Extraordinary Leaders for Unordinary Times: A Grounded Theory Study

Doris E. Candelarie
University of Denver

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EXTRAORDINARY LEADERS FOR UNORDINARY TIMES

A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Morgridge College of Education
University of Denver

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

by
Doris Candelarie
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Advisor: Dr. George Straface
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ABSTRACT

Across the United States, school districts are working to turnaround their lowest performing schools in order to meet the requirements of Adequate Yearly Progress mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. These failing schools are facing district, state, and federal sanctions of closure, takeover, or restructuring. A new phenomenon emerging from this dire state in education is the turnaround leader. An educational turnaround leader is one who leads a high poverty, low performing school to dramatic improvement. Limited research exists on educational turnaround leaders, but what is available hypothesizes that turnaround leaders have different characteristics and qualities.

The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of turnaround school leadership and to identify the essential attributes of a turnaround leader. Turnaround principals were identified across the state of Colorado based on their School Accountability Rating improvements over a two to five year period. Interviews were conducted, transcribed, and data analyzed using the classic grounded theory methodology of coding, memoing, theoretical sampling, and constant comparative analysis.
The study generated a set of conceptual hypotheses and an integrated theoretical model that explains the behavior of the turnaround principals as they worked to solve their main problem of improving the lives of the disadvantaged students in their schools through academic achievement. The theoretical model represents the essential attributes of the turnaround principals consisting of intellectual attributes and emotional attributes held in a dynamic state by two balancing attributes. The attribute of moral leadership emerged as the core category at center of the model and was the prime mover of the behavior of the turnaround principals. Turnaround principals are moral leaders who infuse moral leadership in their thinking, decisions, and actions.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study began with the moral imperative of the pursuit of equity in education and ended with moral leadership as a necessary prerequisite to finally realize equity for disadvantaged children.

I dedicate this study to the turnaround leaders who are leading the nation’s most challenging schools with moral spirit. They do what they do because they believe it is the right thing to do and they are determined to make a difference in the lives of children.

I want to thank my advisor, Dr. George Straface, for his thoughtful feedback and challenging expectations. And a special thank you to my loving family, my parents, my brothers, and my daughters for their support and understanding during my time away from them.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One ...................................................................................................................... 1
  Introduction to the Study ............................................................................................ 1
  Turnaround Schools Research ................................................................................. 5
  Statement of the Problem ......................................................................................... 6
  Purpose of the Study ................................................................................................. 9
  Research Questions .................................................................................................. 10
  Methodology ................................................................................................................ 10
  Research Participants ............................................................................................... 11
  Significant Findings ................................................................................................. 11
  Organization of the Study ......................................................................................... 12

Chapter Two..................................................................................................................... 13
  Literature Review ...................................................................................................... 13
  Turnarounds ............................................................................................................... 14
  Historical Perspective of Equity in Education ......................................................... 16
  Coleman Report ......................................................................................................... 16
  Great Society Plan .................................................................................................... 18
  A Nation at Risk ......................................................................................................... 19
  Standards in Education ............................................................................................. 22
  Goals 2000 & Reauthorization of ESEA ................................................................. 26
  No Child Left Behind Act ......................................................................................... 29
  The Condition of Turnaround: Failing Schools ....................................................... 35
  The Process of Turnaround ...................................................................................... 38
  Retrenchment: Change of Leadership ..................................................................... 39
  Retrenchment: Diagnosing the Problem of Failure ................................................. 39
  Retrenchment: Taking Immediate and Emergency Action ..................................... 43
  Recovery ...................................................................................................................... 44
  Recovery: Interventions for Failing Schools ............................................................ 45
  Turnaround as a Consequence ................................................................................ 50
  State of Turnarounds in Education ......................................................................... 58
  Turnaround Leadership ............................................................................................ 61
  Turnaround Leader Actions ..................................................................................... 62
  Turnaround Leader Characteristics ......................................................................... 66
  Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 69

Chapter Three: Methodology .......................................................................................... 72
  Introduction ............................................................................................................... 72
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Problem</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of Methodology</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Findings</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Eleven Hypotheses</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 1</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 2</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 3</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 4</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 5</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 6</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 7</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 8</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 9</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 10</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 11</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings Related to the Literature</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unanticipated Outcomes</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implication for Action</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Further Research</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concluding Remarks</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: School Accountability and Free and Reduced Lunch Percentages .................. 85

Table 2: Theoretical Sample Group 1 .............................................................................. 87

Table 3: Categories and Properties .............................................................................. 101
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Cycle of Leader Actions in Turnaround .......................................................... 64
Figure 2: Core Category and Four Main Categories ..................................................... 112
Figure 3: Core Category: Moral Leadership ................................................................. 114
Figure 4: Main Category I: Beliefs ............................................................................... 118
Figure 5: Emotional Attributes of the Turnaround Principal ....................................... 121
Figure 6: Beliefs Sub-Category I: Sensible ................................................................. 123
Figure 7: Beliefs Sub-Category II: Integrity ................................................................. 127
Figure 8: Beliefs Sub-Category III: Relational ............................................................. 134
Figure 9: Intellectual Attributes of Turnaround Principal ........................................... 146
Figure 10: Main Category II: Systemic Strategist ....................................................... 147
Figure 11: Systemic Strategist Sub-Category I: Intrapreneur ...................................... 159
Figure 12: Systemic Strategist Sub-Category II: Achiever ........................................... 167
Figure 13: Systemic Strategist Sub-Category III: Professional Knowledge ................. 176
Figure 14: Main Category III: Challenger .................................................................... 184
Figure 15: Main Category IV: Reflector ...................................................................... 190
Figure 16: Theoretical Model of Essential Attributes of the Turnaround Principal ..... 199
Figure 17: IQ, EQ, and Balancing Attributes of the Turnaround Principal ............... 200
Figure 18: Theoretical Model of Essential Attributes of Turnaround Principals ......... 210
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to the Study

There is a moral imperative growing in the hearts of educational leaders. It is comprised of thousands of children’s faces who are learning, despite the odds stacked against them. These children are expected to learn in our most challenging schools, which in the United States, includes high numbers of second language learners, minorities, and children in poverty. Compounding the urgency to improve the learning environments for the neediest children are the federal mandates holding districts hostage in their quests to improve schools. Across the United States, school districts are scrambling to rescue their poor performing schools from being taken over by their state educational agencies. These schools have been unable to meet their Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) state requirements under the federally mandated No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). NCLB states that all students, regardless of economics, disability, or language will meet annual proficiency targets in reading and math as measured by state achievement tests. The proficiency targets increase incrementally every three years, with the goal of all students reaching 100% proficiency by the year 2014. NCLB requires that each state education agency receiving federal Title I dollars identify and label the Title I schools that are not meeting the targets in order to indicate the school’s status in the NCLB
improvement process. The labels range from “School Improvement” to “Restructuring” and carry a social stigma that reverberates across school communities and school districts.

While those in the education world understand the complicated statistics and formulas leading to the labels, the general public does not. Most school districts do not disagree with the expectation that all students should meet high standards of achievement and do not deny the need for an education accountability system. What is troublesome is the fact that there are 12,978 schools across the United States in various stages of NCLB School Improvement with no reliable statistics to indicate that these schools are improving (U.S. Department of Education, 2008, June 11). The schools receiving the labels are the nation’s highest poverty, highest needs schools. There is no denial of the sense of urgency being experienced by educators for these schools so badly in need of reform or a “turnaround.”

The social and emotional capital of these schools is strained by a system meant to help them. While the government enforced support for schools with the label of “Improvement” is meant to help the schools, there has been a social backfire of these offerings. Parents of the children in these schools are offered transportation for their students to another local school currently making AYP, or students can be provided with private tutoring from a source outside the school. These public castigations send a powerful message that the school is not a good place for students to learn. Consequently, it is mostly the parents who have the wherewithal to understand their options, who move their higher achieving children away from the low-performing school. And thus begins a vicious cycle where poor schools become poorer and their capacity to improve seems
futile. Ultimately, if the school does not improve, it can be taken over by its district to be restructured or reconstituted and if the district does not get involved with results based efforts to improve the school, it can be taken over by the state’s educational agency.

All of these sanctions exacerbate the low performing school’s shaky public perception and sense of efficacy. The funds for transportation and tutoring are taken from the district’s Federal Title I budget, originally allocated to improve those same highest needs schools. It is a national dilemma for school districts trying to provide support to their neediest schools. How do they provide support morally, ethically, educationally, monetarily, socially, and emotionally, while complying with NCLB and do no harm?

The moral imperative pulling at their hearts is the futures of the children in these schools and the need to turn the school around, and not just for NCLB, but for the greater good. “The goal is presumably to get the schools, and the people who inhabit them, off the road to perdition and on the road to dignity and respect as a result of better performance” (Fullan, 2006d, p. 24).

Getting off this “road to perdition” is not an easy task; it involves state leaders working with school districts, district leaders working with school leaders, and school leaders working in their schools with the teachers, students, parents, and communities. The approaches to turning around low performing schools vary across all 50 states, but there are some basic commonalities. An Education Commission review of state interventions currently being instituted outlined the following restructuring options for the lowest performing schools:

- Close and reopen as a charter school.
- Reconstitute staff.
• Contract with an entity to operate the school.

• Turn the operation of the school over to the state education agency.

• Implement any other major restructuring of governance arrangement. (Christie, 2007)

Regardless of the option chosen, none can be effective without a high quality leader. In Spreng’s (2005) dissertation study of interventions in low performing schools, he found that the process of turning around underperforming schools is a challenging endeavor and not always successful. What determined whether an intervention was successful was the “capacity of the intervening body and the quality of the leadership at the school itself” (p. 147). The intervening bodies, namely state educational agencies or local school districts, are facing unprecedented educational decisions and there is little to prove one intervention over another works long term. What has remained constant throughout the accountability tenure is the need for exemplary leadership.

There are two types of research used with improving low performing schools to describe what is occurring nationally and in Canada, one is the improving low-performing schools research also called turnaround schools research, and the other is the high poverty, high minority, high achieving schools research. Although some districts were involved in turning around low-performing schools in the 1990’s (Ziebarth, 2002), most of the turnaround schools research emerged in the last five years due to the requirements of NCLB. The improving low performing schools research and what works in high poverty, high minority schools, has evolved over the last twenty years as part of a greater mass of research on school reform. Leadership is clearly identified in both bodies of research as a critical component of improving low performing schools (Almazán,
Turnaround Schools Research

The newest body of research, the turnaround schools research, has led to the study of turnaround leadership. Turnaround leadership research is focused on principal leadership in low-performing schools and the actions of the turnaround principal. Turnaround leadership researchers agree that leadership is fundamental to the daunting work of the turnaround process (Duke, 2004; Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore & Lash, 2007).

There is a new title for the leader districts are seeking; the leader they seek is called the Turnaround Principal and is described as,

Their missions are painfully clear raise test scores, reduce the number of dropouts, and narrow the achievement gap separating white and minority students. The consequences of failure are equally clear, denial of school accreditation, state takeover, school closure, and diminished hopes and dreams for struggling communities. Such is the world of turnaround principal. (Duke, 2004, p.12)

The Arizona Department of Education (2007) posted the following job summary for a Turnaround Principal:

A Turnaround Principal will be placed at a School Failing to Meet Academic Standards. He/She will replace the current principal and become the educational leader of the school. His/Her mission will be to 1) transform the school from a Failing to Meet Academic Standards school to a Performing school; and 2) develop an infrastructure in order to ensure sustainability at a Performing level.

There are also Turnaround Specialists, a principal specially trained to put a struggling school on the path to higher achievement, likened to a FBI special agent. These specialists receive specialized training designed to help them go into challenging situations, change the school for the better, and come out victorious. It sounds simplistic,
but it is rather complex. Who are these superhero type leaders in education? What makes them extraordinary or unique? How or where do they get these qualities and characteristics? Can these qualities or characteristics be identified and developed? How is a turnaround leader different from an effective leader? Answering these questions in order to identify these leaders is one of the main problems facing state and district educational leaders working to improve their lowest performing schools. If the leader makes the difference then the right leader is essential.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of finding the right kind of leader to turnaround low-performing schools exists across the United States. Few states have been able to address the lack of exemplary leaders in a way that makes a large scale difference. Some states such as California, Connecticut, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Texas, and West Virginia have taken an aggressive route to improve their lowest-performing schools, including in most cases, district takeover (Education Commission of the States, 2002). Since there have not been any documented studies analyzing the effects or success of such drastic measures, it is unknown if leadership was addressed in these situations. What is known is that in situations where schools have been reconstituted, 66-70% changed leadership (Fullen, 2006b; Duke, 2004).

The Education Commission of the States (2007b) identified Georgia, Tennesse, and Arkansas as states with policies focused on principal/leader development and support. However, only a few states have taken a proactive approach to the larger problem of schools in need of drastic improvement by directly addressing the leadership
in these schools. The state of Virginia, in partnership with the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education and Darden Graduate School of Business Administration, created the Turnaround Leader Specialist Program to train educational leaders to turnaround low-performing schools. In 2007, they expanded their program to create Edu-Lead, a partnership between University of Richmond and Virginia Commonwealth University, and were awarded a $273,486 contract from the Louisiana Department of Education to create a similar leadership development project for the Louisiana School Turnaround Specialist Program (“University of Richmond-Virginia,” 2007). The Arizona Department of Education offers a Turnaround Principal Program intended to train principals to turnaround the lowest-performing schools in the state. Most states do offer technical assistance to their lowest performing schools that includes an analysis of leadership structures and leadership behaviors, and many states have replacement of the principal as part of their restructuring or takeover process. But the reality is that the research behind the Turnaround Leader is very limited, and soon the states restructuring or reconstituting schools will be left with a serious void in the leadership capacity needed for these schools.

Private industry has been analyzing and documenting the turnaround process at length, but the education world is just beginning to uncover what kind of leadership is going to be necessary for school turnarounds. What has been uncovered is identifiable differences in leadership behaviors for continuous or incremental school improvement and school turnarounds (Duke, 2004; Fullen, 2006b; Kowel & Hassel, 2005; Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore & Lash, 2007). For example, leaders engaged in continuous improvement are focused on doing things better, leaders engaged in school turnaround
are focused on doing things differently. What has not been analyzed or identified clearly are the skills, knowledge, and personal character traits of these leaders. What kind of person is needed to do this kind of work? Given the data regarding principal burnout and the reasons why principals leave the field, why would anyone want to do this type of work? Already there are many principals serving in the most challenging schools lacking the skills, knowledge and support needed to turn these schools around.

There has also been a national spotlight on the principal shortage. The last extensive study done regarding the principal shortage was done in 1998 by the Educational Research Service for the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the National Association of Secondary School Principals. It was posited then that the problem was both a shortage of candidates in general and a shortage of qualified candidates. Of the 403 districts participating in the survey, 50 percent indicated that their districts were experiencing a shortage of qualified principal candidates. The Wallace Foundation (2003) commissioned three independent research studies to determine the validity of the principal shortage and reported that there was no statistical evidence that there was a shortage of certified candidates; however,

The fact that some districts, and some schools, are experiencing difficulty in attracting adequate pools of certified principal candidates is NOT the same as saying “there is a shortage of principal candidates.” There is, nonetheless, a serious, unsolved dilemma in the labor market for the principalship: many credentialed or would-be candidates, both inside and outside the education field, either are not seeking jobs in the districts or schools that most need them — or are shunning leadership positions altogether. The stressful working conditions, inadequate job incentives, ineffective hiring practices, and increasingly formidable expectations for success, are deterring prospective candidates from entering the field. (The Wallace Foundation, 2003, p. 8)
The U.S. Department of Labor (2006) determined that out of 443,000 education administrator positions, 226,000 were held by elementary or secondary administrators. Employment in the field over the next 10 years is projected to grow at the same rate as the national average due to the high rate of education administrators on track for retirement. In a 2002 National Association of Elementary School Principal survey, 66 percent of the members responded affirmatively that they would retire in the next 6-10 years. The jobs will be there, but the question is whether there will be enough high quality candidates to fill the vacancies. And of the high quality candidates, how many of them possess the skills, knowledge, and personal characteristics to serve in the most challenging schools as a turnaround leader? More importantly, can these skills and characteristics be identified, developed, or replicated?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of turnaround school leadership and to identify essential attributes of a turnaround leader by analyzing their “lived experiences” (Creswell, 1998). This study attempted to discover what essential attributes constitute a successful turnaround school leader by extracting a profile of this kind of school leader from his/her experiences and life-worlds, or “the way a person lives, creates, and relates in the world” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 48). Thus, the intent of this profile was to help educational leaders at all levels understand the traits school principals need for turnaround situations. Additionally, it offers current principals in the field an understanding of the leadership capacity needed to lead and improve their schools and turn them around if that is what is necessary. Finally, this study provides educational policy makers and other educational leaders an understanding the phenomenon of the
turnaround school leader. It gives insight into the experiences of school principals in the most challenging schools and illuminates the kind of support turnaround school leaders need in order to be successful.

Research Questions

The fundamental question guiding this research study sought to reveal the personal and professional nature of the educational turnaround principal:

- What are the essential attributes of a turnaround school principal?

Research Sub-questions:

1. What is the life-world of a turnaround principal?

2. What is extraordinary or unique about the leadership of turnaround principals who have led their low-performing, high poverty, high minority schools to significant achievement?

3. What skills, knowledge, personality traits, and leadership characteristics do turnaround principals have in common?

Methodology

The turnaround educational leader is a new phenomenon in education and studying the attributes of this type of leader requires the qualitative approach described in Chapter 3 of this study. This research study utilizes the classic grounded theory methodology of Glaser and Strauss (1967) and of Glaser (1978, 1992, 1998). Grounded theory was chosen because there is limited research in turnaround leadership in education and no current theories are available to explain the phenomenon of the turnaround educational leader. Grounded theory provides the methodology to discover theory through empirical study. It is not about verification of theory or description of theory; it is
a process of generating theory through data collection and analysis. This research is a
study of the actions, interactions, and social processes of turnaround school principals
(Creswell, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this study a theoretical model of the
essential attributes of the turnaround principals was generated and eleven hypotheses
were discovered. In grounded theory, one does not begin with hypotheses; the goal of
grounded theory is to discover hypotheses, “the research product constitutes a theoretical
formulation or integrated set of conceptual hypotheses about the substantive area under
study” (Glaser, 1992. p. 12).

Research Participants

The research participants chosen for this study were principals who have led their
schools through the turnaround process. The study was limited to public elementary
school principals in the state of Colorado. These principals were chosen based on
improvement of their schools’ overall academic ratings over a two to five year period.
The schools’ were identified from the Colorado School Accountability Ratings system
where they were previously rated “low” performing and recently achieved a higher
performance rating. The participants were interviewed and their responses were
transcribed and analyzed utilizing the grounded theory approach.

Significant Findings

This study followed the classic grounded theory methodology where the goal of
the research was to discover a theory represented by an integrated set of conceptual
hypotheses. The intent of this study was to uncover the essential attributes of turnaround
principals engaged in the action of turning around their low performing, high poverty
schools. What emerged from this study was a theoretical model of the turnaround
principal attributes that explains how they resolved their problem of improving the lives of the children in their schools through academic achievement. The theoretical model outlines the main attribute of moral leadership and its relationship to the other attributes, beliefs, systemic strategist, challenger, reflector, sensible, integrity, relational, intrapreneur, achiever, and professional knowledge. The discovered turnaround principal attributes extracted from the research are detailed in Chapter 4 as results of the study and summarized in Chapter 5 as conceptual hypotheses.

Organization of the Study

The study is organized in a five chapter format. Chapter 1 is an introduction to the study and gives a brief overview of the problem, the purpose of the study is described, the research questions are presented and a short description of the grounded theory methodology and research participants is given. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature relating to the pursuit of equity in United States public education and informs the reader how this pursuit has evolved into the need for turnaround schools and turnaround leaders. Chapter 3 outlines the research methods and procedures used in this study and a literature review of qualitative research and grounded theory methodology is incorporated to inform the reader. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study from the interview process; it also integrates current literature related to the results. In grounded theory “all is data” and it is recommended that current literature is constantly compared and analyzed as data (Glaser, 1992 & 1998). Chapter 5 concludes the study with the major findings of the study, and the findings as related to current literature in the field of turnarounds in education. Additionally, Chapter 5 presents unanticipated outcomes of the study, conclusions, implications for action, and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The problem of finding the right kind of leader to turn around the nation’s lowest performing schools exists for a number of reasons. First, there is the need to understand the context for this new type of leader, the context of turnaround in education. There is extensive research on turnaround in business and non-profit organizations, but little research on the phenomenon of school turnaround. School turnaround is a relatively new concept, making its debut in education literature as recently as 2003 (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). It falls under the broader umbrella of educational equity and school reform. The significant events in U.S. educational history relating to educational equity and school reform will be outlined in order to describe the evolvement of school turnaround.

Second, there is a need to understand the actions or events of a turnaround in education and how the turnaround leader is involved in the event of a school turnaround. Since this is a new concept, examples of school turnaround must be highlighted with the spotlight on the turnaround leader. The turnaround leader research will be presented and the available identified attributes will be detailed and contrasted with those of an effective leader. This literature review will describe the context for educational equity in the U.S. and how it has progressed from Civil Rights in the mid-20th Century to the
reform efforts of the 21st Century and the resulting need for turnaround schools and turnaround leaders.

Turnarounds

One of the biggest challenges of defining turnaround is the ambiguity that surrounds it as a phenomenon. A phenomenon is commonly understood as something that is out of the ordinary, something notable, or something that is considered extraordinary. According to Merriam Webster, it is defined as “a rare or significant event,” or in regards to a turnaround leader “an exceptional, unusual, or abnormal person” (“Phenomenon”).

Murphy and Meyers (2008) culminated a thorough review of current literature on organizational turnaround and educational turnaround literature. They designed a framework for understanding organizational turnarounds, taking research from a broad base of private, public, and non-profit industries and organizations. This framework includes the concept of turnaround explained and described “as a condition, as a process, and as a consequence” (p. vii). The rationale for their research argues that much of the turnaround literature in education is almost exclusively solution focused and does not examine the decline or the whys of educational failure in the first place. They also posit that education has much to learn from other organizational turnaround processes, recovery schema, and both successful turnaround attempts and non-successful attempts. Their research will be summarized here to set the stage for the concept of turnaround in the larger context of organizations in general. Additionally, their findings on educational turnaround will be contrasted with the other current turnaround research. This section begins by defining turnaround within the constructs outlined by Murphy and Meyers
(2008) in both the organizational and educational context. Each construct will then be deconstructed using the most current educational turnaround literature.

Murphy and Meyers (2008) assert that the non-education organization world has a difficult time defining turnarounds due to the complex natures of varied organizations citing Schuchman and White’s (1995) claim that a “review of the literature in this field shows that there is no unifying theory of turnarounds, no common taxonomy of classification system or even a universally accepted lexicon of terms” (Murphy & Meyers, 2008, 7). Most of the literature in the last twenty-five years has centered on how to be successful, very little attention has been paid to what causes organizational decline and what to do when organizations fail.

The Murphy and Meyers turnaround model is portrayed as a horizontal-left to right, one thing leads to another framework. All turnarounds begin with organizational stability, then specific causes lead the organization to decreasing performance, decreasing performance results in failing status, consequently forcing a necessitated turnaround situation either ending in an organizational turnaround or organizational demise. The model highlights turnaround through the following three constructs: turnaround as a condition, turnaround as a process, and turnaround as a consequence.

Turnaround as a condition is referred to as situational. In business it would be considered a situation where decline or performance is at such a level that viability of the business is in jeopardy. In education, turnaround as a condition is where the current state of the school’s academic performance is at such a level that reconstitution or restructuring is in order, either based on NCLB sanctions or state and district level monitoring structures. Turnaround as a process is simply the action of turning around the
organization. It is what happens during the events of moving the performance of the organization from failing to succeeding. Turnaround as a consequence is the result when failing organizations are revitalized, restored, and brought back to acceptable levels of performance. The three constructs intersect together to define turnaround and will be used here to set the stage for the need for a new kind of leader in education, a turnaround leader.

**Historical Perspective of Equity in Education**

Turnaround in education as a condition is a new way of describing the state of a school’s performance, but the underlying cause of this state is an often misunderstood relationship that has developed over time. The historical events of education in the United States reveal that the evolvement of equity in education has been a turbulent journey of trying to find balance between moral and ethical desires and the American public’s expectations of its schools. Sadovnik, Cookson, and Semel (2006) outlines “in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the relationship between race and education and the question of school segregation were at the forefront of political, educational, and moral conflicts” (p. 77). The critical event that lit the fire of educational equity was the 1954 landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education*. In this case, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that separate but equal schools for black and white children was unconstitutional (Wisneski, 1996-2008). Thus began an era of Civil Rights and the quest to equalize educational opportunities for minorities and children of poverty (Sadovnik, Cookson & Semel, 2007).

**Coleman Report**

The relationship between poverty and academic achievement was brought to the forefront by a sociologist, James Coleman. His controversial, yet groundbreaking 1966
study, titled *Equality of Educational Opportunity* is commonly known as The Coleman Report. The study originated from the 1964 Civil Rights Act and was commissioned by the U.S. Department of Health Education and Welfare to assess whether equal educational opportunities existed for children of different race, color, religion, and national origin. The results of the study sent a shock wave through the educational system; it was “a report that would shake the beliefs upon which many educators and social reformers had staked their work” (Viadero, 2006).

The Coleman Study’s findings revealed that “family background had a strong predictive role in academic achievement” (Chenoweth, 2007) and “the organizational differences of between schools were not particularly important in determining student outcomes” (Sadovnik, Cookson & Semel, 2007).

The Coleman report was so controversial that Harvard University conducted a Faculty Seminar to review and analyze the results. The seminar attracted some of the nation’s top academics who, in the end, came to the same conclusion. It was clear, “The Coleman Report’s conclusion on schools’ relative ineffectiveness at overcoming the academic disparities that children bring with them was just one of many findings in the study” (Viadero, 2006). The underlying and unrevealed message at that time was that while family background and social class made the difference and school’s structures did not, most public school structures were largely the same. Also uncovered was the number of schools that remained segregated ten years after the *Brown vs. Board of Education* desegregation ruling. Schools with minorities as the majority, also known as majority minority schools, had not been affected to scale, and schools in the North were found to be just as segregated as schools in the South (Viadero, 2006). Another revelation was that
of the achievement gap between white and black students. For the first time in education history, there was large scale quantitative data that substantiated the achievement gap.

The education world reacted to Coleman’s initial study in a number of ways that continue to impact education today, both intentionally and unintentionally. When children were bussed to new schools in order to desegregate schools based on ethnicity, the results segregated schools by class as well. With every action, there are unintended consequences. The two unintended consequences of bussing that would undermine the goals of desegregation were white flight to suburbs and an increase of private school attendance; one could posit that it had something to do with charter school interest later.

Sadovnik, Cookson and Semel (2007) remarked that the decade from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s was a “time of great turmoil”; the traditional way of schooling in the U.S. educational system was being challenged along with the morals and values of the nation. The tenor of the nation was fragile, the Civil Rights movement had gained momentum and fury, the assassinations of President Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. were fresh and painful, and the Vietnam War, among other things, fueled questions regarding the nation’s role and stability in the world.

Great Society Plan

The moral imperative of addressing the needs of the disadvantaged was a hot topic on the streets, in the public schools, on college campuses, and in the White House. The initiatives implemented during this time were part of President Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society plan. Programs such as Head Start aimed at teaching school readiness skills, the Bilingual Education Act targeted native language development concurrently with English language development, and the Higher Education Act increased college
opportunities for minorities (Andrew, 1998). Additionally, under President Johnson, Federal Title I funding was authorized by the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* as noted in Sec 201 below:

In recognition of the special educational needs of children of low-income families and the impact that concentrations of low-income families have on the ability of local education agencies to support adequate educational programs, the Congress hereby declares it to be the policy of the United States to provide financial assistance (as set forth in this title) to local educational agencies serving areas with concentrations of children from low-income families to expand and improve their educational programs by various means (including preschool programs) which contribute particularly to meeting the special educational needs of educationally deprived children. (p. 27)

The actions of the Great Society Plan affected education symbolically and financially. Symbolically, the government was taking a stand on the social aspects affecting education and for the first time in educational history there were financial implications to federal law affecting education. Up until this time, education had been the primary responsibility of local school districts and states, but the tide was beginning to turn.

A Nation at Risk

The political state of the nation in the mid-1970s influenced the reactions in education through the mid-1980s and heightened the competitive nature of the country. Sadovnik, Cookson, and Semel (2007) called it “a conservative response to the progressive reforms of the 1960s and 1970s” (p. 458). The politicization of education crept in and culminated in a scathing report of the status of the U.S. education system and its academic achievement. In 1981, the U.S. Secretary of Education, Terrell H. Bell created a National Commission on Excellence in Education and directed it to research the quality of education in America. In the archived introduction to the report, it was noted:
The Commission was created as a result of the Secretary's concern about ‘the widespread public perception that something is seriously remiss in our educational system’. Soliciting the ‘support of all who care about our future,’ the Secretary noted that he was establishing the Commission based on his ‘responsibility to provide leadership, constructive criticism, and effective assistance to schools and universities.’ (Goldberg & Harvey, 1983)

The report titled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* was released in 1983 and caused a domino effect of a number of reform initiatives. The report’s opening paragraph set the stage for the imminent danger of education in America:

Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world. This report is concerned with only one of the many causes and dimensions of the problem, but is the one that undergirds American prosperity, security and civility. We report to the American people that while we can take justifiable pride in what our schools and colleges have historically accomplished and contributed to the United States and the well-being of its people, the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur—others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments. (Goldberg & Harvey, 1983, p. 14)

The report’s frank findings appealed to policy makers, and educators, parents, and students and the recommendations made to “reform” education were straightforward and to the point. The suggested reforms were identified by five themes (noted below in bold type) followed by a detailed outline of each theme (noted here as a brief description):

1) **Time:** Increase high school graduation requirements of New Basics, math, English, science, social studies and computer science.
2) **Standards and Expectations:** Adopt more rigorous and measurable academic standards.
3) **Content:** Devote more time to the New Basics.
4) **Teaching:** Improve teacher preparation programs and make teaching a more rewarding and respected profession.
5) **Leadership and Fiscal Responsibility:** Citizens should hold educators and elected officials responsible for the leadership to ensure the success of the
proposed reforms and at the same time should provide the fiscal means to their success (Goldberg & Harvey, 1983).

Ultimately, the report, *A Nation at Risk*, spawned a new era in education known as the “modern standards movement” (Buttram & Waters, 1997, p. 1). It could be argued that equal educational opportunity forced the standards movement or that “the standards movement arose from the struggle of equal educational opportunity” (McClure, 2005, p. 4). Conservatives would say that using education to solve societal ills had diluted U.S. educational standards and academic achievement. Liberals would counter that achieving both equity and excellence are not counter-productive, but should be an American democratic goal. Regardless of opinion, standards were one of the agreed upon solutions to addressing the need to improve education in the 1980s.

It was a movement from relying upon inputs in education as the source of improvement to analyzing outputs as the measure of success. As Porter (1994) noted, “historically, education in the United States has been thought about in terms of inputs and procedures. But education is being thought of in terms of outputs more and more often” (Porter p. 424). The shift in education finance from relying solely on local property taxes to state and federal revenue increased expectations of the funding sources, i.e. the federal government. The funding sources expected results (or outputs) in return for the dollars spent, and “with the power to fund came the power to regulate” (McClure, 2005, p. 6). Education thought of as outputs led to the question of what outputs and how to measure these outputs. The main output considered was academic achievement. In order to measure academic achievement there needed to be the same expectations for all students, which translated to standard expectations, and what all students should know and be able
to do at each grade level and by the time they graduated from high school. How to come to agreement on this overarching question of these standards proved to be a monumental task.

Standards in Education

Although the standards movement was ignited by the report, *A Nation at Risk*, it did not catch fire across the nation until six years later. In 1989, President George H. W. Bush and 49 of the 50 state governors convened for a National Education Summit; it was only the third of such a meeting and the first since the Depression. The focus of this meeting was to discuss the implications of *A Nation at Risk* and to rally support for national education goals (Vinovskis, 1999). Although President Bush was adamant that the federal government was a supporting and coordinating partner, not leading the effort, the outcomes of the meeting signified the beginning of Federal oversight and state regulation of student achievement outputs. Although the goals were not written until after the summit, Vinovskis (1999) outlines four areas of agreement reached by President Bush and the Governors:

- Establish a process for setting national education goals.
- Seek greater flexibility and enhanced accountability in the use of Federal resources to meet the goals, through both regulatory and legislative changes.
- Undertake a major state-by-state effort to restructure our education system.
- Report annually on progress in achieving our goals.

Taking the information set by the summit, President George H. W. Bush presented an outline of goals in his State of the Union Address in 1990, where he stated that in ten years that:
1) All children in America will start school ready to learn.
2) The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.
3) American students will leave grades four, eight, and twelve having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter, including: English, mathematics, science, history, and geography; and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our modern economy.
4) U.S. students will be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement.
5) Every adult American will be literate and possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.
6) Every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a safe, disciplined environment conducive to learning. (Bush, 1990)

A report, Federal Education Policy and the States summarizes the next series of events leading to educational standards and accountability in education (Nelson & Weinbaum, 2006). In 1991, Bush attempted to bring national goals to the forefront with his America 2000 proposal, but his added initiatives brought about a great amount of discourse, disagreement, and opposition. America 2000 originally introduced national standards, voluntary national tests, Federal grants to support New American Schools, district and school report cards, and support for school vouchers. The contested issues of national testing, private school vouchers and limited involvement of states and local districts stalled the legislation in the House and Senate. But the idea of systemic educational reform was gaining support and in mid-1991 Congress authorized the National Council on Education Standards and Testing to review the “desirability and feasibility of establishing national standards and assessments” (Nelson & Weinbaum, 2006).
The council was comprised of “elected leaders from both parties along with private individuals from the worlds of education, business, and other fields” (Resnick, 2005). In January of 1992, their report titled *Raising Standards for American Education* was completed. In the opening letter to Congress, The Secretary of Education, The National Education Goals Panel, and the American People; the co-chairs, South Carolina Governor Carroll A. Campbell and Colorado Governor Roy Romer wrote,

In the absence of well-defined and demanding standards, education in the United States has gravitated toward *de facto* national minimum expectations, with curricula focusing on low-level reading and arithmetic skills and on small amounts of factual material in other content areas. Most current assessment methods reinforce the emphasis on these low-level skills and processing bits of information rather than problem solving and critical thinking. The adoption of world-class standards would force the nation to confront today’s educational performance expectations that are simply too low…We strongly endorse national standards and a voluntary system of assessments as appropriate focal points in ongoing educational reform. (National Council on Research in Education, 1992)

The recommendations from the report raised questions regarding equity and financial support for national standards development and implementation. Critics pointed out that high poverty, high minority schools and districts needed more resources in order for their students to master national standards. Additionally, they questioned whether disadvantaged children in these learning environments had the same opportunity to learn as those in more advantaged environments. Elmore (2003) found the opportunity to learn standards as the most difficult to define and implement. Opportunity to learn standards arose from the following:

“The proposed accountability uses of outcome indicators to administer sanctions and incentives based on individual student and school performance [and] they presume an educational system that provides adequate human and material resources to ensure a fair opportunity for students to achieve these outcomes and
that schools’ efforts predominantly account for student performance.” (Guiton & Oakes, 1995, p. 324)

The concerns for opportunity to learn were specifically addressed in the report by the National Council on Research in Education (1992) under the section titled School Delivery Standards. The Council believed that “schools should be able to provide a metric for determining whether a school ‘delivers’ to students ‘the opportunity to learn’ well the material in the content standards” (p. 72). They acknowledged the concern that national standards would contribute to widening achievement gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged “if national content and performance standards and assessments are not accompanied by clear school delivery standards and policy measures designed to afford all students an equal opportunity to learn” (p. 79). What they did not describe is how school delivery standards would be developed or how they would be monitored for effectiveness.

The report had the right intentions and stated, “providing genuine opportunity for all students to achieve high standards is a national moral imperative” (p. 44), but opportunity to learn or school delivery standards were never mandated or monitored in future legislation. The report also stated that “world class standards and quality assessments can be powerful catalysts for implementing the systemic change necessary to bring all students, leaving no one behind, to high performance standards” (p. 16). It is interesting that the words “no one behind” would ten years later resurface in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), known as the most significant legislation in education history.
The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is the Federal legislation rooted in the fertile soil of National Goals, America 2000, and Goals 2000. America 2000 never passed the Senate and ended with Bush’s term in 1992. Under the newly elected President Bill Clinton, Goals 2000 came to life and shifted standards from a movement to permanent educational fixture. Clinton had been a key participant in the 1989 Education Summit as the Governor of Arkansas and helped lead the development of the National Education Goals as a member of the National Education Goals Panel. Within a year of his first term, Clinton proposed the Goals 2000 legislation based on the recommendations from the National Council on Education Standards and Testing, his work with the National Goals Panel, and evidence from states who were implementing systemic reforms. Goals 2000: Educate America Act passed in 1994 and included the six goals from the original National Goals Panel recommendations plus two others having to do with teacher quality and parental involvement. It was designed to promote a long-term direction for the improvement of education and lifelong learning, as well as to provide a framework and resources to help States and others interested in education to strengthen, accelerate, and sustain their own improvement efforts. The Goals 2000 act:

- Set into law the six National Education Goals and establish a bipartisan National Education Goals Panel to report on progress toward achieving the goals.

- Develop voluntary academic standards and assessments that are meaningful, challenging, and appropriate for all students through the National Education Standards and Improvement Council.
• Identify the conditions of learning and teaching necessary to ensure that all students have the opportunity to meet high standards.

• Establish a National Skill Standards Board to promote the development and adoption of occupational standards to ensure that American workers are among the best trained in the world.

• Help States and local communities involve public officials, teachers, parents, students, and business leaders in designing and reforming schools.

• Increase flexibility for States and school districts by waiving regulations and other requirements that might impede reforms (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Goals 2000 funded grants for “state development of standards and assessments and school district implementation of standards based reform” (Nelson & Weinbaum, 2006). There was little regulation in the funding and therefore the quality of standards and assessments varied by state, and standards based reform relied heavily on district capacity for implementation success. Nonetheless, “within three years, more than one-third of the country’s almost 15,000 school districts had received a Goals 2000 grant through their state” (Nelson & Weinbaum, 2006, p. 67).

Along with firmly establishing Goals 2000, Clinton moved simultaneously to reauthorize and modify the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), renaming it the Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994 (IASA). In the opening section of the IASA it states:

The Congress declares it to be the policy of the United States that a high-quality education for all individuals and a fair and equal opportunity to obtain that
education are a societal good, are a moral imperative, and improve the life of every individual, because the quality of our individual lives ultimately depends on the quality of the lives of others. (IASA)

Almost thirty years after Title I funding began under ESEA, the goals for a fair and equal educational opportunity were again at the center of legislation. The difference in 1994 was that IASA required the standards for Title I and non-Title I students be the same, it allocated $11 billion dollars to support students of poverty in meeting the standards, school-wide Title I programs were established, the qualifying level of poverty was reduced from 75% to 50%, and the funding was tightly aligned with Goals 2000. This legislation solidified the federal government’s position as the Title I educational program’s accountability anchor and financial sovereign. IASA has been touted as “one of the most significant uses of federal power in state and local education policy.” It also initiated the federal government’s “increased demands [academic expectations] on state and local agencies in exchange for federal dollars” (Nelson & Weinbaum, 2006, pp. 67-68).

The Clinton approach to education reform was systemic “comprehensive and focused on coordinating state policy with restructured governance” (Sadovnik, Cookson & Semel, 2007, p. 481). During the Clinton tenure a number of major education actions were passed, but it was Goals 2000 that would set the stage for the most controversial and significant educational policy in United States history, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.
No Child Left Behind Act

In 2001, President George W. Bush was elected to office and very early in his term he introduced the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)*. What began as a 25 page concept paper, grew into “the most comprehensive federal legislation governing state and local educational policies in U.S. history” (Sadovnik, Cookson & Semel, 2007, p. 482). NCLB, a document of over 1,000 pages, begins with a simple definition of its purpose, “To close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind” (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 1425). NCLB was yet another reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and while described with a simple definition, each key word in the definition of its purpose: accountability, flexibility, and choice would paint the impact on education both broadly and deeply.

At the pinnacle of NCLB is Title I with its purpose clearly delineated, “the purpose of this title is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments” (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). The key components of Title I include:

1. The assurance of alignment between challenging State academic standards and high quality academic assessments, an accountability system for ensuring all students meet those standards, teacher preparation and training and curriculum and instructional materials;

2. Meeting the educational needs of low-achieving children in our Nation’s highest poverty schools;
3. Closing the achievement gap between high and low-performing children, especially the gaps between minority and nonminority students and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers;

4. Holding schools, local educational agencies, and States accountable for improving the academic achievement of all students, and identifying and turning around low performing schools that have failed to provide a high-quality education to their students, while providing alternatives to students in such schools to enable the students to receive a high-quality education;

5. Distributing and targeting resources sufficiently to make a difference to local educational agencies and schools where needs are greatest;

6. Improving and strengthening accountability, teaching and learning by using State assessment systems designed to ensure that students are meeting challenging State academic achievement and content standards and increasing achievement overall, but especially for the disadvantaged;

7. Providing greater decision making authority and flexibility to schools and teachers in exchange for greater responsibility for student performance;

8. Providing children an enriched and accelerated educational program, including the use of school-wide programs or additional services that increase the amount and quality of instructional time;

9. Promoting school-wide reform and ensuring the access of children to effective, scientifically based instructional strategies and challenging academic content;
10. Significantly elevating the quality of instruction by providing staff in participating schools with substantial opportunities for professional development;

11. Coordinating services under all parts of this title with each other, with other educational services, and, to the extent feasible, with other agencies providing services to youth, children, and families; and

12. Affording parents substantial and meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children.

NCLB evolved from a combination of Clinton’s Goals 2000 and the 1994 IASA, but added was the increased focus on accountability and federal sanctions for not meeting expectations. While alignment of high-quality standards with curriculum, instruction, and an assessment system were central to NCLB, the goal of students making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) toward 100% proficiency in reading and math became the heavy weight component of the law.

AYP includes the requirements that by the year 2014 all students in all subgroups must meet minimum proficiency targets in reading and math, and each state must develop a system for annually monitoring AYP indicating the progress toward the 2014 goal. The annual rate of progress is measured for the school, district, and state aggregates and also the disaggregated groups of students including students groups of gender, race, income, English language proficiency, special education, and gifted and talented status. Additionally, at least 95 percent of each subgroup must participate in the assessment (U.S. Department of Education, 2002; Sadovnik, Cookson & Semel, 2007; Office of Cultural Education (n.d.). If one student group, in one grade, in one subject area does not
meet the AYP target, the school and the district are designated as not making AYP and subject to federal sanctions. For example, if the students in the group labeled Limited English Proficiency in one particular school do not meet the AYP performance target for reading in the 3rd grade, the school and district are both designated as not making AYP. The 2001-2002 school year was designated as the baseline year for AYP; therefore, beginning in 2002-2003 school year the federal sanctions were put into place.

The NCLB AYP sanctions are applied strictly to schools that receive federal Title I funds. (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) delineates the following sanctions for Title I schools that do not meet their state-defined AYP targets:

- Schools that receive federal Title I funds (based on percentage of students from low-income families) that have not made state-defined adequate yearly progress (AYP) for two consecutive school years must be identified as needing school improvement before the beginning of the next school year. Immediately after a school is found to be in need of improvement, school officials must receive help and technical assistance. These schools must develop a two-year plan to turn around the school. Every student in the school must be given the option to transfer to another public school in the district (one that has not been identified as in need of improvement) with transportation, subject to a spending cap, provided by the school district.

- If the school does not make AYP for three consecutive years, the school remains in school improvement and the district must continue to offer public school choice to all students. In addition, students from low-income families must be offered "supplemental educational services"— free tutoring services
or additional academic help for students provided outside of the regular school day. Parents can choose the services their child needs from a list of approved providers.

- Schools that remain in improvement for additional years are subject to corrective action and restructuring, including a takeover or complete reorganization of the school (U.S. Department of Education, 2008a).

The road to the goal of 100 percent proficiency for all students in 2014, began with the acknowledgment of unequal educational opportunities in the United States. The heart of this law is the goal to achieve equity in education, coupled with the aspiration to impact the academic achievement of the most disadvantaged students. However, the reality of large scale change has been looming from the actuality of implementing sanctions in schools, districts, and states across the nation. The impact of this legislation was not known until sanctions began to take effect, “it was only after the initial year of implementation did educators and the public develop a broad understanding of the extent to which federal education policy had intervened in school practice” (U.S. Department of Education, 2006, p. 78). Now after eight years of implementation, NCLB has become a household acronym. Throughout its implementation there have been a number of challenges to its effectiveness, its unfairness to English language learners and students with disabilities and to its lack of funding, but the administration has been steadfast in its unwillingness to compromise its key components (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). President G.W. Bush ended his second term in January 2009 with the legacy of NCLB, a law that will most likely endure due to its bipartisan development and its long history of evolvement from the goals for equity in education.
In his examination of the problem of low performing schools’ and their responses to accountability policies, Elmore (2003) stated “Nothing in the recent history of state accountability efforts has equipped states or localities to handle the number of schools that will likely be classified as low performing under NCLB” (p. 5). As of 2006-2007 school year, there are 12,978 schools not making AYP in the United States with 10,676 in the School Improvement phase and 2,302 in the Restructuring phase (U.S. Department of Education, 2008b). In Colorado, there are 71 schools either in the Corrective Action phase or Restructuring phase (U.S. Department of Education, 2006, p. 27). Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore, and Lash (2007) state “within two years, schools in NCLB’s Restructuring category will represent more than one million students nationally” (p. 19).

The U.S. Department of Education has detailed proposed regulations to NCLB for schools in the Restructuring phase. It is noted that “restructuring requirements are not being implemented effectively, and in some cases, not at all” (2008a, p. 3-4). Therefore, NCLB is considering requiring the following:

- Interventions implemented as part of a school's restructuring plan must be significantly more rigorous and comprehensive than the corrective action plan that the school implemented after it was identified as in need of improvement.

- Districts must implement interventions that address the reasons why a school is in the restructuring phase.

- In replacing all or most of the school staff, a district may include replacing the principal; however, replacing the principal alone would not be sufficient to constitute restructuring. (Education, 2008, pp 3-4)
If restructuring requirements are not being implemented effectively or not at all, one has to wonder if the aspects of these schools needing restructuring are understood. A school needing restructuring is a school needing a turnaround. The questions not being asked include questions about condition, process, and consequence of turnaround from the Murphy and Meyers (2008) framework for turnarounds. 1) Condition: What is a failing school? How or why does a school fail in the first place? 2) Process: What happens inside the school during the turnaround? What are the interventions that address school failure? 3) Consequence: What are the key components of a turned around school? What do schools that have turned around have in common?

The Condition of Turnaround: Failing Schools

In education, turnaround as a condition is where the current state of the school’s academic performance is at such a level that reconstitution or restructuring is in order, either based on NCLB sanctions or state and district level monitoring structures. For the purposes of this dissertation, the condition of turnaround is that of a failing school. In order to understand how a failing school is turned around, one must first understand what characterizes a failing school. In their review of the failing schools literature, Murphy and Meyers identified four themes that may make understanding failing schools problematic, “newness of the term, interchangeable terms, undefined parameters, and lack of research” (2008, p. 252).

The word “fail” used as a verb is typically associated with negative connotations. According to Merriam-Webster, “fail” is an alteration from the Latin word fallere to deceive or disappoint. It is defined as, “to lose strength; to fade or die away; to stop functioning normally; to fall short; to be unsuccessful; to disappoint the expectations or
trust of; to be deficient in; to be unsuccessful in passing.” Murphy and Meyers (2008) define the word failure, “failure means ‘failing,’ the reality that the enterprise has crossed some organizational performance line in the sand and that unless conditions change fairly dramatically, the firm will cease to exist” (p. 19). Spreng (2005) states,

The problem in this context [grading of schools] is that there is neither (a) a universally valid expectation for schools, nor (b) an agreement on how the performance should be measured, or (c) how low the performance has to be before the designation of failure is warranted. (p. 21)

The use of the term “failing schools” became more widespread with the advent of the accountability component of the NCLB Act. NCLB requires states receiving federal Title I dollars to create an accountability system and report card that grades or rates schools based on whether the schools make AYP. The School Accountability Report Card or School Accountability Reports were intended to be a way for states and school districts to inform the public and parents about the progress of their schools toward AYP (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). The use of the word failing as a rating for schools is a cause-effect dynamic. Student sub-groups failing standardized tests, fail to make AYP, which in turn causes a school to fail to make AYP. Therefore, the effect on schools with failing students has become a failing schools label.

There are many terms being used to describe failing schools such as, low performing, needing improvement, schools in decline, troubled schools, corrective action schools, and many others (Murphy & Meyers, 2008, p. 253). Since there are so many terms being used, one questions the validity and equity of such terms. Is a “school in decline’s” performance equal to a “corrective action school’s” performance? Are both of these schools considered failing? Making this topic even more complicated is the
multiple formats states use for standardized tests, evaluation of the tests, and levels of proficiency for students. One district’s failing school may very well be another district’s improving school because the parameters are so varied (Murphy & Meyers, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Spreng (2005) defines a failing school as “simply one that has not met a threshold of performance specified by the accountability framework in which it operates” (p. 24).

The lack of research on failing schools may be due to the newness of the term or to the challenge of defining the term. Brady (2003) refers to the difference in amount of research between that of effective schools and that of failing schools as a “paradox” because “much is known about how effective schools work, but it is far less clear about how to move an ineffective school from failure to success (p. vii). Elmore (2003) found that “existing policies toward low performing schools are often based on limited knowledge about school failure” (p. 9). It is clear from the limited research on failing schools that defining what constitutes failing is ambiguous. What is not ambiguous is the fact that 12,978 schools in the U.S. house students who are not proficient in reading and math. To move forward from this kind of unacceptable academic performance, it is important to understand how schools decline and ultimately fail.

How or why do schools fail? Murphy and Meyers (2008) contend that school failure is a result of both external and internal causes, neither exclusive of the other. Some external causes include high mobility rates, high numbers of non-English speaking students, lack of funding and resources, and inadequate community or district support. Based on a thorough review of the research, they found “the most prominent external causes contributing to school failure are urban setting, minority populations, and low
socioeconomic status; although, it is clear from the literature that these concepts are highly correlated” (p. 259). Internal causes are far more complex and involve cultural aspects of schools that are a result of the interactions of the people who inhabit them. Internal causes include poor teacher quality, limited skills and knowledge of teachers, lack of teacher experience and preparation, and high teacher turnover. Additionally, the research overwhelmingly points to ineffective school leadership as an internal cause of failure in schools (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore and Ash (2007) explain that “schools fail because the challenges they face are substantial; because they themselves are dysfunctional; and because the system of which they are a part is not responsive to the needs of high-poverty student populations they serve” (p. 8).

The Process of Turnaround

Turnaround as a process is simply the action of turning around the organization. It is what happens during the events of moving the performance of the organization from failing to succeeding. The process of turning around failing schools is a new concept, quite different from the improving schools concept. Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore and Ash (2007) define turnaround as “different from school improvement because it focuses on the most consistently underperforming schools and involves dramatic, transformative change” (p. 10). In a review of current literature, the Education Commission of the States (2007b) also found “the process of turning around a failing organization is very different from the process of incremental improvement within an organization that is already performing at satisfactory levels” (p. 3). The concept of improving a school that is not failing involves adjusting actions and improvement strategies to make it better, to advance it from one level of performance to another. The concept of turning around a
failing school is a concept of complete change or overhaul; it is not enough to apply improvement strategies. A turnaround requires a more intensive and strategic approach. For the purposes of this dissertation and to clarify the specifics of the turnaround process in education, the term failing schools will be used in reference to schools that need to be turned around.

In their review of turnarounds outside of the education realm, Murphy and Meyers (2008) found there were two stages in the turnaround process, retrenchment and recovery. Retrenchment is referred to as the stage where it is overwhelmingly clear that the organization is failing and whatever they are currently doing, they must stop and reorganize. Within the context of NCLB and federal sanctions, this would be the restructuring phase. The school must make significant changes or face takeover. During the retrenchment phase organizations first “get the right people, in the right seats on the bus” (Collins, 2001), meaning they change leadership. Next they spend time diagnosing the problem, how they got to failing status or why they are failing. Finally, they take immediate emergency action. Recovery refers to the stage directly following retrenchment; it is the period of time where the organization moves toward turnaround or demise.

Retrenchment: Change of Leadership

Change of leadership is common in all organizational management; the critical difference for the turnaround process is the type of leadership needed. Murphy and Meyers (2008) present the leadership change rationale as “the apex of the organization” (p. 138). Getting the right leadership involves understanding the characteristics and personality traits of a turnaround leader. The literature refers to the type of leader needed
for turnarounds as transformative, entrepreneurial, and leaders of change. Additionally, the turnaround leader must be situational, adept at changing his/her leadership style according to the unique situation of each organization (Murphy & Meyers, 2008, Duke, 2004). Change of leadership in turnaround situations in education is the prevailing first step for schools in the restructuring phase. Brady (2003) states “in most cases solid school-level leadership seems to be critical to success—yet that is precisely what’s missing in many failing schools” (p. iv).

Retrenchment: Diagnosing the Problem of Failure

The second stage of the turnaround process is diagnosing the problem of failure. This is a challenging endeavor due to the limited amount of research on why organizations fail and even less literature available on school failure. There are a number of reasons posited for the lack of research in this arena including the more attractive and pleasing side of researching school successes. In contrast, the more disturbing side of examining the failure of children learning in America’s public schools. The research is clear, “proficiency drops steadily as school poverty rises… school performance varies significantly at every income level, and extensively among high poverty schools… and high poverty schools that overcome poverty are rare” (Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore & Ash, 2007 p. 26). Nonetheless, while it is easy to defer the problem of failure in U.S. schools to those of demographics, there are a number of schools called High Poverty/High Performing (HPHP) schools that are beating the odds, breaking molds, and defying myths.

The non-educational world uses a diagnostic approach to uncover the reasons for decline and failure. The turnaround leader is central to the diagnostic process, leaves
nothing to assumption, questions everything, and spends the time necessary to thoroughly understand the organization inside and out (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). It is during the diagnostic stage that the turnaround leader exposes the “current reality” to the organizational members and leads them to examine “the brutal facts” of their failing status (Collins, 2001).

In education, the diagnosing stage appears to be more of an outside/in process. Schools receive the failing status and they are ordered to improve or face sanctions. Those that hold the accountability responsibility and funding resources, whether it is the school district or the state, also bear the weight of enforcing the sanctions and finding solutions once the sanctions are in place. There are two overarching problems. One, is while they are telling schools they must improve or else, schools are given little direction on what to do to improve (Brady, 2003; Elmore, 2003). Two, if the sanction is takeover or restructuring, there is little knowledge about how to approach this intervention. The idea of diagnosing the reasons for failure is somewhat foreign to educators (Murphy & Meyers, 2008).

Blankstein (2004) describes some of the common routes to failure as having to do with the people in the organization and their response to the need for change. He goes on to describe that “many schools don’t know what they want, what they need or the difference between the two” (p. 44). Without identifying the current reality of the failing situation and confronting the brutal facts of the status of the student achievement, schools have no idea about where to start. From this analysis, schools can begin the dialogue about what it is that they want from education for their students and what it is that they want for themselves as professionals. Blankstein elaborates on the misconception of time
on the route to failure. Many teachers and staff believe that they do not have the time to spend on diagnosing the reasons for failure, analyzing data, completing needs assessments, and planning for change; they believe they should be spending the time preparing for instruction and teaching the students. Blankstein states, “In most European and Asian countries, teachers spend only 17 to 20 hours of the 40-45 hour work week actually teaching.” The rest of the teacher’s time, according to Darling-Hammond’s (1999) study, is spent on “class preparation and joint planning; collegial work on curriculum and assessment development; one on one meetings with students, parents, and other colleagues; and learning through involvement in study groups, observations of other teachers, research, and demonstration lessons” (as cited in Blankstein, 2004).

Another reason for failure in schools has to do with resistance to change initiatives. Resistance stems from a number of factors, including: fear, philosophical beliefs about children in high poverty schools, work load, capacity to change, and top down mandates.

Finally, Blankstein draws attention to one of the major reasons for school failure, the silver bullet response, “waiting for the Dream Person or Program” (2004, p. 47). In this approach, schools want to replicate what has worked in other schools, which in theory makes sense, saves time, and is supported by empirical evidence. The problem with this approach is that each failing school is unique and the reasons for failure have much to do with the individual culture and climate complexities of the internal systems within the school.
Even if the processes are applicable, the implementation is sure to vary. School staff members would likely lack commitment to any ‘imported’ initiative. And becoming too attached to a given charismatic speaker, buzzword, or program is inherently contrary to the successful use of any new initiative. (Blankstein, 2004, p. 47)

Organizational decline leading to failure does not happen quickly, but over a period of time. Many schools facing restructuring have been operating under the continuous improvement structures found in most U.S. schools. Each year, as is required by their district and state, schools write their school improvement plan. They analyze their achievement results, set new goals for their school, write an action plan, put it in a notebook and file it on a shelf until the next year. These schools may be oblivious to their school’s progress toward organizational decline. Duke (2004) advocates that “understanding how a school’s academic achievement begins to slip can thus provide important insights into the adjustments needed to reverse the process” (p. 731). He cites Kanter’s (2005) nine ‘pathologies’ of organizational decline that are applicable to school systems, “1) communication decreases; 2) criticism and blame increase; 3) respect decreases; 4) isolation decreases; 5) focus turns inward; 6) rifts widen and inequities grow; 7) stereotypes are perpetuated; 8) aspirations diminish; and 9) negativity spreads” (p. 731). While these pathologies make sense intellectually, they have not been examined deeply or thoroughly in the educational context. The question remains how to use these ideas to turn the tide of organizational decline and prevent failure. What is it that turnaround organizations do once they have determined how or why they have failed?

Retrenchment: Taking Immediate and Emergency Action

The next step in the stage of retrenchment is taking immediate and emergency action. Immediate action implies action taken the instant the understanding of failure has
taken place. Emergency action implies the medical analogy of the triage, “Stop the bleeding!” In triage, the medical staff prioritizes the injured or sick according to the seriousness of their condition. The *Merriam Webster* definition of “triage” in relationship to general work is “the assigning of priority order to projects on the basis of where funds and other resources can be best used, are most needed, or are most likely to achieve success” (“Triage”). In the turnaround situation, it involves analyzing what needs immediate attention and acting upon it. The important question to ask is: What is going to make the greatest impact in the shortest amount of time? The emergency plan must be based upon the information gathered in the evaluation phase, it should have a time frame, be goal oriented, and tightly directed by the new leadership (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). In the corporate world, retrenchment is all about survival of the organization, in the education world it is all about survival of the children’s education in the failing schools.

**Recovery**

Once a turnaround plan is created and initial strategies are in place, the organization faces the recovery stage of the turnaround process. Important lessons from the Murphy and Meyers (2008) research on turnarounds include:

Analysis at the broadest level provides two critical insights that are generally ignored in the turnaround literature in education: (1) begin the recovery with efficiency/operational moves rather than with entrepreneurial moves and (2) start by amassing resources to engage the turnaround, focusing primarily on freeing up less productive assets for more productive use. (p. 175)

Key aspects of recovery include: improving the state of the organization from failing to healthy, addressing the reasons for failure, changing old behaviors that attributed to failure to new ones that contribute to improvement, and creating new systems to sustain change and improvement. These aspects fall under Murphy and
Meyers’ (2008) “composite conceptual model: developing an operational vision, capturing efficiencies, and building more productive organizational processes and structures” (p. 188).

In the recovery phase, school organizations should consider Shelly and Jones’ (1993) five nonfinancial aspects of organizational recovery:

1. Creating an organizational vision of the future
2. Identify organizational values that facilitate the turnaround process
3. Define a culture built on continuous improvement and efficiency
4. Redefine policies, procedures, and practices to capitalize on the basic desire of people to do a good job
5. Structure the organization to perform more effectively (cited in Murphy & Meyers, 2008, p. 192).

Duke (2007) studied 15 schools that had undergone a turnaround and found lack of direction to have been common to the schools in his study. After the turnaround, the “principals were credited with developing highly focused mission to guide improvement efforts” (p. 7). Missions and visions are based on organizational values, and organizational values affect school cultures. Boleman and Deal (2003) stress that leaders must have a commitment to the core beliefs and values of the organization and “organizations need leaders who can impart a persuasive and durable sense of purpose and direction, rooted deeply in values and the human spirit” (p. 432).

Recovery: Interventions for Failing Schools

In the process of turnaround, specifically in the recovery stage, failing schools have identified interventions outlined. Here again, are the steps mandated by NCLB as
interventions for Title I schools that have not met AYP targets, first, when “Title I schools that have not made AYP for two consecutive years are identified as needing school improvement” then,

- School officials must receive help and technical assistance.
- These schools must develop a two-year plan to turn around the school.
- Every student in the school must be given the option to transfer to another public school in the district currently making AYP (NCLB).

Second, if “Title I schools not making AYP for three consecutive years remain in the school improvement category” then the following steps are taken,

- The district must continue to offer public school choice to all students.
- In addition, students from low-income families must be offered “supplemental educational services”— free tutoring services or additional academic help outside of the regular school day.
- Parents can choose the services their child needs from a list of approved providers.
- Schools that remain in improvement for additional years are subject to corrective action and restructuring, including a takeover or complete reorganization of the school (U.S. Department of Education, 2008a).

Brady (2003) classifies failing schools’ interventions into three categories, “mild, moderate, and strong”. Mild interventions include the identification of failing school, school improvement planning, technical assistance, professional development, parent involvement, and tutoring. This level of intervention is called “sunlight theory” and is designed to alert the school staff, parents, and communities that the school is on a watch
list and needs to be monitored and improved. Moderate interventions may add time to the
school day, could involve the reorganization of the school, the implementation of a
reform model, and the change of the principal. Strong interventions cause the greatest
disturbances to the school system including “school reconstitution—the process of
removing or replacing all, or almost all of a school’s staff”; school takeover; school
closure; vouchers for school choice, currently only in use in Florida; and imposed
curriculum change. The next three most severe interventions exist only in theory and
stature, outsourcing a school or district’s operations, redirection or withholding of school
or district funds, and closing failing districts (Brady, 2003, pp. 10-19). The seriousness of
strong interventions should not be taken lightly, as,

Strong interventions are different from mild and moderate interventions insofar as
the existing structures in the school are deemed beyond repair. Changes are
mandated and carried out by people or entities outside the school. Strong
interventions signal the government’s belief that the school failed and cannot be
improved in its current form. (Spreng, 2004, p. 41)

Although the strong interventions are reserved for schools that are undeniably
failing, they “are rarely tried because they are controversial and difficult to mount”
(Brady, 2003, p. 18). Each level of intervention incurs increasing costs and thus decision
makers are reluctant to move forward with stronger actions.

Many school districts and states are scrambling to determine how to address the
large number of failing schools facing restructuring in the seventh year of NCLB.
Schools that fail to make AYP for a fifth year in a row must implement the restructuring
plan to improve student learning (Kowal & Hassel, 2006). Most failing schools in the
restructuring phase of improvement are awaiting district or state sanctions, but very few
states or districts have followed through with strong interventions. Kowal and Hassel
studied four restructured schools in two different states, and found each situation to be
different, but a few commonalities surfaced around the impact of NCLB on school
restructuring,

1. NCLB provides schools and districts an opportunity to make change, but gives
   them wide flexibility on how to proceed.
2. NCLB is just one of many forces acting on failing schools.
3. Districts’ involvement in the planning process varies widely.
4. The restructuring process can offer a chance for meaningful community

According to research from Steiner (2005) “23 states have the legal right to take
over schools, but only five of these states—Alabama, Louisiana, Maryland,
Massachusetts, and Rhode Island—have chosen to exercise their right to do so” (p. 5).
Colorado was not included in this report, but in 2004, the Colorado State Board of
Education took over Cole Middle School and converted it to a charter school (Anderson
& DeCesare, 2006). In Gill, Zimmer, Christman, and Blanc’s (2007) study of the School
District of Philadelphia takeover by the state of Pennsylvania, it is noted that “no
evidence to support private management as an especially effective method of promoting
student achievement” (p. 41). Brady (2003) outlines two “sets of implications” stemming
from his research on failing schools. The first set is for decision makers regarding
interventions for failing schools:

1. The specific intervention strategy is not important, what is important is having
   the right mix of people, energy, timing and other elements—particularly
   school leadership—that together contribute to success.
2. Interventions come in many forms and flavors, and for each circumstance a different package might be appropriate.

3. Don’t hesitate to mix and match.

4. Stick around…where interventions have been associated with success, it is typically two to three years before these results manifest themselves in test scores.

5. You will be criticized and sometimes vilified. Your efforts may be discarded when you leave. But know that you have colleagues fight the same fight and taking the same battles.

6. Don’t expect anything to work every time or everywhere (Brady, 2003, p. 41).

The second set of implications and concerns about the NCLB accountability system are summarized below,

1. The law may expect too much too fast. If successful, interventions take two to three years to begin to manifest results in terms of AYP, then the measure of success may prove slower than many of the law’s timelines tolerate.

2. States and districts should prepare for the challenge of widespread changes among a large number of schools by the 2007-2008 school year. [While many more schools are in the restructuring stage, widespread change is yet to be felt.]

3. Some children will still need more than NCLB promise. While ‘restructuring’ is the final step in NCLB intervention process, the experience in states and districts over the past decade indicates that restructuring will not always lead to improved schools (Brady, 2003, p. 41).
Spreng (2005) makes a strong case for interventions in failing schools to be “specifically designed for the failure that they are meant to correct” (p. 151). He argues for thoughtful approaches to understanding the problem of failure. The research has demonstrated that the concept of intervention for failing schools is multifaceted and highly dependent upon each unique set of circumstances by school, district, and state.

Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore, & Lash (2007) lament the fact that “intervention into struggling schools and districts is the least developed and least-understood dimension of the nation’s standards based reform movement” (p. 19). Research confirms that there are no silver bullet interventions that cause a school to turnaround.

Turnaround as a Consequence

So far this literature review has attempted to summarize the historical events in federal policy and educational reform history having to do with the goal of realizing equality of education. These events have led the United States to the current state of public education where failing schools are openly identified and marked for improvement or they face restructuring or closure. The concept of turnaround schools in education has evolved from these historical events, and today presents educators with an opportunity to learn from those who have done it—equalized educational opportunities. This review will now attempt to summarize turnaround as a consequence in education.

Turnaround as a consequence occurs when failing organizations are revitalized, restored, and brought back to acceptable levels of performance. The questions this section will attempt to answer include: What constitutes a turned around school? What are the key components of a turned around school? What examples of turned around schools exist in the U.S. and what do they have in common?
A turned around school is defined as “a documented, quick, dramatic, and sustained change in the performance of an organization” (Rhim, Kowal, Hassel & Hassel, 2007 p. 4). In his case study of 15 turnaround schools, Duke (2007) defined these schools as schools that had reversed a “pattern of low achievement as measured by student performance on standardized tests of literacy and mathematics...[and] the increase in student achievement had to have been sustained for at least two years” (p. 4). Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore, and Lash (2007) define turnaround “as the integrated, comprehensive combination of fundamental changes in program, people, conditions, and (sometimes, but not necessarily) management and governance required to interrupt the status quo and put a school on a new track towards high performance” (p. 71).

The research on school turnarounds in relationship to restructuring sanctions imposed by NCLB is limited to mostly small scale qualitative case studies, due to the newness of the concept in this context (Rhim, Kowal, Hassel & Hassel, 2007). What is revealed in current research, are some very specific key components of turnarounds in education. Duke (2006), a leader in the research of turnaround schools, found only five important studies of school turnarounds between the 1999 and 2004. These studies identified characteristics common to the process of improving low performing schools. Duke then identified characteristics common to three or more of the schools studied with the numbers in parenthesis representing the number of schools out of the five studied that identified the characteristic as essential to improving academic achievement:

- Assistance. Students experiencing problems with learning required content received prompt assistance. (4)
• Collaboration. Teachers were expected to work together at various levels to plan, monitor student progress, and provide assistance to struggling students. (4)

• Data-driven decision making. Data on student achievement were used on a regular basis to make decisions regarding resource allocation, student needs, teacher effectiveness, and other matters. (4)

• Leadership. The actions of principals and teacher leaders set the tone for the school improvement process. (4)

• Organizational structure. Aspects of school organization—including roles, teams, and planning processes—were adjusted to support efforts to raise student achievement. (4)

• Staff development. Teachers received training on a continuing basis in order to support and sustain school improvement efforts. (4)

• Alignment. Tests were aligned with curriculum content, and curriculum content was aligned with instruction. (3)

• Assessment. Students were assessed on a regular basis to determine their progress in learning required content. (3)

• High expectations. Teachers insisted that students were capable of doing high-quality academic work. (3)

• Parent involvement. School personnel reached out to parents to keep them apprised of their children’s progress and to enlist them in supporting school improvement efforts. (3)
• Scheduling. Adjustments were made in the daily schedule in order to increase time for academic work, especially in the key areas of reading and mathematics (3) (Duke, 2006, p. 730).

Duke cautions that “the school turnaround process is sufficiently complex to warrant more than highly generalized prescriptions” (p. 731).

Duke conducted a study of his own in 2007 and uncovered the following “clusters of aspects” of turned around schools:

1. Leadership changes.
2. School policy changes.
3. Program changes.
5. Personnel and staffing changes.
7. Changes in parental and community involvement.

Most of the schools in the study received some resources to support the turnaround, but it is interesting to note that the list did not have financial implications. Also worthy of note is the impact of change on turnarounds.

Kannapel and Clements (2005) studied 15 high-performing, high-poverty (HPHP) elementary schools in Kentucky and identified the following common characteristics that contributed to high performance:
1. High expectations were held by principals for staff and by staff for students.
2. Caring and nurturing relationships between adults and between adults and students.
3. Strong focus on academics and student learning.
4. Use of student assessment information to monitor student learning progress.
5. Collaborative decision making process.
6. High level of faculty work ethic and morale.
7. Careful and intentional focus on teacher recruitment and hiring. (Kannapel & Clements, 2005)

In her article summarizing interviews of 18 schools that had dramatically improved their student achievement, Almanzán found the following elements that led to their success are similar to what is found in the school improvement research,

1. High expectations.
2. Using performance data to drive decision making.
3. Creating a focused plan.
4. Fostering interactive administrative leadership.
5. Embedding professional development in school culture.
6. Aligning curriculum to standards.
7. Reaching out to parents. (2005)

The difference in these high needs schools was having high expectations beyond the “pobrecito” syndrome, the belief that the poor babies have so much to deal with they cannot be expected to learn at high levels. The principals led the staff to embrace the
mind-set that while they cannot affect what goes on outside of the school, they can effect what happens inside the school, the teaching and learning.

The teachers used performance data continuously and specifically and adjusted their instruction based on this information. Having a focused plan and setting priorities helped them create a road map for their goals. The principals are a constant presence in the school. Many made teacher observations a priority, actively monitoring teachers teaching and students learning. Additionally, they spent considerable time with students before and after school, even checking in on students at their bus stops.

These schools were focused on learning while doing. Their professional development was their work; they used meeting times for learning, collaborative planning, and analyzing student work and assessments. Evidence of their focus on aligned curriculum, instruction and assessments can be found visibly in the school. In one school, the principal monitors their aligned expectations, in another, examples can be found in common literacy expectations and instructional focus.

Parent involvement is a two-way approach, with the schools seeking to meet parents’ needs while drawing them into the school for support. Each school adopted the effective school practices, but enhanced them or went beyond them to address their school’s specific clientele and culture.

Reeves (2005) reviews the successes of the 90/90/90 schools in the Milwaukee Public School District where more than 90 percent of the students are eligible for free and reduced lunch, more than 90 percent of the students are minorities, and more than 90 percent of the students met or achieved high academic standards. Reeves found these schools to have five principles in common,
The 90/90/90 schools had a “laser-like focus on student achievement,” their halls and walls were dressed with student achievement data, excellent student work, and evidence of teaching and learning and continuous improvement. The mantra of these schools was ‘it is not how you start that matters, but how you finish’. The laser-like focus emphasized a strong foundation of reading, writing, and math, which led to increased results in science. Students were frequently assessed and given feedback to improve. Teachers stressed the importance of informative writing, used common scoring rubrics and taught students to write across all subject areas. The research clearly identifies that effective teaching and leadership make a difference.

With this type of remarkable evidence, many often question whether this approach can be replicated. In 2003, Reeves studied another set of schools in Norfolk, Virginia with similar conditions and again found that the “keys to improved academic achievement are professional practices of teachers and leaders, not the economic, ethnic, or linguistic characteristics of the students” (p. 9). He highlights nine characteristics of the schools with the greatest gains in student achievement:

1. Teachers devoted time for collaboration.
2. Teachers provided timely, accurate and specific feedback.
3. Schools made dramatic changes in their schedules with a focus on literacy.

4. Teachers engaged in action research and mid-course corrections.

5. Principals made decisive moves of teacher assignments.

6. Schools included an intensive focus on student data from multiple sources, and specifically focused on cohort data.

7. The schools with the greatest improvements in student achievement consistently used common assessments.

8. Schools employed the resources of every adult in the system.

9. Music, art, physical education, world languages, technology, career education, consumer and family education, and many other variations on these themes are integrated and important components of the schools. (Reeves, 2003 & 2005)

Reeves argues that “variables in teaching, curriculum, and leadership are profoundly important” and has evidence suggesting that schools can change the life paths of children of poverty. He stands firm in his assertion that “in fact, these variables, that teachers and leaders can control, are more influential over student achievement than the intractable variables of poverty, culture, and language” (2003, p. 17).

Fullan (2006d) focused his research to answer the questions surrounding and associated to this turnaround success, and found that turnaround schools,

1. Engage people or organizations with expertise and experience in improving underperforming schools in challenging circumstances.

2. Appoint new principal (2/3’s of turnaround schools changed leaders).
3. Select an experienced principal with a demonstrated capacity to improve schools of this nature.

4. Select a principal with strong intrapersonal and interpersonal skills who will accept external support and team solutions.

5. Conduct a thorough review to identify the school's key weaknesses and devise strategies to correct them.

6. Be clear about everybody's role in the leadership team, have clear behaviors, tasks and targets for all.

7. Consider contracting external service providers to undertake specific tasks and functions. (Fullan, 2006d, p. 19)

While there is very little research of turned around schools, what is available presents encouraging findings and opportunities for high poverty schools. There is no doubt that NCLB has forced the need to address the number of schools facing restructuring and has created a sense of urgency for schools and districts nationwide. The problem facing the nation is how to tackle this enormous challenge with a specific action plan that can be replicated on a large scale.

State of Turnarounds in Education

Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore and Lash conducted research through Mass Insight Education and Research Institute and, funded by a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, were given the charge to “examine the landscape of current efforts to turn around the nation’s most chronically under-performing schools and develop a new framework for states, working in partnership with communities and districts, to apply to school turnaround” (2007, p. 2). Their report has amassed the prevailing research on high
performing, high poverty schools. They recommend a large scale approach for states and
districts and a local level framework for schools. For the purposes of this dissertation,
only the local level framework will be portrayed. This framework is designed with a
“New World” approach “reinventing what schools do.” The High-Performing, High-
Poverty (HPHP) Readiness model has three main dimensions, readiness to learn,
readiness to teach, and readiness to act; and three strategies within each dimension that
“turn the daily turbulence and challenges of high-poverty setting into design factors that
increase the effectiveness with which these schools promote learning and achievement.”
The nine strategies foster the following:

Students’ Readiness to Learn

1. Safety, discipline and engagement: Students feel secure and inspired to learn
2. Action against adversity: Schools directly address their students’ poverty-
driven deficits
3. Close Student-Adult relationships: Students have positive and enduring
   mentor/teacher relationships

Teachers’ Readiness to Teach

4. Shared responsibility for achievement: Staff feel deep accountability and a
   missionary zeal for student achievement
5. Personalization of instruction: Individualized teaching based on diagnostic
   assessment and adjustable time on task
6. Professional teaching culture: Continuous improvement through collaboration
   and job-embedded learning
Leaders’ Readiness to Act

7. Resource authority: School leaders can make mission-driven decisions regarding people, time, money and program

8. Resource ingenuity: Leaders are adept at securing additional resources and leveraging partner relationships

9. Agility in the face of turbulence: Continuous improvement through collaboration and job-embedded learning (Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore & Lash p. 9)

The Mass Insight team “analyzed the most prominent studies” resulting in three main points regarding the phenomenon of HPHP schools, which are,

1. The ecology of high-poverty school is inherently much more unpredictable, variable, and irregular than that of low-poverty schools. Students and staff face more curveballs in a week than their colleagues in low-poverty schools see in a year. Accounting for this turbulence in academic and organizational design, as well as in operations and training, is a prerequisite to successful [high-poverty] schools.

2. Our most common approaches do not help, and in fact sometimes do harm. The traditional model of education is not prepared to respond to unpredictability and turbulence that disrupts its grade by grade advancement and common teaching, testing, and disciplining techniques.

3. It seems clear that what we are observing in the phenomenon of HPHP schools is the evolution of a new species.
4. HPHP schools have morphed into highly adaptable organizations whose staff are expert at igniting learning for each child in spite of the surrounding turbulence…they are in sense reinventing what schools do. (Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore & Lash p. 9)

The HPHP Readiness model places the child at the center and is designed to address poverty in ways not approached in the past. The effective schools research focuses on classic standards based educational reform strategies, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and strong leadership. The HPHP Readiness model does not discount the effective schools research, but instead frames it within the needs of high-poverty schools which are different from low-performing schools. The model advocates for “reframing” the understandings of high-poverty schools, HPHP schools, and the overall approach to school reform. Additionally, it posits that high poverty schools exact a completely different level of challenge that requires a strategic and specific response beginning with leadership.

Turnaround requires special skills from school leaders and external partners, and the resource base in both categories is glaringly weak. Turnaround is only now becoming appreciated as a special discipline in education. Training for specialized leaders in turnaround management is in its infancy (p. 41).

Integral to the concept of turnaround is the turnaround leader, also considered a phenomenon in the education realm. The next section will discuss the turnaround leader in the context of turnarounds in education.

**Turnaround Leadership**

Years of research on effective schools emphasize the importance of school leaders. Marzano, Waters, & McNulty (2005) in a meta-analysis study of 35 years of
research found that school leadership accounts for 25 percent of the difference in student learning. The research available on turnaround schools supports that school leadership is imperative to the turnaround process (Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore & Lash 2007; Duke, 2003; Kowal & Hassel, 2005; Rhim, Kowal, Hassel & Hassel, 2007; Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Research has found “turnaround [to] require more than just good leadership; it requires leadership that is adept at the particular challenge of turnaround” (Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore & Lash, 2007, p. 51). It is important to note that “existing research lacks rigorous studies that describe the distinguishing actions and characteristics of school leaders who are very successful in a turnaround situation” (Rhim, Kowal, Hassel & Hassel, 2007, p. 14). What will be presented here is summarized from a cross section of the research available on turnaround leaders from Rhim, Kowal, Hassel & Hassel (2007) and Murphy and Meyers (2008). Where applicable, extrapolations, correlations or examples will be related to school turnaround leaders. Common findings are assumed in this summary and findings specific to the authors are cited accordingly.

The right leader is necessary to successful turnarounds and the leadership is different in the turnaround setting. Rhim, Kowal, Hassel & Hassel give examples of two ways turnaround leadership is different. “First, turnaround leaders appear to take a common set of actions during successful turnarounds. Second, effective turnaround leaders likely have different pre-existing capabilities from leaders who are successful in more general realms of organizational leadership” (2007, p. 14).

Turnaround Leader Actions

Rhim, Kowal Hassel and Hassel (2007) cite Waters’ (2003) meta-analysis of second order change as a frame for what turnaround leaders need to do in the turnaround
process. Changes that require a break with the past, operate outside existing paradigms, conflict with prevailing values and norms and are emergent, unbounded, and complex are second-order and parallel changes needed in a turnaround. The challenge with second-order change is it requires people involved to change their beliefs and “mental models” about how something should be (Senge, 2000). Schools have many mental models of how schools should operate, things such as schedules, planning, teaching styles etc. Turnaround school leaders address these structures and how they impact student learning within the context of turnaround.

Kowal and Hassel (2005) describe the similarities between actions in second order change and turnaround leaders’ actions. The turnaround leader’s actions in successful turnarounds such as clarifying a vision of the future, involving a leadership team, acknowledging failures openly, challenging the status quo, and acting as the driving force of change are also similar to second-order changes (p. 18).

Rhim, Kowal, Hassel and Hassel (2007) have identified two turnaround actions that appear in the literature frequently. One, leaders work to achieve a few credible wins early in the process, and two, they implement high leverage strategies that will yield big dividends even if they deviate for organizational norms. Successful turnaround leaders look for quick results in the first year in order to establish credibility and signal to constituents a positive change. The two central actions are followed by the noted leadership actions “analysis and problem solving, driving for results, influencing inside and outside, and measuring and reporting” (p. 15). This model of the Cycle of Leader Actions is illustrated in Figure 1.
Kowal and Hassel (2005) summarize the significant actions of turnaround leaders to include the following:

- Communicates a positive vision of future school results
- Collects and personally analyzes school and student performance data
- Makes an action plan based on data
- Helps staff personally see and feel the problems students face
- Gets key influencers within district and school to support major changes
- A typical credible win for a school turnaround leader is student achievement
- Measures and reports progress frequently and publicly
- Gathers staff team often and requires all involved in decision making to disclose and discuss their own results in open air meetings
• Funnels more time and money into tactics that get results; halts unsuccessful tactics
• Requires staff to change—not optional
• Silences naysayers indirectly by showing speedy successes
• Acts in relentless pursuit of goals rather than touting progress as ultimate success
• Increases, student behavior improvement or staff morale change (p. 20-21).

Turnaround leaders are “hands on,” leave nothing to chance, and personally involve themselves in analyzing performance data. They take immediate action by leading a plan of change based on current realities and brutal facts. These behaviors align with Murphy and Meyers’ recovery period of the turnaround process. The turnaround leaders can appear to be directive at the start of the turnaround process. They need to take charge and demonstrate to staff that things are going to change; the “way they do things” cannot stay the same for a turnaround to take place. In some cases, turnaround leaders make staff changes, especially if the staff is unable or unwilling to make needed changes.

Turnaround leaders align resources with the turnaround plan and goals. They identify what behaviors, actions, and strategies the organization needs to start and what is not working and needs to stop. Murphy and Meyers categorize this under “organizational efficiencies” and “organizational structures” (2008, Part IV). Turnaround leaders do not stop in the throes of progress, it is at that point that they intensify their focus and re-adjust and fine tune their plans based on current information. Turnaround leaders consistently communicate a positive vision for future results.
The act of turnaround is deeply rooted in the change process and turnaround leaders are change leaders. The change literature suggests that people are not willing to change unless there is an emotional connection to the change (Kotter, 1996). Turnaround leaders help their staff see their organization through the eyes of their parents and students, they design ways for their staff to personally see and feel the problems of their students. For example, leaders of HPHP schools lead their staff in the study of poverty, types of poverty, and the effects of poverty on children’s learning. They go out in to their communities to see how their families live in order to raise empathy and awareness (Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore & Lash, 2007).

An African proverb states, “It takes a village to raise a child,” and is key to turning around high poverty schools. Turnaround school leaders get important community members, investment partners, and constituents involved in their change process. This credible support along with early successes can silence the resisters and motivate feet draggers. Rhim, Kowal, Hassel and Hassel (2007) found that they develop “webs of relationships upwards, sideways and down” as a support system for their entrepreneurial spirit (p. 23).

Turnaround Leader Characteristics

It is important to note, once again, that the research on education turnaround leader characteristics is extremely limited and what is presented here has been summarized from Murphy and Meyers’ (2008) short cross-section of the literature on characteristics of turnaround leaders. Turnaround leader characteristics fall under four broad frames of leadership action: transformational, entrepreneurial, change, and situational.
Transformational characteristics include the ability to formulate a clear vision for the future of the organization. Transformational leaders empower their followers and raise their consciousness beyond their own needs for the greater good. They are role models, walk their talk, and know what they value and believe in relationship to their work.

The entrepreneurial spirit of a turnaround leader is pivotal. While the other leadership characteristics mimic those of effective leaders, entrepreneurial characteristics are essential to the turnaround leader. Being opportunistic, a risk-taker, an out of the box thinker, innovative, and action oriented are traits associated with entrepreneurial leaders.

Due to the extreme state of change, turnaround leaders not only must be very comfortable with change, they must thrive on it. They must enjoy a certain level of ambiguity, disequilibrium, and uncertainty. In fact, turnaround leaders are change agents, according to Goldstein (1988),

First and foremost the turnaround leader is the architect of change. He or she must shape the organization from what it is to what it can or must become. As architect, the leader must clearly and objectively assess the present condition of the company, create a realistic vision of its future, and develop the game plan for getting it there. (cited in Murphy & Meyers, 2008 p. 151)

As situational leaders, they are adaptive and responsive to the waves of change that are associated with the chaos of turnaround. While they must be courageous and make bold decisive moves, they must also be reflective and flexible. They are noted as both transparent and strategic leaders. They are willing to share their thinking out loud and also willing to admit mistakes and faults, but they must know when to speak and when to listen. They have the ability to lead their organizations to make decisions that further the goals of turnaround.
There is consensus across the literature on the critical need to have the right leader to lead a turnaround. Murphy and Meyers assert that “successful turnaround schools almost always have good, if not exceptional, principals. As a common strand across successful school turnarounds, leadership is crucial” (p. 321). Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore and Lash (2007) note that “a wide range of research suggests that leaders who will be effective in efforts to achieve dramatic improvement are likely to have characteristics that are very different from those of typical school leaders and take actions that diverge significantly from those required in more stable leadership situations” (p. 51). Fullan (2006c) suggests that turnaround principals must have strong interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and a proven track record of improving schools of this type. What remains unknown are the specific personal and professional traits turnaround principals possess that enable them to lead turnarounds. The lack of research on turnaround leaders adds to the gap of limited knowledge on how to affect the growing number of failing schools in the U.S. and their call for a turnaround.

Rhim, Kowal, Hassel, and Hassel support additional research on turnaround leader characteristics and traits, as “Typical case study approaches, which involve site visits, interviews, focus groups, and document reviews, are especially ideal for studying environmental factors and the actions that leaders and others take to effect turnarounds. They are less well-suited however, to pinpoint the individual characteristics that distinguish successful turnaround leaders from others.” The researchers also suggest that another study would be effective, to study “personal characteristics that distinguish leaders who effect very successful turnarounds (Rhim, Kowal, Hassel, & Hassel, 2007, pp 25-26).
Murphy and Meyers also advocate for additional research on turnaround school leaders as an effect of turnaround, as “turnaround is a new idea in education. Because of that, very little impact data are available. And in no case has a consensus picture begun to emerge. Data are uneven at best. Context issues are rarely investigated. And the methods used to investigate effects often leave a good deal to be desired (2008, p. 294).

Clearly the need for turnaround school leaders is ubiquitous with a million children’s lives waiting for the next round of AYP sanctions. And finding the right leaders to turn around the nation’s failing schools is, without question, a priority.

Conclusion

This chapter led the reader through the evolvement of the pursuit of equity in education from the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education segregation case to the present day NCLB system of accountability. The current educational system of accountability brings the United States to its current state of schools that needs more than school reform, they need school turnaround. School reform is about school improvement, school turnaround is about deep seated and sustainable change. Equity in education continues to be controversial; the conflict between the strived for outcomes of academic excellence and educating everyone is wound up in the tension of the purposes of education for all. Nonetheless, the quest for educational equity persists and the U.S. educational system is grappling with how to enforce a law intended to change the educational outcomes for children in the nation’s highest poverty schools.

Most likely, NCLB will undergo considerable changes soon and ESEA with be reauthorized once again. If public education continues to operate in the same ways it has for the last hundred years, the achievement gaps between minority and nonminority
students and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers will not change. Holding schools, districts, and states accountable without a system to ensure the likelihood of success is akin to requiring ill patients to take medication that is unavailable. Is the nation prepared to close 5,000 schools and restructure them and turn them around? Do school districts and states have 5,000 turnaround school leaders ready to take charge and lead their schools out of perdition? The time is now, the question is not only how, but who.

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the phenomenon of the turnaround educational leader and in doing so, discover a theory that explains the essential attributes of this type of leader. A good research study, in answering its question tends to raise additional questions. The researcher hoped to not only to raise additional questions, but also to add one piece of the puzzle to the research base. The missing piece to the puzzle of turnarounds in education is the turnaround leader. The researcher’s findings contribute to the conversation about what kind of leaders will be needed to lead schools from failing to succeeding. This is a New World school leader, a turnaround leader; one that is not confirmed of existing, yet. If, in fact, these New World leaders possess characteristics and traits in common, that can be identified and theorized, then potentially other leaders can be trained to attain them. If the essential attributes of turnaround leaders are innate personality factors, then one wonders if they can be identified in others as possible candidates for turnaround leadership.

Collins (2001) writes about what it takes to move an organization from good to great. He suggests that organizations must assess their current reality and confront the brutal facts of their organizational truths. His extensive study found that organizations
that changed developed a culture of discipline and a laser sharp focus on what they could be best in the world at. And critical to the organizations that became great was their leadership. This literature review has discussed what it takes to move a school organization from abysmal to successful, and with schools in need of a turnaround as the new current reality in education; the brutal facts have been confronted, a culture of discipline is clearly needed, and the one thing they can be best in the world at—is educating all children. What is missing, once again, is the type of leader needed to do this work. Fullan’s (2006a) “road to perdition” in education does not have to be a one-way avenue; there are many signs along the way hinting of alternate routes. The route this research is suggesting is the route of leadership, specifically turnaround leadership.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The problem of finding the right leaders to turn around the poorest performing schools in the United States is unprecedented. For the first time in educational history, 5,000 schools, or more, will be faced with NCLB federal sanctions that may include closure at the extreme or at the least, significant organizational changes (Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore & Lash, 2007). A review of the literature has uncovered minimal research regarding the leadership attributes of turnaround school principals. Who are these extraordinary people who work in the most extreme conditions of the public educational system? These are schools with high percentages of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and populations who largely make up the achievement gap. These leaders are able to guide their schools to overcome the barriers that most negatively impact student achievement (Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore & Lash 2007; Duke, 2004 & 2007; Kowal & Hassel, 2005; Rhim, Kowal, Hassel & Hassel, 2007; Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Their schools beat the odds and potentially change the direction of the lives of the children of poverty.

This chapter outlines the methodology used to discover a theory that explains turnaround leaders’ essential attributes. First, the purpose of the study is described,
research questions are outlined, and the research design is explained. Next, the methodological procedures are summarized according to the methods literature for each of the following sections—sampling, data collection, data analysis, and limitations. The actual procedures of the study are woven into each section as appropriate and pertinent.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of turnaround school leadership and to identify essential attributes of a turnaround leader by analyzing their “lived experiences” (Creswell, 1998). This study attempted to discover what essential attributes constitute a successful turnaround school leader from the experiences and life-worlds of successful turnaround school leaders. Thus, the intent of this profile was to help educational leaders at all levels understand the traits school principals need for turnaround situations. Additionally, it offers current principals in the field an understanding of the leadership capacity needed to lead and improve their schools and turn them around if that is what is necessary. Finally, this study provides educational policy makers and other educational leaders an understanding the phenomenon of the turnaround school leader. It gives insight into the experiences of school principals in the most challenging schools and illuminates the kind of support turnaround school leaders need in order to be successful.

Research Questions

The fundamental question guiding this research study sought to reveal the personal and professional nature of the educational turnaround school principal:

- What are the essential attributes of a turnaround school leader?

Research Sub-questions:
1. What is the life-world of a turnaround leader?

2. What is extraordinary or unique about the leadership of turnaround principals who have led their low-performing, high poverty, high minority schools to significant achievement?

3. What skills, knowledge, personality traits, and leadership characteristics do turnaround principals have in common?

Research Design

In order to conceptualize the turnaround leader profile, an examination of the life-world of the turnaround leader must take place. The life-world is “the way a person lives, creates, and relates in the world” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 48). Examining the life-world of turnaround leaders requires the complex integration of human science research methodology, which is metaphorically a “journey.” The challenges of the human science researcher are compared to those of a “creative architect” (Polkinghorne, 1983, p. 9). The journey is the path of methodology taken, the plan for how to address the research problem and attend to the purpose of the study, and the plan for how to answer the research questions, “such journeys open vistas to new journeys for uncovering meaning, truth, and essence” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 65). The human science researcher as the creative architect or designer must design the qualitative study with pedagogical mindfulness, scientifically, and with careful thought. Therefore, the human science researcher must design and adapt the research to fit the multiple requirements of the phenomenon being studied.
Qualitative Research

The research here is focused on the phenomenon of the turnaround school leader, specifically the essential attributes of the turnaround school leader. The turnaround school leader is a new phenomenon in the world of education and studying the essential attributes of this type of leader requires the qualitative approach described by Creswell (1998):

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p. 15)

This study aims to create a “complex, holistic picture” of the turnaround school leader’s essential attributes using the characteristics of a qualitative research study and researcher outlined by Creswell below.

The characteristic of the qualitative research study:

- Takes place in the natural setting.
- Uses multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic.
- Is emergent rather than tightly prefigured.
- Is fundamentally interpretive. (2003, pp. 181-182)

The characteristics of the qualitative researcher outlined by Creswell are:

- Views social phenomena holistically.
- Systematically reflects on who he or she is in the inquiry and is sensitive to his/her personal biography and how it shapes the study.
- Uses complex reasoning that is multifaceted, iterative, and simultaneous.
Adopts and uses one or more strategies of inquiry as a guide for the procedures of the qualitative study. (2003, pp. 182-183)

The qualitative research approach has been chosen for this study for a number of reasons. First, the phenomenon of a turnaround school leader has variables that cannot easily be verified quantifiably, and currently there are no theories available to explain the attributes of a turnaround educational leader (Creswell, 1998; Duke, 2004). Second, in order to fully understand the essence of a turnaround leader, a rich or detailed style of writing should be employed, which requires a literary style of writing, an attribute of qualitative research. Third, studying turnaround leaders in their natural setting in order to extract the “essential, invariant structures (or essence) [of] what makes them who they are… is yet another aspect of qualitative research” (Creswell, 1998, p. 55).

Justification for Grounded Theory

The question of appropriate methodology to be used for human science study stems from the debate between scientific tradition and twentieth century advancement. The use of natural science methods for human science study has been challenged by the complexity of humans as subject matter. “In theory, ‘human sciences’ is a term used merely to distinguish [the] sciences that explore the world of humans in contrast to exploring the rest of nature” (Tesch, 1990, p. 33). The question was whether rigorous methodology for human science study could be developed at par with those methodology developed by the physical sciences.

Two sociologists, Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss addressed this question in their development of the grounded theory approach (1967). Though the men came from diverse backgrounds, Glaser from a quantitative perspective and Strauss a
qualitative one, they had a common goal of creating a methodology that reflected these beliefs about research,

1. The need to get out into the field, if one wants to understand what is going on.
2. The importance of theory, grounded in reality.
3. The nature of experience in the field for the subjects and researcher as continually evolving.
4. The active role of persons in shaping the worlds they live in through the processes of symbolic interaction.
5. An emphasis on change and process and the variability of and complexity of life. (Glaser, 1992, p. 16)

Glaser defines the grounded theory approach as “a general methodology of analysis linked with data collection that uses a systematically applied set of methods to generate an inductive theory about a substantive area” (1992, p. 16). Simply put, grounded theory is the discovery of theory from data. It is not about verification of theory or description of theory; it is the process of generating theory through data collection and analysis. Grounded theory has components that align with the philosophical tradition of phenomenology. Stewart and Mickunas (1974) describe phenomenology as a return to the origins of Greek philosophy, “a search for wisdom or true knowledge” and a quest to understand man’s relationship in the world and beyond (p. 5). Phenomenology is the study of the human’s experience of life, and how things are presented and made sense of through such experience (Solowiski, 2000).

The study of the human experience of turnaround leaders in education and the search for the theory regarding their essential attributes led the researcher to the grounded
theory approach. This method distinguishes itself from other forms of qualitative research which aim to produce general descriptions or descriptive themes. Glaser (1992) posits that grounded theory “has the purpose of generating concepts and their relationships that explain, account for, and interpret the variation in behavior in substantive area under study” and justifies grounded theory in the realm of scientific research, because it “meets two prime criteria of good scientific inducted theory: parsimony and scope. It accounts for as much variation in behavior in the action scene with as few categories and properties as possible” (p. 18). Grounded theory is the study of the actions, interactions, and social process of people (Creswell, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The objective of a grounded theory study “is to generate or discover a theory, an abstract analytical schema of a phenomenon, that relates to a particular situation” (Creswell, 1998, p. 56).

This research study generated a theory about the essential attributes of a turnaround leader as related to turnaround in education. The particular situation is specifically in the most challenging of educational situations—turning around high poverty, high minority, low-achieving schools. This research study attempts to analyze the turnaround leaders’ interactions, actions, and reactions to their situations in order to identify their essential attributes in the turnaround situation. For the purposes of this study, grounded theory will be used as von Eckartsberg described it, “to study human experience as articulated in language taking ‘stories’ [as] starting points for all further thinking and theory building” (as cited by Tesch, 1990, p. 39). The stories are the participants’ experiences of turning around their schools and were collected through an intensive interview of the subjects being studied. The “grounded theory methods
[provide] systematic procedures for shaping and handling [the] rich, qualitative data of the study” (Emerson, 2001, p. 336).

A great difference between grounded theory and other methods is the hypothesizing aspect of the research. Researchers using the grounded theory methodology do not begin with a hypothesis they wish to test, they begin with the data. Grounded theorists begin with their focus area of study, whether it is an individual experience, a group experience, a situation, or an event, and collect data related to the focus. In order to understand the data and identify patterns or relationships, the researcher must delve into the data with a systematic process, yet have an open mind to what the data reveals. The qualitative method of interviewing was used “to uncover the nature of people’s actions and experiences and perspectives which are as yet little known” (Glaser, 1992, p. 12). The point of grounded theory is to yield hypotheses, “the research product constitutes a theoretical formulation or integrated set of conceptual hypotheses about the substantive area under study” (p. 16).

Traditional validity is not a concern for grounded theory, instead Glaser (1992) proposes that “a well constructed grounded theory will meet its four most essential criteria: fit, work, relevance, and modifiability.” Glaser defines this well constructed grounded theory as,

1. If a grounded theory is carefully induced from the substantive area, its categories and their properties will fit the realities under study in the eyes of subjects, practitioners, and researchers in the area.

2. If a grounded theory works, it will explain the major variations in behavior in the area with respect to the processing of the main concerns of the subjects.
3. If it fits and works, the grounded theory has achieved relevance.

4. [If a grounded theory is well constructed, it] should be readily modifiable when new data present variations in emergent properties and categories. The theory is neither verified nor thrown out, it is modified to accommodate by integration [of] the new concepts. (Glaser, 1992, p. 15)

Glaser (1992) continues, “when these four criteria are met, then, of course, the theory provides a conceptual approach to action and changes and accesses into the substantive area. In this sense, it provides control in the substantive area researched” (p. 15). Glaser and Strauss propose that the roles of theory should enable prediction and explanation of behavior, be useful in theoretical advances in sociology, be usable in practical applications, provide a perspective on behavior, and should guide and provide a style for research on behavior (1967, p. 3).

This study endeavored to utilize the Glaserian or the classic approach to grounded theory with a few modifications as noted in the limitations section below. The term classic has been used to describe grounded theory in alignment with its origins, “the conceptual nature of classic [grounded theory] renders it abstract of time, place, and people” (Glaser & Hon, 2004, p. 2). While grounded theory methodology has certainly evolved over the last forty years, the basic premises of the approach as defined by one of the originators, Barney Glaser, continue to hold true for credible research study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Hon, 2004; Glaser, 2006; Glaser, 2008; Creswell, 1998).

The procedures for conducting this grounded theory research study are outlined in the following section titled, grounded theory methodology. The data collection and data
analysis methods were undertaken in six overlapping phases: data-collection, note-taking, coding, memoing, sorting, and writing. Each is described sequentially and accordingly within the grounded theory methodological procedures in the upcoming sections. The overarching qualitative methodological tool used in this study is that of comparative analysis, described in more detail in that section below. The definitions for grounded theory terms can be found in Appendix A

Grounded Theory Methodology

The primary task of the researcher in grounded theory is to ascertain what is happening in the research situation with the goal of answering Glaser’s (1998) questions: What is going on here? What are the participants concerns?

Sampling

Initial sampling in grounded theory begins with heterogeneous group, typically individuals who have experienced the social process under investigation. The social process under investigation in this study was that of turning around a school with the purpose of improving student achievement from formerly low performing to higher performing. This study was limited to specifically identified Colorado Title I elementary school principal leaders who have led their schools through a turnaround process. Title I is a federally funded program defined here by Colorado Department of Education (CDE)

Title I, Part A, provides resources to help ensure that all children have the opportunity to get a quality education, resulting in their attainment of high academic standards. Title I targets resources to districts and schools whose needs are the greatest. The program is the largest federal program supporting both elementary and secondary education, and allocates its resources based upon the poverty rates of students enrolled in schools and districts. Essentially, Title I focuses on: (1) promoting schoolwide reform in high-poverty schools and (2) ensuring students' access to scientifically based instructional strategies and challenging academic content. (Colorado Department of Education, 2009b)
The participants for this study were elementary school principals selected from the Colorado Department of Education’s Title I schools’ list meeting the following minimum criteria:

- Schools designated as school-wide Title I schools.
- Schools with 60% or more of the student population receiving free and reduced lunches.
- Schools with a 50% or more student minority population.
- Schools recognized by local or national education authorities as having dramatically improved academic achievement.
- Schools who have improved their Colorado School Accountability Rating over the course of the last 3-5 years from Unsatisfactory or Low to Average or Low to High
- Principals have been leading the school at least two or more full years or are in their third year at the time of the study.

The researcher began by searching the CDE Title I website to identify Colorado Title I elementary schools (Colorado Department of Education, 2008a). The researcher then accessed the CDE School Accountability Report (SAR) website and generated the 2006-2008 lists of schools in Colorado and their school accountability scores and ratings (Colorado Department of Education, 2008b). NCLB requires that each state provide parents and communities a report card detailing the progress of their local schools. In Colorado, the report card is the SAR, and as required by NCLB provides information not only on the school’s academic progress, but also information on the school’s safety and environment and a taxpayer’s report on how money is distributed in that school district.
For the purposes of this study, the “Overall Academic Performance on State Assessments” rating will be used to identify turnaround schools (Colorado Department of Education, 2009a). This rating is based on student performance on the Colorado Student Assessment Program, which are annual assessments given in Grades 3-10 in selected content areas. According the CDE website, the schools in Colorado are rank-ordered and receive the following ratings: 8% of the schools receive the rating of Excellent, 25% are rated High, 40% Average, 25% Low, and the bottom 2% receive an Unsatisfactory rating. The lowest value in each performance rating range becomes the cut-score for that performance rating.

The Title I schools list was matched to the SAR list to identify which Title I schools had increased a rating level from the 2006-2007 academic school year to the 2007-2008 academic school year. The first matched list yielded 31 Title I schools who had moved in their SAR rating from Low to Average. There were no schools identified that moved from Unsatisfactory or Low to High, therefore, the researcher focused on the schools that moved from Low to Average. Additionally, for the purposes of this study, moving from Average to High was not considered a turnaround. Instead, these schools are referred to as High-Performing, High-Poverty schools. Turnaround schools move from low performing schools to higher performing schools. A turned around school is defined as “a documented, quick, dramatic, and sustained change in the performance of an organization” (Rhim, Kowal, Hassel & Hassel, 2007 p. 4). For the purposes of this study the researcher judged that turnaround schools are schools that have improved from abysmal performance to higher performance. However, a measure to determine a turnaround in education does not currently exist (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). As a result,
the researcher identified schools that improved their SAR ratings in Colorado from Low to Average for the selection of the participants in this study.

Next, the researcher identified 16 schools labeled as school-wide Title I schools from the list of 31 Title I schools. A school-wide Title I program provides academic services for all the students in the school. In order to qualify for a school-wide Title I program, schools must show evidence of a 40% or higher poverty rate based on free and reduced lunch counts (FRL). The researcher examined the SARs from 2001 to 2008 for each of the 16 schools to identify the percentage of students receiving meal assistance, principal tenure and overall academic performance ratings (Colorado Department of Education, 2008c).

Turnaround school research identifies turnaround schools as having the same principal for at least three years. From the 16 schools examined, only eight schools had the same principal during the time the schools moved from Low to Average. The years the school had the same principal are shown highlighted in Table 1.
Table 1
*School Accountability Ratings and Free Reduced Lunch (FRL) Percentages*

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<td>School A</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>Low</td>
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<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Avg.</td>
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<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>Avg</td>
<td>Avg</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Avg.</td>
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<td>School C</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Avg.</td>
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<tr>
<td>School D</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Avg.</td>
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<tr>
<td>School E</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>Low</td>
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<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Avg.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School F</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Avg.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the eight schools originally selected, seven principals participated in the study. The principal of the eighth school was no longer at the school. School G had the same principal during the turnaround and was able to sustain the Average rating. The G principal is now a district administrator and has responsibility for supervising the school in the study. Principal G was interviewed in the first sample and the current principal of the school was interviewed in the theoretical sample.

*Theoretical Sampling*

Theoretical sampling is at the heart of discovering theory. Glaser (1998) states his refined definition of theoretical sampling as “the prime mover of coding, collecting, and analyzing data. It is both directed by the emerging theory and it directs its further emergence. It is the ‘where next’ in collecting the data ‘for what’ according to the codes, the ‘why’ from the analysis in memos” (p. 153). Theoretical sampling occurs throughout.
the data collection where the researcher may adjust or add to the interview questions according to the emerging theory. The researcher may select additional sample groups of participants to interview.

The initial participants were interviewed and the data from the interviews were coded for categories and properties to data saturation. Details on the use of theoretical sampling during this study are outlined in the data collection and data analysis sections below. After the theory began to emerge, the researcher selected another group of participants to theoretically sample the codes from initial sample, utilizing the emerging theory to conceptualize the codes, and to generate a greater scope of the emerging theory.

The emerging theory cannot be preconceived, it must be come from the data, “the emerging theory points to the next steps—the [researcher] does not know them until he is guided by emerging gaps in his theory and by research questions suggested by previous answers” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 47). Theoretical sample groups are not chosen for structural purposes, they are chosen for theoretical relevance. Theoretical relevance has to do with the group’s ability to “further the development of emerging categories [by generating] to the fullest extent, as many properties of the categories as possible, and that will help relate categories to each other and to their properties” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 49). The researcher stops sampling when theoretical completion takes place; the point in the research when the data is saturated and no new categories emerge.

The theoretical sample for this study included follow up questions for the initial group of principals. In addition, the researcher added two school-wide Title I school principals who led their schools movement from Average to High. These schools had been able to maintain an Average rating for three or more years and had recently been
rated “High with High Growth” (see Table 2). The growth rating was new to Colorado in 2008 and recognizes student academic growth. The schools also had a free and reduced lunch percentage at or above 60%. These schools are considered High Performing/High Poverty schools. The purpose of theoretically sampling the principals of these schools was to determine whether these principals had the same concerns as those in the midst of turnaround and to test the emerging theory of turnaround principal attributes. The data from these participants did meet Glaser’s (1992) criteria for fit and work in the emerging theory and was included in the results. One additional principal was added, a non-Title I school principal who is leading a large elementary school of 52% poverty and led the school from Low to Average overcoming 3 years of a Low rating. The purpose of sampling with this principal was to determine whether a principal with a Title I population, but without Title I school-wide designation has the same concerns and attributes as Title I principals. This data also fit and worked in the emerging theory and was also included in the results.

Table 2
Theoretical Sample Group 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School J</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Avg.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Participants

The researcher initially contacted the participants by email to invite them to participate in the study. A follow up email included the online link to the bibliographic survey and confirmation of interview date and location. An Informed Consent form was provided to each participant at the time of the interview (see Appendix B). The privacy of the participants is protected utilizing a coding system assigning an alphabetic letter to each participant per school. Participants’ responses to bibliographical information were managed through an online survey system, Survey Monkey, and are anonymous. Interview tapes, notes, and memos were coded and destroyed after final write-up. Participants did not receive any compensation for participating, but the researcher offered copies of the data analysis to be sent after completion of the study.

The study did not purposely sample the participants from specific school districts. The participants were selected based on whether they met the criteria of a turnaround school as outlined in the sampling section. The participants’ schools spanned the state of Colorado from the northern plains to south suburbia and from east suburbia to the Western Slope. Four schools were selected from the state’s largest suburban/urban school districts and one school was from one of the state’s smallest school districts, the other schools were in small to medium sized school districts. There was no pattern to the schools selected in regards to geographic location.

The purpose of the online survey was to identify any biographical patterns of the turnaround principals. The principal of the non-school-wide Title I school was included in the survey with the initial sampling group for a total of 8 participants. The survey
generated the following biographical information of the participants: 7 out of 8 principals have more than six years administrative experience; 7 out of 8 have more than 10 years teaching experience; 7 out of 8 are 41 years or older; 3 were males and 5 were females. Each participant holds masters level degrees ranging from two Master of Science degrees and six Master of Arts degrees in educationally related areas.

The High Achieving/High Poverty schools’ principals were recommended from CDE, one was recognized for closing the achievement gap in Colorado, and the other is a principal of a Nationally Recognized Blue Ribbon School.

Data Collection

In grounded theory, the primary tool for data collection is the interview process, but data can also be collected through observations and from written documents such as research and/or books. In grounded theory, “all is data [and] whatever comes the researcher’s way in his substantive area of research is data” (Glaser, 1998, p. 8). The researcher began with initial interviews, and from the ongoing analysis of these interviews generated additional questions to probe further into the phenomenon under study. The data leads the process from the beginning and as it emerges.

In this study, the researcher conducted one hour, in person interviews with each participant at their school sites beginning with the prepared preliminary interview questions as a guide (see Appendix C). In a grounded theory study, it is preferable that the subjects be allowed to speak freely in order not to lead or constrain their possible answers or discussion. The basic interview questions are generative and designed specifically for the population under study.
In the interview process, the researcher engaged in what Glaser and Strauss (1967) describe as note-taking. In note-taking, the researcher takes notes from the subject’s responses to the interview questions writing key words, phrases, or conceptual ideas. Glaser (1992) discourages audio taping and script note-taking, but many other practitioners of grounded theory study leave the decision of their use to the individual researcher citing what works best for the particular study (Creswell, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Dick, 2008). For the purposes of this study, the researcher used a digital taping device for the interviews and Glaser’s note-taking procedures. Additionally, the note-taking was done following a format recommended by Dick (2005). The researcher used 8 ½ x 11 sheets of blank paper divided into 2/3 and 1/3 sections with the 2/3 section for notes and the 1/3 section for coding, identifying themes arrived at from the notes. After the interviews were completed, the researcher was given a tour of each of the schools by the participating principal. Additional data was added to the interview notes after the tour. Within two days after each interview session, the digital files were transferred to a computer and transcribed by the researcher.

The researcher began theoretical sampling after conducting the second participant’s interview. The first two interviews were scheduled for the same day due to the proximity of the schools. It was quickly apparent to the researcher that the first three questions in the interview protocol did not seem to fit for the participants. The questions are as follows (see Appendix C):

1. What do you think of being recognized as a turnaround leader?
2. What do you consider turnaround leadership to be?
3. What criteria would you use to describe a turnaround school?
The participants were unfamiliar with the term turnaround leader and were self-effacing in their responses. This led to a hesitant start for the participants most likely due to the possibility that they thought that the researcher was the expert on the topic. They seemed to want to be sure to answer the questions in the right way. The first participant said, “I’m not sure if this is the right answer, but...” The next participant began to talk about how Colorado measures the schools and whether the SAR report is a complete measure of a school’s progress. Once the participants were asked to talk about their schools and their experience, the interviews progressed more smoothly. The initial three questions were later revised (see Appendix D) and the interview protocol was modified to theoretically sample as needed and to respond effectively to the individual participants. According to Glaser (1998) “questions constantly change with the requirements of the emerging theory and theoretical sampling” (p.158).

Comparative Analysis

In grounded theory, comparative analysis is used as a strategic method for “the generation of theory [and] assigns the method its fullest generality for use on social units of any size” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 21). The action of comparative analysis is done iteratively, while the researcher is simultaneously involved in the data collection and the analysis phases of the research. It is an ongoing approach to gathering and interpreting the data. In grounded theory, its own form of verification is built in through constant comparative analysis and is woven into all aspects of coding, theoretical sampling, memoing, and sorting the data (Glaser, 1998). The researcher’s use of this method will be explained the upcoming coding, memoing and sorting sections of this chapter.

Terminology definitions are listed in Appendix A.
Coding

The complexity of analyzing the data generated for grounded theory is a challenge to the research process; therefore, the coding processes must be given careful attention. According to Glaser, “coding is the generating of categories and their properties by constant comparison of incidents and categories” (1998, p. 137). Charmaz defines the coding of the data as “the process of defining what the data are all about” (cited in Emerson, 2001, p. 341). In quantitative data collection, the codes are predetermined, in grounded theory the codes are created as the researcher is studying the data. Like the data collection, the coding process is interactive; the key word is emergence. The codes emerge from studying the data.

There are two types of coding in grounded theory, substantive and theoretical. The goal of substantive coding is to arrive at conceptual meanings by generating categories from the patterns found in the substantive incidents from the data (Glaser, 1992). Substantive categories can be “in vivo” defined as insider talk; for example, terms that are specified to the substantive area and used by participants in the milieu. Substantive codes infer imagery or analytic responses. Theoretical coding consists of applying a theoretical model to the data evolving through “conceptual models of relationship that are discovered to relate the substantive codes to each theoretically” (Glaser, 1992, p. 27).

There are two stages of coding in grounded theory. The initial stage of coding is called open coding. In open coding, the researcher is determining a category for each incident and properties of each category “which fit, work, and are relevant for integrating into a theory” (Glaser, 1978, p.56). As categories are formed, the researcher begins to
compare other incidents to the newly generated categories and produces properties of the categories. Categories can stand alone as conceptual elements of the theory and properties are conceptual aspects of a category (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

It is important to note that while categories and properties emerge from the data, they are not the data itself. As the researcher consistently codes and analyzes data, one category (sometimes more) will typically surface as the core category. The core category is “one of the categories [that] seems to be consistently related to many other categories and their properties over and over [and] it provides and becomes the latent structure of the theory” for the study (Glaser, 1998, p. 26).

The second stage of coding is called selective coding. Selective coding is used to code for a core category. It takes place after the data is saturated and various categories have been identified. Selective coding is done when the researcher can see prospects for a theory. The categories are coded for a core category, which may come from the categories identified or may come from the associations of the categories identified. Glaser (1998) calls this “the boiling down of the theory.” The point is to organize the theory with the core category relating to all other categories.

Substantive Coding

During this study, the researcher began coding during the interviews by jotting codes in the margins next to notes taken during the interview. These initial codes served as a starting point for generating categories and properties. After the interviews were transcribed, the researcher substantively coded the transcriptions using the open coding process of constant comparative analysis. With the initial interview codes in mind, the researcher read through transcriptions line by line to identify themes or potential
categories, and in so doing, compared one incident to another, generating additional categories or properties of categories. An incident can be found in a phrase, a sentence, or possibly a paragraph (Glaser, 1998).

Several rules govern open coding, which tends to insure its proper use and success. The first rule is to ask a set of questions of the data which must be kept in mind from the start. ‘What is this data a study of? What category does this incident indicate? What category or property of a category, of what part of the emerging theory, does this incident indicate?’ (Glaser, 1978, p. 57)

From this initial coding process, 413 categories and properties of categories were generated. These categories and properties from each participant’s transcription were transferred to 3M sticky notes with each participant assigned to a different color. The sticky note system became a form of “fracturing the data into analytical pieces” designed by the researcher to organize the large number of potential categories and properties (Glaser, 1978, p.56). The grounded theorist must fracture the data and take it apart to later put it back together as a theory. Glaser (1978, 1998) recommends the researcher do his own coding and that all the coding be done by hand to enhance theoretical sensitivity, which is the ability to generate theory from discovered categories.

The sticky notes were posted on a wall one by one using the constant comparative analysis method and were organized into groups of similar content (see Appendix E). The researcher wrote memos throughout this process regarding the emerging grouping patterns. From this process, 17 initial main categories and 56 properties of categories emerged. Each newly developed category was compared to each incident code to verify compatibility. The categories were also compared to one another for fit, work, and relevance. The researcher began hypothesizing about the emerging theory by asking the
two Glaserian questions: What is the main concern of the participants or what problem are they trying to solve? What accounts for the behavior of the participants in their quest to resolve their main concern (Glaser, 1978 & 1998)?

The emerging problem identified was improving the lives of the children in their schools through educational achievement. How the participants resolved this problem was still elusive after coding, but two categories or variables, “systemic strategist” and “can-do-spirit”, also emerged as potential core categories.

Glaser (1998) cautions the researcher not to give in at this point and to trust emergence. In instances of more than one core category, he advocates that the researcher focus on one core category at a time. In the case where it is difficult to determine which core category will become the focus, the researcher chooses one core category and places others as sub-categories if they fit, work, and are relevant to the core category. The core category is the one category that accounts for the variation in the behavior of the participants, it is relevant and works in the emerging theory and most of the other categories and their properties are related to it. The criteria for a core category include:

- That it is central, relating to as many other categories and their properties as possible and accounting for a large portion of the variation in a pattern of behavior.
- The core variable reoccurs frequently in the data and comes to be seen as a stable pattern that is more and more related to other variables.
- It relates meaningfully and easily with other categories.
- It has clear and grabbing implications for formal theory.
• It is completely variable and has conceptual carry through in the emerging theory, enabling the analyst to get through the analyses of the processes that he/she is working on by its relevance and explanatory power (Glaser & Holton, 2004, p.14).

The researcher theoretically sampled the initial participants via email with follow up questions listed below to dig deeper into their behavior and to attempt to discover the core category.

1. Why do you do the work you do?
2. How do you motivate yourself and keep the focus?
3. What values define you and give you a sense of significance, or guide your actions?
4. What goals do you have for yourself as an educational leader? Where do you see yourself in 3-5 years?
5. If you could go back and change anything you have done while leading your school to a turnaround, what would you change and why?

After this theoretical sample for more data around the emerging core category, coding the data, and adding it to the data wall, the researcher began to selectively code for the core category. The researcher began trying out the two main categories against the new data and within this process came a “eureka” moment for the researcher. The core category of moral leadership emerged and was then seen everywhere in the data in the categories and their properties. The two potential core categories, systemic strategist and can-do-spirit became main categories in the theoretical model. Later during the theoretical sorting
process, can-do-spirit became a property of the category, belief. Glaser (1998) writes about grounded theory,

Remember, participants most often have one main concern and one core process or category for resolving it. It will usually emerge full blast, with many substantive, in vivo categories and properties surrounding (by theoretical relationships) the concern and the core category (p. 151).

Over time, the researcher reached a point of data saturation. The data from the interviews and from the theoretical sampling did not add anything new to the categories, their properties, or the core category. When this occurs in a grounded study, the researcher is to discontinue further coding. The coding, memoing, and sorting are all inter-related, inter dynamic processes leading to theory completeness. After the core category emerged, the researcher moved on to memoing the data wall.

Memoing

Memoing is the core stage in the grounded theory methodology (Glaser, 1998). Memoing occurs throughout the data collection process and engenders theoretical sampling; it should occur right after the first group’s interview data is coded and thereon after in the research study to saturation. According to Glaser (1998), “memos are the theorizing write-up of ideas about substantive codes and their theoretically coded relationships as they emerge during coding, collecting, and analyzing data and during memoing” (p. 177). Memos are considered to be the driving force behind the bringing of the grounded theory together. Glaser (1998) implores researchers to take the time to “memo in the moment,” as the goal is to capture meanings and ideas for one’s growing theory “at the moment they occur” otherwise risk loss of emergent theory (p. 178). Memoing is usually done by hand, some practitioners suggest using 3x5 note cards to jot
memos and others prefer sheets of paper. Regardless of method chosen, if done well, memoing leads to saturation and delimitation of the research. When the researcher is at theoretical completion, he should begin to sort memos in order to write up analyses.

The researcher began memoing immediately following the first interviews. The researcher reviewed the notes the evening of the interview(s) in order to memo while the interview was still fresh in her mind. There were specific themes that arose during the interviews and memos were written on those themes in the same notebook as the notes. During transcription of the interviews, the researcher “memoed in the moment” (Glaser, 1998). Using the Microsoft Word comment application, the researcher highlighted phrases or words and wrote and inserted memos off to the side of the document. After completing the transcription, the researcher read through the document line by line and added additional memos, first on the computer and later by hand. Finally, all the computer memos were written on 3x5 note cards, one memo to each card, and compared to the initial memos from the written notes. While there were far more memos from the transcription, there were a number of duplicates between the two groups of memos and further verified for the researcher the validity of both memo processes.

Memos vary from being a ‘jot’ of a few words or a jot to write a memo later on an idea all the way through theory bits… they are anything that capture the meaning of conceptualized ideas, where they go theoretically and for theoretical sampling” (Glaser, 1998, p. 178).

Memoing the Data Wall

During open coding, the researcher posted sticky notes with potential categories and potential properties of categories on a wall. The sticky notes had been organized according to common themes or patterns. Throughout the comparative analysis process of
comparing sticky notes to one another and to the emerging patterns, the researcher also wrote memos on 3x5 cards. Once the groups of commonalities were formed, the researcher wrote memos on the 17 emerging categories, some categories became properties (concepts) of categories, other categories became dimensions of the properties. The categories fell into two distinct groups: intellectual categories and emotional categories. Theoretical sampling, theoretical coding, and theoretical memoing began at this point and continued throughout the sorting process.

**Theoretical Sorting**

Theoretical sorting, simplified as “sorting,” is the last stage of grounded theory methodology. According to Glaser (1998), sorting “is the epitome of the theory generation process [and] the test of how good was the collecting, choosing a problem, coding, saturation, sampling, and memoing” (p. 187). In the sorting stage, the researcher organizes the mass of written memos into an integrated theory, these memos now become known as “sorts.” The comparative analysis approach is engaged to discern which memos are related substantively and theoretically.

**Theoretical Coding**

Theoretical coding may begin in the memoing process where the researcher starts to think theoretically about how the substantive codes fit together, but it is engaged purposefully in the sorting process. Glaser (1998) outlines the use of theoretical codes,

Theoretical codes implicitly conceptualize how the substantive codes will relate to each other as interrelated, multivariate hypotheses in account for resolving the main concern [of the participants]. They are emergent and weave the fractured story turned into concepts back to an organized whole theory. (p.163)
In sorting, each memo is analyzed in relationship to all other memos until the process is exhausted with the integration of emerging theory. Typically, the sorting process is done manually using memo cards or memo sheets and hand labeling the sorts into integrated concepts. The goal of the sorting process is to lift up a small amount of concepts that account for the greatest variation in substantive behavior resolving the main concern of the participants. The sorting process sets the stage for the writing of the analyses of the research.

In this study, the researcher began the sorting process by first laying out the 3x5 cards of the memos (of the new categories and their concepts) on a large table. The researcher placed the core category in the middle and put the two distinct sub-categories, systemic strategist and belief, on opposite ends of the core category. Using the comparative analysis approach of comparing memo to memo, the memos were sorted into the two distinct groups, intellectual attributes and emotional attributes. During this process two additional sub-categories emerged, challenger and reflector as the balancers for the two groups of categories. The researcher continued to sort memos into the emerging theory and identified two to three properties for each of the main categories and a number of sub-categories and properties. The final result was one core category, moral leadership. Four main categories were discovered: beliefs, systemic strategist, challenger, and reflector. Six sub-categories were identified: sensible, integrity, relational, intrapreneur, achiever, and professional knowledge, as well as 29 properties (see Table 3).
Table 3. *Categories and Properties*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Category</th>
<th>Moral Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Properties:</td>
<td>• Personal Convictions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Make a Difference</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Social Justice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Category I</th>
<th>Beliefs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Properties:</td>
<td>• Self-Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Can Do Spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Passion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Beliefs: Sub-Category I** Sensible

| Properties:     | • Rational Empathy |
|                 | • Sense-Maker |

**Beliefs: Sub-Category II** Integrity

| Properties:     | • Transparent |
|                 | • Trustworthy |
|                 | • Significance |

**Beliefs: Sub-Category III** Relational

| Properties:     | • Responsive |
|                 | • Relational Trust |
|                 | • Connector |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Category II</th>
<th>Systemic Strategist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Properties:</td>
<td>• Visionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Change Architect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Focused</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Systemic Strategist: Sub-Category I** Intrapreneur

| Properties:     | • Optimizer |
|                 | • Innovator |

**Systemic Strategist: Sub-Category II** Achiever

| Properties:     | • Prioritizer |
|                 | • Organizer |
|                 | • Orchestrator |

**Systemic Strategist: Sub-Category III** Professional Knowledge

| Properties:     | • Knows Organizational Purpose |
|                 | • Knows How to Accomplish Organizational Purpose |
|                 | • Knows Measures of Success |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Category III</th>
<th>Challenger</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Properties:</td>
<td>• Confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Questioner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Category IV</th>
<th>Reflector</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Properties:</td>
<td>• Thoughtful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Insightful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Through this process of theoretical coding and sorting, the theoretical code of paired opposites emerged. The theory of paired opposites is where two opposing things in life exist and balance one another. In this study two main sets of paired opposites appeared to balance one another and the core category of moral leadership. The paired opposites were beliefs and systemic strategist and challenger and reflector. The sub-categories were also sorted into paired opposites as follows: intrapreneur and sensible; achiever and integrity; and professional knowledge and relational. Glaser (1998) describes the theory of the paired opposite family where “in social life there are many paired dichotomies or paired alternatives or polar opposites. They go together and back and forth easily. They can be reverberating opposites generating a stability based on a continuous equilibrium” (171).

The two distinct main categories were based on one group of memos of intellectually related categories and the other group was comprised of emotionally related categories. There was a sense of balance, of yin and yang categories or head and heart categories. The other two main categories, challenger and reflector were sorted as the categories that kept the intellectual and emotional categories in balance. This formed the foundation for the theory of this dissertation to be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Writing

Writing the analyses of the grounded theory research is the pinnacle of the research study. It is at this point that the researcher came to terms with the learning curve of hours of interviewing, coding, theoretically sampling, memoing, and sorting. The conceptual constructing through induction leads to the generation of substantive grounded theory. The goal is not to write-up findings, but instead to write-up the
discovered integrated set of conceptual hypotheses. Glaser (1998) posits, “In a substantive grounded theory the integrated hypotheses account for much of the behavior seen in a substantive area. They are plausible” (p. 3). He goes on to advocate that there is no need to spend time on proof, the product will legitimize itself. He believes the “proof is in the outcome” and asks the following questions:

1. Does the theory work to explain relevant behavior in the substantive area of the research?
2. Does it have relevance to the people in the substantive field?
3. Does the theory fit the substantive area?

Writing analyses in grounded theory require: “(1) a clear analytic story; (2) writing on a conceptual level; [and] (3) the clear specification of relationships among categories” (Glaser, 1992, p. 113). The initial writing was done based on the sorts of the memos. Next, literature that arose from the coding and theoretical sampling was incorporated through the constant comparative analysis for fit, relevance, workability, and modifiability. The researcher continually added to the literature review based on emerging theory. The prior literature review was treated as data and was also incorporated under the same criteria. The final product is a scholarly production of theory on the topic under study, turnaround leadership.

Limitations

This research study attempted to closely adhere to the classic grounded theory approach with the exception of the timing of the literature review. There is disagreement regarding when the literature review should be conducted. McGee et al. reviewed the
literature on this controversy and found the following reasons for the promotion of a prior literature review:

- To justify the study.
- To meet the requirements of local research ethics committees.
- To avoid conceptual and methodological pitfalls.
- To discover the extent of previous knowledge and therefore assess if grounded theory is an appropriate methodology.
- To be ‘open-minded’ but not ‘empty-headed.’ (McGee et al., 2007)

In 1992, Glaser’s main argument for not conducting the literature review prior to research is the possibility of the literature’s contamination of the emerging theories.

Later, he noted the following risks associated with pre-research literature reviews:

- First, the researcher can get grabbed by received concepts that do not fit or are not relevant.
- Second, [the researcher] may develop a preconceived, ‘professional problem’ of no relevance to the substantive area of research of which yields nothing.
- Third, the researcher will become imbued with speculative, non-scientifically related interpretations and connections that find their way into the grounded theory.
- Fourth, the researcher will become ‘awed out’ by other authors… which detracts from one’s own self valuation as a creator of a theory.
- Fifth, the researcher becomes rhetoricalized, thus sounding all the time like the literature and not sounding as the emergent theory would have it.
Sixth…which literature is relevant is unknown until the main concern of the substantive participants emerges with its continual resolving. (Glaser, 1998, pp.67-68)

While still keeping these risks in mind, Glaser came to the realization that there are many instances where a literature review is a required part of the research process. He contended with it by encouraging the researcher to utilize the literature as additional data collection to be constantly compared with data from the grounded theory research and not allow the literature to become preconceived categories or properties. He adds that the researcher must be careful that the research problem emerges as the study progresses (1998). The researcher completed a preliminary literature review prior to conducting the research for this study.

Conducting the literature review prior to the emergence of theory in this study could be perceived by classic grounded theorists as a limitation to the study. The overarching research problem for this study emerged from the researcher’s initial literature review which revealed that the explicit study of the educational turnaround leader was almost non-existent. The preliminary literature review encompassed the history of equity in education as related to the current state of turnarounds in education. It was designed to help the reader understand the background behind the turnaround issues in education and the need for very specific types of leaders. The literature review did reveal a theory developed by Murphy and Meyers (2007) for turnarounds in organizations in general. They applied this theory to turnarounds in education and identified turnaround leaders to be transformative, situational, entrepreneurial, and change oriented. The
researcher summarized their findings, but did not explore these leadership characteristics beyond the Murphy and Meyers work.

In order to maintain objectivity and open-mindedness, the researcher was mindful of the grounded theory concept of theoretical sensitivity throughout the study.

Theoretical Sensitivity

Theoretical sensitivity is an underlying concept integral to a credible grounded theory study. According to Glaser (1992), it is “an ability to generate concepts from data and to relate them according to the normal modes of theory in general” (p. 27). It requires the researcher to “have the ability to conceptualize and organize, make abstract connections, visualize and think multivariately. The first step in gaining theoretical sensitivity is to enter the research with as few predetermined ideas as possible—especially logically deduced, a prior hypothesis” (Glaser & Hon, 2004, p. 11).

The researcher of this study did not hold predetermined ideas or preconceived hypotheses about the turnaround educational leader attributes. In this section of limitations specifically addressing the topic of theoretical sensitivity, it is important to acknowledge the researcher’s knowledge and professional background in education. Professionally, the researcher served as a middle school principal for four years and was considered a principal who led the school to significant improvement. The researcher also served as a district level executive for three years, overseeing all levels of school improvement. Currently the researcher is a principal of one and a half years in a high poverty, high minority, low-performing elementary school in need of a turnaround. It is legitimate to recognize the researcher’s professional background as both a strength and possible limitation. Theoretical sensitivity requires the researcher to,
Have the personal and temperamental bent to maintain analytical distance, tolerate confusion and regression while remaining open, trusting to preconscious processing and to conceptual emergence [and] the ability to develop theoretical insight into the area of research combined with the ability to make something of these insights. (Glaser & Hon, 2004, p. 11)

The researcher’s successful professional background speaks to the researcher’s ability to conduct research. The challenge for the researcher was to “bracket” (set aside) all prejudgments regarding turnaround school leadership until the point of discussion. The researcher was careful not to force the data with her own problem, and kept an open mind to the subject’s problems. Determining the participant’s problem in this study came from the coding process while analyzing the data. While the researcher’s intent was to study the leadership attributes of the turnaround leader, she remained open to the other problems in the area. The limited research in turnaround leadership allowed the researcher to remain open-minded regarding the problem of finding the right leaders for turnaround situations in education. The research withheld her biases throughout this process.

Glaser (1998) suggests the researcher suspends all knowledge of what is personally known about the topic and “by suspending interests and prior knowledge the researcher increases his level of sensitivity to enable catching what will surely emerge” (p. 122-123). The researcher was intentionally conscious of what Glaser terms as “sensitive,” meaning aware and mindful of the possibilities of emergence, as well as cognizant of the need to conceptualize.
In order to address potential limitations, the researcher had to keep in mind the risks associated with a prior literature review and purposely withheld all professional knowledge regarding the topic until comparative analysis was done.

Conclusion

Grounded theory was chosen as the methodology for this study because currently no empirical theories exist to explain the essential attributes of turnaround educational leaders. The goal of this grounded theory study was to generate theory from data. While it appeared simplistic, it was actually rather complex. Fullan (2008) writes, “Theories that travel well are those that particularly and insightfully guide the understanding of complex situations and point to actions likely to be effective under the circumstances” (p. 1). There were a multitude of considerations the researcher had to keep in mind while in the midst of discovering theory. One highly important underlying concept was the blurred lines between collecting, analyzing, and coding data through the use of comparative analysis. A second important concept was that of bracketing prior knowledge, preconceived ideas, or hypotheses in order for the theory to emerge from the grounded theory methodology.

Finally, grounded theory required the researcher to engage in mindful inquiry. “Mindful inquiry is a creative act. It seeks not only to discover or record what is there, but to allow what is there to manifest itself in a new way, to come forward in its ‘shining’” (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 54). The researcher used mindful inquiry to remain open to what was revealed in the interviews, what was discovered in the data analysis, and what theory might organize the results. This openness led the researcher to a rich bank of data and a number of categories to explain the behavior of the participants. The
openness to the theory allowed for the theory to naturally come together. Glaser (1998) states, “People have a natural way of coding their own life, its problems and its resolving. The analyst need only use this natural bent and be open to… the ‘no pre-conceived dictums of grounded theory” (p. 150).

The researcher attempted to closely follow the classic grounded theory methodology and was pleased to find that the process works beautifully to express the main concern of the participants and what they do to resolve their main concern. The results presented in the next chapter and the theory generated are grounded in the data of this study and account for the actions of the turnaround principals.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter represents the journey of the discovery of a theory that explains the essential attributes of educational turnaround leaders. The journey of discovering grounded theory is “multivariate…it happens sequentially, subsequently, simultaneously, serendipitously, and scheduled” (Glaser, 1998). It is a journey of highs and lows, from enthusiastic coding to exhaustive data analysis, from feeling the flow to feeling stuck, from confusion to clarity, and ultimately from data saturation to theory completion. The goal of grounded theory is to discover both the main concern of the participants and what they do to resolve their concern. The researcher spent one month interviewing the participants in order to understand their life-worlds and their concerns and to learn their stories of turnaround and how they came to resolve their concerns. Their stories were recorded and transcribed then they were coded and fractured into data details, categories and properties of categories. Next their stories were put back together into a conceptual theory of how their attributes explain their behavior in the turnaround situations.

This chapter presents the results of the grounded theory methodological process used in this study to discover the personal and professional nature of the educational turnaround leader. It outlines the theory for answering the following questions:
Main Research Question:
- What are the essential attributes of a turnaround school principal?

Research Sub-questions:
1. What is the life-world of a turnaround principal?
2. What is extraordinary or unique about the leadership of turnaround principals who have led their low-performing, high poverty, high minority schools to significant achievement?
3. What skills, knowledge, personality traits, and leadership characteristics do turnaround principals have in common?

Theoretical Model

The researcher used the grounded theory methodology of coding, constant comparative analysis, memoing, sorting, and theoretical sampling to answer the research questions. The methodology led the researcher to discovering the core category, known as the “latent structure of the theory” (Glaser, 1998). The core category of the theory of essential attributes of turnaround educational leaders is moral leadership. It is the one category that was most significantly related to the other main categories of the theory and is at the center of the theoretical model. Connected to the core category are two main categories of beliefs and systemic strategist, these categories are balanced by the categories of reflector and challenger. This theoretical model explains the behavior of the turnaround leaders as they resolve their problem of improving the lives of the children in their schools through educational achievement (see Figure 2).

In grounded theory, the writing up of results begins with the core category and logically lays out the theory as it relates to the core category in sections with an
explanation of each of the main categories and their properties followed by their sub-categories and their properties. Next, the categories are related to each other to demonstrate viability of theoretical model. The researcher coded the relevant literature in the field and incorporated it into the results as it applied to the categories their properties, and the theoretical model. In the conclusion of the chapter, the theory is summarized as a theoretical model of the Essential Attributes of Turnaround Educational Leaders. Figure 2 depicts the core category, moral leadership, and the four main categories, beliefs, systemic strategist, challenger, and reflector.

Figure 2.
Core Category and Four Main Categories of Essential Attributes of Turnaround Leaders
Every single day I come to work, I know that I am going to be able to make a difference in someone’s life—a dramatic difference. I believe that we are all supposed to take care of each other in this world, and focusing on groups of people who have been marginalized their whole lives makes me feel that I can have the biggest impact. (Principal A)

The turnaround principals are moral leaders. Their primary interest is the well-being of their students, and their main concern is improving the lives of the children in their schools through educational achievement. During the interviewing process, coding, and data analysis, the researcher noted that the turnaround leaders used the in vivo codes of “whatever it takes and no excuses” to describe their convictions. They are driven by a personal conscientiousness to be better and do better in everything related to their jobs as principals. The turnaround principals have an intense desire to be in Title I schools because they are drawn to make a difference with that particular student population. They exhibited moral leadership in the actions they took throughout the turnaround process; they appeared to be intrinsically driven. These principals were focused on doing the turnaround work and putting the students first. They were not thinking about how to implement moral leadership; they were just doing it. Many of them were not even aware of the concept of turnaround leadership; their work was about doing the right things for kids.

The core category of moral leadership has three properties, personal convictions, making a difference, and social justice (see Figure 3).
Moral Leadership

Properties:
- Personal Convictions
- Making a Difference
- Social Justice

Figure 3. Core Category: Moral Leadership

Moral Leadership: Properties

Personal Convictions. Each principal had his/her own personal convictions that aligned with the theme of moralistic behavior. They do what they do because they believe that it is the right thing to do. One principal talked about her goal as an educator, “My goal as an educator is to continue to be impactful in changing the lives of kids by helping them to be successful both as students and as people” (Principal I). The turnaround principals believe that the children in their schools deserve the same opportunities and the same success that other children are receiving in higher socioeconomic schools. They do not blame, shame, or make excuses that it is the children’s home environments that are keeping them from achieving. They believe that it is their responsibility to ensure that the children in their schools are learning. They hold their teachers, their students, and themselves to higher expectations. They set a high moral standard for themselves, they set the pace, and they model the way. During the interviews there was a sense of energy
around the principals as they were talking about their work, and they strongly emphasized that their work matters. It was described by Principal F as a “spiritual work.”

Making a Difference.

I have a huge desire to make a difference in my students’ lives. Many of the students in my school do not have the love, nurturing and guidance they need, but I believe I can provide that for them at [I] Elementary. (Principal I)

The turnaround principals were self effacing and humble in being recognized for the study as a turnaround leader. Each of the principals attributed the turnaround of their school to their teachers doing the hard work in the trenches. Although they were modest in about their role in the turnaround, they were visibly proud of their schools, and as they talked about their work, they repeated the theme of making a difference over and over. In one school, the principal talked about making sure that students were supported academically, emotionally, and physically. She talked about buying coats on sale at a local store to give away to the children. While on the tour of her school, another principal stopped to tell a student that she had brought in a car-seat for his baby brother. Yet another talked about walking students home because it was dark following the after-school tutoring project he insisted they attend. These principals make a difference in a number of ways, it is who they are, it did not appear for show; it appeared as a moral commitment to making a difference. When the researcher asked about what legacy each would like to leave behind them, the participants had a common response, “That I made a difference.”

Social Justice. The work in Title I schools is replete of social justice. Students of high poverty environments have many obstacles to overcome in order to be successful in
school. The job of the turnaround leader encompasses the challenges of poverty which include: generational poverty; immigrant poverty; families new to poverty due to the current economy; children being raised by grandparents; children raised without supervision; and children who are victims of violence, abuse, drugs or alcohol. The turnaround leaders in this study were passionate about social justice. They recognized what they could and could not control in their roles as principals, but were advocates for managing what they could control. The principals knew that what went on outside their schools—the parenting, the neighborhood, and societal ills—was out of their control. Inside their schools was another story and they built the safety net inside their school environments by feeding and clothing kids, keeping kids safe, and having high expectations for their learning. All this is done in an effort to break the cycle of poverty for many of their students through educational attainment.

Principal A stated, “We owe it to every single child to help them grow and be successful.” For many of the principals, the turnaround work has been a journey for their teachers, “We’re beyond the level of making excuses, I think our teachers…our whole staff has come to the viewpoint that our perception has changed. We know that we can move all students to the levels they should be. We are always looking for what else we can do to get them there” (Principal B).

Main Category I: Beliefs

In their meta-analysis study of leadership behaviors associated with student achievement, Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) found the extent to which the principal communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling to
have .22 correlation with student achievement, meaning accounting for 22% of effect on student achievement. They define and explain ideals/beliefs as,

The extent to which the leader establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school’s attention…Specific behaviors and characteristics associated with this responsibility and identified in our meta-analysis are the following:

- Possessing well-defined beliefs about schools, teaching and learning;
- Sharing beliefs about school, teaching and learning with the staff
- Demonstrating behaviors that are consistent with beliefs (p. 51).

Turnaround educational leaders have strong belief systems. They believe in themselves, in their teachers, in their students, and in the work they do. “I truly believe that all students can achieve and succeed if they have appropriate educational opportunities, including excellent instruction and effective intervention, regardless of risk factors, home environment, etc.” (Principal F).

They believe that their work matters, and because of their work they are changing the future life opportunities for the children in their schools. Their beliefs are motivating and personally empowering as well as appearing to fuel their effectiveness fire. One principal talked about how, as the leader, he had to help teachers change their beliefs about kids. He was clear about his beliefs, but the teachers did not believe that all kids could be successful because they lacked so many basic skills. He said “We had to get clear about what we believed about kids, we had to change the mindset of the staff, I was not going to allow people to not believe in kids” (Principal C). In a discussion of school transformation, Sparks (2005) purports,

Because school leaders’ most important responsibilities are helping schools set inspiring goals and engaging staff members in creating the means to achieve them, leaders’ intentions and the way they are expressed have a profound effect on the organizations they lead. Consequently, one of the most important skills
possessed by leaders is clarity of thought and speech about what they believe and want to create. (pp. 1-2)

The main category beliefs has three properties, self-awareness, can do spirit, and passion (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4. Main Category I: Beliefs**

**Beliefs: Properties**

*Self-Awareness.* Turnaround leaders are extremely self-aware. They are conscious of their actions, speech, and behaviors, and check those against what they profess as beliefs. They think about their thinking in relationship to the work of turning around their schools. Their belief system keeps them engaged in this self-awareness. One principal noted, “I am a big picture person, I have to get with the teachers to get down to the nitty gritty of what we need to do” (Principal A). Another principal talked about her impatience with teachers who have low expectations for students or make excuses for students not learning, “I just don’t tolerate that, I know from my own experiences that it
is just not true, I don’t accept that from anyone, we only limit kids’ learning and abilities to be successful by our own limitations as adults” (Principal G).

What they believe about teaching children is foremost in the principals’ minds and they shift back and forth between challenging the status quo and reflecting on their current state as a school and their role in changing it. Sparks (2005) describes how self-awareness is related to authentic leadership, he states “authentic leadership flows from self-awareness regarding intentions, values, and feelings and yields its influence through actions congruent with that self-awareness” (p. viii).

*Can Do Spirit.* Turnaround educational leaders are inherently “can do” people. According to Principal A, “Whatever it is you decide to do, you embrace it fully, you jump in with enthusiasm and a can do attitude.” They roll up their sleeves and get right in the middle of the turnaround work. They immerse themselves in the spirit of the work of improving the lives of children through educational achievement. They are positive people; they focus and build upon the good things going on in their schools. They are optimistic about their students and the future for their schools. They are not quitters; they never stop believing that they can do this work. Fullan (2004) writes about the leaders doing change work in schools, “Leaders in a culture of change value and almost enjoy the tensions inherent in addressing hard-to-solve problems, because that is where the greatest accomplishments lie” (p. 6). The turnaround educational leaders do not get caught up in the challenges of poverty. They recognize and acknowledge when these challenges are impacting kids, but as Principal D said,

I want kids to see that I get it, but I don’t go there to pity, it is just the way things are, there is always something going on. There are some teachers who get so affected by these things, but we can’t do that and take it home with us, it is not
going to help the kids. It is not adding value to the kids’ lives. So I say if this is what happened: What are we going to do about it that adds value to the lives of the kids?

These principals are always thinking about what they can do to make a difference, to improve the lives of the children, and to “get the job done” (Principal D).

**Passion.** While passion is interrelated to self-awareness and can do spirit, it also stands alone as a property of belief. Passion is the central energy source of the beliefs of the turnaround principals. While interviewing the principals, the researcher felt the passion emanating from them as they talked about their schools and their work.

I feel a passion for our kids and their futures. I feel a passion for our teachers and their work. I want us all to go home each night and feel good about the work we did that day. It is awesome to come to work each day and get to do this again and again. (Principal B)

Passion is an encompassing word, but it does reveal the innermost desires of people. The turnaround principals expressed their passion for their work as the work. It was expressed in different ways, but it was clear that it existed as a form of energy, enthusiasm, and hopefulness. Their passion is related to moral leadership. According to Fullan (2004) “moral purpose is usually accompanied by a sense of urgency” (p. 7). Principal I said, “I wake up each morning with a sense of urgency to get to school and see my students. The part of my job I love the most is seeing teachers teaching and students learning.” The work of the turnaround leader was described by Principal F as a “work of the heart,” it is passionate and fulfilling work.

The turnaround principals’ beliefs are a driving force behind their actions in the turnaround situation, and those beliefs seem to be dynamically related to moral leadership. Through the constant comparative analysis process and theoretically
sampling, the following sub-categories of beliefs emerged as turnaround leader attributes: sensible, integrity, and relational. This half of the theoretical model represents the Emotional Attributes of the Turnaround Principal (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5. Emotional Attributes of the Turnaround Principal**
Beliefs Sub-Category I: Sensible

The turnaround principals are keenly sensible. They are able to respond to the needs and challenges of their schools and not be paralyzed by them. Their capacity to understand and respond is based on having sound judgment and awareness. Each of them exhibited calmness and fortitude that seemed to come from a deeper place, possibly the consciousness of the two qualities within. The responses of various turnaround principals as they addressed the challenges of their student population were,

“You just have to deal with it” (Principal C).

“It is just part of the job” (Principal E).

“You have to understand the population, it is a second nature response” (Principal D).

“You have to understand the population, it is not about pity” (Principal A).

“It is important to know the reality of a high needs population” (Principal F).

They were not reactive instead they were purposeful in their actions and behaviors as empathetic sense-makers.

While they understood the challenges and had empathy for the children, they were matter of fact in their approach and did not let the challenges disable them. They were able to help their teachers and staffs understand the challenges and manage them. They were the sense-makers for the complexity of the turnaround work. This ability to be sensible in the face of enormous obstacles came from their intense moral approach to their leadership. Sensible is a sub-category of beliefs and has two properties, rational empathy and sense-maker (see Figure 6).
**Sensible: Properties:**

*Rational Empathy.* The turnaround leaders demonstrated a sense of empathy for their students, for their students’ families, for their teachers, and for the challenges of poverty. They identify with the challenges, but did not accept them as excuses nor did they use them as a way to assign blame for their prior poor performance. Instead, they worked to understand the challenges. Principal G went to the trailer park where many of her migrant families lived, and went into the homes of the children and talked to the parents. She said, “I learned that because a person is poor that does not mean that they don’t value education.”

Many high poverty schools get caught up in the pobrecito syndrome discussed earlier in the literature review. The word *pobrecito* is Spanish for “poor little one”. The term pobrecito syndrome is commonly used to describe situations where educators feel so sorry for the poor children and are so concerned about the children’s needs, lack of food,
clothing, healthcare, that they get caught up in meeting those most basic needs. They also blame the reason for poor achievement on the deficits of the children. Many of the schools in the study exhibited the pobrecito syndrome prior to the turnaround, they were places where kids were loved and nurtured, but kids were not learning. The turnaround principals understood the pobrecito syndrome and did everything to make sure that it did not exist in their schools. They learned about their populations, their needs, and accessed resources to help, but they did not focus on what the students were lacking. They focused on what they could do and went from there to next step, which for Principal H was about improving, “As long as you have kids that are not achieving there is always more to do… I have a real intolerance for kids not being able to achieve, I start asking questions.”

Rational empathy is having the ability to care and understand difficulties yet not get caught up in them emotionally. It is the ability to think reasonably and logically about the difficulties in order to be responsive. For the turnaround principals, it was about having compassion in the moment and taking care of things, but not losing sight of the end goal which was ultimately improving the lives of the children they serve.

**Sense-maker.** Turning around a school is a paradoxical dynamic; at times it can feel contradictory. The work of turnaround principals in this study was complex and chaotic, yet simple and focused. It was complex and chaotic with change and ambiguity as constant factors. It was simple and focused in regards to having one great goal of improving the lives of children through achievement. The turnaround principals were the sense-makers of this dynamic. Because turnaround work is so encompassed by relentless change, the schools involved were often overwhelmed with anxiety and disequilibrium. The turnaround principals focused on making sense of the work for themselves and for
Fullan (2004) calls this coherence making “effective leaders tolerate enough ambiguity to keep the creative juices flowing, but along the way they seek coherence” (p. 6). The turnaround principals not only sought coherence, they created it.

The researcher learned that turnaround principals tend to be fairly autocratic at the beginning of the turnaround process; they had to make decisions, changes in staff, and changes in structures and programs. During this period they were very conscious of helping teachers to understand the changes. They talked of their vision for the school and the moral reasons behind the changes. It was important to them that they inspired their teachers to get behind the changes. Principal B talked about “going slow to go fast,” he wanted to make sure that the teachers took ownership and responsibility for the instructional changes. Principal F spoke of the challenge of changing beliefs of teachers while simultaneously changing their practices. She said, “Doing this is hard work.” The literature on change discusses that people don’t change their beliefs before they change their behavior, it is a change in behavior that causes different results and ultimately in a change of beliefs (Kotter, 1996). The turnaround principals were immersed in both changing beliefs and changing behaviors. They did not have the time to wait for either to change, they were transparent and explained to teachers along the way what they were doing and why they were doing it.

They called themselves translators, filterers, and sorters of information. Before they could lead the teachers through data analysis, they had to decide on what data. What data was going to be the most impactful, useful, meaningful, and bring about the greatest results? They discussed their work of change not as change itself. They were doing the work of drastic improvement by being clear that things were going to change, but
collaborating and communicating along the way. Principal F stated, “I thought about it a lot [change as related to the turnaround]…How do I make it acceptable for people and as logical as possible?”

Sergiovanni (2005) writes about the leader as a sense-maker “Leadership practice, as a result is always concerned with both what is effective and what is good; what works and what makes sense; doing things right and doing right things” (p. 19). Turnaround principals as sense-makers are moral leaders when they make decisions that disturb the system. Their sense-making helps to put the system back together in a better way that does the right things to improve student achievement in the right ways.

Beliefs Sub-Category II: Integrity

Having integrity is the epitome of moral leadership. One cannot do one without the other. In this study, the researcher discovered integrity to be a critical attribute of the turnaround leaders. Having integrity was important to them; it was named as a high value; it was what they hoped their teachers would say they possessed. According to Sergiovanni,

Moral leadership taps the spirit. How credible is the leader? Is the leader honest, forthright and sincere? Does the leader model beliefs, live purposes, exemplify standards? In essence, what does the leader represent, and does this representation symbolize something of value to followers? (2005, p. 18).

Principal I described how she used integrity to make decisions, “Integrity is always my initial lens: What is morally and ethically correct?” The turnaround principals are driven by a strong desire to do the right things and this translates to having high integrity. How do they know the right things to do? They trust their intuition of doing what is right by kids, they are transparent in their approach, and they are willing to be
questioned or challenged. They talked about how their teachers have learned to trust them and how they built that trust through actions of integrity. They described how important it was to them to be leaders of integrity in all aspects of their work and how they have arrived at this place of value. Integrity has three properties, transparency, trustworthy, and significance (see Figure 7).

**Figure 7. Beliefs Sub-Category II: Integrity**

**Integrity: Properties**

*Transparent.* Being transparent relates to being honest and truthful for the turnaround principals. They believe that it was through their leadership transparency that their teachers began to change their beliefs about their schools and the children’s ability to learn. These principals challenged the status quo, while at the same time, explaining why they were doing what they were doing. Transparency in leadership is easy to give lip service to but harder to actually enact. It opens leaders up to be vulnerable to criticism. It is not a very comfortable place for most people, but the turnaround principals seemed to thrive on this way of being, it seemed to give them energy and more motivation.
The turnaround principals believed so strongly in their work they made it public. They posted student performance data by grade levels and by individual teachers in hallways, in notebooks, and on data walls, and openly discussed the classes where students were not making progress. They opened the process for creating a schedule to the teachers by asking them to create a schedule that met the needs of, kids not adults. They did action research to uncover myths and misinformation regarding achievement data assumptions. They openly revealed that the students were not the problem, it was the teaching and the response to students not learning that was the problem. They tackled the issues of their high poverty schools head on, and they did not waver on the reasons for doing so.

The turnaround principals were willing to put themselves on the line as well. Principal J talked about how he asks his teachers to tell him what he can do better. He actively seeks their feedback about himself in order to improve, while at the same time, he challenges them to be better. They led their teachers to have open and honest conversations about their beliefs about whether their students could learn. “We identified the powerful things we believe about our kids and what are our roles in having them obtain those things” (Principal D). Integrity to the turnaround principals means transparency in everything, thinking, beliefs, decisions, discipline, data, and expectations for all.

Trustworthy. “There is honor in this work, I lead by my values of trust, fairness, and honesty” (Principal I). Trustworthiness is built upon repeated acts of the individual, that when accumulated, create integrity. The turnaround leaders built trust by behaving in ways that exemplified integrity. They were honest and straightforward about the things
that were not okay, yet willing to offer help and support to fix those things. They built trust through heartfelt relationships grown over time. According to Covey (1989), “Trust is the highest form of human motivation. It brings out the very best in people” (p. 178).

One principal related trust to loyalty, she shared that when she arrived her staff did not trust leaders. She said, “I am here for the long haul” and expressed loyalty to the school, staff and kids (Principal E). Another principal said she build trust by,

Listening and trying to understand where they were coming from…I always told them the truth, what I was thinking, and why I was thinking that… Trust takes time to build, but it has to be there. If your people do not feel that they can trust you, you cannot do [turnaround work] (Principal F).

Many schools in need of a turnaround have seen repeated turnover in their leaders. One principal confessed that when she told friends in her district that she was going to this particular school, her colleagues responded, “Well you will only have to put in a couple of years and then you can go somewhere better” (Principal E). Leading high poverty schools is not easy, principals in high poverty schools face enormous difficulties stemming from poverty and many are unprepared to deal with those societal dilemmas (Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore & Lash, 2007). The turnaround principals demonstrated a sense of moral responsibility to their schools. They openly shared that they want to be there and they love doing this work. This type of emotional honesty further endeared them to their teachers and fostered more trust. Covey (2006) summarized the impact of trust on organizational profit and achievement. He described organizations with high trust to have a 40% dividend in business and almost three times higher achievement in education.
Significance.

The gift of significance lets people find meaning in work, faith in themselves, confidence in the value of their lives, and hope for the future. Work becomes more of a joy than drudgery, an opportunity to make a difference as well as a living. (Boleman & Deal, 2001, p. 120)

The turnaround principals appeared to be extremely dedicated and committed to their work. Their work was intensely meaningful and rewarding. It was not that they felt significant individually, but they felt their work was significant, it mattered, and they believed it made a difference. They exhibited a sense of significance as they described the changes they have made in their schools. The researcher heard several of them say, “It’s not about me, it’s about we.” They repeated over and over again that it was the teachers in their buildings doing the hard work of changing their teaching practice that has made the difference. They were very proud of their teachers and their work.

Boleman and Deal state in their book Leading with Soul that leaders need to provide their employees with gifts of authorship, love, power, and significance. They describe significance below,

Significance has both internal and external facets. The internal dimension is the feeling of unity and cohesiveness that goes with being a part of a tightly knit community. The external dimension is the sense of pride associated with contributing something of value to the larger society. (2001, p. 116)

In his book on themes of talent, Rath (2007) identifies significance as a strength for some people. He describes people who are strong in significance to have a desire to be admired, credible, and successful. The researcher’s use of significance does not meet this description. Instead, the researcher’s definition for significance in regards to the turnaround leaders is the opposite. They are not seekers of recognition, they are humble and self-effacing. It was interesting to note that 4 of the 8 principals have received
recognition, one was nationally recognized as a principal of a Blue Ribbon School, another Colorado Title I Principal of the Year, another had received state recognition for closing the achievement gap, and another was recognized as a principal of a Colorado Distinguished Title I school. While they don’t personally seek recognition, recognition seems to find them.

They want their work to be meaningful in order to resolve their main concern of improving the lives of the children they serve. It is in this service of others that the concept of significance shines. They serve the children, they serve their teachers, and they serve their communities—all because the act of doing so is meaningful. Having a sense of significance motivates these principals to continue to achieve for the benefit of the children. The researcher agrees with Rath (2007) that people with the significance theme as a strength have an “independent spirit [and find] work to be a way of life rather than a job” (p. 161). The turnaround principals led with integrity and their significance behavior is one way they demonstrated their integrity and how they expressed moral leadership. Principal C summed it up, “It’s about the kids, that’s why we are here. I want to ensure that they have the best possible education while they are here…If we fail one kid, we fail ourselves… [and so] I go beyond what is expected.”

Beliefs Sub-Category III: Relational

“I am a people person, which is good, I don’t know how you can be in this job and not be a people person… People are important… Relationships are important” (Principal A).

The researcher found that turnaround leaders were naturally relational, they encouraged deep relationships with their employees, district personnel, and others
connected to the school. They believed in the power of people to create together.
Knowing their personnel both personally and professionally was a priority for them.
What was also significant about the turnaround leaders’ relational approach was that they
realized that they could not do the work alone. “The best ideas come from people within
the school” (Principal I). Shared leadership was a common theme. Although many of the
turnaround leaders behaved autocratically at the beginning of the turnaround process,
they worked toward a shared leadership model. Turnaround principals empowered their
staffs, through teamwork and shared leadership, to make the right decisions, the kinds of
decisions that positively affected student learning. Principal D talked about how she
empowered her teachers;

I believe in the intellect of others. I believe in the people I work with, there really
are so many teacher leaders. We have many, many people that have expertise or a
viewpoint that can be used to figure things out… If we believe in each other and
give it a go… We can do great things.

The turnaround principals were developers. They developed people by first identifying
their strengths, putting them in leadership positions, and supporting them to be
successful. Each turnaround school had some type of leadership team. Fullan (2003)
relates the moral imperative with developing leadership in others and states, “It is the
combined forces of shared leadership that make a difference.”

According the turnaround principals, it was the collective commitments around
common purposes that contributed to the turnaround success. The turnaround principals
were inclusive and brought everyone into the process of change, decision making and
future planning. They built trust through strong relationships, and by doing what they
said they would do. The turnaround principals were responsive leaders who made sure
that their teachers had what they needed to teach, and their students had what they needed so that they could learn. They had a high level of relational trust in their schools; they trusted their teachers and the teachers trusted them. For the turnaround leader, connecting with others was a natural behavior. They were human connectors, they connected with students, parents, teachers, district staff, and with outside supporters. All of the behaviors related to being relational had something to do with the turnaround leaders’ personal convictions, and their desire to make a difference. Building relationships was an outcome of the turnaround leaders’ acts of moral leadership. To the turnaround leader, building relationships was an integral component of the turnaround process and of doing the right thing for students. “If relationships improve, things get better. If they remain the same or get worse, ground is lost” (Fullan, 2004, p. 5).

The researcher discovered the sub-category relational to have a large number of codes (101), and these codes were sorted into the following properties: responsive, relational trust, and connector (see Figure 8).
Figure 8. Beliefs Sub-Category III: Relational

**Relational: Properties:**

*Responsive.* The turnaround leaders led in service of others. This style of leadership had a lot to do with the fact that relationships were immensely important to them. They were responsive to the needs of their teachers, the children, and parents in their schools. Responsiveness was represented by the following characteristics: caring, encouraging, listening, communicating, and collaborating. The turnaround principals cared deeply about their teachers and their success. They made it a priority to ensure that the teachers knew that they cared for them and valued their relationships. Principal E described her feelings for her teachers, “we are like a family here, I love my staff.” Principal B stated, “I care for each person in my school as an individual, I am concerned for their well being and success.” Principal F described her relationships with her staff, “we laugh together, we like being together, we are friends…I do care for everyone, I give lots of hugs.” Principal A talked about the importance of knowing her staff, “I really try
to talk with people and get to know them on a personal level. They know me really well too, and we miss each other when we don’t see each other.”

While in the midst of the change work in the turnaround process, the turnaround principals realized the need to encourage and support their teachers along the way. “My job is to help keep them going, give them whatever they need to get the job done, and keep the morale up…I need to praise the people for doing the work” (Principal H). “My job is to be a supporter of teachers in their mission. My primary role is to support them and help them achieve the things that need to happen” (Principal B). The turnaround principals encouraged their teachers to challenge themselves to improve student achievement through the use of data. When the teachers were given the responsibility of finding the solutions to the problem of improving student achievement, the principals supported their teachers by listening to them and taking their input, thoughts, and ideas seriously.

Responsiveness also included the turnaround principals’ abilities to be present, visible, approachable, and flexible. The turnaround principals described their days beginning and ending around students and teachers. They talked about walking through the building each morning to do a quick check in with teachers and students. Their days were filled with serving the teachers and the students, not sitting behind their desks in their offices. Each principal listed getting into classrooms everyday as a priority. “I like to get into classrooms everyday to touch base with kids and with teachers” (Principal B). “I like to end my day around people, around the office staff, and around the teachers” (Principal E). “I make sure that I am out and about, available to the staff and the students” (Principal F). They shared that they are visible so that staff can approach them
with questions, clarifications or anything else that they need. Many of the principals used the term open-door policy to describe their willingness to engage with their staff.

Finally, the turnaround principals were communicative and collaborative. They got the work done by communicating what they are doing and why.

To have a turnaround, it’s all about change and the willingness to change… You have those people that are not excited about change…you have to create that understanding and the reasoning behind why we’ve got to change… If you just say this is what we are doing and you are going to be happy, you are not going to get buy in to make the change… As the leader you have to go about this by treading softly and creating understanding and communicating to your staff about what needs to happen and the why…and helping them in that process to be collaborative… If you involve them in the process you are going to go a lot further… A turnaround organization is a collaborative organization. (Principal I)

They worked with and through the people both within and outside their schools. When asked, “What did you do to turnaround your school?” The turnaround principals’ answers overwhelming involved the word “we.”

“We aligned the school improvement plan and put it in place in the building and tied all the strategies to the plan” (Principal C).

“I meet with teachers during their planning to talk about what they are doing… checking on data… sharing data… we have worked together to cause change…teachers have great buy in and depth for what we have done” (Principal F).

“We were all in it together… working on collective efficacy… we did the book study… we did revisioning… they learned that I was very collaborative” (Principal D).
Relational Trust. For the turnaround principals, a property of being relational was relational trust. Turnaround principals fostered relational trust as a result of being relational. Their deep moral and personal connections with their teachers, their responsiveness, beliefs, integrity and sensibility—all influenced their high levels of relational trust with their students and staff.

Bryk and Schneider (2003) discuss their longitudinal study of 400 hundred schools in Chicago and found relational trust to be highly correlated to building effective education communities.

Principals' actions play a key role in developing and sustaining relational trust. Principals establish both respect and personal regard when they acknowledge the vulnerabilities of others, actively listen to their concerns, and eschew arbitrary actions. Effective principals couple these behaviors with a compelling school vision and behavior that clearly seeks to advance the vision. This consistency between words and actions affirms their personal integrity. Then, if the principal competently manages basic day-to-day school affairs, an overall ethos conducive to the formation of trust will emerge… Further, relational trust supports a moral imperative to take on the difficult work of school improvement. (p. 43)

The turnaround principals established relational trust by walking their talk, modeling the way, and demonstrating loyalty to and belief in their teachers. The principals talked of rolling up their sleeves and examining the student performance data right alongside their teachers. While they did not skirt around the issues, they were not blatantly confrontational either. They challenged the teachers with collective efficacy and took ownership for their part as the leader.

I knew there were many teachers that wanted to get the work done, they had the heart to get it done…so [I thought] how could I manage that piece? We were all in this together… I had to establish trust amongst the staff that we can get it done and they would trust me to make decisions not to overload them with so many things at one time and stress them out that they could not really move forward (Principal D).
Principal D also realized that the trust that was built enabled her to engage her teachers in the change work and eventually she was able to give complete responsibility to the teachers for the changes that she wanted to occur.

Principal E talked about how she worked really hard at building relationships with those staff that were most resistant. She worked to uncover their strengths and later capitalized on those strengths to do the turnaround work “I had to build rapport and trust…they knew I was loyal to [our school]. It was important to set that stage first. Since they do trust me, I can push them and I can set the expectations.”

The turnaround leaders were genuine, transparent, and authentic, which led the teachers to high levels of trust. For example, Principal A talked about her beliefs about people,

I believe in people and that can be a positive and a negative. I really believe that people have the ability to change and to become a better teacher or a better parent, or better para… You need to work with people and maybe I am still so close to being a teacher that I still have this belief…I recognize the changes in people and I think it is harder for others to recognize them. Oftentimes I believe in people and it works out really great, other times I believe in people and I have to move them to a different position and that is really hard.

Each turnaround principal was conscious of the trust building they did with their staffs and they acknowledged it as a key ingredient to the turnaround process.

It really takes time on the ground floor to build the trust. I got gray hair over it…I always told them the truth, what I was thinking and why I was thinking that…trust takes time to build, but it has to be there. If your people do not feel that they can trust you, you cannot do it [turnaround work] (Principal F).
Principal I said, “I believe that my staff trusts me. I will drop anything to meet the needs of staff and kids.” “I have enormous respect for teachers and they trust me,” said Principal G.

Almost all the turnaround principals had more than 10 years experience as teachers and reflected on this as a contributing factor to their ability to understand what teachers need and what leads to a high trust culture. As they talked about what kind of leaders they wanted to be, Principal F said, “I want to be a leader that leads from the heart, not by fear.”

“I know what kind of principal teachers want, they want someone they can trust and someone who works just as hard as they do” (Principal C). “I want to lead without the teachers necessarily knowing I am leading them… I listen… it is an open, collaborative, communicating atmosphere…I don’t ask them to do something I would not do” (Principal J).

Fullan (2003) identified relational trust characteristics as, respect, competence, personal regard for others, and integrity cited from Bryk & Schnieder (2003) to be related to more effective principals. He also discussed how these traits originating from the principal eventually become a part of the school culture and lead to school improvement. Later, Fullan (2004) relates relational trust as integral to creating a high trust culture where “high-trust cultures make the extraordinary possible, energizing people and giving them the wherewithal to succeed under enormously demanding conditions—and the confidence that staying the course will pay off” (Fullan, 2004).

Relational trust was clearly an important property of the category relational and creating it was integral to the turnaround process.
Connector. The researcher found that turnaround principals were human connectors, meaning they enjoyed being around people and working with people, and they placed a high priority on relationships.

Relationships are the pathways to the intelligence of the system. Through relationships, information is created and transformed, the organization’s identity expands to include more stakeholders, and the enterprise becomes wiser. The more access people have to one another, the more possibilities there are. Without connections, nothing happens. (Wheatley, 2005, p. 40)

Turnaround principals connected with others on multiple levels of the educational system simultaneously and strategically for the purpose of solving their concern in the turnaround process. That is, their concern of improving the lives of the students in their schools through educational achievement. Simultaneously, they connected with district level leaders, teacher leaders, teachers, students, parents, and community members. Strategically, they connected for specific purposes.

The turnaround leaders talked about the connecting they had done to garner support from their districts’ central offices. This support was seen as important on two levels. On one level, the principals needed support in regards to resources and direction for their schools. The other level, they needed support for autonomy in decision making and in staffing.

In regards to connecting with teacher leaders and teachers, the turnaround principals related these connections to relationship building. They built relationships in order to connect at a higher level, on a moral level. The strong relationships allowed them to connect around a common purpose, improving the lives of the children in their schools, which ultimately led to changes in the practices in their school, which led to increased student achievement. The turnaround principals used a variety of methods to connect
with their teachers. Many used book studies, some went to professional development conferences and studied what high performing schools do, others accessed district resources for professional development. Regardless of the method chosen, all changed their practices within the school and in classrooms. The connections related to developing professional learning communities fostered a learning environment where people became open to new ideas and new ways of doing things.

These principals also were kid connectors. They all spoke about knowing their students, not just as learners, but also knowing them as kids in families. They knew who was achieving and who was not achieving, and they used this knowledge to challenge their teachers to investigate the reasons behind students not achieving. They knew which kids did not have support at home and which students needed a daily check in to ensure a positive experience at school. Principal F pointed to a gift on her desk and said, “That’s for a student in my school. He did not receive any Christmas gifts, he thought Santa went to the wrong house.” Another principal talked about the homes the children in her school come from and what basic needs from breakfast to clothing they provide at school to make sure the students can be successful. The researcher observed the kid-connectors in action as she toured the schools with the principals. They called students by their names, gently touched a shoulder here and there, gave high fives and hugs, they asked about homework, asked about families, and demonstrated that the connections were authentic.

While the researcher did not observe parent or community connections, she observed evidence of parent connections via parent bulletin boards. She heard in the interviews the importance of the parent and community connections. One principal talked about getting parents to understand that things were going to change in the school,
The parents were no longer going to be able to just walk in and go to their child’s classroom. I said that they had to check in the office and could not interrupt during instruction. This was different and I had to spend the time explaining why it needed to be different. (Principal C)

Others talked of home visits and sharing the vision of the new direction of the school with the parent groups. Parent involvement in high poverty schools is a challenge due to the economic difficulties of families. Each turnaround principal admitted that they could improve in this arena. Principal B talked about how, prior to the improvements in his school, the community had labeled his school as the “not so good school”.

Several of the schools had taken advantage of the Colorado Department of Educations’ (CDE) school improvement review process. In this process, schools having not made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) have an opportunity to engage in a school evaluation process whereby their school practices are audited by the state. After the evaluation, the school must write a Title I School Improvement plan which implements the changes recommended by the review. Those that participated in this process felt that the CDE school improvement audit significantly influenced the turnaround process. There is a monetary advantage of participating in the audit, the school is awarded approximately $100,000 per year and the principals utilized the funds to establish professional learning communities and to support the changes recommended. “I really took the review seriously and listened to the recommendations from the review” (Principal D). After the CDE review, “we said, okay we are going for it” (Principal F). Principal C talked about using the audit from the state to begin the turnaround process, “I looked at all the information that had been given the school, I looked through all the strands and with the leadership team we developed a plan.” The turnaround principals
used the connections made with state leaders to further advance their goals of improving the achievement and changing the practices of their schools.

Strategically, the turnaround leaders connected with experts to support their program changes or to conduct professional development in their schools. Some of the connections that the turnaround principals named were noted theorists, researchers, and educational experts such as Douglas Reeves, Michael Fullan, Richard DuFour, Nancy Commins, Robert Marzano, Rick Stiggins, Jane Bluestein, and Sonia Nieto. The principals took their teachers to conferences and supported book studies to access researched based information.

They also shared that district level professionals helped support them in their turnaround efforts. Principal A spoke specifically about how her connections with educational researchers and central office personnel furthered the turnaround work in her school,

A good friend of mine was not consulting that year because she was writing a book, but she had promised that she would give me one day [of professional development] and I reminded her of that…I realized that it was too big for me to do it by myself, I hired experts to help. You try to align yourself with people who are going the same direction as you are…and having support from the school district helped. I think that they trusted me because I knew what I was doing.

Wheatley (2005) labels these types of connections as “communities of practice”,

Communities of practice demonstrate that it is natural for people to seek out those who have the knowledge and experience that they need. As people find others and exchange ideas, relationships develop and a community forms. The community becomes a rich marketplace where knowledge and experience are shared. It also becomes an incubator where new knowledge, skills, and competencies develop (p. 172).
Through their ability to not only connect with others, but to purposely connect their teachers with each other and their schools with others, the turnaround principals developed and fostered many relationships that positively affected their schools.

**Main Category II: Systemic Strategist**

The paired opposite category of belief is systemic strategist. The category of belief for the turnaround principal identifies, “I believe I can do this!” The systemic strategist category identifies, “This is how I am going to do it!” Just believing in oneself to do something is not enough to get it done, one has to have, or be able to, access how-to-do-it in order to make it happen. Turnaround principals were systemic in how they approached the turnaround process; they did so in a logical manner encompassing the whole school. They were strategists in the steps they took, how they managed themselves, how they managed people, who they connected with, and the things they did. The acts of the turnaround principals as systemic strategists were driven by their moral leadership behaviors. They did the things they did because they believed them to be the right things to do to improve the lives of the children in their schools.

Fullan (2003) outlines two important leadership behaviors that relate to the turnaround leaders as systemic strategists, “The first is to take action consistent with the moral journey” which, for the purposes of this study, is to improve students’ lives through improved educational achievement. The second behavior Fullan discussed is “To push for and be responsible to system opportunities to deepen and extend the moral purpose” (p. 63).

The turnaround principals took actions consistent with the moral journey in how they approached the systemic issues. The systemic issues ranged from not having the
right people to not focusing on the right things. Each principal approached these issues individualistically. Some accessed their intellectual attributes, while others leaned toward their emotional attributes. Regardless of how they approached the issues, they all challenged the system deficiencies. They were systemic in how they took advantage of opportunities and strategic in how they acted. Principal A described how she viewed herself being systemic, “It’s about having systems in place so that even on those days that are irregular and different, the school stays together and keeps going in the right direction.” Being systemic involves the use of the discipline of systems thinking.

Senge (2005) advocates for the use of systems thinking in learning organizations. “The discipline of systems thinking provides a different way of looking at problems and goals—not as isolated events but as components of larger structures” (p. 78). The larger structure for the turnaround principals was that of the school, and the problem of improving the lives of the children through educational achievement was the focus. The goal of higher educational achievement for all students was viewed strategically. The principals shared that having a vision for what the school could be and a vision for what kind of school they wanted to create for the students was a beginning step. Next, they addressed the change process, not necessarily through a theoretical lens, but they acknowledged it and understood that it was a significant component. Lastly, they focused on what needed to be done to realize the change they were seeking.

Through the constant comparative analysis process and theoretically sampling, the following sub-categories of systemic strategist emerged: intrapreneur, achiever, and professional knowledge. An intrapreneur, for the purposes of this study, is a principal with entrepreneurial behaviors functioning within the larger school district organization.
The achiever attribute is related to the turnaround principals’ intense desires to achieve at high levels, both personally and as a school. Professional knowledge encompasses the principals’ broad and deep knowledge of teaching and learning. This half of the theoretical model represents the Intellectual Attributes of the Turnaround Principal (see Figure 9).

![Diagram of Intellectual Attributes of Turnaround Principal]

Figure 9. Intellectual Attributes of Turnaround Principal
The main category systemic strategist has three properties, visionary, change architect, and focused (see Figure 10).

Systemic Strategist: Properties

Visionary. The turnaround principals were visionary leaders. They had envisioned the schools they wanted to create and they knew they needed to get their staffs to commit to the vision. Sergiovanni (2005) advocates for visions to be specific and shared,

Value is added when visions are accompanied by the promises and commitments each constituent group makes to help move their school closer to its vision. Effective visions obligate people who share them. The obligation ups the ante from visions as management tools to visions as moral statements (Sergiovanni, 2005, p. 59).

The turnaround principals were driven to revision their schools by making the need for change a moral issue in order to solve their problem of improving the lives of the children in their schools through educational achievement. Their obligation was
reinforced by their moral beliefs, that it was the right thing to do. In the beginning of the turnaround process the principals needed to find out where their teachers were in regards to the larger moral obligation. They began by assessing the status of student achievement and the staffing of their schools. It was important to them at the start of the process that they understood their situation. The principals took the time to view data, talk to teachers individually, to build on the schools’ strengths, and to learn how the school had operated in the past, and how the school had evolved to their current status.

Principal F talked about how she learned about the school, “I met with each teacher, had personal conversations with staff, I wanted to know about [our school]. I began envision for myself how we needed to change.”

Some principals made minimal changes the first year, while others changed everything. What they had in common was that they knew where they wanted to go with the school. Some principals took action with more emphasis on being relational, others placed more emphasis on their achiever attributes. Principal E stated, “The first year I did not make any changes at all, I got to know the staff…what was happening in the building…then I decided that I needed to go a certain direction.”

Principal C said, “We could have made minor adjustments, but we changed everything, all the dynamics, we have changed the schedule, the curriculum, the actual academic piece that kids are getting…there were major changes in the way the school operated.”

After identifying where she wanted to take her school and creating a vision of what the school could be, Principal A engaged her staff in the vision. She took advantage
of the opportunity to move her school forward taking on a new program focus and by building on the excitement and motivation of the staff.

Principal D was adamant, “We knew where we needed to go, it was not ambiguous. We knew the standards; our reference point was the standards.”

Principal J was matter of fact about his vision, “I know where I am going and I have to bring the people along with me…we’re all in this together, we want kids to graduate from high school, we want them to be proficient, now how are we going to make this happen?”

Principal G had a vision of where she was taking her school and although it was not realized right away, she knew that she had to maintain that vision through the implementation dip. She was a long range planner and even kept a list of things she wanted for her school to implement her vision, so when there was money available she was ready.

Principal C motivated his staff by sharing what they could become, “I keep talking about becoming a Blue Ribbon school or a 90/90/90 school.”

Each turnaround principal was visionary in different ways, but each was committed to a vision to change their schools into places that served children in ways that change their lives. Sergiovanni (2005) relates vision to trust, “it is trust first, followed by vision, strategy, and action, that works for serious and long-lasting change to occur” (p. 8). The turnaround principals established trust through their relational behavior and then strategized throughout the process of changing their schools as change architects. The actions of the turnaround principals flowed naturally from the change process and will be
described specifically in the sections on intrapreneurial, achiever, and profession knowledge behaviors.

*Change Architect.* The turnaround leaders operated as change architects. They facilitated and designed the changes for their schools. Principal I described the turnaround process as “huge, it’s about making things different, nothing is sacred, everything can be changed. It is an evaluative process, if it’s not working for our kids, it’s not worth doing.” The turnaround principals were strategic in their approach to change. While some of them changed everything, they did not do so without bringing the teachers along and explaining to them what they were doing and why they were doing it. Fullan (2001) calls the change process,

Reculturing…transforming the culture—changing the way things are done—is the main point…effective leaders know that the hard work of reculturing is the sine qua non of progress. Furthermore, it is a particular kind of reculturing for which we strive: one that activates and deepens moral purpose. (p. 44)

Reculturing the turnaround schools involved strategized changes with people, resources, structures, and time. Changing people’s behaviors is not easy to do and involves both an emotional and intellectual approach. Emotionally, if the principal has a good relationship with the teachers, he or she can counsel the teachers to a different environment. Intellectually, a leader can approach a people change through strategy, vision, and engagement of new ways of thinking. This approach can intellectually manipulate people to choose to follow the new way or choose another way. The turnaround principals talked about the staff shifts that occurred in their schools. Some chose the emotional approach for some staff and others utilized the intellectual approach.
In his book on companies that moved from good to great, Collins (2003) wrote about what great leaders did in regards to people changes. The good to great leaders began the transformation by first getting the right people on the bus and the wrong people off the bus. They also focused on getting the right people in the right seats on the bus (p. 41). “The good to great leaders were rigorous not ruthless in people decisions” (p. 63).

The turnaround principals talked about how they made staffing changes

We changed the culture of the school and the staff. I had quite a few people who retired and I had quite a few people who moved to other schools…hiring the right staff became very important. The staff that was here when I started were not changing, the school was changing and they were not changing. It wasn’t that they were doing a bad job it was just that they were not right for the school anymore. It’s one of those things you need to either be on the boat or get off the boat. (Principal A)

There were some people here that did not belong in a Title school. I don’t feel it’s for everybody. You have to work twice as hard in a Title school than in a non-Title school. There are just so many issues you deal with on a daily basis. They were not up for that challenge and they were not here for the right reasons. I assessed who was in my building and who needed to be in my building. I did move some people out that first year that didn’t belong here and I coached some people out of the building. They were happy, I was happy. I was able to hire three teachers my first year. I look for certain criteria when I hire teachers. They really need to know education, they have to have a Title background, they have to be compassionate, and they have to know what good instruction looks like. (Principal E)

I told people, if you don’t want to be in this building you can leave. People knew who I was concerned about. I moved people around, I let people go. People who stayed know that we are doing what is best for kids. (Principal C)

Other principals talked about how the new vision and philosophical changes led staff to seek other school positions. “People left because they realized things were going to be different” (Principal B). Additionally the turnaround principals reassigned staff to
optimize their strengths. They described how they utilized additional Title I school people resources such as instructional coaches, literacy coaches, and interventionists in different ways. “I moved 35% of the staff around…putting them with their strengths…staffing looks different, how we use Title staff, Special Education staff, paras, ESL staff, it is all very different” (Principal F). Principal C was also very purposeful in his staffing changes, as he stated, “I identified teachers that were really strong in reading and I put them in reading interventions [positions]. I moved people around. People still have ill feelings about that, but that is okay, it is what is best for kids.”

Changing the way they used their people resources was an important act that demonstrated things were changing to align with the new vision and moral purpose of schooling. The turnaround principals also changed how they used their material and structural resources. For some, there were dramatic program changes including school focus or curriculum. For others, they made changes in how they functioned as a school and their ways of doing things. One major change they all had in common was the way they utilized data to improve instruction, and the way they provided resources for academic interventions. The principals talked about how they set up data days or data talks where all the teachers came together to talk about how their students were progressing academically. One principal showed the researcher a wall of data in the hallway, another had devoted a whole room to displays of data, and another shared a notebook where all the data from the school was kept.

Regardless of the method chosen to address data, each principal was conscious of the data focus and spoke of it as a significant change in practice. Another significant change in practice related to data analysis was the change in how instructional
interventions were provided for students. The data and instructional changes will be explained in more detail in the section on professional knowledge.

The turnaround principals also shared how they had established leadership teams for input and decision making purposes. The leadership teams functioned as sounding boards, as instructional leaders, as a staff development planning teams and as the go to teams for new initiatives. In addition to leadership teams, the principals created other teams for the purpose of establishing Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in their schools. The concept of a PLC comes from the work of Rick DuFour, a former high school principal and superintendent who created this concept from his exemplary work in schools. Since its original debut in 1998, the concept of PLC has become a common term in schools used to describe any sort of grouping of educators. However, DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many (2006) argue that it is not just any grouping of educators in a meeting. PLCs are high functioning learning teams;

The very essence of a learning community is a focus on and a commitment to the learning of each student. When a school or district functions as a PLC, educators within the organization embrace high levels of learning for all students as both the reason the organization exists and the fundamental responsibility of those who work within it. In order to achieve this purpose, the members of a PLC create and are guided by a clear and compelling vision of what the organization must become in order to help all students learn (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006, p. 3)

The researcher recognized the PLC concept as defined by its originators, and for the purposes of this study will use that definition. The turnaround principals were change architects in their acts of creating PLCs to build capacity and sustainability in their buildings. Principal D stated,
The first thing I wanted to do was to work as a PLC. So the first thing we did is a book study around DuFour’s book, I wanted everyone to be on the same page around what a professional learning community was and we had conversations from there and we learned a lot of things from that [experience].

We built a strong PLC, we were constantly asking the four questions about students. What do we want students to learn? How will we know if they are learning it? What will we do if they don’t learn? Or what will we do if they already know it? (Principal F)

We have achievement and results meetings. We discuss plans for interventions or enrichment for kids. These are very, focused meetings. I am not there as an administrator, I am there as an outside resource. I get insight into how the kids are doing. (Principal B)

Another change the turnaround principals led was how time was used in their schools. They changed their school schedules, time for instruction, time for intervention, and created time for teachers to meet in learning teams. One principal even changed the school day, increasing instructional time to 7 hours a day.

Change architects have to be able to envision the changes and help their systems adjust to accommodate the changes. They also need to be comfortable with ambiguity and at times uncertainty as they move forward with the changes. Fullan (2001) advises leaders in change to be aware of the complexities of change, “There can never be a clear recipe or cookbook for change, nor a step by step process” (p. 44). He encourages leaders to develop their own mindsets through the maze of change and that it is in the act of learning while doing that change happens (2001, 2006). Each of the turnaround principals followed a different path to change their schools, but what was evident from the research was that they were not only comfortable with change, they actually found it energizing and motivating.
**Focused.** The turnaround principals were persistently focused on their missions to turnaround their schools. Once their visions were conceived, they engaged in purposeful action, change, and involvement with their staffs. They were focused on solving their schools’ problems by improving the lives of the children in their schools through educational achievement. The changes in their schools were evaluated for their effect on improving achievement. Being focused required them to constantly analyze their behaviors, the work being done in the school, and school systems, structures and practices. If what they were doing was not making a difference, they reviewed it against their goals and re-focused. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) identified focus as one of the 21 responsibilities of school leaders that positively affected student achievement.

The effect of focus on student achievement was 24%. They define focus as,

> The extent to which the leader establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school’s attention…Specific behaviors and characteristics associated with this responsibility and identified in our meta-analysis are the following:

- Establishing concrete goals for curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices in the school
- Establishing concrete goals for the general functioning of the school
- Establishing high, concrete goals, and expectations that all students will meet them
- Continually keeping attention on established goals. (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005)

Whether based on the CDE audit or state required plans, the turnaround principals talked about their school improvement plans as their guide and focus
We aligned the school improvement plan and put it in place in the building and tied all the strategies to our plan...I wanted it to demonstrate what we were doing in the building. If I walked into classrooms, I should see that what was taking place was aligned with the plan. (Principal C)

The turnaround leaders described their focus as both narrow and broad. They focused narrowly on individual students and as they focused broadly on the whole system at the same time. Most important to them was that they focused on doing the right things. They focused on instruction, on data, on monitoring the progress of students, on collaboration, on relationships, and on changing the beliefs of staff. The principals saw themselves as the keepers of the focus on student achievement. One principal shared a story about her unrelenting focus impacting the students,

When we were recognized as a Title I Distinguished School for closing the achievement gap, the Colorado Commissioner for Education came to award our school. One of my students approached him and said, “We say the ‘F’ word around here all the time.” The Commissioner looked down at him quizzically and said, “You do?” and the little boy said, “Yeah, focus, focus, focus, that’s what our principal always tells us, she tells us to focus!” (Principal F)

As systemic strategists, they had to focus on how to move the entire school system to a new way of being. This new way of being required them to engage their attributes as intrapreneurs and achievers. They also had to utilize their professional knowledge of education and researched based best practices for student learning.

Systemic Strategist Sub-Category I: Intrapreneur

The concept of intrapreneur was coined by Gifford Pinchot III in 1985, who described an intrapreneur as someone working inside a larger organization who behaved like an entrepreneur (Brown & Cornwall, 2000).
Because they closely resemble entrepreneurs, we call the people who turn ideas into realities inside an organization ‘intrapreneurs.’ The intrapreneur may or may not be the person who first comes up with an idea. Intrapreneurs roll up their sleeves and get things done. They recruit others to help. Whether working on an idea that was originally their own or building on someone else’s, they are the ‘dreamers who do.’ (Pinchot & Pellman, 1999, p. 16)

Turnaround principals are intrapreneurs doing the work of turning around their schools. They cannot behave completely entrepreneurially because they are limited to what they can do within the constraints of the larger organization. The school is not their own business, but they act like it is. Brown and Cornwall describe the attributes of an intrapreneur that the research found to be applicable to the turnaround principals,

1. **Passion and commitment.** Successful intrapreneurs have a strong emotional commitment to the opportunity. An intrapreneur will talk about the opportunity as if it were his or her own business.
2. **Serve self and the organization…** Successful intrapreneurs develop dual loyalty. Although they are committed to the school system and its goals and understand that they are pursuing their projects for the good of the school system in which they work, they are also incredibly loyal to their projects.
3. **Team building.** Successful intrapreneurs generally have the ability to build strong teams and work well with a variety of people inside and outside the organization.
4. **Leadership.** Successful intrapreneurs not only build strong teams but also have the ability to inspire their teams and create within the team the same passion and commitment for the project they have.
5. **Problem solvers.** Since they often work with a great deal of autonomy, intrapreneurs must be good problem solvers.
6. **Management skills.** Intrapreneurs must be able to bring together the resources, support, and information needed to successfully implement their projects.
7. **Communication skills.** Successful intrapreneurs are generally excellent communicators… intrapreneurs must be able to communicate the vision to team members and other stakeholders.
8. **Tolerate risk and uncertainty…** [Successful] intrapreneurs [must be able to] tolerate a moderate amount of risk and thrive on it. Intrapreneurs also must be able to tolerate uncertainty and ambiguity.
9. **Decision makers.** [Successful] intrapreneurs must be good decision makers… Educational intrapreneurs must be able to make decisions, at least in part, on the basis of intuition and experience.
According to the turnaround literature, turnaround educational leaders are entrepreneurial (Murphy & Meyers, 2007). The researcher found the turnaround principals to be more intrapreneurial than entrepreneurial. While coding and memoing the literature for the concept intrapreneur, the researcher was able to relate each of the attributes described by Brown and Cornwall (2000) to the turnaround principals.

The turnaround principals were passionate and committed to their schools and to the turnaround process. Passion was a property of the main category beliefs and committed is related to the property of significance. They serve themselves because it is a moral and personal conviction to do what they are doing, and it is not easy work. They serve the organization by doing the work of the greater good and are driven by the moral purpose of serving others. They are extremely loyal to their schools and their staffs. The turnaround principals are relational and naturally build strong teams, they connected with others inside and outside their schools. They inspired their teams to make changes in their practices—the kinds of changes that led to increased student achievement. The results of their work motivated their schools to continue on with passion and commitment. The turnaround principals have demonstrated their problem solving and management skills as systemic strategists. They navigated the turnaround process by making changes such as, accessing resources, moving staff, and altering the way things were done in their schools. They are strong communicators and were able to inspire people to work toward a new vision of what their schools could be. The turnaround principals were comfortable with risk, ambiguity, and uncertainty. They did not have a guidebook for their work, they had to learn while doing the work. They were excellent decision makers and used their experience as administrators and teachers as a foundation for decision making. They
remembered what it was like to be a teacher and made thoughtful decisions with that in mind. They also knew when to make a quick decision to act and when to enlist the staff in the decision making process.

The literature and research results support turnaround leaders as intraprenuers. The researcher discovered the category intraprenuer to have two properties, optimizer and innovator (see Figure 11).

![Intrapreneur Diagram](image)

*Figure 11. Systemic Strategist Sub-Category I: Intrapreneur*

**Intrapreneur: Properties**

*Optimizer.* The turnaround principals were optimizers. An optimizer is a person who can make something function at its best. The turnaround principals optimized the people in their schools to do their best work, they optimized resources, and they maintained optimistic attitudes. Examples of the turnaround principals optimizing people include, Principal C who moved the people that were the best at teaching reading to reading interventionist positions. Principal E replaced her literacy coach because she was not coaching teachers in classrooms. The coach was great at collecting data, summarizing
information, and accessing resources for teachers, but she was not improving instruction. Principal A networked with experts and district personnel to get the best support in her school in order to advance her new program.

The turnaround principals maintained optimistic attitudes. They are inspired by optimism and seeing the positives of what they are doing and creating. “I am optimistic, I never take “no” for an answer, where there is a will, there is a way” (Principal F).

My glass is half-full! That is just the way I have to go… I truly believe that I am doing the right things. What helps me to do what I do here is the community that I have created here. It is a great community… it feels good here… and people notice who have not been here in awhile. It feels better and better. (Principal A)

The turnaround principals also looked for ways to improve the functionality of their schools. They optimized their resources to find creative ways to provide interventions for students. They figured out ways to enhance instructional time and increase student engagement. Principals C, F, and D optimized the CDE audit to make changes in their schools. They took the grant seriously and optimized the resources it brought to their schools.

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) identified optimizer as one of the 21 responsibilities of school leaders that positively affected student achievement. The effect of optimizer on student achievement was 20%. They define and explain optimizer as,

The extent to which the leader inspires others and is the driving force when implanting a challenging innovation. Specific behaviors and characteristics associated with this responsibility and identified in our meta-analysis are the following:

• Inspiring teachers to accomplish things that might be beyond their grasp

• Being the driving force behind major initiatives
• Portraying a positive attitude about the ability of staff to accomplish substantial things

The turnaround principals were inspirational to their teachers as they envisioned a better school, new ways of doing things, and improved educational achievement for their students. In order to solve the problem of improving the lives of the children in their schools through educational achievement, they acted as intrapreneurs who optimized their people, resources, time. The difference between the turnaround leader and other intrapreneurs is that the turnaround leaders behaved as moral intrapreneurs, they did what they did in the interest of improving the lives of the children in their schools.

Innovator. Turnaround principals were innovators. They were constantly thinking about how to solve the problem of improving the lives of the children in their schools in new and innovative ways. The old methods had not worked and so they had to challenge the old ways of thinking and doing things in their schools. The turnaround principals had to think “outside the box.” They had to think outside the current box of schooling and envision a new box of schooling. Principal F said,

I try to be the leader that I would like to work for. I try to stay open to new ideas and to change. When I first started I told the teachers, If we do what we’ve always done, we’re gonna get what we’ve always got. And look at these numbers, you’re not satisfied with them; I am not satisfied with them, we all want to change... We’re gonna start over... with an open slate and nothing is the wrong answer.

Innovation is highly related to change, to be innovative one has to be able to do things in new and creative ways. The turnaround principals knew that they had to change almost all, if not all, aspects of their school system to improve academic achievement. They were systemically strategic in how they approached the changes and accessed their
intrapreneurial spirit as the driver of many of the changes. Fullan (2001) discusses how innovation is related to change, “understanding the change process is less about innovation and more about innovativeness” (p. 31). It is not about innovation as a thing, it is about being innovative, doing things differently. Many of these schools suffered from a common symptom in high poverty schools, called overprogramitis. They were chock full of instructional programs, but there was no alignment or focus of these programs. Many of the schools also suffered from a lack of systems, structures, and procedures necessary to operate efficiently. The turnaround principals had to understand what was going on in their schools and how they came to be that way, before they could innovate to align, remove, or change programs, systems, structures, or procedures.

Each turnaround principal approached innovativeness organically. The changes they made to programs of instruction, structures such as schedules and leadership teams, and procedures for how they used time and how they worked together were not new innovations in education. They were innovative in how they changed these things from the inside of their schools. The important point here is that they led their schools in becoming innovative. In order to lead innovativeness, the turnaround principals had to be inherently innovative themselves. Being innovative involved a thorough understanding of their organization and knowledge of their organizations’ purposes. The turnaround principals all had strong backgrounds in education and instructional leadership. They worked with their teachers to understand their schools’ populations and their communities. Their innovative acts focused on improving their schools’ responsiveness to students.
Principal D had her staff read the book *Creating Emotionally Safe Schools* by Jane Bluestein. She felt that a lot of the discipline problems in her school stemmed from not only how her staff was responding to the students, but also from a lack of understanding of the students themselves. The innovativeness was in how she used the book to start the conversations about how best to respond to children’s needs. The book study resulted in more responsive teachers, less students sitting in the office, and more students learning.

Principal B talked enthusiastically about how he posed problems to his teachers that they needed to take ownership for and solve. Through the process of innovating team structures focused on instruction, the school was able to solve problems at the “levels closest to the kids.” He shared how as a leadership team they provided the tools for the teachers, but the teachers came up with the specifics of how to make things work. “Our tendency was to come up with the solutions all the time... we realized that the teachers needed to decide, they have great ideas and then they own it.”

Principal E created a different style of leadership team that was focused on instruction. She said, “The teachers prefer to hear from a classroom teacher. When it comes from a teacher who is doing it daily, it has more credibility. This team does all the professional development for our school, all instructional type things.” She shared how this is the team she goes to when looking to make instructional changes.

As the head innovator in the school, the turnaround principal had to challenge the mental models operating in their schools. The term, mental model, comes from Senge’s (2000) work on systems thinking. He states,
Human beings… are creatures of interpretation. Our behavior and our attitudes are shaped by the images, assumptions, and stories that we carry in our minds of ourselves, other people, institutions and every aspect of the world… Because mental models are usually tacit, existing below the level of awareness, they are often untested and unexamined. (p.67)

The mental models operating in the schools before the turnaround were limiting the ability to change and innovate. The turnaround principals fostered the environment of innovativeness by openly and candidly challenging the teachers to examine and test their mental models in use. These conversations were morally based. The principals asked their teachers to justify and give evidence that the mental models in use were the best practices for their students. The inquiry led to innovative practices that ultimately led to increased student achievement.

**Systemic Strategist Sub-Category II: Achiever**

The turnaround principals were morally driven to achieve by their fundamental beliefs. Their primary interest was in improving the lives of the children in their schools through academic achievement. “I am driven everyday to make a difference. I am never satisfied with the results, we can always do better” (Principal I). “I am passionate and driven to ensure that our kids are successful, I am not someone who necessarily needs pats on the back, however that translates to me as a leader” (Principal D).

They organized the work of turning around their schools by their systemic strategist approach. A sub-category of systemic strategist was achiever. As achievers, they displayed a drive to get the job done, but they also understood that they could not do the work alone. Therefore, they were also driven by a need for deep relationships. They talked about getting the work done by motivating and inspiring their people. The researcher heard a sense of competiveness from the turnaround principals,
We were sick of being second fiddle. There was a perception in the community that the other school was the good school and we were second fiddle. We never felt like we had second rate teachers or students…we committed to going for it! (Principal B)

“I am honest with my staff…they know what others thought of us. We have been trying to beat the odds. We have presented our work to others, our name and reputation have changed” (Principal E). The turnaround principals expressed not wanting to be known as the low school, the poor school, or the needy school as a motivator for their determination to turnaround their schools. Principal A stated, “I am a determined person…determined to make sure that kids are receiving the education they need to receive. I am determined about kids.”

They are resolute doers, initiators, and activators. According to Fullan (2003), “the moral imperative of the principal involves leading deep cultural change that mobilizes the passion and commitment of teachers, parents, and others to improve the learning of all students” (p. 41). Turnaround principals do not lead this kind of change from the sidelines—they get in the middle of the huddle to get the work done. Principal C discovered that his before and afterschool programs lacked structure and focus. He found that students and parents did not understand its purpose. He enlisted his secretary and between the two of them made personal phone calls to parents to get students to the program. When parents resisted, giving excuses like it was too cold for their kids, or too dark outside for them to walk home safely, Principal C knocked on doors and promised to walk kids home. He said, “It’s my military upbringing and being in the military, you have to lead by example and you have to have high expectations for yourself, the kids, the staff and the parents.”
These principals were willing to do whatever they asked their teachers to do.

Principal J stated this emphatically,

I ask the staff to take risks, but I never ask them to do anything that I am not willing to do. I even put myself in a position to lead a math talk. That was not easy for me, but I did it because I wanted them to see me take a risk.

As doers, the turnaround principals spent time with their teachers analyzing data and discussing what needed to be done in their schools to improve learning. They provided the structures and resources so that teachers could do their jobs. They learned with the teachers, they went into classrooms and worked with students, they assessed students, and compiled data for review. They initiated action through provocative questioning and challenging the status quo. They activated others to act, by demonstrating the “can do spirit” themselves.

In the beginning, they had to be autocratic to get the momentum in the school to shift from a “woe is us” attitude to “we can do this” attitude. This behavior aligns with the Murphy and Meyers (2008) turnaround research literature that found turnaround leaders to be directive in the retrenchment stage. While they were observing the school and learning about it, they were also prioritizing their steps in the turnaround process, what they were going to do that would make the biggest difference in improving student achievement. They strategized how they were going to organize and orchestrate the process of turning around their schools. The researcher discovered the sub-category achiever to have three properties, prioritizer, organizer, and orchestrator (see Figure 12).
Figure 12. Systemic Strategist Sub-Category II: Achiever

**Achiever: Properties**

*Prioritizer.* The turnaround principals were effective at prioritizing their efforts. Some priorities surfaced at the beginning as leverage to garner the greatest effect for their efforts. Other priorities became evident throughout the change/turnaround process. The turnaround principals first analyzed what was happening in their schools for impact, value, and effect on student achievement. With “kids first” as a common motto, they began by analyzing data and asking questions.

Some of the questions they asked themselves include the same general questions as mentioned in the change facilitators section describing PLCs. They also asked more specific questions such as: What is this data telling us? Who are the teachers that are getting the best results? Do we have alignment in our curriculum, instruction and assessment? Are we teaching the right things? How much time are we devoting to literacy?

From these questions they moved on to questions about needed changes: What people changes need to be made? What instructional and assessment changes need to be
made? What systemic structures, programs and procedures need to change? They asked morally related questions: What beliefs and attitudes about our students need to change?

“Effective leaders see what is essential and ignore the rest” (Schmoker, 2006).

The turnaround leaders were clear about what was important, the kids came first. They analyzed what was and was not working and got rid of practices that were not contributing to improving student achievement. They prioritized their actions associated with individual students; all participants echoed similar statements, saying the following:

It is about those individual kiddos, I sit in those staffings and meetings and know that we still have those kids that are not making progress… What do we need to do to help them reach success?...We had to get clear about instruction… What is our purpose for being here if not for teaching students well?... My priority is the kids… You always go into a Title I school with the intent that you want students to achieve… We still have students falling through the cracks, that is just not acceptable… My job is to ensure that students are achieving.

Principal J said, “If it is really not working for our kids, it really is not worth doing.” The turnaround principals had many issues to contend with at the start of the turnaround process. Putting kids first seemed to ease the pressure of all that they had to do.

The turnaround principals prioritized around people. They determined who was contributing positively to their mission of turning around their schools. They shifted people into key positions and different positions to gain the greatest effects on student achievement and school climate. They prioritized resources, traded out some things for other things, let some programs and practices go for other high leverage ones. They prioritized instructional time for literacy and math and created protected time where there were no interruptions. Old systems and structures in the school were found to inhibit their new practices. The turnaround principals prioritized which structures and procedures
needed to be altered or changed to provide the teachers with time to do what they needed them to do.

_Organizer._ Driven by their need to achieve, the turnaround principals appeared to appreciate order in their lives. The turnaround principals were both self-organized and organized in their approaches.

While they were not impeccable, the offices of the turnaround leaders were orderly and simple. Only one of the turnaround leaders had piles of papers and books all around her office. The others had cleared desks and organized notebooks on their shelves. They had data and books they accessed frequently at their fingertips. They each spoke about arriving early at school to take care of email, phone mail, and school business. Once the students and staff arrived, they were out of their offices checking in with students, parents, and teachers. Most shared that the only time they get the principal paperwork done was at the end of the day or in the evenings or weekends. One principal was so organized that she confessed that she did not take school work home. All of the turnaround principals talked about organizing and managing their time in order to get into classrooms every day, to meet with teacher teams, to monitor student achievement, and to check in with kids. All participants responded,

Even though I am right brained, I like to plan ahead too, in case there are complications in the day I have everything ready… Every day is different… I like to spend time in classrooms every day so I have to schedule that in… I block time for it… As an instructional leader in a school in the midst of change, you have to be in classrooms. I plan to be in classrooms every single day… I like to start my day in the cafeteria with kids… checking in on them. Then in my office I check my calendar… I like to get here early, I am extremely organized, in an anal sort of way… my best day is when I can start with kids. I prioritize and make lots of lists… I start my days early… I walk about and check on people and kids…then I get in classrooms as much as possible… my goal is always at least two walkthroughs each day in every classroom.
The turnaround principals did not appear to be abstract leaders. They knew exactly what they needed to do and how they were going to go about it. They demonstrated organization in how they spoke about their work with methodical, purposeful, vivid, and specific language. Some of the turnaround leaders seemed to be more of big picture people than others, but what they had in common was their ability to conceptualize the complexities of the turnaround process in an organized fashion. The researcher noted that they organized everything about the ways their buildings operated, from how parents accessed students during the day to schedules and how they used the time before and after school. The turnaround principals organized their staffs to maximize the strengths of each person. They organized how they looked at data by providing protocols and structures for data analysis. Even professional development was organized to correlate to the turnaround work.

An important aspect of organization is understanding the value of order. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) identified order as one of the 21 responsibilities of school leaders that positively affected student achievement. The effect of order on student achievement was 25%. They define order as,

The extent to which the school leader establishes a set of standard operating principles and routines…In our meta-analysis, the responsibility of Order involved the following specific behaviors:

- Establishing routines for the smooth running of the school that staff understand and follow.
- Providing and reinforcing clear structures, rules, and procedures for staff.
- Providing and reinforcing clear structures, rules, and procedures for students.
The turnaround principals prioritized and organized their actions and behaviors in order to achieve and were driven by their morals to do so. Like orchestra conductors, they orchestrated how they prioritized and organized into a seamless production of a turnaround in their schools. Prioritization and organization cannot happen without orchestration.

Orchestrators. The turnaround principals were masterful orchestrators. Turning around a school is a complex and daunting task (Murphy & Meyers; Duke, 2007; Kannapel & Clements, 2005). They seemed to have the perfect balance of knowing when to push and when to pull back, and when to challenge and when to reflect. The turnaround principals were able to orchestrate the turnaround process by balancing their intellectual and emotional leadership attributes. Orchestrators need to have a good sense of who they are leading and what strengths and weaknesses they possess. They have to have people willing to follow them and be willing to align with their missions and goals.

The turnaround principals orchestrated the turnaround in a number of interrelated ways. They achieved buy in by demonstrating morals through their leadership, by leading by example, by having high expectations, and by helping their teachers to envision a new way of being. They orchestrated their priorities of people, resources, and time. They organized the people by getting the wrong people off the bus and getting the right people in the right seats on the bus. They organized and prioritized the turnaround work to be the right work done efficiently. Conversations were orchestrated to change behaviors which ultimately led to changing beliefs.
Orchestration of the turnaround involved the principals’ relational attributes. Changing the whole system of how they operated their schools caused a disturbance in the worlds of all those involved. The turnaround principals had to be conscious of this disturbance in order to purposefully orchestrate it. An example of this orchestration is described by Principal A,

I take risks, so I can be stubborn when I think something will work. So when people say ‘no it won’t work.’ I say, come on, jump in the river with me, we will be fine, it will be fine. Sometimes I have to rein myself in a bit and let the people process that need to process… That is such a challenge for me.

Heifetz and Linsky (2002) advise leaders to orchestrate the conflict and not become the conflict. Orchestrating the conflict happens when leaders are able to control the temperature of conflict. Heifetz and Linsky state, “changing the status quo generates tension and produces heat by surfacing hidden conflicts and challenging organizational culture” (p. 107). The turnaround principals as the orchestrators of change were adept at monitoring the reactions to change. They were ready to provide support and resources and to compromise if necessary. They were willing to share the leadership and gave those closest to the problems the opportunity for input and solution generation. This required the principals to maintain not just intellectual capacity, but also a high level of emotional intelligence.

Emotional intelligence comes from the work of Daniel Goleman. Goleman (1998) defines emotional intelligence as “the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships” (p. 317). “It is not surprising that the most effective leaders are
not those with the highest IQ's but those who combine mental intelligence with emotional intelligence" (Fullan, 2004, p. 93).

The turnaround principals were driven by their achiever attribute to orchestrate the work of turning around their schools. They were masterful at orchestration because they were able to balance their intellectual and emotional attributes. Leading morally enabled them to orchestrate effectively and at the same time manage their achiever attribute.

**Systemic Strategist Sub-Category III: Professional Knowledge.**

Current literature on educational improvement abounds with the importance of the school principal being an instructional leader (Elmore, 2007; Fink & Resnick, Fullan 2006a, Marzano, Waters, and McNulty, 2005; Reeves, 2003 & 2005; Schmoker, 2006; Sparks, 2005). Elmore (2007) strongly relates “instructional leadership is the holy grail in educational administration” (p. 48). Unfortunately, the literature also laments that even though the concept of principals as instructional leaders is regarded as highly important, the reality of principals leading in this way is not occurring to scale (Schmoker, 2006).

The participants in this study exhibited high levels of education professional knowledge, both theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge. Fullan (2001) identified knowledge building to be a key skill for leaders. “Effective leaders understand the value and role of knowledge creation, they make it a priority and set about establishing and reinforcing habits of knowledge exchange among organizational members” (p. 87). Fullan also said, “Moral purpose accompanied by a powerful pedagogy is unstoppable” (2006).
The content from the interviews indicated that the turnaround principals knew the work of teaching and learning. All but one of the turnaround principals had 10 years experience as teachers, and all but one had at least six years experience as administrators. Principal A stated, “I know we are in line with what the experts are saying really makes a difference in schools.”

The turnaround principals realized that having a clear understanding of the purpose of education was a critical factor in aligning the curriculum, instruction, and assessment in their schools. In the area of curriculum, they helped their schools identify what tools and resources they would use to teach. In instruction, they identified how they would teach students of poverty, students whose native language was not English, and students who struggled to learn. In the area of assessment, they worked to utilize their school and district assessments to inform their instruction and they used assessment information to generate meaningful data. They monitored instruction and made teaching and learning in their schools a public and collective affair.

The turnaround principals hired teachers who were knowledgeable in curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The new hires were also learners, willing to challenge their thinking and teaching practice to create better methodologies for instruction. The principals also moved staff around to optimize their strengths. Most importantly, the principals modeled the importance of learning, they were the head learners in their schools. They set high expectations for themselves and for the teachers as learners. The expectations were monitored by the principals with feedback when they were not being met.
Knowledge based organizations utilize current research and literature to inform their practice. The turnaround principals incorporated a variety of methods from current research to model teaching and learning.

Another thing we are trying to do more and more is to model effective teaching with our staff meetings. We have a specific agenda, an objective, and then we reflect on whether we met our objectives. We recently used a matrix on engagement with the teachers and showed them how we were assessing engagement of the staff in the staff meeting (Principal B).

The turnaround principals paid attention to all learners, the adults, the students and themselves. They monitored the learning of everyone and encouraged team learning. The team learning structure is a goal of the turnaround principal as a systemic strategist. Team learning is a component of Senge’s (1990) model of systems thinking. “Learning that changes mental models is immensely challenging. It is disorienting. It can be frightening as we confront cherished beliefs and assumptions. It cannot be done alone. It can occur only within a community of learners” (Senge, 1990, p. xv).

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) identified intellectual stimulation as one of the 21 responsibilities of school leaders that positively affected student achievement. The effect of intellectual stimulation on student achievement was 24%. They define and explain intellectual stimulation as,

- Continually exposing staff to cutting-edge research an theory on effective schooling.

The extent to which the school leader ensures that faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices regarding effective schooling an makes discussions of those theories and practices a regular aspect of the school’s culture…Specific behaviors and characteristics associated with this responsibility and identified in our meta-analysis are the following:
• Keeping informed about current research and theory on effective schooling.

• Fostering systematic discussion regarding current research and theory on effective schooling. (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005, p. 52-53)

The turnaround principals created the team learning structures to put a context to what they were doing. They were learning the work while doing the work. They did not recognize that they were doing turnaround work as defined in the literature, nor did they go into the principal position with that in mind. They used their profession knowledge to address the problem of improving the lives of the children in their schools through academic achievement. Because of their deep moral commitments, they continued to learn and apply their learning to solve their problem. Fullan (2005) calls these type of leaders “the new theoreticians…people working on the real problem of transforming real systems, learning by doing it” (p. 14). The category of professional knowledge has three properties, knows organizational purpose, knows how to accomplish organizational purpose, and knows how to measure success (see Figure 13).

Figure 13. Systemic Strategist Sub-Category III: Professional Knowledge
**Professional Knowledge: Properties**

*Knows organizational purpose.* Educators are in the business of teaching and learning. Fink and Resnick (2001) describe the need for “very strong instructional leaders who share a common set of commitments to teaching and learning, along with a sense of belonging to an effective and demanding professional learning community” (p. 605). The turnaround principals were instructional leaders and instructional learners. They spoke of their schools as learning environments and prioritized learning for all. The adults in the school modeled the learning environment they expected in their classrooms. The work from the adult learning transferred to the classrooms. Turnaround schools are laboratory like environments. Everyone is constantly looking at the data and results and determining what they need to do next to improve. “PLCs at the school level are crucial in establishing cultures in which teachers learn from each other and school leaders and teachers collaborate on continuous improvement” (Fullan, 2006a, p. 87).

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) identified Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment as one of the 21 responsibilities of school leaders that positively affected student achievement. The effect of involvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment on student achievement was 20%. They define this responsibility as

The extent to which the principal is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment activities at the classroom level…Specific behaviors and characteristics associated with this responsibility as defined by our meta-analysis are the following:

- Being directly involved in helping teachers design curricular activities.
• Being directly involved in helping teachers address assessment issues.
• Being directly involved in helping teachers address instructional issues.

The turnaround principals encouraged a collaborative culture for learning. They brought in articles for staff to read, engaged in action research, and employed research based best practices in all areas of teaching, learning, and assessment. “It almost feels like we are doing action research every moment of the day” (Principal D). Principal G said that one of the first things she did when she arrived at her school was engage the staff in action research. She was trying to break down myths the teachers had about who was contributing to their low achievement. They incorporated professional learning into their faculty meetings and team meetings. According to Senge (1990), “The organizations that will truly excel in the future will be the organizations that discover how to tap people’s commitment and capacity to learn at all levels in an organization” (p. 4).

*Knows how to accomplish organizational purpose.* Educational achievement is accomplished through quality curriculum and highly effective instructional practices. The turnaround principals focused on aligning the curriculum, instruction and assessments in their schools. Upon arriving in their schools, many of the principals found fragmentation of curriculum, unfocused instruction and vague use of assessments. The curriculum was prioritized and narrowed, program fidelity was highlighted, and standards based teaching was revitalized. Principal B shared how they had to “pull weeds and get rid of the fluff,” which meant they had to refine and clarify what they were going to teach. Principal I gave an example of removing the Sustained Silent Reading time in her building. She said,
“It was fifteen minutes every day and students were just not engaged in purposeful reading, we got rid of it!”

The turnaround principals also focused on instruction. Instructional time became sacred and protected. Teachers identified teaching points from data analysis and provided targeted and specific instruction to student needs. The before and after school programs were aligned to meet student needs and to provide specific interventions. One principal shared that now their school follows the bell to bell model of instruction, no time is ever wasted. Principal I said, “The global approach does not make sense for instruction, if you want to make a difference you have to focus on the individual students and what they need.” The turnaround principals did walk throughs in their buildings, monitored instruction, and met with teachers frequently. They also gave specific feedback to teachers regarding their instruction and alignment with goals and improvement plan.

Research was utilized to better inform their practices. Three schools used brain research to provide better instruction in reading. Another school changed their school focus and became experts in Dual Language instruction. Others incorporated research on student engagement, instruction, interventions, and creating emotionally safe schools.

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) identified knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment as one of the 21 responsibilities of school leaders that positively affected student achievement. The effect of Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment on student achievement was 25%. They define and explain this responsibility as,

The extent to which the leader is aware of best practices in these domains. The focus here is on the acquisition and cultivation of knowledge…Specific behaviors and characteristics identified in our meta-analysis and associated with this
responsibility are the following:

- Possessing extensive knowledge about effective instructional practices.
- Possessing extensive knowledge about effective curriculum practices.
- Possessing extensive knowledge about effective assessment practices.
- Providing conceptual guidance regarding effective classroom practices. (pp. 54-55)

All schools invested time in studying about and employing practices of team learning or Professional Learning Communities. Schmoker (2006) advocates for learning communities, “It is this simple: schools won’t improve until the average building leader begins to work cooperatively with teachers to truly meaningfully oversee and improve instructional quality” (p. 29).

Knows measures of success. The results of education are measured in knowledge and achievement of taught curriculum. The analysis of assessments in the form of data informs educators whether they were successful or not. Reeves (2002) sums this up A data friendly school uses numbers not as a weapon, but as a guide. The data-friendly leader uses measurement not only to suggest how children can improve their performance but more important how the adults in the system can improve their leadership, teaching and curriculum strategies. (p. 44)

The turnaround principals were very conscious of their achievement results. This was evident in their data walls, data rooms, and data notebooks. All of the principals talked about data and how it was used in their schools to inform curriculum choices and instructional practice. Principal H said, “We have to know what is in our sandbox, what tools we have to use.” Principal E stated, “I was the driving force in setting expectations. We started collecting data, analyzing data, making changes in instruction and targeting
kids for intervention; then we had to figure out whether the intervention worked or not.”

The turnaround principals were critical thinkers when it came to assessments. They knew which ones they used and for what purposes. Principal F said, “We are diagnostic with our assessments, we can no longer say, ‘my heart tells me that this is where this kid is.’ We have to be knowledgeable about the use of assessments.” The principals used a variety of data sources and were able to speak about the assessment tools and forms of data knowledgeable.

Data was used as a meaningful tool by the turnaround principals. Principal J said, “I am adamant, the data belongs to all of us, not just the teachers giving the CSAPs.”

Principal D had strong feelings about knowing the data herself, and said,

I know every single student that did not make AYP. There is value in knowing that… as a leader you have to be on top of the data that is meaningful, and you have to know how to filter that data for your teachers. Generally, I believe it is our job to filter the data that is going to be the most meaningful. As quickly as we can make that data available for our teachers, the quicker we can make instructional decisions for our kids.

The teachers at Principal F’s school were not used to looking at data in a meaningful way. She said that the first time she walked them through data analysis, “There were tears as we all sat together to look at what we needed to do for our kids…we were data rich, but knowledge poor. Now we have data meetings every week.” The shift in how data was used went from seeing data as abstract from practice to teachers taking personal ownership for what the data represented. According to Schmoker (2006) “when leadership is focused on results, on urging a formal, frequent review of the impact of instruction, teaching improves” (p. 126).
Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) identified monitoring/evaluating as one of the 21 responsibilities of school leaders that positively affected student achievement. The effect of monitoring/evaluating on student achievement was 27%. They define and explain this responsibility as,

The extent to which the leader monitors the effectiveness of school practices in terms of their impact on student achievement…Specific behaviors and characteristics identified in our meta-analysis and associated with this responsibility are the following:

- Continually monitoring the effectiveness of the school’s curricular, instructional and assessment practices

- Being continually aware of the impact of the school’s practices on student achievement (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005, pp. 55-56)

The turnaround principals took personal responsibility to monitor the changes. “I felt it was my job to ensure that the changes occurred” (Principal D). The turnaround principals used the results of their achievement assessments to motivate the teachers. The results gave the turnaround principals credibility with their teachers that they were on the right track. The turnaround literature cites this as “early wins” and posits that even small positive results can give the turnaround the momentum it needs to continue moving forward (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). To encourage their teachers, the turnaround principals made sure that they celebrated along the way. The journey to improve a consistently low performing school is an arduous and moral journey. The turnaround leaders had to maintain a relentless focus on improving student achievement through data analysis and change of instructional practice. It was constant work and required the
turnaround principal to never allow themselves to sit back and enjoy the moments of success. “I am never satisfied, there is always more we can do” (Principal I).

Main-Category III: Challenger

The turnaround principals were courageous challengers who confronted and questioned the status quo operations of their schools. In challenging the status quo they encountered conflict and dealt with it openly and courageously. Principal E shared, “you have to fight the hard fights, you have to face conflict, which I do not like to do. I don’t like it when people are mad at me, but you have to tackle it.” According to Fullan (2004) “Conflict avoidance in the face of poor performance is an act of moral neglect” (p. 32).

They were able to overcome difficult situations, ineffective practices, and staff behaviors to lead their schools to a new way of being. The turnaround leaders led their schools by outrage. “A symbolic act that communicates importance and meaning and touches people in ways not possible when leadership is viewed entirely as something objective and calculated” (Sergiovanni, 2005, p. 15).

They challenged the belief systems operating in their schools where the adults’ beliefs about kids said that low achievement was something out of the teacher’s control. They were courageous as they confronted and questioned teacher behaviors that were not aligned with the new direction and focus. Principal C exhibited this when he said, “I told the teachers, we are going to open all doors. All doors were opened so that when I walked down the hallways I could see what was going on in all the classrooms.”

The barriers that were getting in the way of the school moving forward were confronted by the turnaround principals. Some barriers included lack of curriculum, instruction, and assessment alignment; dysfunctional climate and culture; inauthentic
relationships; and lack of personal ownership for results. Other barriers involved the systems, structures, and procedures of the schools. The principals confronted the brutal facts of student achievement. Principal G discovered that her faculty blamed their school’s low performance on children who had recently been assigned to their school from a nearby trailer park. She engaged her staff in action research to discover that it was really the children who had been their school the longest who had not been making progress.

The turnaround leaders challenged the sacred cows of their schools, (the things that had previously been immune to change or criticism) by questioning their value in regards to student needs and their new vision. Using innovative and creative thinking they addressed the mental models operating in their schools that hindered progress. The two properties that emerged from the challenger category were confident and questioner (see Figure 14). The turnaround leaders challenged the status quo by displaying confidence in their approach to the turnaround. They challenged the systems, structures, procedures, instructional practices, and behaviors in their schools through the use of thoughtful and provocative questions.

Figure 14. Main Category III: Challenger
Challenger: Properties

Confident. The turnaround leaders were confident leaders. They had a clear understanding of their role as the leader and their strengths and weaknesses. Many of the words they used to describe themselves related to confidence,

Risk-taker
Tough but fair
I model what I preach.
Straightforward
Persistent
Tenacious
Intense
Determined
Decisive
Willing to take a stand
I am stubborn when I believe in something for kids.
I am knowledgeable about teaching and learning.
I have a real intolerance for kids not achieving.
I’m intense, I make myself stressed because I have such high expectations
I never show my stress to the teachers.
I’m feisty, I am willing to stand up for the work, for what it is leading to.

The turnaround principals expressed their confidence in their knowledge of their profession. Principal C stated,

I just knew what had to take place. It felt like the whole school was not aligned. It felt like there were pockets of people just doing what they wanted to do… I was a visible presence in the classrooms because I wanted to see what was taking place, just so they’d know that I am around, not behind the closed doors of my office. I know my stuff… I know what I am doing.

Principal E talked about how her background as a teacher informed her leadership, “My knowledge came from my own teaching. I taught in a title school; that’s where my
learning developed and how I became a better teacher. I have realized that it is all about instruction!”

They were willing to take risks in order to make progress. For example, several of the principals let go of certain curricular programs in their schools in favor of new practices to improve student achievement. This caused some staff to leave their schools because they were comfortable with where they were and with what they had been doing.

The principals were confident in their approach to challenging the systems operating in their schools that did not address the realities of what was needed to improve achievement. Principal G had confidence in her challenge of the achievement data in her school, she said, “I think sometimes if people don’t see something, they don’t believe it can be real. I started putting the data up on the walls. The teachers were terrified.”

They did not waver in their pursuit of improving the lives of the children in their schools through academic achievement. The principals confidently confronted the beliefs of the staff that did not align with this vision. Principal D talked about how at first her teachers were stuck in only supporting the students emotionally but not academically.

Yeah, we know things are tough for some kids, we are not going to let that be okay. We are going to get them there [academic achievement] through the best instruction, we are going to move them forward because they deserve it and we know where they need to go. I was recently reading an article about the Brownsville school district and the pobrecito syndrome they had to overcome, there is none of that [at my school] anymore.

Principal F confronted staff if she saw that they were creating barriers for others in the school. She said,

I had to confront the things that were getting in the way. If this is our vision and the direction we are going, I will confront if people are not in alignment. I try not to make it personal and I have to make sure everyone is focused. It is my job to make sure we are going together, personally and privately. If there is someone
causing a damper in what we are doing or causing us not to grow as fast as we can, I will ask them to have a conversation. Sometimes there are tears, but I always offer to help. You have to know when to confront and you have to leave the relationship intact and confront in kind and healthy way.

The principals had confidence in their abilities, in their focus, in their professional knowledge, and in their leadership styles. “I am confident about what I believe. I am confident in what I think should be done” (Principal A). They did not hesitate to confront or challenge staff, practices, systems, procedures and policies that did not fit with their new direction.

_Questioner_. The turnaround principals questioned the alignment of the schools’ espoused theories and their theories in use in regards to teaching, learning, and adult behavior.

When someone is asked how he would behave under certain circumstances, the answer he usually gives is his espoused theory of action for that situation. This is the theory of action to which he gives allegiance, and which, upon request, he communicates to others. However, the theory that actually governs his actions is this theory-in-use. (Argyris & Schön, 1974, p. 6-7)

The espoused theory was what the schools said they were doing for their students and what they professed to believe about their students. The theory in use was what they were actually demonstrating and saying in both subtle and not so subtle ways. The two were not congruent and this was a problem. Questioning this lack of congruency was a necessary act for the turnaround principals and doing so helped them uncover the ineffective practices and underground belief systems going on in their schools. Principal F said, “I had to change beliefs. That is the hardest thing to do. I had to ask, what do we want to become and what do we believe about kids and learning?”
The turnaround principals challenged the status quo of their schools through the use of questions. They asked questions about the current reality of their schools from reasons why students were not achieving to the purpose of non-instructional events during the school day. They asked the tough questions about students not making progress. Principal H asked, “Why is it that the kids who have the most dots to connect and can’t connect them easily have the most fragmented learning environments?” Principal D wanted her staff to be really clear about why they were in a Title school. She challenged them to be introspective, “I was asking teachers to tell me, what is it in your lives that brought you to teach in this school? I really wanted to know the factors that brought them here.” Principal F asked questions in order to understand what was going on in her school, “I asked a lot of hard questions at the beginning. I asked questions about all aspects of instruction, schedule, staffing, and serving kids.”

The turnaround principals used questioning to move their schools toward change. Principal I was constantly questioning, “What’s working and what’s not working?” She stated emphatically, “If it is not working, it’s not worth doing—so what do we need to change?” The principals asked questions to challenge their teachers and at the same time demonstrated their commitment to them. Principal F talked about how he was challenging his staff to improve by helping them to set the target first, “What is it that we need to do?” He would follow up with questions such as, “what do you need and how can I help you?” to demonstrate commitment and support.

In situations where organizations have experienced failure, the literature on turnaround suggests that recovery of failure requires the leadership to address the reasons for failure. Additionally, it was found that the leaders worked at changing old behaviors
that attributed to failure to new ones that contributed to improvement and they created new systems to sustain change and improvement (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). The turnaround principals tackled the reasons for failure, changed old behaviors, and created new systems in their schools through their use of questioning. They exercised moral behavior by questioning the espoused theories and theories in use. The questions they utilized were strategic. They wanted to raise awareness and attention to the changes that needed to be made in order to solve their main problem of improving the lives of the children in their schools through academic achievement.

**Main-Category IV: Reflector**

“Reflection—thinking about what we do before, during, and after our actions—is our cognitive guide for growth and development, a way of thinking that we should engage in continuously” (Lambert, 2003, p. 22). The turnaround principals were reflective practitioners. They used reflection both in action and in introspection. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) describe this behavior with the metaphor of moving between the dance floor and the balcony. The dance floor is where the action is taking place and the balcony perspective is a view from above the action. “The process must be iterative, not static. The challenge is to move back and forth between the dance floor and the balcony, making interventions, observing their impact in real time and returning to the action” (p. 53).

The turnaround principals were achievement oriented, they jumped right in the middle of the action. They were examining data, working on the problems, asking questions, and making changes. In the midst of this action, the dance of change, they had to reflect in the moment. They were constantly thinking about what they were doing and whether it was making a difference or not. On the dance floor they could see how they
personally affected the operations and other people in the organization. They could also see the inter-relationships of others and how they interacted with one another.

They also reflected from the balcony. From the balcony they could see all that was happening and they were able to strategize. They were able to see needs and provide resources, they were able to see gaps and make suggestions. The teachers who were not effective became clearly visible and they were able to move them to other assignments or out of the school. On the balcony they were able to see how the changes they were making effected student achievement, and they could see the effects of changes on the whole system.

The turnaround principals used reflection to help them manage the complexity of the turnaround. For some it was stated as a conscious act, for others it was implied in the statements they made. The two properties that emerged from the main category reflector were thoughtful and insightful (see Figure 15). The turnaround principals reflected thoughtfully on their actions as a leader. They also reflected insightfully into the complex nature of the turnaround.

Figure 15. Main Category IV: Reflector
**Reflector: Properties**

*Thoughtful.* The turnaround principals reflected thoughtfully on their leadership actions. In reflection they realized the challenges they faced and thought about the decisions and changes they had to make. They were concerned with relationships and really cared about the people in their schools. Even while moving people out of their schools, they were considerate about ensuring people left with dignity. They were demanding, yet fair, and used their moral leadership to confirm their thinking regarding tough decisions. They expressed that they reflected on their past experiences as teachers and administrators to help guide them. “I learned what not to do from a past principal,” said Principal E. Principal I shared her thoughts about what has influenced her leadership,

I think my past experiences have molded me. I was very reflective of what I felt as a teacher I wanted in a leader. I have a list of things never to forget as a principal and I read those periodically to remind myself what it was like to be a classroom teacher.

Principal A reflected on her leadership,

There are basic things that sustain you in life, like being strong spiritually, having a strong foundation, feeling like what you are doing is for the good of others all those things help us as human beings and you just pull those into your leadership.

While discussing the actions of turnaround Principal F stated,

You have to be smart and think about where you need to go…from where you are to where you want to go. I aspire to be the best. I am competitive, but I know that I have to be patient and know that it [turnaround] is a process and it takes time. Reflection is important to me.

What was revealing during the interview process was the ease or naturalness in how the turnaround principals responded to the interview questions. They demonstrated their
thoughtfulness as they shared their stories of turnaround. During the interviews they often exhibited high energy and enthusiasm for their work, but at times in reflection, they also grew quiet and pensive. The turnaround leaders’ thoughtfulness and passion for their work came through in their responses. It appeared to the researcher that their thoughtfulness came from accessing their moral leadership.

_Insightful._ The turnaround principles were insightful leaders. They demonstrated clear reflection of what had transpired in their schools. As they were being interviewed, they talked of the years leading to their turnarounds as if they were recent. Their perceptive recollection of the experience was evidence of their insightful practice along the way.

Principal C reflected on the beginning of his turnaround journey,

When I got here I thought the school was going to be restructured, but then I saw the staff working so hard and when the people started saying “we can do it” I thought we need to go with the momentum.

Principal B reflected on the work he had done in the school with program consistency and instructional alignment. They had not seen results so they voluntarily took advantage of the CDE review. Principal B said,

It wasn’t until the CDE support team review that we really realized what was going to make a difference. Our teachers were open and we really wanted to have better student achievement. We felt that in house when we went down the halls we could see it [improvement]. So we did the CDE review, and to be honest, we felt that they were going to tell us ‘you guys are really right on target.’ But we got back the review… 42 pages and they were really harsh… as far as being standards based, focusing on the essentials, and examining data… we were way behind. We thought we were doing all the right things and we were surprised at the feedback.
He talked about how they used the review as a means for being reflective of their work and really took the feedback to heart. He led his team to use this information as guide to improve, first he was reflective and then he took action.

Principal D shared her reflective thinking regarding beliefs about kids and learning, “If we really believe this… that kids can learn… then what is the leader’s role in helping teachers to make that happen? That is what I think of all the time.”

When people are in the midst of deep change, it can be highly stressful and their sense of self, sense of direction, and decision making can get foggy. The turnaround principals used reflection to hone in on direction and to clarify decision making. Through reflection, they were able to see clearly and intuitively into the nature of the turnaround situation. Being insightful relates to their self-awareness and ability to see themselves in the turnaround. They were able to look inward and validate their beliefs. As they worked through the turnaround, they became stronger in their personal convictions and integrity which furthered their moral passion for the work. They developed their voices for the moral purpose of the turnaround work. Lambert (2003) relates reflection to learning and leading,

Reflection develops the inner voice into the public voice. It is a higher form of learning and an essential dimension of constructivist learning for it is how we integrate what we are coming to know. As a form of assessment reflection applies equally to learning and leading.(p. 61)
**Relationships of the Categories:**

In grounded theory, data is conceptualized into categories and properties for fit in the emerging theory. An analytical rule of sorting memos in grounded theory states “the social world is integrated and the job of the analyst [grounded theorist] is to discover it” (Glaser & Holton, 2004, p. 18). Grounded theory is intensely generative and when the procedures are followed the theory emerges. The researcher demonstrates the integration of the theory in the next section. Each category relates to all other categories in some form or another and each distinctly relates to the core category.

**Belief/Systemic Strategist**

The belief concept is dynamically related to the systemic strategist concept. The concept of beliefs is based on the participants’ self awareness, can do spirit, and passion for the work of turnaround. The beliefs of the turnaround leaders are grounded in integrity, with sensible and relational behaviors. The concept of a systemic strategist is based on having a vision, the ability to navigate change, and being able to focus on the components of the turnaround. The turnaround leaders as systemic strategists have a strong foundation of professional knowledge, they are achievers and intrapreneurs. When the two concepts of beliefs and systemic strategist interact, the result is an active relationship between the belief “I can do this” and the systemic strategist action “this is how I will do it.” The paired opposite theory is the relationship between the passion centered and emotional aspects of beliefs and the knowledge based, intellectual aspects of systemic strategist. The relationship between the two categories is energized by the core category of moral leadership. Moral leadership supports both concepts and is the
connective glue between them. The participants’ actions were based on their moral beliefs and their moral view of needing to affect the whole system.

**Challenger/Reflector**

The concept of challenger is related to the concept reflector, they each balance the other. The attribute challenger is based on the participants’ confidence in their approach and ability to question the status quo of their organizations’ operations. The concept of reflector is based on the participants’ thoughtfulness and insightfulness. When the two concepts of challenger and reflector interact the result is a balancing effect on the overall theory. The application of paired opposite theory is in the relationship between challenging behavior and reflective behavior. Challenging behavior causes disequilibrium in the system and reflective behavior activates adjustments to the system and results in equilibrium. The relationship between the two opposing concepts is influenced by the core concept of moral leadership. The turnaround leaders morally challenged the status quo of the organizational system with positive intent to make the system better and to push the turnaround to fruition. They morally reflected on the interests of the children, the organization and people within it with the desire to do the right things and to do things better.

**Beliefs/Challenger**

The concept of beliefs is related to the concept of challenger. The turnaround leaders’ willingness to challenge the system stemmed from their strong foundation of beliefs. Their confident approach and questioning attitudes were influenced by their passion for the work. They applied sense making to what was happening in the organization and used questioning to understand and make sense of what was going on.
Integrity was their lens for challenging the status quo, questioning the morality of what was going on in their schools. They were transparent as they challenged the operations of the system explaining why they were challenging them and why they needed to make changes. They were able to challenge and confront issues because they had built relationships and relational trust. The beliefs of the participants gave them the capacity to engage their moral leadership when needed in order to challenge and confront people, issues, and the systems of their organizations.

**Beliefs/Reflector**

The concept of beliefs is related to the concept of reflector. The turnaround leaders used reflection as a means of checking their actions against their beliefs. Relationships and trust were very important; therefore, they constantly reflected on how their actions stemming from their beliefs affected the people in the organization. Their can do spirit was tempered by reflection, they were careful to bring people along. They made time to be thoughtful in both action and introspection as they made drastic changes in the way their school operated. Integrity was a key factor as they reflected on the changes they were making. It was important to the turnaround leaders that what they did mattered, therefore they were very thoughtful about their choices and actions. They were sensible in their approach and reflection enhanced their natural sensibilities. They transparently analyzed whether the changes they were making aligned with their beliefs and the morality of their leadership actions.

**Systemic Strategist/Challenger**

The concept of systemic strategist was related the concept challenger. The turnaround leaders had a vision of where they wanted to take the whole system as they
strategically challenged the status quo of the organizational operations. It was important to them to acknowledge the difference between the espoused theory and theory in use. Therefore they were purposeful in their challenges and were careful to challenge in a logical fashion that made sense. Systemically and strategically they controlled how they went about confronting what was not working. They used their confident professional knowledge to back up their challenges and supported their actions with research based practices. Operating as change architects and intrapreneurs, they finessed the challenges to bring about innovation and new ways of being. Relentless in their focus, the turnaround leaders confronted only those things that were going to make the biggest difference in their organizations. The relationship between systemic strategist and challenger was driven by the participants’ moral leadership. They did what they did because they believed it would make a difference.

**Systemic Strategist/Reflector**

The concept of systemic strategist was related to the concept of a reflector. The turnaround leaders as systemic strategists were action oriented. All of their actions as systemic strategists were related to changes in the organizational operations or changes in people. As reflectors, they engaged in reflecting both in action and in introspection. The turnaround leaders reflected on the action before, during, and after it occurred. The reflection led them to clarify direction and decision making and, thus, more action. They also reflected on how their actions were impacting people within the organization and the system as a whole. The act of reflection enabled them to optimize, innovate, prioritize, organize and orchestrate their organizational systems. As systemic strategists, the turnaround leaders were using their professional knowledge to do the work of turnaround.
As reflectors, they took the time to step away from the work and reflect on its current status, next steps, and results. They used data analysis as a form of reflective practice. The turnaround leaders engaged moral leadership to manage the interaction of the concepts systemic strategist and reflector. The systemic strategist is a competitive, focused, driven individual. Operating from a moral standpoint of reflection brings the actions of systemic strategist to a personal level. It was at the personal level that the turnaround leaders were able to institute the daunting changes involved in the turnaround process.

The relationships of the categories in this study are represented in the theoretical model of the turnaround leader attributes (see Figure 16). The theoretical model emerged from the grounded theory methodology of data collection, note taking, coding, memoing, theoretical coding, selective coding, and sorting. The theoretical model depicts a relationship between all categories and with the core category at the center of the model. The core category of moral leadership is the prime mover of the behavior of the turnaround principals and is at the center of the model. The main problem of the turnaround principals is improving the lives of the disadvantaged children in their schools through academic achievement. Moral leadership is how the turnaround leaders resolve their problem. The belief category and sub-categories of sensible, integrity, and relational represent the emotional attributes of the turnaround principal. The systemic strategist category and sub-categories intrapreneur, achiever, and professional knowledge represent the intellectual attributes of the turnaround principal. The categories of challenger and reflector represent the balancing categories of the theoretical model. They balance the intellectual and emotional attributes of the turnaround principal (see Figure 17).
Figure 16. Theoretical Model of Essential Attributes of the Turnaround Principal
Figure 17. IQ, EQ, and Balancing Attributes of the Turnaround Principal
Hypotheses

A specific distinction between grounded theory and other research methods is the hypothesizing aspect of the research. Researchers using the grounded theory methodology do not begin with a hypothesis they wish to test, they begin with the data. In grounded theory an integrated set of conceptual hypotheses are generated through the grounded theory methodology, they emerge from the data. According to Glaser (1992) “Grounded theory also taps into the natural bent of people, since we are implicitly doing grounded theories to figure out hypotheses on what to do in our daily lives” (p. 12). For example, people take in all the data that has to do with situations or events in their daily lives. The data is labeled, sorted, and grouped to explain, to understand, to make decisions and choices, and to take action or to not take action. Glaser discusses how grounded theory has formulated and extended this natural bent into a methodology. In this study, the daily lives of the turnaround principals were examined to discover their essential attributes. The eleven hypotheses generated as a result of this study explain the behavior of the turnaround principals as they worked to resolve their main concern of improving the lives of the children in their schools through academic achievement.

The Eleven Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1. Turnaround principals are moral leaders.

Hypothesis 2. Turnaround principals have strong internal belief systems.

Hypothesis 3. Turnaround principals are sensible leaders.

Hypothesis 4. Turnaround principals are leaders with integrity.

Hypothesis 5. Turnaround principals are relational leaders.
Hypothesis 6. Turnaround principals are systemic strategists.

Hypothesis 7. The turnaround principals are intrapreneurs.

Hypothesis 8. The turnaround principals are achievers.

Hypothesis 9. Turnaround principals have excellent professional knowledge.

Hypothesis 10. The turnaround principals are challengers.

Hypothesis 11. The turnaround principals are reflectors.

Conclusion

This chapter represented the theoretical model of the essential attributes of turnaround principals. The theory was discovered and grounded in the data from the research study. According to Glaser (1998, p.17), the following bulleted questions evaluate the grounded theory methodology:

- Does the theory work to explain relevant behavior in the substantive area of the research?

The theory works to explain the relevant behavior of the turnaround principals. The categories were generated from extensive coding, memoing, theoretical sampling, and sorting. The concepts generated were related into hypotheses that account for how the participants resolved their main concern.

- Does it have relevance to the people in the substantive area?

The theory has relevance to the people in the substantive area. The related quotes within the category explanations demonstrate that the theory has relevance to the participants. The theory was exhaustively developed, and will generate interest from those involved in turning around schools.
• Does the theory fit the substantive area?
The theory fits the substantive area. The use of the constant comparative analysis is evident in the dense development of concepts and saturation of data. The concepts are grounded in the data and express the patterns in the data.

• Is it readily modifiable as new data emerge?
The theory is readily modifiable as new data emerge. The paired opposite theoretical model could accept additional categories fitting into the themes of intellectual categories and emotional categories or balancing categories. The model could also be modified as new categories of more relevance emerge.

The next chapter, Chapter Five, reviews the overall study, and discusses the study’s major findings and conclusions drawn from the results of the study. The literature related to the findings are shared, compared, and synthesized. Implications for action are discussed and recommendations for further research are presented.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Introduction

Being a leader brings with it a responsibility to do something of significance that makes families, communities, work, organizations, nations, the environment, and the world better places than they are today. Not all these things can be quantified. (Kouzes & Posner, 2008, p.13)

The problem of finding the right kind of leaders to lead turnaround situations in Title I schools facing corrective action is unprecedented. At the time of writing this dissertation, President Obama signed into law the America Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 allocating 13 billion dollars for Education for the Disadvantaged to carry out title I of the Elementary Education Act of 1965 and 200 million dollars for Innovation and Improvement, to support teacher and principal recruitment and retention in high needs schools and subjects (H.R. 1, 2009). The findings of this dissertation are highly applicable to this historic act. Never before has the concept of turnaround in education come to the forefront of public education with such financial implications. Turnaround leaders are needed to lead the low performing schools of poverty, minorities, and English language learners off the road to perdition and onto the road of recovery, success, and sustainability for the futures of the children and for the future of the United States educational system.
Summary of the Study

This chapter presents a summary of the findings in the study, related literature, and important conclusions drawn from the data presented in Chapter Four. It provides a discussion of the implications for action and recommendations for further research.

The Problem

The problem of finding the right kind of leader to turnaround low-performing schools exists across the United States. Few states have been able to address the lack of exemplary leaders in a way that makes a large scale difference. Most states do offer technical assistance to their lowest performing schools that includes an analysis of leadership structures and leadership behaviors, and many states have replacement of the principal as part of their restructuring or takeover process. But the reality is that the research behind the turnaround leader is very limited, and soon the states restructuring or reconstituting schools will be left with a serious void in the leadership capacity needed for these schools (Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore & Lash, 2007; Duke, 2004 & 2006; Fullen, 2006b; Kowel & Hassel, 2005 & Rhim, Kowal, Hassel & Hassel, 2007).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of turnaround school leadership and to identify essential attributes of a turnaround school principal. This study attempted to discover what essential attributes constitute a successful turnaround school principal by extracting a profile of this kind of school leader from his/her experiences. The intent of this profile was to help educational leaders at all levels understand the attributes school principals need for turnaround situations. Additionally, it offers current principals in the field an understanding of the leadership capacity needed to lead and
improve their schools and turn them around if that is what is necessary. Finally, this study provides educational policy makers and other educational leaders an understanding the phenomenon of the turnaround school leader. It gives insight into the experiences of school principals in the most challenging schools and illuminates the kind of support turnaround school leaders need in order to be successful.

**Research Questions**

The fundamental question guiding this research study sought to reveal the personal and professional nature of the educational turnaround principal:

- What are the essential attributes of a turnaround school principal?

  Research Sub-questions:

  1. What is the life-world of a turnaround principal?

  2. What is extraordinary or unique about the leadership of turnaround principals who have led their low-performing, high poverty, high minority schools to significant achievement?

  3. What skills, knowledge, personality traits, and leadership characteristics do turnaround principals have in common?

**Review of Methodology**

The qualitative research approach was chosen for this study. Grounded theory was chosen as the methodology for this study because currently no empirical theories exist to explain the essential attributes of turnaround educational leaders. The goal of this grounded theory study was to generate theory from data. It is not about verification of theory or description of theory; it is the process of generating theory through data collection and analysis. The intent of this research study was to generate or discover a
theory of the essential attributes of a turnaround principal as related to turnaround schools in education. The particular situation is specifically in the most challenging of educational situations—turning around high poverty, high minority, low-achieving schools. The researcher used the grounded theory methodology to discover a set of integrated hypotheses that explain the substantive area under study in a theoretical model.

The data collection and data analysis methods were undertaken in six overlapping phases: data-collection, note-taking, coding, memoing, sorting, and writing. The overarching qualitative methodological tool used in this study is that of comparative analysis. Comparative analysis is used to compare incident to incident, code to code, categories and properties, and is ultimately used to sort the data into the final theory.

This study was limited to specifically identified Colorado Title I elementary school principal leaders who have led their schools through a turnaround process. The researcher conducted one hour, in person interviews with each participant at their school sites beginning with the prepared preliminary interview questions as a guide. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Theoretical sampling occurred of the initial sample group of principals and of a second group of principals in high performing high poverty schools. The high performing, high poverty school principals were selected as exemplar principals. The researcher theoretically sampled this group to verify the main problem of the participants and to sample for the core category.

Throughout the data collection the researcher added to interview questions according to the emerging theory (Appendix D). The researcher coded the interview notes and transcribed data into an initial group of 413 potential categories and properties.
These categories and properties were comparatively analyzed through coding, memoing, and sorting until the final theoretical model emerged, resulting in one core category, four main categories, six sub-categories, and 29 properties. The final categories and properties were written-up as analyses grounded in the data. The analyses resulted in an integrated theory of conceptual hypotheses.

Major Findings

The integrated theoretical model and resulting conceptual hypotheses of the essential attributes of turnaround principals was the result of the grounded theory methodology undertaken in this study. The researcher closely followed the classic grounded theory methodology and through the coding, memoing, sorting, and the theoretically sampling processes, the main problem of the participants was discovered. In this study, the participants’ main problem was improving the lives of the disadvantaged children in their schools through academic achievement. Moral leadership emerged as the core category, it was the one category that had a significant relationship with all other categories and accounted for the behavior of the participants in the study as they resolved their main problem. Additionally, four main categories, six sub-categories, and twenty-nine properties were discovered and grounded in the data.

The theoretical model of this study is composed of the central core category, moral leadership and the related categories and properties. The main categories are organized into two groups: (1) intellectually related categories and (2) emotionally related categories. Intellectual categories have one main category, systemic strategist, and three sub-categories of systemic strategist: (1) intrapreneur, (2) achiever, and (3) professional knowledge. Each of the systemic strategist sub-categories has properties that
are significant to the theoretical model. Intrapreneur properties include: (1) optimizer and (2) innovator. Achiever properties include: (1) prioritizer, (2) organizer, and (3) orchestrator. Professional knowledge properties include: (1) organization purpose, (2) organization approach, and (3) measures of success.

Emotional categories have one main category, beliefs, and three sub-categories of beliefs: (1) sensible (2) integrity (3) relational. Each of the belief sub-categories has properties that are significant to the theoretical model. Sensible properties include: (1) empathy and (2) sense-maker. Integrity properties include: (1) transparent, (2) trustworthy, and (3) significance. Relational properties include: (1) responsive, (2) relational trust, and (3) connector.

The two other main categories are challenger and reflector. These categories do not have sub-categories. Challenger properties include (1) confidence and (2) questioner. Reflector properties include: (1) thoughtful and (2) insightful.

The theoretical model is a dynamic representation of the essential attributes of the turnaround principals. The theory of paired opposites is represented with beliefs situated opposite systemic strategist and challenger situated opposite reflector. The beliefs category is representative of the turnaround principals’ attributes: sensible, integrity, and relational that indicate, “I can do this work.” The systemic strategist category is representative of the turnaround principals’ attributes: intrapreneur, achiever, and professional knowledge that indicate, “This is how I will do this work.” The two attributes, challenger and reflector balance each other and the model. The challenger attribute causes disequilibrium to the natural balance between intellectual attributes and emotional attributes. The reflector attribute brings everything back into harmony.
Figure 18. Theoretical Model of the Essential Attributes of Turnaround Principals
**The Eleven Hypotheses**

In grounded theory an integrated set of conceptual hypotheses are generated through the grounded theory methodology. The eleven hypotheses generated as a result of this study explain the behavior of the turnaround principals as they worked to resolve their main concern of improving the lives of the disadvantaged children in their schools through academic achievement.

**Hypothesis 1.** Turnaround principals are moral leaders.

They behave morally to improve the lives of the children in their schools through academic achievement. They base their moral leadership behaviors on personal convictions. They do the work they do because they believe they can make a difference. The moral imperative of their work is social justice, doing the right things because they believe them to be the right things to do for children from economically disadvantaged environments.

**Hypothesis 2.** Turnaround principals have strong internal belief systems.

Their beliefs are based on self-awareness, they know who they are and what they stand for in regards to their role as principals. The turnaround leaders are inherently can do people, they immerse themselves in the spirit of their work. They have the belief that they can do the turnaround work. They are passionate leaders and infuse their work with energy and positive attitudes.

**Hypothesis 3.** Turnaround principals are sensible leaders.

They understand the problems of the high poverty populations and they manage them with rational empathy. Rational empathy is having the ability to care and understand difficulties yet not get caught up in them emotionally. It is the ability to think
reasonably and logically about the difficulties in order to be responsive. They are the sense-makers of their organizations and help people manage change and make sense of innovation through a systems thinking approach.

**Hypothesis 4.** Turnaround principals are leaders with integrity.

Integrity is the lens they look through before they act or make decisions. They are transparent leaders, honest, forthright, and sincere in their talk and actions. They demonstrate trustworthiness by doing what they say they will do and behaving morally. The turnaround principals are extremely dedicated and committed to their work and they find their work meaningful and rewarding. They believe that what they do matters and significantly contributes to their communities and to the world.

**Hypothesis 5.** Turnaround principals are relational leaders.

They encourage deep relationships with the people in their schools, and those connected to their schools. They are responsive leaders who find joy in the service of others. Their deep personal connections with people, their responsiveness, beliefs, integrity, and sensibility influence high levels of relational trust with their staffs. Turnaround principals are human connectors. They place a high priority on relationships and connect on multiple levels of the organization. They are kid connectors too; they love children and develop enduring relationships with kids. They emphasize that kids come first in their schools.

**Hypothesis 6.** Turnaround principals are systemic strategists.

As systemic strategists, they are able to work on the whole system and its component needs all at once. They are visionary leaders who are able to inspire their schools to a shared vision of a new way of being that improves the lives of the children in
their schools. They are change architects who strategically manage the change processes of resources, people, structures, and time. The turnaround principals are focused and committed to making a difference in their schools through purposeful action, change, and engagement of their schools during the process and beyond.

*Hypothesis 7.* The turnaround principals are intrapreneurs.

Intrapreneurs work within larger organizations as entrepreneurs. The turnaround principals exhibit entrepreneurial behaviors as they work within the context of their school districts. They are comfortable with risk, ambiguity, and uncertainty as they go about their turnaround work. They are optimizers and are able to extract the best from their people and their resources. As organic innovators, they constantly seek new and creative ways to maximize people, resources, time, money, and structures within their schools. They challenge the old mental models operating in their schools and invent new ways of operating.

*Hypothesis 8.* The turnaround principals are achievers.

They are focused and driven to succeed. In order to achieve at the levels they desire, they prioritize and organize their work. They prioritize by beginning with what is going to make the biggest difference and they organize for effectiveness and efficiency. Turnaround principals orchestrate the changes in their schools. They challenge the status quo, take action, reflect on what is and is not making a difference, then make adjustments. They are resolute doers, they work and learn alongside the teachers.

*Hypothesis 9.* Turnaround principals have an excellent grasp of professional knowledge.

They use their professional knowledge to define the purpose of their work, to accomplish and improve their work, and to measure results. They are knowledgeable
about the use of data and use meaningful data to monitor the effect of instruction on the progress of their students. Turnaround principals are experienced teachers, and they model and monitor effective educational practices. They create team learning structures and function as the head learners in their schools. They understand the critical components of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

*Hypothesis 10. The turnaround principals are challengers*

As challengers they do not hesitate to challenge the status quo systems that operate in their schools. They are comfortable with the conflict that challenging causes and they deal with it openly and honestly. The turnaround principals challenge the belief systems operating in their schools through questioning. They confront the brutal facts of their student achievement in ways that motivate teachers to change their teaching practices. They are confident in their knowledge of teaching and learning and they are confident leaders.

*Hypothesis 11. The turnaround principals are reflectors.*

The turnaround principals are reflective in action and in introspection. In the action of the turnaround, they reflect on the changes going on in their schools for the impact on student achievement. They reflect thoughtfully on how the changes are impacting their staffs and schools as a whole. Turnaround principals reflect inward and think about how their behaviors and actions affect the organization and the people in the organization. They are insightful leaders and demonstrate keen reflection of what was transpiring in their schools.
Findings Related to the Literature

There is limited research on turnarounds in education and very little research on the turnaround educational leaders. The findings in this study are presented here as they relate to the turnaround literature’s representations of turnaround principal behaviors. Additionally, as recommended by Glaser (1998), “The researcher should turn his [literature] review into data collection to be constantly compared as the review is done” (p. 72). The literature review was constantly compared for significant data which will be presented in this section.

The literature review in this study presented a number of studies and literature on school turnarounds (Almanzán, 2005; Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore & Lash, 2007; Duke, 2006; Duke, 2007; Kannapel & Clements, 2005; Kowal & Hassel, 2005; Rhim, Kowal, Hassel & Hassel, 2007; Reeves, 2003; & Reeves, 2005). Commonalities from these studies as they related to the findings of this study and turnaround principal behaviors are: high expectations for staff and students, caring and nurturing relationships between adults and between adults and students, collaborative environments, use of data to inform instruction and decision making, evidence of the use of data, frequent assessment of students with progress monitoring systems, embedded staff development related to needed changes in the schools, intense focus on all aspects of academics, alignment of curriculum instruction and assessment, action research, utilizing people and material resources wisely, decisive staff changes, changes in schedules and school structures and operations, use of school improvement plan, and a high level of faculty work ethic and morale.
Duke (2007) also uncovered the following “clusters of aspects” of turned around schools:

1. Leadership changes.
2. School policy changes.
3. Program changes.
5. Personnel and staffing changes.
7. Changes in parental and community involvement.
8. Changes in school facilities.

Duke’s findings support the findings of this study. Each of the turnaround principals in the initial sample group arrived at their schools when they were poor performing schools; they made all of the above changes in their schools. Duke’s study does not discuss the specific principal behaviors related to each of these changes. What is relevant here is that the turnaround principals in this study appeared to manage all of these changes utilizing their essential attributes.

In the turnaround literature (Murphy & Meyers, 2008) discuss the retrenchment phase of turnaround. This is the phase where it is clear a turnaround needs to take place and there are some very specific actions the turnaround leaders do. They analyze what needs immediate attention and act upon it. They choose actions that are going to make the greatest impact. This is consistent with the findings in this study. As systemic strategists, the turnaround principals chose to do things that they thought would make the biggest difference in their schools. The turnaround principals in this study were focused and
driven, they made choices that affected the whole system and the component parts at the same time. There was no one big thing that they did, they did a number of things. Clearly there was a new focus on instruction and a focus on getting the right people on the bus and the right people in the right seats on the bus and the wrong people off the bus (Collins, 2001).

Murphy and Meyers also discuss the recovery phase of the turnaround process. It is in this phase that turnaround begins with critical moves “(1) Begin the recovery process with efficiency/operational moves rather than entrepreneurial moves and (2) start by amassing resources to engage the turnaround” (p. 175). This is contrary to the findings in this study. The turnaround principals engaged entrepreneurial behaviors from the start of the process, while at the same time orchestrating efficiency/operational moves. They did engage resources, but they did so in an optimizer fashion. They optimized their people resources to get the best from each person. They accessed and optimized their district and material resources to be used to produce the greatest gains.

Fullan (2006d) found that turnaround schools, “engage people with expertise to lead, select experienced principals with demonstrated capacity to improve schools of this nature, and select principals with strong intrapersonal and interpersonal skills who will accept external support” (p. 19). The principals in this study were experienced, but they were not all hired with the specificity of turnaround given to them as their charge, nor did they express that they had previous experiences with turnaround. For six principals, this assignment was their first assignment as a principal. Most of them had been assistant principals prior to their current position. The principals in this study were open to
external support. Examples of support came from CDE, from district personnel or from experts.

Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore and Lash’s (2007) study culminated the prevailing research on high performing, high poverty schools. They formulated the High-Performing High-Poverty (HPHP) Readiness Model and within it a local level framework with the following strategies for turnaround leaders:

- Resource authority: school leaders make mission driven decisions regarding people, time, money and program.
- Resource ingenuity: leaders are adept at securing additional resources and leveraging partner relationships.
- Agility in the face of turbulence: continuous improvement through collaboration and job-embedded learning.

Their research supports the findings in this study. The turnaround principals in this study expressed resource authority and were able to make decisions regarding people, time, and money. The people decisions were not completely free reign decisions, they still had to operate within the human resources guidelines. The turnaround principals demonstrated resource ingenuity through their relational and intrapreneurial attributes. As optimizers and human connectors they engaged others in partnership to improve their schools. The turnaround principals in this study showed agility in the face of turbulence. High poverty schools are filled with turbulence, the principals in this study faced it head on with rational empathy, integrity, and responsive attributes. They were driven and focused on continuous improvement and created learning cultures of collaboration.
Kowal and Hassel (2005) summarize the significant actions of turnaround leaders to include:

- Communicates a positive vision of future school results.
- Collects and personally analyzes school and student performance data.
- Makes an action plan based on data.
- Helps staff personally see and feel the problems students face.
- Gets key influencers within district and school to support major changes.
- A typical credible win for a school turnaround leader is student achievement.
- Measures and reports progress frequently and publicly.
- Gathers staff team often and requires all involved in decision making to disclose and discuss their own results in open air meetings.
- Funnels more time and money into tactics that get results; halts unsuccessful tactics.
- Requires staff to change—not optional.
- Silences naysayers indirectly by showing speedy successes.
- Acts in relentless pursuit of goals rather than touting progress as ultimate success. (Kowal & Hassel, 2005, pp. 21-22)

These findings are consistent with the actions of the principals in this study with the exception of “requiring staff to change” with no options. The turnaround leaders in this study did not express that they required staff to change, they did express that they made significant changes in the ways their schools operated. The researcher suggests in this study that it was moral leadership that inspired the staffs to change. Kowal and Hassel’s
in-depth research, laments the lack of studies focused on defining the leadership characteristics necessary for turnaround.

In 2007, Rhim, Kowal, Hassel and Hassel presented a checklist of leadership competencies needed for school turnarounds. Each is presented below, followed by the correlation with this study:

- Driving for results: setting high goals, taking initiative, being relentlessly persistent to succeed.

The turnaround principal attribute, achiever is related to the competency, “driving for results,” the turnaround principals were conscious of setting goals, they were doers, and driven to succeed.

- Solving problems: using performance data to identify and solve immediate problems.

The turnaround principal attributes of challenger and professional knowledge are related to the competency “solving problems.” The turnaround principal utilized their professional knowledge of data to expose the achievement problems in their schools, they challenged the beliefs and thinking around the use of data.

- Showing confidence: exhibiting confidence, using failure to initiate problem solving, not excusing failure.

The turnaround principal attribute, challenger is related to the leadership competency “showing confidence.” The turnaround principals challenged the status quo in their schools with confidence; they used the in vivo code “no excuses” in regards to the failures in their schools.

- Influence: influencing immediate action toward the school’s goals.
The turnaround principal attribute, relational is related to the leadership competency “influence.” The turnaround principals influenced those connected with their schools to support them and help them, and they influenced their staffs to make changes.

- Teamwork and cooperation: getting input and keeping others informed.

The turnaround principal attributes, professional knowledge and relational are related to the leadership competency “teamwork and cooperation.” The turnaround principals in this study developed leadership teams for decision making and input and professional learning communities, and other structures to communicate with their staffs.

- Conceptual thinking: connecting the mission, learning standards, and curriculum to clarify for all.

The turnaround principal attribute, systemic strategist is related to the leadership competency “conceptual thinking.” The turnaround principals were thinking conceptually as they strategized how to connect all the systems operating in their schools.

- Team leadership: assuming the role as leader and motivating staff to perform despite challenges.

The turnaround principal attributes, professional knowledge and relational are related to the leadership competency “team leadership.” The turnaround principals established deep relationships through professional learning communities, learning teams and day to day interactions in their schools. They modeled the way and these structures and behaviors motivated the staffs.
• Organizational commitment: making personal sacrifices needed for school success.

The turnaround principals’ expressed organizational commitment through various behaviors stemming from both their intellectual and emotional attributes. The turnaround principals’ relationships with their teachers, their students, and their students’ parents demonstrated their organizational commitment. They devoted personal time to their schools above and beyond the school day, during weekends, and summers. They did not ask their teachers to do anything they were not willing to do. They followed the mottos “whatever it takes” and “no excuses” to improve their schools.

• Communicating a compelling vision: rousing staff to commit energy to the change.

The turnaround principal attribute, systemic strategist is related to the leadership competency “communicating a compelling vision.” The turnaround principals envisioned the schools they wanted to create and enlisted their staffs to envision with them. They functioned as change architects and focused their schools to make changes to align with the new visions.

Kowal and Hassel (2005) posed a relationship between Marzano, Waters, and McNulty’s (2005) description of second order change and what school leaders need to do in turnarounds. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty define second order change as deep change, not incremental change “deep change alters the system in fundamental way, offering a dramatic shift in direction and requiring new ways of thinking and acting” (p. 66). They identified leadership responsibilities from their highly recognized meta-analysis study that are related to second order change: knowledge of curriculum,
instruction and assessment, optimizer, intellectual stimulation, change agent, monitoring and evaluating, flexibility, and ideals/beliefs. All, but one, “flexibility” were related to the findings of this study. The related responsibilities were coded and incorporated into the results of this study as additional data regarding turnaround leader attributes.

The review of the turnaround literature by Murphy and Meyers (2008) was examined for relationships to this study. Murphy and Meyers found turnaround leader characteristics to fall under four broad frames of leadership action: transformational, entrepreneurial, change, and situational. The turnaround principal attributes discovered in this study also aligned with these frames of leadership.

- Related to transformational, the turnaround principals had strong belief systems and modeled this in their behavior as leaders. They enlisted their staffs to create a vision of what kind of school they wanted for kids and for themselves. They empowered their staffs to think beyond themselves to the greater good.

- Related to entrepreneurial, the turnaround principals were intrapreneurs, they behaved entrepreneurially within a larger organization. Their attributes were not in alignment with the entrepreneurial characteristic, opportunistic, rather the turnaround principals were optimizers. They were out of the box thinkers, risk-takers, innovative and action oriented.

- Related to change, the turnaround principals were change architects, they were comfortable with both initiating change, managing it, and manipulating it throughout the turnaround process.

- Related to situational, the turnaround principals had no experience with turnaround situations in their past. They had not received specialized training in
turnaround, but they were able to adapt their leadership to the turnaround situation. They were responsive leaders to their teachers and students. They challenged the system and reflected on their actions. As transparent leaders, they modeled their thinking out loud. They were strategic in how they went about doing the turnaround work.

The literature on leadership traits lists the following as five major leadership traits: intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability (Northouse, 2004). The findings of this study, the purposed essential turnaround principal leadership attributes align with this research. The attributes of systemic strategist, intrapreneur and professional knowledge relate to the trait of intelligence and the attributes of reflector, sensible and relational relate to the trait of sociability. The attribute challenger relates to the trait of self-confidence, and the attribute achiever relates to the trait of determination. Integrity was found to be both a leadership trait and essential attribute of turnaround principals. The attribute belief relates to the leadership trait, integrity.

The concept of moral leadership is not new to the field of educational leadership, but is seldom mentioned as a core concept of leadership with the exception of the works by Michael Fullan and Thomas Sergiovanni, two well known authors of educational leadership literature. Both Fullan and Sergiovanni have written at length regarding the idea that moral leadership is central to effective leadership in schools. Fullan (2001) lists “moral purpose” as a necessary component for leading in times of change. He states,

Moral Purpose is about both ends and means. In education, an important end is to make a difference in the lives of students. But the means of getting to that end are also crucial. (p. 13)
Fullan’s concept of moral purpose relates to the findings of this study. The ends and means of turnaround leadership put moral leadership at the center of how the turnaround leaders in this study did their work. Making a difference in the lives of students is related to the beliefs and systemic strategies of the turnaround principals. The means of getting to the ends were evident in how the turnaround principals used moral leadership as their compass and guide for decisions and actions. Fullan (2003) uses the phrase, moral imperative to describe “the greatest hope for transforming school systems” (p. 80). His recommendations for moral leadership encompass the whole school system from the teachers in classrooms, to the leaders in schools, districts and states, to national level systems. Fullan (2003) writes,

The criteria of moral purpose are the following:

- That all students and teachers benefit in terms of identified desirable goals
- The gap between high and low performers becomes less as the bar for all is raised
- Ever-deeper educational goals are pursued
- The culture of the school becomes so transformed that continuous improvement relative to the previous three components becomes built in (p.31)

The results of this study demonstrated that the turnaround principals met the criteria of Fullan’s moral purpose. The cultures of the schools were transformed as the principals continuously worked to solve their main problem of improving the lives of their students through educational achievement. Later, Fullan (2004) defined moral purpose as acting with the intent of making a difference. The turnaround principals in this study were conscientiously acting with the intent to make a difference.
Sergiovanni (1992) asserts that moral authority should be at the center of leadership practices. He writes,

Moral authority, emotion, social bonds, covenantal communities, duties, and obligations, leadership by outrage—these represent dangerous ideas...[and] they are strong medicine that, if used properly can help us get to the heart of school improvement. The ailment to be treated, it has been argued here, is management theory and management practice that consider logic, reason, scientific evidence, and bureaucratic authority to be the only legitimate values of management and leadership. The results have been the serious neglect of emotion and morality...the cure proposed here does not seek to replace the values of traditional management theory and leadership practice but rather to expand them in a fashion that includes the moral dimension. (1992, p. 141-142)

Sergiovanni’s literature supports the findings in this study. The idea of leadership expanded to include the moral dimension is reflected in the theoretical model discovered in this study. The theoretical model of the essential attributes of turnaround principals represents the management attributes needed for leadership, what the researcher terms as intellectual attributes. In addition, it also represents the heartfelt emotional attributes, those attributes that more easily relate to moral leadership. The combination of the intellectual attributes and emotional attributes infused with moral leadership is what Sergiovanni refers to as expanding leadership practice to include the moral dimension.

Sergiovanni (2007) uses the terms “normative rationality” and “technical rationality” explain the moral dimension further,

The key to understanding the moral dimension of leadership is understanding the difference between normative rationality (rationality based on what we believe and what we consider to be good) and technical rationality (rationality based on what is effective and efficient). (p. 25)

The turnaround principals’ attributes of beliefs and systemic strategist are related to the concepts of normative rationality and technical rationality. The researcher proposes that
the turnaround principals behaved with normative rationality and technical rationality while leading the turnaround process. The turnaround principals’ emotional attributes related to what they believed to be good and the right things to do. They believed that behaving sensibly, having high integrity, and building strong relationships were good things to do for themselves, for the teachers, and for the children in their schools. The intellectual attributes related to what they believed to be effective and efficient practices. They used their professional knowledge, achiever and intrapreneur attributes to be effective and efficient in their decisions and actions.

Sergiovanni (2007) advanced the idea of moral leadership as “value added” to leadership practice, he states “Moral authority is the means to add extra value to your leadership practice, and this added value is the secret to bringing about extraordinary commitment and performance in schools (p. 70). The turnaround principals added value to their leadership when they practiced moral authority using their intellectual attributes: systemic strategists, intrapreneur, achiever, and professional knowledge to challenge the status quo operating in their schools and to orchestrate the changes needed for improvement. If the turnaround leaders had not practiced moral authority, they may have been seen as only change agents or directive leaders. Instead, through moral leadership, they built tight knit and supportive learning communities. They helped their teachers understand the reasons for the changes and with their emotional attributes: beliefs, integrity, relational and sensible, they were able to get their staffs to make the kinds of changes that improved student achievement. Another way they added value to their leadership practice was through their attribute, reflector. The turnaround leaders used moral leadership as a lens to reflect on their decisions and actions.
The idea of the balance of intellectual qualities and emotional qualities is also not new. It has been referred to in the literature as head and heart qualities of leadership by Sergiovanni (2007)

The heart of leadership has to do with what a person believes, values, dreams about and is committed to---that person’s personal vision. The head of leadership has to do with the theories of practice each of us had developed over time and our ability to reflect on the situations we face in light of these theories. (p. 20)

What is new is the incorporation of the right mix of being challenging and reflective to balance the intellectual and emotional attributes. Also new to the literature is the theory that turnaround principals appear to demonstrate moral leadership in all their behaviors related to the turnaround process resulting in a related set of morally infused leadership attributes.

Moral leadership in this study is not defined as a moralizing behavior, “I know better” or “this is what is good for you”, but as a mission of integrity, caring, compassion, and service of others. Moral leadership in this study was represented by the turnaround principals doing what they believed to be the right things to do for the right reasons and purposes. Their main problem was improving the lives of the economically disadvantaged children in their schools through academic achievement and they resolved this problem by leading morally. The moral leadership referred to in this study aligns with Sergiovanni’s beliefs,

The leadership that counts in the end, is the kind that touches people differently. It taps their emotions, appeals to their values, and responds to their connections with other people. It is a morally based leadership. (1992,p. 120)
The literature on moral leadership in education supports the findings of this study in a number of ways, but the literature does not represent moral leadership as an aspect of turnaround leadership. The literature in the field did support the findings in this study in regards to school turnaround commonalities and aspects, turnaround leadership actions, strategies competencies, and broad leadership characteristics and traits. There were no studies found by the researcher that specifically addressed turnaround principal attributes.

Unanticipated Outcomes

The researcher was surprised to find that the principals in this study were not aware of the concept of turnaround leader. In their minds, they were just doing what they believed to be right for the children in their schools. They attributed the success of their schools not to their leadership, but to the work of the teachers in their schools. Another unanticipated outcome was the way the principals managed the challenges of their high poverty population. The researcher was surprised to find that they dealt with these things in a matter of fact way, these issues did not appear to be overarching or overwhelmingly influencing their work. Instead, the principals were more intensely focused on improving academic achievement as a way of solving the dilemmas of poverty.
Conclusions

The researcher sought to answer this fundamental question:

*What are the essential attributes of a turnaround school principal?*

The essential attributes of the turnaround school principal are moral leadership, systemic strategist, intrapreneur, achiever, professional knowledge, beliefs, sensible, integrity, relational, challenger, and reflector.

Sub-questions the researcher sought to answer include:

*What is the life-world of a turnaround principal?*

The life-world (the way a person lives, creates, and relates in the world) of the turnaround principal is expressed in the theoretical model as a combination of intellectual attributes and emotional attributes balanced by two juxtaposing attributes that enable the turnaround leaders to be dynamic and conscientious at the same time. Without the two balancing attributes challenger and reflector, the turnaround principals would find themselves in a state of tension with their attributes. The balancing attributes add the just right combination of raising and lowering the temperature of change (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

*What is extraordinary or unique about the leadership of the turnaround principal?*

The turnaround principals are unusually different in their attitudes and demeanor about their challenging work. They are positive promoters and empathetic pragmatists. They manage schools of turbulence in intense/calm, energetic/thoughtful, enthusiastic/insightful, and passionate/caring ways. It is a positive paradoxical style of leadership, a style of the balance between strong leadership traits and deeply personal
leadership traits. The result is leadership that is a balance of IQ and EQ, intellectual intelligence and emotional intelligence.

*What skills, knowledge, personality traits, and leadership characteristics do turnaround principals have in common?*

The turnaround principals appeared to have a well developed foundation of professional knowledge. The literature correlating effective principals with instructional leadership is extensive. Almost all of the turnaround principals had many years of teaching experience. The researcher posits that this strong teaching background is likely to influence their instructional leadership abilities. The researcher’s intent was not to examine the personality traits explicitly, but to determine whether they surfaced within the attributes. It is suggested that the findings in this study have possible commonalities with personality traits. Repeatedly revealed was the moral attitude of the principals and its influence on the attributes as demonstrated in their behaviors. The moral leadership attribute found in this study is likely to have a strong relationship to turnaround school success when combined with the intellectual attributes, emotional attributes, and the balancing attributes found in this study.

*Implication for Action*

The results and findings of this study suggest practical implications for professional practice. This study sought to inform district and state leaders about the leadership attributes necessary for turnaround situations. The results and findings of this study point to specific behaviors of turnaround principals and attributes that inform or drive these behaviors. District and state leaders interested in turnarounds in schools could use this information to formulate an assessment to evaluate current principals’ capacity
for turnaround leadership or potential candidates’ capacity for turnaround schools. The assessment information might be used to design support for turnaround leaders. The results and findings could also be used in training programs for turnaround leaders. The findings may enhance higher education principal preparation program curriculum by incorporating turnaround leadership as an added topic under the subject of school reform. Principals currently leading low performing schools might find the results and findings of this study useful to rethink their approaches in their schools.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

The results and findings of this study propose further research in the area of essential leadership attributes of turnaround principals. Replicated studies with middle school and high school turnaround principals would be useful to determine whether there are commonalities in turnaround principal attributes across school level leadership. A replicated study with a larger nationwide sample would further validate findings. This study could be expanded to a mixed method study with a survey of leadership personality traits, characteristics or competencies for correlation to attributes discovered in this study. Research on intellectual capacity and emotional capacity or cognitive intelligence-IQ and emotional intelligence-EQ in turnaround education leaders could be explored. Additionally, investigation into intrapreneurial leadership and its effects on turnaround situations has potential merit. Studies of turnaround leadership over time and its resulting effects should be conducted to determine which practices of the turnaround leaders are sustained by the schools. Leadership attributes of principals of High-Performing High-Poverty schools should be studied and compared to turnaround leadership attributes to
determine similarities and differences and whether or how the attributes change from the turnaround situation to the high performing situation.

Concluding Remarks

The findings of this research study provide a purposed theoretical model of the essential attributes of the public school turnaround leader. This theoretical model suggests turnaround leaders to possess both intellectual and emotional attributes and balancing attributes that keep this model in a dynamic state. The vibrancy of this model comes from the core attribute, moral leadership. Moral leadership is at the center of the model and infuses all the other attributes with purpose and energy. It is moral leadership that influences the turnaround leaders personally and professionally to do what they do.

This study began with an investigation into the moral journey of the pursuit of equity in education. The actions of American education policy along the way have created the path of this journey to the present state of public education and NCLB sanctions for poor performance and the resulting need for school turnarounds. The researcher has come full circle in her understanding of the journey—it is still a moral issue. Turning around the schools with the greatest needs will require moral leadership. It will require moral leaders to lead the way.
Bibliography


H.R. 1, 111d Cong., (2009).


APPENDIX A

Methodological Terminology

Category: A type of concept. Usually used for a higher level of abstraction.

Coding: Conceptualizing data by constant comparison of incident with incident, and incident with concept to emerge more categories and their properties.

Concept: The underlying, meaning, uniformity and/or pattern within a set of descriptive incidents.

Constant Comparative Coding: Fundamental operation in the constant comparative method of analysis. The analyst codes incidents for categories and their properties and the theoretical codes that connect them.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Memoing</td>
<td>The theoretical write-up of ideas about substantive codes and their theoretically coded relationships as they emerge during coding, collecting and analyzing data and during memoing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Coding</td>
<td>The initial stage of constant comparative analysis, before delimiting the coding to a core category and its properties—or selective coding. The analysis starts with no preconceived codes—he remains open.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property</td>
<td>A type of concept that is a conceptual characteristic of a category, thus at a lesser level of abstraction than a category. A property is a concept of a concept.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantive Coding</td>
<td>Coding that conceptualizes the empirical substance of the area of research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Coding</td>
<td>A property of coding and constant comparative analysis that yields the conceptual relationship between categories and their properties as they emerge.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theoretical Sampling

The process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them in order to develop his theory as it emerges.

(Glaser, 1992 & 1998)
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

DISTRICT RESEARCH
Extraordinary Leaders for Unordinary Times: A Grounded Theory for Understanding Turnaround School Leaders
You are invited to participate in a study that will explore the phenomenon of turnaround school leadership and will attempt to discover what critical attributes constitute a turnaround school leader. It will help current principals in the field understand the leadership capacity needed to lead and improve their schools and turn them around if that is what is necessary. In addition, this study is being conducted to fulfill the requirements of a dissertation in the Educational Administration Ph.D. program. The study is conducted by Doris Candelarie who can be reached at 303-994-9925 or dcandela@q.com. This project is supervised by the course instructor, Dr. George Straface, Department of Education, University of Denver, Denver, CO 80208, 303-871-2496 or george.straface@du.edu.
Participation in this study should take about one hour of your time for an in-person interview. Participation will involve responding to a few questions about turnaround leadership. The researcher will audiotape the interview to ensure that responses are accurately portrayed. The researcher may contact you by telephone or email to follow up on the interview or to clarify responses. Participation in this project is strictly voluntary. The risks associated with this project are minimal. If, however, you experience discomfort you may discontinue the interview at any time. We respect your right to choose not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
Your responses will be identified by code number only and will be kept separate from information that could identify you. This is done to protect the confidentiality of your responses. Only the researcher will have access to your individual data and any reports generated as a result of this study will use only group averages and paraphrased wording. However, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. Although no questions in this interview address it, we are required by law to tell you that if information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect, it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities.
If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the interview, please contact Susan Sadler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-3454, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.
You may keep this page for your records. Please sign at the bottom of this page if you understand and agree to the above. If you do not understand any part of the above statement, please ask the researcher any questions you have.

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of the study called Extraordinary Leaders for Unordinary Times. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form.

Signature _____________________ Date _________________

___ I agree to be audiotaped.
___ I do not agree to be audiotaped.
Signature _____________________ Date _________________

___________ I would like a summary of the results of this study to be mailed to me at the following postal or e-mail address:
APPENDIX C

Preliminary Interview Questions:
According to the literature your school is considered a turnaround school and you are considered a turnaround leader. A turnaround school is a school that has achieved dramatic improvement in academic progress from formerly a poor performing school to a high performing school. A turnaround leader is one who has led the school through the turnaround process.

1. What do you think of being recognized as a turnaround leader?
2. What do you consider turnaround leadership to be?
3. What criteria would you use to describe a turnaround school?
4. Describe how you turned your school around?
   How did you begin?
   What steps did you take in this journey?
   What research and/or theories, did you rely upon?
5. Give me an example of a typical school day in your life?
   How do you usually start your day?
   What encompasses a typical day?
   How do you organize yourself?
   What are your priorities and challenges?
   How do you end your day?
6. How would others describe you as a leader?
   Personal characteristics
   Leadership characteristics
7. How would you describe yourself as a leader?
   Personal characteristics
   Leadership characteristics
8. What contributes to your leadership style?
   Personally
   Professionally
APPENDIX D

Revised Interview Questions:

According to the literature your school is considered a turnaround school and you are considered a turnaround leader. A turnaround school is a school that has achieved dramatic improvement in academic progress from formerly a poor performing school to a high performing school. A turnaround leader is one who has led the school through the turnaround process.

1. What do you think of the concept of turnaround leader?
2. Describe how you turned your school around?
   a. What was your school like when you first arrived?
   b. What things were you not okay with?
   c. What things needed to change?
   d. How did you begin? How did you prioritize?
   e. What steps did you take in this journey?
   f. What resources did you rely upon?
3. Give me an example of a typical school day in your life?
   a. How do you usually start your day?
   b. What encompasses a typical day?
   c. How do you organize yourself?
   d. What are your priorities and challenges?
   e. How do you like to end your day?
4. How would others describe you as a leader?
   Personal characteristics
   Leadership characteristics
5. How would you describe yourself as a leader?
   Personal characteristics
   Leadership characteristics
6. What contributes to your leadership style?
   Personally
   Professionally
Later added the question:
   What legacy do you want to leave in this school?
APPENDIX E

Data Wall