation programs. For example, leadership preparation programs are the environments that have the greatest opportunity for early identification of leaders of color who will ultimately be selected or encouraged to self-select school and district leadership as a career option (Tillman & Cochran, 2000), yet the issue of under-representation of school leaders of color continues. Although there have not been studies that have specifically examined the impact of leadership preparation programs for women of color, research has documented the experiences of Black women aspiring to leadership positions. For example, Brunner and Peyton- Caire's 2000 study explored the reactions of a Black female graduate student, aspiring to the superintendency, to the narrative data of one Black female superintendent. The purpose of the study was to identify the structural barriers facing a Black woman enrolled in an educational administration preparation program.

The researchers (Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000) identified these three structural barriers related to leadership role ascendency: narrow perspectives, risky research and curriculum, and the lack of literature about Black female superintendents. Narrow perspectives referred to the dominance of White men in both educational administration programs and dominance of their perspectives in the curriculum. Risky research and curriculum related to the notion that topics focused on women and women of color are risky business for professors' instruction, curriculum, and research agendas. The third barrier, lack of literature about Black women in school leadership positions, was explained as further evidence that they are scarcely represented in the ranks. According to Brunner and Peyton-Caire (2000), Black women's scarcity in school

districts makes their practices in the superintendency and principalship almost invisible to most Black women who are preparing for and aspiring to the positions.

The educational administration programs are the environments and entities for leadership preparation. They have also served as recruiting grounds for the position of superintendency and principal. It is noted that if the preparation programs have so few Black women, then their recruitment as superintendents or principals, will remain limited. Recruitment is inextricably linked to hiring practices (Tillman & Cochran, 2000) and applicant pools.

Theoretical Framework

For this study, Black feminist thought (Collins, 2009) provided the theoretical/conceptual grounding. Knowledge is an important component in the social relations of domination and resistance (Collins, 2009). As such, "Black feminist thought demonstrates Black women's emerging power as agents of knowledge" (p. 221). The tenets of Black feminist thought are:

a. lived experiences as a criterion of meaning
b. the use of dialog in assessing knowledge claims
c. an emphasis on the ethic of caring
d. an emphasis on the ethic of personal accountability
e. an emphasis on positionality as an agent of knowledge, and
f. the recognition of "truth" and the complexity of the pathway toward the truth. (Beard, 2012, p. 62)

Collins (2009) portrayed African American women as self-defined, self-reliant individuals who constantly encounter race, gender, and class oppression. Afrocentric feminist thought articulates the importance that knowledge plays in empowering oppressed people. Black feminist thought (Collins, 2009) supports centering the experiences of Black women leaders. Conversely, this study highlights the perspectives of one Black woman leader, to centralize her professional experiences and practices as she relates to potential structural, racial and gender oppressions.

The conceptual paradigm of intersectionality (Collins, 1998; Crenshaw, 1991) is the secondary framework that undergirds this inductive, qualitative study. Intersectionality is based on the premise that social constructs, such as identities intermingle and work in groups. Therefore, the focus is on the formation of social identities. This study documents the female leader's perceptions of how race, gender and/or the intersection of these social constructs influence her principal practices. Intersectionality best supported the conceptualization of the experiences of one Black woman school leader because it created a frame to view race and gender influences from the participants' own perspectives of her experiences.

Methods

For this qualitative study (Glesne, 2011), the researchers elicited the perspective of one female principal of color, as a single case study. By borrowing ethnographic techniques (Murchison, 2010) such as interviews, observations, and document collection, the authors triangulated all data points to answer the research questions. Interviews were semi-structured, audio-taped, and

transcribed. The transcripts were provided to the participant for member checking purposes and then verified by the three researchers. The research team collected and reviewed more than one hundred documents that contained information about the participant's work, life, and own professional development (Patton, 2002). By shadowing the participant over the course of the study, for three months, the research team conducted observations and kept anecdotal notes in an ethnographic journal.

Employing Wolcott´s (2009) three step process, the research team first described the work of the principal and identified patterns, themes, and concepts. Second, the team analyzed the descriptions for evidence of themes. Lastly, the researchers provided an interpretation of the data. Thus, the findings are represented in a narrative write-up.

Participant Selection

Our participant for this case study was Sarah (pseudonym). She earned a Master of Arts in educational administration and a Bachelor of Arts in a non-educational discipline. Both degrees were earned at a private, university in Texas. She also earned special education teacher, administrator, supervision and superintendent certifications. She received all her certifications and degrees from institutions in Texas.

She had more than 20 years of experience in educational leadership at the time of the study. Some of her professional experience in education included service in the following positions: elementary principal, interim assistant superintendent of special education (district level position), curriculum and instruction coordinator (district level position), bilingual education coordinator, inclusion specialist (district level position), charter school principal and director, high school academic coordinating teacher/administrator, high school department chair, and high school special education teacher. Prior to entering education and obtaining a teaching certificate she worked as a mental health specialist, lab assistant, grant writer and child-care assistant. She reported that her educational mentors were Black, Hispanic, and White females and males and her professional mentors have been White, Hispanic, and Black males, and Black and Hispanic females. She is married and has one adult daughter and two teenage sons.

Setting

At the time of the study, the urban elementary school where the principal was employed has been in good academic standing with the state agency, based on previous four-year accountability measures. The school has a high percentage of student attendance (above 97%). The average years of experience for teachers at this school is 22 years. The student population consists of 389 students. The following data indicates the accountability demographics: 87% Limited English Proficient, 89% At-Risk, 6% Special Education, 97% Student Attendance. The campus was selected to participate in an innovative leadership support initiative and study, in which a School Administrator Manager (SAM) was provided to assist the principal in completion of technical and operational administrative tasks and duties.

Findings

This study highlights the processes, strategies, dispositions and beliefs of Principal Sarah, a female elementary school leader who met the relational (professional and personal) needs of faculty and staff members while also assuming responsibility of the technical aspects of leadership. The researchers identified the following three themes within the data: *1.)*

prioritizing people before the paperwork, 2.) *having dialogue and communication* and 2.) *providing care and facilitating social justice support* are. Because Principal Sarah centered her leadership practice on placing people first and ensured follow-through on commitments and supports for others; we conceptualize the leader´s processes, dispositions, and beliefs as acts of professional love. Social justice leaders who exercise professional love facilitate authentic care to sustain *the lifeworld* of the organization. As such, Principal Sarah cultivated relationships by prioritizing people before paperwork/accountability in order to achieve school improvement and advance towards social justice, as part of her overall process and her strategy to achieve school improvement. According to Sarah, "being a leader WITH the people and taking care of people as a priority, affects their relationship with the leader." Furthermore, the research participant confidently reports that prioritizing people over the plethora of paperwork and accountability constraints allows her resist deficit points of view or thinking about her faculty and staff, in favor of humanistic notions inclusive of an ethic of care and professional love.

Prioritizing People over Paperwork

Building relationships with faculty and staff members in an era of accountability seems to be a challenge, especially if schools operate like bureaucracies that discount relational leadership aspects. Principal Sarah, however, considers accountability as conditional because for her "the paperwork, which will never go away, is what accountability is." Therefore, *how* the participant cultivates relationships with faculty and staff may be best represented by her prioritization model that guides the relational aspects of her work: "Priority, People, Paperwork," (Three P's). According to the study's participant, Sarah, who maintains these aspects in the specific order noted, "people are in the middle because *people* have to play back and forward between the priorities and the paperwork". She explains, "My priority is for them to get their emotionality in place to be better teachers." She further explained,

> I believe that people will follow the person before they follow the plan. For me, when educators have an emotional connection to their leader and colleagues, they are more willing to follow plans (related to the leader) that require changes in their practice to improve and enhance both teacher effectiveness and student learning. I believe that emotional connections are the foundation of relationships. Trust is a key emotion in collegial, professional relationships, because trust opens the lines of communication and cultivates inter-dependence.

Sarah's prioritization model suggests that while accountability/paperwork is important for the school to measure and document gains, she considers people's needs first, because humans are the drivers and vehicles of school improvement and success, while accountability /paperwork is only the vehicle manual. By considering people's (faculty and staff) needs first, Sarah contends she can prevent an educator's physical absence or emotional detachment from affecting teaching and learning. She asserts: "I can't have a teacher that is going to be most effective, dealing with (challenged by) a health issue that has gone unattended, so when I think about priority, I really think what is priority in (your) life right now."

When we asked Sarah about the implications, if any, accountability had on the prioritization of the school goals, and the effect it had on her relationships with faculty and staff; Principal Sarah stated:

> When a campus has a low accountability rating, it brings down the morale. When a campus has a high accountability rating, it brings the morale up. But I have seen how

> accountability can create a climate of complacency. And that is where my campus was. Staff (faculty) members were complacent because we were "acceptable" to the state, which is fine, but there was still room for growth and that is where accountability can really (cause a) twist. So, I focus on the three P's.

Additionally, Sarah asserts that centering her practice of the three P's stems from her foundational goal of education. When we asked how her philosophy of education influences her practice. She replied:

> Educational beliefs are cultivated and instructional practices are implemented to foster a community of leaders, teachers and learners who have a passion for teaching and learning, authentic love and respect for students and a shared laser-like focus on academic, intellectual, emotional, social, moral and physical growth for all students. I believe that school leaders are responsible for supporting high expectations for staff (faculty) and students, closely observing students at work, identifying students' strengths and building on them and celebrate staff and student successes. The principal, as chief learner, should consistently and frequently visit and participate in classrooms, to focus on student and teacher learning and provide feedback.

This statement suggests that Principal Sarah is committed to helping teachers become better learners and life-long learners, as she describes herself as the "chief learner" of the school. Sarah seems to assert that the school encompass educators who see every moment as a teaching and learning experience. As such, when we asked Sarah how she describes her relationship with the teachers at her school, she indicated:

> I believe they would describe our relationships as one of reciprocity; giving/receiving, teaching/learning and leading/(following) together. I provide my teachers with numerous opportunities to lead within the school environment because I believe in the power of teacher-leaders. I build rapport with my teachers by collaboratively planning lessons and co-teaching in their classrooms. My practice of planning and co-teaching has assisted us in engaging in feedback that supports reflecting on (reflection upon) and critiquing our practices. The participation of the principal in co-teaching is often counter-intuitive because some principals are accustomed to their role as manager or as coach.

Dialogue and Communication

Sarah discussed one incident in which she a her actualized her Three P's Prioritization Model, which helped her strengthen a relationship with one a faculty member who was concerned about a district mandate. That faculty member sent an email to Sarah requesting clarification. Although though the email was sent to Sarah late in the evening, she explained that she responded to the teacher, with detailed and extensive clarifications soon after receipt. Sarah did not notice that her reply email was sent to the teacher at 3:20 a.m. The next day, the faculty member was moved by the promptness of Sarah's response as she explained, "The teacher spread the word to his colleagues about how he believed Sarah lived up to her own expectations and cared enough to respond (regardless of the time the communication was received)." According to Sarah, the teacher now serves as a "prophet" for other faculty and staff members. He tells them that if they have questions, concerns, or ideas for Sarah, she will be responsive to them, even if she responds very early in the morning or late in the evening. In the end, Sarah explained, "that incident could have been viewed as negative, like 'when does this lady sleep?"

However, for Sarah, the chance incident was a reinforcement of how effectively and efficiently she responds to her faculty members' communications. She purported,

> From one email, this teacher realized that (first), I do care, and (secondly) I do model what I expect of them and (third) it's these types of opportunities to have (these types of) dialogues and discussions, that in my opinion, builds the team and (cultivates) the relationships.

This event suggests how Sarah fosters dialogue and communication at all hours (of the day and/or night) in order to cultivate, enhance and sustain relationships with campus faculty and staff members.

When the researchers asked Sarah about a typical day in her job, she reported, "I see my role as the master communicator. I am in constant communication (with my faculty) and it is not just written communication, but there is a lot of verbal communication." Whether it is on the cell phone during her commute to work, checking voice mail or stationed in her "anchor spot," every morning as teachers and students enter the school, she stated she is able to convey that she is not only visible, but accessible and available to and for her faculty and staff members.

In considering both parents and community members, Principal Sarah states she makes concerted efforts to establish a vehicle of communication in order to build enduring and trusting relationships with the parents and community representatives. When asked how else she uses communication in her school, she replied, "I've used communication most effectively to build relationships when I scheduled Principal's Coffees, to ensure that parents, guardians and community members had monthly opportunities to engage in informal group forums or conversations with me regarding topics that were of interest to them." Additionally, I ensured that invitations were provided in English and Spanish and that a language interpreter was present for each session (Principal's Coffees). "*Mi habla Español un poquito.* (I speak very little Spanish)." However, "I understand the language better than I'm confident to articulate and conduct the conversation in Spanish", she explained. Because Sarah is accessible and in constant communication with staff, parents and community members, she is most likely to know her faculty and staff members on both professional and personal levels.

Caring and Supporting

Sarah reports seeing her staff, not from a deficit point of view, but rather highlighting their strengths and conducive skill-sets: As an effective leader, you almost have that unconditional and professional love for your staff in that you might have staff or faculty member who are not as effective, ineffective, or having some performance concerns, but if you are operating and leading in love, your first response will be, "How can I support?" or "How can I help?" not "How can I remove (you)."

This statement suggests Sarah views her faculty and staff members as living and breathing beings, who are capable of evolving, rather than as cogs in a machine. Additionally, Principal Sarah considers herself a resource and she takes responsibility for the development of all educators in her school. Sarah invites her faculty to be active participants in the learning process to foster a climate of trust and care. As such, she asserts:

> Teaching and learning with a sense of love and care means that the educators maintain high expectations for all students and develop a strategic process of enhancing learning, intervening for (students) and preventing learning deficits for all students.

> We engage in the use of strategies needed to provide quality and differentiated teaching and learning to our diverse population of students.

By ensuring the school is an "intellectually stimulating and caring environment," Principal Sarah engages her staff in book studies and together they think about and reflect upon how to use the professional scholarly literature in their school initiatives and classroom activities:

> They have confidence in much of the literature that I provide to them, and I feel that they have confidence in what they receive because they see the utility of it and the things (ideas and perspectives) we are bringing to the table. And when they disagree with some of the constructs, tenets, or text, they let me know.

Fostering a supportive learning environment that also encourages intellectual discourse and dissonance, suggests how Sarah builds trusting professional relationships with her faculty and staff. Sarah demonstrates how she can be a critical friend to her staff members and care for them as well. Principal Sarah critical friendships appear to be much like how a parent exhibits unconditional love during critical or contentious situations. She shares,

> As a parent, you love your children unconditionally, and I think even in education as an effective leader you almost have that unconditional and professional love for your staff in that you might have staff (a faculty member) that (who) is ineffective or having some performance concerns. It's that unconditional love that (will ensure the leader's support) even when they (faculty or staff) are not on target with performing such as objectives; you still care about them and you still feel this duty to support.

This type of open dialogue and professional dissonance, between the participant and her faculty/staff indicates that the participant builds capacity, facilitates professional development and expects her faculty and/or staff members to develop and act as "scholar-practitioners," much like a parent anticipates growth and progression in his/her child. Like children who respond to their parents and form a loving bond, faculty and staff members also develop professional bonds and create relationships based on the premise of the leader's unconditional professional love.

Discussion/Interpretation

School leaders who exercise professional love facilitate authentic care to maintain *the lifeworld* of the organization. For the study's participant, principal Sarah, who also maintained a social justice orientation, she was also cognizant of the social justice landscape conducive in sustaining *the lifeworld*. Sarah envisioned and enacted school improvement as a process, not an end-product. Therefore, she focused on people first and believed that the resulting product, scores, would naturally be constructed by the people who are prioritized. Such an act of courage and confidence in the unknown requires agency and resistance of the iron cage of technical rationality in school leadership. While accountability metrics is how a school as an organization and how Principal Sarah are measured, she vehemently believed that prioritizing her care for people within the organization and facilitating social justice are other salient variables that are also valuable, but unfortunately, are not directly measured by accountability standards.

Implications for Research and Practice

The School Administrator Manager (SAM), a short-term (one calendar year) private grant funded position was particularly important for Sarah because she was able to better facilitate the priorities of *the lifeworld* to then move towards school improvement and social justice efforts. The SAM assisted the study participant/Principal Sarah by completing much of the technical aspects or paperwork/accountability related tasks, so that the participant/Sarah could focus more on instructional issues and relational aspects, such as co-teaching, mentoring and feedback. According to Holland (2008), in addition to building relationships and demonstrating support for staff, the SAM initiative gives principals a broader perspective about the instruction and learning occurring in their schools. Furthermore, she writes, "Principals can't and shouldn't do it all." The participant's experiences confirm Holland's research, regarding the time that is needed to build relationships with faculty and staff members. Thus, engaging in the technical aspects of school leadership, such as accountability and paperwork is a job that may be more conducive for a school administrative manager, rather than for a school leader/principal, who effectively and efficiently focuses on the high yield instructional and relational work in schools.

While school budgets and fiscal constraints are not inclusive of a school administrator manager (SAM) to mitigate administrative technical work in order for the principal to foster relationships; the more salient task of an effective principal is to not only designate time to build relationships, but to also find value in the work associated with building these relationships. As such, principals ought to reflect on school improvement both as a process and as a product and evaluate what they privilege and prioritize. Principals need to understand that in addition to identity, the nature of their reality (ontology) and/or that their ways of knowing (epistemology) informs their beliefs and actions with and for people, as well as their own goals, beliefs, and positionalities. To further ensure that principals generally, and specifically in Texas are equipped with the resources to achieve school improvement, and actualize a social justice leadership orientation, and meet new state principal exam certification licensure standards measure, preservice and in-service leaders must have access to pre-assessment resources (TEA, 2019) as well as self-evaluate tools to assess their competence as an effective and efficient instructional leader.

Aguilar (2017) maintains that faculty of principal preparation programs and other educator preparation and development programs across a college of education have the responsibility to first undergo self-study to then be able to teach preservice principals how to demonstrate care and how to facilitate social justice. Principal preparation program faculty can and should implement processes and practical strategies (i.e. autoethnography) for principals to immolate, adopt and enhance for social justice and lead with professional love. Yet, further research is needed to better understand professional love in other contexts and within other accountability systems, as these vary from state to state.

Conclusion

Rationalizing schools might maximize efficiency for meeting accountability targets. However, human capital development is component of school improvement that also informs and influences the end-product of scores and accountability ratings. Rather than perpetuate the iron cage of technical rationality, schools should be places that foster human connections and

relationships where leaders demonstrate an ethic of care and social justice efforts through professional love for their employees, students, and external community members.

People have the potential to authentically care for each other. As educators and educational leaders, we need to embrace the need to practice professional love (justice and the ethic of care) as a strategy/process to achieve school improvement and discover how to meet the varied needs of our diverse school demographics.

This research is of importance, given the socio-political climate in which our nation's schools currently exist. The explication of one African American female principal's quest for accountability compliance undergirded by her professional love for all, contributes to an understanding of the everyday leadership practices implemented in schools. We conceptualize Sarah's work as professional love because she exhibited social justice leadership and encompassed with an ethic of care. As the nation continues to grapple with diversity, inclusion and unity, how public-school leaders connect with others through professional love may provide new perspectives and insights for what love has to do with school leadership.

References

Ackerman, R. Maslin-Ostrowski, P. (2004). The wounded leader and emotional learning in the schoolhouse. *School Leadership and Management, 24*(3): 311-328.

Aguilar, I. (2017). Internal Revolutions: Auto-Ethnography as a Method for Faculty Who Prepare K-12 Educators and Leaders at Hispanic Serving Institutions, *Journal of Latinos and Education*, DOI: 10.1080/15348431.2016.1262264.

Beard, K. S. (2012). Making the case for the outlier: An African American female administrator who decided to close the achievement gap. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 25*(1), 57-71.

Biesta, G. (2011). *Philosophy of education for the public good: Five challenges and an agenda.* Distinguished lecture given to the Philosophical Studies in Education Special Interest Group of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, La, April 8-12, 2011.

Brunner, C. C. & Peyton-Caire, L. (2000). Seeking representation: Supporting Black female graduate students who aspire to the superintendency. *Urban Education 35*(5), 532-548.

Collins, P. H. (1998). *Fighting words: Black women and the search for justice.* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Collins, P. H. (2009). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment.* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Crenshaw, K. W. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review, 43,* 1241-1299.

Commeyras, M., Orellana, M. F., Bruce, B. C., & Neilsen, L. (1996). What do feminist theories have to offer literacy, education, and research? *Reading Research Quarterly, 31*(4), 458-468.

Crawford, M. (2009). *Getting to the heart of leadership: Emotion and educational leadership.* London. UK: Sage.

Day, C., Harris, A., Hadfield, M. (2001). Challenging the orthodoxy of effective school leadership. *International Journal of Leadership in Education, 4*(1), 39-56.

DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & Karhanek, G. (2004). *Whatever it takes: How professional learning communities respond when kids don't learn.* Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service

Elmore, R.F. (2000) *Building a new structure for leadership*. New York: Albert Shanker Institute.

Ellsworth, E. A. (2005). *Places of learning: Media, architecture, pedagogy*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Fullan, M. (1993). Why teachers must become change agents. *Educational Leadership, 50*(6), 1- 13.

Glesne, C. (2011). *Becoming Qualitative researchers: An introduction.* Boston, MA: Pearson.

Holland, H. (2008), *Out of the office and into the classroom: An initiative to help principals focus on instruction.* Retrieved from http://www.wallacefoundation.org/KnowledgeCenter/KnowledgeTopics/CurrentAreasofF ocus/EducationLeadership/Pages/an-initiative-to-help-principals.aspx

hooks, b. (2003). *Teaching community: A pedagogy of hope*. New York, NY: Routledge.

hooks, b. (2000). *Feminist theory: From margin to center*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

Hord, S. M. (1997). *Professional learning communities: Communities of continuous inquiry and improvement.* Austin, TX: SEDL.

Ingersoll, R. M. (2003). *Who controls teachers' work? Power and accountability in America's schools.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Leithwood, K.A. & Louis, K.S. (2000). *The learning school and school improvement: Linkages and strategies.* Lisse, The Netherlands: Swets and Zeitlinger.

Maxwell, J. A. (1994). Diversity, solidarity, and community. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA, April 1994.

Murchison, J. M. (2010). *Ethnography essentials.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Nelson, S.W., & Aguilar, I. (2011). *Leadership based in love of people and place*. In M. Cowie (Ed.), New primary leaders. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Nelson, S.W., de la Colina, M., & Boone, M. D. (2008). Lifeworld or systems world: What guides novice principals? *Journal of Educational Administration*, 46.

Noddings, N. (2007). *Philosophy of education (2nd ed.).* Cambridge, MA: Westview.

Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Sarason, S.B. (2004). *And what do you mean by learning?* Portsmith, NH: Heinemann.

Senge, P. (2001). *Schools that learn*. New York, NY: Doubleday.

Sergiovanni, T. (2000). *The lifeworld of leadership.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Simpson, D. J. and Stack, S.F. (2010). *Teachers, leaders, and schools: Essays by John Dewey.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Starratt, R.J. (1991). Building an ethical school: A theory for practice in educational leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 27*(2), 185-202.

TEA (2019). Principal Certification Redesign https://tea.texas.gov/Texas_Educators/Educator_Initiatives_and_Performance/Principal_Certification_Redesign

Tillman, L.C. (2004). (Un)intended consequences?: The impact of the *Brown v. Board*

of Education decision on the employment status of Black educators. *Education and Urban Society*, *36*(3), 280-303.

Tillman, B. & Cochran, L. (2000) Desegregating urban school administration: A pursuit of equity for black women superintendents. *Education and Urban Society, 33*(1), 44-59.

Valenzuela, A. (1999). *Subtractive schooling: U.S.-Mexican youth and the politics of caring*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Villenas, S. (2006). Pedagogical moments in the borderlands: Latina mothers and teaching and learning. In D. Delgado Bernal, C.A. Elenes, F. E. Godinez, & S. Villenas (Eds.). *Chicana/Latina education in everyday life.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Waite, D., Boone, M., & McGhee, M. (2001). A critical sociocultural view of accountability. *Journal of School Leadership, 11*(3), 182-203.

Waite, D., & Nelson, S. W. (2005). Educational leadership reconsidered. *La Revista Española de Pedagogía*, *63*(232), 389-406.

Waite, D., Nelson, S. W., & Guajardo, M. (2007). Teaching and leadership for social justice and social responsibility: Home is where the struggle starts. *Journal of Educational Administration and Foundations, 18* (1&2), 200-223.

Webb, L. D. & Norton, M. S. (2008). *Human resource administration: Personnel issues and needs in education.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Weber, M. (1947). *The theory of economic and social organizations*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Wheatley, M.J. (2006). *Leadership and the new science: Discovering order in a chaotic world (3rd ed.)*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.

Wolcott, H. (2009). *Writing up qualitative research.* Thousand Oaks: CA: Sage.

Dessynie Edwards, Ph.D., lead author, currently serves as assistant professor in the Department of Educational Leadership, Curriculum & Instruction. She has been a member of TCWSE for numerous years. Dessynie.edwards@tamucc.edu

Israel Aguilar, Ph.D. is an assistant professor at the University of Texas- Rio Grande Valley. Dr. Aguilar's professional experience include serving as a school administrator in Dallas, and as a teacher in Austin and Brownsville. israel.aguilar@utrgv.edu

Juan Manuel Niño, Ph.D. is an assistant professor at the University of Texas at San Antonio. Niño's public educator experience include secondary science teacher, ESL teacher, athletic coach, campus and district leader. His primary research focuses on school leadership for school improvement. juan.nino@utsa.edu