RURAL HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS: LEADERSHIP IN RURAL EDUCATION

A Dissertation
Submitted
to the Temple University Graduate Board

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

By
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May 2010

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ABSTRACT

RURAL HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS: LEADERSHIP IN RURAL EDUCATION

By Aaron L. Shuman
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Educational leadership has been the focus of many studies; however, leadership does not occur in a vacuum. Understanding the context in which it occurs will in turn help to explain the phenomenon itself. Rural communities in the United States have many differences when compared to urban and suburban areas. Twenty-eight percent of schools in the United States are rural, and within those rural districts seven million students attend schools (Sherwood, 2001). Even with the large number of rural schools, there are significant deficiencies in rural research, including available raw data (Sherwood & Arnold, 2001, 2004). Moreover, when research is done, the rural context is almost always seen as a limitation (Howley & Howley, 1999). Many times research that is conducted in urban and suburban settings is generalized to the rural setting.

Ethical educational leadership is drawing increased attention in research. The bulk of ethical decision-making research has focused on administrators in urban and suburban settings. The rural context is silent when one looks to ethical leadership work.

This study explores four rural high school principals' perceptions of how the rural context influences their ethical leadership, career aspirations and advancement opportunities. This study also explores the principals' perceptions about their personal history and their gender to determine whether either has been a hindrance or a help to their leadership in the rural context. A case study methodology was utilized while conducting this study. Over a twelve month period; 18 site visits were conducted at four rural high schools in central Pennsylvania. Twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted along with eight days of shadowing to explore the respondents' perceptions on leading in the rural context.

The findings indicate that the respondents of this study did perceive differences in the rural context as compared to urban and suburban areas. Those differences were perceived by the respondents to have an impact on their work as educational leaders

This study suggests that the principals' personal histories impact their leadership within the rural context. All of the respondents lead in districts where they once attended school. This phenomenon strengthened the impact of social reproduction as the principals struggled to maintain a way of life that they valued, while competing with the ideals of the educational institution. The principals maintained programs with a focus on local interests such as logging, shop programs, fish farming and agriculture education. They did this with limited resources and at the expense of offering other programs. Students entering these programs often ended their formal education with high school. They entered the local economy and reproduced their parents' class position in the wider society. The principals' ties to their communities impacted their expectations for students in their schools.

This study suggests that the rural context impacts opportunities for advancement. While opportunities for advancement were perceived to be present, they often required principals to move their families due to geographic distance. None of the respondents were willing to relocate to take advantage of opportunities.

Gender barriers were rampant within the rural context. The two female principals had experienced gender discrimination. The two male candidates acknowledged gender barriers in their districts. All the respondents affirmed that the stereotype for a high school principal in their respective districts was a male.

The principals used multiple paradigms when solving difficult ethical decisions, and their personal history influenced the paradigms they used most frequently. The respondents all used the ethic of care and critique more than the ethics of justice and the profession. Critical life incidents shared by the principals were from a caring or critical perspective and tied to the paradigms they used most frequently. Competing values about the educational mission of the school,

the purpose of school and social mobility of students were found to impact leadership.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have not always wanted to be an educator. In fact, for a while I was not even interested in being a good student. During my time as a student and early in my career as an educator many different people inspired me and encouraged me to continue my education and to explore a career in education and eventually educational administration. These people have accompanied me along this journey in my career, my education, and my personal life. Without their continued support this achievement would not have been possible.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my parents, Randy and Jill Shuman. They have supported my career choice and pursuit of an advanced degree tirelessly over my 29 years of continuous formal education. They always pushed me to do my best and always took an interest in my studies and my pursuits both in and out of the classroom. My parents worked tirelessly to develop a nationally recognized and well respected business to provide my sister and me with opportunities that they did not have growing up. Along with their sacrifices, they were always there when I needed them for support or for a firm push in the right direction.

Next, I thank my sister, Dr. Lesli Smith. Dr. Smith is three years younger than I am, and she has always been the stronger student. My sister and I both went through Temple University's Educational Administration program. She finally surpassed me and finished her degree first. I am so proud of her and she has been a motivating influence for me throughout the past years.

A special thank you is needed for my wife and son. My wife Melissa Shuman has sacrificed so much in order to provide me with the time and support needed to complete this work. Being an administrator means long hours, and when you couple that with the demands of doing research, there simply is not enough time in the day. My wife has worked with my schedule and my workload at home for the past five years with continuous support. My two year old son, Parker, has been an inspiration to me throughout this process. When I was tired

and stressed, he was always there with a smile and a hug. He even seemed to know when daddy needed a break and interrupted my work periodically to play.

Another companion in this process who deserves a thank you for his continuous support is my Rhodesian Ridgeback, Ozzy. He was right by my side many evenings when everyone else in the house was asleep, and I was busy writing. Ozzy sat beside me on the couch for countless hours watching as I typed, edited and analyzed relentlessly.

Within my professional life there have been many people who have supported and encouraged me throughout this process. Since I went through a career change moving from teaching and coaching to administration, there are colleagues at both levels who deserve a notion of gratitude.

During my time as a teacher and a coach at Hatboro-Horsham High School, there were many who encouraged me and made sacrifices allowing me to pursue my studies. The members of the Business Education Department at Hatboro-Horsham High School covered many of my classes and after school commitments to allow me the opportunities to attend classes and meetings at Temple University. Thank you to the following for making many sacrifices in order to allow me to pursue my dream: Carol Miller, Donna Doherty, Sue Fox, Billie Radosin, Ted Mulroy, Nick Pace, Amanda Bollacker, Alice Stahl, Jim Wood, Tammy VanSteinburgh, and Ed Sherretta. During my time at Hatboro-Horsham, I also had extensive time commitments related to coaching three different swimming teams. My coaching colleagues also sacrificed a great deal to cover my responsibilities when I could not fulfill them. Thank you Kip Emig, MaryBeth Creveling, Amanda Dynan, Mike Chorba, Kathy Chorba, Mike Marra, Brian Palme and Melissa Shuman.

Leaving a teaching position to pursue an opportunity in administrative work was one of the toughest decisions I have had to make. I truly miss the interactions with the students in the classroom and at the pool, but I enjoy the challenge that administrative work has provided. There are many people at the administrative level who have supported me and encouraged me. Thank you

Curtis Griffin, Dr. Bill Lessa and the administrative team at Derry Township School District.

A special thank you needs to be mentioned for Mrs. Sue King, my boss. Mrs. King took a chance hiring an administrator with no experience and has been an excellent mentor, colleague, and friend. Mrs. King is currently working on Doctoral Work at Seton Hall University and has made many sacrifices to allow me the freedom to travel around the state to conduct research. Mrs. King was also supportive through the suggestions she provided and the feedback that she gave regarding my work.

Finally, I need to thank the many wonderful professors at Temple University who influenced me to explore doctoral work and helped every step of the way. These professors pushed me to continuously improve my work and to challenge my own beliefs about the field of educational administration. They have also served as role models for me as I worked through the program. Thank you to the following: Dr. Joan Shapiro, Dr. Corrinne Caldwell, Dr. Stephen Gross, Dr. Bill Jordan, and Dr. Vivian Ikpa.

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CHAPTER I
THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Educational leadership has been the focus of many studies. Leadership does not occur in a vacuum. Understanding the context in which it occurs will in turn help to explain the phenomenon itself. Rural communities in Pennsylvania have many differences when compared to urban and suburban areas. Rural communities have a lower cost of living, lower per-capita income, lower property tax base, lower expectations for educational attainment, and cultural attributes that create a greater propensity for social reproduction. Rural schools face inequitable funding, a lack of highly qualified teachers, a lack of highly qualified administrators, geographic transportation issues and a digital divide.

Ethical educational leadership is drawing increased attention in research. The bulk of ethical decision-making research has focused on administrators in urban and suburban settings. The rural context is silent when one looks to ethical leadership work. This study focuses on the leadership behaviors and perceptions of four rural high school principals in Pennsylvania. By understanding ethical leadership, educational leaders in the rural context can develop decision making strategies for working in a complex and diverse society (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005).

This study explores four rural high school principals' perceptions of how the rural context influences their ethical leadership, career aspirations and advancement opportunities. In addition, the principals' perceptions about their personal history and

their gender were central in this study to determine whether either has been a hindrance or a help to them as leaders in the rural context.

Twenty-eight percent of schools in the United States are rural. Within those rural districts, seven million students attend schools (Sherwood, 2001). Even with the large number of rural schools, there are significant deficiencies in rural research, including available raw data on rural schools (Sherwood & Arnold, 2001, 2004). Moreover, when research is done, the rural context is almost always seen as a negative influence (Howley & Howley, 1999). Many times research that is conducted in urban and suburban settings is generalized to the rural setting. Sherwood (2001) makes note off the following concerns in his paper *Where has all the rural gone*:

> lack of appreciation for urban-rural differences, 2) lack of academic appeal comparable to the excitement generated for urban work, 3) relatively little networking in professional and research communities around rural education research, 4) a paucity of professionals devoting their careers to the continuous study of rural education, 5) longstanding lack of consensus concerning rural education's domain and research priorities, 6) and a lack of the sense of crisis associated with urban schools, and the accompanying focus by policy makers. (p. 3)

With the lack of research on rural schools and rural communities, principals are left with little guidance when they attempt to lead. Nachtigal (1994) states that rural schools are the center of rural town activity. Rural high school principals often find themselves at the center of the entire community since schools may be the largest single expenditure within the infrastructure of the rural community (Nachtigal, 1994). A wider understanding of rural schools and the leadership within them is needed.

Rural schools and rural communities present challenges to educational leaders. Rural regions cannot keep pace with urban areas economically as many

cities produce rapid economic growth (Bush, 2003). Many rural districts operate on some of the smallest tax bases in the country as economic and social resources tend to be scarce in rural areas (Hunter & Howley 1990; Bush, 2003). Rural economies often specialize in natural resource extraction and tax bases are low. Hunter and Howley (1990) state "Inadequate resources make capital outlay issues acute in rural districts." (p. 2). Rising poverty and population loss characterize rural life (Huang & Howley, 1991). The American Association of School Administrators (1999) reports that the main problem for rural school districts is attracting and keeping quality teachers; therefore, rural schools are at a disadvantage when it comes to attracting and retaining teachers (Bush & Arnold, 2003, 2004). Local control is also a central focus in many rural school districts as the school contributes to the identity of the community. According to Howley (2001), context actively influences educational purposes, processes, and meanings. The rural context contains many challenging elements, and the previously mentioned items are just a few of the factors facing rural schools and communities.

Difficulties exist in attracting and retaining quality administrators. Rural administrators must take on a wide range of responsibilities, and administrator preparation programs often do not focus on preparation for rural settings (Arnold, 2004). Moreover, compensation for rural administrators is often lower than their suburban and urban counterparts. Who are these rural administrators? How do they lead? Why have they chosen to lead in rural schools? These are some of the questions this study explores.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is threefold. It explores rural high school principals' perceptions relative to the rural context's impact on the following: how personal history and gender impact leadership, how a rural setting affects ability to acquire leadership positions and access advancement opportunities, and how rural leaders make difficult ethical decisions.

Two male principals and two female principals were selected for this study. As Schmuck (1993) has stated, gender is inclusive; one cannot study women without also studying men. First, this study explores the principals' perceptions of how their own personal history has influenced who and where they are today. Second, this study explores how the principals' perceive the rural context impacts their attainment of a leadership position and realizing career aspirations. Gender issues are explored to determine whether this plays a role. Finally, this study explores how the principals' perceptions of the rural context affect their ability to lead and to make ethical decisions. Many different variables affect the interactions and processes that the principals use in making difficult ethical decisions in the work place. Shapiro and Stefkovich (1994) explain that life stories and critical instances define people and how they view dilemmas. Furthermore, it is critical to consider life experiences when developing an understanding of what makes a person who they are. The principals' perceptions on their own life histories and the current context of their work environments were explored with respect to their leadership and decision making.

At the core of understanding leadership and leadership styles is ethical decision making. Moral issues concern a leader's duties and obligations to

stakeholders, including what constitutes just or fair treatment of one another and what rights each person has (Strike, Haller, & Soltis, 1998). Each administrative decision carries with it the potential for restructuring of human life; that is why administration, at its heart, is the resolution of moral dilemmas. Dilemmas in educational institutions can be complicated and may naturally lead to the use of two or more paradigms to solve problems (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005).

Sergiovanni (2001) sees educational leadership as stewardship and asks educational leaders to create institutions that are just and beneficent. Shapiro and Stefkovich (1998) believe that professional ethics includes ethical principles from multiple paradigms. For example, the code of ethics embodied in the justice paradigm takes into account other paradigms as well as professional judgment and professional decision making. Shapiro and Stefkovich (1998) also state that educational administrators should be given the chance to develop their own personal code of ethics based on life stories and critical incidents. Their professional ethical codes should be based on the experiences and expectations of their working lives as well as consideration of their personal codes. Understanding how a person leads necessitates an understanding of how he or she solves difficult ethical dilemmas which are often associated with paradoxes within educational administration.

The rural context presents several paradoxes for school leaders. Education has historically seen rural places and their entrenched status quo as an impediment to progressive education and educational leaders have often sought to isolate the school from local policies (Howley & Howley, 1999). Conversely, rural schools are often the center of rural town activity (Nachtigal, 1994). The schools provide a sense of

identity for the rural community through activities like sporting events and theater productions. This competing view of community involvement creates a paradox for educational leaders. Another paradox that is entrenched in rural education is whether schools and their leaders should focus on what Howley (2001) calls "real problems" or "intellectual problems." Rural citizens may view the schooling of their children as separate from the mass agenda of education (Howley, 1998). Howley (1998) states, "The expectation that rural schools will deliver the same services in the same ways as other schools is bound to end in frustration" (p. 5). Moving up in social class for many rural students means moving away. Harmon (2001) states that "rural children who decide to stay in rural communities are often viewed by educators as having low aspirations" (p. 6). This paradox creates difficulties for rural educational leaders because support for the school is difficult to gain when the community seldom reaps the benefits of the school system.

Finally, the curriculum presents another paradox for rural educators. College preparation for a long time was seen as elitism in rural communities (DeYoung, 2002). DeYoung insists, "Rural administrators and teachers need to find a way to educate people who plan on using the high schools as terminal places" (p. 9). In other words, within the rural context, there exists a paradox concerning what the purpose of education should be. Because of the physical size and available resources in there schools, rural high schools face difficulties in providing the services needed to operate a comprehensive school. The curriculum can become highly contested. Arguments about consolidation of schools enter the picture, and many community

schools are often closed. More will be mentioned on this topic in the literature review chapter of this study.

Specifically, this study sought to explore one overarching question with four supporting areas of focus:

Overarching Question

How might rural high school principals perceive the influence of the rural context affects their work as educational leaders?

Supporting Areas of Focus

A. How might the principals perceive their personal histories affect their decision making and choice to lead in the rural context?
B. How might the principals perceive the rural context as aiding or limiting their career path and future aspirations?
C. How might the principals perceive their gender impacts their ability to lead in the rural context?
D. How might rural high school principals perceive the rural context affects their ability to make difficult ethical decisions?

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to the perceptions, attitudes, experiences, personal histories, and interactions of four rural high school principals. The subjects were selected based on gender and the context in which they work. Participants were

limited to those who work in rural districts within central Pennsylvania. Two male subjects and two female subjects were selected from those willing to participate. Furthermore, the principals must have worked in the rural setting for one year, and in a district that experiences some level of geographic isolation and low population density.

While conducting this study, the researcher uncovered an unintended similarity among the candidates selected for study. As the principals spoke about their personal histories, it became evident that all of the leaders grew up and attended school where they now lead. They all moved away from home to attend college, but they all eventually returned home to seek administrative positions at their Alma Matter. This unintended commonality could impact the principals' perceptions related to community fit and expectations of stakeholders. Because the principals all have personal and family ties to the community, their answers to questions related to community expectations may be skewed. The researcher kept this unexpected limitation in focus while coding and analyzing the data collected in this study.

One part of the study's focus was on rural high school principals; consequently, geographic location, size of the district, and socioeconomic level of the community determined the selection of subjects. This study also explored participants' perceptions around the role that gender plays in leadership and career paths of the principals; therefore, two male principals and two female principles were selected for study.

A case study approach with some ethnographic tools was used. Case studies are often not reliable with respect to the duplication of findings. Menzel and

Maxwell (1978, 1992) confirm, “The perspective on the events and actions held by the people involved in them is not simply their account of these events and actions, to be assessed in terms of truth or falsity; it is part of the reality you are trying to understand” (p. 19). In other words, understanding the process by which events and actions take place is the focus (Maxwell, 1996). The interest was in the process rather than the outcomes. A case study is the preferred method when “how” or “why” questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is a contemporary phenomenon in some real-life context (Yin, 2003). In other words, “The case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon” (Merriam, 1998, p. 41). In this study the focus was to understand the rural context and its relationship to educational leadership. This study explored the particular phenomenon of rural educational leadership at one time in one context.

Definition of Terms

1. Metropolitan Area – metropolitan areas contain the following: (1) core county with one or more central cities of at least 50,000 residents or with a Census Bureau-defined urbanized area (and a total metro area population of 100,000 or more) (2) fringe counties that are economically tied to the core counties (United States Department of Agriculture, 2003).
2. Rural Area – non-metropolitan counties outside the boundaries of metro areas that have no cities with as many as 50,000 residents (USDA, 2003).

3. Rural School District – for the purpose of this study, rural school districts will be determined by a total student enrollment of 3,000 students or less. These rural districts must also be geographically located in a rural area as defined above.
4. Leadership – there are many definitions of leadership. For the purpose of this study, leadership will be defined as the five key areas outlined by Kouzes and Posner (1995). A leader has the ability to do the following: challenge the process, inspire a shared vision, enable others to act, model the way, and encourage the heart.
5. Rural Context – for the purpose of this study, the rural context will include demographic data about the school district, demographic data about the community, socioeconomic level of the residents, geographic location, histories of both the school and the community, economic focus of the community, and culture of both the school and the wider community.
6. Ethical Decisions – decisions made by or presently facing the subjects that carry with them the restructuring of human life. These decisions necessitate that administrators reflect upon concepts, such as what they perceive to be right or wrong and good or bad, who they are as professionals and human beings, how they make decisions, and why they make the decisions they do. These may include decisions about diversity, individual rights vs. community standards, traditional curriculum vs. the hidden curriculum, personal codes of ethics vs. professional codes of ethics, and equality vs. equity (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005).

7. Career Path – the professional history of the subjects as well as future career aspirations, including membership in professional organizations, networking opportunities both formal and informal, professional development, and role model or mentor relationships.
8. Ethnography – a qualitative research design employed primarily by anthropologists to study human nature and culture. An educational ethnography usually deals with the culture of a school community (Merriam, 1998).
9. Culture – beliefs, values, and attitudes that structure the behavior patterns of a specific group of people (Merriam, 1998, p. 13).

Significance of the Study

There is a large gap in educational research when it comes to rural schools. According to Howley (2001), very few scholars devote any attention to rural education. Of the research that has been accumulated concerning rural schools, there is almost none that is rigorous enough to use in decision making (Arnold, 2004). Inadequate research on rural schools is an issue for all levels of government as policy makers are frustrated with the lack of a definitive definition of rural (Harmon, 2001). This lack of research is particularly troubling when you consider the number of students attending rural schools and the number of professionals working in rural school districts. Rural school districts make up 63.8 percent of all school districts in public education (Howley, 2001). In Pennsylvania, 3.4 million people live in rural areas (Rural by the Numbers, 2006). According the 1990 Census, Pennsylvania has the largest rural population in the United States (Yan, 2002). Howley (2001)

acknowledges that “looking to Stanford or Harvard for meaningful rural research is part of the problem. Local grounded research is what is needed” (p. 3).

The cultures of rural communities are different compared to urban and suburban communities and should be studied with a rural focus in place of implied urban and suburban educational ideals. Most educators do not understand the rural context since the traditional view of rural culture is that it is subjugated and diminished (Howley & Howley, 1999). Although the rural setting differs in many ways from its suburban and urban neighbors, Educational researchers have traditionally generalized their findings in urban and suburban studies to be applicable in rural settings. Some of the differences include the following: funding inequities, teacher and administrator quality and retention issues, local control, community and parent expectations, declining enrollments and community populations, and economic and poverty factors. A more inclusive list with explanations is provided in the literature review section of this study.

School districts throughout the United States find difficulty in recruiting and retaining administrators. Half of all districts report a shortage of qualified applicants, and rural school districts report larger percentages (Howley & Pendarvis, 2002). This shortage impacts the need for secondary principals moreso than the need for elementary principals. Federal mandates like No Child Left Behind and IDEA coupled with funding inequities make the rural principalship a challenging occupation. Conflicts with local school boards and increasing diversity of rural communities add to the pressures of rural school administration (Howley & Pendarvis, 2002). There are many elements of the rural principalship that are

different than suburban and urban positions. To complicate the problem, administrator preparation programs generally do not prepare administrators for the rural context.

Along with the lack of research on rural schools and their leaders, research on female rural principals is almost non-existent. Although Tallerico and Tingley (2001) found that most graduate students earning degrees today are women, according to Shakeshaft (1993), women, as a group, are underrepresented in school administration and over represented in the profession of teaching. The barriers for women attaining school leadership positions, particularly at the secondary level, have been documented extensively in the research. Female administrators may be a viable untapped resource for rural school districts; however, the barriers to administrative positions for women candidates need to be explored within the rural setting. In fact, Dunshea (1998) found that the rural setting made it difficult for novice female principals in Australia. Hite (1994) studied 40 female administrative certificate holders in rural settings and found that the rural setting amplified certain barriers to female candidates in obtaining administrative positions. Hite identifies these barriers as "traditional views of female roles, religious affiliation, personality characteristics, and physical characteristics" (p.4).

In a 2004 multiple case study on high performing rural schools conducted by the Rural School and Community Trust, leadership was found to be the key to building successful rural schools. Building trust and incorporating the community in the curriculum, according to Harmon (2001), is essential in rural educational leadership. Administrators in rural schools often take on a variety or roles. Loveland

(2003) found that educational leaders in rural schools often develop close relationships with the community, and these relationships can produce unrealistic expectations of the leader. A better understanding of rural educational leadership is needed if leaders are to be prepared for the challenges of the rural context.

By providing an in-depth look at four rural high school principals, this study contributes to the research on leadership styles, ethical decision making, career paths, and the effects of gender on high school principals within the rural context. It provides insight to the backgrounds, perceptions, behaviors, and decisions of a group of people who are often overlooked by educational researchers.

Theoretical Base

The theoretical base that guided this study consists of two frames. The Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory (Shapiro & Gross, 2008; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005) and Social Reproduction Theory (Apple, 1995; Bourdieu, 1977, 1990; Trainer, 1993) were used to frame the inquiry process. Rural high school principals are often faced with competing values from the educational institution and rural communities. Social Reproduction Theory, used as a framework, exposed some of the competing values rural administrators face, and the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory provided some insight into the ways difficult decisions are made. These two theories framed the researcher's inquiry into the phenomenon that is rural high school leadership in Pennsylvania.

The understanding of the four ethical paradigms of justice, care, critique, and profession can help educational administrators solve real life complex dilemmas that

they face in their communities and their schools (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005). Furthermore, by using multiple paradigms, educators should become familiar with the perspective they tend to use most often; however, dilemmas in education are complex and may require the use of multiple paradigms (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005). A short description of the four ethical paradigms is offered below. A wider more in depth explanation is offered in the review of related literature in chapter two.

The ethic of justice focuses on rights and laws as part of our liberal democratic tradition (Shapiro & Gross, 2008; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005). This paradigm comes from two competing ideals. The first sees justice as the individual giving up some individual right for the good of the whole. The second sees society as the central focus and is oriented on how individuals should behave as part of a community. The ethic of justice generally serves as a foundation for legal rights and ideals (Shapiro and Gross, 2008; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005).

The ethic of critique finds its roots in critical theory. The ethic of critique looks at laws and those who create laws to question if they are just, which forces society to rethink democracy in light of privilege, power, culture, language and justice (Shapiro & Gross, 2008; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005). The ethic of critique, as Shapiro and Stefkovich describe it, is concerned with the social class and its inequities. Related to schools, the critical theory is concerned with how schools reproduce the inequities in society.

The ethic of care stems from feminist literature. This ethic turns to issues of loyalty, trust and empowerment in decision making and requires decision makers to pay attention to the “other voices” (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005, p. 17). This ethic is

predominantly focused on the individuals involved in the decision and the decision's outcome.

The ethic of the profession is often equated with justice, stemming from a set of rules or an ethical code (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005). An understanding of one's self as a person and as an educational leader is part of the profession paradigm. Educational leaders are influenced by personal and professional values.

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) have found three primary conflicts in individuals' ethical decision making. There may be a clash between an individual's personal and professional codes of ethics. There may be clashes within professional codes. Finally, there may clashes of professional codes between administrators. These clashes are instrumental in understanding leadership in this study. Rural administrators may find themselves grappling with their own values compared to those of modern day education or the community at large. There may also be differences in how administrators interpret and apply ethical codes within the rural context.

The second theoretic frame guiding inquiry in this study is Social Reproduction. Democratic ideals provide the foundation for the educational system in the United States which values universal access and participation (Trainer, 1993). In conjunction with this, educational and political institutions have lost a large portion of their legitimacy as the state finds itself unable to respond to the current economic and ideological situation (Apple, 1995). There is a relationship between schooling and the maintenance of unequal relationships in society.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) explain the process of reproduction in education, society, and culture as the passing of different types of capital from generation to generation. The educational system is influential in this process. The educational institution expects students to behave and receive information in a certain manner. For students, success involves exhibiting many behaviors, including both academic achievement and non-academic elements or cultural behaviors. Bourdieu (1990) speaks to cultural elements and behavioral factors including, but not limited to the following: values, demographic characteristics, income, disposition toward school, linguistic capital, class origin, and social networks (p. 255). Upper class students behave based on the expectations placed upon them by the educational institution and thus experience success within the system. Working class students do not posses these behaviors. The educational hierarchy eliminates working class students from certain educational tracks, and these students also eliminate themselves by choosing not to pursue higher levels of secondary education (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Bourdieu (1977) sees this as a process for reproducing the division among social classes in society. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) explain:

> All of the conditioning received in their previous training and all the social conditions of the relation of pedagogic communication cause students to be objectively condemned to enter the game of fictitious communication, even if this entails adherence to the academic world-view which casts them into unworthiness. (p. 112)

Students from upper class families are equipped with the linguistic skills, academic skills, and behaviors to meet their parents' expectations of achievement which enables them to succeed in the educational system. On the other hand, working class students are often predisposed for failure based on their deficiencies in these

areas. This reproduction process allows the social stratification present in society to endure as the educational system reproduces many of the inequities that already exist across social classes.

According to Trainer (1993), rural Americans are at an extreme disadvantage, lacking the ability to participate in the "American Dream" due to their lower college attendance rate (p. 10). Pennsylvania historically has had one of the lowest rates for college attendance (Trainer, 1993). This can be explained in part because rural communities associate moving up with moving out (Hobart, 2001). Trainer (1993) proposes, "In many rural communities the school faces pressures to develop programs that will enable students to remain in their own community" (p. 185).

Social stratification has also been found to have an impact on students in rural schools. In many cases, schools persuade students from specific socio-economic groups to pursue certain programs (Trainer, 1993). Apple (1995) argues that "schools have elements within them that tend to reproduce the maintenance of the dominant class" (p. 14).

The school is not alone in this reproduction of social stratification, as often times parents' expectations and beliefs about the purpose of education in rural communities influences student educational attainment and through it social mobility. Yan (2002) found that rural students in Pennsylvania who did not attend college were likely to say that their fathers expected them to attend vocational school or to end their education with high school. The same can be said for mothers' expectations. Rural students were more than twice as likely, compared to urban or suburban

students, to say that their mothers expected them to attend vocational school or end their education at high school (Yan, 2002).

Rural high school principals face a number of paradoxes associated with leading in the rural context. These include the following: the control of schooling, the purpose of school, the fact that moving up often means moving away, and individual good vs. the community good. These paradoxes are present in part because of the impact that social reproduction has on rural areas and students within rural Pennsylvania. By using multiple ethical paradigms, rural educational leaders may uncover different strategies to solve difficult problems.

This study explores the phenomenon of educational leadership in rural Pennsylvania by studying four high school principals, a group of leaders often overlooked by the research. An exploration of principal perceptions of contextual elements and social reproduction in rural areas and how they influence ethical leadership frames this study.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The review of related literature is divided into six major sections**:** 1) the rural education context; 2) education leaders in rural settings; 3) ethical educational leadership; 4) women in educational leadership; 5) female educational leaders in rural schools; and 6) a review of current educational leadership research from the rural context. A gap exists in the literature relating to rural education. Educational leadership has been studied in depth, but few studies focus on rural settings and even fewer focus on female leaders in rural settings.

Due to the fact that few research studies have been conducted on rural high school principals, this review of the literature pulls from research relating to educational leadership as a whole. Because context is such an important element to both research and leadership, the lack of leadership research with a rural focus, in turn, strengthens the significance of this study. Since there is a lack of empirical data coming from research relating to rural education, many sections of this literature review use opinion papers from experts in the field of rural education. Whenever empirical data exist, it has been incorporated in the review of the literature. Of course, similarities do exist between rural, suburban, and urban educational leadership. These similarities helped to shape the interview questions and other data collection instruments used in this study. Administrators in all settings face similar problems. The context of the school and community may suggest the use of a different paradigm in analyzing difficult decisions. It is these difficult decisions that helped to shape this study's view of rural educational leaders.

The Rural Education Context

The rural context referenced in this section of the review of related literature refers to the circumstances in which rural schools exist. The history of rural areas, their demographics, and economic and political trends set them apart and make them different when compared to their urban and suburban counterparts. The schools that exist therein also experience many funding inequities. Furthermore, student outmigration and consolidation of community schools create challenges to administrators in the rural context. The culture of the rural community itself is crucial to understanding rural educational leadership. A dominant view exists in the research that rural people and rural communities are an impediment to the ideals of progressive education. All of these elements make educational leadership in the rural context a phenomenon that differs from urban and suburban settings. Each of the aforementioned elements and others will be discussed in detail throughout the following pages.

In exploring the research on rural schools and the rural context, it is helpful to begin with an historical overview. As Theobald and Nachtigal (1995) explain, educational history is the key to understanding the day-to-day activities of educators. Rural education began in the foundations of the United States and in the early debates between federalism and republicanism. The federalists promoted a government machine that would pump out solutions without requiring citizen engagement. Thomas Jefferson argued that republicanism was a better approach as a hands-on, face-to-face way of solving problems (Nachtigal, 1994). Nachtigal concludes that the

federalist approach prevailed in the development of the Constitution and other laws impacting state and federal relationships.

During the 19th Century rural communities experienced growth and small towns developed throughout the countryside. Rural communities provided farming, forestry, and mining that fueled much of the nation (Harmon, 2001). Virtually every school was rural prior to the Industrial Revolution (DeYoung, 1994). One room school houses were spread throughout the landscape. Teachers were often unemployed surveyors or disabled veterans (DeYoung, 1994). Rural schools originally had volunteer administrators and partially trained teachers (DeYoung, 2002). Early rural schools were characterized by a lack of control, lack of funding, and even a lack of teachers.

The Industrial Revolution has an important role in understanding the history of education (Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995). The Industrial Revolution of the mid 19th century brought with it a population shift to urban areas. Immigration increased greatly during this period of growth. DeYoung (1994) asserts, "Just as crime led to police departments, trash led to sanitation departments, city children led to the creation of educational departments" (p. 7). Experts said that the rural schools could no longer provide the model for dealing with city children, and efficiency became the primary educational ideal (DeYoung, 1994).

Many differences emerged between the city model of schooling and the rural model of schooling during the Industrial Revolution. Rural communities valued livelihood and practicality (DeYoung, 2002). For a long time college preparation was seen as elitism. Practical learning was seen as important in the countryside, and in

many cases parents trained their children for their future occupations. In the city schools social issues like immigration, industrialization, urban blight, and child labor shaped education (DeYoung, 2002). This debate was depicted well by John Dewey (1902) who explained that Education should be for the doers and makers, not just for the information accumulators. The argument over the purpose of schooling continued throughout the first half of the 20th Century and often found students with college aspirations at odds with students focused on occupational learning. Even today rural students have a lower college attendance rate compared to their urban and suburban counterparts (Yan, 2002). After World War II the comprehensive high school model with tracking systems was firmly in place throughout American education.

High schools in rural settings presented a problem for educators because they did not have the resources to provide a comprehensive program (DeYoung, 2002). Many community schools in rural communities were closed as consolidation measures were implemented to provide a more efficient means of allowing for a comprehensive model (Howley, 1996).

*Demographic*s

An overall description of rural demographics is difficult to generalize as the following data pulled from the United States Department of Agriculture's 2003 report entitled *Rural Education at a Glance* illustrate. Rural demographics differ largely with respect to regional and racial factors (United States Department of Agriculture, 2003). The South is home to half of all rural adults who have not completed high school. Rural Hispanics and African Americans are half as likely as Caucasians to

complete college. Rural Hispanics have the lowest level of education of all racial groups (USDA, 2003). Non-rural African Americans are twice as likely as rural African Americans to have a college degree. College completion is highly related to the urbanization level of a given area (USDA, 2003). Low education levels are highly correlated to persistent poverty. As the skill requirements of jobs continue to rise, better-educated adults move to urban and suburban areas. Most of the low skilled jobs have been lost to foreign competition and outsourcing. Manufacturing jobs still account for one quarter of all rural earnings (USDA, 2003). Outmigration remains a problem for rural communities as the best and brightest students continue to leave for better opportunities in urban and suburban areas.

Not all of the data are negative. Rural students perform as well as urban students. Fifteen percent of rural adults have graduated from college, and that is more than four times the number holding degrees in 1970 (USDA, 2003). Younger rural adults (under 55) have a higher level of education than older adults. Rural college graduates make more than twice the earnings of rural high school dropouts. Rural college graduates experience a very low rate of poverty (USDA, 2003). Even with these improvements cited by the United States Department of Agriculture, rural education still lags behind urban levels.

Studies have shown significant differences in post-secondary persistence between rural, urban and suburban students (Yan, 2002). A recent study of six hundred forty-two Pennsylvania students found rural students less likely to attend college. In Pennsylvania, 48 percent of rural students did not attend college, compared to 28 percent urban and 36 percent suburban (Yan, 2002). The rural and

urban students who did not attend college were evenly distributed between the low and middle socio-economic category. Moreover, rural males were less likely to attend college as compared to rural females (Yan, 2002). This study found marital status to be a significant factor for rural students attending and completing college. Parental influence was also found to be significant. Rural students were about twice as likely as urban and suburban students to have parents who did not expect them to go to college (Yan, 2002).

Poverty has been an historic characteristic of life for rural areas (Huang & Howley, 1991). Most of the chronically poor counties in the United States are located in rural areas. In 1986 rural poverty was 50 percent higher than urban areas. Rural poverty rates rose faster and decreased slower than urban rates throughout the 1980s. Unemployed rural workers were unemployed 50 percent longer than their urban counterparts. In order to gain a full perspective of the poverty in rural communities, the focus must include employment status, family structure, and race of rural people (Huang & Howley, 1991).

Rural poverty can be best described as working but poor. Three quarters of heads of households work year round (Huang & Howley, 1991). Two-thirds of impoverished rural families live in households with a family member who is working (Huang & Howley, 1991). A family with working parents is about twice as likely to be poor in rural areas as opposed to suburban and urban areas (Huang & Howley, 1991). The assumption that poverty is primarily an urban problem is simply wrong.

Poverty's effect on students can be far reaching. In recent research, Blaum (2000) found that urban and rural students from disadvantaged backgrounds complete

an average of eight fewer years of schooling compared to their advantaged counterparts. Furthermore, educational goals have an impact on educational attainment. Blaum (2000) found that rural students have lower goals than urban youth. They are less likely to have educated parents with professional careers. In addition, rural parents are more likely to approve of their children not attending college (Blaum, 2000).

Rural poverty is less visible to the media and policy makers, and it is less noted in educational research. Blaum (2000) found that the socioeconomic level of children greatly influenced children's educational achievement in terms of the years of formal schooling they complete. Advantaged rural boys are likely to complete 18.4 years of schooling and girls 19.1 years (Blaum, 2000). Boys from average backgrounds are likely to complete 13.1 years and girls 14.2 years (Blaum, 2000). Rural boys from disadvantaged backgrounds averaged 9.4 years of schooling and girls averaged 10.9 years (Blaum, 2000). Blaum's findings indicate how significant poverty can be as a negative influence on educational achievement in rural areas.

The cultural diversity of rural communities in the United States is increasing, but it can best be described as geographic diversity (Harmon, 2001). In other words, many rural communities are clustered with a certain race or ethnic group in a specific location. In the United States, 333 counties in the out of 2,288 have a minority group that makes up one third of the population (Harmon, 2001). Rural minority groups often live in geographic clusters where poverty tends to be high (Harmon, 2001). For example, rural counties in which one-third of the population is African American are only found in the South. Rural minorities are significantly more impoverished as a

percentage of the population than their suburban and urban counterparts (Harmon, 2001). There has always been a misconception that poverty is a minority problem in the United States; however, that is not the case in rural areas. Seventy-three percent of the poor people living in rural areas are White (Harmon, 2001). In rural America poverty is not just a minority problem.

In Pennsylvania there is a growing income gap between rural and urban areas (Christofides, Pats, & Behr, 2006). A recent study of the income of Pennsylvania residents conducted by the East Stroudsburg University found that the income gap between rural and urban has grown from 19 percent in 1969 to 25 percent in 2001. In 2001 the per-capita income gap between urban and rural residents was $8,637 (Christofides et al., 2006).

A study conducted by Kurre (2000) found that "there is a very real cost of living difference between urban and rural areas in Pennsylvania" (p. 59). However, not all rural areas are less expensive to live in; for example, Pike and Monroe counties tended to have a higher cost of living despite their rural classification (Kurre, 2000). Kurre (2000) found the cost of living patterns in Pennsylvania to include the following: 1) Urban areas tend to be more expensive than rural areas, 2) Eastern tier counties tend to be more expensive than others, 3) The southeastern counties, especially Philadelphia and its suburbs, tend to be especially high cost, and 4) Counties on the western tier of the state and those around Pittsburgh also tend to exhibit higher costs than northern tier counties (Kurre, 2000). The average difference between urban and rural Cost of Living (COL) indexes was 2.4 percent. According to Kurre (2000), when you account for population density, the COL index is 6.0 percent

higher for urban areas. Urban areas were found to be more expensive in all sub-index areas including: groceries, housing, utilities, transportation, healthcare and miscellaneous (Kurre, 2000).

Changing economic trends are largely to blame for the problem of rural poverty. Rural economies differ in many ways from mainstream America. Howley (1998) asserts, "Many rural areas have not experienced steady growth due to cycles of boom and bust" (p. 4). They often have a dependence on natural resources. Rural communities, according to Alan DeYoung (1994), can be categorized into eight primary types of activities: farming, mining, manufacturing, retirement, government services, federal lands, persistent poverty, and unclassified. Twenty-nine percent of rural communities depend on farming for economic stability and twenty-two percent are based on retirement income. Ultimately, ten percent of rural communities are experiencing persistent poverty (Howley, 1988). Rural communities generally have a low industrial base (Huang & Howley, 1991). When industry does exist, it brings with it a dependence on low skilled labor. Recent trends in outsourcing and technological advances in production industries have decreased the demand for low skilled labor (Huang & Howley, 1991).

With society making a shift from the Industrial Age to the Information Age, some rural communities are experiencing economic growth because of reduced isolation from new communication technologies. A longstanding belief that rural economies rely on farming is a misnomer (Sherwood, 2001). Agriculture is no longer the dominant staple of rural economies that it once was (Huang & Howley, 1991). Even with the increased promise of the Information Age, rural areas experience a lack

of demand for a highly educated work force. When economic growth occurs in rural areas, it most often brings more minimum wage jobs. The service industries are expected to see the most growth in the future; however, rural workers in service fields presently experience the highest poverty rates (Huang & Howley, 1991).

Pennsylvania experienced economic growth throughout the 1990s; however, disparities exist between rural and urban areas (Shields, 2004). In Pennsylvania, growth has been seen in the service and technology-based sectors. The southeast counties have experienced the most growth while northern tier and western counties have grown slowly. Growth rates are higher in rural counties than urban ones; however, the per-capita income gap has continued to grow (Shields, 2004). Rural Pennsylvania residents are faring worse in the new economy than they were 20 years ago (Shields, 2004).

Employment in rural Pennsylvania grew between 1990 and 2000 by 98,763 jobs, 12 percent faster than the 9 percent growth of urban areas (Shields, 2004). The industries in rural Pennsylvania providing the most growth were service and retail industries. The health services industry was the leading industry experiencing growth. A shift from manufacturing to service industries has occurred (Shields, 2004). In rural Pennsylvania, all but two industries experiencing the most growth were export industries, meaning that the industries sell most of the goods and services outside of the state (Shields, 2004). Rural Pennsylvania has seen growth in high tech manufacturing with a 10 percent increase in jobs in the 1990s. Producer services grew half as much in rural Pennsylvania compared to the national rate through the 1990s (Shields, 2004). In the 1990s rural Pennsylvania added more jobs than urban

Pennsylvania, but the earnings were significantly lower. Throughout the 1990s rural earnings grew 36 percent compared to urban earnings that grew by 48 percent (Shields, 2004). The growth in rural employment has been relatively low wage jobs (Shields, 2004). Factors influencing rural growth included the following: college education, industry agglomeration, and highway infrastructure (Shields, 2004).

Many different circumstances exist in rural communities throughout the country (Sherwood, 2001). Rural areas, are defined in the following ways: poor rural, wealthy rural, rural with minorities, rural with no minorities, rural communities with high ESL (English as a Second Language) populations, and large rural and small rural communities (Sherwood, 2001). Variables exist in regards to isolation and population scarcity as well as outmigration trends. The specific needs of rural areas are often masked by researchers who lump all rural communities together. Furthermore, policy makers have not come to consensus on a definitive definition of rural (Sherwood, 2001).

Alan DeYoung (1994) outlined five different typologies of rural communities as developed by Tom Gjetlan in 1982. Gjetlan went further to suggest that within these five typologies individual school cultures differ significantly (DeYoung, 1994). The five general typologies that Gjetlan developed are listed as follows: 1) High Growth Rural Communities – in the midst of economic expansion and/or very near expanding metropolitan areas, 2) Reborn Rural Communities – inundated by city refugees attempting to escape urban congestion, 3) Stable Rural Communities – include stereotypical rural areas often still involved with agriculture, although their numbers continue to dwindle, 4) Depressed Rural Communities – where the local

economy is underdeveloped and outmigration is high and 5) Isolated Rural Communities – those typically far removed from the transportation and commerce centers of the nation (DeYoung, 1994). Many times isolated and depressed rural communities provide the most difficult concerns for educational leaders because of disadvantaged children and a lack of resources (DeYoung, 1994).

Political Trends

Political trends throughout the country's history have drastically affected the voice of rural people. According to Paul Nachtigal (1994), the old story of declining rural populations and declining influence on public policy is a story of urban versus rural interests. Rural interests faired well historically, and until 1918 over half of the population lived in rural communities (Nachtigal, 1994). In 1994 only 15 percent of the states still had rural populations making up more than 50 percent of their total residency (Nachtigal, 1994). The Supreme Court's decision concerning one person, one vote further diminished rural influence in political circles (Nachtigal, 1994). After the Supreme Court's decision, control of politics and policymaking followed the population shift to urban centers (Nachtigal, 1994).

Several other trends have worked against rural people having a larger voice in politics. According to Nachtigal (1994), these include the following: the development of single issue coalitions, the traditional belief that rural policy is agricultural policy, the reluctance of rural people to organize into coalitions, the lack of a clearly articulated comprehension of what rural policy would look like, and rural representatives underrepresented in committee chair positions. Rural people continue

to become more disempowered as distant decision makers decide what is good for all (Nachtigal, 1994).

Fowler (2004) explains how the "United States can be divided into three primary political cultures" (p. 95). The three different political cultures are traditionalistic, moralistic, and individualistic. Pennsylvania falls into the individualistic category (Fowler, 2004). According to Fowler (2004), the individualistic political culture is defined by the following characteristics. Politics is understood as a type of marketplace. Members of the individualistic culture believe that the government should stick to a minimum role in private business. The government should focus on regulating the economy in order to keep it functioning efficiently. Politics is seen in a business light where individuals enter the political arena for self-advancement. Strict party loyalties are also a characteristic of an individualistic political culture. Ideally the individualistic culture can function in a smooth and efficient businesslike manner. Sometimes, however, systems do become corrupt where votes are bought and sold to the highest bidder (Fowler, 2004).

Bill Clinton's political consultant, James Carville, said in the 1992 campaign that Pennsylvania is Philadelphia and Pittsburgh with Alabama in the middle (Madonna & Young, 2006). Madonna and Young (2006) explain that conventional wisdom would suggest that there is a major rural and urban fault line across Pennsylvania. At the same time, rural and urban residents do not have differing opinions about the major issues facing Pennsylvania. In fact, Madonna and Young found that rural and urban residents agree on the state's most important problems. Data collected in October 2006 showed that residents agreed that terrorism, crime, the

economy and education were the most important issues affecting the state. Madonna and Young explain that conventional wisdom also speaks of ideological differences whereas rural people are more conservative than people in urban areas. Even so, in Pennsylvania rural and urban people are equally as likely to define themselves as conservatives. As a matter of fact, roughly one-third of the state's residents would classify themselves as conservative.

Madonna and Young (2006) found differences regarding issues such as gun control and the death penalty. Rural residents are more in favor of the death penalty with 56 percent approving of this practice compared to 34 percent of urban residents. Urban residents are stronger proponents of gun control with 43 percent supporting this issue compared to 31 percent of rural residents. When differences are uncovered across rural and urban beliefs, they tend to be within the range of ten percent, a small deviation.

Madonna and Young (2006) found that some differences do exist, and they often contradict stereotypical beliefs. Rural residents are more likely to say that the state should intervene frequently to solve concerns in local communities. Rural people, 54 percent, are less likely to feel that they can depend on competition to equalize prices in their communities compared to 64 percent urban of urban people. Results show that there are not a lot of differences between rural and urban beliefs; the difference is in the degree of the belief. Historical evidence suggests that at one time there was a very real divide between rural and urban beliefs. Madonna and Young explain that this was partly due to transportation and communication barriers between the city and the country. Differences today are largely regional or run along

demographic lines. Rural and urban differences in Pennsylvania still exist, but they are far less substantial than they once were (Madonna & Young, 2006).

Regional differences do exist across Pennsylvania. Madonna and Young (2001) explain that Pennsylvania can be broken into seven different regions: northwest, central, northeast, southwest, southeast, Philadelphia and Allegheny. The northwest region which contains 14 counties and holds nine percent of the voting population narrowly registers Republican. Driving issues are healthcare and education. The northwest has the highest percentage of senior citizens and the lowest proportion of residents earning less than $50,000 per year (Madonna & Young, 2001). Religion is important here, and gun ownership is a high priority.

The central region is the largest geographic region containing 29 counties. More people in this region than any other describe themselves as conservative, and the region is heavily registered Republican. The central region has the highest percent of Protestants and contains 25 percent of the voting population (Madonna & Young, 2001).

According to Madonna and Young (2001), the northeast region contains 10 counties and 12 percent of the voting population. The northeast region has more Democrats than Republicans. This region is highly Catholic, and moderate voters live here. Issues focus on property tax and quality of education.

Philadelphia accounts for 13 percent of the voting population and registers overwhelmingly Democrat. Philadelphia residents are more likely to call themselves liberals. This region has the largest non-White population in the state and the lowest college completion rate. It also has the largest proportion of unmarried voters and

voters under the age of 35. Cultural issues are important here. People are more likely to be pro-choice and favor gun control legislation (Madonna & Young, 2001).

The southeast region is essentially suburbia. This region has the state's lowest proportion of seniors and the highest per-capita income. This region registers Republican and describes itself as politically moderate. Cultural issues are important here with residents often being pro-choice and supporting gun control legislation similar to Philadelphia (Madonna & Young, 2001).

The southwest region consists of eight counties surrounding Pittsburgh. The region registers Democrat, but it has many self defined "cultural conservatives." This region is the most Catholic in the state, and gun ownership is important. In addition, this region has the highest number of pro-life voters (Madonna & Young, 2001).

The Allegheny region includes Pittsburgh and the surrounding municipalities. Allegheny has the second highest proportion of college graduates and contains 12 percent of the voting population (Madonna & Young, 2001).

Pennsylvania has the largest rural population in the United States with more than 2.56 million rural residents (The Center for Rural Pennsylvania, 2000). A division of power exists in Pennsylvania between the major urban centers, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh and a large rural population. Pennsylvania has 67 counties, 17 urban and 49 rural (CRPA, 2000). Pennsylvania is different than most other states because in Pennsylvania a large population actually lives in the rural counties. Surprisingly, only 17 percent of total income is represented in rural counties while 83 percent is found in urban areas (Christofides et al, 2006). The cost of living expense in rural Pennsylvania is less than the cost of living in urban

Pennsylvania; however, it only accounts for 19 percent of the income gap (Christofides et al., 2006).

A study done by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania (2000) explored attitudes of rural residents regarding the government and the economy. Survey respondents felt the government is spending too little in the areas of job creation, aging issues, child care, education, health services and farming and agriculture. Respondents felt the government is spending adequately related to parks and recreation, historic preservation, and public transportation. Respondents showed a moderate to high level of trust in government institutions. Police, local legislators, educational institutions and government agencies all had high ratings. Congress received the lowest ratings. The four most important policy areas noted by respondents were education, public safety, economic development, and health services. The rural residents favored regional competition with local control. Rural people felt the government should take action to control "suburban sprawl" as long as it is handled locally. Fifteen percent of respondents felt that unemployment was the most crucial element facing them locally. In regards to policy, health services, jobs, economic opportunities, and education were the most important to rural Pennsylvanians (CRPA, 2000).

During the 90s the Clinton administration brought with it a Neoliberal focus. Neoliberalism maximizes the role of markets and profit making and minimizes the role of non-market institutions (Edmondson, 2001). During the Clinton administration economic investment took priority over social investment (Edmondson, 2001). The result of Neoliberalism brought an increase of commercialism and the removal of safety nets for the poor and disadvantaged.

Education, agriculture, and welfare were a few of the many areas to feel the pressure of this new Neoliberalism approach to policy (Edmondson, 2001). Schools with increased diversity, dwindling resources, limited budgets, and crumbling infrastructures were increasingly vulnerable. At the same time, education vouchers and for-profit education began to enter the public's thinking (Edmondson, 2001). Rural schools and their communities began to feel increased stress due to all of these elements during the nineties.

School Funding

The economic and political trends of the later half of the 20th Century have left rural schools and rural administrators with many difficult issues relating to school funding. Rural schools operate on budgets that are significantly less than many urban and suburban schools. Due to their size, per pupil expenditures remain higher in many rural districts. Capital projects are a critical issue for most rural districts. Federal mandates that are partially funded or not funded become difficult policies to implement in rural settings. Attracting quality teachers and administrators is difficult for rural schools partially due to a lack of resources. An overall inequitable funding system and a lack of resources create chronic problems for many rural districts.

Howley explained some of the funding inequities that exist in his essay, *Economic Support for Education in Rural School Districts* (1988). The general expectation is that schools everywhere will function in the same way to serve all students. Rural areas are where education developed its roots, but rural areas have not experienced the same growth as other areas of the country. Rural communities

spend proportionately equal amounts on education as urban communities (Howley, 1988). The problem is that rural communities earn significantly less than urban and suburban communities. States use a variety of funding formulas to allocate resources to school districts. Funding formulas do not take into consideration the lack of economies of scale in rural schools or the number of disadvantaged students served by a school district (Howley, 1988). Funding that is available for at risk students helps but does not come close to equalizing the disparities. Government contributions and aid are often tied to strict guidelines and new programs that may be particularly hard for rural districts to implement. Aid is often a mixed blessing for rural schools because it forces educators to work twice as hard in many cases to implement new programs in order to receive the benefits. In general, mandates may impose burdens for rural schools that are out of balance with the benefits they provide (Howley, 1988).

Many rural districts operate with facilities that are outdated, insufficient, or unsafe because capital projects are a large problem for rural districts. Many rural communities operate on economies based on natural resource extraction and tax bases are often low (C. B. Howley, & A. Howley, 1990). Local school district budgets suffer from the demands of providing increased services, and the physical plant is put on the back burner. Nationwide, school buildings are deteriorating faster than they can be replaced, maintained, or remodeled. The local property tax still greatly influences the quality of school buildings in many states. Inadequate resources make capital outlay issues acute in many rural areas (Howley, & Howley, 1990). Related to this issue, the value of equity is seen as comparative and not subjective, and the

courts are starting to play key role in determining what is equitable. Recent litigation has suggested that if the states do not address capital outlay, the courts will get involved (Howley, & Howley, 1990).

In Pennsylvania school funding is largely based on local property tax base. Present school funding formulas do not address student achievement. In 2006, the Pennsylvania legislature passed Act 1 which limited the local tax increase that a board of school directors may levy. According to Odden (1999), if school funding is to help students meet standards, then three categories of students should be influential in state funding: students from low socio-economic backgrounds, students with special needs, and students who need to learn English. Research has shown that about an additional $1000 is needed for students from lower-socioeconomic levels (Odden, 1999). Students with special needs require about 130 percent of the normal per-student expenditures (Odden, 1999). More research needs to be done regarding English Language Learners. School districts in Pennsylvania have widely varying levels of property wealth per student. Districts with above average property per-pupil tax bases were traditionally able to spend at above average levels with below average tax rates. Conversely, districts with below average tax bases spent below average levels per-pupil even with higher than average tax rates (Odden, 1999).

Attracting teachers in rural schools remains a problem for many districts. Many college level teacher preparation programs do not focus on rural education preparation. Compensation for rural teachers is significantly less than teachers in urban and suburban areas (Harmon, 2001). Teachers in rural settings may have to take on a variety of roles in the school, which are outside of normal educational

responsibilities (Harmon, 2001). The salary difference continues to be a barrier to attracting and retaining rural teachers. The recent legislation of the No Child Left Behind Act and its requirements for highly qualified teachers has also increased the difficulties for rural schools in relation to finding certified staff to fill every vacancy.

Many of the same issues make it difficult for rural schools to find and retain administrators. Salary differences and difficulties relating to resources and the cultural expectations of the community present difficulties. More will be mentioned about rural administrators later in the review of the related literature.

Culture

The culture of rural communities is an essential element of the rural context. According to Merriam (1998) culture refers to beliefs, values and attitudes that structure the behavior patterns of a specific group of people. Specific cultural elements of rural communities include, but are not limited to, agricultural focus, hunting sub-culture, commitment to place, resistance to higher education, student outmigration, and a community school focus. All of these elements are important for an educational leader to understand if he or she is to be successful in a rural school.

Because culture evolves over time, a brief historical analysis of rural culture can explain a variety of aspects of present day culture in many rural communities. Early settlers brought with them a value for agricultural work, homogenous communities, and a commitment to community (Edmondson, 2001). Political localism and exclusionary religious groups were part of early rural settlements. Edmondson (2001) believes, “Settlers were individualistic but gaps were bridged

through agricultural cooperatives" (p. 5). Edmondson (2001) also found that many of these traditional ideals still exist even if only as nostalgia.

A more present view of rural culture finds that agriculture is a declining focus in rural livelihoods. Edmondson (2001) states, "Progress is often viewed by many as doing away with a valued way of life" (p. 6). Alan DeYoung (1994) has spent a number of years in the field studying rural education in Braxton County, West Virginia. DeYoung found many significant differences between rural culture and urban or suburban culture. The rural people of Braxton County, according to DeYoung (1994), were "independent, kin involved people whose lives were bound closely to the physical environment, whose activities are traditional, and whose beliefs are both fatalistic and religiously fundamentalist" (DeYoung, 1994). DeYoung (1994) found that the kinship, political, and economic systems of the region instilled character traits that made it difficult for integrating into the outside world. Schools in the Braxton area were outposts of national culture in the local communities.

The community provided an oppositional culture to the school (DeYoung, 1994). DeYoung (1994) found, the influence of the hunting sub-culture was significant within the community. "In Braxton County, West Virginia many people hunt. The schools close for hunting season. Many of the residents eat what is killed. Gun ownership and hunting were a high priority for citizens" (p. 22). Moreover, he discovered the commitment to regular work was low as many residents take time off to go hunting.

DeYoung also revealed that the rural people of Braxton County felt a commitment to place. Many live near their place of birth and citizens said that they would rather live on government assistance than move to the city (DeYoung, 1994). The people of Braxton County had a strong sense of pride in being independent mountaineers.

Several researchers (Edmondson, 2001; DeYoung, 1994; Trainer, 1993) found resistance to higher education in the rural community. Edmondson (2001) studied Prairie Town in the Midwest which actually had a University located in the town. She noticed that although the University brought economic benefits, there remained a division between the town and the University. Roughly half of the faculty and staff of the University live outside the community (Edmondson, 2001). Trainer (1993) studied the post-secondary educational patterns of students in rural Pennsylvania. Trainer found, "Many parents in rural areas take a hands-off approach in influencing college attendance of their children" (p. 163).

Outmigration of students continues to be a problem for rural schools and rural communities. There exists a dominant view in society that education will balance the playing field for all, and this belief is part of the liberal democratic ideology (Edmondson, 2001). Neoliberalism rewards those who share common values. In other words, those within our society who live in certain ways are expected to achieve success (Edmondson, 2001). The problem persists for rural communities when their values do not always match the values of modern day education. The educational system in rural communities influences this value conflict by preparing students to enter the global economy at the expense of the local economy (Harmon, 2001). Often

the goal of schools is to prepare students to enter college; students who seek education for local occupations are seen as having low aspirations by rural educators.

Schools socialize children for adult society (DeYoung, 1995). This becomes a problem when the society that children are prepared for doesn't exist within their community. Many times, for the best and brightest rural students, being successful means moving away. Harmon (2001) states that schools in rural settings need to think globally, but act locally. When rural schools act as an export service for the community's children, support for schooling is difficult to find. Rural people rarely see a return on their educational investments.

Rural schools have historically been linked to their communities (Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995). The rural community, on one hand, looks to the school as a source of identity. On the other hand, rural communities tend to view the school and its educational agenda as being different from their own. As Paul Nachtigal (1994) states, "Rural schools are the center of small town activity" (p. 1). Schools provide a venue for social functions within the community through sporting events, musical events, and general meetings (DeYoung, 2002). Tradition is important in many rural communities as often times many generations may have attended the same school (DeYoung, 1994). If rural schools are to be successful, according to Howley (2001), they need to pay attention to the life of the community as well as the individual well being of the student.

In rural settings, modern day education has brought with it a focus on expertise and efficiency and a shift away from family ideals and tradition (DeYoung, 1994). DeYoung (1994) states, "Rural populations are being trained to deal with

national development worldwide" (p. 5). More traditional individuals, like the community members in rural areas, are less interested in new experiences (DeYoung, 1994). Public schools historically demonstrate to children that the importance of place and kinship that once were primary are secondary to adult success (DeYoung, 1994).

The focus on connecting with the community has brought about an interest in "place based" education (Harmon, 2001). Theobald and Nachtigal (1995) argue that the educational agenda should refocus on the community. Knowledge of place, they argue, is the key in understanding who you are and where you come from. The argument of place-based education is grounded in the belief that education curriculum should grow out of real issues (Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995). Creating viable rural communities involves studying local history, literature, music, and art. Opportunities should be provided for kids to be part of communities now instead of in the distant future.

The culture of rural communities and rural education has been stereotyped in much of the research. Rural education and rural communities have been rhetorically subjugated and diminished (Howley & Howley, 1999). Education almost always sees rural as an impediment. The entrenched status quo is seen as a problem to progressive education (Howley & Howley, 1999). Furthermore, Howley and Howley (1999) go as far as to say that rural is the antithesis to cosmopolitan culture. There has historically existed a view that rural is fundamentally deficient (Howley, 2001). Rural policy has been equated to agricultural policy (Sherwood, 2001). Alan DeYoung (1994) explained that rural schools have been targets of ridicule and reform

historically. Professional educators have thought for a long time that the problems of rural education could be solved by Americans abandoning the countryside (DeYoung, 1994).

There are many different types of rural communities. The needs of individual rural settings are masked by lumping all of the different rurals together (DeYoung, 1994). Harmon (2001) argues that the lack of a precise definition of rural frustrates policymakers. He goes further to say that inadequate research on rural education is a problem for all levels of government (Harmon, 2001).

All of the previously mentioned issues make leading in the rural context challenging. Who are these rural educational leaders? Throughout the next few pages of this chapter, an exploration of the research on rural educational leaders is offered.

Educational Leaders in the Rural Context

Many characteristics within the rural context make educational leadership an abstract phenomenon. These elements are especially challenging for high school principals in rural communities since the high school is often the center of community activity. Rural high school principals face many challenges, some of these include the following: role variability, salary disparities, increased strain due to accountability legislation, an extreme lack of resources, school consolidation, unrealistic demands of community members, limited career path, lack of preparation, and a shortage of qualified candidates to fill vacancies. The North Central Regional Advisory Committee (2005) cited several specific characteristics that make rural educational

leadership particularly challenging in their *Report to the United States Department of Education*:

> Challenges regarding improvement, corrective action, and restructuring of schools; 2) Challenges regarding data and information on students, schools, and educational administration; 3) Challenges regarding recruiting, training, developing and retaining teachers; 4) Challenges for developing school leadership, curriculum alignment, and technology integration in education; 5) Challenges meeting the needs of special populations; and 6) Challenges educating and motivating parents in education of children, taking into account different cultural, ethnic and working backgrounds. (p. 2)

Throughout the next several pages all of the previously mentioned items will be explained in detail.

The rural school leader is often a person who must wear many hats. He or she takes on a variety of roles within the school and often times the community as well (Loveland, 2003). Howley and Pendarvis (2002) state that the job pressures of the rural principalship are complex, and the position is more stressful than ever before. Rural principals face long hours, low pay, an emphasis on collaborative leadership, loss of power, lack of resources, and unrealistic expectations from different constituencies (Howley & Pendarvis, 2002). Many times, rural principals must work in more than one school (Loveland, 2003). Furthermore, there exists a rural culture that the administrator must be willing to accept if he or she is to be successful (Wallin, 2001).

Rural administrators experience a salary difference that, in some cases, has them earning one third less than their suburban and urban counterparts (Howley & Pendarvis, 2002). Compounding the salary difference for many perspective rural administrators is the fact that many times the rural context does not provide many

career opportunities for a spouse (Loveland, 2003). Both of these concerns are explained in part because rural schools operate on some of the smallest tax bases in the country (Hunter & Howley, 1990).

Rural administrators face a greater lack of resources compared to urban and suburban administrators. Harmon (2001) contends that a lack of resources in rural districts is the largest concern facing administrators. According to Arnold (2004) there is some speculation that rural schools may not have the resources needed to meet the demands of NCLB. Rural schools experience high per-pupil costs primarily because of lower enrollment (Arnold, 2004). The information age has brought added pressures for resource allocation in technology (Nachtigal, 1994). This is a particular problem for rural administrators who often work in outdated, deteriorated, and even unsafe buildings. Furthermore, immigration, migration, and ESL costs continue to compound the lack of resources in many rural districts (Arnold, 2004).

The demand for services is only one side of the resource problem. The other side of the issue that makes resources scarce for rural administrators is inequitable funding formulas. Howley (1988) explains that rural schools proportionately spend as much as urban schools. The problem is that rural communities have a lower tax base. The local property tax is still a major part of school funding in many states (Hunter & Howley, 1990). Residents often feel extreme tax pressure in rural areas where a larger percentage of their income must go to support the school. Howley (1990) goes further to explain that aid through grants is often difficult for rural administrators to accept because they need to implement new programs in order to receive the support. This spreads an already overworked staff even thinner.

Local budgets in rural schools have felt the strain from demands for increased services (Hunter & Howley, 1990). Mandates from the federal government like (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) IDEA impose burdens on rural schools that are often out of scale with benefits (Howley, 1988). The No Child Left Behind Act is another example of a federal mandate that has imposed burdens on rural schools. The emphasis on accountability has turned the lack of resources in rural schools into an acute problem. NCLB labels schools as failing and funnels resources away from districts that need them most (Sherwood, 2001).

The present day argument for smaller schools, which is often fueled by the funding dilemma, is seen as ironic to rural administrators according to Howley (1996) in his article, *Ongoing Dilemmas of School Size: A Short Story*. The machine model that was forced on education during the Industrial Revolution is now starting to be reconsidered in many cases. Many rural schools in America have closed due to consolidation models that focus on efficiency (Howley, 1996). The closing of community schools in the hopes of improving efficiency has created new problems concerning distance and topography. Smaller schools have increased student performance in disadvantaged groups (Howley, 1996). However, it has been the poor rural areas where schools were most often closed in hopes of improved efficiency through consolidation. Furthermore, impoverished large schools can achieve a level of despair greater than small schools due to their population density (Howley, 1996).

Rural administrators often encounter pressures from the community arguing for and against consolidation. Many rural schools face declining enrollment, loss of funding, and consolidation (Loveland, 2003). Rural students and their parents who

are focused on college tend to favor consolidation because of the comprehensive course offerings a larger school can provide (DeYoung, 2002). Students and their parents who are focused on occupational learning generally do not support consolidation (DeYoung, 2002). DeYoung (1994) found that in Braxton County, West Virginia, consolidation was pushed on the community by arguing the athletic benefits to the students. According to DeYoung (2002) as long as local occupational health is good, local schools can resist the pressures of consolidation.

Because of school size, administrators in rural schools often develop a close relationship with the community. According to Harmon (2001) the school in a rural community must focus on people and not business. Building trust in the community is crucial to leaders in rural settings (Harmon, 2001). Miller (1995) argues that a shared vision about the importance of the community is important for educational leaders and their respective communities. Administrators need to understand that rural people see the school as more than an instructional site. Rural communities often reject tax increases for schooling because they do not see the benefits locally as students leave to pursue collegiate interests (DeYoung, 1995). Because rural school administrators get very close to the community, they can face unrealistic expectations from their constituents (Loveland, 2003). The small physical size of rural schools and unrealistic expectations of school leaders promotes an environment where every decision is viewed in a critical light. Dunshea (1998) found that rumors and gossip tended to be powerful within the rural communities that she studied.

Lack of Qualified Administrative Candidates

There are many elements contributing to the lack of qualified candidates available to fill rural administrative vacancies. This shortage is felt most at the secondary level (Howley & Pendarvis, 2002). Job pressures are more complex than ever before. Low pay, recent focus on accountability, need for collaborative leadership styles, lack of resources, and unrealistic expectations of constituencies contribute to these pressures (Howley & Pendarvis, 2002). Howley and Pendarvis (2002) suggest publicizing the satisfactions of the job, improving salaries and benefits, and encouraging the application of women and minorities may aid in the existing shortage.

Rural administrators are often not well prepared for a position within the rural context. Administrator preparation programs often do not focus on preparation for rural settings (Arnold, 2004). Sherwood (2001) goes so far as to say that rural leadership is no longer considered an area of study. Rural administrators need skills in negotiation, communication and conflict resolution (Howley & Pendarvis, 2002). Those working in the field of rural education repeatedly voice their frustration with the lack of a definitive body of knowledge concerning rural educational leadership (Sherwood, 2001).

The career path to the high school principalship in rural school districts was difficult to discern from the literature. There seems to be some differences in the path to the principalship depending on gender. Livingston (1998) found that the typical path to the high school principalship was through the assistant position. In addition, coaching and teaching experiences were listed as being important (Livingston, 1998).

In a study of rural female principals in New Brunswick, Canada, Gill (1994) cited Hoffman's 1991 study of 67 rural principals. The important influences listed by principals as critical to attaining a principalship position included the following: family support, level of graduate study, above average communication skills, interpersonal skills, mentoring, and networking relationships.

Wallin (2001) found that community fit was important for a rural candidate's appointment to a principal position. Religious affiliation was also found to be important in a 1994 study conducted by Hite. Administrative candidates faired better if their religion was the dominant denomination in the community. The separation of church and state is sometimes still openly contested in some rural areas (DeYoung, 1994).

Ethical Educational Leadership

Coupled with the difficulties of attracting and retaining quality rural administrators, many authors write about a need for ethical educational leadership. Scholars (Beck, 1996; Beck & Murphy, 1997; Foucault, 1992; Noddings, 1992; Rest, 1986; Sergiovanni, 1993; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005; Starratt, 1992; Strike, Haller & Soltis, 1998; and others) have written about the importance of ethical training and ethical leadership in educational administration. Ethical leadership is a complex topic that has many different definitions and a variety of approaches to decision making, but its importance for educators is not disputed. Educational leaders face many moral dilemmas (Lashway, 1996). Administrators have obligations to society, the school board, and to students, and often find that it is not clear what is

right or wrong, what one ought to do, or which perspective is right in moral terms (Lashway, 1996). Furthermore, Starratt (1991) notes, "Every social arrangement benefits some people at the expense of others; simply to assume that schools embody desirable standards is ethically naive if not culpable" (p. 2). Moral philosophers agree that there is no simple solution to complex ethical problems (Lashway, 1996).

Real leaders concentrate on doing the right thing, not doing things right (Lashway, 1996). The principal must behave responsibly as an individual but must also create an ethical institution. Much of the principal's power and authority is moral. Coercion through bureaucratic authority will seldom have a lasting effect (Lashway, 1996). Scholars, such as Fullan (2001), write about the importance of change being rooted in moral purpose. Fullan argues that change should come from our moral commitment to the students.

This focus on people, relationships, and purpose in leadership contrasts the traditional bureaucratic organizational model that dominates school leadership literature and theory. Sergiovanni (1993) argues that "educational administration is a field that is essentially characterless" (p. 1). He goes further to say that education has borrowed its definitions of quality, efficiency, and productivity as well as its strategies to achieve them from business. Education's theories of human nature and motivation are built on self-interest and self-motivation (Sergiovanni, 1993). Schools following a bureaucratic model seek legitimacy from appearing rational. Administrators have to convince everyone that they are in control, and they do this by using rules and regulations, monitoring and supervising teachers, and other regulatory

means (Sergiovanni, 1993). Sergiovanni proposes a paradigm shift away from the bureaucratic model to a community model for schools (Sergiovanni, 1993).

In a community connections are not based on contractual obligations but commitments. According to Sergiovanni (1993), communities are defined by their centers of values, sentiments, and beliefs that provide the needed conditions for creating a sense of "we" from a collection of "Is" (p. 6). Communities rely on norms, values, professional socialization, collegiality, and natural interdependence for control (Sergiovanni, 1993). Empowerment within a community comes from a shared commitment to a vision instead of a hierarchical structure (Sergiovanni, 1993). There is no single recipe for creating a community, but it is clear that systems of extrinsic rewards need to be replaced by moral obligations (Sergiovanni, 1993).

Many different explanations of ethical leadership exist in the literature. Ralph Waldo Emerson defined ethical behavior as "The sort of behavior that is conditioned not by a host of narrow and rigidly defined principles but by a broad and loosely defined ethic that molds itself in situations and has proper regard for human affections, weaknesses and anxieties" (Mitten, 1996).

Noddings (1984) says that "to behave ethically is to behave under the guidance of acceptable and justifiable account of what it means to be moral" (p. 2). According to John Dewey, "Ethics is the science that deals with conduct in so far as this is considered right or wrong, good or bad" (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 1996). Many scholars of ethics in our dominant culture suggest that people should follow principles set forth by the Bible. Plato, Aristotle, Kant and John Stuart Mill have written about such ideals. According to these ethicists, using principles keeps ethical decision

making rational rather than emotional (Mitten, 1996). Conversely, several scholars (Apple 1996; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005; Starrat, 1992) ask questions about ethical decisions from a different perspective. The needs of the individual are a focus that arises from a feminine perspective (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 1996). Perhaps the most inclusive view of ethical decision making comes from Starratt (1992) who advocates using three different paradigms of justice, critique, and care when analyzing ethical decisions (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 1996). No matter what the definition of ethics, there is little dispute about the importance of ethical decision making in educational leadership. Each administrative decision carries with it a restructuring of human life, and that is why administration at its heart is the resolution of moral dilemmas (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 1996).

One of the most cited theories related to ethical decision making is Lawrence Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development. Kohlberg started in the 1970s working in developmental psychology and then moved to the field of moral education (Barger, 2000). Kohlberg's theory of moral development was built upon the work of Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget and American philosopher John Dewey. Like the work of Dewey and Piaget, Kohlberg's work focused on human beings, developing philosophically and psychologically in a progressive manner (Barger, 2000). Kohlberg believed that human beings go through six stages of moral development depicted in the table 2.1 below:

Table 2.1

Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development

Level	Stage	Social Orientation
Pre-Conventional	1	Obedience and punishment
	2	Individualism, instrumentalism and exchange
Conventional	3	Good boy/girl
	4	Law and order
Post-Conventional	5	Social Contract
	6	Principled Conscience

Note: From *A Summary of Lawrence Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development* (p. 1), by Barger, R. N., 2000, The University of Notre Dame: South Bend, IN. Retrieved January 29, 2006 from http://www.nd.edu/~rbarger/kohlberg.html.

Kohlberg's first level, stage one, is found in elementary school children where they behave according to acceptable norms because they are told to do so by an authority figure (Barger, 2000). Stage two occurs when individuals realize that acting in the right manner is in their own best interest. The conventional level is commonly found in society. Stage three occurs when the individual decides what to do to gain the approval of others. Stage four is achieved when an individual decides what to do based on the law and their obligation to duty (Barger, 2000). The third level, post-conventional, is achieved by most adults. In stage five, individuals decide on correct actions based on the welfare of others. Stage six involves respect for universal principles and the demands of individual conscience. Although Kohlberg believed that stage six existed, he was not able to get many subjects to progress to it (Barger, 2000).

Kohlberg believed that individuals could only progress through one stage at a time. Progression was achieved in a linear fashion. According to Kohlberg, moral development occurred as a result of social interaction. Development occurs as a result of moral conflict in each of the preceding stages (Barger, 2000).

One recent study conducted by Edmonson, Fisher, and Polick (2003) surveyed 85 students in administrator preparation programs about the characteristics and behaviors that depict ethical leadership. A total of 58 behaviors were listed by respondents (Edmonson, Fisher, & Polick, 2003). The top behaviors listed included the following: fair, respectful, open-minded, student-centered, listens, facilitates, and models. Fair and respectful were the behaviors listed by the most respondents with 35 percent and 26 percent (Edmonson et al., 2003). The respondents in the study were also asked to list characteristics of leaders that illustrate ethical leadership. The responses included the following characteristics: honest, positive, caring, fair, professional, trustworthy, consistent, respectful, open-minded, kind, listener, high expectations, and accessible. The top characteristics listed included the following: honest, positive, and caring (Edmonson et al., 2003). Ethical Leadership involves administrators who not only know ethical standards but also know how to model these standards in their daily decisions and behaviors (Edmonson et al., 2003).

According to Beck (1996), at least four characteristics of educators' professional lives compel them to take seriously the challenges at hand, to enter thoughtful and sustained conversations about values, and to construct appropriate ways to honor those values (Klinker & Hackmann, 2003). These four elements include the following: 1) the situations that challenge moral reasoning are complex,

2) the stakes are high, 3) the impact of moral decisions are enormous, and 4) the institutions that have traditionally guided moral reasoning are crumbling. Ethics, morality, and values are the foundation from which leadership draws strength (Klinker & Hackmann, 2003).

Traditional and Non-Traditional Ethics

Ethical decision making can be best understood by looking at two competing schools of thought: traditional and non-traditional ethics. Dilemmas facing educational administrators today are complex and may naturally lead to the use of two or more paradigms to solve problems (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005). It is due to this complexity that an understanding of both traditional and non-traditional ethics is important. Starratt (1992) approaches the study of ethical leadership by looking at three different ethics: justice, care, and critique. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001, 2005) expanded Starratt's work by adding a forth ethic of the profession, that includes elements of the other three ethics, to explore an administrator's decision making in terms of certain professional obligations. These four ethical paradigms will be utilized in this study to explore and categorize the subjects' ethical decision making patterns.

Traditional ethics is firmly entrenched in the dominant culture. Ethics comes from the Greek word "ethos" meaning customs or usages, especially belonging to one group as distinguished from another. Traditional ethics is most closely related to the ethic of justice. The ethic of justice focuses on rights and laws and is part of our liberal democratic tradition (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005). According to

Delgado (1995), “Traditional ethics is characterized by incrementalism, faith in the legal system, and hope for progress” (2001, p. 11). The justice perspective deals with issues like the nature of the universe, the nature of God, fate vs. free will, good and evil, and the relationship between individuals and the state. Justice can further be broken into two competing theories: Act Utilitarianism and Act Deontology (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005). Utilitarianism can also be referred to as consequentialism and is focused on an act being either right or wrong by looking at the consequences in terms of the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Act Deontology looks at ethical decisions in the light of absolute rules, often coming from religion. In a Deontologist perspective certain acts are always wrong or always right regardless of the consequences. Viewing ethical dilemmas from the perspective of justice leads one to ask questions related to the rule or the law (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005).

Professional ethics has most often been viewed historically as a subset of the ethic of justice (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005). Under the ethic of justice morality is seen as fixed, universal principles imposed on schools (Miron, Bogotch & Biesta, 1999). These principles often take shape as professional codes of conduct from professional organizations within education. Organizations like The American Association of School Administrators, The National Association of Secondary School Principles, The National Association of Elementary School Principles, and The National Middle School Association have all created codes of ethical practice for members (Edmonson & Fisher, 2002). Even though these codes exist, little training takes place to ensure that members are even aware of standards (Edmonson & Fisher, 2002). There is a significant discrepancy between acceptance of the codes and

adherence to the codes in practice (Edmonson & Fisher, 2002). The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISSLC) recently created a group of six standards for educational professionals in leadership preparation programs and in practice. The fifth standard is devoted in full to ethical leadership (Murphy & Shipman, 1998).

The second school of thought in ethical study is best termed non-traditional. Writers such as Apple, Bakhtin, Bowles and Gintis, Foucault, Giroux, Greene, Purpel, and Shapiro are not convinced by the analytical, rational, step-by-step approach presented in the traditional view of ethics (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005). Authors writing from a non-traditional perspective challenge the status quo by seeking an ethic that deals with inconsistencies, formulates hard questions, and debates hard issues (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005). These authors force us to rethink democracy and redefine factors like privilege, power, culture, language, and even justice (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005). Starratt (1994) opened the floor to the theory of practice centered on three interrelated ethics necessary for the building and designing of an ethical school (Miron, Bogotch, & Biesta, 1999). These three ethics are justice, critique, and care (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005). In their text, *Ethical Leadership and Decision Making in Education* Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001, 2005) expanded Starratt's three ethics to include a forth, the ethic of profession. The ethic of the justice comes from traditional ethics previously discussed. Throughout the next few paragraphs, an explanation of the other three ethics of critique, care and profession will be presented.

The ethic of critique comes from critical theory, which focuses on social class and inequities. One of the major arguments of critical theorists is that the schools

reproduce the inequities in society (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005). Educators who work from a critical theory perspective seek to find a voice for those who have been silenced. According to Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001, 2005), "The ethic of critique, inherent in critical theory, is aimed at awakening educators to the inequities in society, and in particular, in schools" (p. 15). According to Moore (1996), democracy and majority rule can perpetuate a cycle of voicelessness for minority groups. To be silenced in a representative democracy is the same as being ignored. Moore goes further to say that "allowing minority groups into some type of collaborative relationship, in many cases, is considered discomforting the status quo" (p. 2).

The ethic of care finds its roots in feminist studies. Like critical theorists, feminists emphasize social responsibility, often discussed as injustice or inequity (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005). Carol Gilligan (1982) first explored an ethic of care when refuting Kohlberg's use of justice and progression through stages in resolving moral dilemmas. Nell Noddings (1992) affirms that "the first job of schools is to care for children" (p. 16). Noddings (1992) goes further to say that we cannot separate education from personal experience by expressing, "Who we are, to whom we are related, how we are situated all matter, in what we value, and how we approach intellectual moral life" (p. xiii). An ethic of care, according to Noddings (1992), reflects our memories of caring and being cared for. The ethic of care brings the focus of moral decision making to how the individuals involved are treated. Caring involves stepping beyond one's own frame of reference into the other's and is characterized by moving away from one's self (Mitten, 1996). In an ethic of care,

one responds to another out of love or natural inclination, the focus becomes connectedness and relationships (Mitten, 1996). True caring and understanding of others has been shown to aid in their empowerment (Mitten, 1996).

In a 2002 study, Williamson and Hudson looked at how the effects of socialization during the first year of administrative work affected female leaders in a male dominated culture. In this study, socialization was defined as the process of learning the regularities of the job, both formal and informal (Williamson & Hudson, 2002). Current norms and traditions from the traditional approach to ethics made it difficult for these new female administrators to use an ethic care in their decision-making. Williamson and Hudson (2002) found that relationships were stressed and contextual factors were important in the principals' socialization. For the new administrators, listening was a crucial part of caring (Williamson & Hudson, 2002). A feminist leadership style was considered an asset as opposed to a hindrance (Williamson & Hudson, 2002). Decisions that were grounded in what was right as opposed to what was legal seemed to be valued by the educational staff in the various schools studied (Williamson & Hudson, 2002). Williamson and Hudson (2002) concluded that caring for one's self needed to be balanced with caring for others.

Miron, Bogotch, and Biesta (1999) stress the importance of ethical leadership in a modern pluralist society. They advocate the use of non-traditional ethics because the pluralist nature of American society makes it difficult to define an all-encompassing ethical code. Too often the idea of morality as fixed, universal principles is imposed on schools (Miron, Bogotch, & Biesta, 1999). Lost in this concept of ethics are social interactions among people in specific contexts (Miron et

al., 1999). The argument is centered on the idea that modern institutions bring about policies and practices of exclusion, which can lead to social injustice, repression, and violence (Miron et al., 1999). They argue that to be just and caring means to continually address oneself to the plight and conditions of others (Miron et al., 1999).

It is important to note that no one administrator adheres to a single ethical theory (Marshall, 1993). It does not necessarily follow that women use feminist ethics and men use traditional patriarchal ethics (Mitten, 1996). Traditional ethics is based on principles and rules, and it ensures that different groups will argue and fight to prove which rules and principles are right (Mitten, 1996). Furthermore, ethical principles change over time as people grow and learn (Mitten, 1996). Non-traditional ethics like the ethics of critique and care are not guided by a single set of overarching principles. The individuals involved and the context become important elements in decision making when using a non-traditional approach to ethics.

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001, 2005) have expanded Starratt's multiple ethic theory to include a fourth ethic, profession. The ethics of justice, critique, and care, according to Shapiro and Stefkovich, do not provide an adequate picture of the factors that must be considered as educational leaders strive to make ethical decisions (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005). Professions such as law, medicine, dentistry, and business all include the study of ethics in their preparation programs (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005). Noting a need for professional ethical standards for educators, (Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium) ISLLC devoted one of its six standards of professional practice entirely to ethical leadership (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005). Many other codes have been developed by the states and

professional organizations, but they tend to be limited in their applications to everyday practice in the field (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005). Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001, 2005) define their concept of professional ethics as: "An ethical paradigm that includes ethical principles and codes of ethics embodied in the justice paradigm, but is much broader, taking into account other paradigms, as well as professional judgment and professional decision making" (p. 21).

They go further to suggest that:

> Educational leaders should be given the opportunity to take time to develop their own personal codes of ethics based on life stories and critical incidents and their own professional codes based on the experiences and expectations of their working lives as well as consideration of their personal codes. (p. 21)

The ethic of the profession places an emphasis on reflection for administrators as to why they make decisions in the manner that they do. School administrators are likely to be influenced strongly by personal values (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005). Along with personal values and written codes of ethics, community standards play a key role in ethical decision making (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005).

Changing Factors that Call for Ethical Leadership

In the 21st century, as society becomes even more demographically diverse, educational administrators will need to be able to develop and lead tolerant and democratic schools. According to Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001, 2005), diversity includes the cultural categories of race/ethnicity, religion, social class, gender, disability, and sexual orientation as well as individual differences including learning styles, exceptionalities, and age. Ethical decisions in schools tend to be complex and

can lead to the use of two or more of the previously mentioned paradigms to solve problems.

Recent corporate scandals have led to an increased emphasis on ethical leadership (Edmonson et al., 2003). As a result of the Enron scandal, several business schools now require students to take an ethics course (Edmonson et al., 2003). There also exists a sense of crisis in the economy and deterioration of the nation's well-being which stems from the reports of the 1980s like, *A Nation at Risk*, and the new focus on the global economy of the 21st Century (Murphy & Shipman, 1998). Students are achieving at the same rate or slightly better than 20 years ago, but the job market is changing. There exists justifiable pressure to redefine the educational system to address these concerns (Edmonson et al., 2003). Murphy and Shipman (1998) discuss several economic, political and social factors that are changing. These include the following: declining systems that hold fast, changing social dynamics, recalibration of control, new ways of thinking about teaching and learning and the failing of the existing managerial structure (Murphy & Shipman, 1998). Throughout the next few paragraphs, these changing environmental factors will be expanded upon, and the need for ethical educational leaders will become apparent in part due to the changing context that schools must function in.

The many systems that once were the cornerstone of American culture are in decline. The report, *A Nation at Risk*, published in 1983 presented the argument that the United States had fallen behind foreign competitors and placed the blame on the educational system. There was a belief by many that America's schools were becoming obsolete. The news media and politicians contributed to the problem by

reporting partial or incomplete information (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). Even though students are achieving at the same rate that they did 20 years ago, the belief that our education system is failing is deeply entrenched in society (Murphy & Shipman, 1998). This is partly due to the changing emphasis on the global economy and the fact that students are not prepared for entrance into the new job market (Murphy & Shipman, 1998).

The social dynamics are changing and there is increasing pressure on the schools to address the widening number of social problems in the nation. Minority enrollment and the number of disadvantaged students in the nation's schools are rising. The number of (English as a Second Language) ESL students is increasing. Families with one parent working and one parent providing care are no longer the norm. The numbers of social ills confronting society are increasing. Furthermore, children are disproportionately represented among the ranks of the impoverished. Dysfunction and health problems are on the rise marked by an increase in unemployment, unwanted pregnancy, alcohol and drug abuse, and violence (Murphy & Shipman, 1998). Some scholars believe that the schools offer a solution strategy to confront many of these societal ills (Murphy & Shipman, 1998).

New ways of thinking about teaching and learning are dominating educational literature. Behavioral psychology is being pushed out in favor of constructivist psychology and sociological perspectives on the way children learn. Research on cognition is taking center stage. A belief in the normal curve is being replaced by the focus on equal educational opportunity for all learners (Murphy & Shipman, 1998). This new view of teaching and learning centers on the belief that knowledge is

subjective and dependent on the values of the individuals and the context in which learning occurs. Learning is seen as a social phenomenon and attention is focused on the social origins of cognition. Traditional views of acquiring information are being replaced by an emphasis on learning to learn. Competition and individual learning is slowly being replaced by an emphasis on cooperative learning and social relationships. Attacks on tracking of students and a push for a core curriculum are commonplace. The core technologies of teaching are shifting to interdisciplinary vision, vertical curriculum, higher order thinking, use of technology, authentic assessment, and service learning (Murphy & Shipman, 1998). Student centered instruction is replacing teacher centered instruction.

The existing managerial structure of schools is failing (Murphy & Shipman, 1998). Education has traditionally used a bureaucratic machine model approach to managing schools (Murphy & Shipman, 1998). A machine model works well when the environment is stable; however, that is not the case in education today (Morgan, 1997). Murphy and Shipman (1998) state, “The current system is not capable of handling the problems facing education” (p. 11). The argument against the old model is that it has stifled creativity, initiative, and professional judgment.

Decentralization and professionally controlled systems are creating new models for school leadership. One of the major goals of the old bureaucratic model is to buffer the school from parents and community interests (Murphy & Shipman, 1998). New models are replacing this dominant model where parents and community members have a more powerful voice in decision making. Choice is becoming a powerful educational value. Choice in selecting schools, voice in school governance,

and partnership in the education of their children are all priorities for parents in the new collaborative model (Murphy & Shipman, 1998).

Paradigm Shift to Connectedness and Community

This new model of leadership for education involves creating a community rather than encouraging the current practice where hierarchy now reigns. This shift will make learning a possibility for everyone (Murphy & Shipman, 1998). Sergiovanni (1993) argues that the model of educational organizations must shift from a bureaucratic machine model to a community model if schools are to be successful. Sergiovanni argues that education has taken its model of organization from other disciplines. He concludes, "Educational administration has borrowed its definitions of quality, efficiency, and productivity as well as its strategies to achieve them from business" (Sergiovanni, 1993). Human motivation and human nature theories are built on self-interest (Sergiovanni, 1993). Schools as organizations seek to be legitimate by appearing to act rational. There is an assumption within educational leadership that hierarchy equals expertise (Sergiovanni, 1993). All of these factors have strengthened the power of the organizational structure in schools.

Sergiovanni argues the importance of a metaphor shift to community in order to better solve the problems facing education. According to Sergiovanni (1993), communities are defined by their centers of values, sentiments, and beliefs that provide the needed conditions for creating a sense of "we" from a collection of "Is" (Sergiovanni, 1993, p. 6). In addition, communities rely on norms, purposes, values, professional socialization, collegiality, and natural interdependence for control.

Sergiovanni goes further to explain that collegiality in organizations results from organizational structures. In a community collegiality comes from felt interdependencies, mutual obligations, and emotional and normative ties (Sergiovanni, 1993). Communities have qualities that endure time (Sergiovanni, 1993). Members pass through the community and customs and rituals are taught to new members (Sergiovanni, 1993).

Central to Sergiovanni's argument is the fact that in organizations, "What gets rewarded is what gets done" (1993, p. 16). He argues conversely that often, "What doesn't get rewarded doesn't get done" (1993, p. 16). In bureaucracies leadership is based on personal authority. In communities authority comes from shared ideals (Sergiovanni, 1993). In order for a community to develop, extrinsic reward systems need to be dissolved (Sergiovanni, 1993). Sergiovanni argues that for community to develop, bureaucratic models must be removed entirely.

Educational administration is lacking when compared to other professions that teach ethics. Professions such as medicine, dentistry, and law all have students study ethics as part of their preparation and socialization (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005). In education, if ethics is taught at all, it is done so at the doctoral level. Since many aspiring administrators take courses and gain certifications at the master's level, many principals and superintendents have no formal ethical training. Because society in the 21st Century is becoming more diverse, educational administrators, more than ever, will need to develop democratic and tolerant schools (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005). This lack of ethical training is due in part to the shortcomings of educational preparation programs, particularly administrative preparation programs

(Edmonson et al., 2003). Furthermore, educational literature and research seldom focus on ethics. Ethical codes have been implemented at every level of education, but little if any training is done to ensure that members are even aware of these standards (Edmonson et al., 2003).

Women in Educational Leadership

The review of related literature will now focus on female administrators as a whole as well as the subgroup of rural female administrators. Female administrators are underrepresented as a group in educational administration (Shakeshaft, 1993). There has been a lot of research done on educational administration, but often it is done from a male perspective and generalized to all (Shakeshaft, 1993). There are many barriers in place within the male dominated traditional environment that exist in many schools; however, many authors argue that a feminine leadership style is more appropriate for the conditions existing in education today.

The rural context can affect female administrators both positively and negatively. It can be an environment that welcomes a caring connected type of leader, or it can limit an administrator's ability to obtain a position, work effectively, and gain opportunities for advancement. Throughout the next few pages, the review of related literature will touch upon research related to women in administration and women in rural administration.

To better understand the role of female leaders in education, one must first gain background knowledge of women's roles in educational history. The historical story of women in education is summarized in Michael Apple's (1985) article,

Teaching and Women's Work. Apple explains that the job of teaching itself has changed throughout history. In 1920 teaching in the United States was 89 percent female. The ideologies of American culture associated with domesticity, the Industrial Revolution, and rising costs of education all contributed to the high numbers of female teachers (Apple, 1985). As qualification requirements and the duties of the profession increased, men left the field (Apple, 1985). As the bureaucratic model became entrenched in education, men assumed administrative roles (p. 64). Particular jobs in American culture were seen as "appropriate" for women and school leadership was not one of them (p. 67).

Charol Shakeshaft (1999) explained a series of six key historical factors affecting the role of women in education. These historical elements are: 1) bureaucratization of schools, 2) suffrage movement, 3) equal pay movement, 4) the Cold War, 5) societal expectations, and 6) expanded options (Shakeshaft, 1999). The bureaucratization of schools fostered the belief that women should teach and men should lead (Shakeshaft, 1999). There existed a conflict between collaborative leadership models and bureaucratic authoritarian leadership models in which bureaucracy won out (Shakeshaft, 1999).

During the suffrage movement women sought power in many organizations including schools (Shakeshaft, 1999). After the suffrage movement many women's groups lost power and dissolved (Shakeshaft, 1999). Even though equal pay was won, it was not always enforced. Given a choice of whether to hire a man or a woman for the same cost, many districts opted to hire men.

During World War II many women were welcomed into the schools only to be dismissed when the men returned (Shakeshaft, 1999). As a result of the G.I. Bill, many males sought higher education and assumed administrative roles in schools. During Vietnam many males entered teaching to avoid the draft. The Cold War brought about the belief that America's schools were falling behind. This was believed by many to be a result of the feminization of teaching (Shakeshaft, 1999). Societal expectations began to change, and single women who were once valued as teachers were looked upon as being deficient (Shakeshaft, 1999). Finally, Affirmative Action and the modern Feminist Movement have increased the opportunities for women in other fields. Consequently, many highly educated women are seeking employment in fields other than education (Shakeshaft, 1999).

In 1999, 7-10 percent of superintendents and 9-16 percent of high school principals in the United States were women (Logan, 1999). Charol Shakeshaft (1999) explains that the numbers are hard to determine because a national database is lacking. She goes further to explain that worldwide frustration also exists.

Women tend to be administrators at the elementary level (Glass, 2000). Glass (2000) conducted a survey of 2,262 superintendents, of whom 297 were women. Glass found that 75 percent of superintendents did not teach at the elementary level. Almost all of the respondents in the survey had been assistant principals or building principals at the high school level (Glass, 2000). As one progresses up the hierarchy of school management, the number of women in leadership roles dwindles. Mathews (2001) found that women are overrepresented in the number two position of assistant superintendent.

Women who do pursue the superintendancy in Pennsylvania are more likely than males to obtain a doctoral degree (Desai, 2008). Desai found that 78 percent of women superintendents in Pennsylvania hold doctoral degrees as compared to 53 percent of men. However, those female superintendents who hold doctoral degrees, on average, earn higher salaries than their male counterparts with the same level of preparation.

Gender Differences in Leadership Style

Until recently, writing on leadership focused mainly on men (Bolman & Deal, 2003). In recent years, there has been an increased interest in gender and leadership (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Women have proven that they can lead in a man's world, but do they lead differently? Research on leadership styles relative to gender is at best conflicting. Some differences cited in the research are listed in this section of the review of related literature. Differences found include the following: 1) Power relationships entered into by male and female administrators have been found to often differ; 2) Men and women have been found to communicate differently in leadership roles; 3) Sex-role stereotyping has a negative effect on leadership styles of women; and 4) Women and men educational leaders have been found to have different points of focus and different reasons for entering and leaving administrative roles. Again, it is important to note that much of the data presented in this section of the review of related literature represents tendencies related to gender; this data does not attempt to classify women into one category and men into another. In fact, most leaders exhibit many of the characteristics mentioned regardless of their gender.

Research evidence for gender differences in leadership is equivocal (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Bolman and Deal (1992) found no differences in frame orientation between men and women leaders. For the most part, available research suggests that men and women are more alike than different (Bolman & Deal, 2003). When differences are found, they generally show women scoring higher than men in a variety of measures of leadership and managerial behavior (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Differences are not substantial, and researchers often debate whether they have practical implications (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Throughout the next few pages, differences in leadership style found in the research will be explored. Although scholars argue about the relevance of these differences, they have been documented in studies.

Shakeshaft (1993) found that women as opposed to their male counterparts in school leadership differ in several ways. Women have been found to spend more time with people, communicate more, care more about individual differences, concerned themselves more with teachers and marginal students, and motivate more than men do (Shakeshaft, 1993). Moreover, women administrators are more productive, rated higher by their staffs, and have higher morale in their buildings than male administrators (Shakeshaft, 1993). Women are also more focused on instruction and more likely to coordinate instructional programs (Shakeshaft, 1993). Along with the differences in leadership styles, women have been found to do as well or better than men in many cases (Shakeshaft, 1993). The differences depicted in the research are discussed in the next few paragraphs.

The school climate that is generated by a male or female leader has been found to be different relative to gender. Parents are more favorable to school districts run by women (Shakeshaft, 1993). For female leaders building a democratic participatory environment is important. Women leaders ask for participation, and they usually get it. Their staff has shared professional goals, higher satisfaction, and more engagement (Shakeshaft, 1993).

Strachan (1999) conducted a qualitative study on feminist educational leadership and found several common themes linking the leaders. Feminists are motivated by equity, and critical reflection tends to be part of their decision making process. Power and its abuse, to maintain social inequities, were common focus areas for women leaders. The ethic of care is central to feminist leadership through its incorporation of caring and compassion, sense of community, and emphasis on belonging (Strachan, 1999). The three principals that Strachan (1999) studied enlisted core values of safety, a student centered environment and consensus building. By incorporating an ethic of care in their leadership the principals studied focused on improving academic performance, battling social problems, and rethinking their roles as leaders. The principals demonstrated a strong commitment to anti-violence and developing a safe environment for students to learn. Strong messages of anti-sexism and anti-racism were part of their leadership styles (Strachan, 1999). Clear guidelines for student behavior were viewed as part of caring. (Strachan, 1999). Supporting at-risk students and battling for social justice, which was a passion of all the principals, was a high priority. Consensus building and involving families in decisions about children was important for the leaders studied (Strachan, 1999).

According to one research study, female leaders have been found to have a greater understanding of what goes on in classrooms. Shautz (1995) studied 519 elementary principals with respect to their leadership styles. The characteristics of the female respondents showed a focus on a collaborative leadership style (Shautz, 1995). The female respondents stressed an ongoing commitment and caring toward teachers. The idea of care was stressed as opposed to the idea of right or wrong. The female respondents had a preference for handling instructional leadership and communication activities and avoided authoritative administrative activities. The empowerment of teachers was encouraged, and a shift from a top-down model of leadership to a collaborative model was stressed (Shautz, 1995).

Women and men have been found to communicate differently in professional settings. Females are more likely than males to be taught to be good listeners (Shakeshaft & Perry, 1995). Differences in speech have also been found between genders. Women tend to focus on connection and community while males tend to be hierarchy oriented. This difference was found to have an effect on supervision styles (Shakeshaft & Perry, 1995). Men and women were found to communicate differently and to listen for different things during a conversation. Women tended to focus on instructional matters and men on administrative matters (Shakeshaft & Perry, 1995).

Shakeshaft and Perry (1995) studied five pairs of principals concerning the ways they conducted a supervisory conference with teachers and found the following tendencies. The female principals gave more constructive and detailed feedback to teachers (Shakeshaft & Perry, 1995). Males tended to give vague and complementary feedback. Women principals were more likely to cite current educational resources

and more likely to stress individual student dignity (Shakeshaft & Perry, 1995). Women also attempted to connect with teachers by discussing family and personal items. Males, on the other hand, focused more on facts and right and wrong. Both male and female principals spent more time with male teachers (Shakeshaft & Perry, 1995). Women were able to build collegiality by asking not telling, listening not lecturing, using connected language, and focusing on students. Men and women also responded differently in their written evaluations to teachers. Each gave longer written evaluations to members of the same sex (Shakeshaft & Perry, 1995).

School administration has always been male dominated (Mertz & McNeely, 1998). Theories have been male dominated as well. The two administrative positions that have been particularly difficult for female applicants to attain are the superintendency and the high school principalship. Many have argued that a feminist leadership style is needed. Others argue that there is no difference in leadership styles based on gender (Mertz & McNeely, 1998).

According to Brunner and Duncan (1994), women not only want to be successful, they want to be successful as measured by the dominant culture. The definition of power in some cases is gender specific. Males have been found to use a power-over technique, and women have been found to use a power-to technique. The female power relationship with subordinates is different from the patriarchal norm (Brunner & Duncan, 1994). Women are caught in the middle of role-expectations and socialization of leadership. Social norms support the idea that power is masculine. Socialization exists both formally and informally within schools (Brunner & Duncan, 1994). Some women maintain a feminine power-to approach and others

do not (Brunner & Duncan, 1994). Women who operate with a masculine power-over approach often endure hostility and are not viewed favorably (Brunner & Duncan, 1994). Traditions of "good ole boys" networks impede success for women often operating in a non-traditional role (Brunner & Duncan, 1994). Furthermore, men recognize that women in leadership roles operate different than they do (Brunner & Duncan, 1994). Men tend to view the feminine concept of power-to as powerless (Brunner & Duncan, 1994). This is not to say that all men lead in one manner and all women in another. The power-over technique is not specific to men and the power-to technique is not specific to women. In fact, most leaders use a combination of both.

Gender Barriers

If women lead as well as men, why are they underrepresented in educational administration? Women candidates are available. In fact in the United States they now represent more than half of the students in educational administration programs (Bolman & Deal, 2003). While there is not a consensus about what maintains the glass ceiling, Bolman and Deal (2003) offer the following critical elements: "1) stereotypes, 2) conflicting expectations, 3) discrimination, and 4) high price of success" (p. 347). Both men and women believe that men do and women do not. High level positions are powerful by nature, but there is a belief that women should not be (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Many associate competence with males. Finally, women pay a higher price because of their greater need to be successful in family and personal life (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

There are many barriers, which limit female representation in educational administration, depicted in the research. Some of the barriers to administrative positions found by Charol Shakeshaft (1993) in her chapter, *Women in educational management in the United States*, include the following: how women are seen as less and different than men, word of mouth recruiting of White males, not allowing outside candidates to apply for positions, asking biased interview questions, offering lower salaries to women, separating applications based on sex, using criteria not related to performance, allowing men to skip steps in the application process, and having only male interviewers. Much has been written in the literature about the barriers that are in place preventing women's access to administrative positions in schools. Many scholars (Apple, 1988; Ataiyero, 2004; Chase & Bell, 1994; Dunshea, 1998; Shakeshaft, 1999; Vail, 1999; and others) have written about the barriers that women experience when aspiring to educational leadership positions. The context in which research is conducted is important (Creswell, 1994). Dunshea (1998) found that the rural context made it increasingly difficult for female principles in rural Australia to perform their duties during the first year on the job.

Women make up 65 percent of the teaching force but only 43 percent of the administrative positions (Shakeshaft, 1999). A shortage of qualified female candidates is not a barrier. In fact, most graduate students earning degrees in educational administration today are women (Tallerico & Tingley, 2001).

There are three primary assumptions that represent why numbers of women leaders lag behind men: women are not interested, capable, or qualified (Smith, 1991). There has, however, been a substantial increase in the number of women in the

candidate pool over the past decade (Smith, 1991). There are a growing number of qualified women administrative candidates in administrative preparation programs; in fact, in many cases the women outnumber the men. Women leaders have been found to be skilled at balancing the product orientation of schools with the human concerns of both employees and students (Williamson, 2003). Women administrators could be a valuable resource for rural school districts that are facing administrative shortages.

One study conducted by the RAND Corporation in 2004 found that the gender gap is still alive and well in educational administration (RAND, 2004). This study found positive trends in the representation of women but found differences in the rates of promotion of men and women (RAND, 2004). This study analyzed data from three states: Illinois, North Carolina and New York. In these three states, women make up about 70 percent of the teaching force but make up about half of the administrative positions. Female teachers are less likely than their male counterparts to move to the role of administration (RAND, 2004). Men in Illinois were two and a half times more likely than women to move to administration. Men in North Carolina were about three times as likely (RAND, 2004). Once promoted to assistant principal, women in Illinois were more likely to move to a principalship, and in North Carolina women were equally as likely as men to do so. In the states studied, the gender gap was larger at the elementary level (RAND, 2004). This is primarily the case because a higher percentage of elementary teachers were female. These findings could indicate that women do not seek administration positions as much as men or school districts favor men for administrative positions. No data specifically pointed to one explanation over the other (RAND, 2004).

The number of women in administrative roles has increased, but it is far from being proportionate to the numbers of women in education (Holtkamp, 2002). Women make up about 70 percent of the educational workforce, but only about 50 percent of administrators are women (Holtkamp, 2002). Women have considerable work to do to balance the ratio of female administrators relative to the number of female teachers (Holtkamp, 2002).

In 1972 Congress passed Title IX which prohibited sex discrimination in all educational institutions (Mertz, 2002). Whether, and to what extent, women are making progress still largely remains unanswered (Mertz, 2002). Mertz (2002) conducted a longitudinal study of the data collected since Title IX to explore women's progress (Mertz, 2002). The study focused on the number of women in one state within nine different administrative positions: superintendent, deputy superintendent, assistant superintendent, high school principal, high school assistant principal, middle school principal, middle school assistant principal, elementary school principal, and elementary school assistant principal. In the state being studied administrative positions increased from 641 to 1,248 since 1972 (Mertz, 2002). The number of females grew from 120 to 642 going from 18.7 percent to 51.5 percent (Mertz, 2002). The numbers of males holding positions increased slightly from 521 to 607 a percentage decrease from 81.2 percent to 48.7 percent (Mertz, 2002).

Parity has been developed in urban and suburban districts, but rural districts have lagged behind, partly due to the lower number of positions available (Mertz, 2002). Of all of the positions, the position of superintendent has changed the least. The high school principalship also experienced modest change. Females have made

the greatest growth in administrator positions on the lower rungs of the ladder. There are fewer females holding high school principalships than middle or elementary principalships (Mertz, 2002). Female administrators have achieved parity in central office positions, but gains in suburban and urban districts mask the lack of progress in rural areas and medium size cities (Mertz, 2002). Progress has been made since the passing of Title IX in 1972; however, numbers are still out of proportion with the numbers of female educators teaching in schools.

Recently state policies toward alternative certification have restricted women's access to administrative roles (Tallerico & Tingley, 2001). This has allowed people from outside education to enter the profession. Many times military and government leaders enter education, which in turn is limiting access to teachers. These professionals from the federal sector are primarily male candidates (Tallerico & Tingley, 2001).

The perception of women's ability to handle discipline, especially at the secondary level, has limited their access to principalship positions (Logan, 1999). Furthermore, Dunshea (1998) found that in rural Australia, community perception was such that the only appropriate person for the role of high school principal was a large male. Conversely, Strachan (1999) found that female principals had no problem handling violent students. Central to the principals she studied was a strong belief in anti-sexism, anti-racism, and anti-violence (Strachan, 1999). In this study, the female administrators suspended students, when necessary, and violent students were not taken from other schools (Strachan, 1999).

Domestic responsibilities, whether real or perceived, have affected women's accessibility to leadership positions. Ramsey (1997) studied 21 female superintendents in New York State with respect to their domestic responsibilities. The female superintendents were at the office late on many occasions and sometimes did not make it home for dinner at all (Ramsey, 1997). In all cases the husband took on an increased role at home (Ramsey, 1997). The respondents indicated that the husband's encouragement played a key role in their success (Ramsey, 1997). Seven of the 21 respondents were divorced, but still stressed the importance of a supportive relationship in order for them to take the role of superintendent (Ramsey, 1997). The respondents in this study seemed to talk at length about their personal lives, and it was evident to the researcher that family was not a side issue for these women (Ramsey, 1997). Researchers argue that children are a more significant issue than spouses (Ramsey, 1997). Some researchers like Adams and Hambright (2004), found that these family commitments can discourage female teacher leaders from seeking administrative positions. When they surveyed teacher leaders about the possibilities for administrative work and the inhibiting factors, one of the top five responses was having less family time (Hambright, 2004).

Informal socialization and networking structures are firmly entrenched in education and are often hard for women to penetrate. Within the male dominated culture of educational administration hurdles of preference and prejudice exist (Atiaiyero, 2004). Jacobs (2002) goes so far as to question, "If you don't play golf, smoke cigars, or ride a motorcycle, how effective can you be as an administrator" (p. 1)? Jacobs wrote about her personal experience in which the female administrators in

one school district were excluded from social activities sponsored by the superintendent because they were female. The social interactions outside of work were exclusionary based on gender (Jacobs, 2002). Jacobs (2002) argues that when a leader participates in activities with subordinates, they should be inclusive activities.

Jacobs is not the only scholar to stress the importance of the "good ole boys network." Shakeshaft (1993) confirms that women lack support systems that help them find and attain jobs. If women do not network as much as men, it is deemed a failure on their part, but little concern is voiced about the system of "good ole boys" (Chase & Bell, 1994). Wyatt (1992) conducted a national survey that showed that 12 percent of high school principals were women. From the research several conjectures were made including the difficulty for women in taking career advancement steps without the proper networking supports in place. Dunshea (1998) studied six female principals in their first year of administrative work. The principals expressed frustration in not being able to participate or feel comfortable in certain male oriented social functions (Dunshea, 1998). Furthermore, Archer (2003) surveyed women administrators about the barriers they experienced; she found networks and traditions that favor men to be listed in the top five.

Along with networking and traditions that favor males, hiring practices have been found by some researchers to favor males (Archer, 2003). Shakeshaft (1993) found several aspects of the hiring process to be detrimental to female aspirants. Women are often seen as less and different than men. Word of mouth recruiting often favors White males. Many times outside candidates are not allowed to apply for open positions. Biased questions are asked of female candidates. Separating applications

based on sex and offering lower salaries to female candidates has also been cited. Sometimes male candidates are allowed to skip steps in the hiring process. Moreover, leadership experience is often counted from the military and business worlds, a practice that also favors male candidates. In addition, sometimes hiring committees contain only male members (Shakeshaft, 1993).

At the highest level, the superintendency, search consultants play a key role (Chase & Bell, 1994; Kamler & Shakeshaft, 1999). Search consultants become a gatekeeper to the superintendency (Chase & Bell, 1994). Consultants often argue that women should change their social life contradicting societal values to make them better candidates. Furthermore, many times women who are superintendents have unconventional social lives (Chase & Bell, 1994). Often times when women and minorities receive a superintendency, it is a sure fail situation, and search consultants are partially to blame for this (Chase & Bell, 1994). Perceived weaknesses and the desire for different leadership styles create a paradox for women candidates (Kamler & Shakeshaft, 1999). When Kamler and Shakeshaft (1999) surveyed search consultants, they found many discriminatory attitudes. Consultants supported the myth that women were their own worst enemies and some blatantly said that they would not hire a woman (Kamler & Shakeshaft, 1999).

Two important issues have emerged regarding the superintendency and who will lead Americas schools in the future (O'Connell, 2000). First, the majority of superintendents are Caucasian males who are old enough to retire if they choose (O'Connell, 2000). Second, there is a large pool of female administrators as potential applicants for the superintendency (O'Connell, 2000). Research indicates that the

education profession is suffering from a lack of interest in pursuing the superintendency (O'Connell, 2000).

Women and men have different reasons for entering or leaving administrative roles. Female teachers, according to Shakeshaft and Perry (1995), are more likely than men to say that they always wanted to be teachers. Women administrators tend to focus on connection and community where men tend to look to gain ground and status when entering administrative roles (Shakeshaft & Perry, 1995). Sutter (1996) conducted a study of assistant principals' job satisfaction levels and concluded that female assistants reported higher levels of job satisfaction. In a 1999 study Ruhl-Smith, Shen and Cooley studied the different reasons that men and women enter the administrative ranks. They found that men move to administrative roles for power and status (Ruhl-Smith, Shen & Cooley, 1999). Women moved to administrative roles for the opportunity to work with teachers, contribute to society, pursue an interesting career, and work with adults (Ruhl-Smith et al., 1999). Overall women were more concerned about collegiality and the intrinsic rewards of administrative positions. Men were found to start their pursuit of administrative positions earlier than women (Ruhl-Smith et al., 1999). Women were found to be less likely to leave an administrative position because of an administrative or student problem. Women respondents reported that they would leave administration if the opportunity to do something more rewarding came along (Ruhl-Smith et al., 1999, p. 4).

Role models, mentors, and sponsors have been shown to play a key role in women's placement in administrative positions (Tripses, 2004). Because administration is a male dominated environment, women are less likely to join

networks of women (Tripses, 2004). Many studies describe the barriers for women reducing access to administrative roles, but few studies have focused on the search for promotion (Smith, 1991). In a (1999) study, Ruhl-Smith, Shen and Cooley explored the reasons people give for entering or leaving administration. They found that female candidates often moved toward administrative roles only after being convinced by a role model or a mentor (Ruhl-Smith et al., 1999). Furthermore, few women consider themselves candidates for administrative positions (Vail, 1999). Ataiyero (2004) found that for women to attain the superintendency, they needed the endorsement of a male sponsor. When an outside candidate was hired for a position, she often had to campaign for support or endorsement (Vail, 1999).

Sexuality can also be a factor that limits female candidates' access to administrative positions. Shakeshaft (1993) found that male discomfort with sexual issues serves as a barrier. When surveyed, superintendents said that they would hire an attractive female for an elementary principalship, but few felt comfortable hiring her as an assistant superintendent (Shakeshaft, 1993). Reasons included the following: being uncomfortable in a close working relationship with an attractive woman, school board perception, and marital friction (Shakeshaft, 1993). The male superintendents who were surveyed thought they may be attracted to the woman, and that would open the door to sexual harassment (Shakeshaft, 1993).

Women have also been noted by some researchers as being their own worst enemies. Ely (1994) studied the effects of organizational demographics and social identity on relationships among professional women. This study looked at women in the male dominated legal profession. Ely found that work relationships between

women are likely to be negative when there are large disparities between the numbers of women and men. Resentment among women in firms with small numbers of women became problematic. In this study, female lawyers who were working as partners in the firm were used as the sample (Ely, 1994). Women in male dominated firms were criticized for acting like males and viewed as having illegitimate authority (Ely, 1994). Women in male dominated firms experienced competitiveness that limited their ability to work together (Ely, 1994). Sexuality was a point of jealousy in male dominated firms (Ely, 1994). In short, a single women partner created an environment of resentment and hostility among subordinate women. This is significant to educational administration in that many times a female administrator may be the only female leader, and many times they may be the first.

Women Administrators in the Rural Settings

The research on women in educational leadership positions has been growing; however, female administrators in the rural context have seldom been the focus of study. Women as a group are underrepresented in the literature on educational administration, but the literature often overlooks the rural principalship entirely (Grady, Perry, & Krumm, 1997). Socialization, bias, and role stereotyping are all elements that need to be considered in the rural context. Female administrators in rural settings may have an entirely different experience when compared to their urban and suburban counterparts. Research tends to generalize male experiences to fit all administrators, and it also generalizes urban and suburban findings to be applicable to

rural schools. By making these generalizations, researchers are doing the profession a disservice.

Gill (1994) conducted a study of female educators who were seeking administrative employment in New Brunswick, Canada. The respondents expressed that they had encountered several barriers related to the rural context. The perceptions of the community and teachers acted as barriers (Gill, 1994). The perception was that administration at the secondary level was not women's work (Gill, 1994). According to Hoffman (1991), a supportive senior administrator is crucial to a woman obtaining an administrative position. Stereotypes of men's and women's work acted as a barrier. Other barriers the respondents encountered included the following: poor self image, lack of confidence, lack of aspiration and motivation, lack of support, home and domestic responsibilities, lack of preparation, and discrimination in hiring practices (Hoffman, 1991). Moreover, informal socialization practices were found to have a negative affect (Hoffman, 1991).

Wallin (2001) examined the impact of the rural context on the career patterns of female administrators in rural Saskatchewan. Of the 107 women interviewed, the youngest administrators were in depressed communities. Female representation was highest at the building level. The idea of, "It has always been done this way" affected women administrators, especially in depressed areas (Wallin, 2001). The personal views of the administrators surveyed reflected the perceived view of the community. Wallin found that community fit impacts the development of career plans (Wallin, 2001). Moreover, rural communities were willing to accept a female administrator as long as her values and ideology reflected that of the community (Wallin, 2001).

Wallin (2001) closed the study by pointing out that because administrators in rural areas must accept the dominant culture as well as the dissenters; it is an ideal situation for collaborative leadership.

In a 1994 study Hite explored the sociological factors in rural communities that impacted the entrance and upward mobility of female administrators. Hite found that the rural context presented some difficult barriers to female administrators. Networking and mentoring barriers seemed to be escalated by the rural context. Religious affiliation was found to be an important component for female aspirants obtaining an administrative position in rural settings. The denomination affiliation of the prospective administrator was found to be a barrier to employment if it was different than the dominant community denomination. In addition, marital status was found to be a barrier to women. Women who were single or divorced seemed to experience difficulty in the rural environment (Hite, 1994). A dominant belief exists in the rural community that women should be "sugar and spice and everything nice," and they were not suited to lead (Hite, 1994). Hite also found that physical size of women worked against them as the perception in the community was such that a large male was best suited to be an educational leader (Hite, 1994).

The path to school administration can also work against female applicants. Livingston (1998) studied 40 graduate students who had assumed administrative positions in rural settings. The respondents stressed that the path to the principalship was through the assistant principalship (Livingston, 1998). Coaching experience was also sited as being important (Livingston, 1998). These findings are significant

because the assistant principalship and coaching positions are both male dominated positions in rural schools.

Administrators in rural settings have different leadership styles based on gender (Boone, 1997). In a 1997 study of superintendents in Texas, respondents filled out a survey about their respective leadership styles (Boone, 1997). Female superintendents used "challenging the process" and "modeling the way" more than their male counterparts (Boone, 1997). There was no difference in the focus both sexes placed on inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart (Boone, 1997).

Rural schools are faced with a shortage of administrators (Howley & Pendarvis, 2002). Job pressures are more complex and more stressful than ever before. Principals face long hours, low pay, accountability, emphasis on collaboration, loss of power, lack of resources, and extreme expectations of different constituencies (Howley & Pendarvis, 2002). Howley and Pendarvis (2002) argue that this shortage of administrators can be alleviated, in part, by encouraging the application of women and minorities.

The high school principal is an educational leader with a powerful effect on the lives of all those around them. Principals influence all the activities of the school. They provide stewardship for a shared educational vision. This task may become difficult in rural school districts when the school's vision may be in conflict with the beliefs and values of the very community it serves. This paradox can provide many difficult ethical decisions for the high school principal.

The rural high school principal must wear many hats. In a smaller school district, roles and responsibilities are often less defined. Formal leadership training does not adequately prepare rural principals for the host of duties they may encounter. Research, often conducted with an urban and suburban focus, leaves little guidance for the rural principal. Furthermore, there is a shortage of educational administrators to fill rural high school vacancies. Women may be a viable and well qualified solution to solve the leadership vacancies in rural schools, but often the rural community escalates the barriers already in place for women who aspire to attain a high school principalship. This study adds to the existing knowledge base on rural high school principals and expands upon the understanding of the dynamic that is the rural high school principalship.

Summary of the Literature on Rural Administrators and Ethical Leadership

Although research on rural administrators is lacking, some studies exist that focus on the phenomenon of rural educational leadership. Within that body of research, fewer studies exist that focus on women in educational leadership. Ethical leadership in the rural context is a phenomenon that has not been studied. Throughout this section of the review of related literature, an overview of the work done in these areas will be provided. Because ethical leadership in the rural context is silent in the literature, research on ethical educational leadership in general will be explored. Studies are presented in chronological order from the most recent to the oldest.

Educational Leadership in the Rural Context

Blake (2003) studied school culture in one rural consolidated school district located in the southwestern United States. Two of the schools that volunteered to consolidate were segregated. One school was entirely African American and the other European American. One of the schools had a diverse population. The schools agreed to consolidate in 1986, and a new school was opened in 1988. The researcher interviewed 26 stakeholders and conducted observations to explore the new school's culture. The data revealed a fragmented school system due to inconsistencies with policy enforcement and the treatment of stakeholders.

Jones and Karen (2003) studied instructional leadership practices of rural educational leaders. They found that rural leaders are often isolated from their peers and have limited time to examine their own professional growth. They also found that little research has been done in the area of effective rural school leadership. This study explored principals' self reported instructional leadership strategies against performance scores of their students on the Texas Academic Excellence Indicator System. Principals from community schools with student enrollment of 500 or less students were surveyed. Results were grouped into two categories: exemplary schools and acceptable or low performing schools. The study found no significant differences in the means between the two groups.

Lamkin (2003) explored whether or not rural superintendents are adequately prepared to lead in the rural context. Lamkin interviewed 57 superintendents in three states. Work in rural schools was found to be as complex as work in urban and suburban settings. The rural superintendent, however, needed to assume many

different roles in the rural district. Superintendents discussed frustration with their lack of training relative to the rural context. They stressed that networks, professional development, and mentors formed the basis for their core knowledge. Past and present experience and gaps between formal training and the requirements of the job were present in the discussions. The role of rural superintendent has become increasingly challenging due to increased demands and diminishing supports. Lamkin found that the demands of rural leadership differ significantly enough to warrant specialized training.

Rembold (2002) studied rural superintendents' attitudes toward development activities within their districts. Specifically, this study explored rural superintendents' perceptions regarding rural development, implementation of rural development activities, and the skills necessary to support rural development activities. Rembold found a resistance to implementation of rural development activities. Neutral or negative attitudes toward rural development activities were found to exist.

Caroll (2000) studied the barriers to making change in one rural school district. State and federal initiatives called for change and a redefining of predominant belief systems. Caroll found that factors inhibiting change included the following: hard work, poor leadership, time, lack of trust, and commitment. Historical elements also worked against change. Caroll found a strong trust in the community with regard to teachers. This belief in the current system enabled students, especially low achievers and disenfranchised students, to fail and go

unnoticed. After five years, no noticeable measures of change were visible (Caroll, 2000).

Lochry (1998) studied superintendents and principals in small rural elementary schools within small districts in California. The purpose of this study was to explore the demands of administration in small rural districts where administrators are often not prepared for the responsibilities of the job. In turn, high administrative turnover rates existed in the districts of study. The participants in this study perceived themselves as being very involved with the duties and responsibilities of the position. In the districts of study, the superintendents acted as elementary school principals. This was primarily a result of the size of the district. The results of this study suggest that administrative preparation programs need to better prepare potential administrators for the demands of administrative positions in small rural districts.

Knapp (1998) studied leadership in poor rural districts from the perspective of educational leaders who introduced initiatives and programs that focused on students, staff, and school climate. Specifically the study explored the following questions: 1) What initiatives have the principal taken to offset disadvantages of small size, rural isolation, and lower than average wealth? 2) Which of these initiatives have been successful? 3) What are the indicators of success? and 4) What were the barriers to successful implementation, and how were they overcome (Knapp, 1998)? Seventy-eight small, poor, rural districts in New York state were studied. The most commonly listed successful initiatives were school-college partnerships, block scheduling, inclusion, distance learning, common planning time, and professional development.

Indicators of success were higher Regents Exam scores and higher inclusion rates. The greatest barriers listed were teacher resistance and financial limitations (Knapp, 1998).

Hackett (1997) studied leadership styles of principals in urban and rural schools in Alabama. This study classified leadership styles into three categories: responder, manager, and initiator. Hackett explored whether or not differences exist relative to the location of the school. The study found no significant relationship between leadership style and the location (urban vs. rural) of the school.

Smith (1996) studied the mobilization of the community and stakeholders in one rural county for the improvement of education. The essential question that guided this study was how to influence educators, business people, and policy makers to unite around a common goal of improving the educational system. The results of this study helped to develop an annual conference for community collaboration. This conference serves as a vehicle to bring stakeholders together, helps them focus on common goals, and allows for the ongoing development of improvement plans. The local community college plays a key role in coordinating the work.

Rural schools face issues around technology and minimizing the effects of the digital divide. Brown (1996) studied 70 rural school districts in Colorado to explore factors influencing technology use in rural schools. The superintendent and principals' uses of educational technology were found to be significant. School district demographics also influenced technology use including the number of minority students and the socio-economic level of students. Brown found that superintendent and student demographics were significant in determining technology

use in rural schools. Severns (1998) studied principals' perceptions of technology use in a rural county in New Jersey. Severns found that principals' perceptions on Internet usage in their schools strongly related to their own use of technology.

Hauck (1995) studied two rural Wisconsin districts where the community got involved to save two failing districts. One school district served five communities and faced a crisis related to the age of their school buildings. A referendum was passed by a 2 to 1 margin to rectify the situation. In another district, a similar condition existed. Two referendums for new schools failed, and the third attempt passed only after the involvement of a multi-millionaire. Both of the districts were able to avoid consolidation attempts. Six themes emerged from the research which helped to explain the controversy: community identity, consolidation issues, location of schools, interest groups, educational ecology, and leadership.

Women in Educational Leadership in the Rural Context

Wilson (2003) studied the career paths of women administrators in Winnipeg, Canada. Changes in the number of female administrators were found to occur in waves, beginning with elementary assistant principalships, secondary assistant principalships, and the elementary principalship. Wilson found that this change was achieved by encouraging the recruitment of female candidates and then following through by supporting them. Both male and female administrators saw the benefits of the district's affirmative action policy (Wilson, 2003).

Karstens (2002) studied barriers to women obtaining educational administrative positions in South Dakota. The purpose of this study was to investigate

the reasons why women obtain degrees in secondary administration and then choose not to pursue or not to pursue a position immediately. The majority of candidates surveyed were married, over the age of 50 and had two to four children. Most of the respondents chose to pursue an advanced degree because they had always wanted to obtain one. The results of this study indicate that even though the numbers of women obtaining degrees and certifications in secondary administration continues to increase, they are not necessarily planning to seek positions. The respondents expressed that the decision to pursue a position was a matter of choice rather than an acknowledgement of the barriers limiting their access (Karstens, 2002).

Wallin (2001) studied the impact of the rural context on the career patterns of female educational administrators in Saskatchewan. All female administrators, as well as, 30 male administrators in Saskatchewan were sent a questionnaire. Wallin found that organizational fit relative to community expectations for the school's leader was significant in obtaining administrative positions. Female participation in administration was found to be strongest at the building level. Wallin also found that women in growing economic areas experienced more barriers to entering administration than women in stable or depressed economic areas.

Boyd (1998) studied characteristics of male and female secondary principals and aspirants in the state of Arkansas. Boyd found that age was the main difference between men and women candidates obtaining secondary administrative positions. Males tended to enter administration at an earlier age. Preferential hiring practices were found to exist in which some candidates had to submit resumes and go through interviews while other candidates did not. Boyd (1998) found that males were more

likely to plan their careers than females. More females than males viewed professional training as a requirement for advancement. Female secondary principals were found in equal proportion in both urban and rural areas. Finally, women comprised about 20 percent of the aspirant pool, but only 9 percent of the administrative positions (Boyd, 1998).

Woodworth (1996) studied factors that were significant in the careers of female superintendents in rural New York. A profile of the 'typical' rural female superintendent was developed from the questionnaires. Woodworth found significant evidence that female administrators' career paths had become shorter and more direct. Encouragement remained a significant factor in women obtaining the superintendency. Other factors that were found to be significant included the following: resilience, administrative experience, and consistency between the superintendent and community expectations (Woodworth, 1996).

Kelley (1994) studied female administrators in one rural New England school district. In this particular district, most of the administrative positions were held by females. Kelley explored how these female leaders approached leadership as a group and individually. The women worked together in many areas of school administration. Competition did exist but not for the purpose of personal gain. Competition was based on providing adequately for their faculties and their students across the different buildings in the district (Kelley, 1994).

Robinson-Hornbuckle (1991) studied female leadership styles of rural school administrators. Twelve rural administrators were interviewed in this qualitative study. The female leaders tended to accept tightly bound traditional roles at home,

more so than their suburban and urban counterparts. The importance of church and family were integrated into their beliefs. The women denied sex discrimination at work that seemed obvious to the researcher. These women used authoritarian methods, confronting problems in a direct manner. Most of the leaders displayed pride at being able to work within the rural environment where they were deeply embedded in rural traditional cultural and social norms. The leaders were strongly committed to the success of their schools and the rural students they served (Robinson-Hornbuckle, 1991).

E*thical Leadership in the Rural Context*

The literature did not provide any studies conducted specifically on ethical leadership in the rural context. For the purpose of this review of related literature, a summary of the work that has been done around ethical educational leadership will be presented. Several studies have been done regarding how educational leaders solve difficult ethical dilemmas and many also present the need for ethics training in administrator preparation programs.

High (2005) conducted a study to explore the ethical training in administrator preparation programs. High surveyed a group of students graduating from administrator preparation programs. Respondents rated critical thinking as the most important ethical principle for educational leadership. Ethical behavior and ethical character traits were also listed by the respondents as being important (High, 2005).

Kallinich (2005) studied the types of ethical dilemmas principals face and how they solve them. Kallinich used the ethical paradigms of care, critique, justice

and profession to frame how leaders solved dilemmas. Principals face difficulties in making moral decisions because of many factors including: a strong commitment to do the right thing when it may be in conflict with policies and procedures, isolation within the organization, a lack of understanding by interest groups as to the rationale of the decision, and a lack of known resources to support the principal in making the decision. Kallinich recommended training for principals in ethical decision making.

Bruno (2004) studied school board members and superintendents in Ohio to explore how they make difficult ethical decisions. Data was collected by interviewing six school board members and six superintendents. Two of the participants identified their ethical decision making as based on justice, one with critique, four with justice and care, one with justice and critique, and four with justice, care and critique. No differences emerged between race, age, experience. Many of the respondents used a multiple paradigm approach to solving difficult ethical dilemmas (Bruno, 2004).

Cutler (2003) interviewed educational leaders about the meanings of care and quality as it relates to transformational leadership. The ethics of care, critique and justice were used to frame the research. Six themes emerged from the data about the meaning of care within the school context including the following: challenging the status quo, collective and individual concern, redefinition of relationships, supportive environments, sense of connectedness, and moral purpose (Cutler, 2003).

A study conducted by Nix (2002) surveyed a random sample of 162 educational administrators who were asked to respond to an ethics orientation self-test. Nix found no differences between males and females in the principles they use

to solve dilemmas. Leaders did not respond differently based on age. Years of experience were also not found to be significant. Respondents across elementary, middle, and high school showed no differences (Nix, 2002).

Harkness (2000) studied the different principles that educational leaders use to make difficult moral decisions. A national sample of school board members, state directors of special education, district superintendents, personnel directors, special education directors, school principals and representatives from higher education participated in this study. The participants responded to two vignettes about decisions regarding students and two about personnel decision making. The analysis of the vignettes indicated that 113 of the respondents did not apply the principles that they had stated they used. Using the ethic of justice, the characteristic of following rules was the most frequently used principle (Harkness, 2000). The results of this study support the idea that the socialized bureaucracy in education affects decision making.

Concluding Remarks

This study explores educational leadership in the rural context. It looks at principals' perceptions on differences and similarities between male and female educational leaders within rural communities in Pennsylvania. The study adds to existing literature related to ethical educational leadership and its adaptation to the rural context. By looking at leadership within the rural context, this study explores leadership as it grapples with several paradoxes that are reinforced by the rural context.

The rural context presents several paradoxes with which educational leaders must contend. These paradoxes include the following: one best system vs. local control (Nachtigal, 1997), moving up means moving out (Harmon, 2001), real problems vs. intellectual problems (Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995), and place based education vs. individualism (Harmon, 2001). These conflicting values exist when urban and suburban educational ideals are introduced into rural contexts making the job of a rural administrator difficult if he or she does not understand them.

Rural school administrators encounter conflict regarding the control of schooling. Rural citizens may view the schooling of their children as different from the agenda of education (Howley, 1988). Local control is a deeply held value in most rural districts (Arnold, 2004). Whenever consolidation issues are discussed it often triggers a heated debate (Arnold, 2004). Traditionally, the "one best system" as defined by progressive education promotes "bigger is better" (Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995). Best practices, however, may not be the same everywhere (Howley, 2001). Increased levels of accountability have shifted much of the control of schools to the state and federal levels. According to Nachtigal (1994), distant decision makers have increased the chasm between the "haves" and "have-nots" in many rural areas. Federal mandates often impose burdens for rural districts that are out of scale when compared to benefits (Howley, 1988). These issues, according to Howley (1988), illustrate a failure to understand rural schools and the communities that stand behind them. Many times the rural context is viewed as an impediment to progress, and schools attempt to stay removed from the rural community. Harmon (2001) believes that leaders in rural schools must resist the pressures to separate or isolate the school

from local policies. Harmon goes further to say that schools need to learn how to think globally, but act locally.

Another prevalent conflict in rural education is the belief that for rural students, moving up in social class often means moving away. Student outmigration is a substantial problem for many rural communities. There is a tendency within rural schools to send the best and brightest away from the community (Edmondson, 2001). Neoliberalism promotes the idea that sharing in economic goals of the marketplace will lead to the "American Dream." For many students finding the "American Dream" means leaving rural areas and relocating to suburban and urban settings (Edmondson, 2001, p. 7). Many rural parents struggle with the decision to send their children away or to have them participate in the rural way of life (Edmondson, 2001). Often if youth opt to stay in rural areas, they are labeled by educators as having low aspirations (Harmon, 2001). Rural parents often do not play an active role in influencing their children to seek post-secondary education (Trainer, 1993). Rural schools, according to DeYoung (2002), are enigmas because those who work in the schools often have different views about the community compared to the residents.

Within the rural context, there exists a conflict concerning the nature and purpose of the curriculum and the school itself. After the conclusion of World War II, elite students with college aspirations and the students who were focused on occupational learning were at odds with each other (DeYoung, 2002). Hence, high schools began tracking students in the 1950s. Comprehensive schools were popular because each track was available. Rural high schools posed a problem because they did not have the resources to provide a comprehensive education (DeYoung, 2002).

School consolidation was often seen as progress by rural elites (DeYoung, 2002). Moreover, teachers and administrators in rural schools began to believe that students needed to leave to be successful.

The other side of the argument promotes local issues as a curricular focus (DeYoung, 2002). Local people often view the school as much more than an instructional site (DeYoung, 2002). The school serves as a source of social activity at the center of the community. DeYoung (2002) goes further to say that the school even serves as a marriage market in some rural communities. A value conflict exists about the curricular focus and the overall purpose of schools in rural communities. DeYoung (2002) argues that local values are not inferior to educational values.

Another value conflict that weighs heavily on rural schools and its leaders is the focus on the individual good vs. the community good. Society tends to measure success by individual profit and has generally forgotten about public good (Harmon, 2001). Harmon (2001) argues that schools need to pay attention to their communities, as well as, the individual student. Theobald and Nachtigal (1995) argue that there is an emerging worldview of culture that rejects global competition and our excessively individualized orientation to life. For this to occur, education needs to refocus on the place where the community is found (Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995). Many rural residents have a strong sense of community, and they do not necessarily buy into the market model of Neoliberalism.

All of the previously mentioned elements of the rural context have a considerable impact on the lives and work of rural administrators. With little guidance from existing literature, rural administrators must sort out what is best for

students while conflicting values breed arguments between the school and the community. At the same time the school is a central focus of the community for reasons other than the instruction of children.

This study adds to the existing knowledge base on educational leadership that has traditionally focused on leadership in an urban or suburban setting. By focusing on rural educational leadership, this study attempts to fill a gap in the literature. Specifically, this study explores educational leadership in rural districts and explains how both women and men leaders obtain positions, lead, and make difficult ethical decisions within the context that is rural education.

Rural schools have not vanished, but the literature on them is significantly underdeveloped (DeYoung, 1994). Topper Sherwood (2001) states that there are significant deficiencies in the national bodies of rural research, including available raw data on rural schools. When research is conducted on rural areas, researchers often fail to realize their urban biases (Sherwood, 2001). Moreover, when rural schools are depicted, they are often shown in light of their inadequacies instead of their assets (Sherwood, 2001). Researchers working in the field often are frustrated with the existing body of research. Sherwood (2001) explains that the missing body of research keeps us from asking the right questions.

Researchers who conduct a study in a rural area term it a rural study (Sherwood, 2001). Many times this is done without including the impacts of the rural context. Most of the researchers in education come from large urban and suburban universities. However, there are not many people working on doctorates in rural education. Funding is needed to draw educational researchers toward a rural focus.

Most of the funding associated with rural education has been tied to agriculture (Sherwood, 2001). When grants for research are awarded they often go to large urban universities and those universities often do not focus on rural education (Sherwood, 2001). The stereotypical images of rural life and the lack of a clear definition of what it is to be rural continue to cloud research (Sherwood, 2001).

This study adds data to a body of research that is significantly lacking when compared to urban and suburban literature. By using a rural focus, the researcher conducted a rural study, truly considering the essential elements of the rural context which adds to the study's validity. This study looks at rural high school principals' perceptions regarding their preparation for leadership in the rural context. This study also considers principals' perceptions relative to gender when looking at the dynamic phenomenon that is rural leadership. This study adds to existing educational leadership literature on gender by extending the knowledge base through adding a rural element. Finally this study looks at leadership through an ethical lens. This element is essential to understanding the difficult decisions that rural educational leaders face. The rural context presents many difficult paradoxes that rural leaders must understand and contend with if they are to be successful in the rural environment. By looking at how educational leaders solve difficult ethical dilemmas in a rural setting, this study adds to existing research on ethical educational leadership through a contextual focus on rural schools.

Rural educational leadership has historically been underserved by the body of literature. Rural schools and their leaders function in a dynamic that is the rural context. The rural context presents several paradoxes for leaders to contend with.

Difficult ethical decisions arise that leaders must contend with. Because research is underdeveloped in the area of rural educational leadership, school leaders in rural districts have few empirical studies on which to base practice. Women leaders are underrepresented as a group within rural educational leadership. By studying rural educational leadership, the career path and barriers associated with obtaining positions and ethical decision making in the rural context, this study will add to the existing educational leadership knowledge base by extending it to a specific rural focus.

CHAPTER III
METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Assumptions and Rationale for a Qualitative Design

This study was conducted using a qualitative research design. It is descriptive and deductive in nature, and it seeks to understand the phenomenon that is the rural high school principal. According to Yin (2003), "In general the case study is the preferred method when how or why questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is a contemporary phenomenon in some real-life context" (p. 1). Yin goes further to state that "the essence of a case study is that it tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result" (p. 3). Merriam (1998) asserts, "Qualitative research can help us to see how all of the parts work together to form a whole" (p. 6). The product of qualitative research is richly descriptive (Merriam, 1998). The case study allows the researcher to cope with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many variables involved beyond the control of the researcher (Yin, 2003).

A case study methodology was chosen for this study. In addition, this case study included some ethnographic methods. An educational ethnography typically deals with the culture of a school community (Merriam, 1998). Culture essentially refers to beliefs, values, and attitudes that structure the behavior patterns of a specific group of people (Merriam, 1998). Because leadership does not occur in a vacuum, the culture of the individual schools and the surrounding community plays a part in understanding the leader's decision making strategies.

A case is a bounded event, part of a system (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). It is common to realize certain elements of a case occur within the system and others occur outside (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). One of the most significant outside features is context. Furthermore, boundedness and patterns are useful concepts for determining the case. This study explored rural principals within the system that is the school district; however, outside elements of the rural context are crucial to understanding the phenomenon of study. According to Denzin and Lincoln, a case study is the process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry. In other words, a case study is studying a particular phenomenon at one time in one specific setting.

Cases of a particular phenomenon may be similar or dissimilar (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Cases are chosen because it is believed that by understanding them it will lead to better understanding of a larger collection of cases. Case study researchers seek to understand what is common and also what is different about the case, but the end result of research often focuses on the differences. This study used a sample of four rural high school principals. By looking at commonalities and differences, the researcher was able to explore the research questions guiding this study. According to Denzin and Lincoln, the case study researcher should gather data in the following areas: the nature of the case, historical background, physical setting, outside contexts, other cases, and other informants through which the case can be known.

The case study can be seen as one step toward generalization (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Generalization should not be the guiding focus. Searching for theory

or generalization can draw the researcher away from understanding the case itself (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Case study research requires immersion in the field of study and the case study researcher must decide how long to study an individual case. Issues are complicated with many variables and relationships to be considered. Case study researchers orient themselves to the complexities of the case connecting practices to abstractions. Researchers focus on foreshadowed problems, focus on observations around issues, and interpret data patterns. In this study, the researcher focused on the rural context and the educational leaders within. The researcher foreshadowed the problems presented by the rural context like social reproduction that may affect the ethical decision-making of educational leaders.

A case study can be seen as one item to be studied as imbedded in a number of contexts or backgrounds (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Historical context, cultural context and physical context are almost always essential. Contexts can go a long way toward making the relationships understood. Case study research requires understanding these complexities. Sequence of events and coincidence are more important than determining causal relationships. Inquiry designs are the favored approach for most case studies.

Case study researchers should place themselves in the middle of what is going on. The researcher should be reflective regarding that which is observed. Data are constantly collected and interpreted. Researchers spend extended time on site immersed in the field. Most case study research is richly descriptive and is done with intrinsic interest in the field. There rich data allow the researcher to communicate complex meanings in a concise report (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Case studies are

different from other types of qualitative research using intensive description and analysis of a single unit or a bounded system (Merriam, 1998). In a case study the investigator is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data to produce meaningful information.

Case study research is usually interactive. The researcher will use a variety of methods to collect data. Using multiple ways of knowing, or triangulation, reduces the likelihood of misinterpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In this study the researcher used multiple sources of data including the following: semi-structured interviews, documents, observations, archival records, field notes, and reflective notes.

The Role of the Researcher

In order for the researcher to be successful certain key characteristics are crucial. Because of the nature of qualitative research, the researcher must have a high tolerance for ambiguity. The use of interviewing requires the researcher to be sensitive and a good communicator (Maxwell, 1996).

In case study research, the researcher is the primary instrument of the research (Maxwell, 1996). The researcher's personal background is of interest. The researcher is originally from a rural area and experienced public education in a rural setting. The researcher is currently a public school administrator and was formerly a high school teacher. This provided some interesting insights to the study and the interpretations of the findings. According to Maxwell (1996), traditionally what researchers bring to the research from their background and identity has been treated

as bias, the influence of which needs to be eliminated from design rather than a valuable component of it. However, separating the research from other aspects of the researcher's life can cut him or her off from a major source of insights, hypotheses, and validity checks (Maxwell, 1996). The contextual concept of the study is defined by Maxwell (1996) as the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that support and inform the research. The researcher's background added to the contextual concept of the study and became a key element in the design of the study. In this case the researcher was aware of his perspective and his background, and rather than creating a bias, it aided in the data collection and served as a source of internal validity as part of the analysis procedure.

Within the technical procedures of this study, the researcher participated both as an interviewer and as an observer. With respect to observing, the researcher practiced total immersion within the field. The researcher observed each principal for two days. During those days, the researcher shadowed the principal as he or she carried out the activities of a normal day. The observations were conducted in a non-participatory manner, meaning that the researcher was primarily an onlooker within the school setting.

The role of the researcher as an interviewer was interactive. Because the identity of the interviewer was that of an assistant principal and high school educator, which was revealed to the subjects, the interviewer's behavior was interactive during the process. Both the interviewer and subject, within the context of the interview setting, shared common experiences relative to administrative work and the rural high school setting.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are paramount for the researcher when conducting a qualitative study.

> Qualitative case studies are limited by the sensitivity and integrity of the investigator. The researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. This has its advantages, but training in observation and interviewing, though necessary is not readily available to aspiring case study researchers. (Merriam, 1998, p. 42)

The researcher has gone through training in interviewing and data collection procedures through formal coursework at Temple University. Moreover, the interview instruments were field-tested and member checks were used to test for accuracy of the collection procedures and analysis through piloting the instruments.

Ethical considerations are important in analysis and dissemination of findings as well.

> Since the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection, data have been filtered through his particular theoretical position and biases. Deciding what is important – what should or should not be attended to when collecting and analyzing data – is almost always up to the investigator. Opportunities thus exist for excluding data contradictory to the investigator's views. Sometimes these biases are not readily apparent to the researcher… Biases that cannot be controlled should be discussed in the written report. Where the data only partly supporting predictions, the report should contain enough data to let the readers draw their own conclusions. (Merriam, 1998, p. 216)

The researcher was aware of this ethical consideration and every attempt was made to present data in an accurate and correct light. More about internal validity will be discussed in the data collection and analysis piece of this study.

Anonymity is another area of particular concern in case study research (Merriam, 1998). All of the participants received full disclosure of the researcher's purpose and methods for conducting this study. All participants signed the consent form (Appendix A) which details the procedures and purposes of the study. In disseminating the information found in the study, the researcher used fictitious names for all participants and all physical locations of the study. The researcher also purposely omitted any information considered to be identifiable in nature. Due to the personal and sensitive nature of the study, anonymity was assured to all of the respondents. Schools and school districts were described only in terms of demographic data. Districts and respondents were referred to under fictitious names, and all possible steps were taken to insure the respondents' rights to privacy. To further protect the confidentiality of the participants, the researcher was the only person to have access to the written and recorded records associated with conducting the study.

A final ethical consideration for this study was focused on the type of information shared in the semi-structured interviews. Because of the relationships that developed between the interviewer and the subject, it is possible that the subject may have shared personal information or sensitive information that they otherwise would not have disclosed. For this purpose, follow up interviews were used as a source of validation and also to allow the subject to review the data collected. The researcher honored all requests by the participants for information to be omitted.

Data Collection Procedures

Population and Sample

Perhaps the most unusual aspect of case study research is the selection of cases in the study. Case work usually begins with the cases already identified (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Achieving the greatest understanding of the phenomenon depends on the best chosen case. A representative sample needs to be selected. The main work of the researcher is to achieve the best possible explanation of the phenomenon. In this study, the phenomenon of study was rural high school leadership. In qualitative field work the researcher draws a purposeful sample for intense study. The researcher recognizes that there is a larger population of hypothetical cases; however, a small subpopulation is accessible and feasible to study. The researcher selected cases that provide the greatest opportunity to learn about the phenomenon of study.

This qualitative study focused on four high school principals working in rural public school districts within central Pennsylvania. Since the 501 school districts fall into three primary categories: urban, suburban, and rural, the principals were selected exclusively from rural districts. Within Pennsylvania 243 of the 501 districts are classified as rural by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania (2006). Within the 501 districts in Pennsylvania, there are 931 secondary principals consisting of 693 males and 238 females. Because the gender of the principals was a focus of this study, two female principals and two male principals were selected to participate. Principals from three counties in central Pennsylvania were selected for study. The three counties include a total of 13 rural school districts. In addition to the other defining

elements of the rural context discussed in chapter two, all of the counties are mountainous and subject to geographic isolation, each of the three counties has at least three exclusive districts. Choosing districts in these counties allowed the researcher to focus on truly rural areas. The districts range in size from 624 students to 2,722 students (CRPA, 2007).

The principals were selected from schools that are geographically isolated. Districts were purposely selected from mountainous areas of central Pennsylvania. These areas are isolated from major metropolitan areas. The districts all have low population densities. This was done intentionally to allow the researcher to explore concerns related to geographic isolation.

The principals were selected through access to the public records compiled by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The researcher selected eight potential subjects that met the criteria mentioned above. Four potential male candidates and four potential female candidates were identified from the pool of rural high school administrators working in central Pennsylvania. By identifying eight potential subjects, the researcher was able to have four back-up candidates if the initial subjects refused to participate or if a principal decided to drop out of the study after initially giving consent. The researcher had to use one of the back-up male candidates because a principal who initially agreed to participate opted to retire before the study could be initiated.

The initial contact with the principals was made by telephone or email. Subjects for this study were chosen through purposeful sampling from the pool of rural high school principals in central Pennsylvania. The principals' gender, rural

status, and high school level were the three exclusive criteria used in the selection process.

Multiple methods of inquiry were used in seeking the answers to the research questions guiding this study. According to Yin (2003), evidence for case studies may come from six sources: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and artifact collection. A major source of strength for case study data collection is the opportunity to use many different sources of data (Yin, 2003). This study incorporated the use of documents, archival records, interviews, and direct observations as data collection methods.

The use of a computer database was implemented to organize and maintain all of the records. Observation notes, transcribed interviews, historical and archival documents as well as a reflective journal were collected or maintained throughout the course of the study. Database technology was used to record and maintain adequate records of the data. A chain of evidence was used to show the relationship between the different pieces of information. The researcher used a systematic approach to collect data.

Four rural high school principals provided the researcher with rich data from four perspectives. According to Merriam (1998), the question of how many people to interview depends on the questions guiding the research study (Merriam, 1998). Four principals, two male and two female, allowed the researcher to develop data that were rich and descriptive and it was a feasible number for this study. The researcher used purposeful sampling from the population of rural high school principals in Pennsylvania, and the research questions guiding the study remained a central focus

in determining the cases. The cases that were selected reflected the average person in the situation of study (Merriam, 1998).

By studying four rural high school principals in rural central Pennsylvania, the researcher explored the phenomenon of rural high school leadership including rural principals' perceptions regarding the impact of the rural context as it relates to their ethical leadership, career aspirations, gender, and personal history. This study explored this phenomenon in the context of rural schools, in the selected locations, at the time of study.

Initiating the Study

The initial interview with the principals at each site started with a short briefing session. During that time the researcher explained the purpose of the interview and the context of the study. The researcher explained the use of recording instruments and the use of transcribed interviews to each subject. The researcher also used the briefing session to discuss safeguards for anonymity. The use of member checks to account for accuracy of interview data was also discussed with the subject. In addition, the researcher provided time for a question and answer period to clarify any concerns voiced by each subject.

During the initial interview, time was set aside for the subject to review and sign the consent forms (Appendix A). During this briefing period all forms were discussed and signed by the participants prior to any data collection procedures.

During the initial briefing session, the participating principals were asked to provide some autobiographical information and documents. Each principal was

asked to provide a resume to show previous experience and educational background. This information was used to develop a descriptive picture of each of the subjects and to analyze the participants' backgrounds as they relate to their prevailing beliefs and decision making strategies as leaders.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Much of the data collected in this study was attained through the use of semi-structured interviews. According to Merriam (1998), interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them (Merriam, 1998). In this study one of the primary foci was leadership style, which is strongly related to the way leaders interpret the world around them.

A semi-structured interview, which was selected for this study, is constructed with questions that are more flexibly worded than a structured interview. The interviews were guided by a list of open-ended questions allowing the interviewer and the respondent greater latitude to explore key concepts. This format allowed the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, emerging worldview of the respondent and new ideas on the topic (Merriam, 1998).

The first interview with each of the principals started with a briefing session about the study, signing of consent forms, and a discussion of the procedures. The second portion of this initial interview focused on the principal's demographic information and personal history. During this personal history, the principals were asked to explain one or two life changing incidents crucial to their current status as a rural high school principal. Shapiro and Stefkovich (1996) explain the importance of

critical life incidents in defining a person's ethical decision making in the following manner:

> In this morally polarized age, we believe that it is extremely important for us as professionals and educational leaders to have a sense of who we are and what we believe in personally and professionally. We have found, through our teaching, that an important exercise for students has been to pull together personal ethical codes, based upon life stories critical incidents, and then develop professional codes based upon the experiences and expectations of one's working life. (p. 5)

After the sharing of their personal history and critical incidents, the principals were given the opportunity to share any other personal background information they deemed to be pertinent to the leadership style.

The second semi-structured interview began with a briefing session in which an overview of the topics to be discussed was shared by the researcher. The question structure for the second interview explored the principal's career path and his or her perceptions of barriers he or she overcame to obtain their current position. The principals were also asked to share future aspirations for their professional careers. Questions were used that related to the gender of the principals and their perceptions of its impact on their career and their aspirations related to the rural context. Questions related to the rural context and its affect on decision making were included as well. The interview instrument was field tested and refined for focus and accuracy as it related to the research questions guiding this study.

The third and final semi-structured interview with the principals began as the other two did, with a short briefing session to explain the purpose of the third interview. This interview used a semi-structured approach to explore the principals' visions for their schools and their perceptions of their interactions with the following:

students, parents, teachers, and community leaders. The interview concluded with the principals' responses to an ethical dilemma. The ethical dilemma was taken from and modified with a rural focus from Shapiro and Stefkovich's (2001, 2005) text, *Ethical Leadership and Decision Making in Education*. This was done with the permission of the authors, one of whom served as the dissertation chair for this study. Dilemmas in educational institutions can be complicated and may naturally lead to the use of two or more paradigms to solve problems (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005). The ethical dilemma that was used and the complete list of semi-structured questions from all three interviews can be viewed in Appendix B of this study.

The interviews were conducted on three separate days over a twelve month period. The first two interviews were completed during individual site visits by the researcher at the principal's school. The third interview was completed either during a third individual site visit or in combination with a shadowing visit. The dates and times of all visits were determined by the principal. Each of the three interviews lasted approximately one to one and one half hours. The exact time frame of each interview depended on the information shared. Because the interviews were semi-structured, the researcher and the subject were able to expand upon the list of prepared questions to greater explore the phenomenon of study.

Field Notes and Reflective Journal

To compliment the audiotapes of the interviews, the use of field notes was also employed. Field notes are written down or mechanically recorded from a period of observation from which the raw data of a study's findings eventually emerge

(Merriam, 1998). Merriam (1998) explains that the researcher may also want to record his or her reactions to what the informant says. In this study the use of field notes while interviewing was utilized to record researcher reactions and items needing further clarification during the interview.

Field notes were used during each briefing session to record the subject's questions or concerns about the interview process. Immediately following each interview session, the researcher used field notes as a reflective measure concerning the interview process. According to Merriam (1998), post-interview notes allow the researcher to monitor the process of data collection as well as allowing the researcher to begin analysis of the information itself (Merriam, 1998).

A particular form of field notes utilized by the researcher in this study was a reflective journal. According to Creswell (2003):

> The qualitative researcher systematically reflects on who he or she is in the inquiry and is sensitive to his or her personal biography and how it shapes the study. This introspection and acknowledgement of biases, values, and interests (or reflexivity) typifies qualitative research today. The personal-self becomes inseparable from the researcher-self. It also represents honesty and openness to research, acknowledging that all inquiry is laden with values. Procedurally, statements of personal reflection emerge in the "role of the researcher" section or an epilogue, or are embedded throughout a proposal or a study. (p. 182)

The reflective journal provided the researcher with a way of checking himself and provided a means to limit researcher bias. The researcher set aside time following each interview to record and reflect upon some nuances of the process that the audiotape could not record.

Observations

In combination with the reflective journal and with the audio taping of the interviews, field notes were used as a data collection instrument for observations of the principals. Shadowing was used by the researcher to observe each of the principals as they went through a normal day. By using this method, the researcher was able to observe every interaction and decision the principals made throughout the course of two days. Merriam (1998) describes observation as a research tool in the following manner: "(1) serves a formulated research purpose, (2) is planned deliberately, (3) recorded systematically, and (4) is subjected to checks and controls on validity and reliability" (p. 95). Because the interviews and observations were conducted in the principals' schools, the researcher recorded field note descriptions of the setting, people, conversations, and activities that occurred within the setting at the time of the interviews and when the observations took place.

Merriam (1998) explains the use of gathering observable data in a qualitative study in the following manner:

> An investigator might want to gather data through observation for many reasons. As an outsider an observer will notice things that have become routine to the participants themselves, things that may lead to understanding the context. Observations are also conducted to triangulate emerging findings, that is, they are used in conjunction with interviewing and document analysis to substantiate the findings. The participant observer sees things firsthand and uses his or her own knowledge and expertise in interpreting what is observed rather than relying on once removed accounts from interviews. Observation makes it possible to record behavior as it is happening. (p. 96)

Merriam goes further to explain:

> Another reason for conducting observations is to provide some knowledge of the context or to provide specific incidents, behaviors, and so on that can be used as reference points for subsequent interviews. This is a particularly helpful strategy for understanding the ill-defined phenomena. (p. 96)

Participants may not feel free to talk about or may not want to discuss all topics (Merriam, 1998). Consequently, observations may lead to information gathering that was not readily available from interviews.

Several factors determine what to observe (Merriam, 1998). The most important criterion is the researcher's conceptual framework or the purpose for conducting the study (Merriam, 1998). This study focused on the leadership of rural high school principals in the context that is the rural high school. The principals were asked to allow the researcher to shadow their interactions over a brief period of time where interactions with students, teachers, parents, and community members could be observed. These observations provided the researcher with observable behaviors with which he was able to note the nature of the principals' interactions with stakeholders within the school communities at large.

The researcher shadowed each principal in his or her school for two days. The principals' interactions with stakeholders were the focus of the observations. The researcher observed the principals making decisions, attending meetings, interacting with teachers, and communicating with stakeholders throughout the course of two "normal days." The researcher was not a participant observer; rather he was a passive on-looker taking copious notes. The researcher recorded descriptions of the setting, people, activities, conversations and activities within the school. The observation days were selected by the principals after the researcher explained the

purpose for the observations. The principals were asked to select two days for the researcher to shadow them where they would be operating in a regular, everyday manner. Observations on the selected days began at 7:00 AM and concluded at the end of the principal's work day.

Document Analysis

By using document analysis as another data collection method, internal validity was increased through triangulation. Each principal was asked to provide an autobiographical document such as a resume, vita, or similar article. This autobiographical document helped the researcher frame each principal's professional experience and path to his or her current administrative role. Other documents were also collected to illustrate the principals' communication with their educational communities.

The principals were asked to provide several examples of public documents that communicate their beliefs, vision, and practices to others. Examples included, but were not limited to, handbooks, vision statements, newsletters, building policies, meeting agendas, curricular offerings, and building procedures. Using document analysis provided the researcher a way to validate information shared during the interviews about each principal's values, beliefs, and visions influencing their decision making. The documents provided to the researcher for review were left to the discretion of the individual building principals.

Merriam (1998) explains that:

> Using documentary material as data is not much different from using interviews or observations. Glaser and Strauss (1967)

> compare fieldwork with library research. "When someone stands in the library stacks, he is, metaphorically, surrounded by voices begging to be heard. Every book, every magazine article, represents at least one person who is equivalent to the anthropologist's informant or the sociologist's interviewee. In those publications, people converse, announce positions, argue with a range of eloquence, and describe events or scenes in ways entirely comparable to what is seen and heard during fieldwork. (p. 163)

Merriam goes further to explain that whether in fieldwork or library work, the data collection is guided by questions, educated hunches and emerging findings (Merriam, 1998).

Archival Records

A forth and final data collection technique infused in this study was the use of archival records. Archival records were collected using two different methods. First, historical documents were explored concerning the community and school itself. Library records were sought out by the researcher to explore the history of the school district, the high school itself, and the community at large. Second, archival records were also used to gain a sense of the demographics and academic achievement levels of the particular high schools involved in the study.

Archival records were collected concerning the counties where the principals' schools are located. Qualitative research is rooted in context. To fully understand leadership, one must understand the context in which it occurs. Records from the Department of Labor and Industry, Department of Agriculture, Department of Forestry, Department of Education, Department of Commerce, and the State System of Higher Education were reviewed to develop an economic and educational

understanding of the rural context where the schools exist. Historic documents were sought out from local libraries and community archives regarding the history of the community and the school district. Census information about population growth or decline was explored. Achievement data from each school were collected and analyzed. PSSA test scores, SAT scores, graduation rates, and attendance rates were used. Median home value and median household income was also collected for the districts where the principals work.

The archival records that were collected enabled the researcher to develop an understanding of some of the contextual elements of the rural communities and counties where the principals lead.

Data Analysis Procedures

The constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to identify patterns in the data (Merriam, 1998). The constant comparative method can be used to develop grounded theory. According to Merriam (1998), grounded theory consists of categories, properties, and hypotheses that are conceptual links between and among the categories and properties. Implementing the constant comparative method involves constantly comparing data. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), if the researcher wishes to generate theoretical ideas, new categories and their properties, hypotheses and interrelated hypotheses, then he or she cannot be confined to first collecting data and then analyzing it (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The constant comparative method is concerned with generating and plausibly suggesting many categories, properties, and hypotheses about general problems (Glaser & Strauss,

1967). The researcher compared field notes, interviews, observations, and documents within and across data sets. These comparisons led to tentative categories, which the researcher compared to each other and to other data sets. It is important to note that the constant comparative method does not attempt to develop universality or causes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The initial goal of data analysis was to develop categories or themes that capture some reoccurring patterns that cut across the thick and richly descriptive data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Merriam (1998) goes further to describe the development of conceptual categories as:

> a largely intuitive process, but it is also systematic and informed by the study's purpose, the investigator's orientation and knowledge, and the meanings made explicit by the participants themselves. Typically, guidelines for category construction found in the literature are very general and their applications are subject to the situational demands of the given study. (p. 179)

The individual pieces of data were categorized and sorted by the researcher. According to Merriam (1998) a unit or piece of data is defined as "any meaningful or potentially meaningful segment of data" (p. 179). As categories emerged or as data emerged to fit an existing category the researcher coded each incident in his data into as many categories as possible. While coding an incident into a category, the researcher compared it to existing incidents in the category. The constant comparison of incidents started to generate theoretical properties of the category (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Two types of categories emerged in the data, those taken from the research base and those developed by the researcher. Throughout this process the researcher encountered conflicts in the data, and these conflicts were recorded in the

researcher's journal as they arose. Data maps were developed and refined using software, and they were refined throughout the data collection process. The researcher also used the qualitative data analysis software tool Atlas TI to analyze interview transcriptions and notes for common themes within the data.

The researcher integrated the categories and their properties. As the coding process continued, the constant comparative units changed from the comparison of incidents to the comparison of incidents with the properties of the category. In addition, the different properties themselves started to become integrated. By jointly collecting and analyzing data, the researcher was using to the fullest extent the patterns in the data itself (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The researcher used questions developed in the data to guide research and fill in gaps.

The researcher reduced the redundancies in the data and developed a smaller set of higher level concepts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Reducing categories forced the researcher to compare the data constantly. These comparisons were based on the literature review and guided by the research questions and theoretical frame of this study.

The final step in the constant comparative method is writing theory. This occurs if the researcher feels that his substantive analytical framework forms a systematic theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This is an inductive approach to theory development, and it is possible that no theory will emerge from the data. The constant comparative method can yield discussional or propositional theory as well. In this case, theory did not emerge from the comparison of the data sets.

The constant comparative method used by the researcher is appropriate for qualitative research. Building theory in this manner is inductive in nature; however, along the way deductive strategies are used as tentative categories, hypothesis, and final categories emerge (Merriam, 1998). The researcher continuously switched between deductive and inductive strategies throughout the data collection part of this study.

Methods of Verification

In qualitative research, the researcher becomes the primary data collection instrument. For that reason validity becomes an issue if the data are left solely to the perception of the researcher. According to Yin (1996), there are two primary threats to validity, researcher bias and reactivity. In case studies the communication of findings is linked to the fact that the data has come from interviews, field observations, and documents (Merriam, 1998). In this study the researcher implemented several strategies designed to strengthen internal validity. The validity checks that were used included the following: the modus operandi approach, searching for discrepant evidence, triangulation, feedback, member checks, rich data, quasi-statistics, and comparison (Maxwell, 1996).

The modus operandi approach was used by the researcher to guide data collection throughout the study. As Maxwell (1996) states, this is done by not trying to control for validity threats as variables. The researcher holds them constant in some fashion by dealing with them as events and by searching for clues as to whether or not they took place and were involved in the phenomenon of question. This approach

resembles the approach of a detective trying to solve a crime (Maxwell, 1996). Maxwell (1996) explains, “This process is generally acknowledged to be true in all science, and qualitative research is no different” (p. 92).

The researcher also searched for discrepant evidence and negative cases throughout the data collection. According to Maxwell (1996), identifying and analyzing discrepant data and negative cases is a key part of attempting to falsify proposed conclusions. Data that cannot be accounted for in a particular explanation can point out key defects in that conclusion (Maxwell, 1996). The researcher rigorously reviewed all data, including outliers and discrepancies that ran counter to the conclusion. The discrepant data and negative cases are explained thoroughly in chapter five of this study.

Triangulation involves collecting data from a diverse range of individuals and settings while using multiple methods (Maxwell, 1996). The researcher used triangulation to strengthen the validity of this study throughout data collection. The multiple methods that were used included semi-structured interviews, document analysis, observations, and reflective journal writing. Complementing multiple methods, multiple subjects and multiple sources of data were used as ways of knowing in this study. According to Maxwell (1996), true triangulation automatically increases validity. This was especially important in this study because interviews and documents are prone to bias because of the self-reporting nature of the tools (Maxwell, 1996). To deal with this self-reporting bias, field notes taken at the principals’ schools and observations made by the researcher were included in the research methods to strengthen interview and document validity.

The researcher solicited feedback from professionals both in education and in other fields throughout the study. Maxwell (1996) states that feedback can be extremely useful in identifying validity threats in the researcher's own biases, assumptions and the methods of the study (Maxwell, 1996). Feedback was used in developing the interview instruments by piloting them prior to their use. The researcher's colleagues at his school district and previous employing district served as a basis for feedback and a pilot group for the instrumentation that was used in this study. Professionals from the pharmaceutical industry and professionals at Temple University also served as a feedback pool for the researcher throughout this study.

A specific form of feedback utilized in this study was member checks. Maxwell (1996) states, "Member checks involve systematically soliciting feedback about one's own data and conclusions from the people being studied" (p. 94). According to Maxwell (1996), member checks are the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpretation of the meaning of what was said in interviews and the perspective of what is going on. When conducting member checks, it is important not to assume that the subject's account is necessarily valid; their responses should simply be taken as evidence regarding the validity of the researcher's account.

In this study member checks were conducted after the third interview with the subjects. After the final interview, a time was set up by the researcher and the subject to discuss the researcher's interpretation of the interview data. The member checks were conducted by phone. By doing this, the researcher was able to account for the possibility of misinterpretation of the meaning of the responses from the participants,

thereby strengthening the internal validity of the data collection procedures for the study.

Qualitative research yields itself to yet another validity check through the collection of "rich" data. The term "rich" data means that the data are detailed and complete enough to provide a full and revealing picture of what is going on (Maxwell, 1996). By using complete transcription of the interviews and collecting detailed notes of the observations, the researcher was able to develop "rich" data about the phenomenon of study. The researcher used the "rich" data to test his theories about what was going on throughout the data collection part of the study. "Rich" data and the constant comparative method were prevalent throughout this study.

The researcher used quasi-statistics to develop and expand upon simple numerical comparisons that presented themselves in the data throughout the data collection. Quasi-statistics refers to the use of simple numerical results that can be readily derived from the data (Maxwell, 1996). According to Maxwell (1996), quasi-statistics allow you to test and support claims that are inherently quantitative but also enable the researcher to assess the amount of evidence that bears a particular conclusion or threat, such as how many discrepant instances exist and from how many different sources they were obtained (Maxwell, 1996).

The final type of validity check that was incorporated in the data collection piece of this study was comparison. Maxwell (1996) explains, "Although explicit comparisons (such as control groups) for the purpose of assessing validity threats are mainly associated with quantitative, variance-theory research, there are valid uses for

comparison in qualitative studies, particularly multi-site studies" (p. 96). Maxwell (1996) goes further to explain:

> Single case studies often incorporate implicit comparisons that contribute to the interpretability of the case. There may be literature on typical settings of the type studied that make it easier to identify the relevant factors in an exceptional case and ascertain their importance. In other instances, the participants in the setting studied may themselves have experience with other settings or with the same setting at an earlier time, and the researcher may be able to draw on this experience to identify the crucial factors and the effect these have (p. 96).

In this study, the researcher used comparisons across multiple sites and comparisons to existing literature to identify and develop important trends and patterns in the data collected.

Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this study was to explore four rural high school principals' perceptions of one overarching question and four supporting areas of inquiry. To explore those questions, a case study approach was utilized. Throughout a twelve month period, 18 site visits were made to four rural high schools in central Pennsylvania. Three semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the four subjects. Observations were made by the researcher during those interviews and during two days of shadowing at each school. To increase internal validity, triangulation was utilized through the collection of documents and archival records. During the data collection, the information was constantly coded and compared across categories that reflected the areas of inquiry guiding the study and the two

theoretical frames used in the study. To strengthen internal validity several strategies, previously discussed in this chapter, were used.

In the following chapters the rich descriptive data are shared in a reflective manner spanning the questions that guided this study. Chapter Four presents a snapshot of the context in which each of the leaders work. Because qualitative research is rooted in context and a focus of this study was the rural context itself, an overview of the context at each site can be helpful in understanding the phenomenon of rural educational leadership. Chapter Four also presents the findings of the study organized across the five areas of inquiry that guided the research. Finally, Chapter Five presents a discussion of the study's findings. In Chapter Five reflective relationships in the data relative to the theoretical framework of the study are also offered. Chapter Five concludes this study with recommendations for practice, policy, preparation and future research.

CHAPTER IV

STUDY FINDINGS

Introduction

In the United States 28 percent of schools are rural, and within those rural districts seven million students attend schools (Sherwood, 2001). Few universities identify rural leadership as a separate area of study. Furthermore, seldom do researchers conduct studies that maintain a rural focus. The rural context has many differences compared to urban and suburban areas, and the federal government does not differentiate its expectations for student achievement or the supports that it provides for improvements. This study explored the rural context through the perceptions of four rural high school principals in central Pennsylvania. Throughout this chapter those perceptions will be described across several areas of inquiry.

The first section of this chapter provides an overview of the four sites in which the educational leaders work. The second part of this chapter outlines the participants' perceptions on the rural context as a whole. For simplicity purposes the principals' perceptions are shared in a topic orientation. Specifically, the second part of this chapter will explore principals' perceptions and the data collected across five areas of inquiry: the rural context, personal history, career path, gender, and ethical decision making.

As previously stated, the research questions guiding this study focused on the principals' perceptions related to leading in the rural context. Specifically, this study sought to explore one overarching question:

How might rural high school principals perceive the influence of the rural context affects their work as educational leaders?

Within that umbrella question, four supporting areas of focus where explored:

A. How might the principals perceive their personal histories affect their decision making and choice to lead in the rural context?
B. How might the principals perceive the rural context as aiding or limiting their career path and future aspirations?
C. How might the principals perceive their gender impacts their ability to lead in the rural context?
D. How might rural high school principals perceive the rural context affects their ability to make difficult ethical decisions?

The purpose of this study was to explore four rural high school principals' perceptions relative to the rural context's impact on the following: how personal history and gender affect leadership, their ability to acquire leadership positions and access advancement opportunities, and how they make difficult ethical decisions. In this chapter a brief contextual overview is provided of the communities and the schools in which each of the four principals lead. To explore the research questions guiding this study, 18 site visits were made, four or five at each school, spanning a 12 month period. The data collected came from three semi-structured interviews, two-days of shadowing, observations, reflections, and documents collected during each visit. The observations and reflections made were from the researcher's own

perspective as an educational leader and were made while immersed in the field. This chapter attempts to paint a picture for the reader of the rural context where each of the respondents works. Case study research is rooted in context. As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) explain, historical context, cultural context and physical context are almost always essential. Contexts can go a long way toward making the relationships understood (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). By providing a brief overview of the context at each school, a greater understanding of the data collected relating to the research questions is attained.

The layout of the first section of this chapter is site-based, meaning the context of a school is explored across several categories, and then each of the remaining schools is described in terms of the same contextual categories. The categories used to provide a rich description of contextual factors at each site include the following: demographics, county profile, community and school history, first impressions, school building, curricular offerings, people, unique elements, and school leader.

Archival documents were used to develop a demographic profile of the four schools in the study. Each school district and community demographic profile includes: racial and ethnic data, educational attainment data, student achievement data, income data, and school funding and expenditure data. The documents used to develop this profile included reports from several state agencies, educational performance data from the department of education, and census data.

The county profile for each of the districts includes data about: employment, income, educational attainment, income figures and residential age statistics. There

data were compiled from reports issued by several state agencies, as well as census data. Many of the same categories that were used in the school district profile were explored. This provides the reader with an understanding of how the school district context compares to the wider county context.

The community and school history section provides a brief historical account of both the school district and the community where the respondents work. This was primarily researched through exploring historical documents at the local public libraries in the communities where the schools are located. The purpose was to provide the reader with a brief understanding of how the community and the school have evolved into the context that was observed and analyzed in this study. It should be noted that, in some cases, historical data were not readily available. When data were available they were included in the profile.

The first impressions and school building sections of each site profile were developed primarily from the observations and field notes taken during each site visit. A reflective journal was also utilized as another source of data when pulling information for this part of the profile. In some cases specific documentation regarding the school building was available and used. In other cases, observations were used to describe the setting.

In providing a profile of the curricular offerings, documents provided by the principals were used. Each principal was asked to provide a student handbook. In those handbooks the curricular programs of the schools were explained. The curricular offerings section of the profile also includes information that the principals

provided during the semi-structured interviews and during the shadowing part of this study.

The section of each profile entitled, “The People”, includes observations and reflections regarding the people encountered during the four or five visits to each site. During each visit, the principals were observed interacting with stakeholders and observations based on those interactions were used to develop this section of the profile.

In visiting each of the four sites multiple times, several things seemed to stand out as compared to other schools. The section of the profile entitled, “What makes this School Unique,” provides the reader with a short summary of those elements. While reflecting on each visit, different elements emerged from each school that stayed with the researcher. Those elements are also provided and expanded upon for the reader in this section.

Finally, a brief description of each school leader who was selected for study is provided. This provides an overview and a jumping off point for the rich data shared in section two of this chapter. This overview of the school leader serves as an introduction to the leader of each school. A more thorough and detailed account of each leader and his or her perceptions related to the questions guiding this study is provided in section two of this chapter and chapter five.

Table 4.1 below shows the individual visits to each school that spanned 12 months. To protect anonymity, the names of schools and participants have been changed.

Table 4.1

Table of Participants: Gender, School, Education, Years at Current Placement, and Interview/Shadowing Dates

Principal's Name/Gender	School	Education Level	Years at School	Interview Protocol	Date	Min.
Mr. Bob Wills (M)	Smithville Area H.S.	• AS in Comp. Sci. • BS in Math • Secondary Education Certification • Principal Certification • MS in Ed • PA Letter of Eligibility (Currently Enrolled)	4 yrs. As Principal	Interview 1 Interview 2 Interview 3 Shadowing Shadowing	6/28/07 7/16/07 8/02/07 10/2/08 10/22/08	60 60 60 NA NA
Mrs. Lesli McInness (F)	Whitfield Area H.S.	• BS in Elem Ed and Special Ed • MS in Special Ed • PA Letter of Eligibility (Currently Enrolled)	9 yrs. 3 as Principal	Interview 1 Interview 2 Interview 3 Shadowing Shadowing	7/02/07 7/16/07 8/6/07 10/1/07 10/19/07	60 90 90 NA NA
Mrs. Joan Kingston (F)	Hooverville Area H.S.	• BS in English Ed • MS in Ed Admin	25 yrs 8 as Principal	Interview 1 Interview 2 Interview 3 Shadowing Shadowing	6/28/07 8/03/07 10/19/07 10/19/07 12/7/08	90 120 90 NA NA
Mr. John Osbourn (M)	Green Mountain Area H.S.	• BS in Finance • MS in Special Ed. • Principal Certification	4 yrs 3 as Principal	Interview 1 Interview 2 Interview 3	3/10/08 3/28/08 4/15/08	90 120 120

Shadowing	4/15/08	NA
Shadowing	5/16/08	NA

Before describing the elements in each site profile, it needs to be noted that the selection criteria used for the study accounted for several similarities regarding the schools. All of the schools selected for study were public secondary schools in central Pennsylvania. All of the schools selected for study experience some degree of geographic isolation. In other words, they are not just rural by definition, they are also rural by their geographic location. In every case the population density of the district was in the lower 50 percent as compared to the rest of the state's school districts. Also, in every case, the schools were located in a mountainous, wooded area far from any metropolitan area. Finally, all of the schools were successfully meeting state accountability standards for student achievement at the time of the study. Because of the nature of state accountability measures and the pressure that this can place on a school district and its leaders, this criteria was chosen intentionally so the data collected were not influenced by pressures from outside the district of study.

Throughout the remaining pages of Section One of this chapter a description of the schools studied is provided. Where empirical data were available, they are provided; however, many of the descriptive elements are based on observations made by the researcher or based on documents collected and analyzed by the researcher.

Section I: Individual Site Profiles

Smithville Area High School

Demographics

Smithville Area High School is a 6-12 school in the Smithville Area School District. The school district has one K-5 elementary building and one high school. The Smithville Area School District's total enrollment K-12 is 724 students with 367 students attending the high school. Enrollment at the high school has declined from 421 students in 2002 to 367 students in 2006 (School Matters, 2007). The ethnic breakdown of the high school is 96.2 percent White, 3.0 percent Hispanic, and 0.8 percent American Indian or Alaskan Native. Thirty-three percent of the students at the high school are classified as economically disadvantaged. The student-to-teacher ratio at Smithville Area High School is 13:1 compared to the state average of 15:1. The Smithville School Area School District spends $11,727 per pupil, which is slightly above the state average of $11,580 (School Matters, 2007). The Smithville Area School District covers 166 square miles. The total school district population is 5,205 (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008).

The community is primarily a blue-collar, lower-middle class community. Sixty-four percent of families in the school district have a household income that falls between $15,000 and $75,000. Eighteen percent of families have household earnings below $15,000, and 18 percent are above $75,000. In 2005 the total revenues for the operating budget were obtained in the following manner: 33.65 percent from local sources, 65.12 percent from state sources, and 1.23 percent from federal sources.

Eighty-five percent of adults living in the district have graduated from high school, a number that is slightly lower than the state average of 87 percent. Ten percent of the adults living in the community have achieved a bachelors degree, a number that is considerably lower than the state average of 26 percent (School Matters, 2007).

In 2007, 67.3 percent of the students scored proficient on state standardized assessments in reading which was slightly above the state average of 65.4 percent. In mathematics, 43.1 percent of students scored "proficient" which was considerably lower than the state average of 53.7 percent. In both cases, the school successfully achieved Adequate Yearly Progress based on state determined criteria (School Matters, 2007).

County Profile

In order to understand the rural context in which the high school is rooted, a wider view of the entire county is helpful. Smithville Area School District is one of three public school districts in Melvin County. Melvin County is a large county spanning 829 square miles. The county itself has a low population density with 42 residents per square mile compared to the state average of 274 (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2007). Melvin County's population has shown little growth with 32,903 residents in 1900, 34, 503 residents in 1950 and 35,112 residents in 2000. The population itself is not very diverse with 98.8 percent of residents being White. The age breakdown of residents shows 21.2 percent under age 18, 60.8 percent between 18 and 64, and 18 percent over 65. The median age of residents is 42.6 years of age (Center for Rural Pennsylvania, 2008).

A snapshot of the economy reveals a working class blue collar population. The median home value in Melvin County is $78,000 which is slightly lower than the state average of $97,000. Household income rates show 32.2 percent earning below $25,000, 13.8 percent earning between $25,000 and $34,999, 18.8 percent earning between $35,000 and $49,999, 22.3 percent earning between $50,000 and $74,999 and 12.8 percent with earnings above $75,000. The per capita personal income of residents in Melvin County is $29,861, which is slightly lower than the state average of $34,868. The poverty rate in Melvin County is 8.8 percent which is lower than the state rate of 11.2 percent. The job category breakdown data finds Melvin County's workforce having 22.5 percent of workers in management jobs, 18.6 percent of workers in white collar positions, 13.3 percent of workers in the service industry, and 45.6 percent of workers in blue collar positions. The unemployment rate in 2006 was 4.8 percent which is similar to the state rate of 4.7 percent. Melvin County is a mountainous area of Pennsylvania, and though it is rural in every sense, there is not a large farming contingent. There are only 226 farms in Melvin County. Resources coming from the land are mainly provided through logging and mining (Center for Rural Pennsylvania, 2008).

The available countywide educational system data show the wider educational context that these high schools and their rural leaders work within. Education levels in Melvin County show 17.3 percent of the population having no high school diploma. That figure was slightly lower than the state average of 18.1 percent. Forty-nine percent of residents have obtained a high school diploma compared to 38 percent for the state. Twenty-one percent of residents have some college education or an

associate's degree equal to the state figures of 21 percent. In Melvin county 12.3 percent of residents have obtained a bachelor degree or higher. That figure falls behind the state average of 22 percent. Seventy-four percent of high school students reported having post-secondary education plans, slightly lower than the state average of 75 percent. The drop-out rate for students in Melvin County was 1.4 percent in 2006 compared to the state rate of 1.9 percent. Melvin County has three public school districts with 79.2 percent of students attending public school. Thirty-two percent of students in Melvin County qualify for the free and reduced lunch program. That figure is slightly lower than the state average of 34.9 percent. The teacher to student ratio in the county is 15:1 students to teacher. The average teacher salary in the county is $50,833 compared to the state average of $54,043. The funding for schools in Melvin County shows revenues received at 46.2 percent from local sources, 50.7 percent from the state, and 3.1 percent from federal sources. Expenditures per student in Melvin County for the 2005-06 school year were $10,170 and was slightly lower than the state average of $11,500 (Center for Rural Pennsylvania, 2008).

Student academic performance in Melvin County, as measured by the PSSA assessment, was slightly better than state averages. In Mathematics Assessment during the 2006 school year Melvin County showed 44.4 percent of students scoring advanced, 34 percent of students scoring proficient, 12.5 percent of students scoring basic, and 9.2 percent scoring below basic. Those figures are a little better than the state numbers of 39.3 percent advanced, 31.2 percent proficient, 15 percent basic and 14.5 percent below basic. In Reading Melvin County students scored 29.8 percent

advanced, 43.1 percent proficient, 15.1 percent basic and 12.1 percent below basic. The reading scores are similar to statewide levels of 32 percent advanced, 36.6 percent proficient, 15.7 percent basic and 15.6 percent below basic. Smithville Area High School successfully achieved state AYP standards in the 2006-2007 school year (School Matters, 2007).

Community and School History

The Smithville Area High School is located in the small rural town of Smithville. Smithville is a blue-collar working class community with 2,817 residents. The town is located along a river in the valley between two mountain ranges. There is one major manufacturing company in the center of town that employs many of the residents. This plant uses timber as a raw material, and the lumber industry is a substantial part of the economic base. Along with manufacturing and logging, there are four state parks within 20 miles of the town. There are three higher education branch campuses near Smithville. Politically, the town supported Republican candidates in the 2000 election.

The early settlers at Smithville arrived around 1810 and settled near the river. There was little activity in the area from 1810-1850 (Westman, 1985). There were only two roads near the community at that time, and they were ten miles away. Railroad activity was the key to development of the community. The first post office in the community opened in 1888. Because the town was located near the river, it was almost destroyed by a flood in 1942. Lumber became the first major industry in Smithville because of railroads, the river, and the abundance of timber. The tanning

of leather also became a crucial industry because hemlock trees were plentiful, and their bark was used in the tanning process. Emigrants came from Sweden, Italy, Poland, Germany, England, Ireland, Switzerland, and Czechoslovakia (Westman, 1985).

As the town began to prosper education became a bigger priority for the community. In 1902 the first elementary school was opened in town (Westman, 1985). In 1894 the first high school was constructed and enrolled 60 students. In 1915 a large brick school was built which contained large classrooms and a 124 seat study hall. This building was meant to house elementary students on the first floor and secondary students on the second floor. As the town continued to grow, the need for a larger school was looming. Eventually, a second building was constructed and connected to the older building through the use of a bridge. These two buildings were adequate until 1971 when two new buildings were constructed. The new high school, which opened in 1971, was constructed on the hill overlooking the town. This school is still being used and is the location of the Smithville Area High School. The building included fully functional shops, an auditorium, a gymnasium and an administrative office suite (Westman, 1985).

First Impressions

The first visit to Smithville Area High School was during the summer months. The trip began early in the morning and lasted two hours while the sun was rising. To shorten the trip, some unpaved roads across two mountains were utilized. Upon arriving in town, several large smokestacks were bellowing white water vapor into

the blue sky. The route continued through the center of town. The town was built along a river that flowed along side the road. Streets seemed to go straight up the mountain. In town there was a big manufacturing plant. Beside the plant, there was a large stadium where the Smithville football team played. After passing the stadium, signs marked the path across the river and straight up the hill to the Smithville Area High School.

The school building was well kept and one of the best looking buildings in the town. The school grounds were located at the top of a hill. The parking lot stretched along the front of the building and wrapped around the back. Behind the school building there were tennis courts, a field with a track around it, a fitness center, a concession stand, several garages, and a shop classroom. The grounds were well maintained and landscaped beautifully. The hill leading up to the tennis courts was landscaped with two different colors of pebbles which spelled out the name of the school mascot.

The entrance of the school building was secure and utilized a buzz in system to access the main office. Inside the main entrance was the library. There were sports trophies and awards displayed in the lobby. On the right was the entrance to the main office. The waiting area was small and two secretaries greeted guests from behind a glass divider. The principal, Mr. Bob Wills came out and introduced himself. His office was located through a short hallway. The office was spacious and the windows looked out to the parking lot. The high school office also housed the district office personnel. The Superintendent's office and the Director of Special Education's office were located farther down the hall.

School Building

The Smithville Area High School was built in 1971 and is in excellent shape given its age of 36 years. The building is located on the top of a hill overlooking the town. The building houses grade levels 6 through 12. The school is a two story building with classrooms on either side of a long central hallway. Classrooms for students in grades six through eight are located at one end of the building with classrooms for grades nine through twelve located at the other end. Although classrooms are laid out in this manner, many teachers teach both younger and older students, so intermixing of students occurs. Inside the main entrance, visitors are greeted by the entrance to the library. Next to the library, the auditorium is located in the center of the building. Behind the auditorium there is a gymnasium and a fitness center.

There are two computer labs in the building. One lab is used for remediation and the other for computer application courses. Many of the classrooms have SmartBoards mounted with projection systems. Like the other schools visited, because of the age of the building, much of the network infrastructure is visible outside the walls of the school. On the main level there is a shop area at one end of the building with fully functional metal and wood shops. Behind the school there is a garage that houses a huge saw. Lumber for the wood shop is brought in as raw timber, and the students learn the wood working process from log to lumber to finished product. There is also another building behind the school where a greenhouse is located. There is a classroom attached and a live fish facility where students are farming tilapia and studying growth rates.

The athletic facilities are located partially on campus; however, the main field where games are played is located in the town a couple of miles away. Behind the school there is a practice field with a track surrounding it. There are also several tennis courts and a weight room facility. These athletic facilities are open daily for the community members to use.

The staff at Smithville Area High School includes a faculty of 27 teachers. It has declined by two since 2001 (School Matters, 2007). The administrative offices for the district are located in the high school. The administrative team for the school district includes the following: the Superintendent, Director of Special Education, an Elementary Principal and a High School Principal.

Curricular Offerings

The Smithville Area High School offers four distinct areas of study including the following: academic, business, occupational preparation, and vocational agriculture. The academic program is designed for students planning to attend a four year college. The advanced courses offered include the following: College Prep. English, Chemistry I and II, trigonometry, calculus and statistics, and Spanish or French I through IV.

The business program is designed to meet the needs of students entering a two-year business school or planning to enter an office environment upon graduation. Course offerings include the following: consumer math, business law, personal finance, computer applications and accounting.

The Occupational Preparation Course of Study is designed to meet the needs of students planning to enter the job market or to enter a trade school upon graduation. Courses include the following: metal shop, wood shop, computer aided drafting, two and three dimensional art, family and consumer sciences and applied algebra.

The Vocational Agriculture Course of Study is designed to meet the needs of students planning to enter a vocation upon graduation. Courses include the following: small gas engine repair, building trades, wiring and plumbing, tree identification and occupational experience.

All students, regardless of their selected course of study, are required to complete certain core credit requirements to graduate. These requirements include the following: four years of English, four years of history, three years of math, three years of science, and a graduation project.

Along with the primary courses of study, the Smithville Area School District has placed a high priority on technology. The Smithville High School applied for a state technology grant and was successful in acquiring additional technology resources. One teacher was selected to receive extensive technology training and will serve as a trainer for other staff members moving forward. The Smithville High School received many computers, a SmartBoard and a projection system as part of the grant. Like many grants from state departments of education, this came with many guidelines and requirements for implementation.

The People (Staff, Students, and Parents)

The words that come to mind to describe the staff at Smithville are helpful, focused, and caring. During all visits to the school, the staff was friendly and helpful. The staff took time to talk to students and to take a genuine interest in their well-being. In the morning, students arrived and waited in the cafeteria until the bell rang for the day to begin. During that time several staff members stopped to talk with students. They asked them about their weekend, welcomed them, and generally wished them well. When the students were dismissed to go to homeroom, many of them stopped as they walked by the principal, Mr. Wills, to speak with him about their weekend, their family, or sports.

The administrative team at Smithville welcomed the researcher on each visit. Administrative meetings were observed on several occasions. The superintendent stopped by on several of the visits just to say, "Hello," and to ask how the work was going. The Director of Special Education allowed observations to be made during several meetings in which student performance data were reviewed with Mr. Wills. The Elementary School Principal also allowed observations to be made of meetings in which he and Mr. Wills discussed programmatic elements.

During the visitations Mr. Wills was shadowed while making several visits to classrooms. The teachers welcomed his presence in the classrooms, and when possible, the teachers took time to explain what they were working on. The teachers seemed to have a strong sense of pride about the work that they were doing and even seemed eager to share elements of their instruction.

There seemed to be an overall atmosphere of cooperation in the high school. Teachers always took adequate time to discuss concerns regarding students with Mr. Wills. As Mr. Wills walked around the building, teachers standing at their doors greeted him and wished him well. There was a concerted effort by everyone to make the most of each day with the students.

The students at Smithville High School seemed to be very mature and exhibited a sense of pride in being a Smithville student. On the initial visit observations were made of students working to prepare the building for the next year. Mr. Wills explained that many times students and past students work in the schools over the summer to prepare the building for the upcoming year. The students openly talked and explained what they were doing. On one visit during the fall semester, the students were preparing for a powder-puff football game that would occur during the upcoming weekend. The juniors and seniors were dressed in school colors and were busy decorating hallways and discussing the upcoming event. Several of the students asked for help with posting a sign and seemed happy to explain what they were doing.

Like the teachers, the students seemed to be comfortable with observations and visits in their classrooms. They were happy to explain what they were working on and also seemed to understand the purpose behind the activities they were completing. The students seemed to compete for Mr. Wills' attention when he visited classrooms. Many of them talked with Mr. Wills about weekend activities or family functions. Mr. Wills had a visible bond with the students at Smithville Area High School. He took a genuine interest in the students both as learners and as people.

Because Smithville is a 6-12 school building, an area of interest was how well middle school aged kids and high school aged kids would relate to each other while sharing the same building. Mr. Wills explained that things functioned smoothly, and the observations made would affirm that. On one of the shadowing days there was a Veteran's Day assembly. The students entered the auditorium and took their seats with no direction from the teachers. They all acted maturely and understood the important nature of the event. All grade levels came in together and took their seats in a quiet and orderly fashion.

Because the Veteran's Day assembly occurred during a shadowing visit, it provided an opportunity to meet many community members and parents. Veterans from the community were part of the program, many of them dressed in full uniform. Many political personalities and township dignitaries were in attendance. After the program Mr. Wills attended a reception in the cafeteria. Several of the veterans came over and talked about their experiences and thanked Mr. Wills for the opportunity to visit the school. The veterans all exhibited a strong sense of pride in serving their country, and they also spoke with pride about their experiences at Smithville High School.

The parents observed during the visits welcomed the researcher and were willing to be observed during their meetings with Mr. Wills. Mr. Wills knew many of the parents on a personal level from activities outside of school. It was interesting to observe how Mr. Wills balanced his different roles as community member and principal while discussing concerns with parents.

What Makes this School Unique?

When thinking about the unique elements of Smithville Area High School, one thing stands out. The Smithville High School and Mr. Wills have been able to balance the dual purpose of preparing students for the local economy and the global world. The high school curriculum displays a strong commitment to technology and is heavily involved in the Pennsylvania Classrooms of the Future Program. There are two modern computer labs, SmartBoards, LCD Projectors and portable laptop carts available for use. Mr. Wills is committed to providing opportunities for students that expand beyond the rural countryside of Smithville.

On the other hand, there are several programs available to prepare students for the local economy. The Smithville High School has a fully functional metal shop and wood shop program. The Smithville High School also prepares students for entrance into the logging industry. The school has its own wood miser, a large machine that processes large timber into workable lumber. This machine is located in a garage behind the school. Students in this program process raw timber, cut from the local woodlands, into lumber for use in the wood shop. Another program with local focus is the on-campus fish farm. Students raise tilapia and monitor their growth rates to determine optimal levels based on feeding rates and environmental factors needed for the most rapid growth to harvesting age. Students and teachers are working in cooperation with a local fish farm to improve production rates. These programs illustrated the commitment to place written about by many authors who study rural education.

Another unique element of Smithville High School that was observed while shadowing was the Veteran's Day assembly. As Mr. Wills prepared for the festivities, the researcher made observations while sitting quietly in the auditorium. The Assembly was simple, but the respect and appreciation that the student body had for the veterans was impressive. The students came into the auditorium and took their seats with little or no direction from the faculty. Mr. Wills gave a short introductory speech, and the small band played patriotic music. The assembly was comprised of veterans from the community being seated on the stage along side many local dignitaries. Each person was introduced and given an opportunity to speak. The students sat quietly and attentively listened to each speaker. There were veterans who where past graduates whose military experience spanned from World War II through the current conflict in Iraq. The mayor and the local state representative each added their remarks, and Mr. Wills closed the program. Afterward Mr. Wills attended a reception in the cafeteria for the participants and their families. The assembly demonstrated a sort of "family" atmosphere where the school was undoubtedly the center of the community. It was obvious that the students and faculty knew most of the veterans, and the veterans were visibly proud to return to their school.

One final element that is worthy of mention in this section is the visible commitment to athletics. While approaching the school, the two most impressive sights were the huge manufacturing plant in the center of the small town and just down the street, the large football stadium. When driving up the hill to the school and pulling into the parking lot, the first noticeable sight was a large track and field

facility positioned just behind the school building. During the first tour with Mr. Wills, observations were made of a beautiful gymnasium, a workout facility and a large strength training facility. Athletic programs are obviously a priority and a source of pride for the community. Mr. Wills shared some success stories regarding the baseball team's efforts at the state level the previous year. High school athletics is a venue in which the community frequently comes together.

School Leader

Mr. Wills, the principal of Smithville Area High School, is a well spoken, well educated man in his forties. He took a non-traditional path to enter education. Mr. Wills started out in the field of computer science but later decided to switch to a career in math education. After becoming frustrated with colleagues who complained about education, he decided to start a career in educational administration. Mr. Wills moved back to the Smithville area to pursue his aspirations in education. He worked for another local district as a math teacher and an assistant principal before returning to his Alma Mater as a school leader.

Mr. Wills has strong commitment to the Smithville School District, the community and the students. His father was a special education teacher at Smithville, and he has strong ties to the community and the school. Mr. Wills' experiences beyond Smithville have afforded him a strong understanding of the global economy and technology. He is committed to providing the students of Smithville with options to explore the global economy while maintaining a local focus.

Mr. Wills is committed to technology. He uses a laptop, has a personal digital assistant, and pushes his teachers to remain on the forefront of new technologies. During shadowing visits several teachers were eager to show what they were doing in their classrooms with laptops and SmartBoards. Mr. Wills provides supports for his teachers on these endeavors and is putting in place a technology implementation model with a teacher who acts as a technology coach for colleagues.

Mr. Wills was also proud of his school's local focus. He took time to point out the wood miser located in a garage behind the school. Students experience the entire timber process from raw lumber to finished product. Mr. Wills also has a program on campus where students are raising and testing growth trends of live tilapia fish. This program is a cooperative effort with a local fish farm. Mr. Wills works hard to insure that his students have opportunities locally while preparing them to be competitive beyond Smithville.

Mr. Wills also exhibited a high level of care for his students beyond the confines of the school and the seven hour school day. He seemed to know a great deal about his students, their families, and the barriers that they endured which prevent success. On several occasions Mr. Wills worked closely with the counselor to resolve student issues extending beyond the classroom. He talked about using common sense in difficult situations and thinking through the consequences for those involved. The students and their wellbeing seemed to remain a central focus as he worked through problems.

Mr. Wills continues to pursue his own education and is currently working on his letter of eligibility. He is committed to his role as the high school principal and

has no plans to seek another position in the near future. He has a solid understanding of what students need to be successful in Smithville and beyond.

Whitfield Area High School

Demographics

The Whitfield Area High School is a 6-12 school in the Whitfield Area School District. The school district has one K-5 elementary school. The Whitfield Area School District's total enrollment is 1030 students with 593 students attending the high school. The ethnic breakdown of the high school shows the following: 97.7 percent White, 0.9 percent Black, 0.6 percent Hispanic, and 0.9 percent Asian or Pacific Islander. Fifty-five percent of the students at the high school are classified as economically disadvantaged. The Whitfield Area School District spends $11,544 per pupil which is slightly lower than the state average of $11,580 (School Matters, 2007). The Whitfield Area School District covers 184 square miles, and the total school district population is 7,855 (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008).

The community is primarily a blue-collar, lower-middle class community. Seventy-one percent of the households in the community have income levels that fall between $15,000 and $75,000. Twelve percent of the families have household incomes below $15,000. Seventeen percent of households in the district have earnings above $75,000. In 2005 the total revenues for the operating budget were obtained in the following manner: 40.13 percent from local sources, 54.06 percent from state sources, and 5.8 percent from federal sources. Eighty-seven percent of

adults in the community have graduated from high school which is equal to the state average. Fourteen percent of adults have obtained a bachelors degree, a number that is considerably lower than the state average of 26 percent (School Matters, 2007).

The student to teacher ratio at the Whitfield Area High School is 12:1 compared to the state average of 15:1. In 2007, 67.8 percent of students scored proficient on state standardized assessments in reading which was slightly above the state average of 65.4 percent. In math, 55.5 percent of students scored proficient on state standardized assessments which was slightly higher than the state average of 53.7 percent. In both cases the school successfully achieved Adequate Yearly Progress according to state accountability criteria (School Matters, 2007).

County Profile

The Whitfield Area School District is located in the same county as the Smithville Area School District. For that reason, this section of the profile related to the county was omitted from the report. The reader may refer to the county profile section listed previously under the Smithville Area School District to obtain a perspective on county demographics.

Community and School History

The Whitfield Area High School is located in the small rural town of Whitfield. Whitfield is a blue-collar predominantly working class community with 2,713 residents in the township and 4,302 residents in the surrounding borough (Center for Rural Pennsylvania, 2008). One of the major industries in the community

is a powder coating plant. The community also depends on the lumber industry. At one time the town had a large railway station located in the center of town. Today all that remains is an old station. There are four state parks within a 20 mile radius of the community. There are three higher education branch campuses located close to Whitfield.

The town of Whitfield is located at the intersection of two rivers. Most of the businesses, industries and shops are located in the valley along the rivers. The residential areas extend up the mountainside. The early days of Whitfield found coal mining and the lumber industry as a staple in the wilderness (Lesson, 1890). In 1880 the population of Whitfield was 1480, and it continued to grow throughout the early 20th Century. The lumber industry supported many other businesses including saw mills and machine shops in Whitfield. Because of a need to transport lumber, the railroad industry became critical to the development of Whitfield. The town continued to grow and ultimately became the county seat, a distinction that is still held today. The community has historically been and remains today politically oriented toward the Republican Party. The community supported the Republican ticket in the 2000 election.

The first school was built in 1834 (Lesson, 1890). A second building for a graded school was erected in 1870 (Lesson, 1890). In 1874 three teachers were employed in Whitfield schools. In 1885 a large wing was added to the school building as the needs continued to increase. Along with the public school, there was also a private academy and a series of Covenant Schools that opened in 1850. The first high school class was graduated in 1881 (Wessman, 1985). Due to increased

enrollment in 1891 the school board purchased a lot in town and erected a four room building (p. 190). In 1899 more space was needed so the building was demolished and replaced with a larger school that opened in 1901. In 1909 a larger building was built in town to accommodate a growing high school population. In that same year a new elementary building was also constructed. In 1922 the schools had again surpassed capacity, and additional land was purchased next to the high school for expansion. In 1953 the school system merged with a local township. Shortly after that merger, a new high school building was constructed containing eight rooms for secondary students. The townships utilized that school utilized until 1979 when it was closed due to low enrollment. Because of the School Reorganization Act of 1963, the school district was expanded to include both the township and the surrounding borough. Today the high school and middle school occupy one building located on the hillside in a residential area (Wessman, 1985).

First Impressions

The trip to Whitfield Area High School led through miles of mountainous countryside. Like the trip to Smithville, traveling some dirt roads shortened the distance. The route passed through many small towns along the way. When entering Whitfield Borough, the researcher observed several businesses. There was a large powder coating plant and a heavy equipment company along the highway. Upon entering town, the road began to run along a river. The houses seemed to sprawl up the mountainside to the right. A sign along the highway indicated a turn up the hill towards the Whitfield Area High School. The high school was two blocks up the hill.

The school building stretched across one block. A series of athletic fields were farther up the hill. A sports complex that contained a weight training facility and a wrestling room was across the street.

The Whitfield Area High School is located on the hillside in the middle of a residential area. Cars were parked along the streets in front of the school building. Parking was limited to spaces on the street. At the front entrance there were two doors and two separate buzz in systems. One door was for the middle school and the other for the high school. After entering the building, a series of signs directed the way to the high school office. The researcher made the first visit in the summer time, and the maintenance crew was busy cleaning. The tile floors shined brightly, and everything was spotless.

Upon entering the office, three secretaries welcome visitors from behind a glass divider. The waiting area was small. A hunting safety poster was posted on the wall along with many other school related announcements. Mrs. Lesli McInness introduced herself as the building principal and escorted the researcher to her office to prepare for the first series of interview questions. Her office was small, a 12 by 12 foot area. It was decorated with many inspirational items and family pictures.

School Building

The Whitfield Area High School is an older facility. The building was originally constructed in 1974 and was intended to be a middle school. Currently, the facility houses students in grade levels 6 through 12. The building is a two story structure located on the hillside of the community in a residential neighborhood. The

school grounds occupy one city block and athletic fields extend farther up the mountainside.

The lower level of the school building houses most of the middle school classrooms. When entering through the main doorway, the high school office is to the right, and the middle school office it to the left. The high school principal, three secretaries, and a guidance counselor are located within the high school office. In the middle school office, there is one secretary and the middle school principal's office. At the far end of the main hallway, there is a library and a nurse's office. The upper level houses most of the high school classes for grades 9 through 12. On the upper level at one end of the building there is a gymnasium, and at the other end of the building there is an auditorium. The cafeteria is in the middle of the upper level. Because the school building is built on a hillside, both levels have entrances to the school. At the end of the building beyond the auditorium, there are several alternative education classrooms and a distance learning lab. The district utilizes the distance learning lab to provide professional development opportunities to staff. Behind the school building, farther up the hill, there are a series of athletic fields. Across the street from the gymnasium there is a building utilized as a fitness center and a wrestling practice room.

The building is in excellent condition. It is clean and very well maintained. Incorporated in the design there is a lot of natural lighting from huge glass windows in the stairwells. The researcher stopped several times to take in the view of the mountainside from the stairwells. The classrooms are laid out in a traditional manner with rows of student desks in rectangular rooms. There is at least one desktop

computer in every classroom, and printers are located at central locations, so network sharing can occur. Because the building was built in the 1970s, most of the wiring for network purposes is visible outside the walls. The building is constructed primarily of concrete, and it is painted a beige color. Student work is displayed throughout the hallways; it is a little more prevalent in the middle school area of the building. Announcements and sports schedules are posted throughout.

The Whitfield Area High School employs 29 teachers. That number has declined from 38 in 2001 (School Matters, 2007). The District Administrative Team consists of the following: the superintendent, a business manager, an elementary principal, a middle school principal, a high school principal, and an athletic director. The team will soon be expanded to include a part-time dean of students at the Whitfield Area High School.

Curricular Offerings

In the high school curricular program there are five levels of courses offered. Level one consists of all courses that do not fall into another category. Level two courses are categorized as academic courses, and there are only three courses falling into this classification: 9th grade English, biology, and 9th grade American cultures. Level three courses are classified as college prep courses. The college prep courses are academic in nature. This level contains offerings including: English, American cultures, algebra through pre-calculus, French and Spanish I and II, biology, chemistry, physics, art III, psychology, choir, drafting, and four technology courses. Level four courses are classified as honors courses. The honors courses include the

following: creative writing, web page design, advanced biology, advanced chemistry, advanced physics, calculus, Spanish III, art IV, advanced drafting and music theory. Finally, level five courses are listed as Advanced Placement courses. There are six Advanced Placement course offerings. These include: chemistry, government, calculus, biology, physics and Spanish. Students can also take a dual enrollment course with a local college for English.

One of the unique aspects to the curricular program at Smithville Area High School is the use of student portfolios. Each student in the school district has created a portfolio full of authentic examples of their work from throughout his or her academic career. The portfolios travel with the students as they go from grade level to grade level. At the high school level, homeroom teachers are responsible for assisting their students with portfolio development.

The People (Staff, Students, and Parents)

The people at Whitfield Area High School are friendly, hard-working, and dedicated. The teachers were willing to share their classrooms during the visits. While walking around with Mrs. McInness, many teachers greeted us in the hallway as we walked by. An art teacher took us into the auditorium and showed us his class's art projects that they had been working on in the stage area. He was excited to explain the students' work and the purpose of the project.

Related to the faculty, there is one aspect of the building that stood out and deserves to be mentioned. There was a Memory Wall located in the lobby outside of the auditorium that listed every faculty member who had been employed by the

district dating back to the early 1900s. This Memory Wall was located underneath a full size wildlife head mount. The mascot of the school district is a woodland creature commonly found in the surrounding mountains. The Memory Wall seemed to be the focus of the entryway to that part of the building, implying the importance of the teaching staff to the larger community.

The secretaries and the main office staff were very helpful on each of the visits to the high school. Even though everyone appeared to be very busy, they always took time to stop and talk or to point in the right direction. The guidance counselor and the athletic director always took time to explain their discussions with Mrs. McInness, so contextual elements related to the discussion could frame the decision. The superintendent even stopped in to talk about the study and to share some of the elements of his own ongoing dissertation.

The students seemed to be very respectful and mature as they went about their daily routines. When classes changed the hallways always seemed orderly. The researcher observed some discipline meetings between Mrs. McInness and different students during the shadowing days. In every case, the students were respectful and honest about their behavior.

The political influence on the operations of the district became apparent during several visits. In several situations, faculty and community members mentioned the Board of School Directors as a means of pressure. One faculty member had three relatives serving as board members. The pressure to consider board response to administrative decisions seemed to be very real.

What Makes this School Unique?

When thinking about lasting impressions of the Whitfield Area High School, a few elements stand out: the political environment surrounding the school and the district, the commitment to meeting the needs of all students, the commitment to athletics, and the instructional focus of Mrs. Lesli McInness, the building principal.

The political environment surrounding the school district seemed to provide some barriers for the school leader. The principal, Mrs. McInness, explained that she was having some problems with one of the coaches, and it was complicated because three of his relatives were acting board members. The issues surrounding this coach were normal staff concerns that all districts face, but because of his political ties, she had to tread very lightly when considering options for ratifying the situation. Mrs. McInness also explained that because she had grown up in this school district, she was highly motivated to insure that kids were not impacted by political elements in the manner that she had witnessed during her childhood. Mrs. McInness shared that she had witnessed students being treated differently because of their family ties when she was going through the system, and she worked hard to make sure that those things did not happen anymore.

Another element that stood out when visiting this high school was Mrs. McInness's interest in the individual needs of students. This may be due to her strong background in special education, but she was visibly committed to all of the students in the district. Mrs. McInness worked with the Superintendent to develop and house an alternate education program on campus. She also was implementing an early intervention program for younger students in the district. When Mrs. McInness met

with students, she seemed to know everything about their situation and asked them to think about the consequences of their choices. She even offered a couple of logistical barriers when a student wanted to withdraw. She hoped to extend the decision so that the young lady might change her mind. Mrs. McInness worked closely with her guidance counselor and was highly involved with students' family situations and individual needs.

Mrs. McInness is a strong curricular leader and is heavily involved with the building's curriculum and classroom instruction. During the first shadowing visit she spent some time meeting with a new AP English teacher and mapping out the curricular objectives for the first semester. Later she visited a long term substitute who was struggling with planning. Mrs. McInness took plenty of time to review the curriculum and the state standards and anchors to insure that the teacher was comfortable moving forward. Mrs. McInness shared some work that she was doing with the Intermediate Unit on assessment anchors and complimented the work of the Intermediate Unit in supporting the local districts.

Mrs. McInness also worked hard to provide meaningful professional development opportunities to her teachers. During one shadowing visit, several teachers were part of a webinar on standards and anchors. After working out the technology issues, the teachers were able to receive the training without having to travel half way across the state to attend the session. Mrs. McInness also monitored and supervised a district portfolio assessment system in which each student maintained a portfolio of his or her work from elementary through graduation. Mrs. McInness is highly engaged as an instructional leader at Whitfield Area High School.

The lobby outside the auditorium had a couple of unique displays that are worthy of mention. Covering one of the walls, there was a Memory Wall. This wall displayed the names of every teacher and administrator who had worked in the building since the turn of the century. It was interesting to see how teachers and administrators for the district are held in high regard and enshrined forever on the Memory Wall. Next to the wall there was a life-size wildlife mount of the school mascot. This appeared as a unique feature to the researcher, having a suburban background and knowing that an animal mount would never be displayed in most schools throughout the state.

Finally, the Whitfield Area High School seemed to maintain the central focus of the community through athletics. The facilities were exceptional for a small school district. Behind the school building, the athletic fields were located up the mountainside. The football stadium was visible from the cafeteria, and it overlooked the entire campus. Outside the gymnasium, and across the street, there was new building that served as a wrestling room and weight training facility. Trophy cases lined the lobby with pictures and trophies spanning several decades. The gymnastics team was one unique feature of the programs and awards displayed. The Whitfield Area High School has a strong gymnastics program; a rare program for any school, so it was surprising to find a small rural school in the forefront of gymnastics in the state.

School Leader

Mrs. McInness, the principal of Whitfield Area High School, has a strong background in special education and a wide variety of experience within the Whitfield Area School District and beyond. Mrs. McInness began her career as a special education teacher for the Intermediate Unit that services the Whitfield Area High School. After a year she moved to Maryland to work in the same field because someone with more seniority took her job. She returned to Whitfield a year later and worked again for the Intermediate Unit. She then took a job at Whitfield, her Alma mater, and worked in a variety of positions including the following: special education director, athletic director, teacher and high school principal, her current position.

Mrs. McInness decided to seek opportunities in administration because she felt she could have a "positive impact on a larger number of kids." Mrs. McInness uses her background in special education to help her meet the needs of individual students, and it also helps her to wade through the daily paperwork requirements that go with an administrative role.

Mrs. McInness is a young woman in her late thirties, and she has a strong support structure and a commitment to her family. She listed her family as a reason for returning to the Whitfield area. Her office was decorated with many pictures of her family, and she referred to their support many times when talking about the stressors related to her administrative role.

Mrs. McInness maintains an instructional focus that is worthy of mention. Along with her other roles, she had served as Director of Curriculum for the Whitfield Area School District. Mrs. McInness met with teachers about their

curricula during several of the visits. She worked with a new Advanced Placement English teacher on curricular concerns. She spent time with a long term substitute to be sure that she was comfortable with the standards and assessment anchors in the subject area. Mrs. McInness also works closely with the Intermediate Unit to ensure that her teachers have all of the current resources they need.

Mrs. McInness is a well educated school leader with a wide variety of experience. She has her Superintendent's Letter of Eligibility but currently has no plans to leave her position as school leader. She cares for her students on an individual level and works hard to understand students' individual situations when working through problems.

Hooverville Area High School

Demographics

The Hooverville Area High School is a 6-12 school in the Hooverville Area School District. The school district has one elementary school that is a K-5 building. The Hooverville Area School District's total enrollment is 627 students with 309 students attending the high school. The ethnic breakdown of the school is 100 percent White. Thirty-seven percent of the students are classified as economically disadvantaged. The district spends $12,394 per pupil which is significantly higher than the state average of $11,580 (School Matters, 2007). The Hooverville Area School District covers 228 square miles. The total school district population is 4,335 (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008).

The community is heavily oriented to farming, and most of the residents are lower middle class or upper lower class. Seventy-one percent of the district households have an income level between $15,000 and $75,000. Twelve percent of the households have earnings above $75,000. Seventeen percent of the households earn less than $15,000. In 2005 total operating budget revenues were obtained in the following manner: 32.49 percent from local sources, 63.16 percent from state sources, and 4.35 percent from federal sources. Eighty percent of adults in the district were graduated from high school. Nine percent of adults, which is well below the state average of 26 percent, have obtained a bachelor's degree (School Matters, 2007).

The student to teacher ratio at the Hooverville Area High School is 12:1 compared to the state average of 15:1. In 2007, 53.6 percent of students scored proficient on state standardized assessments in reading which was slightly below the state average of 65.4 percent. In math, 39.3 percent of students scored proficient on state standardized assessments which was lower than the state average of 53.7 percent (School Matters, 2007). In both cases the school successfully achieved Adequate Yearly Progress according to state accountability criteria.

County Profile

As previously stated, in order to understand the rural context in which this high school is rooted, a wider view of the entire county can be helpful. Hooverville Area School District is one of five public school districts in Marshall County. Marshall County is a large county spanning 1,081 square miles. The county itself has one of the lowest population densities in the state with 17 residents per square mile

compared to the state average of 274. Marshall County's population has shown a decline with 30,621 residents in 1900, 16,810 residents in 1950 and 18,080 residents in 2000. The population itself is not very diverse with 97.7 percent of residents being White. The age breakdown of residents shows 23.5 percent under age 18, 59.2 percent between 18 and 64, and 17.2 percent over 65. The median age of residents is 41 years (Center for Rural Pennsylvania, 2008).

A snapshot of the economy reveals a working class blue collar population. The median home value in Marshall County is $68,700 which is lower than the state average of $97,000. Household income rates show 37.3 percent earning below $25,000, 15.6 percent earning between $25,000 and $34,999, 18.7 percent earning between $35,000 and $49,999, 18.3 percent earning between $50,000 and $74,999 and 9.8 percent with earnings above $75,000. The per capita personal income of residents in Marshall County is $27,418, which is lower than the state average of $34,868. The poverty rate in Marshall County is 11.9 percent is slightly higher than the state rate of 11.2 percent. The job category breakdown data find Marshall County's workforce having 26.3 percent of workers in management jobs, 21.4 percent of workers in white collar positions, 12.2 percent of workers in the service industry, and 40.1 percent of workers in blue collar positions. The unemployment rate in 2006 was 6.0 percent, higher than the state rate of 4.7 percent.

Marshall County is a mountainous area of Pennsylvania, and though it is rural in every sense, there is only a modest farming contingent. There are only 343 farms in Marshall County; however, many of those farms are located inside the boundaries of the Hooverville Area School District (CRPA, 2008).

The available countywide educational system data show the wider educational context within which these rural leaders work. Education levels in Marshall County show 19.4 percent of the population having no high school diploma. That figure was slightly higher than the state average of 18.1 percent. Forty-seven percent of residents have obtained a high school diploma compared to 38 percent for the state. Twenty-one percent of residents have some college education or an associate's degree equal to the state figure of 21 percent. In Marshall county 12.3 percent of residents have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher. That figure falls behind the state average of 22 percent. Sixty-one percent of high school students reported having post-secondary education plans which is lower than the state average of 75 percent. The drop-out rate for students in Marshall County was 1.0 percent in 2006 compared to the state rate of 1.9 percent.

Marshall County has five public school districts with 95.8 percent of students attending public school. Forty-two percent of students in Marshall County qualify for the free and reduced lunch program. That figure is higher than the state average of 34.9 percent. The teacher to student ratio in the county is 13.4 students to teacher. The average teacher salary in the county is $46,588 compared to the state average of $54,043. The funding for schools in Marshall County shows revenues received at 41.9 percent from local sources, 55.7 percent from the state, and 2.4 percent from federal sources. Expenditures per student in Marshall County for the 2005-06 school year were $12,413 which was slightly higher than the state average of $11,500 (CRPA, 2008).

Student academic performance in Marshall County, as measured by the PSSA assessment, mirrored state averages. During the 2006 school year mathematics assessment in Marshall County showed 33.2 percent of students scoring advanced, 35.8 percent of students scoring proficient, 16.7 percent of students scoring basic, and 14.2 percent scoring below basic. Those figures were similar to the state numbers of 39.3 percent advanced, 31.2 percent proficient, 15 percent basic and 14.5 percent below basic. In the reading assessment, Marshall County students scored 28.2 percent advanced, 40.1 percent proficient, 16.9 percent basic and 14.9 percent below basic. The reading scores are similar to statewide levels of 32 percent advanced, 36.6 percent proficient, 15.7 percent basic and 15.6 percent below basic (School Matters, 2007). Hooverville Area High School successfully achieved Adequate Yearly Progress state standards in the 2006-2007 school year.

Community and School History

The Hooverville Area High School is located in the small rural town of Hooverville. Hooverville is a small farming community with 761 residents in the township and 669 residents in the surrounding borough (CRPA, 2008). The main livelihood of the residents is farming. Along with farming, the logging industry is still a staple in the local economy. The State Logging Heritage Museum is located near Hooverville. Many of the residents commute to a larger town 20 miles south of Hooverville where a large communications firm employs many workers. There are six state parks near Hooverville.

The town of Hooverville is a small rural community built around the intersection of two state highways. There is a convenience store, a bank, a couple of restaurants, and a few shops in town. The small town of Hooverville is surrounded by farms. The school is located outside of town in the surrounding farmlands.

The history of Hooverville dates back to the early 1800s. The township of Hooverville was first assessed in 1833. In 1880 the population was recorded at 638 residents (Lesson, 1890). The lumber industry was the primary employer in the 1800s and there was a sawmill and a tannery in the town of Hooverville. The lumber industry and the agriculture industry still account for most of the economic base in the school district today.

The history of the School District of Hooverville can largely be explained by the closing and consolidation of many one room school houses throughout the 20th Century. A legislative act of 1919 mandated the closing of all one room schools having an average of ten or less pupils (Welfling, 1975). Another act in 1921 authorized a payment of $200 to school districts for each closed school (Welfling, 1975). These acts resulted in the closing of many of the 100 one-teacher schools in the county leaving only ten remaining in 1950. In 1950 there were only two, two-teacher schools and eight high schools and graded schools, the latter employing 143 teachers (Welfling, 1975).

In 1937 the state legislature established county boards of school directors to consist of five members (Welfling, 1975). On October 29, 1937, the county elected the first board of directors. In 1939 the county board sent out mandates for the merging of schools in the county (Welfling, 1975). The attention of the board turned

to dividing the county based on geography. In 1951 the jointures were organized in five areas of the county. The Hooverville School District was made up of the jointure of six local townships. The state anticipated this and set aside money for a program to finance school construction, and in 1951 Act 27 provided a formula to share in the expense of school construction (Welfling, 1975). Hooverville completed plans in 1954 for a Junior/Senior High School to be erected two miles east of town. That school building is still being used today, and it shares the campus with a new elementary school and administrative suite.

First Impressions

The first visit to Hooverville Area High School involved an early morning drive through the mountainside. The route led north following country roads for many miles. While driving farther north, the towns seemed to get smaller, and on many stretches of road there was not another car in sight. When approaching the township by the school district, a black bear ran across the highway. Stopping on the highway to observe, it seemed as if he disappeared directly into the mountain. Continuing on the route eventually led to the small town of Hooverville. The town was a series of houses, several businesses, and a couple of restaurants built around an intersection of two state highways. Heading out of town toward the high school, the route led past several farms. It seemed like the high school just appeared over a hill, and a large sign welcomed visitors to Hooverville Country.

The Hooverville Area High School is located on the top of a hill in the middle of farming country. The high school shares the campus with a newer elementary

school and administrative office. Because the first visit occurred during the summer months, there were few employees at the school. The front of the building had a large metal overhang that led to the main doorway. There was a secure entrance buzz-in system on the doorway, but it was not functioning. Upon entering the building, signs indicated the path to the main office.

The school building was an older building and summer cleaning was underway. The maintenance staff had moved student desks and other furniture into the hallway for cleaning purposes. Several classrooms were observed, while walking down the center hallway, with wires hanging from the ceiling. It was obvious that some of the network infrastructure for the district was under construction. Upon entering the main office, there were boxes and materials piled up around the front counter. Mrs. Joan Kingston, an older lady, entered the office and introduced herself as the principal. We walked behind the counter to enter her office and prepare for the first interview.

Mrs. Kingston escorted me to her office and we moved a stack of papers off of the conference table to make a place to sit down and talk. Her office was fairly large, but it was packed full of different materials. The book shelves were overflowing with literature on everything from curricular subject areas to handbooks on school nursing. There was information on state standards and an award indicating Adequate Yearly Progress for the previous year. Around the office there were pictures of students posted and various mementos laid about. Mrs. Kingston reviewed the paperwork required for participation in the study and talked with the researcher for a while about the purpose of the study. Mrs. Kingston was much more interested than the other

candidates about the implications of the study and the overall lack of research on rural educational leaders.

School Building

The Hooverville Area High School is 54 years old. In 1954 the original secondary school building was built and it is still used today; however, a new edition has been added. The new edition incorporated a large auditorium and several new classrooms onto the old school plant. A new elementary school has recently been added to the grounds with a new administrative suite. Both buildings are built upon a hilltop in the middle of farming country. The Hooverville Area High School, a two story building, contains 6th grade through 12th grade students. Classrooms span both sides of a center hallway on both levels. In the back of the building, a new wing houses music classrooms and a large auditorium. On the main level there is one main office where the principal is located. There is also a guidance office and a faculty lounge. At one end of the building, there is a cafeteria and several shop classrooms. The lower level is occupied by academic classrooms which are constructed in a traditional format having rows of student desks within a rectangular space. The building is made of concrete block, and because of its age, it was not wired for technology resources. There are computer network jacks on the walls, and they are accompanied by wiring outside the building walls in most cases.

The building is well maintained and is in good operational shape considering its age of 54 years. The hallways are carpeted and clean. The building itself seems to give off a sense of pride. Artwork, athletic awards, and murals are displayed

throughout. The students enter each morning through the main entrance which has a covered bus drop-off area. Many students report to the cafeteria for breakfast when they arrive. Hooverville has a large percentage of students who receive free and reduced lunches. Mrs. Kingston shared that there are many more who qualify for the program but are too proud to accept the help. Some students participate in a morning walking program in the gymnasium. Others report to homeroom upon arrival.

The staff at Hooverville Area High School is not a large group. There are 28 teachers employed at the high school. That number has increased slightly from 26 in 2001. The administrative team for the district consists of the following: the superintendent, a business manager, an elementary principal, a high school principal, an athletic director who also serves as a part time teacher, and a disciplinarian who also serves as a part time teacher.

Curricular Offerings

Specific data were not available relative to the different educational programs offered at Hooverville Area High School. The high school offers courses that are academic in nature and others that are vocational in nature. A specific description, like the ones offered for the other schools studied, could not be determined or included in the report based on the data collected; however, several areas of specific focus were evident.

One focus at Hooverville Area High School is learning support. The principal, Mrs. Kingston, shared the improvements in their program over the past year. She explained that they were really working hard to implement inclusionary practices.

The high school had recently hired some new learning support teachers, and they were working on team teaching in various subject areas where a learning support teacher is teamed up with a content area teacher to deliver instruction. Mrs. Kingston explained that the faculty had to make a big shift in theory and practice to make this program work, but she was happy with the results to date. The program is going to expand to include more classes in the upcoming school year.

The Hooverville High School has a very successful agriculture education program that serves many students. The community is very heavily oriented toward farming, and this program prepares students to enter that field upon graduation. Mrs. Kingston explained that the new regulations from the State Department of Education regarding agriculture education were making things difficult. She explained that there was no way that the high school could comply with the new guidelines given their current resources. Mrs. Kingston said that the program was worth fighting for, and she explained that she had spent time on the phone discussing the new regulations with the Department of Education. The Department was sending a representative to Hooverville in the upcoming months to evaluate the program and to recommend feasible changes to help with program endorsement by the Department of Education.

The People (Staff, Students, and Parents)

The words that come to mind when thinking about the staff a Hooverville Area High School are hard working, committed, and family. The staff always seemed to be focused on the task of serving their students; however, they were never too busy to stop and talk. All of the teachers were happy to share what they were working on

in their classes, and they were always anxious to talk about their students. There seemed to be a high level of commitment to the school, tradition, and to the students. The staff seemed to function as a family, and Mrs. Kingston played the role of matriarch. The teachers came to her to discuss concerns and problems openly, and Mrs. Kingston always seemed to have a solution to problems. Even if the solution was not easy to carry out, she encouraged the staff to do so.

The students are hard working and proud. They understood the expectations of Mrs. Kingston, and they worked hard to avoid disappointing her. When observing Mrs. Kingston working with kids, she treated them as if they were her own children. She was honest with students and confronted them in a caring but stern manner. Mrs. Kingston expected honesty, and the students understood that. The students that she talked with regarding discipline were always honest about what had happened, even when they knew the results of their actions meant consequences. Even though many students came from homes with minimal resources, they always seemed proud of their school and their family.

The parents of Hooverville Area School District were mostly blue collar farmers. Mrs. Kingston shared that many parents came from a location over the hill that she referred to as "the hollow." The people were very proud. Many of them qualified for the free and reduced lunch program, but they refused the help. Because of the small size of the school and the small town atmosphere, it seemed as if everyone knew one another. When the superintendent spoke about parent concerns, Mrs. Kingston seemed to know the root cause of the problems and the politics

involved in the community. She was willing to pick up the phone and work out issues since she knew many of the parents on a personal level.

What Makes this School Unique?

When visiting the Hooverville Area High School, several items stood out as unique elements of the school. The first was the high school's commitment to the surrounding county and its respective communities. Second, was the school and principal's commitment to the agricultural program. Third, was the commitment to the learning support program and the students it serves. Fourth, the socio-economic level of the community presents a challenge. Fifth, the political environment is challenging. Finally, the school plant was in dramatic need of some improvements.

While visiting Hooverville Area High School, commitment to the students and schools of the county seemed to stand out. The first shadowing visit occurred on a day in which all of the school districts in the county were sending 7th and 8th grade students to a teen conference that Hooverville was hosting. The conference was offered in cooperation with the county human services. The conference started with Mrs. Kingston welcoming everyone at the opening ceremonies in the auditorium. Then, the students were able to select several sessions to attend. The student sessions were provided by local agencies and businesses. Students were able to choose from the following topics: arts, forensics, outdoors, cosmetology, working with animals, healthcare, wellness, sports careers, and bone science. The program offered teens from across the county a chance to come together, explore potential career interests and build relationships. Mrs. Kingston closed the day by introducing an authentic jug

band and a magician. Mrs. Kingston explained the importance of bringing the students across the county together and the need for cooperation among the school districts to provide opportunities for students. The program also exhibited the local focus of the school through the sessions that were offered. The PA Game Commission, local artists, local veterinarians, police, and other community members were all part of the festivities.

The high school's agricultural focus was impressive, and it was a program that Mrs. Kingston was working hard to keep. Mrs. Kingston spent several minutes discussing her frustration with the State's new regulations on agricultural programs and shared her strong commitment to the school's agriculture program. The Hooverville Area School District is located in a mountainous rural area, and the primary occupation of its residents is farming. Because the state recently changed the guidelines for maintaining a certified Agricultural Program, Hooverville's program was in danger of not meeting the requirements. Mrs. Kingston had arranged for the Department of Education to send a representative to Hooverville for discussion of their difficulties. Because the school is small and has limited resources, they were unable to offer the entire comprehensive program needed to gain certification from the Department of Education. Mrs. Kingston shared that she intended to keep the program because it was an essential program for the kids even if it was not certifiable, saying that they would find a way to cover any penalties levied from the state.

Inclusion was another area of focus for the high school. The Hooverville Area High School has implemented a strong learning support program and has made substantial progress with their learning support population. Mrs. Kingston explained

that they had worked extensively on the program and shared that it has been difficult. The high school uses a team teaching model where regular education teachers work in cooperation in the classroom with learning support teachers. Mrs. Kingston and the Hooverville Area High School are committed to improving the performance of learning support students, and they are doing it with a philosophy in which every staff member is responsible for every student. Mrs. Kingston shared that this philosophy was difficult to sell. She had to remove some roadblocks along the way, but they are moving in the right direction.

There are a large number of students at Hooverville who are come from families of low socio-economic levels. A considerable number of students took advantage of a breakfast program. During the first shadowing visit, Mrs. Kingston walked down the hall to the cafeteria where many students had arrived early for breakfast. Mrs. Kingston shared that many of the families in the community qualify for the free and reduced lunch program but added that many of the families are too proud to accept the assistance. According to state figures, 37 percent of the students receive assistance through the free and reduced lunch program. Mrs. Kingston shared that the actual number of families that qualify is much larger.

An area worthy of mentioning was the political environment that surrounds the school district. Mrs. Kingston, on several visits, shared concerns about politics. She appears on a weekly local radio program to share what is happening at the high school and to promote public education. She explained that recently there had been some issues regarding board members in which a former member was speaking out publicly about a current member. When a position opened, the former member was

re-elected to serve. At one point there was a physical altercation between two board members. Mrs. Kingston said that during the next meeting the superintendent had to sit between the two feuding board members to maintain a civil atmosphere. Mrs. Kingston also shared that the board treasurer resigned and left the budget in a state of chaos. Mrs. Kingston was currently serving as the board secretary because that position was vacant. Overall, the local politics and the functioning of the school board of directors remain rocky at best.

Finally, the school plant left a lasting impression. Behind the high school there is a new elementary school with a connected administrative office. The high school has some newly renovated areas in the back of the building, but overall the school building is old and in need of renovation. The front doors of the building have a large gap between them that allow the cold air to blow inside. Up the stairs the main hallway extends in both directions. The hallway is carpeted and clean, but the carpet is visibly worn. In the classrooms, networking wires are run outside the concrete block walls to allow for internet access. The classrooms were small and not designed to meet technological needs. The main office was small and cluttered with deliveries and school supplies. Although this paints a negative picture, the school was maintained exceptionally well by the maintenance staff. The school serves its purpose well, and the staff and administration provide a warm and welcoming environment for students; however, of the four schools visited while conducting this study, this school was the oldest and in the greatest need of renovation.

School Leader

The principal of Hooverville Area High School, Mrs. Kingston, is an older woman who has spent many years in education as an English teacher and a high school principal. She is a very well educated and well spoken school leader. She maintains high expectations for her staff and her students. Mrs. Kingston has spent much of her life and her entire educational career at the Hooverville Area High School. She attended the school as a student and is now the educational leader. Mrs. Kingston has a strong commitment to the community, a direct but caring approach with students, and an insightful view of the wider political environment surrounding education in the state.

Mrs. Kingston's commitment to her students and her staff was visible in her interactions with them. While shadowing, there were ample opportunities to observe her interactions with students related to discipline. In every case, she addressed students in a direct and caring manner. She demanded honesty, and the students seemed to know that she would be fair in her decisions. Students were willing to share information, even in situations in which consequences were involved. Mrs. Kingston was also available for faculty members who were struggling with difficult decisions. She worked closely with a teacher who also served as the athletic director to solve problems with the scheduling of events. Even though the situation was tense and time sensitive, she remained calm and offered valuable direction to the teacher. Teachers welcomed Mrs. Kingston in the faculty lounge, and they seemed eager to share humorous stories about her. There existed a strong sense of collegiality.

Even though Hooverville Area School District is an isolated rural district, Mrs. Kingston was well versed in the political arena. She was working with the State Department of Education in regards to special education and agricultural education issues. If students were impacted negatively, Mrs. Kingston was demanding and refused to take "no" for an answer from the state. She spoke about future plans that involved publishing articles or working in the state capital to lobby for rural education.

Mrs. Kingston was insightful and involved in local politics as well. She had a firm understanding of the politics at the school board level. She appears weekly on a local radio program to promote the events happening at the high school. She works hard to inform the stakeholders of Hooverville Area School District about the many activities that are happening within the high school.

After many years in education, Mrs. Kingston remains passionate when speaking about current issues. She maintains a high level of knowledge regarding policy and the impact of politics on her students. Her enthusiasm and commitment to her students and her school is commendable.

Green Mountain High School

Demographics

The Green Mountain Area High School is a 9-12 school in the Green Mountain Area School District. The school district has three elementary schools that are K-5 buildings. There is one middle school that serves grade levels six through

eight. The Green Mountain Area School District's total enrollment is 2,722 students with 878 students attending the high school. The ethnic breakdown of the school is the following: 94.4 percent White, 3.3 percent Black, 1.4 percent Hispanic, 0.6 percent Asian/Pacific Islander and 0.3 percent American Indian/Alaskan Native. Twenty-one percent of the students are classified as economically disadvantaged. The district spends $15,980 per pupil which is significantly higher than the state average of $11,580 (School Matters, 2007). The Green Mountain Area School District covers 206 square miles, and the total school district population is 16,850 (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2008).

The community is predominantly blue-collar and middle class. Sixty-seven percent of the district households have an income level between $15,000 and $75,000. Twenty-three percent of the households have earnings above $75,000. Ten percent of the households earn less than $15,000. Total operating revenues in 2006 were obtained in the following manner: 53.78 percent from local sources, 43.12 percent from state sources, and 3.1 percent from federal sources. Eighty percent of adults in the district were graduated from high school. Twelve percent of adults have obtained a bachelor's degree which is well below the state average of 26 percent (School Matters, 2007).

The student-to-teacher ratio at the Green Mountain Area High School is 17:1 compared to the state average of 15:1. In 2007, 51.9 percent of students scored proficient on state standardized assessments in reading which was below the state average of 65.4 percent. In math, 42 percent of students scored proficient on state

standardized assessments which was lower than the state average of 53.7 percent (School Matters, 2007).

County Profile

Green Mountain Area School District is one of five public school districts in Mountain County. Mountain County is a medium sized county spanning 772 square miles. The county has a modest population density of 168 residents per square mile compared to the state average of 274. Mountain County's population has shown consistent growth with 54,902 residents in 1900, 75,927 residents in 1950 and 129,313 residents in 2000. The population itself is not very diverse with 95.2 percent of residents being White. The age breakdown of residents is 22.6 percent under age 18, 61.1 percent between 18 and 64, and 16.3 percent over 65. The median age of residents is 39.2 (Center for Rural Pennsylvania, 2008).

A snapshot of the economy reveals a working class blue collar population. The median home value in Mountain County is $97,800 which is slightly higher than the state average of $97,000. Household income rates show 26.8 percent earning below $25,000, 15.3 percent earning between $25,000 and $34,999, 19.9 percent earning between $35,000 and $49,999, 22.1 percent earning between $50,000 and $74,999 and 15.8 percent with earnings above $75,000. The per capita personal income of residents in Mountain County is $29,424, which is slightly lower than the state average of $34,868. The poverty rate in Mountain County is 8.2 percent, lower that the state rate of 11.2 percent. The job category breakdown data finds Mountain County's workforce having 27.5 percent of workers in management jobs, 24.1 percent

of workers in white collar positions, 15.4 percent of workers in the service industry, and 33 percent of workers in blue collar positions. The unemployment rate in 2006 was 3.2 percent, lower than the state rate of 4.7 percent. Farm land is common, with 1,418 farms in Mountain County (CRPA, 2008).

The countywide educational system data available show the wider educational context within which these rural leaders work. Education levels in Mountain County show 21.1 percent of the population having no high school diploma. That figure was slightly higher than the state average of 18.1 percent. Forty-four percent of residents have obtained a high school diploma compared to 38 percent for the state. Nineteen percent of residents have some college education or an associate's degree, which equals the state figure of 21 percent. In Mountain County 14.8 percent of residents have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher. That figure falls behind the state average of 22 percent. Sixty-two percent of high school students reported having post-secondary education plans, which is lower than the state average of 75 percent. The drop-out rate for students in Mountain County was 1.4 percent in 2006 compared to the state rate of 1.6 percent.

Mountain County has five public school districts with 88.3 percent of students attending public school. Twenty-seven percent of students in Mountain County qualify for the free and reduced lunch program. That figure is slightly lower than the state average of 34.9 percent. The student-to-teacher ratio in the county is 16.2. The average teacher salary in the county is $50,833 compared to the state average of $54,043. The funding for schools in Mountain County shows revenues received at 53 percent from local sources, 33.4 percent from the state, and 13.6 percent from federal

sources. Expenditures per student in Mountain County for the 2005-06 school year were $10,474 which were slightly lower than the state average of $11,500 (CRPA, 2008).

Student academic performance in Mountain County, as measured by the PSSA, was slightly lower than state averages. In the mathematics assessment during the 2006 school year, Mountain County showed 32.2 percent of students scoring advanced, 34.5 percent of students scoring proficient, 17.7 percent of students scoring basic, and 15.7 percent scoring below basic. Those figures are a little lower than the state numbers of 39.3 percent advanced, 31.2 percent proficient, 15 percent basic and 14.5 percent below basic. In reading Mountain County students scored 27 percent advanced, 38.4 percent proficient, 17.9 percent basic and 16.7 percent below basic. The reading scores are slightly lower than statewide levels of 32 percent advanced, 36.6 percent proficient, 15.7 percent basic and 15.6 percent below basic (School Matters, 2007). Green Mountain Area High School successfully achieved state Adequate Yearly Progress standards in the 2006-2007 school year.

Community and School History

The Green Mountain Area High School is located in farming country between four townships and neighboring the borough of Remington. Remington is a small farming community with 1,549 residents in the borough. The main livelihood of the residents is farming. Along with farming, there is a large private school in the town of Remington. Many of the residents commute to a larger town 20 miles north of

Remington where there is some industry employment in manufacturing and other blue-collar jobs. There is one state park within the school district.

The townships that make up the span of Green Mountain School District are rural in every sense. Farms are visible in every direction when driving through the school district. The towns that exist within these townships are small, often with one convenience store and a couple of auto repair shops. Most of the towns do not even have a traffic signal. The school is located in the middle of farmland. While sitting in the parking lot, you can see five different farms in the surrounding area

The history of Green Mountain dates back to the early 1700s. Indian tribes moved north from the Carolinas and settled along the mountains. The area's history is predominately related to small farming communities through the Civil War. The confederate soldiers visited the area on their track to the Battle of Gettysburg. The area has many historic elements pertaining to the Civil War and tourist attractions related to the war generate a modest tourist income.

The history of the school district was not available during the course of this study. Although the researcher sought archival and historical documents, only limited data were able to be found. An accurate and complete history of the school was not included in the same manner as the other three districts of study.

First Impressions

The early morning trip to Green Mountain High School led through many small towns and past countless farms. Most of the towns where nothing more than a few houses clustered along the road with a small store and gas station. The road

wound through the countryside, over small streams, and through many corn fields. While approaching the school, the route led past a farm that doubled as the district's bus garage. There was a large pole-barn along the road with several school buses parked inside. Over the next hill, the Green Mountain campus appeared. Signs directed the way to the high school parking lot.

Arriving a little early provided some time to sit quietly in the parking lot taking in the sights and reviewing notes. The researcher observed several different farms bordering the campus. The baseball field and football practice field were on the school grounds in front of the building. The school itself was noticeably aged. The building had a large footprint with wings spanning off in different directions. The landscaping was modest but well maintained. The glass entry way had a concrete overhang that was crumbling. The office was a large square with a long counter across the entire room. Behind the counter there were portraits of the four previous principals. All of the principals were middle-aged White males.

Mr. Osbourn appeared from the hallway to the left and introduced himself. He was a young man, unlike all of the men in the portraits. John was in his thirties and was full of enthusiasm. The researcher followed him back the hallway and talked with him in his office for a while. The conversation focused on administration and some common difficulties. John's office was small and painted blue and white, the schools colors. Several pictures of baseball players and other sports memorabilia were on display. There was a large collage of murals on the left wall.

Mr. Osbourn was well educated and very well spoken. As he answered the interview questions, he did so in an articulate manner and provided many valuable

examples to illustrate points. He also had a sense of humor that was present even when discussing serious issues. It was obvious that he enjoyed his role as building principal.

School Building

One of the most striking images of the Green Mountain High School came while sitting in the parking lot and looking out at the five different farms surrounding the school. The school itself is an old brick building with long corridors flowing out from a central area which contains the gym, auditorium and offices. The doorway is comprised of large glass panes and two sets of doors that funnel late arriving students into the attendance office. Beyond the outer entrance, located on the left, is the main office. The office has a reception area where two secretaries greet and accommodate visitors. To the left is a corridor that houses the administrative and attendance offices. On the right there is a conference room and the guidance office.

In the lobby area there are several trophy cases. One case displayed student artwork and Adequate Yearly Progress achievement signs from the Department of Education. Another case was devoted entirely to the agricultural program at the school and proudly displayed several Future Farmers of America awards. Athletic awards were displayed in front of the gymnasium. Above the gym, there were pictures of sports teams spanning several decades. Senior class portraits dating back to the early nineties hung in the main lobby.

The school's hallways were long and spanned off in different directions from the central area. The hallways where constructed on concrete block and housed

classrooms on both sides. The ceiling tiles were stained in many areas from water damage, and many of them had been replaced. The floors where made of large brightly polished tiles, typical of schools from that era. Locker pods were located in two different spots, both in high traffic areas. The locker areas had large walls that concealed them from view, and the locks on most of the lockers no longer functioned.

The hallways deserve special attention. In most places, they were covered with student generated murals. The murals displayed political, sports, and historical themes from decades dating back to the 1970s. Many of the murals were dated and signed by the authors. The researcher spent several hours just observing the artwork and marveling at the detail and the time that each must have taken.

The high school building may undergo a major renovation costing 37 million dollars. The building is definitely in need of renovations. Some of the problem areas include the following: water leaks, a crumbling portico, a facade that is missing stones, condensation problems, HVAC problems, water stains, rust, peeling paint, missing floor tiles, missing auditorium seats, broken lockers, an outdated and unsafe pool, poor athletic facilities, cracked walls, sinking floors, electrical problems, and an outdated, non-functioning planetarium.

Curricular Offerings

Green Mountain Area High School is noted for its agricultural program. The school is located in a farming community, and the Future Farmers of America programs do very well. There are several awards displayed in the school lobby that illustrate the success of the program.

During the first shadowing visit, Mr. Osbourn visited the career preparation program in the business department. The classroom was full of students who were interviewing with local business owners for potential employment. The students were dressed in professional clothing and prepared for several interviews throughout the day. This was a culminating project for the course, and several students actually gained employment from the process. It was an excellent example of the local focus of the curriculum within the school.

The high school program of study involves two distinct tracks. Students can select the college preparation track or the career preparation track. Along with these specific tracks there exists a variety of opportunities: PSSA preparation and remediation courses, service learning options, dual enrollment courses, and AP courses. Graduation requirements include the following: 4 credits of English, 3.5 credits of Social Studies, 3 credits of Science, 3 credits of Math, 2.5 credits of Health/PE, 0.5 credits of Driver's Education, 0.5 credits of Technology, 0.5 credits of Family Consumer Science, 0.25 credits for a graduation project and 5.5 credits of Electives. There are six Advanced Placement courses offered: American history, biology, statistics, calculus, government, and English. The school district has agricultural education agreements with three local colleges and a technology education agreement with one local college. Elective course offerings are available in the following areas: art, music, family and consumer sciences, business and computer education, and agriculture and business education.

The People (Staff, Students, and Parents)

The people are helpful, friendly, committed to place, and sharing. The staff was willing to talk and to answer questions without reservation, and they all seemed to be committed to the community and students of Green Mountain Area High School. They talked about opportunities that their students needed and the steps that they were taking to ensure that they were available.

The parents and students were also all open and willing to share. Even in difficult and stressful situations, they were willing to answer questions and to allow the researcher to make observations. While observing a difficult meeting with legal implications, the parents involved and the students both seemed eager to share information.

The staff was eager to interact and made the researcher feel like a member of the larger school community. They allowed the researcher to observe their discussions, shared humorous stories about their leader, and extended an invitation to lunch.

The students seemed to be happy, engaged and proud of their school. As Mr. Osbourn walked the halls and visited classrooms, the students greeted him with conversation and questions about our presence. The students appeared to come from middle class or lower middle class families. They were dressed in modest but fashionable clothing. Many students were dressed in NFL football and NASCAR T-shirts. They were well mannered and well behaved. The students were proud of their school and willing to share what they were doing as they went about their daily routines.

What Makes this School Unique?

When thinking about Green Mountain School District and the four visits, two items stand out. First, the local focus of the curriculum coupled with the commitment to technology was impressive. Second, the school plant itself left a lasting impression.

The local focus of the school district was evident in three different elements observed during shadowing visits. During the first visit, Mr. Osbourn visited a business education class in which students were participating in interviews with local business owners. Students were dressed appropriately for interviews, and two classrooms were set up with tables for interviews. Students rotated through a series of real job interviews, and several students were actually hired for open positions. The interview activity illustrated the high school's commitment to local business and its desire to prepare students for local occupations.

There were also several opportunities to observe Mr. Osbourn's interaction with the teacher who ran the Cooperative Work Experience program. Many students at the high school who are in their junior or senior year participate in the Co-op program. These students attended school in the morning and worked at local businesses in the afternoon. Many of the students were also enrolled in the vocational school studying a particular vocation and working part-time for credit. Many of the vocational students at Green Mountain High School attend the vocational school for a semester and then take academic classes and work through the Co-op program during

the remaining semester. Again, the success of this program points to the school's commitment to the local economy.

The Green Mountain High School maintains a strong commitment to technology. The high school runs a computer platform on Windows Vista, a recent version of Microsoft's operating system. The high school students select courses using an on-line interface through the district website. The computer labs at the high school are outfitted with the latest technological hardware and software. The high school's commitment to technology illustrates a global focus.

Finally, the school plant itself left a lasting impression on the researcher. First, the location of the high school was interesting. The high school and middle school campus is located in farm land. When one thinks of rural, this is what usually comes to mind. Sitting in the parking lot, five distinctly different farms bordered school grounds.

The second aspect of the school plant worthy of mention was the building itself. The school building is badly in need of renovation. In fact, the district has a 37 million dollar renovation project pending board approval. The school building is old and has many elements that no longer operate correctly. The HVAC system leaks and operates at different levels in different areas of the building. Ceiling tiles are stained and in need of replacement. The pool is in poor condition and does not function consistently. The lockers no longer lock. Seats are missing in the auditorium. There is a planetarium that no longer functions. There are many other elements that do not operate properly; a more extensive list was already provided in

the building profile listed earlier. In short, the school plant is not an asset to the educational mission of the district.

The final element worthy of mention is the many murals painted on the school walls. Students of each graduating class paint murals on the concrete corridors in the building. The murals are signed, and they date back to the 1970s. Most of the murals depict political or sports themes from the era that they represent. Mr. Osbourn actually painted a mural of a hunting scene when he attended the school. These murals will be lost if the building project is approved. Mr. Osbourn said that he has been working on a plan to preserve them through taking a series of pictures of the murals with their corresponding authors before the construction project begins.

School Leader

Mr. John Osbourn, principal of Green Mountain High School, like the other male subject, took a non-traditional path to education. Mr. Osbourn chose education as a second career. Like the other principals, Mr. Osbourn also leads at the high school he once attended. Mr. Osbourn is a younger man in his thirties. He is very well educated and very well spoken. He was able to answer all of the interview questions thoroughly and provided many examples to illustrate the points that he made. Mr. Osbourn has a strong commitment to the community and the students of Green Mountain High School.

Mr. Osbourn graduated from Franklin and Marshall College and followed his wife to the Richmond area to pursue a career in finance. Mr. Osbourn immediately realized that the financial industry was not for him, so he took a job selling shoes at a

Footlocker in Richmond. He spoke at length about the lessons he learned while working at Footlocker and how it opened his eyes to diversity. He decided to go back to school to pursue a career in education. After moving to New York for a while, he and his wife decided to move back to the Green Mountain area to raise their family. Mr. Osbourn spoke very highly of the community and felt that it was an excellent place to raise his family.

Mr. Osbourn was full of enthusiasm for education and his role as principal at the Green Mountain High School. While shadowing, sometimes it was hard to keep pace with him. When he answered the interview questions, he did so passionately and provided many specific and detailed examples to illustrate his thoughts. While interviewing him, it became clear that he was very well educated and very reflective about his actions and the overall environment surrounding his school.

Mr. Osbourn often spoke a lot about the "smallness" of the school and the community. Even though this district was the least isolated of all of the schools studied, Mr. Osbourn explained that people do not move in or move out often. He went further to explain that many students never leave the county. This lack of diversity and exposure to the larger world beyond Green Mountain was a source of frustration for Mr. Osbourn. He also seemed to struggle with the role of principal beyond the school. He explained that when he goes out in the community, everyone always wants to speak to him about the high school. He even mentioned trying to hide from the community at his son's little league game by sitting far away from everyone else. The school is clearly one of the central focal points for the

community, and Mr. Osbourn struggles to remove himself from the role of school leader.

When dealing with students and parents, Mr. Osbourn uses a straight forward approach and does not shy away from issues. When speaking to students, he approached the issues in a no-nonsense manner, and the students all understood his expectations. He always approached people with a high level of respect and received respect in return. Mr. Osbourn explained that he does not enjoy conflict; however, he understood that in the role of principal it was part of the job. He always seemed to remain calm in the face of adversity, and that approach helped him to resolve concerns in a logical and rational manner. He explained that sometimes his laid back approach upsets his faculty, but it helps him resolve difficult issues in an appropriate and timely manner.

Similarities found in Profiles

Through developing the profiles of the different schools and communities, several common threads emerged crossing the four rural contexts studied. Commonalities exist related to demographics, countywide statistics, community and school histories, curricular offerings, and the people at each site. Throughout the next few paragraphs, a summary of those similarities is offered.

The demographics section of each site's profile revealed similarities relative to the following: district structure, lacking diversity, level of disadvantaged students, student-to-teacher ratios and median home value. The district structure was similar across sites with three of the school districts having one high school serving grades 6

through 12 and one elementary school serving grades kindergarten through fifth. All of the schools have a low level of diversity with populations of 94.4 percent White to 100 percent White. All four of the schools have large populations of students classified as economically disadvantaged ranging from 21 percent to 55 percent. Three of the four schools have student to teacher ratios that fall below the state average of 15:1. Three of the four districts have a median home value well below the state average of $97,000 the forth district came in near the average at $97,800.

When exploring the county profiles of the four sites studied, several commonalities also emerged. Educational attainment from high school completion through some college experience within the counties containing the sites of study faired better than the state average; however, all counties lagged behind state averages for obtaining a bachelor's degree or advanced degrees. The state average for residents with a bachelor's degree or higher is 22 percent, and the counties of study had rates ranging from 12.3 percent to 14.8 percent.

The curricular programs of the schools uncovered another similarity across the four sites studied. All of the schools had programs that tracked students for different types of post-high school experiences. Unlike many high schools in suburban and urban settings, these schools all still maintained industrial arts programs. Some schools maintained specialized programs like logging and fish farming. For two of the schools, agricultural education was a focus for many students.

The communities themselves shared some similarities that were apparent to the researcher during the initial visit. The "small" size of the communities and their isolation left a lasting impression. Although small is a relative term, in this case it

refers to the physical size of the communities where these schools are located. Two of the schools are located in towns that were nestled within the mountainside. In both cases, the high schools were located on hills where residential streets sprawled up the mountainside overlooking the towns below. The athletic facilities for these schools were extensive.

The two towns where these schools were located both had a limited industrial base. One relied heavily on a manufacturing plant for employment, and the other had several small powder coating plants. Railroad tracks ran through the towns and at one time served as part of a major railroad industry. For both of these districts, the logging industry provides a staple in the local economy. The other two schools are located in the middle of farmland and seemed to emerge along the road. These two schools are both located near several small towns that consisted of a few stores and homes located at intersections in the highway.

All four of the districts studied served communities that relied heavily on natural resources for a source of income. In every case, the isolation of the schools became evident as the researcher traveled long distances across country roads with little traffic to get to the site. In some cases the researcher traveled unpaved mountain roads to shorten the distance.

Finally, the people encountered at each site over the course of several site visits offered yet another similarity across sites. The teachers and staff at each site were welcoming to the researcher, taking time from their busy schedules to answer questions and share their work. The adults working in each building knew a lot about the students they served. In many cases, the staff shared personal relationships or an

understanding of students' home circumstances. The students themselves appeared to be mature and responsible. No problems were observed between students interacting in 6th grade through 12th grade. The students, like the staff, displayed pride in their schools. They took time to share their work with the researcher as he observed their classes and their daily activities. The interactions observed between the principals and parents, in many cases, had personal connections. It appeared as if everyone knew everyone else and their respective influence within the community.

Summary of Site Profiles

In order to fully understand the data collected during this study, a wider knowledge base about the four schools is needed. Qualitative research is deeply tied to the context of the phenomenon of study. Understanding the phenomena by the events and processes taking place is a crucial element of qualitative research (Maxwell, 1996). The product of qualitative research is richly descriptive (Merriam, 1998). This rich description of the context adds to validity of the overall study.

Much of what the review of related literature suggests was verified in the context encountered during this study. The schools and communities were isolated and long distances from metropolitan areas. The local economies rely heavily on natural resources and farming. The school buildings were all older dating back to the 1960's and 1970's. Two of the buildings were in good shape and two were in need of repair or renovation. Median household income and higher education rates in the districts lagged behind the state average. The programs offered in the schools attempted to prepare students for both the local economy and the global economy.

The people encountered exhibited a strong sense of pride in their communities and their schools. More detailed information about these similarities to the literature is provided in chapter five of this study.

The previous section provided the reader with an overview of the rural context where each of the leaders selected for study work. This understanding of the context helped the researcher to understand the cultural context and physical context he was immersed within for 12 months. Having a contextual understanding also helped the researcher to understand the relationships observed throughout the course of data collection and analysis.

The final section of this chapter turns the focus to the four principals' perceptions related to the research questions guiding this study. The principals were each asked to share their perceptions on: the rural context, their personal histories, their gender, their leadership, ethical decision making, and an ethical dilemma. While exploring each of these areas, the principals were asked to comment on how they perceived the rural context impacted each area. Throughout section 2 of this chapter the data collected are shared in a topic orientation where each principal's perceptions are shared relative to each topic and then the next topic is explored. The lone exception to this format is the principals' personal histories. Each leader's history is explored in full in order to develop a full picture of each educational leader. This change is noted in the chapter where it occurs.

Section II: Principals' Perceptions

Rural Context

To explore how the rural principals perceive the impact of the rural context on their leadership, initially the principals were asked about their thoughts on what it means to be rural. The literature review of this study found that there is a lack of definitive definition as to what "rural" means. Hobart Harmon (2001) explains in his work that inadequate research on rural schools is an issue for all levels of government as policy makers are frustrated with the lack of a definitive definition of "rural." The principals provided several different definitions of what they perceived it means to be "rural." The respondents defined "rural" in terms of the following: geographic isolation, reliance on natural resources, different from urban or suburban settings, and unique in mindset.

Mrs. Kingston, principal of Hooverville Area High School, explained her perceptions about what it means to be rural by saying, "I think to a certain extent being rural is a state of mind. I am certainly well aware of the diverse definition of rural when it comes to legislatures and so forth." Mrs. Kingston went on to specify her own ideas of the criteria for being rural:

> I think that isolation is a key word in defining rural. I really do. Is being rural good or bad? Obviously, I think it is good. I would not be here if I did not. I think it is good, but educationally it has its drawbacks. It has terrific drawbacks. You just have to work harder to provide opportunities for kids. You have to work harder to provide opportunities for your parents. Things such as social services in a rural area to get what your kids and families need is a nightmare.

Mr. Wills, principal of Smithville Area High School spoke about rural in terms of it being a state of mind. He went so far as to say it is a type of lifestyle, defining rural in the following way:

> I guess I would start with maybe a sparsely settled place that is away from city influences. It is a state of mind. It is different than the city thought process. Even just what is important in rural areas like here is logging, there is mining, there is natural gas and things of that order. That is what keeps us going. In the cities they don't even know what that is probably, so it is a lifestyle.

Mrs. McInness was unable to explain specifically what she perceives it means to be rural. She simply defined rural as being different but stressed the importance of needing experience in the context to be successful by saying, "Before you lead in a rural district you have to have some sort of experience in a rural district."

Mr. Osbourn, principal at Green Mountain High School, talked about geographic location, but he also alluded to a mindset that he perceives to be part of being rural. He described rural in the following way:

> I think rural is typically defined as geographic, where you are as compared to larger cities. If I say I am in a rural setting, most people picture wide open spaces or small towns or possibly no towns… I think what impacts us in schools is the mind set that goes along with that ruralness: the resistance to change and some of the less diverse thinking, less experiential thinking. We have kids that have not been out of Mountain County.

After the principals explained their ideas regarding what it means to be rural, they commented on whether or not they viewed being rural as positive or negative relative to school leadership. With one exception, three of the four principals viewed leading in a rural school as a positive. Mrs. Kingston explained her positive views saying, "I think having a rural school and putting kids through a rural school is the

best background they can get in growing up and working out some of the issues of adolescents in learning good basic values."

Mr. Wills explained that being a rural school leader is a positive thing but stressed the importance of having a good fit with the community by stating, "I think it is a positive. You have to know the area as an administrator and most do understand this. We need to fit that mold."

Mrs. McInness explained the positives of leading in a rural school in terms of relationships with students and how that caring perspective plays into her decision making:

> I think it is a positive thing to be an administrator in a small rural school because you get to know the kids. You get to have a tremendous impact on a lot of kids because you get to know them, and you get to know their families. You get to know their background, and you can use that information to make a better educational decision.

Finally, Mr. Osbourn, principal of Green Mountain Area High School explained the difficulties of rural education leadership as a frame of mind relating to an ongoing resistance to change. Mr. Osbourn stated, "It is the mindset and culture that comes with the rural stuff. I think that is what we battle everyday."

After the principals shared their perceptions related to what it means to be rural and whether or not they viewed it as a positive influence, the researcher asked them to share their perceptions on some specific areas of the rural context. While conducting the literature review for this study, the researcher uncovered several areas of difficulty confronting rural educational leaders across the country. The principals were asked for their perceptions relating to the following: community tax base,

poverty levels, outmigration, diversity, attracting and retaining quality teachers, and the roles that the educational leaders of rural schools must assume.

Tax Base

The researcher asked the principals about their perceptions on the low tax base. As Howley (1988) states, "The local property tax still greatly influences the quality of school buildings in many states. Inadequate resources make capital outlay issues acute in many rural areas" (p. 3). Without exception all of the principals viewed this as a challenge in their districts. The principals' perceptions related to tax base included the following: family businesses, outmigration of students, high needs families that rely on social services, lack of industry and unemployment with a lack of available jobs. Mrs. Kingston, principal of Hooverville Area High School explained the difficulties of having a low tax base in terms of needing to stretch resources and people often leaving the community to find employment.

> Low tax base is reality in districts that are truly rural. There is little industry. Industry is typically struggling, or it is a long standing family industry that you hope as the generations pass they will keep that business going. There is always that concern. We have lost a lot of our farms. That has been an issue here; so when you are looking at the same source as your tax base for funding you cannot do much with it. You can only stretch it so far. People and kids leaving – yes – unfortunately we usually lose hardworking bright kids. Special needs families don't seem to move, but the others do. We are losing resources in the community, and we are losing the resources here at school because we have very little to offer them as far as jobs and careers.

Mr. Osbourn explained that the tax base in Green Mountain School District is primarily residential. He explained that there is not much industry to draw from in his district saying:

> Even as compared to the rest of Mountain County, we struggle with our tax base. We are very rural. We have a lot of farms, some which are given taxing advantages because of agricultural preservation. Our biggest thing is we don't have any industry. Most of our local tax base is residential, not all of it, but the vast majority of our local tax base is residential housing as opposed to having industry.

Mrs. McInness, principal of Whitfield Area High School explained the problems associated with the low tax base in terms of social services and the attraction that those services create for impoverished families.

> The low tax base or the lack of tax base is very challenging here. I don't know how it is in other rural communities, but we do not have a lot of industry. A lot of industry has left the area and left behind a tremendous amount of unemployed, so we do have a higher level of unemployment. That brings to us a whole other bag of problems between different health issues and drug and alcohol abuse. Because we are the Melvin County seat our courthouse is here. Our human services are here. We have a lot of people that come in because of the cheapest housing in the area. Welfare is here.

Mr. Wills, principal at Smithville Area High School explained the impact of having a low tax base in terms of student outmigration, consolidation and a large population of retired citizens.

> My district is about 70% retired citizens, so the tax base is very low. With that also our job situation is poor. We are losing job opportunities, so students are moving out. We are down to maybe 60 kids in a class, and it is getting lower each year, so as that goes, our funding is lower, so that gives us less opportunity to do some of the things that other districts can do. So, consolidation is something that people are looking at.

Poverty

After the principals shared their perceptions on the impact of having a low tax base, the focus of the interview turned to the related issue of poverty. Huang and Howley (1991) argue that "Poverty has been an historic fact of life for rural areas. Most of the chronically poor counties in the United States are located in rural areas" (p. 1). Two of the four principals specifically expressed high levels of frustration related to poverty. The other two did not see poverty as a critical element affecting their leadership. Both of the principals who spoke to poverty levels shared that in their communities, students who are poor do not necessarily realize they are poor. Their families, who qualify for help, often refuse due to pride.

Mrs. Kingston explained that there is a high level of poverty in her district. She explained the impact of poverty in the following terms:

> We have a lot of poverty here, but most of our kids don't know they are poor. They don't' sense it. They don't feel it. They don't believe it. I guess that is a good thing because it keeps the pride the family has… Even materials and trips for kids, we have to be very careful of what we expect the families to fund and be careful of what we can support because it does get down to that issue. We have many kids that should be getting free and reduced lunches that do not because of the family pride. We can help them out in that respect, but they do not want that.

Mrs. Kingston went on to explain that it is hard for families in poverty to focus on education. She stated, "It really makes you understand why some of these families and kids place very little value on education because they are all about survival. They have a whole different set of rules on survival then you and I have."

Mrs. Kingston explained that she understands these financial constraints and shared some examples:

> It does help because I understand a lot of things. I understand especially those who are farming. I really have a good insight to that. I understand people not being able to jump into a car and run to the store to get something because the store is 5 miles away, 10 miles away, 15 miles away. I understand somebody's concern about leaving their kids home because there is no one within miles of their house. Or I understand when someone cannot come into a meeting or can't be here for something because they do not want to go out on the roads because they live over in the hollow. It is all dirt roads, and it is treacherous so just some of the economic things. I try to keep my expectations of what the kids should have realistic based on the economy here and based on what is available.

Mr. Osbourn felt that poverty was an issue in his district but explained that they do have a wide range of incomes. He described his district as having a fairly low average income. Specifically, he explained the poverty in Green Mountain Area School District in the following manner:

> We have some of the extremely poor people like you have in any community. We don't have massive quantities. We have our trailer parks and some housing different places that is very sub-par. I would say the middle income of our community is fairly low.

Mr. Osbourn went on to explain, like Mrs. Kingston, that most of the impoverished families do not realize that they are living in poverty:

> We have a lot of people who don't know how poor they are. We have a lot of people who don't want to admit how poor they are. We have so many kids that would qualify for free and reduced lunches and different services but are embarrassed to do so.

Outmigration

Research suggests that student and citizen outmigration are elements that rural leaders in the United States face. When asked about outmigration, all of the principals

classified it as a problem in the rural context. Their answers highlighted a lack of professional jobs existing in the community and the best and brightest graduates moving away and seldom returning to the community.

Mr. Wills explained that student outmigration in the Smithville School District is a real problem. Mr. Wills talked about there only being one major employer in town:

> All we really have is the mill. There are 300 union workers, maybe another 100 salaried. That tells you there is not much availability in the area. That is just this community. In other communities there are some other powder metal plants and what not. As a whole there is nothing to come back to with a college degree.

Mr. Wills went further to explain that he is battling this dilemma with his own daughter. He explained how technology does provide some potential avenues for impacting this trend; however, he stressed that students who leave seldom come back to Smithville:

> I am struggling with that with my own daughter. She is going to be a sophomore. I know we have to prepare them, and I know she is probably not going to be here. The only thing that might change somewhat is that you may be able to work at home with a company in California. You are just going to be working through the internet or whatever, but I don't know that we know what the odds are going to be out there for a lot of these kids. Unfortunately, I see a lot of our kids moving away. That is what happens. All the kids that go to college rarely come back.

Mrs. McInness explained the outmigration issue in Whitfield Area in terms of the there being limited opportunities for students in professional fields. She explained that in the community of Whitfield the only options that exist are found in education or health care:

> Right now they are really scarce unless you are coming out with a degree in education and there is medical. There are a lot of changes in the medical field. There are opportunities in the medical field. I would think that medical and educational are the two biggest employability options that they would have. Coming out with something other than that, there is not much.

Mr. Osbourn echoed the same sentiments as his colleagues stating that not many of the students who go on to higher educational endeavors ever return to the Green Mountain District.

> People that have come out of our school and have gone on to be a PhD and this and that, where are they? Not here. We tend to retain the less successful people in our school. They are the ones that tend to stay here.

Finally, Mrs. Kingston expressed similar perceptions. She spoke about the availability of white collar jobs in a neighboring community. It is important to note that the major employer that she talks about had recently undergone a restructuring due to unethical corporate practices, and the impact on the region remains to be determined. Mrs. Kingston's perceptions reflect the community's dependence on this one large company to provide professional jobs to citizens.

> We seem to be making small steps toward rebounding from the corporate fiasco in the neighboring community, which didn't have a significant impact on this school district. It had some fallout, but whether that will be enough to attract some of the kids back, whether those are the jobs that they would seek remains to be seen.

Diversity

Another area of hardship that research suggests rural leaders encounter is a lack of diversity. The cultural diversity of rural communities is increasing, but it can best be described as geographic diversity (Harmon, 2001). This can be explained in

part by geographic isolation that can contribute to a lack of population turnover. All of the principals expressed frustration related to having a lack of diversity. The principals perceived a lack of diversity in terms of having a lack of exposure, racial issues, issues related to sexual orientation, and a resistance to change. Mrs. McInness explained the lack of diversity in Whitfield Area School District as the following:

> Worldly news, they see it on the television, but they don't get to experience it. There is a lot of detachment I think from the rest of the world so to speak in small rural communities.

Mr. Osbourn explained the lack of diversity in the Green Mountain School District in terms of racial problems. Mr. Osbourn explained that it is more of an issue between students who grew up in the community and those that did not, stating:

> We have 95 percent White in this community. As a leader and a representative, we fight those battles to make sure our kids are treating each other properly as they need to. We have underlying race relations/diversity issues just as everyone does, but ours are so out of kilter as far as 95 to 2. Our minority percentage is so small that it is just outrageously unbalanced. Whenever we have situations we work through them with kids, and it comes back to more of, "I don't care if he is Black or White, but he or she is not from here." We have had some race things over the years. It comes back to he or she did not grow up here. It comes back to that nobody here moves around.

Mrs. Kingston explained problems with diversity as it relates to the students' extreme lack of exposure to differences:

> Culturally, we are not diverse. Occasionally we get a family who moves in whether it is religion or whether is someone of a different sexual orientation or whatever. Our community does not handle that well – not at all. In fact, I wish we were more diverse for our kid's sakes.

Mrs. Kingston went on to provide an example of a lack of diversity concern related to sexual preference. She explained a situation with two lesbian students that almost erupted into a riot:

> All of a sudden a female student's girlfriend from the state of Washington came to Marshall County, PA and moved in her family's house and enrolled in our school. The first day she was here the two of them sat in the cafeteria and held hands and gave each other a peck. I had a near riot. I had a steady stream of kids coming in here. I mean they were indignant saying, "They have no right…that is disgusting…you would not believe that" and on and on…. and for about three days this went on. For three days I did my canned speech. Everyone has rights. If you wish them not to hold hands then no one holds hands here - no boyfriend/girlfriend holding hands. That is the way it will be.

Mr. Wills, principal of Smithville High School simply addressed diversity by saying, "We are very constant here with that." The lack of diversity in these four high schools can be explained in part by the geographic isolation that these rural districts battle. Another area where geographic isolation impacts these schools and their leaders is in attracting and retaining quality teachers.

Attracting and Retaining Teachers

Attracting teachers in rural schools remains a problem for many districts (Harmon, 2001). Many teacher preparation programs do not have a rural education focus. Salaries for rural teachers are significantly less than, that of teachers in urban and suburban areas. To compound this problem, teachers in rural settings may have to take on a variety of roles in the school, which are outside the normal educational responsibilities. The researcher asked the principals for their perceptions around this issue, and they stressed the difficulties they had encountered. Three of the principals

look for teachers from rural areas or from the local area when hiring. They expressed frustration in needing to do this but explained that if they do not, turnover becomes a problem. They went further to explain that it is important to bring in new ideas and fresh perspectives; however, that becomes challenging when hiring locally.

Mr. Wills explained the difficulties he has experienced in hiring and retaining teachers in terms of wanting to hire locally but trying to balance bringing in fresh perspectives. He shared, "Going to a rural area where enrollment is dropping. There isn't any industry. It is difficult. You want to find locals, but you also want to bring other people in to get other ideas." Mr. Wills provided a specific example about how he was dealing with two difficult vacancies at the beginning of the school year. He stated, "Unfortunately, two of my biggest pieces left me right before the beginning of this school year. One of my 8th grade math teachers moved back home and actually so did my reading teacher."

Mr. Wills explained the dilemma associated with hiring young teachers and teachers from other areas. He explained that he actually looks for teachers from rural areas by saying the following:

> If they are not from an area similar to this or if they are not here because they truly want to be in an area like this, it is hard to keep them. They are looking for a bigger school, more money; they are looking for more opportunities. If we hire somebody young and single, it is a nightmare, because if they already have a significant other, and they are somewhere else they want to get to where they are, or if they aren't involved with anyone and they are looking, there is not a lot to choose from unfortunately. It is a reality, so it is tough unless they are already established in the nearby area. Lately, some of the teachers we have hired have been non-traditional. They have been forty years old or better and getting in teaching. They have raised their families. We have had a lot of success with them.

Mrs. McInness echoed Mr. Wills' sentiments by explaining that they also stress finding someone from the area when hiring a new teacher. She spoke about the difficulties in teachers making the transition to a rural area:

> It is challenging to a point, which kind of narrows our options as far as when we hire. We probably place a greater emphasis on where are they from, where do they reside from? Is the way they grew up, where they lived; is it compatible with where we live? That is where we start. I take that into consideration when hiring people because a lot of times excellent outstanding teachers will have a huge issue transitioning to rural Whitfield.

Mr. Osbourn expressed some difficulty in attracting and retaining quality teachers, and he said that he actually asks each applicant, "Why here?"

> Whenever I interview people, I ask, "Why are you thinking here?" especially if you are from Virginia or Washington or New York. How did you land in Mountain County? I feel that I could say that because I grew up here. If there is any criticalness there, I feel I can do that because I am a local person. It is not an area that people say, "I want to live in Mountain County." Our pool is small, but we tend to get good people out of the pool.

Mrs. Kingston explained the difficulties with finding teachers through a specific example she was dealing with and also expressed difficulty in finding people with the appropriate certification:

> Absolutely, it is difficult, even things such as certifications. We are in a situation right now where I have no Spanish or French teacher to start the school year. We will have somebody in there I am sure, but whether I have a fully certified person in there to start the year is very questionable. Now, will we be able to get an emergency certificate, probably, but to jump through all of those hoops…

Different Roles

Another area of difficulty that the research base suggests rural leaders struggle with is the wide variety of roles and responsibilities these leaders assume. As Loveland (2003) explained, the rural school leader is often a person who must wear many hats. They take on a variety of roles within the school and often times in the community as well. Howley and Pendarvis (2002) state that the job pressures of the rural principalship are complex, and the position is more stressful than ever before. The principals participating in this study affirmed this as they each explained the span of their roles and shared their perceptions on their preparation for leading in the rural context.

When asked about his role at Smithville Area High School, Mr. Wills explained that his roles spanned across several different areas. In larger districts, these roles are often delegated to other members of an administrative team. Mr. Wills explained his roles in the following manner:

> In larger districts assistant principals do a lot of the discipline monitoring and observations. There are times when I have to be the nurse, there are times when you are teaching, and there are times when you write grants. I sit in with special education meetings whether it is an ER, IEP, or GIEP. It could be something through the guidance center or agency meetings. Sometimes I help out with the guidance scheduling, just the whole gamut. Even personnel, I mean, we hire, we fire, we do athletics, teaching, maintenance, cafeteria all of it.

Mrs. McInness explained her role responsibilities in terms of discipline and curriculum:

> Well, there is discipline; each building is in charge of their discipline. I am in charge of the district's curriculum as well as my building level and any revisions we have with that. We run a curriculum renewal schedule where we look at new

> curriculum every year, a new content area every year to renew and revise that curriculum or purchase textbooks and things like that, so I am in charge of that for K through 12. I am in charge of overseeing the technology.

Mrs. Kingston shared that she was actually thinking of writing an article for *Educational Leadership* on the many hats that rural leaders wear. She summed up the roles that she assumes by simply stating that she does it all:

> I should not say, "I am doing it all," but essentially, I am doing it all. In a school district in an urban area these things are farmed out. I think people in Harrisburg forget that kind of thing.

Parental Expectations

A final area of difficulty that rural leaders encounter was parental expectations. Blaum (2000) found that rural students have lower goals than urban youth. They are less likely to have educated parents with professional careers. Rural parents are more likely to approve if their children opt not to attend college (Blaum, 2000). To explore this element of the rural context, the researcher asked the principals about their perceptions related to parental expectations. The principals all expressed frustration related to parental expectations. The principals stressed the importance of parents' own experiences with schooling. They talked about the idea of social reproduction related to the expectations that students will achieve the same level of success as their parents.

Mrs. Kingston talked about a split she perceives to exist in her district. She explained that many parents do not value education, while many others do. She perceived one group taking a toll on the other:

> We have a fair share of people here that do not place much value on education unfortunately. Many of those folks are the third generation poverty people. Again, their focus is survival. Their focus is this is how we have always done it. We have made it; just leave us alone. We don't need this. We also have more who do value education and who feel if you don't have a good education you are not going to be able to succeed and advance yourself. The majority values education, but I can see the toll that the other group is taking on all of us. It is very frustrating when you are trying to stress to people your child needs to be in school. You cannot have this absenteeism because it negatively impacts one's learning. They don't care.

Mrs. Kingston explained that many parents in Hooverville Area School District do not want their children to be challenged by the school. She stated, "I do see people not wanting their kids challenged because it is too hard for them. They don't understand the stretch the mind and your reach should exceed your grasp concept. They don't understand that." She went on to explain that Hooverville often falls below the state average for students who pursue higher education and explained that she sees this as a paradox.

> We don't meet the state average for higher education. I don't think we will ever meet that, but some years we have had 60 percent. Then, we get another class, and you are lucky if you hit 50 percent. It all depends. I find that a paradox that "one size fits all." It is not true.

Mr. Wills perceived parental expectations in the Smithville School District to be extremely important and closely tied to the experiences the parents had with schooling.

> It is huge what their perception is. If they had a good school career then their perception is that school is a good thing. If their kids are working hard, then teachers are doing the right thing. But if they had a bad time at school, then they don't see it that way. When you call them if there is a problem the support is not there. So, it all comes back to what their childhood was like.

Mr. Wills, like Mrs. Kingston, mentioned the percentage of students that leave Smithville and go on to pursue higher education. Again, the numbers were lower than the state average. Mr. Wills shared, "We have probably 60 percent of our kids that move on to some kind of school, and we have few that go into the military and about 10 percent go to the workforce."

Mrs. McInness, like Mr. Wills, felt that parental expectations in her district were closely tied to their own experiences in education:

> Well, I think it has a huge impact. A lot of the parents of our students that struggle are the parents who struggled in school. There are a lot of issues with that when a parent says "I don't know, this is how I was treated in high school. I quit high school." So their perception of their high school experience has a huge impact on their kids. A lot of times the kids will bring that baggage in. "Well, this is how you treated my parents." We face that a lot.

Mrs. McInness perceives parental expectations for higher education to be falling in Whitfield Area. When asked about expectations for higher education she said, "Some do, but I don't have a percentage on it. I think the percentage of parents that are expecting their children to pursue higher education is getting less and less."

Mr. Osbourn spoke about the lack of parental expectations for higher education in his community and also perceived there to be a direct correlation between expectations and student achievement:

> The amount of college educated adults in the community and then the test scores of our kids. I think there has to be a direct correlation there because our kids are going to come to school prepared and having a good background, a good support system. We are not strong. If I pulled 100 people out of a crowd at a basketball game and said, "How many went to college?" it is not a high percentage here.

Mr. Osbourn went on to explain the impact of parental expectations in terms of parents expecting children to experience the same level of success that they have. This perception makes it difficult for him, as an educational leader, to influence change. Mr. Osbourn said that he often hears things like, "I went there. It was good enough for me. I have a job." He said that he also hears things from students like, "My dad drives a truck, and I am going to drive."

On the other hand, Mr. Osbourn explained that many times when parents have high expectations, they are unrealistic. Mr. Osbourn perceived this to be closely tied to the parents' own experiences in education. He, like Mrs. Kingston, perceived there to be two competing schools of thought within his district, one that had high but sometimes unrealistic expectations and the other that expected students to achieve the same level of success as their parents:

> I think our expectations are not always based on reality. That is not just a rural thing. That idea that we don't know how competitive the environment our kids are going to go into when they are out there. I am going to go to med. school…maybe you are. I hope you can, but from what I see you are probably in for a rude awakening when you get to Chemistry 101 in college let alone apply for med school. I think our expectations are a little high. Everybody wants their kid to do well. I think there are two different things that get in the way. One is unrealistic expectations of what it takes to do well or what they are going to compete against. The other extreme is the expectation that we do okay the way we are…you can do what I do. You can be just like me. Neither do I think is unique to a rural school. Again, it goes back to what you have experienced.

The overarching question of this study explored how the principals perceive the rural context impacts their leadership. From the previous section, the answers provided by the participants verify what the literature review of this study suggested.

The rural principals struggled to clearly define one single definition of what it means to be rural. The principals also expressed frustration and provided examples to illustrate difficulties with a low tax base, poverty, outmigration, lack of diversity, attracting and retaining teachers, assuming a wide variety of roles and parental expectations within their schools and communities.

Principals' Personal Histories

A subsequent area of focus guiding this study was the perception of how personal history has influenced the ability to lead in the rural context. To explore this question, each participant was asked questions about his or her: childhood, family, parental expectations, critical life changing incidents, and community fit. Each participant was asked to share a snapshot of his or her personal history and whether or not he or she perceived that his or her personal history was a barrier or bridge in the ability to lead within the rural context. From his or her personal history, each principal was asked to share one or two life incidents that he or she felt were critical in shaping who he or she is as a leader today. One unexpected outcome of this portion of the study was the fact that all of the principals lead in school districts that they attended while they were growing up. This unexpected outcome is addressed in chapter five of this study.

Throughout the next few pages, this study explores the principals' perceptions regarding their personal history and its impact on their leadership. To provide a full picture of each principal's history and background, the report will depict each subject in full before switching focus to another leader. This process allows the reader to

develop a descriptive picture of the people occupying these leadership roles. The researcher asked each principal to share information about his or her personal history, beginning with their childhood.

Personal History: Mrs. Kingston

Mrs. Kingston, principal of Hooverville Area High School, grew up in the school district where she is now high school principal. Mrs. Kingston grew up in a farming family. She described her childhood in the following terms:

> I am a farmer. I am a daughter of farmers. I think that was a great upbringing. We did a lot of things together. Mostly work, but we managed to have fun and good times doing that. Actually, some of my fondest memories are some of the picnic lunches we had under the maple trees while we were putting hay away. So, we had a close family. I have two siblings and we are far apart in age. I am the oldest. My brother is nine years younger; my sister is 19 years younger than I am. So, it was like three different families. My dad passed away when I was 21. That was definitely a defining moment. I had just completed college and had started to work here. I grew up in this area. My family was originally from another part of the state but came here to buy a farm.

Mrs. Kingston felt that her family was probably in the lower middle class while she was growing up, but she explained that she never realized that. She described the socioeconomic level of her family through examples:

> I guess I really wasn't aware because a lot of my friends lived like I did, some lived better. I look at our house. We had a huge house that was fully furnished, but was it fancy or elaborate? No. I think the only room in the house that had carpeting was my parent's bedroom. It was just an area rug. I can remember with my mother that she thought she died and went to heaven because she got a new sink and cupboards. Not a new kitchen, but just a new stainless steel double sink and cupboards. So that was a big deal. My dad always had some

> money in his pocket, but he was always big on, "You pay for what you get." You don't get it until you pay for it.

Mrs. Kingston explained her high school experience saying that she liked school. She was involved in many different activities. She spoke about her parents' expectations that she attend college, and she never thought it would not be an option. She expressed these perceptions in the following terms:

> This is my high school. I went to school here. I was always very involved in school. I always liked school. I was involved in music, plays and student council. Most of the time, I was an honor student, but not always. Interestingly enough, there was never any question in my family if I would be going to college or not. It was understood that you are going to college. I believe I was the second by one year in our family, both my mother and father's that went to college. I was torn between nursing and education. There was a lot of influence from my parents. My mother, for some reason, thought nursing was where I should be. You will have a good career taking care of people. My dad's opinion was that I should teach. You will be able to take care of yourself the rest of your life. You will be able to be independent. That was always a big thing to my family to be independent. So, I decided, probably with some influence from some of my teachers, to go into education.

Mrs. Kingston graduated from college with a degree in English Education and toyed with working away from home. After interviewing with several schools, she eventually ended up teaching English at Hooverville Area. She explains that decision in the following terms:

> I came back and looked around here in the area for a job, and actually at the beginning of the year I did not have one. I got in here as a long-term sub, and then that was the fall that my dad died. The following year a permanent position opened here, and I was offered the job and was glad to take it under the circumstances to be near my mother and my brother and my sister. Actually, during college I had toyed with the idea of wanting to go some place bigger. I did not want be at a small school. I toyed with that. Did some interviews at bigger schools and did not like it.

Mrs. Kingston served as an English teacher at Hooverville Area High School for many years before taking her leadership role as building principal. She had applied and interviewed for the administrative position earlier and was passed over. At that point, Mrs. Kingston explored options at other schools but decided to stay at Hooverville:

> The first opportunity that I had to apply for a principalship here, I was interviewed. I did not get the job. That was kind of bittersweet, you know it was very bittersweet, and I thought, well, you know, you hope for the best. Obviously, this guy is a good guy, and I went through a period of do I want to stay here or do I want to take this administrative degree and go out. I did a few interviews.

A few years later, the building principal decided to leave, and Mrs. Kingston was offered the job. She has been the building principal for the past 13 years:

> I was at home one day and got a phone call from the superintendent, and he said, "Are you still interested in being the principal of the high school?" It really took me back. I said, "Yes, what is going on?" He told me that the principal was leaving, and apparently there had already been a lot of discussion about it between the superintendent and some of the board members, and it was kind of a done deal. So, I was hired very quickly.

Personal History: Mr. Wills

Mr. Wills, like Mrs. Kingston, attended the high school where he now leads. Mr. Wills' father was a special education teacher in the Smithville Area High School. Mr. Wills enjoyed his high school experience. Like Mrs. Kingston, he was involved in many different aspects of the school; however, Mr. Wills did not set out initially for a career in education. He explained his early years in the following manner:

> I grew up in Smithville. My dad was a special education teacher here at Smithville Area High School. So, I have an older brother and younger sister. My mom did not work until I was probably in high school. Then she went to work for the state. I had a pretty typical life here. You know how that goes. We had friends in the neighborhoods. We were outside playing all the time. That helps the social end of it. For high school I did graduate from Smithville Area High School here. I did play basketball. I ran track. I was vice-president of my class in 9th grade through 12th grade. Basically, involved in the school, I enjoyed my school experience, which I think was one of the biggest reasons why I thought I would stick with education because I enjoyed it so much while I was here at school. But when I graduated from high school, I did not have any idea what I wanted to do. I went to the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford for two years where I got my associate's degree in computer programming.

Mr. Wills explained the socioeconomic level of his family as lower middle class. He explained that he would have qualified for free and reduced lunches, but the family never took advantage of that. He, like Mrs. Kingston, explained that his parents expected him to attend college. He explained those elements in the following terms:

> I would have to say we were lower middle. Especially to begin with when my dad was teaching. He was making $5,000. We would have qualified for free lunches, but we never did that. I do think my parents pushed for college. They expected us to go to school. All the way through I knew I was going to be going to college. It just was not an option. It was already decided. I also knew I did not want to be someone who went to the mill or a factory and worked 8, 10, or 12 hours a day pushing a button. I knew I could not do that. They expected me to go, and they expected my brother and sister to go.

Mr. Wills went on after graduating with a degree in computer science to work some odd jobs and then decided to go back to college to become certified as a math teacher. After obtaining his teaching certification, Mr. Wills decided to move back to his home in Smithville saying that when he went to school in Pittsburgh, he liked it,

but he knew that city life was not for him. Mr. Wills took a teaching job in a neighboring district to Smithville and taught high school math for 11 years. Then, he moved into an assistant principal role. Mr. Wills explained that he was tired of people complaining and wanted to do something to affect change:

> Well, I was a math teacher for 11 years and I was teaching the same math courses, algebra I, business math, and pre-algebra. I was getting a little stale. I was getting to the point where instead of complaining I thought it was time to start doing something about it. Then, there was an opening in my school for an assistant principal. After talking with the principal, I decided to go back and take the courses and here we are now.

After working as an administrator for several years in the neighboring district, a principal position opened in Smithville, and Mr. Wills decided to apply. He has been the principal at Smithville for the past four years.

Personal History: Mrs. McInness.

Mrs. McInness attended Whitfield Area High School, the high school where she is now the principal. Mrs. McInness shared the following information:

> I grew up here at Whitfield. I was born at Melvin County General Hospital which no longer exists in Whitfield, and I had two twin brothers, my mom and dad. My mom and dad still live here. One of my brothers lives here as well. He is an attorney in town. We went to school in town. I actually started at St. Michael's which was a Catholic school until grade six, and then I went to the Whitfield Middle School for 7th and 8th grade. I went to Whitfield High School, and I graduated from here.

Mrs. McInness explained that her parents expected her to do well in school and they valued education as a tool for social mobility:

> Both of my parents graduated from high school, and then mom went on to a beauty school where she trained to be a

> beautician. My dad went on to two years of college and then went into the Navy. They were always very big supporters of the value of an education.

Mrs. McInness went on to college after graduation and obtained a bachelor's degree in Special Education and took a job working with emotional support and autistic students for the Intermediate Unit that served Whitfield Area. Her position was taken when a senior staff member was bumped from his position and moved into Mrs. McInness's spot. She decided to move to Maryland to take a job working with emotional support students. She worked in Maryland for one year and decided to move back to Whitfield since Maryland was too far away from home.

> So I took a position in Queen Anne's County, Maryland. I taught there for a year. I taught in a lab emotional support classroom that was K to 5. It was really too far away from home for me. I did not really know anyone down there, so I decided to come back home.

Mrs. McInness took a position teaching emotional support at the Intermediate Unit serving Whitfield again and taught emotional support for two years. At that point, a position teaching emotional support became available at Whitfield, and she moved into that role. Mrs. McInness stayed in that role for two years and then moved into a new position at Whitfield as the Director of Discipline and District Wide Behavior Support. After working in that role for a couple of years, Mrs. McInness moved into administration as an assistant principal and athletic director before assuming her current role as principal.

Personal History: Mr. Osbourn

Mr. Osbourn, like the other principals, grew up and attended school in the community where he now leads. Mr. Osbourn classified his childhood and ties to the community in terms of a popular situational comedy television show saying, "Sure, I grew up here in this community. I actually live one house away from the house I grew up in. I get a lot of jokes about *Everybody Loves Raymond."*

Mr. Osbourn, like Mr. Wills, had family ties to education. His mother was a substitute teacher at Green Mountain Area High School. His father worked as an electric line worker. Mr. Osbourn spoke about his childhood by saying:

> My mother taught in this building as a business education teacher. She was a substitute teacher for most of the time between my sister, who is 3 years older, and I was born until the time I was a senior. She came back here during my senior year as a full time teacher. So for 15 years she was primarily a sub. A pretty busy sub but she had the ability to choose "yes" or "no" for her days. She probably worked most of the school year most years, but it was a matter of her being able to schedule around the orthodontist and those kinds of things or if we happened to be sick she could do that. My dad was an electric lineman. He worked for Alleghany Power at the end it was originally West Penn Power. Then it was Alleghany Power. It was something different when I was a little kid. But he was a linesman; he worked outside, blue collar, difficult work. Whenever there would be a storm, whether it was a thunderstorm or snowstorm, whenever the phone would ring and he would work overtime around the clock. It was very difficult work, very physical job and very dangerous. People were injured frequently on the job.

Like the other respondents, Mr. Osbourn's parents always expected their children to go to college. Mr. Osbourn said that it really never was an option:

> Again, mom was a teacher. I don't know if it was ever a choice for me to go to college. I can't ever remember it not being an expectation. My dad was a tough guy. I did not challenge it too much. You better get good grades. You better

> not get in trouble. You are going to college. That was the expectation. I don't ever remember it not being.

Mr. Osbourn felt that his family was "comfortable" but did not want to use the term upper class. He described his family's socio-economic level in terms of middle class. Mr. Osbourn explained his sentiments in the following manner:

> Certainly, I don't want to say upper class because I am not sure how I would identify upper class in this community. We were certainly comfortable. We did not want for anything. I told you my dad's background, and my mom was a substitute teacher. We had the clothes I wanted to wear to go to school. We made do with everything. I would say we were certainly middle class.

Mr. Osbourn explained that when he left to attend college, his whole sense of wealth changed. He explained that while attending college, he realized what extreme wealth was, not what he had seen previously in high school.

> My whole sense of wealth and place in the world changed dramatically when I started at Franklin & Marshall College. F & M was $16,000 in 1987 and it is $46,000 now or whatever it is. It is a very upper socio-economic college. Most of the kids have gone to prep. schools. Some have been in prep. school since they were in elementary. It gave me a whole different sense of where you are socio-economically. Upper class here was not that extreme wealth.

Like Mr. Wills, Mr. Osbourn did not plan on a career in education. In fact he went to college with initial plans for pre-med. He changed his major and ended up with a finance degree from Franklin and Marshall College. Mr. Osbourn followed his fiancé after graduation to Richmond, Virginia and took an entry-level job as a stock broker. Mr. Osbourn did not care for that career choice and decided to switch to retail sales while in Richmond. In fact, Mr. Osbourn took a job at Foot Locker and got some valuable exposure to diversity. He described it in these terms:

> I was hired by a company in Lancaster first. Then, when we decided to go to Richmond, I transferred there and found employment with a similar company in Richmond, Virginia. I hated it… I quit, and I needed a job, so I worked at Foot Locker in their management program which was actually very interesting. It was not glamorous. You are selling shoes. Basically, you are managing a Footlocker in a retail setting. Looking back what I got out of that was my whole complete experience in any kind of diversity, racial diversity and all of that. I grew up here White as can be as far as background…..very non-diverse situation. It was completely reversed in Richmond. I worked at about eight different Foot Lockers in the city of Richmond at that point, and you rotated around somewhere downtown and others were in malls, different mall situations. In some situations that I worked, I was the only White person around. I saw racism and bias and all of that from the other side and honestly to a much harsher degree than I had ever seen it on this side. I think around here there is inherent racism, and bias is here, but how blatant it is, we deal with it sometimes when it is blatant. I think as a community it is here certainly as it is in other places. I experienced it on a pretty blatant level, "Can I help you sir?" I often got, "I am not talking to you." There were nicknames and all those kind of things, so I worked there for about three years. If nothing else, I got the work ethic stuff with a lot of hours, and I got an exposure to diversity. I just got my eyes opened. All my co-workers and boss were African Americans, one of which treated me as a son. He took care of me. It was good. I became very close to him.

After three years of working at Foot Locker, Mr. Osbourn decided to go back to school to get his teaching certification. He selected special education simply because he knew he could get a job in that area. Mr. Osbourn and his wife moved to New York, and he took a job teaching at an Intermediate Unit working with emotional support students.

After working in New York for six years, Mr. Osbourn and his wife decided to make a change that was initiated by their children. Mr. Osbourn explained that he and his wife wanted to make a move to a location that was more family oriented, and

they ended up moving back to the Green Mountain School District. Mr. Osbourn explained his thinking in the following manner:

> We decided to move after 2002 school year, and we moved back to this area. We were struggling with where to enroll our children. We decided to move home. We looked at southern PA between Pittsburgh and Philadelphia below Route 80 or the turnpike but did not intend to end here at my alma mater or next to my parents. We came here on a leap of faith without jobs lined up. My wife is in physical therapy. She is pretty marketable. I was a special ed teacher, but we did not have jobs or living arrangements nailed down. We had some preliminary discussions, and we had some backup plans for living arrangements. We came down here, and I got a job a neighboring high school as a learning support teacher for the first year. I stayed there through January, and a learning support job here opened. I made this switch at semester time, so I was only in the neighboring district for a semester.

After moving into the role as special education teacher in Green Mountain High School, things happened rapidly as Mr. Osbourn soon found himself as acting principal of the Green Mountain High School. He described the events in the following manner:

> I had been teaching here for a semester, and I had one class in administration and that was the summer that our assistant principal left and went on a medical leave. He did not return. He left unexpectedly that summer. We got the summertime letter from the principal. These are the updates and this is what is going on. By the way, we need an assistant principal. If you know anyone, give me a call. I didn't because I had one class and was not anywhere near ready, so I just chucked the letter as all teachers do. Three weeks to a month later we got a second letter that said we need an assistant principal. I called the principal in the middle of August and said that I had taken one class but was enrolled in more. I am in a program and hoping to be certified as a principal, but I am not. He said come in, and we will talk about it. I became the Dean of Students for that year into the next year and the principal left to become an assistant superintendent in a neighboring school district, and I became the acting principal as of February of the next year still not certified. I was almost done wrapping things up at that

> point trying to go through as quickly as I could because things were sort of swirling. By the first of the year in 2005, I was acting principal. I got my certification that summer, and I have been principal since my certification.

Mr. Osbourn explained that things sped along without him having much time to consider what was happening. He spoke about his past superintendent and thanked him for giving him a chance and allowing him some flexibility when he clearly felt that he was not adequately prepared to be the building principal:

> The first day I was completely unqualified to be Dean. I was unqualified to be acting principal. For whatever reason, he gave me the nod on both of those situations. While it was difficult to come in and take over like that, looking back I had opportunities which I probably did not deserve or should not have had, so I thank him for it. He gave me chances I probably would not have had other places. In that sense, I was blessed with the opportunities.

Critical Incidents

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001, 2005) found that critical incidents in a person's life can shape and influence how they view difficult decisions. For that purpose each of the participants was asked to identify one or two incidents in his or her past that he or she viewed as playing a critical role in who he or she is today. This study explores those critical incidents outlined by the four participants. As Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001 and 2005) suggest, this study did uncover a common theme resonating from the principals' stated critical life incidents that impacted the manner in which they view difficult decisions. That relationship is explained in chapter five of this study.

Mrs. Kingston explained two critical incidents in her life, the first being the loss of her father:

> I have to say that losing my dad at a young age has always given me empathy with some of these kids as they have lost parents or siblings or what not. Because I say to the kids, "I have been there. I have done that. I know. I can relate to that." Whether a student is 12 or 16, a loss of a parent is real significant… You know at the time that it happened was I thinking in those terms then? No, I wasn't. In fact, I did not really know at the time all the processes I was going through with the grief. I remember being real angry because he died unexpectedly. I remember being real angry about that. I really went through the denial. Boom, I am mad. This should not have happened. Why did it happen? It is not fair that it happened. I remember a period where my mother who was always very independent and very smart and a good decision maker and a good manager, all of a sudden she could not decide to put on a blue dress or a green dress. This was very significant to me because she really was very clingy there for a while, and I found that just astounding that this could happen. I am older, and I understand now. I went through the same thing myself. I understand it, but at the age of 21, I just was thinking, "What is going on here?" So, I think eventually over the years some of those things that I just took for granted as a kid, like everyday we would have breakfast together or that every night we would have supper together or that I could always talk to my dad about something, or that he would be there as the breadwinner. He had a terrific sense of humor, a very dry sense of humor. You start appreciating the fact that you did have that more and more, rather than it is gone.

Mrs. Kingston explained how another event in her life helps her to relate to students in difficult situations. She said that it put things into perspective for her and often times she is able to step back from a serious situation and not get caught up in the stress of the moment. Mrs. Kingston explained that the battle her significant other had with cancer had a critical impact on her:

> I was in the middle of my job here, and George was diagnosed with lung cancer. He had surgery, came through the surgery beautifully and had other complications. Six months later, he had six months to live if he didn't have surgery. He had the surgery. He had six months to live anyway. That is how it turned out.

She went on to explain how that experience has made her more patient:

> We had been together ten years. I think he made me more patient. Oddly, enough I have never been patient. I am still not very patient. Truthfully, ask my secretary. It is not my virtue. Maybe patient is the wrong word. Oddly enough and again it puts things certainly in perspective. You are screaming because this kid did not do his homework today. Do you know why he did not do his homework? Could he do his homework? What was happening at home last night that he could not do his homework? Ask a few questions.

Mr. Wills, like Mrs. Kingston, described a situation with his family as being a critical incident in his life. Mr. Wills explained a medical situation involving his daughter:

> One that makes me keep fighting and persevering was when my daughter was born. She was born with a tumor growing on her buttocks, and she also was born weeks early. There were many complications, but now you would probably never know it. She is involved in sports, and there are some little differences there, but it was very possible that she may never have been able to walk, so, seeing her as a kid being able to fight through this and going through it, I see a kid being able to do that… so any time there is a tough decision to be made or something you have to do, I just say, "okay there it is."

After explaining how the situation with his daughter gives him strength when things get difficult, Mr. Wills also talked about the critical point in his life when he decided to go into administration:

> One of the big reasons I decided to go into administration was as teachers we were critical of decisions, and I was tired of being one of those people that would grumble and gripe about something. I thought it was time to go make a difference and see what it is really about. You do get to see the whole picture instead of just your little cubicle in your room.

Mrs. McInness, unlike the two previous principals, listed experiences from high school where she saw injustice as a critical incident in her life. She explained

that when she was growing up and attending high school at Whitfield Area, many times she witnessed students being treated differently because of the family they came from. She explained that she tries extremely hard not to let that happen now. She also cited her strong family relationship as having a critical influence on her.

Mr. Osbourn explained that the time he had spent working at a Foot Locker in Richmond was a critical incident in his life. He explained how it opened his eyes to diversity and affects his decision making today:

> I think perspective-wise I look back where I learned the most. I learned the most about who I am and how I feel and how people get along with each other from that crazy experience at Footlocker. That two and a half years when I was the minority and not treated very well and struggled. That is the first time I was truly out of my element. When you are at college, that is a different experience too, but that is a false sense. College is college and nothing really real and all that. The first time being on my own and struggling to make money and get a job. In that environment I don't want to put it all on my boss, Merle, but he guided me through that experience. Then, coming back to this area and dealing with kids that are not getting along because of race, because of that normal high school squabbling kind of stuff, you use those perspectives of what you learned from that experience. That was a pretty pivotal… I had no diversity background whatsoever to go to that three year hiatus in Richmond as the minority White guy. I would not have the same perspective which I have now. When you come back here, which is a very White community, but we deal with some race issues and all that. You try to be supportive of all people. I think that perspective is what I gained from that experience. I would not have had that perspective had I gone from F & M to teaching. That was one of those weird little life functions for three years, but what I got out of it was the more valuable thing.

Career Track

After discussing each person's history, the focus of the interviews turned to career track and future plans. One of the supporting areas of inquiry guiding this study was how the principals perceive the rural context affects their career track and future plans. To explore that question, the researcher asked each participant about their education, preparation, why he or she chose administration, opportunities for advancement and future plans. Throughout this portion of the data collection, a gender difference in career track became evident to the researcher.

Each of the principals had similar high school experiences. They all attended the high schools where they now lead. They all were good students who were involved in both co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. All of the principals spoke positively about their high school experiences and the communities that they had grown up in. Beyond their personal comments, the researcher referenced resumes provided by each principal to further explore the career track and preparation of each subject.

All of the principals left their homes after graduating from high school to attend college. The two female participants, Mrs. Kingston and Mrs. McInness, entered education programs and obtained certificates as teachers. They both returned home to take positions in schools where they grew up. They later moved into administration and now lead in the schools that they once attended. The male candidates both took a non-traditional track to education. Mr. Wills obtained a degree in computer programming before deciding to go back to school for a teaching certification. Mr. Osbourn obtained a degree in finance and also worked in retail

sales for a number of years before returning to school to obtain a teaching certificate. Both of the male participants, like the female subjects, returned to their hometown to explore careers in education and eventually assumed administrative roles in the schools that they had once attended.

Preparation and Education

Each principal was asked about whether he or she felt adequately prepared by his or her university's program for the leadership role he or she is in now. The principals all felt that they had attended excellent leadership programs, but each expressed some frustration with the lack of a rural focus.

When asked about her preparation and how well her formal education had prepared her to lead in Hooverville, Mrs. Kingston simply responded by saying, "Oh, no but again how would any university prepare someone." She went further to explain what she meant by specifically citing curricular elements:

> I think as much as anyone could have been prepared. By saying that, I mean how does any university prepare an administrator do deal with curriculum until you are actually in a situation, and you have to make decisions, align curriculum, cut courses, add courses, and refine academic goals?

Mr. Wills stressed that there was a lack of hands-on learning in his program and stressed the inadequacy of the focus on theory saying, "I learn better by doing. The people that draw the theories do not prepare you. I felt I was not prepared as well as I thought I was initially."

Mrs. McInness explained how her program prepared her for the management part of administration but not the leadership element: "It prepared me for the

management part of administration. I don't feel that I was adequately prepared for the actual leadership, the role as an instructional leader. It did not prepare me for the curriculum part."

Mr. Osbourn explained how his program did not specify training for urban or rural. He did perceive that he was adequately prepared but expressed some frustration around the lack of specialization:

> They did not specify. There wasn't an urban or a rural specification. The only benefit of a rural aspect was most of us in the program at the University were in the same type of set up in a local sense. I know there were people from urban areas in our courses. You get a little of the diversity. They really did not specify this is a rural issue versus an urban issue.

Reasons for Entering Administration

After exploring the principals' perceptions on their preparation, the researcher asked each principal why they made the move from the classroom to administration. One of the principals said that it was due to some encouragement and timing, while the other three seemed to have a desire for change and motivation to make a difference. Mr. Osbourn felt that his move to administration was brought on by opportunities presenting themselves at the right time. Mrs. Kingston, Mrs. McInness and Mr. Wills, on the other hand, made the move into administration for intrinsic reasons. They mentioned reasons like administrative turnover, teachers' complaints and having a positive effect on a larger number of students.

Mrs. Kingston's listed reasons for entering administration that included administrative turnover at Hooverville Area High School and a desire to add some

continuity to the principalship in her district. Mrs. Kingston explained it in the following terms:

> I left the classroom because we had gone through a period of "the revolving door" with our building principals. It was extremely frustrating. We had some good people in those days. We had some that were not so good, but the good ones did not stay, and the ones that were not so good could not leave fast enough. I found that as a classroom teacher and a community member I was very frustrated because we were in constant flux. The rules changed often. The goals changed often. There was constantly uproar, and it seemed that we just could not go about our business of dealing with kids and doing what is right for kids. Out of that frustration I said, "Oh, my God! I could do better than that." So that spurred me to go back to school to become an administrator. I had the idea in the back of my mind for some time, and I really did not act on it. I finally got fed up and that was that.

Mr. Wills, like Mrs. Kingston, decided to go into administration out of frustration. Mr. Wills explained that he was frustrated with his colleagues always complaining about things, so he decided to stop complaining and to do something about it:

> One of the big reasons I decided to go into administration was as teachers we were critical of decisions, and I was tired of being one of those people that would grumble and gripe about something. I thought it was time to go make a difference and see what it is really about. You do get to see the whole picture instead of just your little cubicle in your room.

When asked about her reasons for entering administration, Mrs. McInness talked about her background in special education and working with individual students. She explained how her background helped her and how she looked forward to helping more kids:

> My specialty is special education. I was constantly involved in working with the administrators and a lot of the administrative aspects of a teaching position. It just seemed like a natural

> transition after becoming so familiar with special education laws, the implementation of IEPs, and how special education kids fit into a school system in the regular curriculum. It is very fascinating, so I enjoyed the impact I had in the classroom and thought I could make a greater impact in administration.

Opportunities

Availability of opportunities can influence the career track of principals. Specifically, because of large geographic areas that are often low in population density, principals often must move their families if they want to take an open position. Also, because school districts often have few administrative positions, opportunities may not be as abundant as in a suburban or urban area. The researcher asked the principals about their perceptions on open positions and whether or not they could take a position without relocating.

Mrs. Kingston explained that she was not interested in other positions; her desire not to leave Hooverville guided her search for administration. She did explain that she would have had to relocate if she took another position, but she decided not to. She explained that there were opportunities in other districts, but she was not interested:

> Actually, my first attempt was here at Hooverville and I did not get hired the first time, which was rather frustrating. It was kind of interesting because when that person who was hired instead left, I was immediately offered the position. There were no questions asked. It was just a phone call, "Are you still interested?" I did do some interviewing out of the district. That was a hard time for me because I had to make a decision as to whether or not to leave the area. I decided that I did not want to leave, so to find a position locally I believe is difficult. So to go back to the question I guess it would be kind of what a person's own beliefs are as to do you want to commute to the

> next district or don't you? Are you in a position to make a move or aren't you?

Mr. Wills explained that, in his perception, opportunities were limited in rural areas. He explained that many small districts often hire internally, and positions are often not open for outside applicants:

> What you will find is a lot of schools in this area try to do an internal move because they know what they have and administrators tend to stay if they are here especially if they are local people. Yes, the opportunities are limited.

Mr. Wills went further to explain that an opportunity would most likely mean a family move and explained that he was not willing to do that.

> For me, I would stay right where I am at. We have family here. Now would I leave? I don't think so. Some people do the weekend thing. They go work then come home on weekends. I don't see myself doing that so it would have to be in the general area.

Mrs. McInness explained that she perceived there to be a lot of open positions in the area. She felt that there was a high turnover rate and several pending retirements within her Intermediate Unit:

> We get the PLS bulletin. There are numerous job opportunities if you look in the back of that in rural school districts and even just word of mouth or going to the Intermediate Unit meeting there are significant turnovers. I am not sure why. There are quite a few superintendent positions open in our Intermediate Unit over this past year as well, most of them through natural retirement. I think there are a lot of good opportunities in rural school districts.

Mrs. McInness shared that she would consider some of the opportunities but expressed discomfort with the long commute. She stressed the importance of being close to the district where she works:

> There are a couple close and there are some additional ones once you start getting up into the northern part of our Intermediate Unit. I would feel more comfortable if we lived closer to those areas because you are talking a two hour travel time. That would be quite difficult.

Mr. Osbourn was the only principal who said that he could easily take a principalship at another school. He said that there were positions in neighboring districts, but those schools were much larger. He explained how he viewed opportunities in the following manner:

> Without having a giant insurmountable commute, I could be the principal at a variety of other districts. The size of this school sort of makes that difficult. This is still a relatively small school about 900 kids here nine to twelve. There are a lot bigger schools out there. I think it is good for principals to at least have some experience before you take on a larger school.

Future Aspirations

To further explore how the principals viewed opportunities available in their respective areas, the researcher asked each leader about their future plans. This question was asked to explore whether the principals saw their current context as a hindrance to future aspirations. None of the administrators was actively looking at making a change. In fact, all of them said they were happy in their current position and intended to stay for the immediate future.

Mrs. Kingston spoke about teaching at the college level when asked about future plans. She also spoke about potentially becoming a lobbyist for rural education interests in Harrisburg. She explained her future plans in the following manner:

> So, future plans. I do not know. I think about, "Do I want to go out and supervise student teachers?" I have toyed with that.

> I think about, "Would I like to be an adjunct professor or do some things with administration?" I think about that. That appeals to me. I thought about, "Do I want to get further involved with the Pennsylvania Inspired Leadership as a coach/instructor?" That has its appeal and I have even thought about taking on the Department of Education. Either infiltrating or I have seriously considered doing some lobbying because areas like ours get the shaft all the time in so many ways, and I am so tired of decisions and laws that are passed and made that affect larger areas with no regard for what is going on there.

Mr. Wills, like Mrs. Kingston, mentioned the possibility of exploring teaching at the college level. He is also considering exploring administration at the district level:

> I want to keep my options open. I am young, forty-four. It is going to be hard being the principal for another ten to fifteen years so central office is a thought. I am not quite sure about that. I have always wanted to teach in college, so I think that I lean a little more that way at this point. You know how that changes.

Mrs. McInness explained that her future was tied to the principal position at Whitfield. She felt that there was a lot of work to do, and it could take as long as five or ten years to accomplish. She talked about the possibility of advancement:

> I do have my superintendent's letter. I did not apply for our position here that was open, simply for the fact that I didn't want to. I felt there was more I could do at the administrative level and more that I wanted the experience rather than after four years in administration moving on. It was a personal preference. I just started a family, and that was another big thing. I did not want to be carrying that load and have to go home.

Mr. Osbourn explained that his future plans involve about ten more years as principal. He said he may consider teaching at the college level but stressed that a move to central office was not something he is currently considering:

> Certain things get easier. I would see myself being here for at least ten years. I struggle with my kids and whether they want me to be the principal. They think it is cool right now. They are at the elementary school, and daddy is the high school principal. I am not sure how cool it would be once they are here. John is fifth grade this year so he will be… I certainly plan to be the high school principal…I will throw ten years out there. I think right now I don't have any interest or desire to go into a doctoral program such as you are in. I think there is a point down the road where a doctoral program would be of interest. That would open up different levels of possibly higher ed.

One interesting fact about the principals' comments was the fact that they all spoke in terms of opportunities in their own district. None of the leaders talked about exploring options in other districts. When they mentioned a move, it was to explore options at the college level. In some cases they were committed to as many as ten more years in their current positions.

Gender

One of the research questions guiding this study sought to explore whether the principals perceived their gender was a barrier to them in obtaining their position as a rural educational leader and also whether their gender has impacted their ability to lead. The literature around educational leadership has clearly shown that gender can be a factor limiting female administrators' access to the high school principalship. The literature also suggests that gender barriers can be exacerbated by the conservative nature of rural areas and stereotypes associated with being a high school principal. Wallin (2001) found that organizational fit relative to community expectations for the school's leader was significant in obtaining administrative positions.

The researcher asked each principal about his or her perceptions of gender and its impact on their obtaining a position and leading in the rural context. Each of the female principals was able to give specific examples of how her gender had impacted her career as a school leader. The male candidates also spoke about a gender barrier in their districts related to female administrators. All of the subjects perceived gender to be a barrier for female leaders in the rural context.

Mrs. Kingston was passed over the first time she applied for the principalship at Hooverville High School, and she perceived gender to be one of the main reasons. She explained her perception in the following terms:

> That was probably the biggest barrier in this school district. We have a lot of wonderful people, but we have a lot of very redneck thinking going on in this area. Actually, one of the board members even made the statement in the community at that time, "We cannot hire a woman and pay her all that money." It was not all that much money anyway, but, I mean that was, and had I been the type that wanted to play the sex card, I could have said, "I will take my job thank you very much sexual discrimination," but I don't go for that kind of stuff. But that was big. We are talking 1990 was when I first interviewed. That was big then.

Mrs. Kingston went on to explain how the mindset of the current board of education is a lot different than the board that passed her over in 1990. She explained their outlook:

> The board that I have now has a little different mind set. They are glad they have someone who is a part of the community. They are glad they have somebody who is not only familiar with the district and the school, but they are loyal to the school. That never occurred to the 1990 school board.

Mrs. McInness did not feel that her gender was a barrier to obtaining the position of principal at Whitfield Area; however, she did explain how her gender has

put up barriers to her as a leader in the school. Specifically, she explained problems with some older male faculty members:

> I do know that can be an issue some places. I don't know if it affected how I got into the position…. I did have some barriers with some of the older male faculty members who just came out said, "We don't think a female should have this position. Don't take it personally."

Both of the male principals explained that gender was not an issue for them, but they both talked about a strong gender bias in their communities for having a male high school principal. Mr. Wills explained it in terms of the community being "old school" in their thinking and not very progressive:

> I think being a male, but we do have two female high school principals. Well, actually more than that in this area. So the trend does seem to be going more on the female end, but for this school district, especially, I think being a male helped a lot. They are old school here. Their beliefs are different, and they are not so progressive.

Mr. Osbourn explained his perception of gender in the history of the high school principalship at Green Mountain, and he acknowledged the stereotype of female leaders being more accepted at the elementary level:

> I will say it this way. This school never has had a female principal. I believe the assistant principal is the first female administrator in this building. Again, I am pretty sure that is accurate. I know the principals themselves are on the wall up there as far as past principals. Now the middle school has had at least a female administrator as assistant principal. I think certainly the stereotype is a male…a male leader in a rural setting. I think there is a difference male/female between elementary to secondary. We currently have two of our three elementary principals that are females at this point. They are also young and do a great job. I think that is more accepted or more expected possibly than it would be for secondary.

The level of impact that the principals perceived gender had on leadership in their districts was surprising to the researcher. The literature suggests that gender is still a barrier for female school leaders, but improvements have been made over the past decade. These principals still clearly described gender, in their perception, as being a barrier to females leading in the rural context. Further discussion of this will be provided in chapter five of this study.

Leadership and Ethical Decision Making

After exploring the principals' perceptions on their personal history, career track, and gender, the focus of the interviews turned to the final area of inquiry guiding this study. The final set of questions explored how the principals perceive the rural context influences their leadership and ability to make difficult ethical decisions. The researcher asked each principal to define his or her leadership style as he or she perceives it. Next, the principals were asked for their perceptions related to the level of importance different ethical elements play in their decision making. The researcher also asked the principals for their perceptions on the relationships they maintain with stakeholders and the impacts those relationships have on their decision making. Furthermore, the review of related literature suggests the existence of four paradoxes confronting rural leaders. The researcher asked for their perceptions on those paradoxes. Finally, the researcher asked the principals to respond to an ethical dilemma and comment on accountability. The remaining portion of chapter four explores each of these areas.

When the principals explained their leadership styles, themes that emerged included the following: collaboration, seeking additional information, societal norms, and willingness to make difficult decisions.

Mrs. Kingston, when asked about her leadership style, explained that she often includes teachers in decision making. On the other hand, she said that she understands that it is difficult to come up with a decision in which everyone will be happy:

> I always let teachers have input in things. I tend to think it is a very good learning process for them because they never really have had anybody who said, "What is your thought on this? Which do you think will work better? Where do you want to go with it?" I posed those questions, and we have had some bumps in the road. We have had some real "crash and burns" as a result. Because I will tend to go with the majority with the understanding that some of them are going to come kicking and screaming and some are going to throw up their hands, but this is the decision. This is what we are going to do. There have been times when the faculty has not been able to reach a consensus. That is when I say that obviously you don't have enough opinion on this, so I will make the decision. They don't really like that.

Mrs. Kingston explained her leadership style by calling it democratic:

> I like to give my staff and faculty ownership in decisions that are made here; however, they are not all at that point professionally. I have several who still want me to make the decisions… I do give my faculty a great deal of opportunities for input… so, in that respect, I am very much democratic.

Mr. Wills, like Mrs. Kingston, spoke about collaboration and delegation when he explained his leadership style. Mr. Wills said that he empowers his people to make decisions:

> I like to get information from a lot of people. Anymore there is so much to do that you need to empower some of your own people. You have to give them leadership ability. I am

> strongly influenced by them because, if nothing else, it is your starting point.

Mrs. McInness explained her leadership style in terms of empowering teachers and using student achievement data to make difficult decisions. She explained leadership in the following manner:

> I think that the teachers, to an extent, need to have input because ultimately they need to be able to buy into whatever it is you are trying to get them to do even through a change. I think you really have to take a look at best practice, take a look at the data. Are numbers readily available on student achievement? Really make decisions based on that.

She perceives herself to be a collaborative leader with an understanding that she has the ultimate responsibility for decisions:

> I would say I am definitely a collaborative leader. It is real important that at the building level this is a team. I have believed in that since the onset of when I took this position. On the same token, you need to demonstrate to people that, okay, this is a team, and we are going to make a decision, but if something happens, it is going to be my responsibility to accept that as far as to accept that decision. The buck stops there, or the buck stops with me.

Mr. Osbourn talked about his leadership style in terms of developing consensus, collaboration and an overall discomfort with conflict. He described himself in terms of helping to find a solution, not necessarily being the leader who dictates the solution. He did explain that sometimes he needs to make the difficult decisions:

> I don't know that I ever was that person that you could tell from day one that they were the captain or leader. I don't know that I was that person. I have grown into it… I don't think that came naturally to me as far as my personality. I don't enjoy confrontation… There are only a few things worth fighting about. There are a lot of issues that can be worked out before it gets to be a fight.

Mr. Osbourn explained how he views his role in terms of customer service. Providing a service to the community is important to him as a school leader. He stressed the importance of finding a workable solution to conflicts by stating, "There has to be a level of customer service. It does not mean you have to give up your cause, but you have to work things out. I think that is a different way to think."

Like all of the other principals, Mr. Osbourn explained that he perceives himself to be a collaborative leader. He explained this in terms of athletics by viewing himself as being a "player's coach."

> I perceive myself as more of a collaborative leader. If you think in athletic terms, I would say I am a player's coach. You hear that term used a lot in sports. I certainly try to get buy in, and I try to take input. Listening is important… It gets very difficult because you cannot please everybody. You can't make decisions that are going to make everybody happy. I think certainly collaborative is my inclination. I am not a terribly authoritative person… I have had to make tough decisions on personnel things that we talked about where it had to be more confrontational, and certainly you can do that too. I don't go directly to that. It is not my first reaction. I listen. I deflect a lot of things. A lot of things do roll off of me which I think is important.

After exploring the principals' perceptions on their leadership style, the researcher asked the principals about how a series of different ethical elements influence their decision making. The principals rated and explained the importance of: rules, impact on the people involved, consequences, absolute right or wrong, and societal norms in their decision making. Table 4.2 lists the ratings provided from the four principals relative to the elements of decision making explored in the study. The highest average ratings were given to the personal impact on the individuals involved and consequences, 4.13 and 3.88 out of five. Three of the principals expressed

frustration related to absolute right and wrong and were unable to rate that category. More information on that element is provided later in this chapter. The next few pages explore the principals' explanations related to these influences.

Table 4.2

Decision Making Elements Rated on a Scale of 1-5, 5 Being the Most Important

Principal	Rules	Personal Impact	Consequences	Right or Wrong	Societal Norms
Mrs. Kingston	3	4	4 to 5	Not Rated	3
Mr. Wills	5	4	4 to 5	Not Rated	5
Mrs. McInness	3	4	3	Not Rated	3 to 4
Mr. Osbourn	2 to 3	4 to 5	4 to 5	3	2 to 3
Average	3.37	4.13	3.88	NA	3.50

Rules

Rules and policies find their origin in the ethic of justice. The principals shared their perceptions on the importance of rules and policies when they are making difficult decisions. Three of the principals felt that rules serve more as a guide, and circumstances become more important when they consider difficult decisions. The other respondent felt that rules and policies are very important and need to be followed.

Mrs. Kingston rated rules by giving it a three and explained that rules are a factor, but she also stressed that you need to look at what rules you have. Her approach to rules seemed to be from a critical perspective. She stated, "If you think on a greater scheme of things, I think you really have to examine what rules you have." She went further to explain what she meant:

> Sometimes a rule, when you really look at that rule, you question why is this rule in place and to whose benefit is this rule? Is this rule important in the overall running and governance of the building? Or was it created in a time and a situation when it was important, but it isn't anymore?

Mrs. McInness rated rules by giving it a three. She said that it depends on the decision. She stressed the importance of following rules when there may be legal implications but said that you need to look at the situation and the people involved:

> Well, I think it depends on the decision. You obviously always have to abide by your policies but all policies are interpreted differently by different people, and that is the same thing with rules and regulations. I think if you are going to make a decision that you are going to get sued over, you better be making it towards the policy. If you are going to be making day-to-day decisions about a discipline issue with a kid, I think you need to take into consideration the circumstances surrounding that, and I think that is something else we have a hard time with. They expect everything to be black and white, cookie cutter. These two kids were fighting, and they should be suspended. You just have to look at the whole picture when you are making decisions rather than just snapshots and doing it that way.

Mr. Osbourn rated rules as a two or three saying that most of the policies are written with flexibility built into them:

> Most of our policies that we deal with on a regular basis have some flexibility. There is a reason for that. I would say you have to have some consistent guiding policy, but I think we do look at every situation individually. There is a margin for error. There is a margin for decision making there. I would say, "two to three." Yes, it guides it, but I don't think there are too many things where the rule is the rule, and we make no exceptions.

On the other hand, Mr. Wills rated rules and policy as a five. He stressed the importance of turning to rules when making a decision. He stated, "I follow policy, and I think that is important. If you don't follow policy, what good is it?"

After asking the principals how important they perceive rules are in influencing their decision making, the researcher posed a follow-up question related to violating policies. Each principal was asked if he or she felt it was sometimes necessary to violate policy when making difficult decisions. All of the principals talked about the importance of following policy but explained that using common sense is important.

Mrs. Kingston explained that she often feels like policies need to be broken, but she said that she really tries to follow policy most of the time. She explained it in the following terms:

> In my heart do I think so? Yes. In the reality of it, no because you just ask for trouble. Breaking your own policies, you are just looking for trouble. That kind of contradicts what I said earlier, but if there is an isolated incident that you can handle under the radar, and it is not the kid, but it is the incident, I would probably go ahead and do that if I felt in my heart the situation warranted… but that is a slippery slope.

Mr. Wills explained that he always follows policy but uses common sense. He explained that when you don't you open yourself up to problems. He stated, "I guess my first answer to that was, hopefully, that you would not paint yourself into a corner to begin with, but you also need to be using common sense."

Mr. Wills went on to explain what he meant by "common sense," saying that sometimes policies have been in place for a long time and no longer apply:

> I think most administrators question policy because sometimes they have been in place for a long time. If you don't really look at them maybe you should… There are policies that are so old, our curriculum was passed, I think it goes back to the 1930s.

Mrs. McInness also spoke about following policies while using an element of common sense. She said that she always tries to consider the situation at hand and gave a specific example involving weapons in school:

> This is extremely challenging. A few years ago when I did K to 12 behavior support, I had a high school kid whom I had just gone over the rules with. I always ask the kids if they have anything on them that they should not have. We can get this taken care of right now. No, no, no. I took the kid upstairs, and he had a knife in his pocket. He was a transfer from a city school. A few days later, I was at the elementary school dealing with a discipline issue where the kid had a pocket knife, but he had just come from Boy Scout camp. Do you know what I am saying? So, you have to take a look at circumstances and the situation. Can policies be interpreted and rules bent. Yes. Can you completely disregard them? No, because then you are out there on your own. You are by yourself, and you don't want to be there.

When asked about violating policy, Mr. Osbourn also spoke about flexibility and using common sense. He also gave some specific examples to explain his point of view:

> Yes, I think I do. I think there are always circumstances… Now, you know as well as I do, with all the different legalities that you deal with, there has to be some discretion in your policies or else you are going to be on CNN with the five year old with the nail clippers. Honestly, you made a policy that forced you to make a non-common sense decision. If you have a zero tolerance policy that says you are going to expel the five year old for bringing nail clippers in or other extreme examples like that, I think everybody including you is saying that does not make a lot of sense.

Impact on the People Involved

The second item the researcher asked the principals to rate was the impact on the people involved in the situation surrounding the decision. Each principal rated

this on a scale from one to five, five being very influential in their decision making. The impact on the people involved finds its roots in the ethic of care where caring for the individuals becomes crucial in weighing difficult decisions. All of the principals rated this element very high, giving it a four or a five.

Mrs. Kingston rated the impact on the people involved as a four. She simply stated, "It is very important. That probably sometimes takes a back seat depending on what the issue is, but I say certainly a four"

Mr. Wills, like Mrs. Kingston, also rated the impact on the people involved in the decision with a four. Mr. Wills said, "If you want it on a scale of one to five, I am going to have to say a four. I mean that is important." Mr. Wills explained what he meant:

> There are exceptions. I think you have to think through the situation and the dynamics of the situation. There are good reasons behind it, but I know that goes against what I said at the beginning with you follow the rules and the policies, but they usually give you enough room that you can make some different decisions. Consistency is important because if you are not consistent, they are going to hammer you there, but sometimes we do have to look at the individual and what their circumstances are.

Mrs. McInness, like the other respondents, felt that the impact on the people involved in the decision is important. She explained it in the following terms:

> I think that is about a four. I think decisions are going to impact each individual differently. I think sometimes you can't always make a decision which is going to be personally best for everybody. I think you need to keep that in the back of your mind about how your decision is going to impact them. Just do that in order to prepare to deal with the ramifications of what will come afterwards.

Mr. Osbourn had trouble deciding if he should rate it a four or five. He explained that there are always positive and negative consequences to any decision, and that it is something that he always considers. He explained it this way:

> I would say high four to five. I think you have to….if the impact would be positive or either way it depends. A lot of times with decisions we make, there is impact in both ways. It could be a positive impact on this person and a negative on this person. Certainly that is huge. That is four or five because you have to consider that.

Consequences

After focusing on rules and personal impact on the individuals involved, the researcher asked the principals to rate the importance of the consequences of a decision in their decision making. Mrs. Kingston simply said that consequences are important to her when considering a difficult decision rating it a four or five out of five.

Mr. Wills, like Mrs. Kingston, rated consequences a four or five when considering a decision. He explained that he always tries to consider consequences and does so by collecting additional information:

> That is important. Actually, what you try to think through is what are going to be the consequences, so that to me is a four or five. For every decision, there is fallout, and I cannot think through everything, but I try to, and I talk to people.

Mrs. McInness explained that consequences of decisions are important to consider, but she classified that answer in terms of who is involved in the situation. She explained that she tries to remain student centered and doesn't let impending consequences overly influence her decision making:

> It depends on for whom. When we have to make some very tough decisions that at times are going to be very unpopular, whether that would be for school board members or a parent I would say that is a three because it depends. You always keep in mind what is in the best interest of students regardless of whether it is dealing with a faculty member or a student or the curriculum. You can't keep in mind. "What are my board members going to think?" They do not necessarily know education the way we know education.

Mr. Osbourn, like Mrs. Kingston and Mr. Wills, rated consequences a four or five explaining that it is very important when he is considering a difficult decision:

> That is big. You don't always want to think about it being big, but you do weigh what am I up against on this one? I would say four or five. It has to weigh into decision making. I will say it that way. I don't think it can drive the decision… What is the consensus going to be? How are they going to react to this? You have to consider that.

Absolute Right or Wrong

The researcher asked the principals to rate absolute right or wrong as it relates to their decision making. This element comes from the ethic of justice in which certain acts are always viewed as wrong or right regardless of the circumstances. This seemed to be a difficult question for the principals to answer, as the principals expressed frustration explaining that there really are not many decisions in which there is a clear and absolute right or wrong decision. Only one of the principals was able to rate this element on the scale of one to five, but all were passionate about the question.

Mrs. Kingston laughed when asked about absolute right or wrong in decision making. Mrs. Kingston explained that there are not many situations in which that

applies, but she said that when it does apply, it is important to consider. She went on to explain how she views absolute right and wrong:

> Oh my, there are so many decisions that there is not an absolute right or wrong. If there is an absolute right or an absolute wrong, then that is important. I had a teacher here who was looking at pornography. It did not take long to make the decision. Under those circumstances, it is pretty important.

Mr. Wills explained that he does not feel that there is any such thing as absolute right and wrong. He said that with his math background, things were very black and white, but he did not perceive leadership to be that way. He explained, "I don't think there is any such thing as black and white anymore. I thought that as a math teacher."

Mr. Wills explained that when he started as an administrator, he searched for absolute right and wrong in decision making but rarely found it:

> When I first started in administration, I would say, "Yes, definitely this is it." Too many things have come up that I thought, "This is the right answer," but I will tell you, some people could give me some good arguments. Because I think it is the right one, I stay with that decision because you cannot be wishy-washy either. You have to make a decision, right or wrong. You have to stay with it, but a lot of times there is that gray area and that makes it tough. I very rarely, in tough decision-making, think it is completely right or wrong.

Mrs. McInness explained that she doesn't think there are many things that are black and white. She, like the others, was unable to rate this decision making element, but she explained how she thinks about it:

> Again, I don't think anything… I mean there are some basic things that are black and white. A kid skips school. There is a consequence for that. I think you need to take into consideration a bigger picture on most decisions and that will often times get you into the gray area…What is best for the students? What is best for the teacher in the long run?

Mr. Osbourn, like the other principals, expressed frustration with absolute right and wrong. He explained that when working with people, there are a lot of gray areas. He was able to rate this element as a three and a half to four saying that when it is discernable, then it is important:

> It goes back to my thing about the previous question as far the rules that govern. I think when you are working with kids and when you are working with a variety of people, it is tough to say whether my absolute right or wrong is their's. You need the perspective and background and all that… Absolute right or wrong, someone may say that is absolutely wrong, and I would say it is touchy, but that does not offend me. There is not a whole lot of absolute right or wrong that I think you can uphold because there is a lot of gray areas in right or wrong.

Societal Norms

After discussing absolute right and wrong, the researcher asked the principals to rate one final area, the importance of societal norms in their decision making. The principals were all over the board with their ratings in this area. One principal rated it a five while others said that it was important to know but not really a factor in decision making. All of the principals had a strong understanding of the norms in their communities because they had all grown-up in the communities in which they lead. It was interesting to hear the variety of responses relative to societal norms and their importance in decision making.

Mrs. Kingston explained that because of technology, her school community is exposed to elements of society that they otherwise would not interact with. She explained that it is important for her to know about, and it is a factor in her decision making:

> We are certainly more aware of the community norms. I would say they would play more of an important role. Societal, I guess not so much in our situation here. As I look at the internet and *My Space* and all of the junk that is out there, you know that stuff has penetrated us to say the least. We have been forced to make some decisions such as this lovely radio that is now becoming a part of my body for safe schools. I am very aware of those kinds of concerns and dangers, but how important is it if I make a decision?

Mrs. Kingston explained that societal norms do influence decision making. The community thinks highly of the schools, and that makes it easier, but she went on to explain how it can have an impact:

> That carries considerable weight, but our community has a fair amount of faith in the school. It is not like there is a political group out there saying that folks at the school are not doing the right things by our students or by our community. I always try to be considerate of the community. We try, for instance, just something as simple as not scheduling Wednesday night events because that is when there are many prayer meetings and youth groups. We are considerate of that. I would have to say it is a three.

Mr. Wills felt that societal norms are very important in his decision making. He simply said, "You have to be well aware of what your community and district expect and that is very important. That is a five." Mr. Wills explained it in the following terms, expressing some frustration in the community's expectations:

> What I see is that the parents in the community remember how it was when they went to school. They think that is how it should be. They don't see this testing as being important, you know the PSSA and whatever. They don't understand that data decision making is important. They think, "Well this is how we did it, and what was wrong with that?" Well, there wasn't anything wrong with it. Education does have to change. Just look at the kids… They always have an iPod or something in their hands, cell phone or whatever. We have to figure out a way to use that and get them to learn. Sitting in rows and talking to them is not the best way to educate kids anymore.

Mrs. McInness explained that societal norms are a bigger issue than she realized when she started in her role as principal. She talked about it in terms of being "old school" and explained it in the following manner:

> Well, here in this particular environment it is a bigger issue than what I realized coming into it because we have a very large population that are from the old school, the old school of thought and the old way of doing things… We have a different group of kids. My kids are not going to come in here all clean cut and clean shaven. They are going to come in with their own personality, which will reflect the society our population is not necessarily familiar with.

Mr. Osbourn talked about societal norms as being important in decision making but also explained that he thinks sometimes those norms need to be challenged. He explained his perspective as the following:

> Those norms are developed here; I think especially in a community like this where a lot of people have not moved in and out. A lot of people I deal with are second, third, or forth generation people from this area. There is not a whole lot of a broader prospective. I think sometimes you need to challenge those norms and at least question or possibly change things… I know we fought a while back whenever we changed some programs and tried to focus more on proficiency in math and the things that we obviously have to do. Parents would argue, "It worked for me, and I have a job."… yes and no. I don't want to be the one to say you are doing it all wrong, or it was never any good… I think I get more breaks because I grew up here, and they know something about me.

Personal vs. Professional Values

To further explore the principals' leadership and decision making the researcher asked each principal to explain his or her most important personal values and share his or her perceptions about whether those personal values sometimes conflict with professional values when making difficult decisions as educational

leaders. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001; 2005) explain that school administrators are likely influenced strongly by personal values (p. 22). Along with personal values and written codes of ethics, community standards play a key role in ethical decision making (p. 22). Sometimes school leaders may find their personal values at odds with what the profession would expect them to do. The principals all perceived their personal and professional values to be the same; however, two of the principals did explain situations in which they sometimes encountered conflicts between what the profession expected them to do and their personal values. All of the respondents had trouble separating their professional responsibilities from their personal lives. Three of the four respondents felt that honesty was the most important value.

When the researcher asked Mrs. Kingston about her values, she spoke very passionately about commitment, explaining that she is committed to the kids. She also stressed the importance of honesty:

> I value loyalty and honesty, commitment way above all else. Personally and professionally, I value those same things, and I constantly find myself at odds with the commitment aspect. I don't know if it was the era in which I was raised and came of age and worked, but I believe that you have to be totally committed to any job in education and it does not start at a certain hour, your responsibility to kids and parents does not end at the end of the school day.

Mrs. Kingston explained how her values sometime conflict with professional values by sharing an example with discipline. She said that she can relate to the perspectives of parents, but her position requires her to act in a certain manner:

> That happens, and sometimes I even tell a parent that as a parent I understand where you are coming from, but you also have to understand what I thought. Usually, they are pretty acceptable with that. That is why communicating is important, and I am pretty much up front.

Mr. Osbourn took a slightly different approach by listing equality as his most important value. Each of the three other principals listed honesty as his or her most important value. His background as a special education teacher has made this a focus for him as a leader. He explained that it is the same for him professionally and personally:

> Well, I don't know if the values are different. The approach certainly has to be different. As a person, you only choose what you deal with, and you choose what you have to deal with… I don't get myself into a lot of messes, and I don't choose to take on a lot of messes outside of school that are not mine. There are a lot of things that if I were not sitting here, I would not care about. I would choose to move on. Fighting the battles that you wouldn't ordinarily fight becomes a difference here. I think my approach here really becomes equal rights for kids. To me, school is a lot more about the students than it is about the adults, and sometimes we lose that focus a little bit. When I say equal things for kids, being a special education teacher, I know firsthand, and I now know as the principal what we do for kids with special needs. I think it is really important to keep that in focus as the principal not just the special education kids but the advanced placement kids. We need to make sure that every student has appropriate and challenging opportunities and supports. You take a broader look at things, and you get involved in things you would not ordinarily get involved in.

Even though Mr. Osbourn's answer states that he does not have conflicts regarding personal versus professional values, he clearly explains that engaging in conflicts is often guided by his responsibilities as a professional educator. In many situations he would not get involved if the profession did not require him to. He expressed many times in conversations that he does not like conflict, but he knows that it is part of the job expectations, and sometimes he has to take on battles that he otherwise would not.

Like Mrs. Kingston, Mr. Wills, stressed honesty. He spoke about trust when asked about his personal values. Mr. Wills also talked about communication and the importance of being a good listener:

> Personal values, I think you have to start with the trust. I think trust and honesty are very important because without that you have nothing. From there you have to be willing and able to communicate and part of that is listening. I do more listening than I do anything, but that helps me be well informed of what people want.

Mrs. McInness, like Mrs. Kingston and Mr. Wills, listed honesty as a priority. She spoke about truthfulness, and said that she sees it as important both professionally and personally:

> I think truthfulness is probably number one in both categories. You have to be honest, not just with the people in your life but also when you are reflecting on your own personal or professional experiences or growth. You have to reflect on that honestly. You sometimes have to be critical of yourself. I think that is sometimes hard for people to do.

Relationships with Stakeholders

Research suggests that rural leaders may develop close relationships with stakeholders, in part because of the size of the schools and the communities they work within. These relationships may place unreasonable expectations on the school leaders as they work within the rural context (Loveland 2003). According to Harmon (2001), the school in a rural community must focus on people and not business. Dunshea (1998) found that rumors and gossip tended to be powerful within the rural communities that she studied.

This study uncovered that all four principals had grown up in the community where they now lead, and that unexpected outcome may have influenced the principals' responses in this area as they all found relationships with stakeholders to have a positive and negative impact. Sometimes their relationships helped in difficult decisions; other times they experienced unrealistic expectations. Throughout the next few pages, those perceptions are explored.

Mrs. Kingston said that her relationships with staff make things difficult at times. Since she had taught in the building for a number of years, there were some preconceived expectations that she had to deal with:

> That is very difficult, not so much anymore because the staff has changed. A lot of people who were my friends have retired. It was very tough because some felt almost, not like I owed them, but this will be alright because of our relationship, or this will fly because of our relationship, and there were times it didn't. That was tough. It was tough on them, and it was tough on me.

Mrs. Kingston also explained how the relationships with the community sometimes made decisions difficult to make. She explained that she always looks at what is best for the students, but she maintains awareness regarding community expectations:

> I try to always make a fair decision. That is a very big thing with me. I try to make it fair. What is in the best interest of the kids, either as a group or individual kid? Make decisions that do not harm, that kind of thing. So, I do consider community interest. I do consider board sentiment, board feeling, but I have to be honest and say I don't necessarily base my decision on that. I have no problem telling anyone why I have made a decision. A lot of times people will assume something, but they prefer not to ask me. I am talking about the community now because they know they might get more than they bargain for.

Mr. Wills explained that he thought the personal relationships that he had developed growing up in the district actually made his job easier. He felt that he was in a better situation than when he was an administrator in a school where he had taught. Mr. Wills explained his relationships with stakeholders in the following manner:

> I know the parents. I graduated with a lot of the parents. Right now, if I don't know the parents, I know of them and vice versa. They know who I am. They know what I am all about. They can go down and see I was on the national honor society here. They know my dad. It is a comfort area… I had friends in my other district. I was there for sixteen years. It was harder being an administrator towards teachers that I taught with, so it was nice to make that move down here because now I am not a teacher anymore. I am an administrator. There are different expectations. Since I was not as close to them, it was easier for me to make the right decisions.

Mr. Wills also explained how relationships can make things difficult as well. He gave the following example about a disagreement with a close personal friend:

> Last year, I had to make a decision about the prom, and it did not sit well with my best friend which caused problems there, but, as I told him, I have to be able to look myself in the mirror and think that I made the right decision. I cannot make my decision on friendships. It worked its way through. That gets to be a problem. You get to be closer with the people around. Sometimes that does skew the thought process.

Mrs. McInness felt that the relationship she has with her stakeholders does make leadership difficult at times, but she explained that because she was from the area, it has helped to develop a level of trust with community members:

> I think that goes back to doing what you say, showing them that you are going to keep their best interest in mind. I think as far as the parents and community go, it is about them having the trust and knowing the type of person you are, and they know that because you are from up here. They can trust that you really will do what is best for their kids based upon that

> knowledge of Whitfield and what kids need. Then, setting the example that you went to school here, you left, you went to college. That kind of thing I think is important for kids and parents.

Mrs. McInness went on to explain how leading in a rural district can be hard on her family. She said that it is difficult to do things as a family in town without it turning into a conversation about school. She offered the following example:

> I just had this conversation with my superintendent because he has small children as well. I don't want to isolate my daughter. She will not have any friends as she grows up, but at the same time you have to be very careful about who you associate with because just based on association there are certain expectations… That puts you in a very difficult position in a rural school district. If you are in a larger school district, you don't necessarily have that day-to-day contact with people. When my husband and I want to do things, we leave town to do them. We had a couple parties we were invited to this weekend. We just don't go because we don't want to put ourselves out, and it took my husband a while because he is a non-educator.

Mr. Osbourn, like the other principals, felt that the relationships with stakeholders in his small rural district can make things difficult at times. Mr. Osbourn went so far as to say that sometimes he wishes he had not grown up in the community.

> I think me having grown up here that adds another flavor to it. There are times when I wish I didn't. That is a unique one for me because I did grow up here. Everybody knew my mom. There is a lot of community influence and a lot of community say that goes into our schools.

He explained how things can get difficult when he has a relationship with stakeholders. He provided the example of discipline when he knows the student's family on a personal level:

> It gets to be more difficult to hold the line on people. If you are completely anonymous, and I don't know you from Adam, here is the rule, deal with it. The reverse of that can be true, too, if you did happen to grow up with somebody and their kid has done something that you have to give consequences for. That is difficult.

Mr. Osbourn also spoke to the general expectations of the community and how the relationships come into play with decision making. He gave an example of attending church with a board member and how that can impact decisions:

> The expectation is that we are very accommodating. We very rarely say or can we say that this is the way it is if you don't like it… Because of that tightness of the community, I know that person, and they go to church with the school board, and the expectation is work it out …I know it would not be the same in urban schools.

Like Mrs. McInness, Mr. Osbourn also felt that the small nature of the community put him in many difficult situations. He described the following situation from his son's baseball game:

> I had a conversation at my son's baseball game last night with a mom whose kid is not going to graduate… She was not upset, but it was uncomfortable… I go out about as far out as you can get. I am in the next field over just to be by myself sometimes. Yes, certainly it is uncomfortable when you have mixed roles…Again, being anonymous sometimes is easy. If I don't know anyone, it is easier than if we grew up together or our kids are best friends. It usually helps, but when it is a negative situation, it is tough.

After the researcher asked the principals to share their perceptions and personal experiences relative to their relationships with stakeholders, the focus became how they perceive their personal history helps or hinders their ability to lead in the rural context. All of the educational leaders selected for study attended school in the school districts where they now lead. The researcher asked the principals about

community perception, community fit, and how they perceived their background impacted their leadership. Without exception, they all spoke about how their background helps them in terms of comfort or fit with the community.

Mrs. Kingston explained that she feels comfortable being from the area and she perceives the community to be caring:

> It is a very comfortable place to be. The small townishness of it sometimes is aggravating especially in my roll… But there is no better place in this area to be if somebody is in need.... There are a lot of good people who work hard, who still have good values, who want their kids to do the right thing and to be good people.

Mrs. Kingston went further to explain that in a rural district like Hooverville, a leader really needs to live in the district to be successful. She said, "I think especially in rural areas, I really believe it is important to be in your own district."

When asked about community fit and his perceptions on leadership in the rural context, Mr. Wills explained the importance of being from Smithville and how it influenced his decision to lead at his Alma Mater:

> Most of it is that I am from around here. I am comfortable with that. Everybody goes where they are comfortable. I honestly felt that I would finish up my career where I started. This job just came open. I wanted to give something back to the school that gave me everything that I have.

When asked about her background and leadership, Mrs. McInness talked about family. She explained that, in her perception, a leader needs to be from Whitfield in order to be a successful leader in the schools:

> It is family. It is knowing the people that you are surrounded by, for good or for bad. You know what you are getting into. There is a familiarity there, and I think you need it in order to do this job well.

Mr. Osbourn did not go as far as saying that a person needed to be from Green Mountain to be successful leading there, but he did stress its importance:

> Not that you could not be successful having not been from here, but I think sometimes when I do difficult things and I make difficult decisions, I get the benefit of the doubt because I am from here. A lot of the kids here now, I went to school with their parents or their aunts and uncles. There is that sense that you know a few people. Value wise, you have the same basic values…There are times it feels a little too close… Big picture wise it has been good.

Paradoxes in Rural Education

After exploring the principals' perceptions on the previously mentioned elements of decision making, the focus of the interviews changed to educational leadership in the rural context. The literature review of this study uncovered four different paradoxes that appear to exist in rural areas that educational leaders must contend with to lead effectively.

The first paradox the literature review uncovered was how rural schools are often the center of small town activity, but their educational agenda is often separate from the agenda of the community. Howley and Howley (1999) explain, "Educational leaders have often sought to isolate the school from local policies" (p. 5). Conversely, rural schools are often the center of rural town activity (Nachtigal, 1994). The second paradox explains that rural schools often focus on intellectual problems while rural communities stress a focus on real problems, and there is a disagreement about the purpose of school. Rural citizens may view schooling of their children as different from the mass agenda of education (Howley, 1998). The third paradox that rural leaders may struggle with is the following: often times moving up

in social class for students equates with moving away from the community (Harmon, 2001). Finally, rural leaders may struggle with providing a comprehensive high school model while maintaining small local schools. The researcher asked each principal about these paradoxes uncovered during the literature review to explore their perceptions on their effect on leadership in the districts of study.

Center Of Activity and Separate Agendas

Each principal was asked about his or her perceptions about whether he or she struggles with the school being the central focus of town for activities but separate when considering the educational agenda. In other words, the school is viewed by the community as a venue for town events and athletic functions, but the community is not supportive of the educational agenda or mission of the school. When asked about this paradox suggested in the literature, all of the respondents perceived it to be evident in their districts.

Mrs. Kingston perceived that in Hooverville this paradox exists. She said that community members believe schools do not know what they are doing, but she also talked about how people turn to the school for help when they have problems. She explained it in the following terms:

> That is probably true here, too. I think our own community members are our harshest critics because of preconceived notions or experiences that they had during their own schooling or upbringing. I have heard it myself, "Oh, that school," or "Those people are stupid up there," or "They do not know what they are doing." Excuse me, "Yes we do." I blame ourselves for part of that because we do not market ourselves well. We need to put it out there what we are doing and what we are accomplishing. The community, I think, would be amazed if they would be aware of some of the things we are actually

> doing and some of the things our kids are doing… It is a paradox because people look at the school to be the answer for everything. I cannot get my kid to listen to me. What can I do? Oh, I am the person that does not know anything, and you want me to tell you what to do… School nurses send a kid home three times, and the doctor will not take them because they don't have the insurance. What do we do? They come to us. Someone's child has been abused; they call us. They look at us as having the answers. In a sense that is a very flattering and a positive thing, but on the other hand there is the mentality of, "Oh my God, they don't know what they are doing up there."

Mr. Wills explained this paradox in terms of the expectation for students to go to school and to follow the rules and procedures. Then, the end result will be positive. He expressed frustration with the close relationships that exist and how he perceives them to cause grade-inflation. Consequently, Mr. Wills felt that they were not adequately preparing students. His answer explains how school in his community is a high priority, but the educational agenda is not completely understood by stakeholders:

> They do feel that school is important, and they do make it a high priority to get their students here… You get to know the kids. You get to know their parents, their grandparents. You walk down the street. You know the people by their first name, so I think that really does help. Now what it hinders is we inflate grades. Now we are changing that or trying to, but it is a long road… look at our SAT and PSSA scores… all of these kids are on the honor roll. Come on, there is a problem. We are not preparing them.

Mr. Wills went further to explain that the school in Smithville is definitely the center of activity, and he also felt that this outweighs the focus on education at times:

> Do we use the school as a central location? Sure, we have a weight facility that we let the community use. The elementary school, they use for walking all the time. We have our drama clubs. We have performances. The schools are used all the time. In this area, sports are very important to people. Actually, I think that outweighs the education sometimes.

Mrs. McInness perceives that the community members in Whitfield definitely view the school as a venue for events and functions, but she felt that they also take pride in the educational agenda. She explained that they do not talk about that and in some cases do not understand it:

> School is definitely one of the focuses, one of the hubs. Of course, there is football and wrestling and different events here at the school. We get that social component, but we also have a very strong academic character as well with the community. I think that is something that they take pride in even though they don't really tell us. I think deep down they do take pride in that.

Mr. Osbourn felt that the Green Mountain High School was definitely at the center of town activity:

> The school is completely at the center of the community. We should do this at 5:30 in the evening in the fall… come by at 5:30 in September, and you will see how much this is the center. There are hundreds of cars on the property between football and soccer and meetings. The pool is open. The weight room is open. Yes, it is completely the center of the community as far as activities.

Mr. Osbourn went on to explain how the community of Green Mountain feels that the schools are doing fine, and they do not understand ideas related to change and the need to meet accountability requirements. He talked about how resistant the community is to change:

> I think it is not terribly progressive to raise standards, but it is a little tough because you are really challenging the people and maybe their kid is not getting the grades they think he ought to get. That is because we are asking more of that student… Our community thinks we are a better school than we are. I am not being critical of myself, but we can do a lot of things better than we do now…well look at our PSSA scores we are not doing great. We are certainly satisfied with being okay. I mean we have to keep pushing that envelope and you get a

> little bit of push back. In some communities the expectation for improvement comes from the community. It is reversed here. The expectation to get better, for the most part, has to come from us.

Purpose of School

After exploring the idea of separate agendas, the researcher posed questions about the second paradox. The principals were each asked about whether they perceived that the community views the purpose of schooling differently than the school itself. The research suggests that rural communities want the schools to focus on real problems and prepare students for the local economy and local needs, while schools often focus on intellectual problems and preparing students for the global economy (Howley, 2001). Rural citizens may view schooling of their children as having a different purpose than the mass agenda of education (Howley, 1998). All of the principals spoke at length about this paradox. Their perceptions ranged from internal curricular conflicts with programs to community beliefs and expectations for their children's education. Whatever the case, all of the principals struggle to balance the need for programs with a local focus against preparation for the global economy. This paradox becomes extremely challenging within the rural context as funding for programs is limited.

Mrs. Kingston felt that there is a high level of apathy in her community when it comes to the purpose of school. She believes that the community does not seem to be interested in curricular matters at Hooverville High School. She explained that programs like their agricultural studies and shops are hard to maintain, but she views

them as important for the students they serve. She viewed this as more of a battle with the Department of Education than a battle with the community:

> I guess I have been fortunate or unfortunate depending on which view point you take. We have very little community involvement in curricular issues. On one hand some of that is apathy, and on the other hand some of that is trust. That is what you do; we trust you to make the right decisions, so we have not felt that tug… We have an agg. program, one of two in the county. We only service about 45 kids to 50 kids with that program. I would fight to keep that to the death because those are 50 kids whose needs would not be met without that program. I feel the same way about our shop area. Our previous superintendent and I had a philosophical disagreement many years ago over the shop area because he wanted to basically eliminate all of that. Yes, I fought and fought and fought and said there are kids who still need to go somewhere and operate a piece of equipment or a tool and create something that they can take home with pride. And again, we are dealing with 50 kids… Had I lost my mind because the trend in the state was XYZ? I said I don't care what the trend in the state is. This is what our kids need, so the community did not even know that battle was going on… We have talked over the years about the agg. Program, and now it has come to the point that we have to make a decision… We are extremely out of compliance with the state. That decision is going to ultimately come down to is it going to hurt the kids or not?

Mrs. Kingston's response reflects the paradox playing out internally as the superintendent wanted to eliminate programs that had a local focus to address larger state and national accountability concerns. Mrs. Kingston struggles to balance the competing needs for a local and global focus.

Mr. Wills talked about the need to focus on local problems, but like Mrs. Kingston, he did express frustration with trying to balance both local and global needs. He explained the competing ideas about the purpose of education in the following terms:

> We want to prepare them for the global world which is what is out there now… We see the decline of everything that is here. What is here for our kids? I wish there was a lot, but there isn't. So, you have to try to prepare them as best as you can. They want you to prepare them because in this area, we have a lot of powdered metal plants, so they think we should be geared in that direction or logging. All that is good, but we cannot put 60 graduates out there from each school in the area and have them find jobs, so you do have that conflict.

Mrs. McInness, like Mrs. Kingston and Mr. Wills, explained that she struggles to find the balance between local and global preparation. She said that some students are not going to go to college, and they need to have marketable skills within the local community:

> We actually focus on both. I think that over time we have learned to focus on both. What are we to do? There are very few technical or trade schools or anything like that was never an option. It was, you were going to college. I think we have come to realize that a lot of these kids are not going to college and when they leave here they better be leaving here with some sort of immediately marketable skill so that they are able to gain employment. I think we are really trying to balance. I really focus a lot on the AP curriculum and the college bound kids. At the same time, we are starting to look hard at what we could be doing for our kids. We get a lot of feedback from the industry that we do have here about what they need from our students, so we are trying to mesh both sides of that. I think that is really important.

Mr. Osbourn explained this paradox in terms of the community's lack of belief that kids are competing in a global marketplace. He said that this makes changing things very difficult at Green Mountain High School:

> Education cannot be the same it was 20 years ago because kids are not competing in the same way as they once were. We are not competing against the next county. We are competing against China and things like that…. I don't know that we quite believe that yet in this community… How do you make people believe there is a global economy, and if we don't do something well, they will do it somewhere else better. I don't

> know that we believe that yet. Until your community believes that, you still look like that crazy guy out there with all these visions. I think we have local emphasis. People still believe that if I just go through school and squeak by, there is still going to be that good paying job for me out there as a not highly qualified but graduated person. It is tough to say to someone, "Well I am not sure that is the case." You have generations of people that say, "I did it. My granddad did it." I don't challenge people. There still is a "mom and pop" flavor to our community. Our challenge is to try and say that we have to keep improving what we do so your kids are qualified and competitive. We still have that flavor of local control or emphasis. I think sometimes that gets in our way.

Social Mobility and Moving Away

The researcher asked the principals to comment on the next paradox regarding the fact that often times, for rural students, moving up in social class often means moving out of the community. All of the principals perceived this as being a real problem, when the best and brightest students often do not stay in the local community. They all saw this as a struggle for parents because if their children are successful in school and go on to post-secondary education, kids will most likely relocate to somewhere else because those professional jobs are not available locally.

Mrs. Kingston explained that there are not many white collar jobs in the area of Hooverville. The recent corporate problems experienced in a nearby town are starting to rebound, but she was unsure if those jobs will be there in the future. When asked about opportunities for students with college degrees, she said the following:

> Not many in this area I don't know what is going to happen. We seem to be making small steps toward rebounding from the corporate fiasco, which didn't have a significant impact on this school district. It had some fallout, but whether that will be enough to attract some of the kids back, whether those are the

> jobs that they would seek, or whether they are not going to be high level enough remains to be seen.

Mr. Wills addressed this question in terms of his own family. He said that he is struggling with this paradox with his own daughter:

> I am struggling with that with my own daughter. She is going to be a sophomore. I know we have to prepare them, and I know she is probably not going to be here… Unfortunately, I see a lot of our kids moving away. That is what happens. All the kids that go to college rarely come back.

Mr. Wills explained that the only large employer was the single manufacturing plant in town, and how there are only limited opportunities there:

> All we really have is the mill. There are 300 union workers maybe another 100 salaried. That tells you there is not much availability in the area… In other communities there are some powdered metal plants and what not. As a whole there is nothing to come back to with a college degree.

Mrs. McInness explained that in Whitfield there are not many options for kids unless they go into education or medical fields. She explained that the Chamber of Commerce is aware of that, and they are trying to bring industry in, but right now there are not many options:

> The Chamber of Commerce and agencies like that within the community are really trying to bring businesses in and industries in, so that when our kids do go off to college, they have some place to come back to that they are going to make a living. Right now they are really scarce unless you are coming out with a degree in education. There is medical. There are a lot of changes in the medical field. There are opportunities in the medical field. I would think that medical and educational are the two biggest employability options that they would have. Coming out with something other than that, there is not much.

At Green Mountain High School Mr. Osbourn explained that this paradox is one that he definitely sees and has to consider. He talked about real data related to this in looking at the alumni directory and where kids are now:

> We have an alumni directory…People that have come out of our school have gone on to get a PhD… Where are they? Not here. Broken down by master's degree, bachelor's degree, advanced training, we tend to retain the less success people in our school… I always brag about last year's senior class. We had a kid at the Air Force Academy, Princeton and some really cool stuff that happened last year… Carnegie Mellon and places like that. Will I see those kids in five years? Are the kids going to come back? No. I look at the people in my particular school district that I played baseball with and any of them that are college educated are not here. The best man in my wedding has a PhD from Penn State and is a professor at Johns Hopkins. He is brilliant and does stuff that I could not explain to you as far as research, but there is no Johns Hopkins here….that is the thing.

Mr. Osbourn went on to explain that this paradox is a real problem for him and his district in terms of accountability requirements:

> It is a little frustrating when we start to be held accountable. You need to improve things to become a better school. You love to have parents with more education and the priority of education stay here because that makes your job easier in a lot of ways at least for test scores. It probably leads to other challenges, but for test scores, if every kid in my school has two parents that are professionals and have graduated college, at least the emphasis on education is there.

Comprehensive Program and Local Control

The final paradox suggested in the literature that the principals commented on was the comprehensive large high school versus the small community school. This paradox involves the need to provide a comprehensive program while trying to maintain a small rural school with limited resources. Ideas of consolidation are often

explored as schools face outmigration and lower enrollment, but local control and maintaining a neighborhood school model is also often a priority in rural areas.

Mrs. Kingston approached this question from the perspective of resources and the many different roles she must undertake as the administrator of a small rural school. She explained that this can be limiting when compared to larger schools where the responsibilities are spread across a team of administrators:

> The same expectations are there for all schools. I think the same expectations are there for all administrators, and when I say administrators it may be a team of administrators in one high school versus a single administrator in another high school.

After talking about the expectations that exist, Mrs. Kingston explained how Hooverville High School was developed as a consolidation model from three local districts. They were consolidated to provide a more comprehensive model, but they still struggle because of limited resources. She also explained that even though the consolidation happened years ago, there are still some hard feelings in the communities that lost their neighborhood schools:

> Fortunately, Hooverville has not had to even think about that, although our normal enrollment is shrinking. This school district, as you know it now, is a result of consolidation of three communities. That hurt in the mid fifties. In 1955 the Hooverville School District was formed. It was Tedford School District, Swartz Valley School District and Lee School District. It was a very bitter consolidation. There was probably ongoing bitterness for 20 years. One of the problems was the location of the school. There are still a few old timers left that will bend your ear about the consolidation if they have an opportunity… I think those little communities lost something when they lost their schools because the schools here are the center of the community.

Mr. Wills talked about frustrations of trying to support a comprehensive model through grants and on-line learning:

> We are small, and with everything that we talked about the poverty, the tax base and all of that, we cannot just go out and hire teachers, so we have to do the best we can with what we have. So, some of the opportunities that other districts have with their course work and curriculum our kids don't have. We are trying to work through that with online courses… The district can only afford so much. We try to pay as much as we can for that. We have gotten grants to be able to pay for it. We are trying. Opportunities are getting a little better, but they are still not what they could be.

Mr. Wills went further to explain that consolidation has been discussed, and they do offer some of their programs in cooperation with another local district. He also explained that often times when policy makers look at numbers, they do so without really understanding the situation in the rural context:

> Just like the consolidation study I was talking about. I mean they were looking at a school. Sure we were the same size and maybe in the same location but from here to Cooper is not even close. That is not feasible, and where they are, if you at look at the map, you know, they are close. Along with that, they look at the funding, and I don't think they give the rural areas a good shake because they don't understand that our tax base is so low. Our job opportunities are not here, and people are leaving, and we need to do something to keep the jobs here. I believe with us, in this area, this school, would prefer to consolidate K through 12 first before they go with any other community.

Mrs. McInness mentioned the strain involved with taking grants that impose regulations on how the school can use the money. She also mentioned that consolidation has been discussed, and they do cooperate with other local districts to provide some programs that they otherwise would not be able to support:

> I think consolidation is a huge issue especially with funding, because what another district might need in their particular area

> is not what we would need, but yet they put restrictions on the Accountability Block Grant. There are all kinds of restrictions on applying for those grants that really can tie our hands, and I think we can use the money from the Accountability Block Grant. We do see a potential lack of revenue. I mean administratively we are not naïve to the fact that we are probably in a position that we will have to consolidate five or 10 years down the road from now. We tried to consolidate sports programs and that in itself is an absolute nightmare with the neighboring school district. There is just so much ownership of the community… Administratively, we have started trying to do that by sharing programs or sharing resources. There is a neighboring school district whose total enrollment is below a 1,000. Our own enrollment is at 1,100 approximately, and it is stable enough that we are able to support ourselves, and we are still able to offer programs. I see that other district as not being able to recover. I think you have to take a look at what is budgeted and what is out there? What is outside of Whitfield? You need to prepare the kids who are going to stay here. I think those are the two biggest things that always weigh in curricular decisions. We have been fortunate. We have not had to cut programs. We have not had to reduce staff. We are running on bare bones. I will be honest there. We are down as low as we can go. You always have to keep in perspective what is best for kids when you make these decisions.

Mr. Osbourn addressed this paradox in terms of decisions he has to make regarding course offerings and cooperating with the local technical school. He explained that there are a lot of kids who sit in study halls because there are no course offerings that they are interested in:

> Yes, money has limited that over the past several years. I mean we do work cooperatively with The Mountain County Career Center. We send about 120 kids or so a year to the Career Center for more advanced vocational career opportunities. It is a strain, as we have actually added some graduation requirements here. It is a trade off between adding more required things versus adding elective areas where they can specialize. I would like to have more electives in the building where they would specialize their education a little more. I have too many kids in study halls just because we don't have offerings that they want to take. There is that fine line between

> what a kid should take and what a kid wants to take… When resources are limited, it makes you make choices…teaching staff…I would love to have another art teacher or a tech. teacher. I would love to do some of those things because that helps you make it more comprehensive. Budget is a limiting factor. Our building, to a certain degree, is a limiting factor as far as the age and condition of it… It is also hard when you have to ship out your vocational people. It is hard to be a small member of that consortium. We have to play by everyone else's rules. By sending kids out to do the vocational stuff, you alienate them to a certain degree because they are just not here.

Mr. Osbourn explained that years ago discussions of consolidation occurred, but it was never official. He did explain that they do have an agreement with a local district to consolidate some sports programs:

> I think years ago there was discussion of consolidation with a local district and us. I think it has never been official… It has never been at a high level. We do have some agreements for Filbert County across the mountain that way. They don't have football teams. We have agreements that those kids can come play with us. Every time you venture into one of those limited agreements, you get the conversation about merger.

Ethical Dilemma

As part of the third and final interview with the principals, the researcher asked each subject to read and respond to an ethical dilemma. The ethical dilemma was taken and modified with the authors' permission from the text:

Shapiro, J. P. & Stefkovich, J. A. (2005). *Ethical leadership and decision making: Applying theoretical perspectives to complex ethical dilemmas* (2nd ed.). Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

The author of this particular ethical dilemma taken from the text listed above, Mr. David Gates, gave consent for his work to be used as part of this study. The researcher modified the original dilemma to include a rural focus. The ethical dilemma is provided in full below. All of the principals spoke about the real nature of the ethical dilemma and how they perceived it to be something that could easily happen in their district; however, they all expressed frustration with the top-down nature of decision making depicted in the dilemma. All of the principals spoke about collaboration and the need to develop an alternate solution. Two of the principals spoke about involving kids in the decision making, and all spoke about the need to make a student centered decision.

Ethical Dilemma

> The meeting could have been worse. That thought provided Central High School Principal Jane Franken little solace as she sat in her office reflecting on the discord created in the just concluded meeting with her department chairs. Their responses to the proposed curriculum change approached open revolt, and Jane felt trapped with few good options.
>
> Central High students always performed well on the state's standardized tests by maintaining scores that were equal or above state averages. The school continued to meet state-defined, adequate yearly progress targets. Unfortunately, it was the school's future performance that most concerned the board of school directors. With each passing year, the state's goals for acceptable scores became more aggressive. Due to such high expectations, it appeared that a large number of districts would not meet state goals in the coming years. The school directors wanted to ensure that their district would not be among them.
>
> If the number of Central High students achieving acceptable scores increased at the current rate, the school would be placed on the state's "at-risk" list in two years. Such an action would eliminate state funding incentives for good performance and open the door for a state takeover of the school district. With such dire consequences looming in the

future, the directors thought it prudent to increase student performance on the state test. The board charged the district Superintendent, Dr. Linda King, to design and implement a curriculum that specifically addressed state standards. Appreciating the gravity of the situation and the serious concern of the board, Dr. King developed a plan that she presented to Jane Franken.

In a meeting with Jane, Dr. King presented an outline of the curriculum changes that the board of directors agreed would address their concern. Courses specifically designed to address the state standards would be created in each of the four core disciplines for grades 9 through 12. These eight new courses would provide intensive training in test-taking skills. The curriculum would be centered on the material covered by the state standards and would be mandatory for students who failed to meet acceptable levels of achievement on state exams. Because there was no state or federal funding provided to support such an initiative, these changes were to be implemented utilizing current staff.

Jane's reaction to this proposal was less than enthusiastic. Sensing her opposition, Dr. King explained how such a curriculum was in the best interest of the school district. The community respected the accomplishments of the district and was proud of its standing in the state. The threat of falling below state expectations and being placed on a "warning list" would undermine the trust and support of the community. The turmoil that would result from such a situation would be unthinkable; consequently, it was necessary to take action before problems developed. Dr. King's parting words were clearly etched in Jane's memory. She stated, "You're either part of the problem or part of the solution. Keep me informed of your progress."

Now that she had her "marching orders" Jane's first action would be to meet with her department chairs. Because of their previous work on developing the curriculum, she knew the meeting would not be pleasant.

Under Jane's collegial style of leadership and with the notable support of the department chairs, especially the respected English chair, Alicia Weston, the faculty developed a curriculum to best serve the needs of all Central High School students. They researched and worked with a strong sense of purpose nurtured by an altruistic desire to give their students "the best." Developed and implemented over a five-year period, the curriculum identified three directions of academic preparation based on students' post-graduation plans. Each discipline offered courses designed to prepare students for

college, vocational/technical school, or direct entry into the workforce. At each grade level, an interdisciplinary relation among core disciplines was established. Students were free to choose among different offerings in order to create an individualized plan that best suited their needs. Although subject to ongoing evaluation and revision, the current curriculum appeared to be successful in achieving the desired objectives and was highly regarded by the staff. It was with this in mind that Jane presented the new curriculum revision plan to the department chairs.

As anticipated, the chairs were not receptive to the proposed change. The impact on the current curriculum would be significant. At first, the discussion centered on a practical consideration. With no new staff, the courses offered for vocational/technical school students and those desiring to enter the workforce on graduation would be virtually eliminated as many of those students would most likely be candidates for the new courses. This trend would be exacerbated in future years with the relentless raising of state targets for successful achievement.

The discussion then took a more philosophical turn. The validity of teaching test-taking skills was questioned. How were such skills useful in the real world?

Additionally, the practice of "teaching to the test" was anathema to educators interested in providing their students with the knowledge and skills necessary for success in their chosen areas. Also, by identifying which students were assigned to the courses, the school would be eliminating students and parental choice by subjecting them to mandatory tracking. It was no surprise that Alicia Weston was particularly vehement in her objections by suggesting that teachers were not needed to fulfill the processing demand of the new curriculum; trainers would be sufficient.

What did surprise Jane was Alicia's threat to resign her position as chair and revert to being a regular classroom teacher if such curriculum changes were mandated. She did not want to be in a leadership position for implementation of a program that she considered to be unethical. While engulfed in the best of the moment, Jane knew her well enough to know that this was not a mere bluff. Trying to gauge the reactions of the other chairs to her pronouncement, Jane could not discern if they were inclined to follow her lead.

Sitting in her office, Jane considered her dilemma. She knew she was bound to carry out the mandates of the school board and the superintendent, but what if she thought that a particular directive was not in the best interests of the students?

> Then she paused to reflect: Who is the ultimate judge of what is in their best interests? The authority certainly resides with the board, but are the directors the best qualified to make curricular and pedagogical decisions? What would be the effect on the school's students, morale and culture if the curriculum changes were unilaterally mandated? Would siding with her chairs in a unified front delineate the shortcomings of the proposed changes influence Dr. King and the board to reconsider their position? These questions preoccupied her mind as Jane tried to formulate the first report of this progress for Dr. King.

Initially, the researcher asked each principal to share their immediate reactions to the dilemma. The dilemma was specifically chosen for this study because it relates to accountability and curricular issues in which many schools in rural areas struggle. All of the principals said that they could relate to the dilemma, but they had mixed reactions to the situation described in the dilemma above.

Mrs. Kingston was frustrated with the top-down approach to change described in the dilemma. Mrs. Kingston expressed concern related to the principal in the dilemma being asked to sell a decision that she did not believe in:

> Well, I find something intrinsically wrong if this is coming from the top down. I mean the school board should not be talking about curriculum in the first place, and they certainly should not be directing the superintendent of schools on what the curriculum is going to be, so that would be my first reaction, that there is something wrong with this picture… It puts the principal in a position of trying to sell something that she herself feels is not in the best interest of the kids.

Mrs. Kingston went on to explain that she felt that this very dilemma was something that could happen at Hooverville Area High School. She also perceived it to be important to involve the students:

> This could be our dilemma. We have made AYP. Our scores have been good with each passing year. Our scores are not keeping pace, and if our prediction is true, in two years we are

> going to be on the warning list. What can we do? Let the teachers do some dialoguing. Get some of the kids involved.

Mr. Osbourn, like Mrs. Kingston, explained that the dilemma could easily happen at Green Mountain High School:

> I think it is extremely common and with a handful of editing things, we could change the names to our school district and most school districts. I think we are closer to that line than what they discuss being here… We have done a little of this. We have had to prioritize in the last year where additional staff would be hired, and requirements are going to be put into our curriculum to meet standards but also to remediate things… In a perfect world you can do all of that, but you do have to prioritize. Being able to pass an algebra test or have the woodworking skills to make a towel rack... I can relate to this completely.

The other two principals also reacted to the dilemma by saying that it was realistic; however, they did not provide specifics like Mrs. Kingston and Mr. Osbourn.

After allowing the principals to react to the dilemma, the researcher changed the focus to potential actions. Each principal shared what he or she would do if he or she were the principal in the dilemma depicted earlier. All of the principals explained that they would not blindly carry out the superintendent's directive. They talked about things like exploring their own beliefs and trying to find some common ground in the situation. Their answers paralleled the collaborative nature of leadership that they had all spoke about earlier.

Mrs. Kingston explained that her approach to the situation would be to dialogue with the teachers and the students to develop an alternate approach. She realized that solution might not be received well:

> What can we do? Let the teachers do some dialoguing. Get some of the kids involved… I guess I would put it in reverse if I were in her situation and say, "Bad approach." Let's try backing into this now. I understand that if she does that, depending on her relationship with the superintendent and the board, she might be committing professional suicide.

Mr. Wills explained that his first actions in the principal's role would be to discuss the situation and to spend some time thinking about his own beliefs:

> First things first, she would really have to sit down and think through her beliefs and if she agrees with the plan or not. Then, take the data, her information that she got from her chair people and go back to the superintendent. Try to discuss with him what some of the flaws are in the plan, what her views might be. Maybe get some kind of conversation going that maybe this plan will/won't work. Maybe there can be some kind of accommodations or changes made into it to appease all sides. Not that compromise is what it is all about… If your teachers don't buy into it, it is not going to work. If it is forced down their throat, it is not going to work. The superintendent hopefully will know that. Sometimes they lose focus, too, so I think, as the principal, you need to go in there and have your information ready and talk to them.

Mrs. McInness also spoke about collaboration and compromise. She explained that she would meet with her department chairs and ask them to come up with some other alternatives:

> I would probably identify the problem with that group of chairs and ask them to come up with some solutions. I would have definitely wanted to get a feel for what they would have thought the solutions could have been or what their thoughts were on the scores and how to bring those up or increase student achievement. This seems like a very top down kind of situation, and fortunately, we are not there in this district. I guess that goes back to what my model of collaboration is and when you need to have a buy in.

Mr. Osbourn said that he would try to find some kind of compromise through discussion. He also spoke about the need to stay student centered in determining the direction ahead:

> To be honest with you, I am going to revert back to the kids' issues much more than the teachers. The teachers would really get in the way of a change like this. I have seen this first hand… You go back to what is good for kids transition-wise and all that. Ideally there would be a mix in there somewhere. There may not be a mix in this particular case. I think I would have an open dialogue with the superintendent first and then possibly with the board to sit and talk about this. The kids have to be proficient in those certain areas, but I think trying to be creative and find as many ways to maintain some of the other good stuff that they do is really important too. Again, compromise is always possible.

Following the discussion of the actions that each principal would take in Jane's situation, the researcher asked each principal about his or her perspectives on caring. Specifically, the researcher asked questions regarding whether the principals felt that caring for the school and the district is synonymous with caring for the students. All of the principals said that caring ought to be synonymous when talking about students or talking about the district; however, they felt that it was not necessarily the case in this dilemma.

Mrs. Kingston explained her thoughts in terms of what an ideal district vision should be. She felt that in an ideal situation caring for the school should be synonymous with caring for the school district. She explained that in this dilemma, it does not appear to be the case:

> Well, I would think the school district's vision ultimately would be to prepare each individual student to their greatest potential as they say. To go out there a be a productive citizen, to be able to compete in the global economy, to have higher reasoning skills, problem solving skills, social skills,

> communication skills and all of that. Be able to collaborate. So that being said, now we are going to trap kids, which research tells you is not in their best interest. We are going to take away their vocational classes which they may have some interest in. I don't think it is synonymous in this situation.

Mr. Wills also explained that he perceives that caring for the district and caring for the students should be synonymous. His answer below explains that he perceives consistency to be a good thing. He also explained that, in this dilemma, caring is probably not synonymous because of the nature of high stakes testing:

> I guess that comes down to do you believe in the anchors and the standards? So, I guess to answer your question on my beliefs, I think it is good to have a direction and the standards and anchors give us that direction. So, with that, I think that is good for the students that this state is basically going in the same direction… Do I agree with one test for the district putting them on warning? Probably not, but the bottom line is at least there is a direction and most people are trying to go in that direction. So, I think that is a good thing.

Mrs. McInness, like Mr. Wills and Mrs. Kingston, also felt that caring is synonymous when talking about the students or the school district. Mrs. McInness explains that often you can get stuck in the middle when a board of education may not understand what is best for kids:

> I think from a building level administrator's perspective, yes. I think if you are looking at this dilemma from a superintendent's standpoint, yes. It is kind of half and half you know. It is kind of where they are stuck in the middle. You are answering to a board that doesn't truly understand or may not necessarily understand accountability and what it means in the bigger picture versus knowing what your kids need. It ultimately comes down to what is best for my kids.

Mr. Osbourn explained that he felt caring for the district and caring for the kids is synonymous. He spoke about focusing on the kids and giving them what they

need to be successful, and he also said that focusing on the kids is much more important than caring for the teachers:

> Is the board taxpayer advocates or kid advocates? I think they are more a split batch than they certainly should be. We have to be the student advocates as the teachers and the professionals. You have to be a steward of taxpayer and district money and interest. Certainly, we have to do what is good for kids. That is the bottom line. It is easy to tell with any school board that you have who is really there for kids and who is there for taxpayers and who is there for any personal or private interest agendas. There is a mix there, and I think there has to be a mix; otherwise, things would get out of control. I think our role in that is to advocate for the kids and what is best for them. We are never going to agree on what that is …we have different opinions. Is strict proficiency best? Is a wide variety of programs such as what they are talking about here best? There are still difficult decisions within that. I think we have to care about our kids and what is best for them and their futures. This is really harsh, and I am not a harsh person, but the teachers are not my care.

All of the principals felt that, given the dilemma, their ultimate responsibility as a school leader would be to find another solution. They stressed elements of leadership like communication and collaboration. None of the principals felt that they could simply carry out the superintendent's and school board's directive.

Mrs. Kingston said that she would be honest and tactful in this situation, while explaining that there is a need to find another solution:

> I think the principal's ultimate responsibility is to realistically face what the prediction is telling her and to roll up her sleeves and help find what I will call middle ground for lack of a better term. Because, that way, she is not necessarily compromising what has been good for the kids and the staff in the past. Her first report to the superintendent should be honest, but tactful, so all the chairs don't get fired and essentially say, "I don't want to be part of the problem. I do want to be part of the solution. I think we have to think out of the box on this one." That way she is not necessarily taking sides although it can be

> perceived that way. I guess she has to make a decision whether she wants to be a sheep or a shepherd.

Mr. Wills explained that the ultimate responsibility of the leader in this position is to find the cause of the problem and to maintain communication:

> Again, I think she needs to go back and decide what she thinks is the driving force… Trying to keep the communication flowing and trying to get everyone to understand the importance of this, I think, is her next move, and I think it is the superintendent she needs to be talking to and her faculty, her chair people. It is an important thing. Does everybody want this test that is so important? No, but it is the bottom line. That is what the districts are graded on whether you want to believe it or not, and the standards are not that bad… I think you have to get that information out to everybody to make sure they understand the reasoning and let them know you understand their concerns and try to work through this.

Like the other principals, Mrs. McInness said that her ultimate responsibility would be to look for an alternate solution. She explained how she would go about that in a collaborative manner:

> There are so many times that I have had to look for alternative solutions, because I did not believe in the solution I was given… I am not sure how they derived at these marching orders, but I guess maybe to establish some sort of curriculum committee that had on it these department chairs, perhaps the superintendent, perhaps a couple of your more reasonable board members, to maybe come to some joint solution that everyone is going to be happy with. The principal is in a heck of a position there. To form a joint committee or at least have those department chairs express their concerns directly to the board members and not to cut the superintendent out of any of it but at least then they have been given their platform… So when things go to hell in a hand basket you know there is more people involved than just you and the department chairs.

Like the other respondents, Mr. Osbourn talked about having the responsibility of finding an alternate solution. He shared ideas about looking at the causes and what they could control, as well as, explaining why this is important:

> I don't think she should side with the department chairs because, ultimately the department chairs will lose if they continue their current pace, and they get below the standard. It is one of those things where we can say, "It is never going to happen," and avoid it and not deal with it, or we can just let things happen the way they are, and we are going to have to deal with it. I think that is a little short-sighted probably… If we are making gradual steps or dramatic steps before that to address what we need to do, I think the principal can moderate the superintendent's stance. She can try to maintain as much of the good stuff that is going on now, but some of the other stuff is going to have to be put in place. That may not be a strong selling point, but I know I have said things like that before where you don't wholeheartedly agree, or it would not be my first choice to do this kind of thing, but here is the bottom line… Let's get ahead of it and make some choices and make some decisions prior to having it taken out of our hands.

Accountability

Finally, after discussing the principals' ideas about the specific dilemma, the researcher asked each principal about his or her perspectives on accountability and how he or she perceives it affects his or her ability to lead in a rural setting. All of the principals explained that they feel accountability is important, but they also expressed frustration with the idea that all schools are expected to achieve at equal levels. The educational leaders in this study perceived that the mandates on accountability do not consider the resources available or the barriers to progress that are unique to some small rural schools.

Mrs. Kingston explained that she perceives accountability to be critical for public education. Her concerns came in when she spoke about equality:

> Accountability is important. We have to keep ourselves in check… It is also important because our kids are going out there in a new world. If you look at *The World is Flat* and you look at all those other sources, accountability somehow levels

> the playing field. The obvious answer is kids should benefit from it. I am not sure they always do. Sometimes educational curriculum in different environments is to keep the public happy or whatever and not to meet the needs of the kids. So, if everything were uniform, we would all benefit. The kids would benefit. The teachers would benefit. The administrators benefit. The school districts would benefit, but all things are not created equally.

Mr. Wills spoke about accountability from a critical perspective. He focused on the idea that it benefits industry and is driven by political influences:

> Well, accountability is a political issue, which I believe is coming from the business world because they are held accountable for their products and so on and so forth. Education is always a hot topic. It is a political topic… Our product is our students. You cannot put a price tag on that, but there is still a lot of influence from the business world, and I think they are the ones that put pressure on the politicians who then put the pressure on us.

Mr. Wills went on to explain that accountability in education is a good thing because it ties education to everything else, where before he saw education as being separate:

> I think we all benefit with that because we all see what the direction is. I mean that is not just the business world or the educational world. That is everything. Because a lot of times education is its own separate little place in our society, and I don't think that is necessarily a good thing. It is not always viewed as it should be.

Mrs. McInness took a slightly different approach when sharing her perceptions on accountability. She perceives that it helps middle level students and limits some others. She does see it as necessary but expressed concerns about what can be done with limited resources:

> I think it's your middle of the road kids that benefit from a curriculum of uniform standards. I think with your upper level kids, just because they thrive in math does not mean they are

> going to be thriving in English. I guess it goes back to your individual kids. You have to be able to have the flexibility in your curriculum to address the needs of all three levels so to speak. Those that are going to go into the skilled work force, those who are going to go to either an associate program or 4-year college and those that are going to thrive academically in a specific area... I think we need to be held accountable, but it needs to be internal accountability. Having someone from the outside set the accountability standards is not going to mean anything if you are not accountable internally in your district for what is going on and what your kids need to accomplish.

Like Mrs. McInness, Mr. Osbourn spoke about accountability in terms of the limiting factors it has on his school with what courses they can offer. He shared that he perceives accountability as necessary, but it does put their programs under a lot of pressure:

> I am not all about testing. We have our PSSAs. We have done all the steps to get ready for that. I hope…but it cannot become our complete focus. Without some motivation, you don't force change. You have to force change. You have to adjust. You have to make sure what you are teaching is appropriate… I think there is a value there… You feel that added pressure, but I think up to now, for our school district, it has been good. It has forced us to focus when ….if it was just me and the superintendent saying, "Hey we have to do this curriculum stuff." You get the, "we put out good kids." We put out good kids, but they are not proficient.

Concluding Remarks

The first section of chapter four of this study provides a picture of the rural context at each of the four schools in which the respondents participating in this study lead. The researcher made observations during 18 site visits during a period of 12 months and collected archival records from state agencies and local libraries to compile the description of each site. Throughout section 2 of chapter 4, this study

explores the research questions guiding the inquiry using data collected through 12 semi-structured interviews in which the principals shared their perceptions on leading in the rural context. The researcher asked questions and shared responses that spanned the principals' perceptions regarding: their personal histories, their career paths, their gender, their ethical decision making, and the rural context. Data from the 12 interviews and eight days of shadowing provided the bulk of the information used to explore the research questions guiding this study. The researcher also used archival documents as well as contemporary documents in the data analysis.

The Researcher coded and analyzed data while working on the second section of chapter 4 relative to the research questions guiding this study. As patterns began to emerge, the researcher regrouped and re-analyzed data to better define themes present in the data as they emerged. The researcher also used quasi statistics and comparisons to the research base to help explain the findings.

The preceding chapter provides a richly descriptive exploration of the data across the five areas of inquiry guiding this study and a contextual overview of the four sites where the participating educational leaders work. In chapter 5, a summary of the findings is offered, followed by an explanation of unexpected results. A reflective assessment of the theoretical frames used in this study is offered. Chapter 5 explores the answers to the five research questions. Finally, the final chapter offers recommendations for research and practice.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

This final chapter begins by restating the problem that initiated this investigation. Following another look at the problem, the chapter provides a review of the methodology used to explore the research questions. In the next section, this chapter outlines a summary of the findings and a discussion of the results. Then, the chapter shares the theoretical implications of the results and identifies unexpected outcomes. Social Reproduction Theory and the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory are analyzed relative to the results of this study based on the research questions guiding the study. Finally, this chapter outlines recommendations for future research and practice related to rural educational leadership.

Re-statement of the Problem

There is a large gap in educational research when it comes to rural schools. Scholars seldom conduct research on rural schools, and the research that is done is rarely detailed enough to use in decision making (Howley, 2001). There is a need for research with a rural focus. Furthermore, the cultures of rural communities are different compared to urban and suburban communities and require study with a rural focus instead of with implied urban and suburban educational ideals. The findings of educational researchers who have studied suburban and urban schools have traditionally been generalized and applied to the rural context.

Rural schools report a shortage of qualified teachers and administrators to fill vacancies. To compound this problem, most education programs and administrative preparation programs do not specify a rural focus. This lack of a rural focus is particularly troubling when one considers the many differences when working in a rural context as compared to suburban and urban areas.

Research on female administrators working in the rural context is extremely sparse. The existing research documents barriers for female administrators aspiring to the secondary level. Currently, more female candidates are graduating from administrator preparation programs than males (Tallerico & Tingley, 2001). The barriers limiting women's access to the secondary principalship need to be explored within the rural context.

The limited research available on rural educational leaders suggests that they may often face unrealistic expectations from stakeholders. This can be explained in part because of the close relationships that many leaders have due to the size of the school and the communities they work in. Rural leaders take on a wide variety of roles within their school communities and interact with stakeholders while wearing many different hats. This problem is exaggerated when one considers that most administrative preparation programs do not offer a rural focus.

This study contributes to the research on leadership styles, ethical decision making, career paths, and the effects of gender on high school principals within the rural context. It provides an in-depth look at a group of educational leaders usually overlooked by researchers.

This study explored the rural context through four principals' perceptions on its effect on their leadership. Specifically, this study sought to explore the principals' perceptions on the rural context's effect on: how their personal history and gender affect leadership, their ability to acquire leadership positions and access advancement opportunities, and their decisions in difficult ethical situations. As Schmuck (1993) has stated, "Gender is inclusive, one cannot study females in our society without studying males" (p 5). Consequently, two male and two female principals were selected for study.

At the core of understanding leadership and leadership styles is ethical decision making. Moral issues, what constitutes just or fair treatment of one another and what rights we each have concern a leader's duties and obligations to stakeholders (Strike, Haller, & Soltis, 1998). Each administrative decision carries with it a restructuring of human life; that is why administration at its heart is the resolution of moral dilemmas (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005). Shapiro and Stefkovich explain, "Dilemmas in educational institutions can be complicated and may naturally lead to the use of two or more paradigms to solve problems" (p. 7). Understanding how a person leads necessitates an understanding of how he or she solves difficult ethical dilemmas, often associated with paradoxes within educational administration.

Specifically, this study explored one overarching question with four supporting areas of focus:

Overarching Question

How might rural high school principals perceive the influence of the rural context affects their work as educational leaders?

Supporting Areas of Focus

A. How might the principals perceive their personal histories affect their decision making and choice to lead in the rural context?
B. How might the principals perceive the rural context as aiding or limiting their career path and future aspirations?
C. How might the principals perceive their gender impacts their ability to lead in the rural context?
D. How might rural high school principals perceive the rural context affects their ability to make difficult ethical decisions?

The findings from this qualitative study of four schools and the perceptions of their leaders cannot be generalized to other schools; however, the results can add to the existing knowledge base on rural educational leadership. Furthermore, the answers to this study's research questions can provide insight for other researchers as to areas needing further investigation. The answers to this study's guiding questions depict one researcher's assessment of leadership that occurred in four specific rural settings during a span of 12 months. This study sheds some light on four rural principals' perceptions on leading in the rural context and how their history, career track, gender, and decision making impacts leadership.

Review of the Methodology

As stated in chapter 3, this study is a four site case study that involves four rural high school principals in central Pennsylvania. The study utilized a case study methodology to explore the research questions guiding this study. Along with case study methods, the researcher utilized the shadowing method, more commonly associated with ethnographic research, to observe each principal in his or her work environment throughout the course of two separate days. The four schools which endure elements of geographic isolation, and their principals were the following: Hooverville Area High School with Principal Joan Kingston, Smithville Area High School with Principal Bob Wills, Whitfield Area High School with Principal Leslie McInness, and Green Mountain Area High School with Principal John Osbourn. All of these administrators have been in their present position of high school principal for at least one full year. All of the schools selected for study were successfully meeting state Adequate Yearly Progress requirements at the time of the study.

Chapter 3 provided an in depth explanation of the methodology used to explore the research questions guiding this study. Chapter 4 provided an overview of the rural context surrounding each of the schools in which the leaders selected for study work. All of the schools selected for study are located in rural counties in central Pennsylvania.

The researcher was immersed in the field to carry out the exploration of the research questions. Over a period of 12 months, the researcher conducted 12 semi-structured interviews with the principals in their leadership setting. Furthermore, the researcher shadowed each principal for two full days. During those site visits, every

effort was made not to interfere with the normal functioning of the school day. The researcher was the primary data collection tool during the field work. Every attempt was made to explore each of the research questions through interviews with the leaders and focused observation. The tools used for collecting data included the following: semi-structured interviews, observation, document analysis, and archival document analysis.

The researcher selected principals for study through records from the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Schools of study were selected based on their rural status as determined by the requirements outlined by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania. Beyond those initial criteria, the schools all experience some elements of geographic isolation because of their location. Because of the impact school improvement can have on leaders, this study used schools in good academic standing. Pressures from the state based on Adequate Yearly Progress performance measures may have clouded the study's ability to focus on the questions guiding the inquiry. None of the schools selected for study was on Pennsylvania's list for school improvement. After the identification of potential schools, the researcher contacted the principals of those respective schools through cold phone calls. If the principal was willing to participate in the study, the researcher contacted the superintendent to obtain permission to conduct research. In each case, permission was granted in writing.

Throughout a twelve month period, the researcher interviewed each principal three times. The interviews ranged in time from one to two hours. The interviews utilized a semi structured format with a series of open ended questions mapped to the

research questions guiding the study. The researcher recorded and transcribed each of the interviews with the permission of the subjects. While conducting the interviews, the researcher also made observations about the rural context of the schools where the interviews occurred. After each interview, the researcher spent several hours reflecting on observations and insights taken from the interviews. The researcher maintained a reflective journal organizing those observations, reflections and insights.

Along with semi-structured interviews, the researcher conducted two days of shadowing at each site. During those visits, the researcher met the principal in the morning prior to the students arriving and observed throughout the day until after dismissal. Every attempt was made by the researcher to avoid disruption of the normal functioning of the day. While maintaining a focus on the research questions guiding this study, the researcher observed the principal's daily interactions with staff, students, and stakeholders. The researcher took notes in chronological order throughout the day and categorized and coded those notes later during the data analysis to uncover trends based on the research questions. As with the semi-structured interviews, the researcher set aside several hours after each day of shadowing to record observations, insights, and reflections from the day's visit.

In every instance, the researcher conducted the interviews in the principal's office at their convenience. Because the interviews were conducted at the research sites during a normal work day, the researcher took the opportunity to make observations about the school and noted any interaction observed with stakeholders.

The shadowing days allowed the researcher a chance to observe many different aspects of each principal's responsibilities. The researcher observed the following: assemblies, meetings with parents, meetings with students, meetings with other administrators, student disciplinary procedures, faculty disciplinary procedures, professional development activities, and social interactions among the professionals at each site.

The researcher used document analysis as another means of data collection while immersed in the field. Each principal provided a resume, handbook, and curriculum guide. Beyond those documents, the researcher visited the local public libraries to collect historical data on the schools and the communities surrounding them. The researcher explored and analyzed library records and census data relative to state averages to provide a picture of the wider context present in the rural counties where the schools selected for study are located. Much of the contextual information shared in chapter 4 came from observations and document analysis.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the four sites and their surrounding communities which provides the reader with an overview of the rural context where these schools are located. Because the rural context is a focus of this study and because qualitative research is rooted in context, a basic understanding of the context can be helpful when exploring the leaders' perceptions.

Summary of Results

The three semi-structured interviews focus specifically on the overarching question and the four supporting areas of focus guiding this study. The first interview

involved questions about personal history and elements taken from the research pertaining to the rural context. The second semi-structured interview explored the principal's career track, future aspirations, perceptions on gender, and ethical paradoxes suggested by the research to exist in the rural context. The third and final interview asked the principal to explain his or her decision making and leadership style framed by the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory. The final piece of the third interview asked each principal to respond to an ethical dilemma.

The researcher spent some time at the beginning of the first interview to explain the purpose of the study and to gain written consent from the respondents. This time was also used to make small talk about education in general and to develop a level of comfort and rapport with the principal. During this time it became evident to the researcher that each of the respondents really enjoyed his or her work as an educational leader. Although each principal would later talk at length about the challenges of educational leadership, they all were proud of their schools and their students. They also expressed a high level of commitment to the communities they serve.

As the interviews and shadowing carried on, the researcher continued to code the data. The research questions guiding the study and the two theoretical frames provided the initial basis for coding categories. As this work was completed, seven different themes began to emerge from the data.

As the principals talked about their personal histories, it was evident that the principals all had close ties to the community and the schools that they lead in, as all four had attended school in the districts where they now lead. All of the respondents

initially left home to attend college or to seek employment only to return home later. The principals all valued the way of life they had come to know during their childhood and returned home to explore employment in the schools where they graduated from years earlier. These ties to the school and the community impact the principals' abilities to lead and make difficult decisions. All of the principals spoke about the importance of "fit" and spoke about feeling comfortable in their current role as principal.

The respondents struggled to maintain a way of life that they valued while maintaining the ideals of the educational institution. The principals' ties to their communities and their schools influenced many decisions they made throughout the course of this study. On one hand, their background provided valuable insights to the community and an understanding of the context surrounding them. Being from the communities they served afforded the educational leaders an understanding of the priorities and the values of the stakeholders within the district. It enabled them to anticipate consequences of pending decisions more easily than if they were outsiders. On the other hand, it influenced many decisions that limited opportunities for students and strengthened the impact of Social Reproduction. The principals all struggled to maintain programs for students that reproduced the way of life that they valued and their parents' social class position in society. Due to limited resources in the districts of study, maintaining these programs pulled funds away from other programs and may have limited the opportunities for some students.

Through the principals answers about their career track and their future plans this study uncovered that the principals all perceived the rural context as having some

level of influence on their obtaining positions and career advancement opportunities. The two female candidates took a traditional path to the principalship through teaching positions. In their case, they were committed to the school district where they taught and waited for administrative opportunities in those districts. The male principals tried other careers first and switched to education, so they could move home. All of the principals felt that opportunities for advancement were available; however, those opportunities would require a long commute or relocation. All of the respondents were comfortable in their current roles, and none of them had plans to make changes in the next five years. They all spoke about potentially exploring becoming a college professor in the distant future.

Another theme that came out of the semi-structured interview responses was the effect that a leader's gender has in the rural context. The female respondents had both experienced gender discrimination, and the male respondents both spoke about the stereotype of the male high school principal. Furthermore, the male respondents both acknowledged that being a male was an important factor for obtaining the high school principalship in their districts.

The principals' perceptions and agreement of the difficulties present within the rural context are notable. Their perceptions affirmed what the research base suggests regarding the rural context. The principals all expressed frustration with having a limited tax-base. They all spoke to the difficulties of working within a climate that lacks diversity. The principals affirmed the difficulties suggested in the literature associated with students leaving. The principals spoke about how they all

take on many different roles that would normally be delegated in larger districts. Finally, they all expressed frustration with attracting and retaining qualified teachers.

As the researcher compared and coded the data, another theme that emerged was how the principals' critical life incidents seemed to define elements of their decision making styles. Two of the principals cited critical incidents from a critical perspective involving injustice, and those principals spoke to these elements when explaining their decision making. The other two respondents explained a critical life experience that provided them with a great deal of empathy and care. Again, they often used this frame to explain their decision making.

The principals all favored the ethical frames of care and critique to solve difficult decisions. This theme became evident as the researcher coded the principals' responses to questions spanning the ethical frames of justice, critique, care, and profession. From a caring perspective, the principals all spoke passionately about their commitment to kids, the importance of collaboration, rated individuals and consequences as important elements in decision making, considered the relationships with their stakeholders in decision making, and several listed impact on students as reasons for seeking administrative positions. From a critical perspective, all of the principals were frustrated with a lack of diversity, expressed frustration with a "one size fits all" approach to accountability, struggled with providing programs for local and global preparation, spoke to violating policy and a need for using common sense, and expressed much frustration with past practice.

Finally, the principals all spoke at length about the elements of the rural context that support social reproduction. All of the principals spoke about parental

expectations and the fact that parents' expectations come from their own school experiences. The lack of diversity and "new ideas" was a problem that all of the principals experienced. Because there are not many opportunities for professional jobs in these districts, often times the best and brightest kids move away and do not return.

There is a disagreement in these districts over the purpose of schooling. Several principals spoke about how the impoverished families do not realize they are poor. Industry is often generational, as it is handed down from parent to child. Poverty is also often a generational problem, and one principal spoke specifically about third generation poverty. Two of the principals target local people for teaching positions because they know they can keep them, but they are frustrated with the lack of new ideas. All of these problems tend to reproduce the current inequities that exist in the communities that these schools serve.

Discussion of the Results

This section of the study explores the theoretical implications along with the unexpected outcomes. Next, the answers to the research questions are provided, and their relationship to the theoretical lenses is shared. Finally, this section provides recommendations for preparation program improvements, policy, practice, and areas of further inquiry.

Case study research alone cannot provide sufficient evidence to make broad generalizations for all rural schools; however, the results of this study provide an in-depth look at four rural high school leaders and their leadership within the rural

context at four settings at one time. This study suggests that the rural context, from the perspective of the principals, impacts their ability to lead, make difficult ethical decisions and obtain leadership positions. Furthermore, this study also suggests that a leader's gender can be a barrier to leading and obtaining leadership positions within the rural context. Finally, this study suggests that administrative preparation programs do not serve aspiring rural leaders or include a rural focus.

Theoretical Implications of the Study and Unexpected Outcomes

In regard to the existing research on the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory and Social Reproduction Theory, the research base on rural school leaders, and the rural context, this study found many consistent elements when compared to existing research. On the other hand, other outcomes of this study provide challenges to existing research or the lack of existing research depending upon one's perspective.

The following section of this chapter explores the answers to the research questions and describes the outcomes that reflected the existing research. The next paragraphs of this section will describe the challenges to the research as well as one unexpected outcome uncovered.

The first challenge to existing literature refers to gender. Research has extensively shown that gender can be a barrier to women seeking administrative positions; however, recent studies suggest that women have made dramatic improvements throughout the past decade. Holtkamp (2002) states that the number of women in administrative roles has increased, but it is far from being proportionate to the numbers of women in education. These stated improvements seem to lag behind

in the rural context. In this study all of the principals felt that gender is a barrier for females in their respective school districts. The two female principals provided examples of gender discrimination, and the two male principals spoke about the existence of gender bias.

The second challenge to existing literature deals with the principals' close relationships with stakeholders. The research suggests that in rural settings, the close relationships principals have with stakeholders can put stress on the leaders, as expectations tend to be unrealistic. The principals in this study did speak to the difficult expectations of stakeholders, but they also stressed the importance of the stakeholders knowing the person making the decisions. In many cases, they felt that this close relationship could be a positive influence.

A third challenge to existing literature is the lack of existing literature itself. This study provides many examples and perceptions from the respondents that suggest that the rural context does impact their leadership and decision making. Beyond that, this study provides many examples that illustrate how their daily responsibilities were different than those of many suburban and urban leaders. Most academic institutions, however, do not specifically prepare students for rural service, but they do often focus on preparing principals for an urban or suburban context. This lack of a rural focus is compounded by the lack of people conducting research in the rural context. This study's results challenge the lack of existing rural research suggesting that more work needs to be done to fully understand the impact of the rural context and to prepare leaders for the challenges that it presents.

As the researcher coded and explored the data, one unexpected outcome surfaced. The principals all spoke about the importance of following rules and policy when making difficult decisions, but they all provided examples or answers that contradicted their earlier statements. In coding the principals' responses across the four ethical paradigms, it became clear to the researcher that the principals' answers and the examples they provided consistently contradicted their earlier stated focus on rules and procedures. Whatever the reason, the principals all felt the need to speak to the importance of following rules; however, their explanations of their own leadership styles and the examples they provided to frame their decision making did not reflect that stated adherence to rules.

During the final member check procedure, the researcher asked the principals about this inconsistency in the data. Their answers reflected the use of rules as a general starting point in decision making. From that point, the individuals involved and the circumstances surrounding decisions became more influential than what the rule suggested as a course of action.

Answers to Research Questions

One overarching question and four supporting questions guided this study. In this section each of those supporting questions will be answered, followed by the answer to the overarching question.

Personal History

The first supporting question was, "How might the principals perceive their personal histories affect their decision making and choice to lead in the rural context?" The four principals and schools selected for study were all located in rural areas of Pennsylvania where population densities are low, and there are elements of geographic isolation due to the Appalachian Mountains. This question had two distinct parts. First, did the principals perceive that their personal history affected their choice to lead in the rural context? Second, did the principals perceive that their personal history affects their ability to lead and make decisions within the rural context?

When exploring the first part of this question in the data collected, several elements came to light. All of the principals grew up and attended school in the very schools where they now lead. The principals' families all valued education. Finally, all of the principals expressed a comfort with being where they were in their professional careers, with the belief that knowing the community and having the same basic values were crucial to success.

As the principals answered questions about their own personal histories, a phenomenon in the data quickly became evident to the researcher. In every case, the principals had grown up and attended school in the communities where they are now school leaders. This close relationship and understanding of the context in which they work allows the principals a level of insight that seems to aid in their ability to lead. Mr. Wills, whose father was a teacher, spoke about everybody in the community knowing him or his father. Mrs. Kingston spoke about understanding the

needs of families and not asking people to give too much. Mrs. McInness spoke about the level of trust that the stakeholders had in her because she was from the area. Finally, Mr. Osbourn spoke about his childhood and how the community he grew up in was a great place to raise a family. Three of the principals pursued careers in other locations, only to return to their hometown to explore educational administration. The fourth principal explored other districts for leadership opportunities but decided to wait for a position to open in her home district. The principals' personal histories aided in their assessment of difficult decisions and provided each leader with a perspective that aided in anticipating the consequences of those decisions.

On the other hand, the principals' ties to their communities and the way of life that they valued impacted their decision making in a manner that strengthened the reproduction of the existing social class structure. The principals all maintained programs with a local focus. The principals all spoke about their frustrations related to the purpose of school and how maintaining programs that focused on the local economy stressed an already tight budget. Their commitment to place and a way of life that they valued provided a local perspective on curricular decisions that could be limiting for some students, particularly those who would use education as a tool for social mobility.

Mrs. Kingston fought to maintain an agricultural education program and shop programs. Mr. Osbourn maintained an agricultural education program and a cooperative education program. Mr. Wills maintained a logging program and a fish farming program. Finally, Mrs. McInness struggled to spread resources between college preparation programs and programs with a local focus. All of these decisions

use resources to maintain programs that reproduce the class structure existing in the communities the schools serve and suggest a high emphasis on a way of life that the respondents know and value. This paradox about the purpose of school is presented in the existing research on rural education. In the four cases, the educational leaders all struggled with educational mandates and the ideals of modern education verse the need to prepare some students for the local economy. The principals' personal histories and their ties to their communities influenced the dilemma facing them related to the purpose of schooling and their curricular decisions.

A second element of their personal histories that the principals all had in common was their family's value in education. All of the principals grew up in areas where college was not an expectation for most children, but they all explained that it was not an option for them. Their parents expected them to attend college. This commonality may not have influenced their decision to lead in the rural context, but it was a common element of their histories that did provide them with the option to make that choice.

The third element that emerged from the data within the scope of this question was the comfort level that all of the principals expressed regarding their current placement. In every case, the principals expressed satisfaction with their current role, and all of them said that they had no plans to change positions in the next five years. The principals talked about their fit within the community and the school by using words like "comfortable," "knowing people," and "common values." The principals all felt that they had good childhood experiences, and those that had children said that they wanted the same for their kids.

Two elements came out of the data when exploring the second part of this supporting question, "How might the principals perceive their personal histories affect their ability to make difficult decision in the rural context?" The principals all listed critical life incidents that served as defining moments for them. Those incidents gave the respondents perspectives that came out when the researcher analyzed other data regarding their decision making techniques. Finally, the principals' backgrounds and community memberships where they now lead have created many close relationships with stakeholders. The principals perceived these relationships to be both a benefit and a stressor when making difficult decisions.

During the course of the semi-structured interviews, the researcher asked the principals to share one or two critical life incidents. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001, 2005) explain that critical incidents in a person's past can help to define his or her decision making strategies and the lenses that he or she uses to frame difficult decisions. When the researcher coded the data across the multiple paradigms of ethical decision making, a relationship appeared between the principals' stated critical incidents and the lenses they used to frame difficult decisions in their responses. All of the principals used the ethic of care and the ethic of critique most often. The critical incidents provided by these educational leaders also suggested the use of the care and critique paradigms.

Mrs. Kingston provided two critical incidents from the caring paradigm. She consequently used the ethic of care when talking about the families and the kids she serves. Mr. Wills provided one critical incident from a caring perspective and one from the critical perspective. As he provided answers to interview questions and

provided examples, Mr. Wills returned to these two lenses repeatedly. Mrs. McInness provided a critical incident rooted in the ethic of critique and related to observed injustices. She spoke at length about the political influences in her district and her work to ensure that all students were treated equally. Mr. Osbourn provided a critical incident from a critical perspective and spoke extensively about diversity. Again, like the others, he utilized this idea in his decision making repeatedly and provided examples of standing up for minority students and working for equality in his school.

The close relationships with stakeholders that each of these principals have emerged as a second element. Because the principals were from the towns and schools where they now work, they have developed many relationships with the stakeholders in the schools and the communities. The principals spoke about these relationships in a positive and negative light. The principals felt that these relationships gave them the benefit of trust and also provided them with what they referred to as a "comfortable fit" within the context. On the other hand, the principals all admitted that these relationships can become stressors. Mr. Wills and Mr. Osbourn talked about difficult decisions relating to discipline of students whose families they knew personally. Mrs. McInness spoke about the political nature of decisions in her school in which everyone seems to know everyone else. Mrs. Kingston spoke about the difficulties involved with being a leader in a school where she had taught for a number of years.

Career Path

The second supporting question was, "How might the principals perceive the rural context as aiding or limiting their career path and future aspirations?" During the course of the three semi-structured interviews, the researcher posed questions that tied specifically to this research question. Three specific patterns emerged in the data coded to this question.

When the researcher asked the principals about their path to the principalship, it became evident that the principals perceived there to be many opportunities available for rural principalships; however, none of these leaders seemed to be interested in pursuing those. When asked "why?" the respondents explained that the positions would require an extremely long commute, and they were not willing to relocate or travel those distances.

The principals' path to the principalship was different based on the gender of the respondents. Both of the female candidates worked as teachers in the districts where they now lead. The men pursued other career choices before returning to their hometown and opting for education. One other interesting difference that emerged relative to gender was the fact that the two male principals came from families with a parent working in education. They initially chose other professions and returned to education seemingly as a second choice. On the other hand, the female respondents chose education as a first career choice and waited for opportunities to open in their home districts for administrative positions.

To explore the principals' opportunities for advancement, the researcher asked questions about their future plans. As stated earlier, the principals all seemed to be

satisfied with their current positions, and no one had plans to make a change in the near future. Three of the principals seemed to have little interest in moving into a central office position. Mrs. McInness was the only one who spoke about having an interest in seeking a superintendancy; however, she stated that she would not want that pressure while raising a family. All of the principals did speak about having a desire to someday explore teaching at the college level. Again, because three of the respondents had children of pre-school or school age, they were not interested in relocating in the near future to pursue that option. Finally, Mrs. Kingston, who was closer to retirement than the other three, spoke about a desire to move to the state capital to lobby for the interests of rural education.

Gender

"How might the principals perceive their gender impacts their ability to lead in the rural context," was the third supporting question. To explore this research question, the researcher posed questions about the principals' experiences based upon their gender. Historically, the research has shown that gender has been a barrier to women who sought the high school principalship or the superintendancy; however, research over the past decade has shown that women have made considerable progress in reaching the superintendancy.

In every case, the principals acknowledged that gender is a barrier to women seeking the high school principalship. The two female respondents provided specific examples of barriers they had encountered both in obtaining the position and in

dealing with faculty members. Both of the male candidates acknowledged that the gender of the high school principal in their districts was a factor.

Mrs. Kingston explained that she was initially passed over for the principalship at Hooverville the first time she applied. She felt that her gender was one of the determining factors. One of the acting school board members at the time actually spoke out publicly about not wanting a female principal. Mrs. McInness provided an example of a gender barrier she encountered when dealing with her faculty. Some of her male faculty members spoke out to colleagues about having a female principal and felt that she could not possibly know what she was doing. Mr. Wills perceived there to be a gender barrier to the principalship in his district by stating, "They are old school here." Mr. Osbourn, like Mr. Wills, felt that, historically, gender had served as a barrier to the high school principalship in his district. He pointed to the portraits of the four past principals hanging in the office that showed four middle aged White males. He acknowledged the fact that the stereotype of a large male as the high school principal was still something the community expected.

Ethical Decision Making

The fourth and final supporting question was, "How might rural high school principals perceive the rural context affects their ability to make difficult ethical decisions?" To explore this question, this study utilized the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory to frame the respondents' answers to interview questions and to an ethical dilemma. The researcher coded the principals' responses across the four

ethical lenses of justice, care, critique, and profession, which were taken from the work of Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001, 2005). Beyond the coding of the responses, the researcher asked the principals questions directly about their decision making strategies and their leadership style.

As the researcher coded the data around the principals' decision making and their perceptions of their leadership styles, six themes emerged from the data corresponding to this question. The principals' favored the ethical lenses of care and critique over justice and profession in their decision making. The principals all perceived themselves to be collaborative leaders. The principals all felt that their relationships with stakeholders made decisions difficult at times, yet they also felt that under certain circumstances these close relationships aided in their ability to make difficult decisions. Three of the principals listed their professional and personal values as being the same, listing trust and honesty as the most important. Finally, all of the principals spoke about the overlap of their professional and personal lives in the communities they serve.

The respondents all favored using the ethical paradigms of care and critique over justice and the profession. The researcher determined this phenomenon using three different strategies. First, the researcher asked the principals to rate five different decision making considerations on a scale of one through five, five being the most important. Second, the researcher coded the principals' responses to the semi-structured interview questions across the four ethical lenses. Finally, the researcher shadowed each of the principals for two full days. During that time the researcher made observations where the principals interacted with stakeholders and made many

decisions through the course of their day. Those observations provided many examples of the principals' decision making.

The supporting data provided below illustrate the focus on the lenses of care and critique. The respondents, with one exception, rated the individuals and consequences as being most important in their decision making. The coding of their responses and researcher observations supported the tendency of the respondents to turn to the ethics of care and critique most often when making difficult decisions. In every case, the respondents' stated critical life incidents aligned with the frames of care and critique. They provided examples of caring for students throughout the data collection. The respondents also spoke critically about a "one size fits all" approach to accountability and the difficulties associated with past practices in their districts.

The respondents rated different decision making elements as to their importance in their decision making. Table 5.1 below lists the principals' ratings.

Table 5.1

Decision Making Elements Rated on a Scale of 1-5, 5 Being the Most Important

Principal	Rules	Personal Impact	Consequences	Right or Wrong	Societal Norms
Mrs. Kingston	3	4	4 to 5	Not Rated	3
Mr. Wills	5	4	4 to 5	Not Rated	5
Mrs. McInness	3	4	3	Not Rated	3 to 4
Mr. Osbourn	2 to 3	4 to 5	4 to 5	3	2 to 3
Average	3.37	4.13	3.88	NA	3.50

Table 5.1 illustrates that the principals consistently rated personal impact on people and consequences higher than rules, right or wrong, and societal norms. The lone exception was Mr. Wills who rated rules and societal norms as important as well.

This was contradicted when the researcher coded Mr. Wills' responses to interview questions. This inconsistency in the data provided the researcher with a point of clarification to explore in the member check part of this study. Another contradictory piece of data was that the principals spoke about the importance of following policy, but all provided several examples and answers to questions that contradicted that stated importance. Again this was clarified through the member check verification strategy. Finally, the principals struggled to rate the category of right or wrong as a factor in their decision making. Three of the leaders expressed frustration when asked about that element saying that there was no such thing as absolute right and wrong.

Three of the principals rated individuals and consequences highest in importance compared to the other categories. The impact on the individuals involved in a difficult decision comes from the ethic of care, where caring for the people involved takes central focus. The ethic of care also speaks to the individual consequence of a decision for the people involved. Three of the principals clearly felt that these elements were the most important in considering difficult decisions.

During the final member check with the respondents, the researcher asked the principals to explain why they spoke about the importance of rules during interviews, but their ratings, in most cases, and their actions did not support that stated importance. The principals explained that rules and policies serve as a starting point or a guide. From that point, the person's individual circumstances and the consequences of a decision become more influential. The respondents stressed the

importance of using common sense and said that most rules and policies have enough flexibility written into them to allow for options when solving difficult decisions.

When the researcher coded the respondents' answers to the semi-structured interview questions throughout the three interviews, the data showed that all of the principals favored the ethic of care and critique over the ethics of justice and the profession. Table 5.2 below shows the numbers representing the coding of the data across the ethical paradigms.

Table 5.2

Principals' Interview Responses Coded Across Ethical Paradigms

Principal	Justice	Critique	Care	Profession
Wills	5	6	22	6
McInness	5	12	19	4
Kingston	8	27	33	6
Osbourn	6	19	19	1

The data show a tendency for Mr. Wills, Mrs. McInness, and Mrs. Kingston to use the ethic of care over justice, critique and the profession. Mr. Osbourn came out even in his preference of the ethics of care and critique over justice and the profession.

All the principals spoke about the importance of rules in their decision making; however, the examples they provided as they answered the interview questions did not support that reasoning. They often based decisions on the individuals and the circumstances of the situation instead of simply following policy. During the final member check, the principals explained that the rules serve as a starting point.

Another similarity that emerged while exploring the data across all of the respondents was how their stated critical incidents aligned with the ethics in which

they most often viewed decisions. The principals all provided critical incidents from a caring or a critical perspective. In every case, the critical incidents the principals listed from their personal histories reflected one or both of the ethics that they used most often throughout this study.

As the data were analyzed, a third commonality that emerged relative to this research question was the caring focus that the principals maintained regarding the kids and individuals they worked with. This was reflected in their answers to interview questions, their solutions to the ethical dilemma, and many of the interactions observed during the course of the shadowing experience.

The principals all mentioned their commitment to their kids several times throughout the course of this study. Mrs. Kingston talked about fighting to keep programs in place for kids who needed them. She also gave several examples of advocating for kids at the county level to get the services they needed. Mrs. McInness spoke about having a greater impact on kids through seeking an administrative position. She works hard to stay involved in the case management of struggling special education students. Mr. Wills spoke about making decisions through returning to a central focus of what is best for kids. Mr. Osbourn stated several times that decisions need to be made in the best interest of the kids not the adults. He also spoke passionately about fighting to ensure that the underprivileged kids were served well in his school. Moreover, in observing the principals interact with kids throughout the course of two days, they all were firm but caring when dealing with kids. Mr. Osbourn and Mrs. Kingston even spoke about involving the

students in the solution to the ethical dilemma, saying that the kids should be involved in determining the programmatic changes needed.

The principals exhibited caring for their students through an understanding of individual circumstances when they were faced with difficult decisions. This was most noticeable to the researcher in the conversations that the principals had with him after several interactions with students. The principals all had a wealth of background knowledge about many of the kids they work with, and they were happy to share that information with the researcher. This was addressed to help provide a context for the decisions observed, but it illustrates clearly the principals' value on individual circumstances and consequences within their decision making. After a tense and difficult discipline situation, Mrs. Kingston explained why she gave a female student another chance, talking about her home situation and the hardships she endures outside of school. Mr. Wills also demonstrated this sort of caring as he worked with a special education student who did not want to attend class. Mr. Wills later explained a prior situation in which this same boy brought a weapon to school. The boy had been hunting over the weekend and forgot the weapon was in his coat when reporting to school. Mr. Wills took that into account when he addressed the situation and stressed the importance of using common sense. The researcher observed Mrs. McInness speaking to a high school senior who wanted to drop out of school. She knew she could not change the girl's mind at that moment, so she came up with a series of steps that the girl would need to go through in hopes that the process would not be completed prior to graduation. Again, like the other principals, she knew a great deal about the girl's situation outside of school and opted to make it difficult for

the girl to make this poor decision. Finally, Mr. Osbourn also talked at length with the researcher about a student who was in foster care and attending school while living outside of the district. Even though the school did not have to allow him to attend, they allowed the boy to stay. These were just four examples of many in which the principals explained their decisions to the researcher. They clearly illustrate the caring nature of these leaders and their propensity for considering individual circumstances and consequences in their decision making.

Another similarity that emerged during the coding of the data was the frustration that all the principals expressed from a critical perspective on past practice and a one-size-fits-all approach to accountability. The principals all provided examples of how past practice and the concept of "This is how we do it here" has made it difficult for them to make changes. Moreover, they all were critical of the State Department of Education and its approach to accountability. The principals repeatedly provided examples of how the circumstances they often face are different from other areas in the state, yet the expectations for results remain consistent.

The respondents all provided examples of past practice and the difficulties they encounter because of it. Mr. Osbourn explained that the community's expectations for schooling were based on their own experiences. He went on to explain that the community thinks that the school is better than it actually is. The stakeholders think that they are doing "good enough" and there is no need to change. He provided another example of a transportation practice that they had recently changed for financial reasons. The district used to transport kids to any of the elementary schools in the district that the parents wanted the kids to attend. This was

a huge expense and a logistical nightmare. Mr. Osbourn explained that the community was outraged with the new policy and saw no need for the change.

Mrs. Kingston spoke about past practice related to the new inclusion model she was developing. She explained how it was a major shift from past practice to have a special education teacher team teaching with a regular education teacher. Mr. Wills gave examples about past practices, the ongoing resistance to technology and the idea of preparing kids for a global economy.

Beyond the concerns related to past practice, the principals all spoke critically of the state regulations for accountability and other programmatic standards. Mrs. Kingston shared concerns about who benefits from high stakes testing. Mrs. McInness voiced frustrations about having to perform like the rest of the state under different circumstances. Mr. Wills was critical about the need to maintain programs for kids while struggling with limited resources to meet Adequate Yearly Progress targets. He struggles routinely to maintain a balance that prepares his students for two different worlds, the one locally available and the one beyond the countryside. Like Mr. Wills, Mr. Osbourn spoke critically about accountability in terms of which kids benefit from certain programs. He also spoke about struggles with maintaining programs with a local focus while being forced to use resources to meet accountability standards.

A second theme that emerged as the principals talked about their leadership and decision making was the concept of collaboration. Without exception, the principals referred to themselves as collaborative leaders. They all spoke about involving the faculty in decision making. They stressed the importance of gaining

buy-in when working through difficult decisions. Mr. Osbourn stressed the importance of collaboration, while explaining that he does not like confrontation. He explained that he almost always seeks to find common ground in difficult situations. Mrs. Kingston said that she involves faculty in decisions but some of them voice frustration and just want to be told what to do. Mrs. McInness stressed the importance of involving the faculty in curriculum decisions. Furthermore, all of the principals spoke about finding a collaborative solution to the ethical dilemma posed in the third interview.

The importance of the relationships the principals have with stakeholders emerged as a third theme in the data when exploring their decision making and the perceived influence of the rural context. The data however, were inconclusive in whether those relationships were a positive or negative influence. Each of the principals spoke about the difficulties encountered as a result of those close relationships, but they also mentioned several positive aspects. It is possible that this data may be skewed due to the unexpected outcome of all the principals leading in their home districts. The strength and influence of these relationships may be exaggerated by the fact that they had grown up in these communities and have known many of the people for most of their lives. At any rate, the principals all spoke about the importance of these relationships in their decision making.

On one hand, the principals all listed hardships they had encountered due to their close relationships with stakeholders. Mr. Wills talked about a difficult decision he had to make related to the senior prom that he knew was going to upset one of his long time friends. The researcher also observed Mr. Wills carry out a meeting with

two separated parents that he knew personally. He met with the father who seemed to expect special treatment and notification based on his personal relationship with the principal. After the father left, Mr. Wills explained that the mother would soon be in for a similar meeting. He knew the family well, and that made both meetings uncomfortable. Mr. Osbourn also talked about the difficulties associated with handling discipline situations in which he knew the families personally. Mrs. McInness and Mr. Osbourn both mentioned the difficulties they have with participating in social activities in the community. They both have a hard time removing their role as principal for that of mother or father. Both of them gave examples of how they try to avoid social interactions in their communities. Mrs. Kingston, unlike the others, spoke about the difficulty she has leading a group of teachers with whom she once taught. The expectations the staff has for her in difficult situations are often unrealistic.

On the other hand, the principals all listed several benefits to having close relationships with stakeholders. Mr. Osbourn and Mrs. Kingston talked about the values of the community and it being a great place to raise kids. They felt that understanding these values in their relationships made decisions easier. Mrs. McInness and Mr. Wills both spoke about their relationships with stakeholders in terms of comfort. Mrs. McInness felt that stakeholders trusted her because she was from the local community. Mr. Wills also stated that people were comfortable because they all know him or knew his father, who taught his entire career in the district.

When asked about their professional and personal values, a forth theme emerged. Three of the four principals listed trust and honesty as their most important personal values. Mr. Osbourn was the only exception who listed treating people with respect as his most important value. All of the principals said that their professional values and personal values do not differ.

A fifth and final theme that emerged was that all of the principals struggle to separate their personal lives and their professional roles. Even though their values were the same in both aspects of their lives, they all struggle with finding a balance between their personal lives and their professional commitments. Mr. Osbourn and Mrs. McInness actually provided examples of how they try to avoid interactions with stakeholders in their personal lives because they do not want to talk about school. Mr. Wills talked about being frustrated with the commitment of being the only administrator and lack of adequate time for his family. Mrs. Kingston, on the other hand, made herself available at all times, taking calls from parents at home on the weekends and solving problems with parents while shopping in the grocery store.

Impact of the Rural Context

The final and overarching research question guiding this study was, "How might rural high school principals perceive the influence of the rural context affects their work as educational leaders?" To explore this overarching question, the researcher coded the principals' answers to the interview questions and observations made during the eight days of shadowing during the course of this study. The researcher developed many of the questions used to explore the principal's

perceptions related to the rural context from the trends in the existing literature. The available literature suggests several areas of hardship that educational leaders face when working within the rural context. Along with these hardships, the researcher asked the principals to explain what they perceived it meant to be rural. Finally, the literature review presented the existence of four paradoxes that become reality for rural leaders. The principals where asked for their perceptions on each.

Throughout the data collection, the responses from the interviews, shadowing, observations, and documents, six themes emerged relative to this overarching research question. The principals consistently struggle to define what it means to be rural. They all perceive the low tax base of their communities, poverty and a lack of diversity to be a problem in their districts. Hiring and retaining qualified teachers is a problem for all of the respondents. The respondents all perceived student outmigration to be a problem in their districts. Parental expectations are another element of the rural context that all of the respondents perceived to be problematic. Finally, all of the respondents perceived the impact of their close relationships with stakeholders to be both a positive and negative influence on their decision making. These six themes align with the literature review of this study as it relates to the rural context. Beyond the six themes, of the four paradoxes explored, all of the principals perceived three of the four to be influential in their work as educational leaders.

The research suggests that policy makers and educators are frustrated with the lack of one single definition of what it is to be rural. As Harmon (2001) explains, "Lack of a precise demographic "rural" definition frustrates those who work in setting educational policy" (p. 12). When the researcher asked each of the respondents what

it means to be rural, their answers had some similarities, but overall they all defined it differently. Mrs. Kingston referred to rural as a state of mind. She also defined rural in terms of the geographic distance from major metropolitan areas. Mr. Osbourn spoke specifically about geographic location. Mrs. McInness defined rural in terms of size, saying that in rural schools you can have a large impact on the students because you know them all. Mr. Wills simply defined rural as being different from the city. Although they all spoke about elements of geographic isolation and population density, the four respondents all defined rural in different terms.

Two of the difficulties listed in the literature that rural leaders may encounter are low tax base and poverty. A common theme emerged from the principals' perceptions related to these hardships. All of the principals spoke about problems they have dealt with in regards to tax base and poverty. Mrs. Kingston simply stated that her district has a low tax base because there are not a lot of professional people. Mr. Wills talked about the lack of industry and the fact that there is only one major employer in town. Mrs. McInness mentioned that her district sees an influx of impoverished families because they are located in the county seat, and people move there for social services. Mr. Osbourn shared perceptions about the low tax base, lack of industry and a lack of professional people in his district.

Beyond these affirmations, two of the principals talked about how the impoverished people in their districts do not realize how poor they are. Since so many people have low incomes, it seems to be the norm. Mrs. Kingston spoke about multigenerational poverty in her district. She, as well as Mr. Osbourn, voiced

frustration with the fact that so many of the families that qualify for services in their districts were too proud to accept the help.

When the researcher asked questions about the principals' perceptions about the diversity in their districts, another common theme emerged relative to the rural context. All of the principals faced struggles related to a lack of diversity. The respondents provided examples that crossed many different elements of diversity. All of the schools are lacking in racial diversity with the majority of students being White. Mr. Osbourn spoke at length about the lack of diversity in his district by saying that nobody moves out or moves in. He experiences trouble with students who do move in. These students face discrimination from others simply because they are not from there. Mrs. Kingston provided examples of diversity issues around the sexual orientation of students citing an example related to two homosexual students and the uproar it caused in the school community.

As the principals talked about hiring and retaining teachers in the rural context, another theme emerged that was suggested in the existing literature. All of the respondents struggle to find, hire, and retain highly qualified teachers. Mrs. McInness, Mrs. Kingston and Mr. Wills were struggling to fill a couple of positions in their buildings well into the school year because teachers had decided to leave right before the start of school. Three of the principals said that when they hire, they actually seek teachers who are from the area, stressing that teachers from a rural area know what they are getting into and are less likely to leave. Mrs. Kingston said that many times teachers use her district as a stepping stone and only stay for a couple of years until they can relocate to where they really want to be. Mr. Osbourn and Mr.

Wills struggled to balance the need to hire someone from the area with wanting to bring in diverse thinking and fresh ideas.

Student outmigration is yet another area in which the principals' responses suggest a common theme. Two of the four schools are experiencing declining enrollment. As the researcher studied archival documents and observed the principals, this fact was evident. During the shadowing of the principals, at two schools, the researcher observed assemblies. It was evident from the number of open seats that enrollment had dramatically declined since the building had been constructed. Conversations regarding enrollment confirmed this observation. Two of the schools were facing consistently declining enrollment numbers. The other two schools had maintained consistent enrollment figures but faced another element of outmigration. The principals of those two sites, Mr. Osbourn and Mrs. McInness, spoke about the best and brightest students graduating and moving away, never to return home. The principals all expressed frustration with their best and brightest leaving due to the lack of employment opportunities for professional adults. Whether the concern was declining enrollment or students leaving for social mobility, the principals all faced problems related to outmigration.

The educational expectations of parents emerged as another common theme in the data. All of the principals talked at length about the expectations of parents, their perceptions of schooling and their beliefs about the purpose of school. Mrs. McInness and Mr. Wills talked about how parents' experiences in their own education have often shaped their expectations for their kids. If parents had bad experiences or did not graduate high school, the parents expected the same for their

children. Often times parents do not understand the accountability standards forced upon the school from distant policy makers. Mrs. McInness stated that the percentage of parents expecting higher education for their children seems to be getting smaller and smaller. Mr. Osbourn spoke about the low percentage of college educated parents and how that translated into lower expectations for the children. He mentioned that parents expect that there will be good jobs waiting for their children when they graduate from high school, the way there was many years ago. Mrs. Kingston said that in her district there are a considerable number of parents who do not place a high value on education. Many times, she explained, it becomes more about survival than education. She has experienced problems with parents not wanting their children challenged, saying that the work is too hard for their children. All of the principals provided examples of hardships and did perceive parental expectations to be a problem they must face in the rural context.

Finally, another contextual factor mentioned in the literature, close relationships with stakeholders, presented a challenge for the respondents. Though the principals talked about difficulties related to their close relationships, they also listed examples and talked about the benefits of this phenomenon. As previously mentioned, this element could be skewed by the fact that all of the principals in the study lead in the districts where they grew up and attended school. Because of this, the closeness of the relationships with stakeholders may be greater than if the principals had not grown up in the community. Regardless, the data verified that the principals perceived these close relationships to affect leadership both positively and negatively.

The principals explained the difficulties relative to close relationships with stakeholders through interactions with parents and staff members. Two of the principals explained how they often deal with difficult situations in which their personal relationships with parents make things challenging. One of the principals spoke about difficulties related to the close relationships that exist within the political realm. Parents and staff members use personal relationships to influence political decisions within the board of school directors. One of the principals spoke about problems she had encountered leading faculty that she once worked with. The expectations of faculty members for their leader were often unrealistic when making difficult decisions.

Along with the difficulties presented by these close relationships, the principals also perceived their relationships with stakeholders to be a positive factor in many cases. Two of the principals spoke about their comfort level within the community, saying that they were comfortable in the rural context. The principals spoke about trust and the perception that the stakeholders trusted them because they were from the area. One of the principals also spoke about having the same values as the community and explained how that made decision making easier.

To further explore the impact of the rural context on educational leadership, the researcher asked the respondents for their perceptions on four paradoxes that the literature suggests impact leadership in the rural context. The first paradox was how the rural schools are often the center of small town activity; however, they are at the same time viewed as being apart or different from local policies and beliefs (Nachtigal, 1994). The second paradox was the fact that many times rural schools

and their communities do not agree on the purpose for education. Progressive education tends to focus on intellectual problems while rural communities focus on real problems (Howley, 2001). A third paradox suggests that for rural students, social mobility often means moving away (Harmon, 2001). Finally, rural leaders may struggle with maintaining a small school with a local focus while trying to provide a comprehensive program for students. This paradox presents the idea of staying small verses consolidation. The researcher asked each of the respondents for his or her perceptions on these paradoxes. The data showed several common threads across their responses.

The first common theme that emerged was the central focus each of the schools maintain in their communities; however, their academic missions are not the main focus for stakeholders. All of the principals spoke about their schools being at the forefront of the community. The schools all serve as venues for athletic events and other community events. Mrs. Kingston stressed her community's reliance on the school for social concerns. While shadowing Mr. Wills, the researcher observed a Veteran's Day assembly in which many of the local dignitaries and veterans used the school as a venue for recognizing military servicemen and women. Mr. Osbourn spoke about how his school building is used all the time for sporting events, fitness activities and social events.

While being the central focus of the community, the principals verified this paradox by explaining that the community does not place a high priority on the academic missions of the schools. Mrs. Kingston explained that her community does not really know much about the educational programs being offered or the

accountability measures that the school must meet. Mr. Osbourn and Mr. Wills both felt that their communities think the schools are doing better than they actually are. Like Mrs. Kingston, they stressed that their stakeholders do not understand the need to make changes to improve student performance measured by standardized testing. Mrs. McInness explained that her community is proud of the athletic achievements and the academics; however, she said that they do not talk about the academics.

The second paradox, like the first, was acknowledged by all of the principals. Modern education focuses on intellectual problems while the communities these schools serve focus on real problems. All of the principals struggle to maintain programs that address community needs while facing increased pressure to meet academic standards. Mrs. Kingston provided the example of her agricultural program that was in jeopardy due to failure in meeting state regulations. She stressed the importance of the program for her students but was concerned that it could not be maintained without the state funding. Mr. Wills struggles to provide technology and 21st Century skills while maintaining a logging program that serves a need in the community. Mr. Osbourn shared that he would love to expand programs for students, but he cannot because of the need to use funding to meet state accountability mandates. Mr. Osbourn spoke about the fact that the community does not understand the need to meet academic standards. Finally, Mrs. McInness spoke about trying to prepare kids for the jobs available in the community, while on the other hand, trying to prepare kids for post secondary education.

When education is used as a tool for social mobility, often times that equates with rural students moving away. All of the respondents perceived this paradox,

found in the research, to be accurate. Mrs. Kingston shared that there is one major employer for professionals located in a neighboring district; however, that company has just gone through a drastic restructuring. She said the effect of the restructuring remains to be seen, but she acknowledges that there are few jobs available for students who pursue a college education. Mr. Wills explained that the only major employer in town was the manufacturing plant, and it provides only limited white collar job opportunities. He went further to share that he struggles with this paradox when dealing with his own daughter, knowing that if she obtains a college degree, most likely she will have to leave the area to gain employment. Mrs. McInness perceived this paradox to be true in her district, stating that the only professional jobs available are in education or at the hospital in town. Like the other three respondents, Mr. Osbourn shared frustrations related to this paradox. His best and brightest students move away after graduation and never come back. He perceives this to compound the problems associated with meeting state AYP measures when the brightest students move away and the families with higher needs remain.

The final paradox found in the literature of maintaining a small community school verses offering a larger comprehensive model was one in which the principals had conflicting remarks. Although they had some consolidated programs within athletics, the principals did not view consolidation as a legitimate solution. Each of them shared difficulties he or she had encountered with maintaining and adding programs, but none of them felt that joining resources with another neighboring district was a viable solution. They all provided the same primary reason. The school provides the local identity. They all spoke about how their communities would not

support consolidation mainly due to the traditions of their school and the pride the community takes in the school. Mr. Wills and Mrs. McInness shared that a study had been done suggesting consolidation, but they both felt that it was not possible. Mrs. Kingston shared that her school district was created through the consolidation of five local townships. She said that, even though it has been more than 40 years, there are still some hard feelings between the townships about the location in which the school was built.

Ties to Theoretical Frames

This study used two different theoretical frames to guide its inquiry and to interpret code and analyze the rich data collected, the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2001, 2005) and Social Reproduction Theory (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Trainer, 1993 & Apple, 1995). The researcher used the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory to analyze the respondents' decision making and leadership. By coding the respondents' answers to interview questions, the document data collected, and the observations made within the rural context, the researcher was able to determine common themes in the data. The researcher used Social Reproduction Theory as a basis for coding much of the data regarding the rural context. Several themes emerged in the rich descriptive data collected. Much of the data collected in the four different rural settings presented competing values that, in turn, provided opportunities for the principals to use multiple paradigms in their decision making.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) explain the processes of reproduction in education, society, and culture as how the various forms of capital tend to transfer from one generation to the next strengthening the social class structure. Several themes found within the data supported Social Reproduction Theory. The principals' personal histories, specifically that they had all grown up and attended the schools where they now lead, impact decisions about curricular elements affecting options for students. The respondents all spoke about parental expectations and their frustrations with parents' perceptions of the purpose for schooling based upon their own experiences. The low tax base and poverty found in the districts presented another means for strengthening the impact of social reproduction. Often for students in these districts, social mobility through education means moving away. Apple (1995) argues that there is a relationship between schooling and the maintenance of unequal relationships in society. All of the aforementioned elements support the maintenance of inequities within the rural context.

Beyond the principals' perceptions regarding their personal histories, the fact that all of these educational leaders returned home to lead in districts where they once attended influences their leadership on several fronts. All of the leaders left their homes after high school to attend college, only to return home to a community and a way of life that they valued. The principals felt comfortable in their current role as high school principal. They spoke to the importance of community fit and an understanding of common values. The respondents perceived their close relationships with stakeholders to be both a positive and negative influence on decisions. All of the

educational leaders struggled to maintain programs with a local focus while meeting state accountability measures and promoting the vision of the educational institution.

All of the principals participating in the study returned home to pursue a career in education. All of the leaders toyed with thoughts about living elsewhere but eventually returned home to a community and a way of life that they valued. Reasons for returning home included the following: closeness to family, dislike of the city, a valued way of life, and the perception of a good place to raise children. The principals stressed the importance of a rural principal being from the community or from a rural area. They felt that an understanding of the rural way of life was a critical element in their success. The principals also perceived there to be an increased level of trust from the communities they served because they had grown up locally.

The principals maintain longstanding close relationships with stakeholders that impact decisions both positively and negatively. Because the principals grew up in the districts where they lead and because the communities were small, the principals know many of the stakeholders personally. They perceive this to be a positive influence on leadership due to the increased level of trust these relationships afford them. On the other hand, personal relationships become a stressor when making difficult decisions with negative consequences. These relationships with stakeholders also make it difficult for the principals to separate their personal and professional roles within the community.

The principals' personal histories provide them unique insight to the economic needs of the community and influence curricular decisions. The four respondents

struggle to maintain programs with a local focus while working with limited resources. The educational leaders maintain programs like the following: agricultural education, fish farming, logging, wood working, metal working, and cooperative education. All of these programs allow students to choose a course of study that prepares them for local employment. These curricular programs strengthen social reproduction in the communities where the schools are located. The principals maintain locally oriented programs on limited budgets at the cost of implementing more progressive programs. Students who enter these programs with a local focus often end their formal education at the completion of high school. The students choosing these tracks enter the local economy after graduation and often reproduce their parents social class position, thus maintaining the inequities currently entrenched within the local community.

The educational leaders all grapple with the need to support and maintain the local way of life and to provide opportunities for all students to continue their education. The principals all perceive that students who go on to higher education seldom return to their home, as professional jobs do not exist locally. This dilemma influences the principals as they fight to keep programs that would maintain the way of life that they value. By doing so, they limit access to higher education for some students.

Democratic ideals provide the foundation for the educational system in the United States which values universal access and participation (Trainer, 1993). Social Reproduction Theory comes into play when parental expectations do not maintain the same values for universal access and participation. All of the principals explained

how parental expectations for students often differ from those of the education systems in which they participate. Mrs. Kingston stressed that for many families in her district, academics is not a priority. She perceives that many families' first priority is survival. She spoke passionately about second and third generation poverty in her school district. She added that parents often voice complaints that the school expects too much. Mr. Wills expressed similar frustrations saying that parents' expectations for children in his district are often based upon their own experiences. Parents often see no need to change. Mr. Osbourn explained that parents in his district expected good paying, stable jobs for their children upon graduation; however, he stressed that those opportunities are no longer as prevalent as they once were. Furthermore, Mr. Osbourn perceived that parents often feel that the school is performing "good enough," and there is no need for change or improvement. All of these perceptions combined with higher education participation rates lower than the state average impact students' access to education as a tool for social mobility. According to Trainer (1993), "Rural Americans are at an extreme disadvantage of not being able to participate in the American Dream due to their lower college attendance rate (p. 10)."

Apple (1995) argues that educational and political institutions have lost a large portion of their legitimacy as the state finds itself unable to respond to the current economic and ideological situation (Apple, 1995). Apple's argument is illustrated in the principals' responses relative to the paradox related to the purpose of schooling. This paradox, that the principals' perceived to be real, involves how educational institutions often focuses on intellectual problems while rural

communities think the school should focus on real problems. All of the respondents encountered hardships in meeting state standards for Adequate Yearly Progress while trying to maintain programs with a local focus. This problem is further exaggerated by unfunded federal mandates and limited resources coming from a low tax base.

All of the principals struggle to maintain programs with a local focus. Mrs. Kingston explained how she was fighting to maintain an agricultural education program. Mr. Wills maintains a woodworking program that involves the entire process from raw timber to finished product. Mrs. McInness struggles with preparing students for employment in the different industries in town while balancing needs for college preparation and AP programs. Mr. Osbourn spoke about wanting to add additional programs to prepare kids for opportunities in the community but not being able to expand electives because of needs related to meeting Adequate Yearly Progress. The state regulations are forcing these principals to pull already limited resources away from programs with a local focus. To add further stress to this dilemma, the principals all perceive that the stakeholders in the community do not understand or support this need for change. As stated earlier, the parents' perceptions about what the purpose of school should be in the rural context seems to differ from what the educational institutions believe the purpose should be.

When schools prepare students for a global economy that does not exist locally in the rural context, students who pursue higher education often leave and do not return. This is a dilemma that impacts social reproduction and is a problem that all of these educational leaders perceived to be true in their districts. Mr. Wills explained that the limited number of professional jobs available in town were located

at the large manufacturing plant. Mrs. McInness spoke about the only two employers in town for kids with college degrees as being the hospital or the school district. Mrs. Kingston talked about one communications firm in a neighboring town. Finally, Mr. Osbourn perceived that the best and brightest students from his district leave and never come back.

All of these principals deal with factors in the rural context that lead to social reproduction; furthermore, the concern is exaggerated when one considers that students who do move up socially often leave the community. The respondents in this study are faced with a difficult dilemma. On one hand, they can educate their students for the global economy through a focus on intellectual problems. On the other hand, if they prepare students for the local economy, they reproduce the inequities that they are already struggling with in relation to low tax base, parental expectations and poverty in the communities they serve. Bourdieu (1977) sees this as the way the educational system reproduces social stratification. Furthermore, a focus on local needs makes it increasingly difficult to meet state requirements for Adequate Yearly Progress.

The second theoretical frame used in this study was the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory. The researcher used the four ethical paradigms of justice, care, critique, and profession to code and categorize the principals' perceptions of their own decision making strategies, as well as their answers to the semi-structured interview questions and the observations.

Throughout the coding of the data, the researcher made several reflections on the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory from the data collected. The principals all

answered questions in a manner that spanned the four different ethical paradigms, and they also provided examples of decisions that spanned the four paradigms. The principals, however, all used the paradigms of care and critique significantly more often than justice or the profession. Three of the four principals used the lenses of care most often, with the forth using care and critique equally as often.

The literature review of this study suggests four paradoxes within the rural context. These include separate agendas between the school and the community, the purpose of school, the fact that moving up often means moving away and the small community school verses a larger comprehensive model. These paradoxes are present in part because of the impact that social reproduction has on rural areas and students within rural Pennsylvania. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001 and 2005) explain that dilemmas in education are complex and may require the use of multiple paradigms. The rich data collected during this study suggest that the respondents do use different paradigms to solve difficult problems when working through dilemmas.

The ethic of justice focuses on rights and laws as part of our liberal democratic tradition (Shapiro & Gross, 2008; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005). This paradigm comes from two competing ideals. The first sees justice as the individual giving up some individual right for the good of the whole. The second sees society as the central focus and is oriented on how individuals should behave as part of a community. The ethic of justice generally serves as a foundation for legal rights and ideals. To explore this paradigm the researcher asked the principals questions about policy, procedure and past practice in their districts. Although the

principals spoke about the importance of rules, their answers to many of the interview questions and the examples they provided did not support a strict adherence to rules.

As Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001, 2005) explain, the ethic of critique finds its roots in critical theory, and looks at laws and those who create laws to question if they are just. It forces us to rethink democracy in light of privilege, power, culture, language and justice. The ethic of critique is concerned with the social class and its inequities. Related to schools, the critical theory is concerned with how schools reproduce the inequities in society. Three of the respondents often turned to the ethic of critique, second only to the ethic of care. The forth respondent used this paradigm equally as often as he used the ethic of care.

The ethic of care stems from feminist literature. This ethic turns to issues of loyalty, trust and empowerment in decision making (Shapiro & Gross, 2008; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005). The ethic of care requires decision makers to pay attention to the "other voices" (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005). This ethic is predominantly focused on the individuals involved in the decision and the decision's outcome. Three of the principals used the ethic of care most often in decision making. The forth respondent favored the ethic of care and the ethic of critique equally.

According to Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001, 2005), the ethic of the profession is often equated with justice, and stems from a set of rules or an ethical code. They go further to explain that understanding of one's self as a person and as an educational leader is part of the profession paradigm. Educational leaders are influenced by personal and professional values. The data collected shows that the

principals seldom turn to the ethic of the profession as a primary lens. All of the principals feel that their values do not differ from their professional life to their personal life. Three of the respondents both personally and professionally valued trust and honesty highly.

Three potential explanations emerged that could explain the primary use of the ethic of care and critique over the ethics of justice and the profession. First, as stated earlier, the impact of social reproduction is clearly evident within the rural context. As the principals encounter these elements from the rural context and the mandates from the state and the federal government, a critical focus emerges. The principals are critical of a "one size fits all" approach to accountability, and they all faced difficulties with meeting these requirements while balancing parental expectations and the need to prepare students for the local economy. The principals turn a critical eye to the regulations placed upon them from distant policy makers who do not understand the context within which they work. Moreover, as the principals influence change, they look critically at the past practices of their school districts that maintain the inequities within their communities.

A second reason that may persuade the principals to use the ethic of care is their relationships with stakeholders. Because of the physical size of the schools studied, the principals developed close relationships with their stakeholders. Beyond this, the four principals studied, all lead in schools where they once attended. This phenomenon could exaggerate the close relationships they have with stakeholders. The principals all stressed the importance of the individuals involved in difficult decisions and the consequences of decisions on those individuals.

Finally, another possible influence impacting a reliance on critique and care may be the principals' critical life incidents. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001 and 2005) explain that critical life incidents can impact how individuals view difficult ethical decisions. All of the principals provided examples of life incidents of a critical or caring nature, and they all used the ethic of care and critique more than justice and the profession.

Recommendations for Practice, Preparation, Policy and Future Research

Recommendations for Practice

As the researcher coded the data collected during this study, two different trends emerged that principals working in the rural context may encounter. First, several paradoxes may exist within the rural context that require framing decisions through multiple paradigms. Furthermore, there are elements within the rural context that may strengthen social reproduction within the schools and communities where these leaders work. As with the paradoxes explored in this study, social reproduction presents many difficult ethical decisions that rural administrators may encounter. These two trends found in the data generated two recommendations for practice.

All of the leaders in this study used multiple paradigms to frame difficult decisions. Although the data show a tendency for the respondents to use the ethic of care or the ethic of critique, examples were encountered that demonstrate the use of the justice and profession paradigm as well. The data suggest that decisions in the rural context are complex and may require the use of multiple paradigms in

determining an effective course of action. Rural principals need to explore their own decision making and incorporate multiple frames when considering difficult decisions.

A second recommendation for practicing rural educational leaders is to explore their own personal histories and critical life incidents to better understand their decision making strategies and their tendencies as a leader. The data collected in this study show a parallel relationship between the principals' stated critical incidents and the paradigms that they turned to in solving difficult decisions. Self-reflection by a leader on his or her own history could be a valuable source of insight into his or her decision making strategies and tendencies when considering difficult ethical decisions.

Recommendations for Preparation Programs

When the respondents spoke about their roles and their formal preparation two concerns emerged. The first concern illustrated in the data was the number of different roles the rural principals assumed within their schools. Only one of the principals had a full-time assistant principal. The respondents assumed responsibilities that are often delegated and assigned to other professionals in larger schools. These principals had responsibilities that included the following: discipline, special education, curriculum, professional development, technology, scheduling, athletics and personnel. While most educational leaders possess some knowledge in these areas, seldom are they solely responsible for all of them. Second, the principals

expressed frustration when they spoke about their preparation. They relied heavily on being from the area and being familiar with the context in making decisions.

One recommendation for colleges and universities with educational administration preparation programs would be to consider offering a rural focus. Many universities allow aspiring principals to specify an urban focus, but few offer a rural focus. This problem is compounded when one considers the lack of existing literature on rural educational leaders. Furthermore, there are few students pursuing doctorates in rural education. There is little knowledge to guide these leaders as they embark on a career in the rural context.

Along with offering a rural focus, universities should consider offering ethical training within master's level programs. The four paradoxes previously mentioned along with the elements of social reproduction found within the rural context provide leaders with many difficult ethical decisions; however, if ethical training is offered, it is most commonly found in doctoral level work. Principals planning to lead in the rural context could benefit from formal training in using multiple paradigms to frame problems.

Recommendations for Policy Makers

One difficulty expressed in the literature and affirmed by the respondents in this study is that there is not one consistent, agreed upon definition of rural. Each of the principals defined what they perceive it means to be rural in different ways. The lack of a single accepted definition makes it difficult for policy makers to develop and implement policy applying to the rural context. Beyond policymaking, analyzing

data becomes difficult as it often mixes across categories that are not consistently defined. Policymakers need to develop a common definition of rural for decision making.

A second recommendation coming out of this study for policy makers is to reconsider the "one size fits all" approach to accountability. The low tax base and limited resources found in the districts studied coupled with unfunded federal mandates for accountability put tremendous stress on these districts who are serving communities with perspectives on the purpose of schooling that are different from those of the education institution. These principals find themselves trying to manage a two-sided problem that pulls resources toward state mandates and local needs. State policy makers need to consider the limited resources and competing demands that exist within the rural context.

One final recommendation for policy makers would be to develop industry and economic stimulus programs within rural areas. The principals studied all acknowledge that students who pursue higher education often leave the communities due to a lack of viable employment. This problem is compounded as state mandates on accountability force these rural schools to prepare students for a world that does not exist locally. As the best and brightest students move away, the community does not see the benefits of education. The low tax base remains and the inequities in the community endure. In two of the four districts studied, enrollment was consistently declining. Students are moving away, and new families are not moving in. To counter act this trend of declining enrollment and out-migration, state policy makers should look to revitalize rural economies or many rural communities may not survive.

Recommendations for Future Research

As a result of the work conducted in this study, several potential topics for additional research emerged. This study provided rich data relative to four principals in four exclusive rural settings across a twelve month period. Generalizations can not be made based on the findings of this study alone. On the other hand, the findings from this study suggest a need for additional research related to educational leadership within the rural context.

More work needs to be done to explore the rural context and the leaders working within it. Rural education leaders as a group are not represented well in the existing knowledge base. This study suggests that the rural context and the variables existing within it may have an impact on educational leadership that differs from urban or suburban settings. At the very least, the four principals studied all perceived this to be the case. With the number of students attending rural schools, it is critical that researchers seek to further understand the phenomenon of educational leadership in the rural context. Often when research has been conducted it is done so in urban or suburban settings and generalized to explain phenomena in different settings. The lack of existing research and the generalization of urban and suburban findings to the rural context, in and of itself, suggest a need for expanded study.

Within the rural context, the findings of this study suggest a need for more work to be done in two specific areas. First, the rural context presents several paradoxes discussed earlier that impact leadership through the difficult decisions they force rural leaders to make. Second, the contextual factors in rural areas that strengthen social reproduction complicate the work of educational leaders and more

work needs to be done to further understand this phenomenon if rural educational leaders are to be successful.

The respondents in this study affirmed the existence of three specific paradoxes that they perceived to affect their leadership. These paradoxes included the following: the separate agendas of the community and the school as to the mission of the schools, the purpose of schooling itself, and the concept that moving up in social class often means moving away from the local area. The review of related literature suggested the existence of these paradoxes and the principals perceived them to be real. Research involving other leaders in other contexts would help to further explore the impact of these paradoxes.

The review of related literature also listed many elements within the rural context that strengthen social reproduction within rural communities and their schools. Again, the principals perceived that many of these elements impact their leadership and their decision making. These elements included the following: parental expectation, low tax base, poverty, lack of diversity, disagreement about the purpose of school, lack of a consistent understanding of the educational mission, and outmigration. Research to further explore these elements within the rural context and their impact on social reproduction would be beneficial. A better understanding of these elements is needed for practicing administrators and policy makers.

Concluding Remarks

Rural schools in the United States educate seven million students (Sherwood, 2001). With considering the large number of rural schools, there are still significant

deficiencies in rural research, including available raw data on rural schools (Arnold & Sherwood, 2001, 2004). Moreover, when research is done, the rural context is almost always shown as a negative factor (Howley & Howley, 1999). Many times generalizations are made to research that is conducted in urban and suburban settings and applied to the rural setting. This is increasingly problematic when considering that the rural context presents many factors that differ from urban and suburban areas. Rural school leaders may encounter paradoxes related to the mission of the school, the purpose of schooling itself, and social mobility of students. The rural context itself often presents educational leaders with difficult decisions related to the following: low tax base, poverty, parental expectations, and attracting and retaining teachers. Rural principals themselves must assume a wide variety of roles that in larger districts are delegated to a team of administrators. All of these contextual factors are complicated further when expectations from policy makers for all schools ignore the unique elements of the rural context.

Throughout a twelve month period, 18 site visits were made to conduct 12 semi-structured interviews and eight days of shadowing. During that time the researcher collected richly descriptive data across five areas of inquiry. Four rural high school principals shared their perceptions of rural educational leadership on: the impact of their personal histories relative to leadership, the impact of the rural context on their career path and advancement opportunities, the impact of their gender within the rural context relative to leading and obtaining a position, the impact of the rural context on their decision making and leadership, and finally, the impact of the rural context on their work as educational leaders as a whole.

The principals perceive that their personal history has an impact on leadership, and the data collected by the researcher throughout this study also supports that perception. All four of the respondents grew up and attended school in the buildings where they now lead. The close relationships that they have developed with stakeholders impact their leadership in both positive and negative ways. All of the principals came from families that value education and attending college was an expectation in every case. The principals shared critical life incidents from their history that frame the way they viewed difficult decisions in the role as school leaders. Finally, the principals' ties to the community influence programmatic decisions that strengthened the impact of Social Reproduction.

On one hand, the principals' personal histories and knowledge of the community serve as an asset when making decisions and anticipating consequences. On the other hand, the principals' value of place and a way of life they have known serve as a limiting factor for students. The principals all struggled to carry out mandates from the state related to accountability and the ideals of education, while trying to balance local needs. This paradox played out in the four districts of study where tax bases and resources are already limited.

In every case, the principals used resources to maintain programs with a local focus. Programs like agricultural education, fish farming, logging, wood shop, metal shop, small engine repair, and cooperative education all use limited resources and allow students to end their formal education with high school. These curricular decisions predispose those students to reproduce the existing class structure in the community.

Though it is admirable to maintain these programs for some students, it is done so with a cost. The resources used to maintain these programs could be used to provide other options for some students, options that could provide social mobility within the wider social class structure. The principals' own personal histories and values of the way of life they cherish impact how they view these curricular decisions. All ethical decisions are complex and do not present one best agreed upon course of action. This paradox about the purpose of school is further complicated when students who do pursue higher education fail to return to the community. The purpose of school is a dilemma with which all of the principals struggle. The data collected suggest that their personal histories may influence their decisions in this area, possibly more so than if they had not grown up in the community.

Similarities across the four respondents indicated that the rural context plays a role in their career path and also serves as an influence in their future aspirations. The principals all returned to their home town to explore careers in educational administration. The female respondents took a traditional path to educational administration, while the male respondents tried other careers initially only to eventually return home and aspire to educational leadership positions. The principals perceive there to be opportunities available for advancement but were not willing to travel the distance necessary to take advantage of those options. They spoke about comfort and fit within the communities they served and had no plans to make a change in the next five years.

The gender barriers documented in the literature are still entrenched in the rural context. The female administrators had both experienced gender discrimination

in their pursuit of the principalship or in their leadership itself. The two male respondents acknowledged gender bias in their districts related to the high school principal being a male. Both of the males' schools never had a female principal, and they acknowledged that their communities expected the high school principal to be a male.

The principals all utilize multiple paradigms when exploring difficult ethical decisions. The principals use the ethic of care and the ethic of critique more frequently than the ethics of justice and the profession. They all perceive that their close relationships with stakeholders impact their leadership both positively and negatively. The leaders all describe their leadership style as collaborative, and their answers to questions suggested a use of multiple paradigms in an effort to develop consensus when making difficult decisions.

The principals perceive the rural context itself to have an impact on their work as educational leaders. The respondents affirm the paradoxes found in the literature related to the rural educational context. They perceive there to be a difference of opinion about the agenda and the mission of the school between the school and the community itself. The principals struggled with competing expectations about the purpose of school. They work hard to balance schooling for local purposes while preparing students for a global economy. All of the educational leaders perceive that students who seek higher education need to move away from the community to find employment. Finally, all of the principals spoke about the problems they encounter in the rural context related to having a low tax base, a poverty battle, and varying parental expectations for the schooling of their children. Furthermore, the principals

all struggle with attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers. One final hardship the principals perceive to impact their leadership is the number of roles they must assume within the school. All of the principals take on various roles that are often delegated in larger districts. They perceive this to be challenging because they are expected to have expertise in a wide variety of areas, but in many cases they had limited preparation for those demands.

The two theoretical frames within this study, the Multiple Ethical Paradigm Theory and Social Reproduction Theory, can serve as valuable tools for leaders practicing in the rural context. Decisions in the rural context can be complicated as competing values of educational institution and rural stakeholders create paradoxes for rural leaders. Rural leaders can benefit from using multiple paradigms when solving dilemmas around these competing values. By framing complex dilemmas in multiple ways, leaders can uncover multiple solutions and develop a greater understanding of the impacts of those decisions. In the end, all of the principals in this study use multiple paradigms when solving difficult decisions.

The rural context presents several difficulties found in the literature that are affirmed in this study which strengthen social reproduction in rural areas. Those elements included but are not limited to the following: a lack of professional occupations, poverty, parental expectations, a lack of diversity, and the paradoxes previously discussed. The respondents in this study encounter all of these elements on a frequent basis, and they impact their ability to lead within the rural context. Moreover, their personal histories, being from the communities where they now lead, influence curricular decisions. By framing these hardships through the lens of Social

Reproduction Theory, rural educational leaders may better be able to combat this phenomenon that recreates many of the inequities in the rural society.

Rural educational administration is a challenging and rewarding profession. Rural leaders face many contextual elements that differ from those encountered by their urban and suburban counterparts. Opportunities for rural leadership positions are limited due to geographic distances and gender discrimination. Competing values and contextual factors impact decision making and leadership. Research and preparation programs often do not specify a rural focus. Furthermore, policy makers are frustrated with a lack of rural educational research and the lack of a consistent definition of what it means to be rural. More work needs to be done from a rural focus to further explore the impact of the rural context on educational leaders working in rural schools.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM: PERMISSION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

Title: Rural high school principals: Leadership in rural education

Investigator's Name: Aaron L. Shuman
Hershey Middle School
717-531-2222 ext. 4203 or 717-277-0246

Advisor's Name: Dr. Joan Poliner Shapiro
Professor
Temple University
College of Education
Ritter Hall 238
Philadelphia, PA 19122
Phone: (215)204-6645

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies department within the College of Education at Temple University. I am engaged in a study of high school principals who lead in rural school districts within Pennsylvania. To help me gain insight into this topic, I am asking you to participate in three interviews in which you will be asked to describe your personal history, career aspirations, and leadership style. Each of these interviews will require 60-90 minutes of your time. Along with the interviews, I would like to spend 2 school days shadowing you as an observer of your daily activities.

The data that you provide will be audio recorded anonymously and your participation and anything you say during the interviews will be held in strict confidence. The data will be stored on a laptop computer until the completion of the study and then destroyed. All identities in the final report will be disguised.

Along with this completed consent form, I will need a letter granting me permission to conduct research in your district for the purpose of this study. This letter will need to be on school district letterhead and provided prior to any data collection. Thank you in advance for your cooperation and attention to this requirement.

I welcome questions about the research at any time. Your participation in the study is on a voluntary basis. You may discontinue participating at any time with no consequence or penalty.

I understand that if I wish further information regarding my rights as a research subject, I may contact:

Mr. Richard Throm
Program Manager and Coordinator
Office of the Vice President for Research
Temple University
215-707-8757

Signing your name below indicates that you have read and understood the contents of this Consent Form and that you agree to take part in this study entitled, Rural high school principals: Leadership in rural education.

Participant's Signature	Date
Investigator's Signature	Date

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM: PERMISSION TO AUDIOTAPE

Permission to Audiotape

Investigator's Name: Aaron L. Shuman
Department: Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Project Title: Rural high school principals: Leadership in rural education

Subject: _____ Date: _____

Log #: _____

I give Aaron Shuman permission to audiotape me. This audiotape will be used only for the following purpose:

RESEARCH

This audiotape will be used as a part of a research project at Temple University. I have already given written consent for my participation in the research project. At no time will my name be used.

WILL I BE AUDIOTAPED?

I agree to be audiotaped during the time period:

from _____ to _____

HOW LONG WILL THE TAPES BE USED?

from _____ to _____

The data will be stored for three years after the project is completed. If it is to be stored longer, additional approval from the Institutional Review Board must be sought.

WHAT IF I CHANGE MY MIND?

I understand that I can withdraw my permission at any time. Upon my request, the audiotape(s) will no longer be used. This will not affect my relationship with Temple University or Aaron Shuman in any way.

OTHER

I understand that I will not be paid for being audiotaped or for the use of the audiotapes.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

If I want more information about the audiotape(s) or if I have questions or concerns at any time, I can contact:

Investigator's Name:	Aaron L. Shuman
Position:	Assistant Principal
Institution:	Hershey Middle School
Street Address:	Homestead Road
	PO Box 898
	Hershey, PA 17033
Phone (Work):	717-531-2222 ext. 4203
Phone (Home):	717-277-0246
Email:	Ashuman@Hershey.K12.pa.us

The form will be placed in my records, and the person named above will keep a copy. A copy will be given to me.

PLEASE PRINT

Subject's Name: _____

Date: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Subject's Signature: _____

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Rural high school principals: Leadership in rural education
Interview Protocol
Interview 1: High School Principal

***Bold indicates essential questions**

1. Now that I have explained a little bit about my study, do you have any questions before we begin? My goal is to understand your experiences and your perception of your leadership style. As we proceed, if it is alright with you, I will ask you to tell me more about some points and refer occasionally to my list so that we don't miss anything important. So begin wherever you like telling me about your childhood, your parents, and where you are now, and we will have a conversation for the next hour or so.

2. Could you tell me a little more about:

    - Your parents
    - Education, past, present, and future plans
    - Work history, past, present, and future ambitions
    - Social life with the family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues

3. **Growing up, what social class were you in? (lower, middle, upper) Do you think this played a role in your career choice?**

    - **Did your family view education as a tool for social mobility?**
    - **Did this aid or impede your ability to become an educational leader?**

4. How influential were your parent's expectations in your persistence to earn a college degree? How many members of your family have post-secondary education experience?

4. Why have you chosen your current position as a high school principal in a rural school district?

5. **Did you grow up in a rural community? How do you think that influenced your decision to lead in a rural school district?**

    - **Did your background help or impede your success?**
    - **Would you have sought this position if your background were different?**

6. **Research has shown that critical life changing events often shape us in our belief structure and chosen path. Can you share one or two critical events in your past that have affected your path to an administrative career?**

    - **Has there been an influential person involved?**
    - **If that incident did not occur, where do you think you would be now?**

7. **Where do you see yourself in 5 or 10 years?**

    - **Will you still be in this position?**
    - **Do you anticipate a move to central office?**
    - **What about college faculty?**

8. In looking back over your whole life, what is it that would be really important for me to understand about you and where you are now?

9. Is there anything else that I haven't asked you about that you think would help me to understand you better?

Rural high school principals: Leadership in rural education
Interview Protocol
Interview 2: High School Principal

***Bold indicates essential questions**

1. In this interview we will focus on your career path, the barriers you encountered, and your perceptions of rural high school leadership. To begin, could you share with me the path you have taken to obtain your current position as a rural high school principal?

2. Why did you choose to embark on a career in educational administration?

3. **Do you feel that the opportunities available for obtaining a rural educational leadership position are limited? Please explain.**

    - **How long did you pursue a position?**
    - **Could you lead in another district without moving?**
    - **Did you wait for a particular position to open, or did you apply on your own schedule?**

4. How important was having a mentor or role model in your obtaining an administrative position?

5. Did you encounter any barriers while seeking a rural high school principalship?

6. Do you think your gender helped or hindered your ability to obtain a leadership position?

7. How important was your family's support in being successful in educational leadership?

8. Do you feel that you were adequately prepared for your position as a rural high school principal?

9. **Many scholars explain that there is not one precise definition of rural. What do you think it means to be rural? To be a rural educational leader?**

- **Does rural have to do with size, population or other physical demographics?**
- **Is rural more a state of mind?**
- **Is being rural a positive or negative attribute?**

10. I would like to direct the conversation toward the context in which you lead, if that is ok with you. Research has suggested that leaders in rural school districts face some unique challenges for many reasons. Let's talk about your perceptions of some of the difficulties that research suggests:

    - Low tax base and inequitable funding
    - Student outmigration
    - Poverty
    - Loss of local control
    - Consolidation
    - Diversity
    - Attracting and retaining quality teachers

12. Let's talk about your relationships with stakeholders. What types of relationships have you developed with parents, community members, colleagues, and students? How do these relationships affect your decision making process?

13. **Many authors have suggested that the rural context creates several paradoxes that can make rural leadership challenging. One such paradox is that the rural school is often the center of small town activity and at the same time viewed as being separate from local policies and beliefs. More traditional communities often view progressive education unfavorably. In your experience do you believe this to be true, can you explain?**

    - **Is your school a center for social events for students and community members?**
    - **Does the community support the educational mission of the school?**

14. **Many times rural schools and their communities do not agree on whether or not schools should focus on intellectual problems or real problems. Education often focuses on intellectual problems in a global economy, while rural communities view local concerns and real problems to be a priority. How would you assess the focus of your educational program? Is there a local focus?**

    - **Does your school focus on 21st century skills?**
    - **Does your school focus on preparing students to enter the community?**
    - **Are these goals the same?**

15. **Often times for rural students education is seen as a tool for social mobility; however, many times, moving up equates with moving away. Many rural families struggle with knowing that the global economy that the school prepares children for**

is not available locally. Has this been your perception through your administrative experience?

- **If students obtain a college degree, are there options for employment in the community?**

16. **How influential, in your opinion, is parental expectations within your educational community? Do you see this as a hindrance to the vision and mission of your school?**

    - **Do parents view education highly?**
    - **Do parents expect children to pursue higher education?**

17. There has also been much written about the issue of consolidation and the comprehensive high school verses the small local school. Do you find resources to be limited? Is it difficult to provide a comprehensive program for students? How do you prioritize curricular elements while maintaining a small community school?

18. Now that we have talked about some of the paradoxes that exist, is there anything else you would like to share about the conflicting views of stakeholders as it applies to leading in a rural setting?

19. Is there anything else you would like to share that could help me understand what it is like to lead in a rural setting?

Rural high school principals: Leadership in rural education
Interview Protocol
Interview 3: High School Principal

***Bold indicates essential questions**

1. This interview is designed to explore your leadership and decision making style. To begin, please describe what you feel to be the crucial elements of your leadership style.

2. **What do you consider to be your most important personal values? What are your most important professional values? Do these conflict within your decision-making? Explain?**

    - **Does your role as principal influence your decisions?**

3. How would you rate the following elements on a scale of one to five, five being the most important, in your consideration of difficult decisions:

    - The personal impact on the people involved
    - The rule dictating the situation
    - Past practice or procedures
    - The consequences or outcome of the situation
    - Absolute right or wrong
    - Societal or community expectations/norms

4. **Do you think there are situations where rules should be violated or policies broken? Please explain your answer.**

    - **Policies like zero-tolerance come to mind**
    - **Mandatory discipline consequences**

5. Many rural school leaders feel that they operate inside their "own little world," separate and apart from the ideals of progressive education. Do you find this statement to be true? Explain.

6. Do you feel that the rural context of this district impacts your decision making? Explain.

7. **How would you describe your leadership style? Are you strongly influenced by rules and policies? Do you view decisions as absolute right or wrong? Do you**

find yourself questioning policies and procedures in a critical nature? Do you view decisions based on the individual, above and beyond the rule? Are you a collaborative leader?

- **Do you turn first to policies?**
- **Do you ever think about who created rules and who those rules hurt or help?**
- **Does your caring for students sometimes make it difficult to follow procedures?**

Throughout the next hour, I am going to ask you to read an ethical dilemma that educational leaders may encounter. At the conclusion I am going to ask you to answer some questions regarding how you would solve the dilemma in your current role as high school principal. It is important to understand that there is no right or wrong solution to the dilemma. The questions at the end are designed to help you explore your decision making strategy.

*The ethical dilemma was taken and modified with the authors' permission from the text:

Shapiro, J. P. & Stefkovich, J. A. (2005). *Ethical leadership and decision making: Applying theoretical perspectives to complex ethical dilemmas* (2nd ed.). Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

The meeting could have been worse. That thought provided Central High School Principal Jane Franken little solace as she sat in her office reflecting on the discord created in the just concluded meeting with her department chairs. Their responses to the proposed curriculum change approached open revolt, and Jane felt trapped with few good options.

Central High students always performed well on the state's standardized tests by maintaining scores that were equal or above state averages. The school continued to meet state-defined, adequate yearly progress targets. Unfortunately, it was the school's future performance that most concerned the board of school directors. With each passing year, the state's goals for acceptable scores became more aggressive. Due to such high expectations, it appeared that a large number of districts would not meet state goals in the coming years. The school directors wanted to ensure that their district would not be among them.

If the number of Central High students achieving acceptable scores increased at the current rate, the school would be placed on the state's "at-risk" list in two years. Such an action would eliminate state funding incentives for good performance and open the door for a state takeover of the school district. With such dire consequences looming in the future, the directors thought it prudent to increase student performance on the state test. The board charged the district Superintendent, Dr. Linda King, to design and implement a curriculum that specifically addressed state standards. Appreciating the gravity of the situation and the serious concern of the board, Dr. King developed a plan that she presented to Jane Franken.

In a meeting with Jane, Dr. King presented an outline of the curriculum changes that the board of directors agreed would address their concern. Courses specifically designed to address the state standards would be created in each of the four core disciplines for grades 9 through 12. These eight new courses would provide intensive training in test-taking skills. The curriculum would be centered on the material covered by the state standards and would

be mandatory for students who failed to meet acceptable levels of achievement on state exams. Because there was no state or federal funding provided to support such an initiative, these changes were to be implemented utilizing current staff.

Jane's reaction to this proposal was less than enthusiastic. Sensing her opposition, Dr. King explained how such a curriculum was in the best interest of the school district. The community respected the accomplishments of the district and was proud of its standing in the state. The threat of falling below state expectations and being placed on a "warning list" would undermine the trust and support of the community. The turmoil that would result from such a situation would be unthinkable; consequently, it was necessary to take action before problems developed. Dr. King's parting words were clearly etched in Jane's memory. She stated, "You're either part of the problem or part of the solution. Keep me informed of your progress."

Now that she had her "marching orders" Jane's first action would be to meet with her department chairs. Because of their previous work on developing the curriculum, she knew the meeting would not be pleasant.

Under Jane's collegial style of leadership and with the notable support of the department chairs, especially the respected English chair, Alicia Weston, the faculty developed a curriculum to best serve the needs of all Central High School students. They researched and worked with a strong sense of purpose nurtured by an altruistic desire to give their students "the best." Developed and implemented over a five-year period, the curriculum identified three directions of academic preparation based on students' post-graduation plans. Each discipline offered courses designed to prepare students for college, vocational/technical school, or direct entry into the workforce. At each grade level, an interdisciplinary relation among core disciplines was established. Students were free to choose among different offerings in order to create an individualized plan that best suited their needs. Although subject to ongoing evaluation and revision, the current curriculum appeared to be successful in achieving the desired objectives and was highly regarded by the staff. It was with this in mind that Jane presented the new curriculum revision plan to the department chairs.

As anticipated, the chairs were not receptive to the proposed change. The impact on the current curriculum would be significant. At first, the discussion centered on a practical consideration. With no new staff, the courses offered for vocational/technical school students and those desiring to enter the workforce on graduation would be virtually eliminated as many of those students would most likely be candidates for the new courses. This trend would be exacerbated in future years with the relentless raising of state targets for successful achievement.

The discussion then took a more philosophical turn. The validity of teaching test-taking skills was questioned. How were such skills useful in the real world?

Additionally, the practice of "teaching to the test" was anathema to educators interested in providing their students with the knowledge and skills necessary for success in their chosen areas. Also, by identifying which students were assigned to the courses, the school would be eliminating students and parental choice by subjecting them to mandatory tracking. It was no surprise that Alicia Weston was particularly vehement in her objections by suggesting that teachers were not needed to fulfill the processing demand of the new curriculum; trainers would be sufficient.

What did surprise Jane was Alicia's threat to resign her position as chair and revert to being a regular classroom teacher if such curriculum changes were mandated. She did not want to be in a leadership position for implementation of a program that she considered to be unethical. While engulfed in the best of the moment, Jane knew her well enough to know that this was not a mere bluff. Trying to gauge the reactions of the other chairs to her pronouncement, Jane could not discern if they were inclined to follow her lead.

Sitting in her office, Jane considered her dilemma. She knew she was bound to carry out the mandates of the school board and the superintendent, but what if she thought that a particular directive was not in the best interests of the students? Then she paused to reflect: Who is the ultimate judge of what is in their best interests? The authority certainly resides with the board, but are the directors the best qualified to make curricular and pedagogical decisions? What would be the effect on the school's students, morale and culture if the curriculum changes were unilaterally mandated? Would siding with her chairs in a unified front delineate the shortcomings of the proposed changes influence Dr. King and the board to reconsider their position? These questions preoccupied her mind as Jane tried to formulate the first report of this progress for Dr. King.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What actions might Jane take that would be fair to both the students and the faculty? Would you recommend she take these actions? Why or why not?

2. Is caring for the school district synonymous with caring for the students? What is the principal's best course of action according to a caring perspective? Should this be the primary reasoning paradigm for this dilemma? Why or why not?

3. Why is accountability so important in education today? Who benefits from an educational curriculum and system based on uniform standards?

4. What is Jane's ultimate responsibility? What should be in her first report to Dr. King? Should she take the chair's side on this issue? Why or why not?

5. What would the profession expect Jane to do in this case? What action would be in the best interest of the students? Would this decision benefit the local community served by the district? If so, how? If not, why not?

APPENDIX D

LETTER TO SUPERINTENDENTS

January 3, 2010

ADDRESS A
ADDRESS B
ADDRESS C

Dear _____ :

I am a doctoral student at Temple University in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. As fulfillment of my doctoral program requirements I am undertaking a study involving rural high school principals in Pennsylvania. The study utilizes a qualitative research design and is entitled "Rural high school principals: Leadership in rural education."

I am writing to request your permission to allow _____, Principal of _____, to participate as a subject in my study. _____ has graciously agreed, contingent upon your approval, to participate as a subject. As I have informed _____ the study will consist of "shadowing" her for a period of two days and three in depth interviews.

Every effort will be made by me to be as unobtrusive as possible while visiting the school. Being an assistant principal and being aware of the demands of the profession, all aspects of the study must be at the complete convenience and with the absolute compliance of _____.

I have already assured _____ that the focus of the investigation is on the principal. Total anonymity regarding the school, school district, and names of individuals will be assured; however, certain demographic details will be revealed in my final report such as, socio-economic level, school size, number of staff, etc.

In order for Temple University's Institutional Review Board to approve my study, I need to provide them with a letter from you on school district letterhead stating that you have approved my request to conduct research in your district. Please forward this to me at your convenience. I would like to get this to the IRB prior to their May 15th meeting date. The letter can be forwarded to me at:

Aaron Shuman
24 Wheatland Circle
Lebanon, PA 17042

I feel this study will indeed make a contribution to the field of educational leadership due to the fact that little research has been conducted on rural administrators; furthermore, studies that focus on them as individuals are even fewer.

If you have any questions regarding this study, please let me know. It is my hope to conduct the "shadowing" during the fall semester and the interviews during the summer months, given your approval. My doctoral advisor at Temple University is Dr. Joan Shapiro. Contact information for both Dr. Shapiro and me is listed below. Please do not hesitate to contact either one of us if you have concerns or questions.

Investigator's Name: Aaron L. Shuman
Hershey Middle School
717-531-2222 ext. 4203 or 717-277-0246
AShuman@Hershey.k12.pa.us

Advisor's Name: Dr. Joan Poliner Shapiro
Professor
Temple University
College of Education
Ritter Hall 238
Philadelphia, PA 19122
Phone: (215)204-6645

I look forward to working with _____ and learning more about your district. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely;

Aaron Shuman
Assistant Principal
Hershey Middle School