TACKLING NEW INITIATIVES: HOW ONE CENTRAL OFFICE SUPPORTS PRINCIPALS IN THEIR EFFORTS TO IMPLEMENT NEW TEACHER EVALUATION CRITERIA

By

DOUGLAS R. CHRISTENSEN

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTORATE OF EDUCATION

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
Department of Education

DECEMBER 2014

©Copyright by DOUGLAS R. CHRISTENSEN, 2014
All Rights Reserved
To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the dissertation of DOUGLAS R. CHRISTENSEN find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

___________________________________  
Michele Acker-Hocevar, Ph.D., Chair

___________________________________  
Chad R. Lochmiller, Ph.D.

___________________________________  
Joan Kingrey, Ph.D.
TACKLING NEW INITIATIVES: HOW ONE CENTRAL OFFICE SUPPORTS PRINCIPALS IN THEIR EFFORTS TO IMPLEMENT NEW TEACHER EVALUATION CRITERIA

Abstract

by Douglas R. Christensen, Ed.D.
Washington State University
December 2014

Chair: Michele Acker-Hocevar

School district central offices have been identified as important actors in the implementation of new education policy initiatives. This qualitative case study focused on the ways in which the central office in a mid-sized school district supported school principals in implementing newly adopted teacher and principal evaluation criteria. The study examined how the school district’s central office supported principals in their planning, preparation, and implementation of the new teacher and principal evaluation system (TPEP) in Washington State. Two research questions guided the completion of this research study: (a) What types of activities took place between the central office and the principals; and (b) Did the principals perceive these activities as helpful to their pursuit of effective implementation of the TPEP initiative in their buildings? The findings highlight the importance of central office administrators as boundary spanners in supporting the principals’ development as leaders who have the capacity to enact the new evaluation criteria. Two themes emerged from interviews, observations and the review of documents. First, the use
of existing district structures and relationships to support implementation at the school level was vital to the successful adoption of the evaluation criteria. This included working together as partners during the implementation and using common language from previous work within the district to achieve broadly shared understanding of the evaluation requirements. The second theme highlighted the importance of central office administrators providing everyday support to school principals. Everyday support included providing meaningful professional development; engaging in regular meetings; working and learning with the school administrators; and engaging in constant, consistent communication about the implementation of the policy. Collectively, the findings highlight how important it is that central office administrators consistently review their leadership practices with principals to ensure that they are providing meaningful structures and support. Further research on the ways in which central office administrators support principals is needed. In particular, research that focuses on how central office administrators measure their own practices relative to principal needs is urgently needed. Such consideration is particularly important as new policy initiatives demand that central office administrators create and establish effective support for school principals.
# Table of Contents

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................................................. iii

LIST OF TABLES ......................................................................................................................................... viii

CHAPTER ONE  INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................... 1

  Role of Central Office Administrators ................................................................................................. 2

  Role of the School Principal .................................................................................................................. 4

  Purpose of the Study .............................................................................................................................. 5

  Research Problem and Research Questions ......................................................................................... 6

  Importance of the Study ......................................................................................................................... 6

  Assumptions of the Study ...................................................................................................................... 7

  Limitations and Delimitations ............................................................................................................... 8

  Organization of the Study .................................................................................................................... 8

CHAPTER TWO  LITERATURE REVIEW .................................................................................................. 10

  Central Office History ........................................................................................................................... 12

  Central Office – Ongoing Changes ...................................................................................................... 13

  Evolving Role of School Principals ...................................................................................................... 17

  Evaluation as a Context for Central Office Transformation ............................................................... 19

  Organizational Learning ...................................................................................................................... 22

    Central office transformation – Partnering with principals. ......................................................... 25

    Professional development. ................................................................................................................. 26

    Assistance relationships. .................................................................................................................... 27
Central office as boundary spanners ................................................................. 29
Theoretical Framework .................................................................................. 30
CHAPTER THREE METHODS ............................................................................ 31
Conducting a Qualitative Study ...................................................................... 31
Sampling Rationale ........................................................................................ 32
Research Setting ............................................................................................ 33
Participants .................................................................................................... 33
Data Collection ............................................................................................... 35
  Interviews ..................................................................................................... 36
  Observations ............................................................................................... 39
  Documents .................................................................................................. 40
Analysis of the Data ...................................................................................... 41
Positionality .................................................................................................... 42
Limitations ........................................................................................................ 43
CHAPTER FOUR FINDINGS ............................................................................... 45
District Context Prior to Implementing TPEP ............................................... 46
Becoming a TPEP Pilot District ...................................................................... 46
Learning Partners ........................................................................................... 47
Purpose, Engagement, Rigor, and Results ..................................................... 48
Theme 1: Leveraging Existing District Structures and Processes to Implement Change. 50
  First structure – Working together as learning partners ......................... 50
  Second structure – Using common language – PERR ................................ 57
Theme 2: Intentional Actions Taken by Central Office to Support Principals .... 63
Specific Supports for TPEP Initiative ........................................................................... 64
Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 82
CHAPTER FIVE  DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS ...................................................... 85
Research Question 1 – What Types of Activities Occurred Between
Central Office and Principals? ....................................................................................... 86
  Leveraging existing structures. ...................................................................................... 86
Research Question 2 – Did the Principals See These Activities as Helpful? .......... 88
  Ongoing support for principals. .................................................................................. 88
Relationships Fostered Through Dialogue, Listening, Co-learning, and Support .... 90
Opportunities to Learn Together Led to Trust ............................................................ 91
What the Superintendent and Central Office Does Matters ..................................... 92
Meeting Together Regularly ......................................................................................... 93
Central Office Boundary Spanning with Principals .................................................. 94
This Study vs. Previous Literature ............................................................................. 95
Future Research ........................................................................................................... 97
Significance of the Study ............................................................................................. 98
  Practical....................................................................................................................... 98
  Theoretical ............................................................................................................... 99
  Substantive.............................................................................................................. 99
Conclusions and Recommendations ......................................................................... 99
REFERENCES ............................................................................................................. 102
LIST OF TABLES

1. Matrix of Findings and Sources of Data Triangulation .......................................................... 36
2. Interview Questions – Central Office Administrators and Principals.................................... 37
3. Interview Questions and How They Relate to Research Questions ...................................... 39
4. Types of Documents Used for This Study .................................................................................. 41
5. Secondary Instructional Academy Morning/Primary Instructional Academy Afternoon ...... 67
6. Professional Development Calendar ......................................................................................... 79
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The pressure to improve student achievement has prompted superintendents and central office administrators to search for new ways to support schools, and particularly school principals, in their work as instructional leaders (Copland & Honig, 2010). In today’s public schools, district administrators are faced with the challenge of guiding schools through national and state reforms, incorporating new initiatives into daily practice, and supporting principals and teachers in their efforts to substantially increase student achievement. Scholars have described this shift in central office practice as part of a “transformation” that involved rethinking the relationships between schools and district office administrators (Copland & Honig, 2010; Honig, 2012).

Central office administrators are being asked to change the way they work. A shift in relationships and leadership on the part of the central office is needed because of the changing roles in principals in their schools. Giving principals authority and capacity to lead is essential. In some instances, the principals may have more expertise in certain areas than their central office counterparts. Terms such as boundary spanning and assistance relationships are becoming more common among central office administrators’ understanding of their roles (Honig, 2009). The term assistance means that participants are involved in deeply engaged learning together. The definition of assistance relationships also includes the expert-novice relationship. In this case, how does the central office administrator (expert) bring the principal (novice) into a deeper, richer participation with any given activity (Honig, 2008)? New policies, practices, and support relationships are being created between central office staff and building principals (Honig, 2008) in an effort to design and implement new initiatives. Central office
leaders find it crucial to provide professional development for themselves and their principals (Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010) in an attempt to prepare principals to become better evaluators for teachers. This introductory chapter addresses three areas. First, this chapter presents the background and overview of the key literature related to the topic. Next, it provides the research problem and key research questions. Finally, this chapter outlines the organization of the study and the description of how it will be reported.

**Role of Central Office Administrators**

The research literature supports the importance of central office administrators establishing relationships with school principals to support learning in their schools (Bardett & McCormick, 2004; Honig, 2012; Johnson, 2010; Knapp, 2008; Snyder, Acker-Hocevar, & Snyder, 1996). Looking back at the role the central office played for many decades leading up to the education reform movement of the 1980’s, could best be described around the idea of isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Isomorphism is the tendency of organizations to replicate structures. School districts have organized themselves very similarly to other public agencies in that they too have operated under the same process of support for their respective organizations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This process is based on the fact that the same environmental conditions exist, and that the organization is “homogenous within given domains and increasingly organized around rituals of conformity to wider institutions” (p. 155). Under this leadership assumption of isomorphism, central office administrators worked less on relationships with schools and centered their attention more on the structure and sustainability of the district that looked similar to other educational structures. Raymond Callahan, in his 1964 book *Education and the Cult of Efficiency*, described school administrators as business leaders who looked beyond the needs of the students and focused primarily on the efficiency of keeping
schools running. A typical example of isomorphism in public schools would be the way the majority of schools are built and organized after the same design as other government or business entities, thus allowing them to be operated with the same efficient focus. New central office leaders usually inherit these standards and processes of operation and replicate them during their own tenure. These relationships have been more hierarchical and telling relationships rather than assistance relationships (Ballenger, Acker-Hocevar, Townsend, & Place, 2013). Many elements play into establishing the assistance relationships needed to support principals. The assistance relationship must be developed and nurtured. This process includes working side-by-side with principals. Using data and other forms of evidence to model standards-based reform efforts as partners helps establish these relationships. These relationships evolve over time in both formal and informal settings (Honig, 2010). Through these relationships, the central office administrator and principal must establish a culture within the district where reforms to existing and traditional relationships are examined and better understood (Copland & Honig, 2012).

Central office transformation is a component defined for this study as the ability of central office leaders to work and learn together with school-based principals. Working together with principals and teachers toward a common goal is part of this transformation (Brudney, Hebert, & White, 2000; Honig, 2008; Knapp, 2008). Providing and participating in professional development with principals is key to central office transformation. As central office members and principals work and learn together, relationships are formed, common goals and themes are identified in the work, and sustainability among administrators is enhanced.

More current research has begun to look at the role of the central office administrator as it relates to the school principal (Brudney et al., 2000; Honig, 2012; Smylie, 2007). The role that
Central office administrators play today is considerably different than that of decades ago. Central office administrators must be at the center of the institutional reform within their district. This means that the conditions and practices in the central office are transformed such that the administrators’ everyday work changes. The central office partners with principals to learn as well as to reach across traditional cultural and political boundaries in the process (Copland & Honig, 2010). As principals attempt to become proficient in new initiatives such as a newly adopted state evaluation system, central office administrators must also establish routines within their own daily work to support these principals. This set of routines, or framework, is by definition a configuration of an interrelated set of assumptions, concepts, values, and practices that comprise a way of viewing reality (Schwandt, 2007). Simply put, re-defining the roles of central office leaders is not enough. And restructuring management positions and duties won’t provide the ongoing leadership that is required to effectively support principals and teachers in the schools (Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Newton, 2010).

**Role of the School Principal**

Also significant to the background of this study is the changing role of the principal. The role of the principal has changed: No longer just a manager of people and resources, the principal is now also an instructional leader for teachers (Cuban, 1988). This change has put great stress on principals (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Heck, 1992). Principals are now being required to shift their focus and become highly qualified in the area of proven instructional strategies to help guide teachers. This new arena for principals can be a steep learning curve, and all the while the principals are still maintaining their past resource managerial duties (Hallinger & Heck, 2010).

As the role of the principal has changed over the last few decades, the call for change from the central office to support these principals has come to the forefront of education reform.
Chapter Two of this study will look more closely at the role of the principal. Past literature will help define how the role of the principal has changed. For example, studies from the 1960s and 1970s show that the role of the principal was primarily one of managing budgets, human capital, and other building resources, including very little interaction with teachers or students (Callahan, 1964; Mintzberg, 1973). Studies from the 1980s on began to look at how the role of the principal evolved to include more leadership activities, with a focus on supporting teachers more in an effort to increase student achievement (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Heck, 1992).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between the central office and school-based principals through the lens of how the central office provided assistance to school principals during the implementation of the new Teacher Principal Evaluation Project (TPEP). This new evaluation system was adopted in the state of Washington by the Legislature in 2010.

I used interviews, observations, and the review of documents to collect the data for the study. For the purposes of this study, a mid-size school district is defined as any district between 10,000 and 20,000 students. The school district in this study, known as the Valley School District, has more than 16,000 students divided into 24 schools, kindergarten through 12th grade. The district includes more than 900 certificated teachers, with principals leading the classified and certified teaching staff in each of the buildings. This district was selected as the primary location of the study because it was one of eight school districts in the state that had been selected to pilot the new teacher evaluation process. Therefore, the participants in the study could speak directly about the new evaluation initiative as it related to their interactions with
central office. The district was also chosen because the central office and principal leadership had remained constant with very little change over the previous 5-10 years, giving the findings of the study a longitudinal as well as a current context.

Research Problem and Research Questions

The value of establishing “assistance relationships” between central office administrators and principals is supported in the literature. A significant amount of research has focused on the role of central office administrators and how it needs to change to support the efforts of school reform today (Bardett & McCormick, 2004; Honig, 2012; Johnson, 2010; Knapp, 2008; Snyder, Acker-Hocevar, & Snyder, 1996). Although Honig (2012) identified key concepts related to how central office administrators establish these relationships, she added that future study is needed in identifying how learning occurs within the district office to provide these assistance relationships. Specifically, the selection of research sites within the central office setting is central to understanding how these relationships are presumed where researchers are able to observe central office learning in action with principals (Honig, 2008).

This research was conducted to facilitate understanding of the complexity of relationships within the school district administrative system and what impacts these relationships have on the principals’ ability to lead their buildings. Therefore, the research questions considered for this study were: (a) What types of activities were occurring between the central office and principals; and (b) Did the principals perceive these activities as helpful to their pursuit of effective implementation of the TPEP initiative in their school buildings? Why or why not?

Importance of the Study

This study has significance at the theoretical, substantive, and practical levels. Theoretically, the results of this study can contribute to the existing body of literature related to
assistance relationships and how learning occurs in the work between central office administration and school principals. Substantively, the study will provide an understanding of what that joint work (Honig, 2008) looks like, and of whether the principal sees the work as supportive and relevant to his/her job. Finally, the results provide practical implications that may be useful in the future work of central office administrators as it relates to supporting and leading principals. This study is also important because every district in Washington State is required to implement this initiative. This means that the central office must play a major role in training and supporting the implementation. Recommendations that come forth from this study may help districts focus on appropriate and sustainable support methods.

**Assumptions of the Study**

One of the assumptions of this study was that this school district’s central office has operated in the past in a traditional hierarchal pattern (Townsend et al., 2013). This means that the central office generally gives direction to the building principals, who then in turn give direction to the teachers and staff who work in their schools. Assuming this pattern existed, the possibility that assistance relationships between central office administrators and principals had been established would then mean that the central office had shifted their approach to working with principals (Copland & Honig, 2010). Additionally, this study assumed that boundary spanning by central office has been primarily an external endeavor (Firestone, 1982). In other words, central office staff had worked with community agencies, interest groups, the media, the school board, and other entities to address issue and solve problems. In contrast, this study asked that participants look at how the central office had taken the idea of boundary spanning and applied it internally, specifically with principals and teachers, to see how and what would be of greatest aid to them (Honig, 2006).
Limitations and Delimitations

I am part of the district leadership team and the participants in this study knew me. Participants might have wanted to have been seen as favorable in their answers to me, thinking that this would have benefited them professionally. Participants may also have had personal reasons for how they responded and answered the questions. Additionally, my research study was looking at only a small sample of one mid-sized district. Even though these results might seem limited, conducting multiple in-depth interviews with the principals and central office administrators may have resulted in findings that could be generalizable across other settings. I triangulated the data of interviews, observations, and artifact checks. I also did member checking for accuracy. Member checking is used to verify the interpretation of the data. This included giving the participants their responses to the interview questions and allowing them to clarify and make changes if necessary, so as to capture their actual intent in the answers that were given. Participants had worked together previously in a variety of settings. Therefore, it was paramount that I minimized the opportunity for influence within the group. Interviews were conducted separately and answers were not shared with other participants. I was looking only at elementary principals in this study. The elementary principals had more robust professional development with the central office around the initiative on which I was focusing. This is a limitation in that other secondary principals might have identified different elements of assistance relationships that are not congruent with elementary school principals. The fact that I concentrated only on elementary principals posed a delimitation to the study as well.

Organization of the Study

This study is reported in five chapters. Chapter One provides an introduction to the study that includes the background, the research problem and questions, and the purpose of the study.
Chapter Two is a review of the literature related to the study. Chapter Three explains the methodology, including detailed information about the setting, participants, methods of gathering information, how analysis was conducted, and the limitations of the study. It also includes the position of the researcher within the study. Chapter Four presents an analysis of the data collected with respect to the findings. Chapter Five, or the final chapter, relates the findings to the research questions, provides conclusions, and states implications of the study.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Central office transformation is an ongoing endeavor, focused on supporting student achievement through the support of building principals. Developing, working with, and supporting principals to become instructional leaders is at the forefront of this transformation. As the literature review will show, major shifts in the areas of central office roles and responsibilities have occurred in recent decades. Learning and partnering with principals has emerged at the forefront of the role of central office administrators (Honig, 2010; Knapp, 2008). Key elements of district office transformation are present in the literature, focusing on the main focal points of successful transformation.

Before the key elements of transformation can be defined, the history of the central office and its role(s) must be understood—specifically, the movement from manager and bureaucrat to partner and instructional leader. Included in this change are personnel and human resource issues that also vary greatly from past practice in terms of shaping the professional identity of central office administrators (Odden, 2011).

Within the movement of central office transformation and learning within the organization are the elements of assistance relationships and boundary spanning, as well as other deliberate strategies that central office administrators across the nation are working to establish. The literature review will show how these elements are embedded in daily practice of central office administrators and that the practice of central office transformation, when carried out correctly, goes beyond the idea of merely shuffling job titles and organizational charts.

Not only has the central office had to shift from manager to leader, but the principal at the building level has also experienced this same transformation. The revelation of the need for
more studies in the area of central office transformation is coupled with a description of how the principal’s role has evolved over time. Without understanding the change in the principal’s role, a person cannot understand the need for change in central office support. Major responsibilities of the principal now include being the instructional leader in the building, as well as becoming an administrator who can oversee, develop, and evaluate teachers (Honig, 2009). Adding to the complicated role of the principal, these new facets are often expected to be developed and to evolve without specific support (Cuban, 1988; Knapp, 2008).

The review of the literature is organized into themes. First, the historical background and current practice of central office roles is explored. Next, the definition of transformation is established, with its corresponding key elements and the need for their implementation. The evolving role of the school principal is the next theme, including the principal’s role as instructional leader and evaluator. Because evaluation has become central to the role of principals, a brief look into related literature concerning how evaluation is connected to instructional practice is also included in the review. The final sections of the literature review focus on organizational learning through central office and principal partnerships, professional development activities, assistance relationships, and finally the central office acting as a boundary spanner.

The literature review process that I used included searching in various educational databases, focused primarily on peer-reviewed research. Key phrases with which I began my research included central office transformation and role of district office. I also looked at research under the phrases role of the principal and evaluation systems and central office support. All of these searches helped me create the themes that are explored in the literature review. Databases that revealed much of the research were: (a) EBSCO, (b) Web of Science,
(c) SAGE, and (d) ERIC. The articles that I selected for this review were organized and filtered by themes into software that I used throughout the study. I was able to cross-reference more current research with study findings as needed to conduct the study.

Central Office History

In the early 1970s, a large study was conducted among CEOs of large successful organizations in the United States. The study concluded that the purpose of managers and leaders in private industry was to ensure that the organization conducted its operations efficiently and provided goods and services of public value. Stability was required and maintained. The leader was in charge of strategies and systems changes to meet the needs of the environment. In addition, the leader had to ensure that the organization served the needs of those who were in control of it (Mintzberg, 1973). Public school management and leadership were no different. Furthermore, central office administrators were often focused on running their districts in the most efficient way possible, regardless of student learning needs (Callahan, 1964).

Scholars suggest that central offices must become learning organizations that make figuring out how to support schools in their efforts to increase student achievement central to their work (Knapp et al., 2010a). District office leadership must become part of the learning organization within a district (Cohen, 1982; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003). At times it can be difficult for members of the central office to spend the majority of their time focusing on establishing these relationships with principals. Often the central office is required to work with community members and school boards, and to resolve conflicts within the district. Pursuing goals with limited capacity; maintaining focus amid multiple competing agendas and logistics; undertaking new tasks within old structures, cultures and routines; developing new plans guided by incomplete theories of action; and confronting unanswered questions with limited information
or data are all struggles that the central office must address. And though these efforts are necessary and do support principals and their schools indirectly, they do take time away from the direct relationship building that is essential between the central office and principals (Knapp, Copland, Honig, Plecki, & Portin, 2010b).

Finally, in looking at the traditional form of politics that existed in central office leadership, it is apparent that the new policies and reformations emerging in public education have caused districts to look at the distribution of power and decision making. The need for the central office to work together with principals to commonly address the reforms and initiatives is the only way to succeed (Honig, 2008). Old methods of giving principals direction without spending time in their schools will no longer work. Understanding this need for change has now become quite common within school districts, although the questions of what that transformation looks like for the central office is still being answered (Copland & Honig, 2010).

Central Office – Ongoing Changes

Various types of changes occur when central office leaders undergo this transformation. Change and transformation are not terms that can stand on definition alone. Some districts have tried to “re-organize” the central office by changing titles and re-assigning duties in an attempt to transform roles (Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Newton, 2010).

Today, this change is described as the central office operating as a learning organization, continually engaged in extensive relationships with schools. Using evidence and data from these relationships to help guide policy and practice strengthens teaching and learning (Honig & Coburn, 2008). The central office uses this evidence-based data to understand and support schools. Building relationships with schools through the use of data is one way to work together and support buildings (Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012). These new relationships help to
distribute the power previously mentioned among all stakeholders and allow the demands of reform and initiatives to permeate the organization, thus creating ownership for all to improve learning (Corcoran & Belcher, 2001; Hubbard, Meehan, & Stein, 2006; Marsh, Kerr, Ikemoto, & Darilek, 2006).

Another visible transformation involves the way in which central office leadership addresses human resource issues. As mentioned before, traditional leadership treated human capital as a resource that should be maximized, whereas ethical or emotional considerations were often minimized. The hiring of solid managers who could continue in the footsteps of others was typical leadership behavior in succession planning (Mintzberg, 1973). Today we see the need to reform the hiring practices in school districts. Concerning central office administrators, the change from hiring good managers to hiring great instructional leaders to improve student achievement is necessary (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004). This includes policy and practice changes from the central office to support such hiring shifts. Collective bargaining agreements, coupled with discussions among stakeholders, must also be led and guided by the central office. Human capital must be managed strategically. In his 2011 article on managing human capital, Allen Odden described the transition and focus of central office leadership and human resources:

Restructuring the human resource system to include the recruitment, selection, distribution, induction, professional development, performance management and evaluation, compensation, and career progression of staff are all [sic] needed to boost teacher and principal effectiveness in ways that dramatically improve instructional practice and student learning. (p. 9)
This type of focus exhibits how central office leadership is transforming to support student achievement. Without these changes, transformation at the district level cannot be complete.

Finally, for central office transformation to continue to progress, the central office must also approach teaching and learning as a systems challenge. This means overcoming past cultural biases. In successful districts, the change in central office isn’t just a realignment of positions or departments or duties, or the re-aligning of organizational charts (Honig, Lorton, & Copland, 2009). Honig (2009) also concluded that there is a gap between what a district office should do and what it actually looks like—the key concept being that the central office must become teachers of principals and learners with them as well.

The structural linkages and relationships with principals are essential to the success of the change process (Johnson & Crispeels, 2010). The central office must provide resources to further develop these relationships. Such resources include but are not limited to meaningful, focused professional development and time for all stakeholders to learn. Structural supports must be present to help drive efficiency and complete tasks. And finally, central office must provide opportunities for professionalism and organizational learning (Johnson & Crispeels, 2010). It is evident that the transformation of central offices throughout public schools is being pushed forward, both externally via federal and state policies as well as internally via principals and teachers who need leadership and guidance to meet the demand for increased student achievement.

One example of central office transformation can be seen in the efforts made in the San Diego, California school district in the late 1990s and early 2000s. A new definition of central office leadership was developed that said central office administrators were to become intimately involved in the day-to-day learning efforts within schools. Roles and responsibilities were
changed among top management and leadership to include having central office administrators partnering with schools, principals, and teachers. Central office leaders were asked to be instructional pillars, meaning that they would come into the schools and provide specific guidance on instructional and learning reforms. San Diego failed because these central office leaders had either forgotten what those practices were as a result of not having been in the teaching field for many years, or they were never trained and taught themselves as to what those best practices were. Central office administrators were assigned to work with building principals based on the geography of the schools, keeping a central office administrator working in one area of the district. Other times administrators were assigned to levels in which they’d had no previous experience. As principals took these central office administrators out into classrooms to observe teachers, many of the central office administrators had not stayed current with effective teaching practices. The central office administrators had been away from classrooms for too long, as they had held central office positions for many years, which had precluded their being able to continue focusing on effective teaching practices. San Diego had simply re-organized their central office and re-assigned duties in the hope that doing so would transform the district, but the central office didn’t have the capacity to work differently in their new roles (Darling-Hammond, Hightower, Husbands, LaFors, Young, & Christopher, 2003).

This transformation from an operational/managerial focus to a leadership/assistant focus will continue to affect central office leadership as they work to support their organizations. Some activities associated with traditional central office leadership continue to be necessary, such as managing resources and budgets, maintaining safety in schools and throughout the district, and ensuring that facilities are viable and foster student learning. These activities create a fair amount of overlap between traditional management and new transformational leadership
(Huber, 1997). The key will be for central office administrators to balance the old with the new as they lead their districts into and through educational reform.

**Evolving Role of School Principals**

For central office administrators to understand how to support principals, they must first understand how the roles of principals have changed (Beck & Murphy, 1993). For principals, the concept of instructional leadership has replaced managerial leadership as the source of improved student learning for all (Cuban, 1988; Elmore, 1990). Principals must balance their ongoing managerial duties with new instructional leadership skills that help teachers improve classroom instruction. This reform effort in schools has expanded the role of the principal, putting greater strain on the principals themselves (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Heck, 1992). This shift has occurred over the past two decades, making the principal’s role today look quite different from the equivalent position of the past. Principals have been asked to increase their skills and knowledge regarding instruction and supporting teaching development. Learning together with teachers is at the forefront of principals’ focus; at the same time, principals must continue to manage their schools (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Knapp et al., 2010a).

Managerial duties were the focus of principal leadership for many decades leading up to the 1980s. Similar to the central office role explained previously, being able to organize and manage resources, finances, budgets, and staff was the core of effective principal leadership. Principal resource management included the evaluation and supervision of teachers, as well as choosing curriculum (Bennis, 1984). Additionally, principals established the building procedures for dealing with student management, staff communications, and overall building culture. In terms of the supervision of teachers, principals were viewed as experts, and in most cases, evaluation was a discreet intervention carried out in an authority-subordinate relationship.
(Reilly, 1984; Reitzug, 1997). At this point, principals had yet to be identified as “instructional leaders.” As education reform efforts emerged, the term instructional leader would become identified with principals and emerge as the main focus of the principal’s role in schools (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988).

Policies and politics of the 1980s placed pressure on public schools to increase student achievement. The idea that all students needed to attain higher levels of achievement in order for the United States to stay competitive in a new global society penetrated public education. With these increased demands on classrooms, principals were now seen in the role of leading teachers to learn the skills required to improve student achievement (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988; Heck, 1992). Concepts such as curriculum alignment and increased supervision of teachers took on a greater role in the principal’s job (Elmore, 1990; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Student learning targets began to emerge, resulting in teachers learning more in-depth about their specific subjects. Principals were charged with providing professional development opportunities to help teachers become more qualified to increase student achievement (Darling-Hammond et al, 2003). A change in policy at the federal level codified this movement by requiring that all teachers become “highly qualified” in their specific subjects. With leadership requirements growing for principals in the areas of instruction, culture, management, human resources, and micropolitics (Portin, 2004), principals were required to decide where to spend their time and efforts. Principals continued to focus more on supervision and evaluation of teachers in an effort to influence effective teaching practices in the classroom. Teacher evaluation scores were being compared with student achievement. Correlations were made, and the role of the principal continued to change from managing the building to influencing effective teaching practices in the classroom. What was found was that teacher evaluations had little or no correlation with the
overall achievement patterns of the school (Hallinger & Heck 1998). Instructional leadership for principals continued to be identified, defined, and given much importance. However, key to this change was the fact that principals did not see any additional support in their efforts to re-design themselves from central office administrators to instructional leaders in their buildings (Hallinger & Heck, 1998).

Because the “instructional leader” role of the principal has emerged as the main focus for principals, the evaluation process also remains very important (Marks & Printy, 2003). Principals must develop practices and processes in their buildings whereby teachers can improve student achievement, implement new teaching strategies, and work together to learn (Knapp et al., 2010b). Learning to use the evaluation process to support and facilitate these initiatives is very difficult for principals and is often a task that they are left alone to achieve. Central office transformation must include this idea of evaluation support for principals (Honig et al., 2010).

**Evaluation as a Context for Central Office Transformation**

The most recent focus on teacher and principal evaluation in Washington State is demonstrated in the adoption of the Teacher and Principal Evaluation Project (TPEP). The Teacher/Principal Evaluation Pilot was born out of Engrossed Second Substitute Senate Bill 6696 during the 2010 legislative session. The bill created moved the state from a two-tiered system of satisfactory and unsatisfactory to a four-tiered evaluation system. These four new tiers are unsatisfactory, basic, proficient, and distinguished. In addition to moving to a four-tiered system, the legislation created eight new criteria for teachers and principals to be evaluated upon, with common themes tying the criteria for teachers and principals together (AWSP, 2013).

This initiative has direct implications for principals in two ways. First, the principal is being evaluated using this new tool and therefore must learn what will be expected of him or her
to produce as evidence to meet the new criteria. Second, the principal must use the new system to evaluate all classroom teachers in the building. The charge for central office administrators to support principals in the evaluation processes is necessary; yet it is still a work in progress for most districts (Honig, 2008).

The new TPEP evaluation system has eight criteria principals must use to evaluate all classroom teachers: (a) Centering instruction on high expectations for student achievement; (b) Demonstrating effective teaching practices; (c) Recognizing individual student learning needs and developing strategies to address those needs; (d) Providing clear and intentional focus on subject matter content and curriculum; (e) Fostering and managing a safe, positive learning environment; (f) Using multiple student data elements to modify instruction and improve student learning; (g) Communicating and collaborating with parents and the school community; and (h) Exhibiting collaborative and collegial practices focused on improving instructional practices and student learning (OSPI, 2013). Of note is that this new evaluation system does not include other certificated employees in schools such as librarians and other specialists.

The new TPEP system also has eight criteria that the central office administrators will use to evaluate principals: (a) creating a school culture that promotes the ongoing improvement of learning and teaching for students and staff; (b) demonstrating commitment to closing the achievement gap; (c) providing for school safety; (d) leading the development, implementation and evaluation of data-driven plan for increasing student achievement, including the use of multiple student data elements; (e) assisting instructional staff with alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment with state and local district learning goals; (f) monitoring, assisting, and evaluating effective instruction and assessment practices; and (g) partnering with the school community to promote student learning (OSPI, 2013).
For the teacher evaluation system, each district can choose one of three approved frameworks that go into great detail in explaining each of the eight criteria. These frameworks were developed and approved by the state to provide support to school districts as they implement the new system. The Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP) was charged with developing the framework for the principal evaluation. All of the frameworks provided, both for teachers and for principals, have specific categories and sub-categories that contain specific examples of best practices. These examples align with the criteria in each evaluation system, providing principals and central office administrators with guidance when they attempt to discern how the evaluation criteria match up with current practice.

For the central office administrator, establishing assistance relationships with principals can be useful in this endeavor to implement a new evaluation system (Copland & Honig, 2010). Without this support from the central office, principals will be left alone to implement this new evaluation system in their buildings, attempt to connect it to current practices, and balance this new work with all of the existing tasks that the principal is already expected to do. Providing effective and focused professional development to principals in the new evaluation system will need to be the responsibility of the central office administration (Knapp et al., 2010a). Principals will need to get training on how the new criteria in the TPEP evaluation system will align with curriculum, teacher instructional practices, data collection and analysis strategies, and teacher professional development and adult learning, as well as policy, procedure, and other cultural factors.

Principals cannot be left alone to understand, implement, and carry out the new evaluation system in their buildings. Central office administration must support principals in this new initiative if it is to be successful. In the past, the central office has often operated as
managers (Honig & Copland, 2008) of resources when a new policy occurred. It would be easy in the case of the TPEP initiative to adhere to that same structure. Because the new evaluation system occurs at the building level, central office administrators could merely pass along the requirements and necessary information that principals need and then sit back and allow each principal to develop procedures to implement the TPEP system. Although principals do need to have a generous set of skills necessary to lead their buildings, they will be left alone to interpret policy and manage situations that always accompany such a significant change in practice unless the leadership, relationships, and training from the central office provide guidance at their school (Knapp et al., 2010b).

**Organizational Learning**

Organizational learning can be defined as a process used to gain knowledge and understanding that improve the organization’s overall effectiveness (Fiol & Lyles, 1985). Organizations establish methods of learning for their members (Lawrence & Dyer, 1983). As identified in previous research, organizational learning occurs when members of the organization can rely on their past learning and experiences to establish practices for how they might approach and learn new concepts (Huber, 1991). When members of the organization are using past experience and providing it as a resource for other members in the organization, then learning can occur for all (Levitt and March, 1988). Also central to organizational learning as it relates to central office administrators and schools is the idea that the central office cannot just pass on information to the school principals and expect learning to occur. The central office must also help interpret the information for the schools and engage in meaningful dialog with their principals. This means that the central office must learn together with the principals when translating and interpreting new information (Dollinger, 1984; Tushman, 1977; Tushman &
Katz, 1980). This type of learning can be difficult, and each organization is influenced by both internal and external factors. Heifetz (1994) described this type of learning as adaptive, where central office leadership becomes an important component of learning together as an organization. Honig and Copland (2008) viewed this type of learning from a system perspective, where learning is open and shared between parties. In this learning situation, information is shared among stakeholders, as is not typical of other business models in which information and learning flow from a top-down approach. A reciprocal relationship is present between central office and principals (Honig, 2010).

Another necessity for organizational learning is that the members of the organization (in this case the central office) must help put the new learning into terms and concepts that all members can understand (Lawrence & Dyer, 1983). Central office administrators should also look at how they can use resources from within their own organization as well as outside resources to help accomplish this new learning (Knapp, Mkhwanazi, & Portin, 2012). This concept relates to the central office’s acting as a boundary spanner for the organization, a concept explained in greater detail later in this chapter. Bringing together stakeholders who might not normally work and learn together from within and sometimes outside the organization creates learning opportunities within the organization (Burch & Spillane, 2004).

Wenger (1998) stated that if central offices are to effectively help their organizations accomplish this learning, they must be familiar with the information that needs to be learned; he adds that the effectiveness of this learning is often dependent on how the central office administrators are viewed by the principals. In other words, are they trusted by the principals? If this learning is to occur together, all participants must see value in the learning, find specific
meaning in the learning, and be able to identify how this learning will fit their own needs (Wenger, 1998).

Honig (2008) explained that accomplishing this task is quite difficult for central office administrators. In reality there are many models for effective organizational learning to occur within schools, and the central office must figure out what works for their specific organization. Also, there are many outside influences that will tell the central office how and what to do to accomplish this organizational learning. Much of this direction will be ambiguous at best, so central office administrators will have to decide what and whom to listen to, and how to incorporate this information and use it as an effective resource (Honig, 2008).

Organizational learning may also occur in schools when leaders listen to what members of the organization have to share (Brown & Duguid, 1991). For example, principals can come to the central office leaders with experiences or perceptions that seem to have positive or negative effects on the organization. Central office leaders can then decide whether these perceptions need to be addressed, either immediately or at a later date. March (1994) adds to this concept by noting that the behavior of the central office can be shaped by the learning and interpretation of these experiences and perceptions that are shared by other members of the organization. Organizations whose members use the past experiences as evidence and apply what they have learned to make new learning occur can make sense of the new challenges in front of them (Levitt & March, 1988). However, the organization must not rely solely on past experience and knowledge to accomplish the new learning. Too much reliance on past knowledge may affect the organization’s ability to react to new evidence or situations (Levinthal & March, 1993). There must be a balance between past organizational experience and new evidence in formulating new learning (Levitt & March, 1988).
Many factors affect organizational learning in school settings. Organizational learning leads to change, which is necessary for an organization to grow (Mintzberg & Waters, 1982). Four elements in this study that affect organizational learning are central office transformation, professional development, establishing and maintaining assistance relationships, and central office administrators acting as boundary spanners.

**Central office transformation – Partnering with principals.** One of the first elements contributing to organization learning was the concept of *central office transformation*. This involves partnering with principals and teachers to become a learning organization working together to identify, promote, and sustain improved instruction (Brudney et al., 2000; Honig, 2008; Knapp, 2008). Historically, political and professional incentives for the central office have emphasized the opposite of central office participation in new initiatives (Elmore, 2006). In other words, central office administrators are praised for maintaining the status quo of efficiently run buildings and are to mitigate major changes in the day-to-day operations of schools. However, as reform efforts emerge and high stakes accountability systems are set in place for public schools, the central office finds itself in a position of creating support networks for schools and using their own experience and evidence to improve the work for principals (Knapp, Swinnerton, Copland, & Monpas-Huber, 2006).

Recent federal and State policies have forced central offices to become learning organizations, but few policies provide evidence of how to do that or what it looks like (Cohen, 1982; Honig, 2008; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003). Central office administrators must continually seek out opportunities to become smarter. Using data as evidence to self-assess and measure growth is required. Understanding external factors such as culture, policy, and practice has enormous influence on the sustainability of effective learning organizations (Knapp, 2008).
Production and participation by the central office means that district and school leadership (central office and principals) must learn together. This work must be done school- and district-wide. New forms of evidence-based practices must be used when making decisions. New policy must be created to support new initiatives (Honig, 2008).

Partnering with principals is one way that central office administrators can help the organization come together in a learning environment (Knapp et al., 2010a). As mentioned previously, the principal role of facilitator and instructional leader has changed significantly. Partnering to learn together with central office leaders on how to manage these changing roles becomes essential. Shortt (1997) explained that when central office and principals partner to understand their roles and know what other stakeholders to involve as well, the ability to successfully accomplish tasks is increased and sustainability toward change is heightened.

**Professional development.** Professional development can be defined as producing a change in instruction and can be linked to higher student achievement (Odden, 2011). Ongoing professional development is essential in transforming the central office (Honig, 2012). Central office administrators are charged with providing meaningful training and leadership for principals to support them in their efforts to improve building instructional practices (Sparks, 1998). Central office administrators can no longer just hand out resources to principals and teachers—they must become part of the learning equation. The way in which decisions about professional learning are made has changed (Von Frank, 2010). The district office bears that responsibility formally and must ensure that professional development aligns tightly with the evaluation of teachers (Knapp et al., 2006). As central office administrators change their traditional role of managing schools to one that includes working alongside principals as instructional leaders, it is important that the professional development provided include a plan
for improving instruction and providing ongoing support. This can be very difficult in large school districts, because leaders have to decide how quickly to act on specific initiatives and who to involve as stakeholders when making decisions about training and development (Corcoran & Belcher, 2001). Often the central office administrators are not trained to provide the type of support that principals need to improve instruction in their schools (Copland et al., 2007). This includes changing the structures and realigning resources to ensure the trainings are timely, meaningful, and appropriate. Ultimately, the goal in this transformation effort is for central office to increase achievement, advance equity, establish policy, and re-orient the district to sustained leadership, accountability, and performance (Honig, 2012).

As state and federal accountability measures increase, principals can no longer be individually responsible for the task of providing supports for students and staff. Furthermore, as principals are asked to move from managing their buildings to becoming instructional leaders, the need for principals to receive meaningful professional development from the central office increases. The need to partner together has become increasingly necessary (Connelly, 2014). Both principals and central office leaders are responsible for creating an organization of learning, and communities or learners are critical to lasting change (Killion, 2011). Providing ongoing professional development for principals and time to work with peers helps principals develop into the schools leaders necessary for leading teachers through educational change (Vitcov & Bloom, 2011).

**Assistance relationships.** Another element that contributes to organizational learning is the establishment of assistance relationships. Meredith Honig (2008), a national leader in research on central office transformation, made the following statement regarding assistance relationships:
Unless the central office is able to work side by side with principals and teachers to become learning partners around improved instruction and specific, focused data collection as evidence of change, the district will continue to seek out and implement the latest popular “quick fix” on the market. Sustained leadership from the central office centers around relationships and the ability to support principals as they work with the framework; especially as they address other external and internal factors (elements) with their staff along the way. (p. 642)

Creating these support relationships between schools and central office includes using new forms of evidence (achievement data). Teaching and learning improvement, as it relates to evaluation, should guide policy and practice to strengthen efforts in those areas. Central offices must provide specific, intentional support for principals, aimed at making their partnership work. A case management approach is needed, giving central office leaders stewardship in each building and allowing them to administer customer service and communication for principals and teachers alike (Honig et al., 2010). These relationships must exist over days, weeks, and months, across venues such as meetings, informal conversations, school visits, and even office work performed in isolation. Internal systems and practices must be aligned to support these relationships, including the recognition and elimination of day-to-day practices that might hinder or interfere with the development of these relationships (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Honig, 2008). Central office leadership must protect principals and buildings from external factors as well (unfunded mandates, micropolitics from school boards, etc.). This is also part of the assistance relationship. In the end, the assistance relationships established should provide overarching support for principals, both indirectly in their everyday work and directly as it pertains to the new teacher evaluation initiative.
Central office as boundary spanners. Boundary spanning contributes to organization growth in that it helps stakeholders overcome factors such as culture, past practice, fear, and lack of vision. Before boundary spanning can be understood, boundary practices must be understood. Boundary practices are routines that sustain connections between different communities of practice (e.g., principals and teachers). They provide for ongoing engagement in an activity for both groups (Richardson, 2002). Boundary spanners, on the other hand, are individuals who can act as the connection between two or more groups. Individuals, rather than routines, become the catalysts that link leader and teacher practices. The central office must take on this role in support of what the principals are attempting to already accomplish (Honig, 2008).

An example of boundary spanning took place in the Oakland, California school district when central office administrators took on the role of connecting schools to district practices through empowering teachers to take the lead within their own buildings through a series of site-based implementations (Honig, 2006). Through the study conducted in Oakland, Honig concluded that the central office provided the help and support principals needed to engage in specific information and political management activities at each school. Central office administrators must model the day-to-day work of collecting and using site information to make decisions that reveal specifically what political management entails. Interestingly, the study in Oakland also revealed that if only some of the central office staff act as spanners, other central office staff can undermine those efforts by continuing to perform traditional duties. This brings up the question: how can we better link spanners to authority structures within the central office for them to effect policy change, while not losing the benefits that seem to come from hiring staff into positions with limited ties to such structures? (Honig, 2006). The ability for central office staff to become spanners in their work with principals and buildings adds greatly to the support
that principals need to grow within the organization. As central office leaders work to bring together principals and teachers in order to engage all stakeholders in change efforts, the learning organization as a whole is strengthened (Ballenger et al., 2013).

**Theoretical Framework**

This is a case study looking at a school district whose central office is attempting to support principals. This study examines *assistance relationships*, previously identified by Meredith Honig (2012) in her continued work on central office transformation. This study fits within the broader context of central office transformation in that much research has been conducted in the larger urban districts around the country; however, very little research has been conducted in smaller, somewhat rural suburban districts. Pure central office transformation must include moving beyond the surface changes in reforms to establishing true partnerships with principals, which rely on research and experience as guides for future change (Honig, 2012).

To interpret and understand the data derived from the study, I used the theoretical framework of organizational learning. Much of the organizational learning theory as it relates to school districts can be intertwined with sociocultural learning theory as well, but for the purposes of this study, I will focus primarily on the how learning occurs through the lens of the organization, specifically between central office administrators and principals. The concepts outlined in the review of the literature regarding organizational learning theory can be applied to the results of this study.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Research for this study was completed using a qualitative case study. The case examined how a mid-size school district transforms its central office leadership to support principals. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the methodology that was used to conduct the study. The unit of analysis was the central office’s leadership actions as the office prepared principals to implement the new teacher evaluation system in their respective buildings. The study included both central office administrators and building principals. Prior to the study’s being initiated, approval for conducting the research was granted by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Washington State University.

This chapter describes the type of study that was conducted, what data sources were used, how the data were collected and analyzed, and the validation strategies used. The guiding research questions from my study were: (a) Within the definition of assistance relationships, what types of activities were occurring between the central office and principals; and (b) Did the principals perceive these activities as helpful to their pursuit of effective implementation of the TPEP initiative in their school buildings?

Conducting a Qualitative Study

For my purposes, I chose to conduct qualitative research study, specifically using a case study approach (Merriman, 2002). The case study is a single case design. The method is used to explore a bounded, integrated system such as a school district. It focuses on intense descriptions of phenomena and social units (Merriam, 2002). This study focused on the “thick” description of activities that were taking place within a specific school district and did not center on the
social aspects of groups that are often part of the qualitative process (Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 2009). The purpose of looking at how the central office approaches the implementation of a new state-wide initiative is the phenomenon. This aligns well with the purposes and methods of a case study. Using a case study approach is ideal when posing questions to participants about how and why they felt the way that they did when responding (Knapp et al., 2012; Merriam, 2009). Guided by the work of Merriam (1998), I was less concerned with the generalizability of my results and more interested in reporting on the thick description of what types of activities were occurring within the school district as they related to the implementation of the new initiative, as well as reporting on how the district’s principals perceived these activities.

Focusing on a specific area and reporting on all of the elements and factors that exist around the topic is known as thick description (Geertz, 1974). By focusing on this single unit (central office), the case went in-depth in generating findings. The focus on the study was on how the central office operates, not necessarily on the topic of TPEP itself, but generally using TPEP as the context to reference central office administrative support. The most often used method of reporting the results of a qualitative study is extended narrative response (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). I report my findings here within the bounds of a traditional five-chapter study, as described previously.

**Sampling Rationale**

I chose to conduct my study within the Valley School District (pseudonym) for various reasons. Having worked in Valley for the past 18 years, I am knowledgeable about the district and its structure, policies, and past practices. Other factors that influenced my decision to select a case study in a nearby district included convenience, previous experience, and relationships (Patton, 2002). My selection was intentional in that this district is ahead of most other districts
regarding the TPEP initiative. This means that this district was chosen as one of eight original pilot districts in the state. This district had central office and principal interactions during the development and implementation of the new initiative prior to most of the districts in the state; thus more data were available for exploration. For this reason I saw it as beneficial to have an outside person conduct the interviews of district staff. I took these factors into consideration during the analysis phase of the study.

Research Setting

The school district has more than 16,000 students divided into 24 schools, Kindergarten through 12th grade. The district has more than 900 certificated teachers, with principals leading the buildings. This district in located in a suburban town of approximately 90,000 residents. The major industries are agriculture, medicine, and government. Ten of the elementary schools exceed the state standards in reading as of 2014, and the district has spent much of its resources focusing on getting elementary age students reading at grade level. From my own experience as a member of the school district for the past 18 years, it is clear to me that professional development for teachers and principals has always been a focus for the district. Central office administrators have typically evaluated the building principals, and in turn principals have been responsible for the supervision and evaluations of teachers within their own buildings.

Participants

The study included nine participants. Participants were selected and interviewed after having completed more than 2 school years of professional development focused on the implementation of the TPEP initiative. Specific central office participants in the interview process were the superintendent, the assistant superintendent over elementary schools (who was also leading the implementation of the TPEP initiative for the district), and the assistant
superintendent of human resources (this person was the lead administrator from the central office working with the teacher’s union on the new evaluation system). All three central office administrators had been building principals. All three also had at least 5 years of central office experience. All three central office administrators accepted the invitation to participate in the study. I was also interviewed as part of the study. The purpose of my interview was to help me understand my perspective as an insider doing the research.

Also interviewed was an elementary building principal who had been assigned as a leader among her peers (other elementary principals) and had attended trainings at the state in preparation for the implementation. This participant was treated as a leader of professional development among her other principal peers.

At the building level, interviews were conducted with four principals of elementary schools, all of whom had a minimum of 5 years of experience as lead principals—two male and two female. All four principals accepted the invitation to be a part of the study. Each had experience working with central office administrators relating to implementation of past initiatives, policies, and/or practices in their buildings.

By restricting the selection of participants within these parameters, I was able to sort all those involved in the study into one of two categories: central office administrator or building principal. The elementary principal who was in charge of much of the professional development of the other elementary principals was included with the central office administrators because she worked closely with the central office to design and deliver many of the trainings related to the new evaluation initiative (TPEP).
**Data Collection**

The data collection used in this case study methodology included interviews, observations, and the collection of documents. Because I was also working within the district, I chose to have an outside interviewer conduct all of the interviews. This colleague worked in another nearby school district and was chosen based on his experience both as a building principal and with having worked with central office administrators. This outside interviewer met with the group of participants prior to the interviews to explain the process. After all of the interviews were completed, the third-party interviewer collected the responses and had them sent to an outside agency for transcription. He also removed the names and other identifiable information from the participants’ responses.

The collection of documents was available to me within the school district setting, whereas the interviews and observations were part of the research study process. Having access to the subjects, in this case administrators at the district and school levels, was crucial to the development of the study. They were accessible during the interview process, something common to case study research. I was also able to observe them during professional development sessions as well as at group meetings.

Set against the interview results, and to further provide validity to the interview findings, the analysis of documents confirmed that the same themes existed in the way central office and principals worked together. Finally, my own participant observations of principals and central office working together in professional development settings completed the triangulation of the data needed to address the research questions. This triangulation of data is paramount to the research study when assessing the validity of data collected as well as ensuring that the research study has provided rich data that can be analyzed and discussed (Merriam, 2009). Table 1
outlines how these different types of data were used to support each theme. On the left side of the table are the two themes that emerged from the findings. These are “building on existing structures” and “everyday support.” Across the top of the table are the three main types of methods used for collecting the data: interviews, observations, and the collection of documents.

This table shows how the interview data, observational data, and the review of documents work together to show the relationship and triangulation of data (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). Table 1 reveals that data were retrieved from all three of the sources for both of the major themes that emerged from the findings. The fact that all three data sources provided examples and evidence of both major themes adds to the validity of the findings.

Table 1

Matrix of Findings and Sources of Data Triangulation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Finding (Theme)</th>
<th>Source of Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category I:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building on Existing Structures</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category II:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday Support</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interviews.** All nine participants were interviewed based on the questions provided in Table 2. Participants from the central office were interviewed individually in a private setting. Interviews with all participants were semistructured, meaning that the questions were decided upon prior to the interviews, but each participant was able to answer the questions with his/her own opinions and experiences. Interviews with central office administrators focused on
gathering background information regarding how and why the central office organized and delivered the trainings and professional development for principals. Specifically, what did the central office administrators do to create opportunities to “learn together” with principals?

Table 2

*Interview Questions – Central Office Administrators and Principals*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Central Office Administrator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Please tell me what your position is in the district and how long you have been working in that position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Describe what your role is in relationship to the new Teacher/Principal Evaluation Pilot initiative in your district.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What types of systems, activities, or relationships does the district office put into place for principals to support the TPEP initiative?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Describe what working with the principals looks like for you. Describe the kinds of activities you engage in when working with principals. Describe an example of how you problem solve with a principal. Describe how communication works with the principals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Tell me how you view your professional relationship with principals. Please describe what a professional relationship with principals looks like. Describe what you have done for principals to welcome their communications and allow dialogue about issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Describe the professional development being provided by the central office regarding the TPEP initiative. How does the central office help with teacher professional development and evaluation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. How does teacher/principal professional development for the TPEP initiative differ from other past initiatives? Related to the new TPEP initiative, how have the district’s professional development needs changed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Describe what supports the central office has provided to help principals with teachers, parents, and the school board to help implement TPEP/Please describe specific situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Describe what supports from central office you have found to be most beneficial in the work with principals to evaluate and develop teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Describe what supports from central office you have found to be least beneficial in your work with principals to evaluate and develop teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Finally, are there any other aspects of support for principals from the central office that you would like to share?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Please tell me what your position is in the district and how long you have been working in that position.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Describe what your role is in relationship to the new Teacher/Principal Evaluation Pilot initiative in your district and building.

3. What types of systems, activities, or relationships does the district office put into place to support your evaluation of teachers?

4. Describe what working with the central office looks like for you as a principal. Describe the kinds of activities you engage in when working with central office personnel. Describe an example of how you problem solve with personnel from central office. Describe how communication works with the central office.

5. Tell me how you view your professional relationship with the central office. Please describe what a professional relationship with central office looks like. Describe what central office people have done to welcome your communications and allow dialogue about issues.

6. Describe the professional development being provided to you regarding the TPEP initiative. How does the central office help you with teacher professional development and evaluation?

7. How does teacher/principal (?) professional development for the TPEP initiative differ from other past initiatives? How have your (principal) professional development needs changed in light of the TPEP initiative?

8. Describe what supports the central office has provided to help you with your teachers, parents, and the school board to help implement TPEP. Please describe specific situations.

9. Describe supports from central office that you have found to be most beneficial in your work to evaluate and develop teachers.

10. Describe supports from central office that you have found to be least beneficial in your work to evaluate and develop teachers.

11. Finally, are there any other aspects of support for principals from the central office that you would like to share?

I also sought to gather perspective from the central office related to how they perceived their own roles in supporting principals. Each participant was interviewed once. These interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour and 15 minutes, depending on how each participant responded to the questions and the length of their answers. After the interviews were transcribed, the participants received a written copy of their answers and they were encouraged to review their statements for accuracy and context. Interviews with the building principals and central office administrators also occurred individually and in a private setting. I also took part in being interviewed in the study. I answered the set of questions that was used for the central office administrators. The data collected from the interview questions were put into categories,
and from those categories specific themes emerged. Evidence from direct quotes was also used to support the categories and themes. An example of how these data were organized can be found in Table 3. The purpose of the interview questions was to elicit answers based on the research questions. Table 3 shows how the interview questions relate to the original research questions.

Table 3

*Interview Questions and How They Relate to Research Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Research Question 1: Within the definition of assistance relationships, what learning is occurring between central office administrators and principals?</th>
<th>Research Question 2: Do principals perceive this joint learning as effective and helpful to their pursuit of leading effectively in their buildings?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Interview protocols, specifically answers questions 2-6, and 10.</td>
<td>Interview protocols, specifically answers to questions 7, 8, 9, and 11.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>Observation notes of professional development sessions where central office and principals are working together.</td>
<td>Observation notes of professional development sessions where central office and principals are working together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifacts</td>
<td>Notes from the review of documents from trainings. Handouts from central office to principals.</td>
<td>Notes from the review of documents that principals give their staff as a result of what they have learned with central office administrators.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Observations.* Observations occurred during trainings and professional development meetings within the school district. Participants in these meetings were both central office administrators and principals. Observations represent a first-hand encounter with the phenomenon of interest, rather than a second-hand account through the interview process (Merriam, 2002). I observed professional development trainings, principal meetings, and planning meetings involving central office leadership. The total number of observations in these
settings was seven, each observation lasting between 1 and 3 hours. During these observations I was a passive observer who did not participate in the trainings; nor was I involved in the discussions or learning that took place. The primary purpose of the observations was to find evidence of central office administrators’ providing activities to support principals in their efforts to implement the new teacher evaluation system, and to observe responses from the principals that would show whether they saw this support as effective. These “look-fors” were selected because they would relate to the original research questions. I took extensive notes during these observations in an attempt to verify and support the themes that emerged from the interviews as well as other themes and categories unique to this data source. I was also looking for examples of central office administrators working side by side (Honig, 2008; Honig, 2012) with principals when new information was presented. I was also anticipating that both central office and principals would digest new information together and discuss meaning and implications for the district TPEP initiative. Finally, I sought to meet central office administrators providing technical assistance to principals—verbally, visually, and in written form. This could be discussion and/or handouts that are discussed and used to help principals understand better their role in this TPEP process.

**Documents.** Finally, the collection of documents, needed to support and triangulate the data from the other two sources, took place throughout the length of the study. The collection of documents was retrieved from the school district, through contacting both central office leadership and principals who participated in the study. The strength of documents is that they already exist and cannot be influenced by the researcher or participants (Merriam, 2002). Handouts, agendas, and training materials were all collected (see Table 4). (Examples of a
meeting agenda and training document are found in Figures 1 and 2 in Findings section of the study in Chapter 4).

Table 4

*Types of Documents Used for This Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Document</th>
<th>Number of Documents</th>
<th>When Collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeting Handouts</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Winter/Spring 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting Agendas</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Fall 2013-Winter 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training Materials</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Fall 2013-Spring 2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Analysis of the Data**

The analysis of the observation data and documents were guided by a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Continuing with a qualitative approach, the analysis of the interview data consisted of recording and transcribing the interviews verbatim, as well as coding the interviews (Merriam, 2009). I completed the coding process, moving from general to specific categories and themes. Once the transcribed interviews were in hand, I first read through them each twice to gain an understanding of the responses. The question I was asking myself during the initial reading of the transcriptions was: How do these answers relate back to the research questions? Next, I highlighted specific words and phrases that stood out in the interviews—words such as *support, learning,* and *together.* Phrases such as *professional development* and *instructional conferences* were also highlighted. I used the concept of assistance relationships, and Honig’s other interpretations of central office transformation, to guide the analytical approach during this process.
I reviewed the observational data and documents to see how they might be related to central office administrators and principals learning together, or how they might show central office assisting the principals in their learning and understanding. The observational data and the documents collected, coupled with the results of the participant interviews, produced all of the data required to perform and complete the analysis. As I compared interview data with data such as observations or documents, I continued to look for similarities and differences. The objective was to find similarities and put them into categories, and eventually to look for themes in the findings (Miles et al., 2014). Being able to show how these data were used to answer the research questions not only adds to the credibility of how the data were collected and used for the study, but it also organizes the connectedness of the data as they relate to the themes.

**Positionality**

My position within the study was one of a current central office administrator who was not involved in the implementation of this initiative. Because I occupied a position of influence over certain staff in the district, I needed to be very careful to avoid the appearance of unnecessary influence. Because I worked for the district in which I conducted the study, I had another professional colleague conduct the interviews. This person had never worked for the school district; nor did he know the participants. He was qualified to conduct the interviews because he had experience with the qualitative case study process. He has also been a building principal for 10 years, as well as having experience working with the central office administrators on district initiatives. He had the interviews transcribed and delivered them to me. Member checking by the outside interviewer was done to ensure the accuracy of the participants’ input throughout the interview and data collection processes.
When research is conducted, the researcher tends to project his/her own experience onto the data that is provided by the participants (Merriam, 2002). I attempted to be as vigilant as possible in my efforts to keep this from happening. For example, many of the participants were principals who had often come to me for resources in their buildings, namely additional staffing to support students with special needs. I had also worked on other district initiatives very closely with the superintendent and other central office administrators, some of whom were interviewed for this study. It was crucial that I continually check my own bias as I worked through interviews and data analysis. It was explained by the interviewer up front to the participants what my role entailed, confirming with them that I was operating from a position of researcher and explorer. I had no supervisory authority over any of the participants or the initiative itself. I also reminded the participants that this study was not a matter of regular professional practice and that they were free to withdraw at any time. I had my colleague provide them with an informed consent form that explained how the information was to be collected, analyzed, and dispersed. I also shared with them the ethical duty of the team and its sole purpose, which was to learn about the processes that the central office was undertaking. Confidentiality was explained. Participants were assured that the information shared was to be anonymous, and that all information shared would be unidentifiable and replaced with pseudonyms. Taking these precautions allowed for open, honest dialogue to help validate the findings of the study.

**Limitations**

There are limitations to this study related to the size of the study and the ability to generalize the study. There were only nine participants in the study. Even though the participants remained confidential in the reporting of the study, because of the location of the study within the school district, the participants’ identity could be compromised if other
administrators or teachers within the district were to read the study. The participants were informed of this possibility and other potential risks during the informed consent process that was provided to each of them prior to their committing to participate. Additionally, the Valley School District has a total of eight central office administrators and 38 building principals and assistant principals, for a total of 46 administrators. The question of whether these nine participants reflect the opinions of all 46 administrators is limiting.

Using “thick description” (Geertz, 1974) to analyze the findings in this study provides the reader with an in-depth understanding of what was experienced and felt by the participants. This process can also be a limitation in that the ability to generalize and transfer these results is completely dependent on each reader’s own interpretation of the findings, as well as how he/she might interpret and transfer the findings to his/her own unique situation (Merriam, 2009). However, because the purpose of the study was to describe a specific relationship between this central office and principals, the limitations regarding generalizing the findings are somewhat mitigated.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The Valley School District enacted changes in the district central office to support principals in understanding the new TPEP evaluation criteria. More specifically, the district adopted new central office structures and practices that supported principals in implementing TPEP. These practices and structures were primarily located in the district’s Teaching and Learning Department as well as the district’s Human Resource Department. Furthermore, the district supported principals’ understanding of TPEP by making tangible connections to the principals’ everyday practices and in so doing, translated the broad goals of TPEP into specific leadership actions principals could use to evaluate their teachers. The two specific themes that emerged from the analysis of the data were: (a) leveraging existing district structures and processes to implement change, and (b) implementing intentional actions by central office to support principals.

This chapter introduces each theme and relates practices that occurred between central office and principals. Within each theme section, various types of evidence present the support of the theme. The evidence includes quotes from interviews, samples of documents and memos, and observational data as well as any other pertinent data collected and analyzed within the scope of the study. The data collected answer the research questions posed prior to the study taking place. To review, the research questions were: (a) As it relates to assisting the principals, what types of structures or processes did the central office have in place to support principals in the implementation of the new teacher evaluation initiative (TPEP); and (b) How did the principals perceive these structures or processes in their pursuit of effectively implementing TPEP?
**District Context Prior to Implementing TPEP**

To answer these research questions with the findings, it is important first to understand the district’s context prior to implementing the TPEP initiative. The school district applied for status and accepted being chosen as one of eight pilot districts within the state. With this opportunity to pilot the new evaluation system, the district turned to other structures and processes that had already been developed and used in previous work. These same structures and processes facilitated and supported principals in implementing this new initiative. For example, two such structures that already existed were (a) having a central office administrator match up with a building principal and become a learning partner and (b) using the district’s focus on effective instruction and common language, otherwise known as PERR (Purpose, Engagement, Rigor and Results) to promote an earlier shared understanding about improved teacher instruction and student learning between the school and district leaders.

**Becoming a TPEP Pilot District**

In the fall of 2011, the state legislature provided funding for up to eight schools districts to act as pilot districts and implement the new TPEP initiative. The legislature gave the state office of public instruction the task of advertising this pilot opportunity and overseeing the selection process. Forty-five school districts applied to pilot this new initiative. The Valley School District made an application and was one of eight districts chosen. The Director of Human Resources for the district shared that the Valley District was encouraged to apply for the TPEP grant. This encouragement came from one of the directors from the State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) because of the district’s positive relationship working with teachers. After the district was selected for the pilot program, central office administrators began to outline their first steps for implementation. First, they established a
district TPEP committee. This committee consisted of central office administrators, building principals, and both teacher and union leaders. Similarly to the implementation of the PERR project previously mentioned, the central office followed the same approach of selecting members from across different job groups to ensure that all parties that were going to be affected by the new initiative had representation from the beginning. Bringing teachers and principals together to plan for and implement the TPEP pilot is another example of how the central office approached their own work.

**Learning Partners**

Several years prior to the creation of the TPEP initiative, the school district began the practice of establishing learning partnerships between central office administrators and building principals. Central office leadership found this practice necessary to understand and get to know the day-to-day work of principals as well as to establish meaningful relationships between central office and building administrators. The central office administrators selected principals each year with whom to partner. Often these partnerships remained constant for more than 1 year, but very seldom did they continue past 3 or 4 years. The central office felt it was important that they change the partnerships so that central office administrators and principals worked with a variety of partners. Because the district had so many principals, it was common for the central office leader to have upwards of five to seven principal learning partners from across the district. Most of the time, the central office administrators attempted to have principal partners at both the elementary and the secondary school levels.

One of the main activities that the learning partnerships engaged in was learning walks in the schools, in which both central office and principals observed teacher instruction and student learning. Often these learning walks included discussion both prior to and after the observations.
Other common practices included discussing current issues concerning teaching and learning and various managerial situations as they arose. Along with the one-on-one learning partner visits, it was common for the central office administrator to gather three or four of his/her learning partners at one of their schools and attend the learning walks as a group, thereby creating a small learning community of administrators to observe and dialogue about what was happening in the classrooms. As TPEP was introduced to the district, it became common for central office administrators to use this small group time to instruct and learn together about this new initiative.

Another common occurrence among learning partners was the review of active data. Central office administrators helped principals gather and analyze the student achievement data that existed in each of their buildings. Principals shared both what they learned from looking at the data and what concerned them about it. Central office administrators could then help principals answer questions about their own buildings or go back and do additional work for the principals in continuing to look for additional useful data. This activity helped the central office understand what the principal was thinking when making decisions about staff, curriculum, building schedules, and so forth. Working as learning partners helped foster the working relationships between central office administrators and principals. Participating in the activities of learning walks and data review sessions gave the central office administrators and principals the opportunity to learn and discuss together what the current needs of the principals were, as well as collaborate on making decisions to address those needs.

**Purpose, Engagement, Rigor, and Results**

The second structure already in place in this district was the common language used in talking about effective teacher instruction. The creation of the terms Purpose, Engagement, Rigor and Results (PERR) evolved more than 10 years previously when many central office
administrators attended a summer institute on school leadership at Harvard University. Within the work done together at this institute, the PERR language was developed and a plan formed as to how to focus PERR instruction on district-wide implementation. Once back at work in the district, the central office administrators invited principals and teacher leaders to attend a series of professional development workshops to share PERR concepts. These workshops became known as instructional conferences. The first year of training devoted time to identifying and defining each term as it relates to Purpose. This concerted effort of just focusing on one element at a time continued through the first couple of years. Simultaneously and as part of the implementation of PERR, teachers within the school district were invited to participate and to be videotaped in their classrooms teaching their students. Administrators and teachers could then view the recorded teaching sessions and identify best practices in each of the PERR areas. Other video sessions included pre and post conferences between principals and teachers, also focusing on the discussion around these key instructional topics. Over the next few years, as classroom visits and learning walks became common in the district, both administrators and teachers developed a common framework of vocabulary to use when describing and identifying effective teaching practices.

After a few years of district professional development in the area of effective instruction, focusing primarily on these key terms, the administrators and teachers in the school district could clearly identify each key element of PERR and its associated meaning, as well as identify in classrooms the elements of Purpose, Engagement, Rigor and Results. The implementation of this foundational structure allowed central office administrators, building principals, and classroom teachers to collaborate in recognition and development of better instructional practices. Central office administrators were able to bring principals and teachers together
through the instructional conference process to establish a structure (PERR) that would become the basis for identifying effective instruction. When the state legislature established the new TPEP initiative, the central office was able to take the PERR structure and apply its concepts to the basic principles of TPEP as they relate to effective teacher instruction.

In conclusion, the district had established policies and procedures to focus on improved teacher instruction and student learning. Focusing on getting principals and teachers to identify effective instructional practices helped establish common educational language. Pairing central office administrators and building principals as learning partners also created opportunities for administrators to focus on this work. Finally, applying for and becoming a pilot school district to implement the TPEP initiative gave the school district an opportunity to begin learning this new evaluation system together.

**Theme 1: Leveraging Existing District Structures and Processes to Implement Change**

**First structure – Working together as learning partners.** The first structure that the central office had in place to help implement the TPEP process was central office administrators and principals working together as learning partners. Each central office administrator usually had four to five learning partner principals, and they often met together to dialogue as a group. One of the main goals of these partnerships was for central office administrators to learn more about what was happening in each building. When the superintendent was asked why these partnerships were important to him, he responded:

It is important that principals can communicate what they think is necessary to help all teachers and staff in their buildings. This system of communication is set up to share that information—otherwise, how do I know what is needed in each building?
This point of view of the superintendent acknowledges that principals have valuable opinions and expertise to share. It is imperative that he know what the principals perceive as important issues in their respective buildings. As a human resources initiative, the idea of learning partners appealed to the superintendent and other central office administrators as a way to make connections with principals. Through these connections, relationships could be fostered and the central office administrators could learn what was important to the principals.

**Principal perspectives.** From the principal point of view, having these opportunities to meet and discuss specific building issues with someone from the central office helped establish lines of communication and initiate support systems. As one principal explained, having a learning partner gave her the opportunity to work closely with the superintendent, as well as to get the TPEP process started in her building:

The learning partners were set up with the central office and I got the superintendent, which has actually been really, really good. We sit down and talk about issues that may be happening in our buildings or information that he wants from us on how things are going with our TPEP implementation. I found that’s been really helpful because he really listens and then will help us follow through on needs in the building . . . I have mainly been involved in all the trainings that the district has given us and last year we piloted some of our teachers’ by taking them through the process. My learning partner helped me set that up for those teachers. As far as that goes this year I got all my teachers in the building on the TPEP process . . . it is more of that kind of a step-by-step process we are going through but it’s kind of a unique experience.

Connecting with the central office administrators in their own buildings on a regular basis provided opportunities for principals to share information. This practice of building
communication and support via the learning partner process was also used for the implementation of the new TPEP initiative. The principal reported not only did the one-on-one meetings help, but the small group meetings were equally useful. The central office administrator would meet with all of his learning partner principals together:

> We basically have small group meetings of our principals. He divides us up into small groups with four or five principals that meet pretty close to monthly. We alternate what schools we meet at and we kind of take a different part of the TPEP process and we kind of study it more in-depth. We have watched videos of teachers teaching and then we’ve used them to go through and practice scoring, to kind of get some inter-relater-reliability . . . We discuss what we saw and any questions or concerns that we have with that so that’s one process that we did. We had several meetings during the year, like once a quarter where we looked at the TPEP process and mainly it was more with the getting the notes down and then how to ask those reflective questions and using the information from what you gathered and we did a lot of practicing with that.

Another building principal shared that he liked the frequency with which he was meeting with someone from the central office. He stated:

> Even though I’m not the superintendent’s learning partner he will still come to my building once a month. He likes to meet with the administrator in that building individually and then walk through the classrooms and get to see some of the teachers in action . . . but then also in our learning partner teams we work with the assistant superintendent over TPEP implementation this year . . . and then monthly I meet with my learning team and talk about different issues with my learning partner. So that is at least three times a month I’m meeting with somebody.
These last two quotations show that principals value central office administrators’ wanting to spend time in schools with principals, observing together what is going on with the new TPEP implementation, specifically in the areas of effective teacher instruction and student learning. Also apparent was the fact that the central office leaders wanted to sit down with principals and discuss these observations and help principals identify and establish practices in their own buildings to effectively implement and carry out the new evaluation process for teachers.

Central office perspectives. The central office administrators reported that they saw the learning partner practice as invaluable and from their perspective there is no plan to discontinue this practice in the school district. One of the main goals when creating these learning partnerships was for central office administrators to learn more about what was happening in each building. The central office also saw the ability to partner with principals as a mechanism for ongoing dialogue. Central office perception was that in this environment, the principals had the opportunity to share concerns about their jobs. When asked why the superintendent thought this was important, he responded, “It is important that principals can communicate what they think is necessary to help all teachers and staff in their buildings.”

The central office administrators were very engaged when speaking about their learning partners and the opportunities that the practice created for them to work closely with the principals. The superintendent noted,

We have done an incredible amount of work with TPEP these past 2 years. We all have principals as learning partners and we go into their schools several times throughout the year. I value this time with the principals. It is the best time to have conversations about what is on their minds and share solutions.
The types of activities that occurred during the learning partner practice were not always limited to just the TPEP process. One central office administrator stated that sometimes the principals would run things by her to get her opinion, perhaps related to an upcoming meeting at which the principal might be presenting. Her statement here shows that there was a level of trust and support between her and the principals: “Sometimes principals are ready to review the school improvement plans with me and make sure they look good before they go to the school board.” The issue of continuity between central office administrators and principals was also important when beginning a new initiative in a district of this size. Having all administrators in buildings receiving the same message helped establish clarity and definition regarding what was to be accomplished. This was also true for the TPEP initiative as explained by a central office administrator:

I don’t know if everybody does this but I’ve had my four principals, we meet as a group and do a learning walk and I think it’s really important sequentially to have elementary see what’s happening at high school. If people have it, being in all three levels is like wow. When a high school person goes and sees what they’re really doing at elementary—I wish we had a middle school person with us right now. To see how TPEP is being addressed at the different levels, what is the scope and sequence with what the teachers are doing and how do you work your different staff on those issues.

As a result of establishing and holding meetings and conversations among central office and principals across the district, the impact of the new TPEP initiative was moving from a building level to a systems level. Common language was again being used for the TPEP initiative, just as it was during previous PERR discussions. Processes and procedures for the TPEP initiative were beginning to be discussed and implemented. The district administration, both central office and
principals, were working together as a system of learners to understand and implement the new evaluation system.

Another specific example of working as learning partners arose when the central office administrator and the principal invited an assistant principal to participate in their learning walks to watch teachers instruct in their classrooms. This dynamic allowed both the central office and the principal to model for the assistant principal when de-briefing the classroom visits. She described this process:

Then we came back and we had made all of our notes about what we observed, what we thought was important . . . and then we shared what we all should have been noticing too because that’s [an] equally important part of the instruction that went on in the classroom. So it’s nice to have those kinds of opportunities and supports.

The superintendent shared his beliefs regarding what types of TPEP activities could be done within the learning partner structure, as well as how he approached learning partner principals to help them be comfortable:

And so we also provide additional training through the venues and then we also have a system here in Valley that we call our learning partner systems. So for example I have a set of my learning partners and then I have three elementary principals as my second set. And so I do individual activities with those small groups of principals to kind of further work on different aspects of observations or you know watching stuff and saying okay, how would you score this because a big concern of ours is inter-rater-reliability and all that kind of TPEP stuff . . . as far as helping principals be comfortable, well we just talk about what we are learning together. I mean I know that I dont have all the answers; I don’t even know for sure where the state’s going . . . so we’re just real honest about it; we
don’t know all the answers and so we’re working on this TPEP together and I think you
know having that approach not coming across as, you know, *I’m here from the district
office and I have all the answers*, it kind of helps the relationship. So they know that I’m
learning with them and sometimes you know I tell them—I don’t know the answer to that;
that’s a good question because we haven't even talked about that and so we’ll talk about
that and if we know the answer we’ll get back to you but that may not be a question that’s
has been answered yet by anybody including the state. And so I think you know not
being the know-it-all, not being the sage, kind of helps our relationship and they know
that we’re trying to learn as fast as we can and so our expectation is we’re learners, you’re
learners, we’re in this together, we’re going to support and help each other.

As previously mentioned, the learning partner process was also used for small group meetings
between central office administrators and principals. This small group approach allowed for the
learning partner relationship to evolve but also brought in three or four additional principals so
that sharing across buildings took place. These meetings typically took place at least monthly, if
not more often. These small groups were organized by similar school demographics or other
commonalities, depending upon the issues at hand. For purposes of TPEP implementation, it
was less important to group principals by traditional parameters given that all principals,
regardless of their building concerns, were working on the same evaluation strategies. The
central office administrator who oversaw the TPEP implementation described the small group
learning partner work as follows:

   And so one of the strategies I’ve used with our elementary principals is once a month
everybody meets in a small group and it’s a group of 3-4 elementary principals and we
focus on the TPEP stuff; we’ll go through the processes and procedures and just hear
what the questions are; we’ll actually watch some videos and then interpret them based on the rubric that we’re using. We kind of just go through all of those kinds of things and that’s where I think our best learning occurs, and when you back away from that we also once a month at our principals meetings do a TPEP thing, you know kind of a TPEP lesson. I kind of look at the principals as my classroom and then on an even more macro scale four times a year or five times a year we bring in all our of our administrators who evaluate teachers K-12 and we do lessons around TPEP with them and so we’ve been doing that really for about 3 years now.

As is evident from this quotation, the central office administrators were deliberate and intentional when working with principals on the TPEP initiative. When learning together with the principals, the central office assumed the role of instructor and leader, similar to that of a teacher in the classroom. Central office administrators valued the opportunity to learn together with the principals.

Before moving to the second structure, the learning partner system that is already in place and functioning in the school district has allowed the central office and principals to continue their work together as the TPEP initiative has been implemented. Administrators at both the district office and the building levels see value in using these partnerships to learn together. Because the learning partner program was already in existence, the preparation and training regarding TPEP has taken place without the need to establish new routines for principal professional development or to redefine roles among central office administration.

**Second structure – Using common language – PERR.** The second structure that the district had in place to help implement TPEP was the use of common language when describing effective teacher instruction. Both principals and central office administrators commented
throughout their interviews that it was very important to have the ability to talk about the changes to the evaluation system in terms that were familiar to them, specifically in the areas of instruction and learning. For example, the district had worked for many years to implement the PERR model. PERR stands for Purpose, Engagement, Rigor, and Results. Similar to what is going on now with the TPEP initiative, this district focused previous professional development for principals around this concept of PERR.

Principal perspectives. One principal noted, “Because we have been working on PERR these past few years, it was nice to follow the same approach with the TPEP initiative. Basically we took the same approach but on a different topic.” This common vocabulary was used to identify and describe effective instruction in the classroom. For more than 6 years, all district staff had been able to build professional learning communities based on these four well-defined words. Because the entire district had been implementing and focusing on the PERR model of instruction, those terms fit nicely into what TPEP also represented, allowing for a consistent transition from the instructional model to the evaluation model. In other words, when principals and central office administrators discussed how the new evaluation model would be implemented, both parties were able to identify what effective instructional strategies looked like throughout the district. This clarity helped minimize the anxiety and the unknowns. One principal stated, “We have had a consistent message for many years about effective instruction; therefore, when we began to talk about evaluation, we didn’t have to go back to the beginning and define instruction. This saved a lot of time.” At the regular monthly principal meetings as well as at the instructional conferences, the PERR language was used when presenting and when sharing comments and opinions. All of the principals who were interviewed commented on how the establishment of common language around PERR had helped lay the foundation for the
implementation of the TPEP initiative. One principal said that without the PERR experience, taking on TPEP would have been much more frustrating, but with the background in using common PERR language, the transition to working on TPEP was much easier. The principal stated:

One of the things that we were focusing on was what we called PERR—that was Purpose Engagement Rigor and Results—and during the last many years we did a lot training on identify[ing] those things and observations and so initially in the pilot year that we had here at Valley . . . much the same from what we were doing, only we just have different criteria that we’re looking for and a different way to kind of approach the observations and so forth.

Principals suggested that being able to identify current practice with this new initiative helped ease their learning curve and that it gave them a baseline knowledge from which to work when learning and discussing the new evaluation system. A veteran principal commented on how the PERR language helped prepare the way for him:

This is my 10th year in the district, so prior to coming here, and participating in TPEP when I first came here, Purpose, Engagement, Rigor, and Results were the four key components to quality instruction, and so that is what we do in Kennewick, and that was how we accomplished the third-grade reading goal, and that was everything. We broke that apart, and that was our professional development. Now we got TPEP and now TPEP has taken Purpose Engagement Rigor, and Results and added to that, so it’s more of the same . . . it’s a blending, but it’s within Danielson’s framework, and it brings in a new dimension to that, so I would say it’s getting different in some ways because it is more,
there’s more material with TPEP, but it’s still the same in that we had a good foundation in going from what we call PERR to TPEP.

Following this same idea of PERR being the foundation for common language when learning the TPEP evaluation system, another principal observed:

Our assistant superintendent has just been the lead in this project, so Valley stepped up even a couple of years ago to try to implement and, and influence TPEP and what we wanted to do. Purpose, Engagement, Rigor, and Results have been a part of our TPEP process, but lots and lots of training, from the district office on TPEP and then interpretation when we have questions and then helping us put together the correct forms and format for teacher interviews and then also professional development for teachers on the Danielson model and on TPEP itself. And so our model has always been for good instructional practices— Purpose Engagement Rigor and Results—and so that has been for years what the Valley School District has really drilled into the teachers as far as this is what we’re looking for in the classroom. Now it’s shifted to the Danielson model, which I think answers all of those, I know answers all of those questions just in a much larger format, so that’s what we’ve shifted to in the last year or two.

Besides recognizing that PERR offered a great baseline for talking about the new evaluation system, principals also readily admitted that the TPEP learning process was much more involved and complicated than just using PERR language when discussing and evaluating effective teacher instruction. The new evaluation process took more time than the previous model, and principals had to figure out how what they were doing fit into the state criteria that TPEP required. As one principal put it, “PERR was a pretty easy one to learn and establish among principals and teachers. TPEP is much more convoluted and it takes a lot of digging.”
Professional development in the early stages of establishing PERR was focused primarily on a large group setting with principals and teacher leaders, and PERR was not necessarily the topic at small group principal meetings or with learning partners. Now with TPEP, almost all principal professional development settings were dominated by issues surrounding this new evaluation system. One principal summarized it like this:

Well, TPEP is different in that it is all encompassing. I mean I mentioned before about the instructional conferences and small group principal meetings and things that go on in principals’ meetings, typically not all of those would end up being TPEP-centered. Now they are. Before, like before our deal it was PERR, Purpose, Engagement, Rigor, and Results. And our instructional conferences were always about, typically were about PERR, and it was always in front. But our small group principal meetings weren’t necessarily about that. So TPEP, it is different. It is different because it is all encompassing, that is . . . . It is almost all we do.

Although principals realized that TPEP is a much larger initiative than just establishing common language (PERR) as was done previously, they did see great value in using the previous PERR practice when tackling the new evaluation system. Working together with central office administrators to establish TPEP as the new evaluation system in the district was difficult and consuming, but having the PERR structure in place helped alleviate the need to identify what principals were looking for when evaluating teachers.

Central office perspectives. Central office administrators were also very aware of how the PERR language helped initiate conversations and training for principals within the new evaluation system. Prior to TPEP’s being established, the central office administration worked hard to get the PERR language into the old evaluation system. Once the new TPEP system was
established, carrying that common language forward became a much easier task. One central office administrator stated in her interview:

Because of our work going off to Harvard and working with principals, we put in place a model, the PERR model, which was an instructional model, which we’ve kind of just continued some of those practices into the TPEP model, which has been nice.

Another central office administrator shared his vision of how PERR helped with the new TPEP evaluation system:

Purpose Engagement Rigor and Results is kind of a common collection of four standard things that are important in instruction. And we were working with that framework for about 10 years and developing instructional videos around that and we didn’t have necessarily a rubric but we had some standards that we were training teachers around; so TPEP is replacing that and it’s better of course because that’s research based and there’s a lot more to it. The difference is its tighter evaluation, so the difficulty I think has been to keep the integrity of it being an evaluation but still use it for what its purpose is as far as improving instruction.

For central office administrators, the idea of transitioning from PERR to TPEP made sense. They were able to take the PERR framework and use it as a basis for what was needed in the new TPEP initiative. The central office administration helped establish a common language to use throughout the district as it related to effective teacher instruction and student learning, without knowing at that time that it would be used by central office administrators and principals to further the implementation of the new evaluation system (TPEP).

The PERR and the learning partner structures were instrumental in allowing central office administrators and principals to initiate the professional development and training activities
necessary to properly implement the new evaluation system. These two structures exemplify consistent support of principals. Also consistent between central office administrators and principals were the connections made by the central office in an attempt to support principals in their everyday practice.

**Theme 2: Intentional Actions Taken by Central Office to Support Principals**

For the purposes of this study, it was important to note that the theme of support for the principals was directly connected to central office administrators’ making tangible connections with principals. One central office administrator replied to the interview question about supporting principals by commenting that her focus was on “getting the principals the everyday support they needed to eliminate their stress around running the building so they could concentrate on leading teachers.” This support was evident in all aspects of the principals’ jobs. One principal noted:

> I feel like I can call anybody in the central office and get my needs met. Everybody seems to have the best interests of the students at heart. It’s a good team. They listen to why I might want to approach a situation in a certain way and they support my decisions. When I come to a meeting with the central office, I get the answers I need to proceed. Sometimes the central office shares a perspective that I might not agree with, but at least I know where they stand on an issue and I can weigh that option against what I might be thinking.

This quotation shows that the principal felt supported in getting answers and support at the building level. Also, even though there might not always have been agreement on an issue, the principal appreciated being able to share her opinion.
In terms of supporting principals, both managerial and leadership-related activities were important to the central office, and specifically related to the purposes of this study, the new evaluation system (TPEP) was no different. A principal newer to the district made the following observation:

They (district personnel) create these initiatives like PERR or you know, we didn’t create TPEP, but we have that system. They are really good about giving us what we need to make sure that we are successful and our teachers are successful, again, whether it is time or money or materials.

Principals who felt this way about central office knew that they were supported from both a resource standpoint and a leadership standpoint. For principals, being able to count on their supervisors for support on a day-to-day basis built confidence and allowed the principals to focus on larger issues such as the implementation of a new evaluation system. Other specific supports, like those for the TPEP initiative, were also appreciated by the principals as they worked with teachers to establish new processes and procedures.

**Specific supports for TPEP initiative.** Although there were many areas in which the central office could and did support principals in their roles as buildings leaders, the four main areas related to supporting principals with the TPEP initiative were meaningful professional development; regular meeting time; learning together; and constant, consistent communication. The district’s Curriculum Department, which included the teaching and learning aspects of the district, had taken a lead role in supplying much of the support for principals regarding the TPEP initiative. Working together with other central office administrators and departments (i.e., Secondary and Elementary Education, Human Resources, and the Superintendent’s office), this department worked closely with principals to provide support throughout the TPEP
implementation. To better understand this dynamic, it is important to know the principals’ perceptions of previous supports already being offered in the district.

**Meaningful professional development.** Key to the implementation of the TPEP project was providing specific training for principals. Not only did principals need to understand thoroughly what the new evaluation system meant to them and their teachers, but they also needed to have complete knowledge of the requirements outlined in the law and of how to evaluate teachers on each specific element. A tremendous amount of professional development was made available from the beginning of the pilot year to the time of the study. Because the majority of this work between central office administrators and principals was focused on the new TPEP evaluation system for teachers, it was important that the time spent together learning the new evaluation system be meaningful and helpful to the principals. All four principals interviewed shared common responses when asked whether the professional development was meaningful to them. All mentioned that it was meaningful and that it was very helpful to have the teacher leaders there as well. One principal commented:

> Having the district office lead these meetings helps the teachers see that it isn’t only me who is asking them to do this stuff. I’m glad the central office finds out what we need to do and then works together with us to make it fit for our district. A tremendous amount of professional development has been available from the district these past 2 years. Central office has done a really good job. When we are training, if they don’t know the answer we figure it out together.

Another principal concluded, “They (central office) didn’t try to accomplish everything the first year. There was a systematic development and roll-out over a long period of time, and we were included along the way.”
Including both principals and teachers in the development and implementation of TPEP provided confidence for both groups. Principals knew that the central office was working with them to develop the TPEP processes and procedures for teachers. Table 5 shows an example of training provided by the central office for principals and teachers. The training included having central office administrators, principals, and teachers sitting together at tables and reflecting on their learning, as well as switching around the groups to have people sit at different tables and share again with other colleagues. This style of professional development provided the opportunity for all to learn together and gain ownership in the implementation process.

Professional development and training for the principals and teachers was definitely a priority for the central office administration.

Because principal training was going to play a major role in the implementation of this new initiative, the central office first asked one of the principals to be trained at the state level, thereby allowing this principal to come back and be a leader in helping train her peer principals. This idea was also well received by the principals as they began their own learning. As one principal put it:

One of our principals was trained extensively in the TPEP framework, and she has been trained to do the training for everyone else, and she is amazing, and has done a fabulous job bringing all that material down to us. She works very closely with the curriculum department and, so she’s not alone, and she was on the committee that helped develop the pilot TPEP, and so there is a number of people around that committee, they’re very well versed in TPEP as well, and have stayed up to date on it, and then she and central office have been the presenters, so there’s just a lot of local support.
A wide variety of professional development has also been offered to principals, both at the district level and within their own buildings. Having multiple types of groups and trainings has afforded central office administrators the opportunities to work side-by-side with principals and teachers from around the district. Specific to these trainings is the concept of having the principal select teacher leaders from their own buildings to help learn and guide the implementation. One excerpt from a principal interview gave an overview of this concept:

The curriculum department provides training for one teacher per building that has been designated as staff development person, so they are trained in district workshops that
happen say three or four times during the year, several times during the year. So they’re trained, and then their purpose is to come back and help train their building staff. So our staff development person works with me, and we do the trainings together with our building teachers, so there’s that support. We also do a focus on instruction, which is a day before school starts where teachers can opt to take little mini sessions, lessons in different areas; they’ve been focusing on instruction sessions that deal with Danielson’s framework, and TPEP, and sort of thing. So there’s just a lot of opportunities for teachers and principals to, you know, continue to grow in the process.

The central office took a systematic approach to professional development with their principals when they asked principals to also bring teacher leaders to these trainings. In regard to the new TPEP evaluation system, the central office knew that one of the important processes was for principals to create a learning environment in their buildings with their own teachers. For the central office administrators, they wanted to provide opportunities for principals to learn together not only with the central office administrators but also alongside their own teachers. Continuing with the idea of having principals and teacher leaders trained by the district curriculum department, another principal noted:

For me personally it’s a very positive experience that our building professional development representative is very capable, very articulate, organized, respected by her peers and, so, you know, people will listen to her. In our presentations typically she talks about what this looks like in the classroom for me, kind of what this means to me as a teacher, and I take the other piece, and this is how it ties into the evaluation and so we’ve kind of split the material, so they’re hearing kind of the same stuff, but from two different perspectives, so it’s been good.
Having these in-house trainers gave validation to the principal and teachers in that one of their own colleagues, having an intimate knowledge of their own building culture and issues, was there to work and train together. Additionally, this trainer was not coming in just for the training and then leaving. This person would be available forever for follow-up questions, future trainings, and so forth.

One aspect of professional development that caught the attention of one principal was: At what point was too much professional development provided? Although three of the principals remained completely positive about the learning opportunities, one principal commented, “I felt after a few meetings that I understood what we were trying to accomplish and from that point forward I just wanted the support and resources to do it.” The idea of specific TPEP professional development for principals was well received and well thought out, focused, and meaningful. However, the one principal wanted to try some of the things at an earlier stage rather than to continue to review the same learnings.

The central office also paid for principals and lead teachers to meet over the summer to develop their own training plans within their buildings. Having the ability to bring teacher leaders to the table to help create and design the professional development in their own buildings was beneficial to the principals. One principal commented:

We also have a personal staff development person or a TPEP staff member who goes to the training with us and so it would be, or we would work as a team in presenting that information, you know, to the staff.

Although principals were very appreciative of all the training, they too sometimes became overwhelmed or wary of all of the meetings around this initiative. One principal claimed
to know that the information and training were necessary, but at times felt the need for a break from it all:

I think we’re all feeling like if we hear TPEP one more time we’re going to run, but we definitely are getting many opportunities for professional development on TPEP . . . .

Then our instructional conferences three times a year focus on the TPEP implementation process and then our learning groups, small groups are focused on TPEP too, so, you know, pretty much any meeting you go to you’re going to hear about TPEP and that’s been supportive. I think sometimes you just need that processing time to make it all make sense.

This last comment confirmed that the central office had made a good decision when deciding to move slowly during implementation. As was previously mentioned, taking the time to include principals and teacher leaders during the planning phase of implementation helped the district office gauge how quickly or slowly the process should move along. In contrast, should the central office have attempted to share all of the new evaluation system, including final processes and procedures, with principals all at once, principals would have been overwhelmed and most likely would not have had the same level of ownership that they did in the new system. Finally, one principal summarized his experience in receiving meaningful and purposeful training around this new evaluation system as follows:

Our district does a really good job of making sure that our principals have the training that they need. They are really good at it and I am sure other districts are as well, but they are really good at it. And they don’t offer a lot of, offer frivolous stuff or stuff that I might think isn’t really value for what we need in our district. It is all meat and potatoes kind of stuff.
The central office also viewed professional development and training for each building principal as key to the new evaluation being implemented. Whether the central office was training on TPEP or on other previous initiatives, the idea of bringing principals together to train has been a constant in the Valley School District. The administrator assigned to lead this TPEP project stated, “Our expectation is that we are all learners. We are in this together and we’re going to support and help each other develop this model.” Later in the interview he added, “We put a system in place to train principals and teacher leaders as well, so it’s not just the principal saying here is what you should be doing.” Purposeful, focused professional development that principals and teachers can take back to their buildings to establish new procedures and expectations is what the central office had hoped to offer when beginning their efforts. To accomplish this goal, not only did the central office need to provide this meaningful training, but they also needed to find the time to deliver it.

*Regular meeting time.* Another type of support that was mentioned often by principals was how central office administration found time to meet and learn together. One example of meeting regularly could be seen in how the central office administrator over elementary education outlined his meeting times with the principals he supervised. These meetings were held twice a month in an attempt to share information about TPEP, communicate and learn with each other, and provide opportunities for principals to get clarification related to ongoing TPEP issues (typical, ongoing district business was also discussed when necessary at some of these meetings). One principal’s perception of these meetings is explained here:

A typical example of our meetings is today we did a little TPEP quiz in our principal meeting just as a way to share information about TPEP in a format that would be teacher friendly, and the purpose of the quiz was to practice, so that we could give it on the
March professional day as kind of a wrap-up about TPEP basically, and hopefully our teachers would be able to answer the questions correctly, hopefully we’ve done a good job of training them, so that’s just an example and, so there’s lots, and lots of other similar examples.

Besides meeting regularly to discuss TPEP as a group of principals, the central office also dedicated their time to meeting with smaller groups. Those small group meetings were dedicated entirely to the TPEP initiative this year. During the previous school year, most of the meetings were focused on TPEP as well. Whereas the large principal meetings looked at TPEP from a building-wide point of view, the small group looked more closely at the specific rubric for evaluation teachers. In all, the small groups met six to eight times for each of the first 2 years.

As described here, the purpose of these meetings was to learn the TPEP process:

We basically have small group meetings of our principals that we meet. He divides us up into small groups with four or five principals that meet pretty close to monthly. We alternate what schools we meet at and we go with and he, we kind of take a different part of the TPEP process and we kind of study it more in-depth. We have watched videos of teachers teaching and then we’ve used them to go through and practice scoring, to kind of get some interrelated reliability . . . We can discuss what we saw and any questions or concerns that we have with that, so that’s one process that we did. And then how to ask those the reflective questions and using the information from what you gathered and we did a lot of practicing with that you know as well. So those are the two main things we did at our meetings. There’s always a TPEP topic and the central office is really good about coming out if we have any questions or any concerns or anything like that.
Similarly to the principals, the central office also valued the idea of creating regular meeting times to learn and initiate the new evaluation system. Central office administrators set up the large group and small group principal meetings with the purpose of dedicating time to share important information. One explained:

What I have done with our elementary principals is once a month everybody meets in a small group and it’s a group of 3-4 elementary principals and we focus on the TPEP stuff. We go through the processes and procedures and just hear what the questions are . . . we’ll actually watch some videos and then interpret them based on the rubric that we’re using. We kind of just go through all of those kinds of things and that’s where I think our best learning occurs, and when you back away from that we also once a month at our principals meetings do a TPEP activity. This is kind of a TPEP lesson. Then on an even more macro scale four to or five times a year we bring in all our of our administrators who evaluate teachers and we do lessons around TPEP with them and so we’ve been doing that really for about 3 years now.

When the central office administrators were asked if they thought dedicating this time to the development of the principals was important, one participant gave the following answer:

That’s easy, when a principal comes back and says I just had the best conversation about instruction that I ever had with a teacher, you just go Okay we’re there or we’re getting there and to me that means that all that stuff we’ve been doing in that system is working. I’m probably fairly bias[ed] but I believe that probably 80-90% of our principals would say that, the ones who’ve really tried to make it work would say, that this is better. It’s harder but it is better.
Working and learning together. Another integral part of connecting central office support with the everyday practice of principals is working and learning together. Central office administrators knew that part of their support for principals would be providing opportunities to work side-by-side with principals, learning and establishing the key elements and concepts of the new TPEP evaluation system.

As part of these professional development meetings, on multiple occasions work was occurring between central office administrators (including superintendent, assistant superintendents, human resources director, level directors, etc.) and principals and teachers. All were together working on new information, sharing ideas and solutions, and creating documents for district use. The following quotation is taken from the observational notes collected by the researcher:

Principals seem very engaged and relaxed working together with the central office.

There is ongoing dialog back and forth, questions and answers. Central office administrators who are not presenting sit at the same tables with the principals and teacher leaders. The central office administrator leading one of these meetings stated, “These TPEP trainings are where we as central office leaders get to train and learn together with the principals. We really need to hit the mark with these meetings.”

A typical training session would include the presentation of new ideas and/or information, a task for all involved to accomplish, and then a reflection and self-assessment at which all parties could share, ask for clarification, and give input for future work. Additional observational notes state, “The central office and administrators are looking at the same materials and reading them together.” Comments by principals centered on the availability of training for both the principals and the teachers and how it was nice that the central office participated and led those trainings at
times, so that the principal didn’t always have to be the only one delivering the new information. Specific to the TPEP initiative, the manner in which the central office rolled out the trainings was slow and deliberate, allowing principals and teachers time to digest the new information. “We had to make sure that we were including principals in our ideas about how to begin this professional development journey into TPEP,” is what one central office administrator reported. Two of the four central office administrators interviewed also noted that principals had a lot on their plates, and for this reason they (central office) had to be careful to not give them too much at once. The willingness of central office administrators to listen to input and opinions from principals was a common subtheme of everyday support. This idea was evident when I observed presentations from the central office to principal groups, especially when they were interacting together in a working environment. The central office administrator would ask questions, elicit responses and opinions about the subject matter, and check for understanding among the principals to ensure that any doubts or concerns were addressed. After presenting a concept and asking principals and teachers to work together at their tables, each assistant superintendent sat at a different table and took part in the discussion and learning. These three leaders could have easily gathered together and waited for the table work to be completed. Instead they sat down and worked together as partners. When asked how the central office supports you in your everyday work, one principal responded:

All the TPEP trainings that we’ve had and everything we do, they (central office) are there and they’re visible and you know a lot of times if you set up for a meeting if there’s issues they’re willing to sit down and brainstorm with you and, you know, work it out.

Central office leaders concurred that it was very important to listen to principals given that they were the administrators out in the buildings dealing with the everyday issues. The
superintendent explained, “Many times the principals call just to run things by me to make sure that they are on the right track in their thinking. And most of the time they are. It’s important that I acknowledge that for them.” The central office administrators felt very strongly about the concept of learning together. The central office participants spoke in depth about how important it was that principals felt supported and that this new evaluation system was a learning challenge for everybody. From the central office perspective, much of what is involved in the implementation of TPEP comes from the state level, so learning together as the process unfolds is important and necessary. The superintendent looks at it from this perspective:

Well we just, we talk about that we are learning together. I mean a lot is unknown and I don’t have all the answers; I don’t even know for sure where the state is going. I don’t know what’s going to happen with the labor union. I don’t know what’s going to be required in terms of future goals for teachers, you know, and so forth. So we’re just real honest about, we don’t know all the answers and so we’re working on this together and I think you know having that approach is important. I don’t say that I’m here from the district office and I have all the answers. I think that kind of helps the relationship with principals.

**Constant consistent communication.** The final aspect of support that emerged from the study was the practice of constant, consistent communication. Having central office support in developing and maintaining this communication with principals supported principal practice. Complementary to the trainings that were conducted were also many handouts that supported what was being discussed and developed. The central office created and maintained a webpage that principals and teachers could refer to when needing instruction regarding, and clarification of, TPEP materials. As one principal noted, “I kept hearing and reading the same things from the
central office about TPEP. Even when the state decided that we needed to change our model, having that communication helped keep us focused.” The superintendent had this to say about the importance of communication: “It helps me just as much as it helps the principals when I think to keep communicating about an issue. Together we arrive at common understanding when we hear the same thing over and over.” As was previously mentioned around the theme of everyday support, many documents and agendas had consistent layouts making it easier for principals to find the information they needed. One principal noted, “I really like the monthly newsletter that our boss sends out. It confirms what I thought I heard at our meeting.” Keeping in line with this thought, a central office assistant superintendent observed, “…we are all so busy that if we don’t constantly communicate, we will find ourselves operating in silos and some of our decisions may not be what is best.” When speaking of communication in general, a principal agreed that it was easy to get in touch with the central office administration:

I can’t remember a time when somebody has failed to call me back or come over, you know to deal with any of the issues that I have and they’ve (central office) been really responsive as far as that goes. It’s a two-way street because when they need information and things like that I do my best to get what they need to them to because I know they have their things that they are working on too and they need information from the building as well . . . The superintendent is probably the busiest guy in the building, but when there is information he needs to communicate or wants information, he will just drop into meetings and he will come and ask questions that he needs to ask or share new important information.

Specific to the TPEP initiative, the central office has been aware of the amount of information that must be shared, so they have tried to keep the principals from receiving too much
communication all at once. Principals appreciated this because they know that it can be very overwhelming to try and digest the entire new evaluation system all at once. As one principal described, the central office decides when and how much communication goes out to principals:

The central office will direct how and when principals get this information because they have more inside knowledge of what everybody’s needs are and that way it’s not being pushed on people who aren’t ready to hear it yet. It’s usually directed by our level director . . . He slowly rolled it out to us. He’s given us information that we need when we need it but it’s been appropriately balanced and the support has been more towards what we need to do for the teachers.

In addition, the creation of TPEP forms was another way to provide consistent communication with principals. Follow-up trainings and small group work with documents that allowed principals to review their learning was important to the central office communication process. An example of one such document is contained in Table 6.
# Table 6

**Professional Development Calendar**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>COMPREHENSIVE GROUP</th>
<th>FOCUSED GROUP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>• Introduction to Danielson’s Framework for Teaching at staff meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Review Evaluation guidelines and timeline complete by September 30</td>
<td>• Introduction to Danielson’s Framework for Teaching at staff meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Staff meeting to hand out and review the goal-setting form</td>
<td>• Review Evaluation guidelines and timeline complete by September 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Meet with the Comprehensive teachers to review TPEP process page and hand out Self-Reflection page due to principal mid-month</td>
<td>• Staff meeting to hand out and review the goal-setting form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>• Principals meet with teachers to review their Self-Reflection, narrow the focus to the goal areas, and begin draft of goal setting form</td>
<td>• Principals meet with individuals or grade level teams to review goal(s) for their chosen focus area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teachers complete and submit final Student Growth Goal form complete by Oct. 31</td>
<td>• Teachers complete and submit final Student Growth Goal form complete by Oct. 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>• Observations and evidence gathered in class to focus on Domains 2 and 3 Components</td>
<td>• Observations and evidence gathered during team planning sessions or classroom observations for components of the chosen criteria, when required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Evidence gathered during pre and post observation conferences to focus on Domains 1 and 4 Components</td>
<td>\n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>• Principal meets with teacher for mid-year review of documented evidence of formal and informal observations by end of January</td>
<td>• Principal meets with teacher for mid-year review of documented evidence of formal and informal observations by end of January</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mid-year review of student growth goals</td>
<td>• Meetings may be held as PLC groups if appropriate to the criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• This step should be done at a post observation conference</td>
<td>• Mid-year review of student growth goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Month</td>
<td>Comprehensive Group</td>
<td>Focused Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February and March</td>
<td>• Observations and evidence gathered in class to focus on Domains 2 and 3 Components</td>
<td>• Observations and evidence gathered during team planning sessions or conferences for components in Domains 1 and 4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Observations and evidence gathered during team planning and conferences to focus on Domains 1 and 4 Components</td>
<td>• Observations and evidence gathered during in class observations for components in Domains 2 and 3. When required.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>• Student Growth summary due to principal by end of the month.</td>
<td>• Student growth summary due to principal by end of the month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Final formal observation complete by May 1</td>
<td>• Begin Final Evaluation Meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Final Evaluation Meeting between May 1 and 15</td>
<td>• Final Evaluation Meetings with individuals or teams between May 1 and 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Final Evaluation complete by May 10</td>
<td>• Final Evaluation complete by May 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This document provided direction to principals regarding what timelines they should follow during the school year when evaluating teachers. This information was shared during a training, but having the document to reference throughout the school year was helpful to principals to remind them of where they should be in the evaluation process during each month of the school year. One principal described this as helpful in this way:

Creating the forms, for example we have now an Excel spreadsheet that links if I go into the classroom, based off of my observation I would score on the TPEP components, which would then fit into the criteria and for the state, which fits into the evaluation model. So creating that form was very helpful along with our new observation form.

In contrast, one principal shared that the sometimes too much information and change can lead to frustration; therefore it is important that the communication lines be open:

I think sometimes least beneficial is just that overload of information and, so sometimes you need some time to process it, and so for us and for teachers we need to recognize that, and then probably this isn’t central office, and then, but probably the most
frustrating is when things change, sort of like last year when we piloted it and we thought we had it down and now things have changed based off of state criteria, we just—that’s probably the least helpful, you know, if we could get a system in place and then tweak it as we need to make it work for us and have it make sense for us that’s the most helpful. This principal is referring to the change that the state legislature made after the first year of the TPEP pilot program, telling all the pilot districts what criteria they must follow. Initially the pilot districts were allowed to create much of their organization and framework to align with the new criteria.

From the central office perspective, it was also recognized that communication was key during the TPEP implementation. As one assistant superintendent stated, “We have produced TPEP material so we have to communicate it in a way that works for principals.” Constant sharing of information over time helps ensure that the central office is getting that information to principals and their teachers. The superintendent shared this example:

A good friend of mine is a superintendent and he talks about it this way: It is like farming. You have to get the water to the far end of the irrigation pipe with the same pressure, and that’s really the big system question is: How do you make sure everybody in the entire system is getting it? Well, part of it is you have to break it down by schools, you have to break it down you know into smaller chunks and so forth, but it’s a big deal to try to implement something this dramatically different than what we’ve done in the past with a 1,000 staff and hope that you know that they’re all getting at least to a sort of a minimum level of understanding of what it is and to kind of try to figure out how to do it in a way that doesn’t scare them off.
It was apparent that the superintendent had given much thought to how information would be shared. It was imperative to ensure that all participants, both principals and teachers, received the necessary information and training around the new initiative. The central office was very deliberate when it chose how to communicate the new evaluation system to principals and union leadership. The assistant superintendent over the TPEP project explained:

We picked leaders from the Valley Administrators Association. Obviously we had our principal president and then we looked at how we can get principal representation from each level and we did the same thing with the teachers; we picked the union leadership and then we worked with them on getting teacher representation from each level. So everybody felt like they were well represented. And the other part that was really important was to think about what’s the message that we want to get out of our evaluation because we had this legislative message it was all about a hammer and beating people up and firing people, and we really didn’t want to send that message. So one thing is to do the broken record thing and just repeat yourself over and over again and as we give examples with folks a lot of what we do is we purposely repeat the same ideas over and over.

The consistent communication and thoughtful “roll-out” of how the district would share information with principals and teacher leaders helped sustain the connection between central office support and principal practice.

Conclusion

The two specific themes that emerged from the analysis of the data were: (a) leveraging existing district structures and processes to implement change and (b) implementing intentional actions by central office to support principals. These two themes align with the original research
questions, which about the types of structures the district had in place to address the new TPEP initiative, and whether the principals saw value or support from the central office during the implementation process.

The use of the existing district structures of learning partners and common instructional language (PERR) helped provide background and continuity when implementing the new evaluation system. Because the central office had worked previously with principals in effectively establishing these two structures, the superintendent and other central office administrators saw value in continuing these processes and continued to support principals through these methods. Through the learning partner process, principals were able to share their own perspectives on how the new evaluation system might work in their buildings and to learn together with other principal colleagues. Central office administrators were able to receive feedback from principals that helped guide future training and professional development. Having the existing structure of using common language with all administrators and teachers in the district gave both central office administrators and principals the ability to talk about the new evaluation system in terms that were familiar, especially in the areas of instruction and learning.

Connecting central office support to everyday principal practice was also apparent when interviewing both central office administration and building principals. In relationship to the new TPEP initiative, there were four specific supports that emerged. First, meaningful professional development was key because principals needed specific training, knowledge, and understanding of the new evaluation system. Second, setting aside regular meeting times for central office administrators and principals to meet specifically on TPEP implementation showed that the central office recognized the importance of learning this new system and that it would take dedicated time to accomplish this new initiative together. Next, working and learning
together supported principals in that the central office recognized that both parties had to learn
together and provide guidance as to how this implementation process would proceed in the
district. Finally, communicating constantly and consistently with principals and their building
teachers was necessary to provide ongoing support for previous trainings, as well as give new
information pertinent to the implementation process.

It was evident that the central office administrators were very deliberate in their approach
to presenting the new evaluation system to principals and teachers. Taking well thought out
actions, building upon previous work, and including key participants such as building principals
helped the Valley School District address the implementation of the new evaluation system.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

As the Valley school district prepared for the implementation of the new teacher evaluation system, it drew upon the foundation of its existing structures to provide the groundwork to support and train principals through the TPEP implementation process. This foundation was key for the district to successfully manage this new external mandate for change. Simply put, the district leveraged (and continued to build upon) its existing structures to establish and maintain the viability for the principals doing this work. The Valley School District office administration felt it imperative that they take specific steps to establish and maintain these partnerships with principals. These structures helped the central office establish with the principals what Honig (2008, 2012) refers to as assistance relationships. Honig’s research refers to central office and principals working side-by-side, becoming learning partners to improve instruction. In alignment with Honig’s description, the Valley School District central office administrators made concentrated efforts to establish these partnerships. These assistance relationships were employed to establish and maintain support, both in the everyday work of the principal and in terms of the new TPEP initiative (Honig, 2012). This approach aligns with previous research that supports the importance of central office administrators’ establishing relationships with school principals (Bardett &McCormick, 2004; Snyder et al., 1996). Congruent with past research, balancing the power between the central office and principals helped the central office assist the principals. This balance created ownership throughout the administrative ranks and allowed the new initiative to be a shared responsibility (Corcoran & Belcher, 2001).
These relationships were viewed by the Valley central office as both paramount and necessary to the ongoing work of the district. Office administrators were intentional in the actions they took to support their principals and to make change possible. Continuing to use the existing structures of learning partners and PERR provided a base for the implementation of the new TPEP initiative. As is noted in the findings of this study, central office administrators were able to both provide both everyday support and to introduce, train, and lead principals through the TPEP implementation process. The district was well prepared for this work through its ongoing development of learning partners. It appears to have also flattened the structure and hierarchy of a typical school district such that all administrators were working together to implement the necessary changes related to the new evaluation system. Before the final discussion and implications of the study are detailed, an explanation of how the findings relate to the original research questions is offered here. Prior to beginning the study, the two original research questions were: (a) Within this definition of assistance relationships, what types of activities were occurring between the central office and principals; and (b) Did the principals perceive these activities as helpful to their pursuit of effective implementation of the TPEP initiative in their school buildings?

Research Question 1 –

What Types of Activities Occurred Between Central Office and Principals?

Leveraging existing structures. The central office approached the opportunity to implement this new evaluation policy by using existing structures that had already proven effective. The district’s use of these existing structures comprised the identified activities described in the first research question. The district had a system of support and learning in place prior the new initiative. Using their learning partners and keeping the common language of
PERR as a foundation, the district was able to move forward with these supports in place. Research shows that by maintaining these supports through previous experience within a district, principals are able to improve their own work (Knapp et al., 2006). The district continued to use these existing structures to further partner with principals and continued their course as a learning organization. Again, this approach aligns with previous research showing that central office and principals working together as partners leads to the promotion and improvement of the organization (Brudney et al., 2000). Administrators at the district office knew that the old method of merely giving directions to the principals without spending time in their schools would not work (Copland & Honig, 2010). Also, previous research noted that past central office administrators operated as managers of the resources when new policies or initiatives were introduced to a school district (Honig & Copland, 2008). This was not the case in the Valley school district. Results from this study show that the principals were pleased and grateful that the central office did not merely allocate funds or direct principals from afar. Instead, the principals were grateful when the central office administrators led and supported the new initiative, working side-by-side with principals to learn together, train together, and support one another. Principals felt supported throughout the process and were able to call upon the central office for professional development and leadership. Research by Honig (2010) shows that even though there is a need for the central office to support and lead principals through this new process, the central office’s ability to do so is not always present. This was not the case with the Valley school district. The central office relationship of support for principals was deeply rooted and established through the previous work in establishing structures, as well as the ongoing purposeful support of the principals.
Principals also saw value in working with the central office regarding their own professional development. The existing structure of learning together as district administrators through learning partnership and the PERR process allowed for a natural and smooth transition to the new professional development around the TPEP implementation. Research shows that recent federal and state policies have forced the central office to become a learning organization (Honig, 2008). However, the research also suggests that there was little evidence showing what that looks like for school districts. In this study, the Valley School District knew how learning occurred together, and thus the administrators both at the school building level and at the central office were able to proceed. Knapp et al. (2006) spoke to the importance of the district office becoming a learning organization by taking on this role of aligning trainings and professional development with principals to implement the new evaluation system. The Valley central office did just that. Specific to this study, the central office administrators of the Valley school district were learning together with principals, supporting them in their day-to-day activities, and building consistent practices with them throughout the district. These activities of learning together and supporting principals were the foundation of establishing and maintaining the assistance relationships. Their trainings were focused on what they as central office and principals must do to establish the new evaluation system in a way that supported and helped teachers improve their instruction. Both the central office administration and the principals spoke to the importance of learning together.

Research Question 2 –

Did the Principals See These Activities as Helpful?

Ongoing support for principals. Not only did the central office provide ongoing support to the district’s principals through multiple activities, but the principals also perceived
this support to be helpful in their pursuit to implement the new TPEP initiative. The findings of this study show that the ongoing support provided to principals is part of the central office culture. Previous research tells us that the support of the central office is crucial to the principal being effective in his/her work (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003). The documentation that exists from the interviews in this study speaks loudly to how the central office administrators make it a priority to put the needs of principals at the forefront of their daily work. This concept is supported by the research of Michael Knapp and his colleagues (2010a), who found that although principals needed to have a set of skills to lead their buildings, without the leadership and training from the central office, principals would be left alone to interpret policy and manage situations of significant change. In the study of this district, the central office did not leave the principals alone to tackle this new initiative, nor did they allow each principal to interpret the new policy. Instead, the central office began the work of learning together with the principals about how to interpret and implement the new teacher evaluation initiative.

Next, it is evident that the majority of the participants involved in this study have been a part of an ongoing professional learning community over many years. Both the central office and the principal groups have shared history. Their journey of learning together began many years ago while establishing common district language around instruction and learning (PERR), and that same approach has spilled over into the implementation focus of the new TPEP initiative. It is important to note here that the relationships that were developed grew over time and within the construct of a professional learning community. Past research calls for the central office and principals to learn to facilitate new initiatives together. Implementing such initiatives is difficult for principals and they are often left alone to accomplish this task. Central office must work to include this new evaluation support for principals (Honig et al., 2010). The
purposeful, directed professional development for administrators in this district is central to their successful relationships. Researchers concur that as central office and principals learn together, the relationships are strengthened and success in the change process will be achieved (Johnson & Crispeels, 2010).


The Valley School District central office administration encouraged principals to interact and work together throughout the implementation process. Whether it was meeting in small groups with a central office supervisor, working one-on-one with their learning partner, or experiencing large group professional development, open dialogue was encouraged. As the interview results make clear, principals felt listened to and as if their concerns were heard. Previous research exposed that often principals did not see any additional support in their efforts to re-design themselves as they transformed from central office administrators to instructional leaders (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). However, like the Valley School District, other successful districts didn’t see this support from central office as merely a realignment of positions or departments or duties, or the re-aligning of organizational charts (Honig et al., 2009). These other successful districts also concluded, like Honig et al. (2009), that there was a gap between what a district office should do and what the reality actually looked like—the key concept being that the central office must become teachers of principals and learners with them as well. This is exactly what happened at Valley. Central office administrators continually sought out opportunities to become smarter and learn together with principals. This was especially important because the reciprocal learning pattern was established prior to the implementation of TPEP, an initiative about which neither principals nor district office personnel could claim they knew more.
Opportunities to Learn Together Led to Trust

All of the principals interviewed agreed that having the central office work together with them to learn about and implement the new TPEP initiative was extremely helpful. It is interesting to note that these principals cited small group meetings and learning partners as major factors in learning together with the central office. Both of these activities are somewhat intimate in terms of how the central office interacted with the principals. Smaller groups, in which meaningful conversations could arise, were meeting monthly. One-on-one learning partner situations, in which a principal could converse about his/her specific problems with a central office administrator, were also taking place monthly. Previous large-district studies also reported the idea of central office administrators partnering with building principals and looked at how that might be structured (Johnson & Crispeels, 2010). In the case of San Diego, the study even mentioned how district administrators attempted to partner with principals in establishing effective instructional practices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2003). Adding to the existing literature previously discussed are the specific findings of the Valley School District. This mid-size school district’s central office leadership engaged in specific, one-on-one, and small group learning activities that were seen as meaningful professional development. These ongoing efforts by the central office were also reflected in the many documents reviewed, which show specific introductions of new legal requirements, various ideas for beginning the new evaluation process, and deliberate follow-up information for principals. I also observed principals receiving and discussing specific information related to the TPEP initiative. This was happening in a mutually respectful atmosphere where questions and comments were welcomed by principal and teacher leaders. Principals shared in their interview responses that trust was evident in their professional interactions with the central office.
What the Superintendent and Central Office Does Matters

The superintendent of the Valley School District was directly involved in establishing and maintaining existing structures, providing ongoing support for principals, and leading the implementation of the new evaluation system initiative (TPEP). The superintendent and central office administration provided and participating in professional development and other learning activities with principals. These actions coincide with current studies by Meredith Honig and her colleagues that demonstrate that one of the elements of central office transformation is to provide ongoing learning and sustained support for principals (Honig et al., 2008; Honig et al., 2010).

Specific to the findings in the area of learning together as central office administrators and building-based principals is the revelations that everyday support of the principals established and/or enhanced the assistance relationships that principals valued in their respective supervisors. The superintendent reported that he often took data with him when visiting principals in their buildings. Building relationships with principals through the use of data is one way this district supported principals. Using this method to build relationships is consistent with previous findings in the literature (Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012). The purpose of using data in this manner is to help principals measure how specific issues in their buildings are going, whether it be a student learning issue or perhaps the results of staff survey. Whatever that data source, it provides a starting point for a conversation between central office and principals. Giving this honest, live feedback to principals will evoke questions from principals that challenge the central office administrators, who in turn might not have all the answers, but who assure principals that they will go find those answers. And according to at least two of the principals, having the central office admit that they don’t have all the answers but are willing to track them down is also a show of support.
Answers to interview questions about learning together and supportive relationships revealed that it was very important to the central office administrators that the use of the same specific vocabulary remained constant as they supported principals. Many referred to previous district-wide initiatives by name, and documents confirmed the use of the same vocabulary. This came as a surprise in a mid-sized district of this size. Often it is difficult to implement common language throughout a large organization (Honig, 2010) so the fact that most all of the participants expressed their thoughts in similar vocabulary and phrases was somewhat surprising.

**Meeting Together Regularly**

Monthly meeting agendas also revealed that the central office would provide guidance on how principals might discuss TPEP issues with their staff. Darling-Hammond (2003) spoke of the importance of principals providing professional development opportunities to help teachers. As it related to the new TPEP initiative, the central office met regularly with principals to help them become qualified to help teachers implement the initiative. One specific example of providing support for principals in their efforts to lead teachers was the creation of a document for principal use. It listed a variety of ways in which principals could discuss with teachers the different types of student achievement data that could be collected (a new part of the TPEP teacher evaluation process). In further review of the document, it became apparent that it was the principals who had actually generated the list of ideas. The central office administrator merely facilitated the learning process and published the individual principal ideas to the entire group, thereby validating their knowledge and supporting their ideas. As mentioned previously, central office administrators approached learning with the principals as a classroom of students, all learning together. While observing one of these monthly meetings, I noticed that the principals were very comfortable in asking specific questions about how conversations with
some teachers might become unproductive quickly if teachers perceived that the principals wanted to focus on whether all students met standards on specific assessments. The assistant superintendent running this meeting was able to role-play those conversations with the principals and resolve their concerns. Having the principals express their concerns and then providing an environment in which it was safe to collectively give solutions to the problems meant that the principals were able to receive these ideas without feeling inadequate or deficient in their positions. Past research confirms these actions taken by the central office will help principals increase their instructional skills to lead teachers. Some studies that go as far back as 1982 state this very point (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Heck, 1982). In these studies, principals were found to have many managerial duties; however, the new instructional leadership label created much stress for the principals. Contrary to the studies conducted decades ago, new study by Hallinger and Heck (2010) shows that this shift for the principal from manager to leader must occur in order for the principal to complete the task of leading teachers through new initiatives. The Valley School District central office administration helped facilitate this shift for principals into their instructional leadership roles.

Central Office Boundary Spanning with Principals

Concerning the idea of the central office administrators acting as boundary spanners, the results of the study confirmed that principals witnessed how the central office administrators brought principals to the table during the education and implementation of the TPEP initiative. The central office administrators recognized the work it took to accomplish these tasks. Another example of how the central office acted as a boundary spanner was their bringing teachers into the trainings with the principals. Many of the trainings included teacher leaders working alongside the central office leaders and principals. Principals saw this invitation to teachers as a
great way to build relationships with teachers and administrators. These activities complement past research, stating that central office and principals must help teachers implement new practices (TPEP) and instructional strategies (Knapp et al., 2010b). Three of the four principals interviewed shared that their ability to work with teachers was enhanced by knowing that teachers understood that the entire district leadership was working from the same paradigm. Furthermore, many of documents regarding the implementation of TPEP that were shared with the principals were also available to all teachers. For example, the principals received a document outlining the eight elements of the teacher evaluation with detailed examples of what criteria might be used to satisfy each element. The instruction from the central office was to share this same document at the building staff meetings with teachers, thereby creating the same point of reference for all involved. The principals did admit that even though they weren’t aware of it, the central office administrators were probably doing work in these areas. As one principal explained, “I’m not really sure what the central office does with the school board or other groups outside of schools, but I’m sure they are working to get the best policies that they can.”

Documents reviewed also showed a lack of information being provided to principals regarding what might or might not be going on between the central office and the school board.

**This Study vs. Previous Literature**

Beyond the original research questions for this study, additional questions arise: If indeed the school district central office was able to support and train principals in this implementation, how is this study different from previous research? Or is it? How do these findings add to the current body of research? Do we have a fresh new look into the relationships between central office and principals in this particular district? Finally, and perhaps most importantly, how are
the findings of this study relevant to the work that school district leaders are trying to accomplish in their own districts?

Research has shown that providing meaningful professional development and supportive resources to principals enhances greatly their ability to be effective leaders (Odden, 2011). The unique contribution of this study is that very little of the literature reports on these experiences in a mid-sized suburban district. Many suburban districts lack the infrastructure to conduct this type of research from within. Previous studies focused more on large urban settings or small rural districts. Therefore, this study adds to the existing literature is this study by showing that central office administrators in a mid-sized suburban district who have effective existing structures in place do not always need to re-invent themselves or transform all that they have done in the past.

Even though specific things happened with the Valley central office that aligned with what previous researchers saw as important to transform a district into a learning organization, the differences that emerged from this study are also important to note. The review of the previous literature does not reveal specific examples of what the assistance relationship between the central office administrators and the principals looks like within a successful mid-sized district, or how both parties learn together to develop the relationship. Although Honig (2008) identified key concepts related to how central office administrators establish these relationships, she added that future study is needed to identify how learning occurs within the district office to provide these assistance relationships. The Valley study shows how this learning can take place between the central office and building administrators.

The study also reveals that as a result of using existing structures and continuing support for principals, learning does not have to be “re-invented” each time district-wide change or a new
initiative is presented. The “transformation” of the central office does not always take place according to a specific, time-bound plan with a definite beginning and end. Sometimes this transformation occurs naturally over time as central office administrators constantly look to refine their roles in supporting principals to get better as a district. This study identifies five specific activities that can be linked to the establishment of an assistance relationship as described by Honig (2010, 2012). Using dialogue, listening and learning together, leads to trust between the central office and principals. Also included is making sure that what the central office and the superintendent do matters to the principals. Meeting together regularly establishes lines of communication. Finally, having the central office act as boundary spanners for principals also was identified as an important element of establishing an assistance relationship. The study also revealed the fact that the superintendent was not afraid to not have all of the answers. He was clear about being honest with principals about what he knew, but he also saw himself as a resource to find out answers that he did not know. These areas of focus for the Valley School District central office became the foundational components in establishing a partnership with their principals to accomplish the TPEP implementation task.

**Future Research**

Some questions arising from the findings of this study include: What about central office staff and principals that are new to the district? Does the central office have a plan to bring these new principals up to speed with the structures that are in place? It is imperative that new administrators understand why learning partners and PERR are the foundation used for the implementation of the new evaluation system. The professional development opportunities of new administrators should differ from those participants of this study who have had many years together. Will the hiring practices for administrators need to focus on finding candidates who
have experience related to the themes discussed in this study? Future research on this topic could go deeper into the human resources aspect of how school district administrators are chosen to lead new initiatives, when they might not have the advantage of knowing past district practices and culture. The data analyzed here touches on these topics, but more in-depth studies around these specific areas will add to the overall aspects of the focus that central office administrators must have to support principals in their work. Future research that is done by those who work within their own districts and who are active participants throughout the process will allow specific strategies to be created both during the study and after the study is complete (Honig, 2010). Action research studies are very beneficial in these situations. More research continues to be needed on how central office transformation should look for districts who are attempting to support principals in their work. Continued study, conducted by both by external and internal sources, will provide meaningful information for central office leaders. An outside researcher can come into a district and organize a study to see what is and isn’t working, draw conclusions as to why, and report out valid results.

**Significance of the Study**

**Practical.** What does this study mean to districts that have this foundation of existing structures and support? In a practical sense, it means that central office administrators who are able to identify what already works well for their district and build upon those structures to introduce and implement new changes will have an advantage over those districts that don’t. Central office leaders who have not moved into becoming learning organizations and partnered with their principals will see this shift as burdensome and complicated, while districts such as Valley who are already working together in that type of environment will receive the new
initiatives like TPEP with a pre-existing plan or outline as to how they might accomplish the new changes.

This study also concludes that if the central office administrators are constantly looking for ways to support principals and are willing to include principals as partners in learning and making decisions for the district, principals will in turn feel supported and equipped with the ability to lead in their own buildings. Knowing that the central office is ready to work with principals and teacher leaders on new initiatives such as TPEP helps establish the district as a learning organization. For districts that have not yet been able to successfully implement this new initiative, looking to districts such as Valley to determine what has worked to implement TPEP will be very beneficial.

**Theoretical.** The results of this study contribute to the existing body of literature related to assistance relationships and how learning occurs in the work between central office administrators and school principals.

**Substantive.** This study has shown how central office administrators and principals can work together in the Valley School District as well as how the principals feel about this support. Because every district in the state will be using this new evaluation system, this study can give guidance to other districts that are looking for effective implementation processes.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

A specific benefit and practical significance have been identified as a result of this study. Central office administrators who engage in joint learning and support building-based principals will see their relationships flourish and experience success in moving forward with new initiative implementations such as the TPEP project. As these central office administrators continue to operate and learn directly with principals in small settings, even one-on-one on a regular basis,
both the principals and the central office administrators will benefit in their efforts to lead district-wide change.

With federal and state initiatives invading what was once a primarily locally run effort, public school districts will need to have processes in place to receive, evaluate, and implement these new laws and initiatives. Just as the TPEP initiative has affected Washington state school districts, so will other future reform efforts. Central office administrators need to take advantage of opportunities to reflect and study their own practices in order to fully understand what else can be done. Specifically, what must be done to create and maintain support and assistance to the principals in the buildings? Sustaining these relationships will be paramount in establishing the necessary groundwork needed to survive the ever-changing reforms applied to public education today. Because the TPEP initiative in Washington State was so new, few studies have yet been completed that speak specifically about how the implementation process is progressing in other districts. However, this study makes very clear that specific actions taken by central office leaders have led to the self-reported skill building and development of principals. Furthermore, the principals have reported via their interview answers that these specific activities have provided them with the learning and support necessary to begin the implementation the TPEP initiative. As one principal noted, “Continuing to learn about TPEP together with the central office administrators puts us all on the same page when delivering the message to our teachers and staff.” In the end, central office administrators who have built positive assistance relationships with principals will be more successful in helping principals implement initiatives such as TPEP. Central office leaders who fail to provide ongoing support, dedicate time and resources to meaningful professional development where all learn together, or establish
consistent communication with principals will find it hard to develop and maintain these relationships and in turn will continue to struggle to meet the ever-changing needs of principals.

Many factors influence how an organization learns, what central office supports are provided, and how principals acquire the necessary knowledge and skills they need to become proficient in the newly adopted state evaluation system (TPEP). This system is the latest pressure to hit districts and it carries substantial implications. External pressures like the TPEP initiative are what test and put pressure on the existing functioning of school districts. If districts and schools are not cohesive throughout their central office and principal leadership, then central office leaders and principals will continue to bounce back and forth, chasing would-be solutions to their problems. This type of behavior typically results in frustration, cultural confusion, and a lack of sustained results in student achievement. In contrast, if the concepts such as central office transformation, professional development, assistance relationships, and boundary spanning are solid, functioning well, and being used in partnership with evidence to drive change, then as new issues arise, districts will be able to absorb these changes and continue preparing and supporting principals in their work.
REFERENCES


103


Huber, N. S. (1997). Effective administrators are managers and leaders. *Adult Learning, 9*(1), 10-11, 30.


