

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL
EXPLORATION OF
PLAY AMONG
EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

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By Janette L. Seybert
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This journey was an exercise in love and play. In large part that is due to the support and understanding of my amazing husband and children. Thank you for making me the luckiest doctor out there.

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An abstract of a Dissertation Proposal by

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Problem: Today's educational leaders are facing more challenges than ever before. State and federal mandates make it difficult for leaders to work outside a given framework and many are stretched physically, emotionally and mentally beyond their limits to maintain health. Play is an important part of a healthy life style. This qualitative study explored how play impacted educational leaders both in their own lived as well as in the culture they created with their followers.

Procedures: This phenomenological study explored the phenomenon of play as it relates to educational leaders. The grand tour question is "How is the phenomenon of play impacting the work of educational leaders?" A semi-structured interview was conducted with eight educational leaders including, superintendents, curriculum directors, and principals. The questions focused on play history, current forms of play, and playful leadership. The educational leaders were selected using purposeful sampling. Data analysis was conducted through the use of open and axial coding and was used to identify key themes or topics. Verification of data will include triangulation and rich, thick descriptions. Findings were written in a phenomenological structure to provide a narrative description of the experience.

Findings: This study found that play is impacting the work of the eight educational leaders in the way they find relief from stress both on the job and at home, the ways in which they identify playful leaders and the culture that is created through playful leadership. The leaders were not all aware of their own playful nature or habits but all of them identified playful behaviors in others.

Conclusion: Reflection offered an opportunity for the participants to make connections to the playful leadership of others as well as in their own leadership role. Those who saw the benefits of play in their own lives also reported feeling a better sense of balance and were more purposeful in their creation of a playful work culture.

Recommendations: These data suggest that leaders can benefit from recognizing play as a part of the human experience and may be more effective leaders when they create a culture of personal connection and play. The data also point to the recommendation that educational leaders provide time for playful learning for their students and staff and that they recognize symptoms of a life without play and the detriment it can cause.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“The true object of all human life is play. Earth is a task garden; heaven is a playground.” Gilbert K. Chesterton

Play was once the cornerstone of a kindergarten day. Not only were children given time to choose play for themselves, but play was also integrated throughout teacher led activities and projects (Graue, 2010). Children were expected to engage in socialization, listening and following directions, and learning to deal with change. Kindergarten used to be the preparation for first grade, rather than its replacement (Graue, 2010; Ray & Smith, 2010). Most alarming, crushing amounts of stress and pressure have become the norm for both students and teachers (Pope, 2010; Conner, 2009; Collie, Shapka & Perry, 2012).

Researchers have long known the importance of play in the development of young minds (Brown, 2009; Burgers, 1966; Katz, 1994; Piaget & Cook, 1952; Vygotsky, 1934) but only in the last few decades has play been highlighted as having importance throughout the human lifespan (Bartlett, 2011; Christakis & Christakis, 2010; Ibarra & Petrigieri, 2008; Panksepp, 1998).

Life as a teacher can be consumed with passion for learning and the need to inspire young children to investigate, discover, and immerse themselves in what is to be their own educational journey. As the years have passed, so too has the vision of what early learning should entail and the expectations of what should be achieved by students and staff.

With the increased pressure on kids there is an even greater pressure on schools. From parents to politicians, the pressure for educators to produce high scoring and even

higher achieving students has created a culture of win at all cost. Performance based pay is becoming more and more common in school districts across the country (Springer, 2010).

What began as a career of the heart has become a testimony in heartache for some teachers. Stress, chronic illness, emotional distress, and burnout have been the costly side effects for both students and leaders (Guglielmi & Tatrow 1998; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Maslach, 1982).

Problem Statement

“The opposite of play isn’t work. It’s depression.” Brian Sutton-Smith

Whether it is a round of golf with a friend, or having a good laugh around the water cooler at work, play is an essential and vital part of a healthy lifestyle (Markey, Markey, Ericksen & Tinsley, 2006). Play offers benefits mentally, emotionally and physically. Many are unaware of what constitutes play and how easy it is to incorporate into a daily routine.

In a world of No Child Left Behind (2001), educators are struggling to manage what they know is best for young learners with the demands of the legislation. Too often school administrators must choose between offering schedules that allow for play and receiving funding that is essential for the daily costs of educating their community (Ravitch, 2013). This creates a discord for the leader’s own physical and emotional health.

When adults are stressed and do not take time out to play the body responds by sending out more of the chemicals cortisol and norepinephrine; too much of these chemicals cause a disruption in the body’s immune system (Fragala et al., 2011). The

opposite occurs when a person takes part in an activity they enjoy. Laughter decreases stress hormones, and can thereby lower the effects of stress on the immune system (Berk, Tan, Napier, & Evy 1989; Berk, 1988). Calming activities such as meditation, yoga, massage, and listening or playing music, decreases cortisol and norepinephrine. Simply playing with children can reduce stress hormones and increase serotonin (Adamsen, Stage, Laursen, Rorth, & Quist, 2011; Mathew & Paulose, 2011). “Serotonin secretion can be enhanced by increasing the recognition that happiness and well-being are important, both as factors protecting against mental and physical disorders and in their own right”(Delamothe, 2005).

Besides the boost of endorphins and the decrease in stress, play has many life enriching benefits (Brown, 2009). Play connects individuals. Sharing laughter, fun and joy, provides an opportunity to bond and strengthen relationships. Through play, empathy, compassion, trust and the capacity for intimacy are developed.

A chronic lack of play in early life can lead to psychological and emotional problems in adulthood (Lester & Russell, 2010). The absence of play in childhood has been studied with results showing correlations to ADHD (Panksepp, 2007; Wilkes, Cordier, Bundy, Docking & Munro, 2011) while absence of play in adulthood has been linked to Alzheimer’s (Brown, 2009). Brain research shows a strong need for play in order to make the necessary growth and maturation of the frontal lobe as well as in social development (Panksepp, 2007). Brains need play to develop but it does not stop there (Burdette & Whitaker, 2005).

Humans are designed by nature to continue play throughout life. Life long play is essential to a continued sense of wellbeing, adaptation and social cohesiveness. Studies

show a connection between play and the longevity of clarity (Edelman, 1987). Brain scans demonstrate a brain's continuation of growth well after one's twenties. Individuals who continue to play throughout their lives prompt continued neurogenesis (Byers & Walker, 1995).

Leaders create culture based on their own beliefs and values. The more a leader emphasizes play as part of a healthy lifestyle and attitude, the more creative and innovative thinking is inspired in those around them (Pink, 2005). The Google Corporation is an example of how companies foster the play roles of their employees. Not only do their offices hold such play zones as foosball tables, pianos and video game spaces, but they also expect each employee to invest in creative time to think, imagine and envision projects and ideas. The Google website refers to their hiring policy as "favoring ability over experience" (Google Culture 2007). Part of that ability comes from the play activities of creative thinking (Robinson & Aronica, 2009).

Although current research that investigates and supports play for leadership in business (Kark, 2011; Panksepp, 1998), a gap exists in application for educational leaders. A large body of evidence supports play for children in and out of school settings and offers implications for the detriment of lack of play (Almon & Miller, 2009; Barlett, 2011; Christakis & Christakis, 2010).

Purpose of the Study

Educational leaders are those who serve in order to release the human potential of both children and staff by facilitation. According to Jordan (1973) the articulation of leadership:

concerns the shaping of present actions in terms of what the

system might become in the future, thereby guaranteeing that the institution or system itself makes a perpetual creative advance into novelty and releases the potentialities as a system (p. 3)

Similarly, Gardner (2011) adds that leaders fashion stories of identity not just for themselves, but also for the organization being led. The form of storytelling can be direct or indirect but are crucial for the formation of common vision and ideals. Further, those serving as educational leaders are required to create culture, ideally for the learning and growth of others. The challenge of creating such a culture is often compounded by the mandates and time restrictions that are passed down from those outside the educational arena. Test scores have become the judge and jury for what is deemed success in public education and it is leaving many leaders struggling to find a balance between what they know to be good practice and the stressors of outside demands. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenon of play, as it is manifested in the work of educational leaders.

“Play” is often distinguished from “work” by contrasting the purposes, processes, and spaces in which it takes place. The ideas of work and play do not represent different activities rather, they are characterized by different ways of approaching activities or different frames for behaving (Glynn, 1994). Brown (2009) defines play as “an absorbing, apparently purposeless activity that provides enjoyment and a suspension of self-consciousness and sense of time. Pursuing an activity for the joy it brings” (p 60).

This study spanned the many ways in which educational leaders exhibit play in their thinking, leading of others, and the culture they create for others in their organization. Documenting play (or lack of play) in educational leaders’ work

environments may help them to understand how play is related to their leadership, which could in turn help them to create more opportunities for creativity and innovation, and/or less stress for those within their organizations.

Significance of the Study

School leaders who encourage creative thinking, collaborative decision-making, and facilitative power, show substantial enhancement to the productivity of their staff and students (Leithwood & Poplin, 1992). Leaders who are sustaining and successful have an understanding of the importance of personal stress relief opportunities for themselves and their staff (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004). Play behaviors are fundamental in the release of stress and the overall health and wellbeing of individuals both in and out of leadership roles (Brown, 2009).

In order to create a culture that remains positive, creative and innovative, educational leaders can look to play behaviors to encourage the overall health and happiness of their staff and students. Positive culture creates a healthier school with both physical and mental components, which leads to academic success overall (Leithwood & Poplin).

Theoretical Framework

The theory of Conservation of Resources addresses the absence of play within a working environment while Role theory focuses on an individual's work identity. Flow theory addresses the presence and the positive impact of play. All three theories are described in full below.

Conservation of resources. According to Hobfoll (2001) the Conservation of Resources theory reflects an individual's struggle to obtain, maintain, and retain those things they value – “resources”. This theory states that psychological distress will occur when an individual's resources are perceived lost, actually lost, or where the individual fails to compensate following a significant loss of investment.

The major resources identified are: time, time for adequate sleep, leisure time, time spent with loved ones and health. Logically, time spent at work will deplete the time available to invest elsewhere however, rewards from work can compensate for this loss. Time off of work can be used to replenish physical and mental resources. When individuals invest an unbalanced amount of time on the job, the opportunities to replenish diminish and negative consequences can result. These include both psychological as well as physical and social loss (Halbesleben, Wheeler & Paustian-Underdahl, 2013).

Educators invest long hours into their work. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development tracks 27 member nations, including the United States. The 2013 data show the average American teacher spends 1,080 hours per 36 – week school year teaching and another 288 hours of required time working at school. After adding in the average hours spent at home and outside the classroom, working on schoolwork, teachers spend 1, 913 hours on teaching work per year. This places teachers at risk for the depletion of time to replenish resources or invest time in other areas such as family, friends, sleep, and exercise.

According to the Conservation of Resources theory, educator burnout occurs when there is a lack of resource gain following significant resource investment of time, energy, loss of opportunities, and borrowing from family time and intimacy to support work

(Hobfoll, 2001). One manner in which an organization can substitute resources is to honor the psychological contract held with the employee (Halbesleben, Wheeler, & Paustian-Underdahl, 2013).

Psychological contracts. Psychological contracts reflect an understanding of people's attitudes towards work, their organization, their behavior, and their wellbeing. It is the perception of both parties in an employment relationship, organizational and individual, of the promises and obligations made by both that are implied in that relationship (Sturges, Conway, Guest, & Liefoghe, 2005).

The depletion of resources can lead to ill health effects such as burnout. Educators need a significant resource gain to counteract the depletion of resources. A psychological contract fulfillment may be a resource that can counteract the loss (Hobfoll, 2001). Often teachers who invest personal time and resources into their work are promised both financial and relational support from their administration or district. For example, a principal may offer a teacher time from support staff, paid transportation, and materials needed for lessons. They may also imply promises to care and support teachers' wellbeing by appreciating their effort, valuing their ideas and input, and considering teachers' best interests when making decisions that affect them. Perceived fulfillment of these promises is a form of economic and social resource that the teacher expects the principal to provide. This need and expectation may be increased when the teacher is nearing burnout (Hobfoll, 2011).

There is a gain in resources for the teacher when the principal has sent a positive psychological message. The teacher feels supported and valued in his or her role in a

relationship where promise-keeping obligations are respected. Parzefall and Hakanen (2010) stated, “when employees feel cared for and safe in their employment relationship, it generates not only positive outcomes in the context of work, but also further positive effects for employee mental health (p.9).

Trust and respect. Trust and respect are essential in all working relationships. These are resources that can fill a need when present and deplete where it is not. Currall and Epstein (2003) define working relationships as having two components, reliance and risk. Risk is the possibility that the trusting party will experience cost if the other person proves unworthy. Risk creates an opportunity to build trust. Reliance is fate being determined by another’s actions.

Creating and sustaining trust is essential for educational leaders. At the institutional level trust is essential in building better relationships within a learning community where knowledge is socially created and shared. On a personal level trust and respect are vital to individual morale and self-worth (Kutsyuruba, Walker, & Noonan, 2011). In order to support and maintain the health of their staff, mutual trust and respect must be established and upheld. In Patterson’s (2012) *Crucial Conversations* the importance is illustrated, “respect is like air. As long as it’s present, nobody thinks about it. But if you take it away, it’s *all* that people can think about” (p. 79).

Role theory. Role theory concerns one of the most important factors of social identity, characteristic behavior patterns or roles (Biddle, 1979). People define a role, or a way to be seen by others, based on social learning and reading. Expectations are formed regarding roles and are encouraged by interactions with others. Internal schemas are

created based on what is read and discussed as well as what is observed in others with similar roles (Merton, 1957).

Role assignments are sent subtly through interactions (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1975). When a leader assumes a position of power he or she may have a preconceived idea or expected behavior for the role. These may have been formed by watching other leaders, reading about leadership or through conversations with others. The expectations for a leader have already been identified internally by the leader as well as externally by those around the leader (Merton, 1957). For example, in a school setting, principals may be identified as disciplinarians for students and are therefore looked upon as serious, authoritative and rules oriented. Social expectations create signals that reinforce the principal's serious behavior.

A person stepping into any role may have different expectations. The imbalance of expectations causes the leader to have a role conflict (Kahn et al., 1964). When role conflict arises, stress increases and the cost to the leader is the depletion of internal resources (House & Rizzo, 1972). It takes time and reflection to balance personal role identity with societal role expectations.

Flow theory. While studying the process of creativity, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1976) observed a phenomenon that he later described as “flow”. Flow is the intrinsic motivation for an activity that is rewarding in and of it self, without outside rewards that may result from the activity. Flow is absorption in the presence of an optimal experience. Flow research continues and has practical applications in education at all levels, as well as outside the academic arena, in sports and in the arts as well as business.

Experiencing flow encourages a person to persist in, and return to, an activity because of the intrinsic rewards it provides. This process of return fosters growth of skills over time and increases achievement as well as creativity (Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Shneider, & Shernff, 2003). Studies have linked flow experiences to commitment and achievement during high school (Carli, Delle Fave, & Massimini, 1988; Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, 2003). A longitudinal study of talented and gifted high school students showed a relationship between quality of experience and persistence. Students who were committed to their talent area at age 17 were compared to peers who had disengaged. Those committed had experienced more flow in the four years prior; they also had less anxiety than their peers. They were also more likely to have identified their talent area as a source of flow (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993).

Although flow is a reward for the individual in and of itself, the benefits of flow are evident for the larger part of a community. Within the school setting, flow has been shown to be more evident when pedagogy and educational contexts are designed to encourage flow. Studies of school types show Montessori students experienced more flow, and were more motivated in school than their peers attending traditional school settings (Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Shneider & Shernoff, 2003; Shernoff & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009).

Regarding classroom activities, active pedagogies such as cooperative learning, scaffolding, giving autonomy, encouraging intrinsic motivation and project approach provided more flow than passive instruction such as highly directive and evaluative practices (Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Shneider, & Shernoff, 2003).

Teachers in a recent British study were shown to experience more flow when teaching in primary and secondary levels (Morgan, 2005). Researchers also examined the antecedents of flow. Among factors identified were self-efficacy, job resources, and social support (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Inadequate provision of resources can lead to anxiety (Salanova, Bakker, & Llorens, 2006). Both personal resources and organizational resources positively affect work-related flow and in addition, work-related flow positively affected workers performance.

For the purpose of this study, the Flow theory, the Role theory and the Conservation of Resources theory were used as lenses to understand the data.

Definitions Associated with Play

Play has not been easy to define. Whereas some authors and researchers refer to play as finding the “element” when there is a connection to a person’s most authentic self (Robinson & Aronica, 2009), other researchers point to play as a response to an ever-changing environment (Burgers, 1966). Brown (2009) defines adult play as having moments of time loss where the mind and spirit are free to engage in creativity for its own sake. Webster (2014) defines play as a “recreational activity, especially the spontaneous activity of children.”

Many in today’s rushed society would define play in similar terms, highlighting its relevancy only to children and not adults, but they would be mistaken. Play is essential throughout life for emotional balance and stability, as well as the building and sustaining of healthy relationships ”(Adamsen, Stage, Laursen, Rorth, & Quist, 2011; Delamothe, 2005; Leven, 2010; Sutton-Smith, 1999). Beginning at birth and lasting a

lifetime, play is essential to health. It is therefore, important to identify the stages and indicators of play throughout the life cycle.

Infant Play

Infant attunement (Brown, 2009) is the awareness and responsiveness to an experience shared with the mother. It is emotional and biological in nature. When a baby makes eye contact with its mother, each experience creates a spontaneous surge of joy. The baby responds with a radiant smile and the mother does the same. Through EEG it is known that the right cerebral cortex, which organizes the brain's emotional control is "attuned" in both infant and mother. Attunement is an emotional connection with physical results (Brown, 2009).

Body movement is the pattern of play in which a person knows and thinks by moving (Muzaffer, 2012). For example, a leap into the air teaches gravity as well as one's roots in movement. It lights up the brain and fosters learning. Innovations, flexibility, resilience, adaptability, all have their roots in movement (Slepian & Ambady, 2012). "The play driven pleasures associated with body movements is done for their own sake. They sculpt the brain, and ready the player for the unexpected and the unusual" (Brown, 2009, p. 85). This play movement begins in the womb and once the baby is born the urge to wave arms continues and soon the baby can get up on her hands and knees and begin exploration on a larger scale.

Object play in young children is the innate pattern of play that incorporates curiosity with manipulation of environment. Spoons, teething rings, and food become an opportunity for the brain to enrich circuits and build connections (Ortega & Bekoff, 1987).

Childhood Play

Imaginative play is *the* most powerful human ability (Brown, 2009). It allows us to create simulated realities that we can explore without giving up access to the real world. The earliest evidence comes in toddlerhood and as the child grows, the degree of complexity of the story grows as well (Piaget, 2013). The need to create narratives occurs worldwide and across cultural boundaries. As a child grows older the line between pretend and real becomes more solid but imaginative play continues to nourish the spirit. It remains a key to emotional resilience and creativity throughout life (Bretherton, 1989).

Humans are social animals and play is the gas that drives the engine of social competence (Brown, 2009). It allows society to function and relationships to flourish. There are several types of social play that were first identified in research by Parten (1932) and are critical in a child's growth and development (Bernstorf, 2012; Wertsch, 1985).

The building of friendships and the feelings of belonging begin at around age 4 and include empathy for others in a more refined state. These will create the basis of friendships throughout our lives. Toddlers begin social play with others through "parallel play" (Parten, 1932) Two children may sit next to each other, both playing with sand, crayons, or toys and be aware of the other child's presence but not interact directly or emotionally with each other (Piaget, 2013). This play becomes more and more social as the child ages and develops.

Rough- and -tumble play is necessary for the development and maintenance of social awareness, altruism, and cooperation. Lack of this type of play impedes the normal give and take relationship that can lead to poor control and violent impulses later in life (Pellegrini, 1988). Rough-and -tumble play can be generalized as any active play that

includes body contact among children (Brown, 2009).

Celebratory and ritual play, are not organized by children but create memories that help build a need for tradition and ritual play as adults (Brown, 2009). Birthday parties, holiday dinners, and songs or dances that celebrate a moment in time are important later in life as evidenced in such events as wedding receptions, and seventh inning songs at baseball games.

The pattern of storytelling and narrative play begins very early and continues throughout life. It is the basic unit of human understanding in learning about the world and one's place in it. A function of the left hemisphere of the brain is to explain why things are the way they are, a story to create a perception of reality (Reilly, Bates & Marchman, 1998). Stories remain central to understanding the world well after childhood. When people make judgments about what is right or wrong, they often do so as a result of a story that has been constructed about events that have happened to them (Parsons & Osherson, 2001). Storytelling has the potential to produce feelings of timelessness, pleasure, and an altered sense of being in the world.

Transformative play is often called integrative or creative play and is the trying on of new behaviors and thoughts. Children are always in a place of changing and becoming and are therefore constantly in a transformative state and it often goes unnoticed (Brown, 2009). When a person engages in fantasy at any age, bends the reality of ordinary life; it can lead to innovation and creativity (Robinson and Aronica, 2009). Daydreams may lead to a new way of doing business, a new way of looking at an old problem, or pioneer a new path that the rest of the world will follow (Pink, 2005).

Adult Play

Brown (2009) points to several play personalities that offer the framework for adults' chosen mode of play. Although it is suggested that each individual has one dominant mode of play, it is important to note that there may be several areas that produce the feeling of freedom and creativity. The eight personalities are joker, kinesthete, explorer, competitor, director, collector, artist and storyteller. Each can influence with varying degrees at different times throughout adulthood, however the dominant personality typically stays the same. Here are the descriptions of each play personality Brown (2009) identifies.

Joker. A joker finds play in nonsense. It starts when a baby babbles to learn language. As an adult, the creating and execution of the perfect practical joke is what gives pleasure to these people. George Clooney is well known for his practical jokes on movie sets and has an impressively complex system of jokes. The television show "Punked" appeals to people who are jokers.

Kinesthete. Kinethetes need movement in order to think. Some aspects of their play may contain competition but that is not the focus. Athletes who engage in an activity enjoy the strengthening and movement of their bodies. Often they report not feeling normal until they have exercised. Runners who seek stress relief and push themselves to feel the burn are kinesthetes.

Explorer. People who love to investigate, research, and learn are explorers. The exploring can be done physically, emotionally or mentally. Jane Goodall is an explorer as was the creator of Apple, Steve Jobs.

Competitor. Competitors are those who shout with joy when they are able to partake in a game with specific rules where they play to win. A competitor loves the fight on the way to being number one. The games themselves can be solitary such as running against the clock, or as a team. Businesses often see competitors in their sales departments where there is a constant strive for benefits, money, or recognition.

Director. Oprah Winfrey finds joy in being the director. She, and others who prefer her mode of play, love to plan, organize and execute the perfect gathering or event. They love the power and when used in a positive light, can contribute to the greater good of society. Because of the power aspect, some directors may be conceived as manipulators and must be conscious of the outcome.

Collector. The thrill of play for the collector is to have and hold on to, the most, the best, and the most extensive collection of objects. It could be toy trains, shoes, designer handbags, sports video clips, antiques, or in the late night talk show host Jay Leno's case, cars. In his free time he loves to work on and shop for unique cars.

Artist. Although Margaret Thatcher is known for many things, few may recognize her play personality. She enjoys wallpapering in her spare time, which makes her play personality an artist and creator. The joy is found in creating something. It can be something new or even rebuilding something already owned in order to make it better than its original version.

Storyteller. For the storyteller, imagination is the key. Storytellers are novelists, playwrights, and screenwriters. They are also people who find joy in reading the novels, or watching the plays and movies. People who see themselves in the story, who experience the emotions and thoughts of the characters are also storytellers. Because the

key is imagination the storyteller can find play in just about any experience. It can include a last minute slam- dunk in the office trash to win the game of paper wad basketball, to the last seconds of a cooking show before judges award the prize macaroni and cheese.

Garrison Keiller, with his tales from Lake Wobegon is an example of a famous storyteller.

Advanced Age Play

The Red Hat Society, a leisure-based social group for women over the age of 50, has been in existence since 1998. It is active world -wide with more than 1 million members from over 30 countries (www.redhatsociety.com). Researchers Yarnal, Chick and Kerstetter (2008) composed a study to understand the definitions of play in older women within the specific context of the Red Hat Society and explore why older women play.

Sue Ellen Cooper founded the organization in order to promote play, to share a sense of fun and make connections with other women. She deemed herself “Exalted Queen Mother” and set forth to find women of similar age and sense of fun. There are no rules for membership, other than the requirement to wear red hats and purple attire. Those who wish to join under the age of 50 are asked to wear lavender outfits with pink hats. Each chapter chooses a “fun” name such as “Crimson Crones” or “Red Hot Flashes” (Yarnal et al., 2008) and assigns a “queen” to govern the group. Members may choose to add to the design of their outfits by adding feather boas, hatpins, red or purple shoes, and rhinestone studded purple or red handbags. The more fun the member is having with the outfit, the better.

The need for play has been a part of the evolution of mankind (Nielsen, 2012). While some researchers point to play evolution as a response to an ever- changing

environment (Burgers, 1966), others look to the past and the valuable role women have played in the passing of knowledge for the survival of the tribe (Hawkes & O'Connell, 1998).

Play, in this way, is socially constructed but it has also been shown to benefit the women in their physical and mental health (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). Stress relief can be attributed to acts of caring for others, which releases the chemical oxytocin producing a feeling of calm and relaxation (Taylor, 2006). Members in the group paint a picture of women who support and care for each other through life's "ups and downs", revel in the opportunity to be silly and goofy, and find stress relief. They also enjoy the positive public responses to their play. Many note the appreciation of older men that had otherwise not "paid attention" to them.

The connections that are made in the organization are of high importance to the members. They feel "a sense of dignity" and "acceptance" as part of a group of friends. A culture created to support and validate its members.

Summary

From the first breath to the last, humans need play. We are designed by nature and evolution to continue play throughout life. Erikson (1993) says it best:

It is human to have a long childhood; it is civilized to have an even longer childhood. Long childhood makes a technical and mental virtuoso out of a man, but it also leaves a lifelong residue of emotional immaturity in him (p 17).

Leaders have a responsibility to acknowledge their own needs as well as those whom they serve, and one way to do that, is to provide a culture of play. Opportunities for

brains to create, innovate, and investigate can, and should, be fostered throughout the day. The benefits are happier, healthier followers, higher production and a wealth of ideas that may not have been discovered had they not been free to flow (Panksepp, 1998).

Educational leaders help to create school climate and culture. Administrative leaders encourage, or discourage, by their own example and style and thus, play has an important role in educational leadership.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

“It is a happy talent to know how to play”. Ralph Waldo Emerson

Overview

To understand more about play in its relation to educational leadership, it is vital to examine the recent literature that is pertinent to the topic. The literature review is important for many reasons, all of which support the notion that the researcher has given consideration to all the information that exists to date regarding the research study. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) explain that researchers conducting literature reviews must adopt a critical perspective in discussing the works of others, and provide a clear analysis of all available related research.

This literature review includes a description of the nature of play in educational leadership and provides an overview of the linkages between lack of play and stress, and the presence of play and health. The research questions were developed after a review of the literature disclosed a dearth in studies involving play and educational leadership.

Challenges of Educational Leadership

In the current era of accountability, school leaders face severe challenges with producing bottom line results while external pressures from federal, state and local mandates are demanding educators to drive up student achievement scores (Onorato, 2013). Dwyer (1984) contends that successful educational leaders combine their day-to-day responsibilities of meeting the needs for student achievement with the needs and resources of the school. Dwyer stated, “Effective principals are better attuned to the behaviors that influence teachers, and thus effect student achievement” (p.37).

In a 2013 study, Onorato sampled forty- five principals within the New York State area to determine their leadership styles. The results showed 69% of those surveyed were leading with a transformative style that encourages attunement with staff and thus, positively influences both staff and student achievement.

Leaders who invest in staff and provide a culture of support and encouragement towards self-actualization are considered transformational. This form of leadership supports the Conservation of Resource theory (Hobfoll, 2011) that requires such leadership for success. When the balance between resources gained and lost are unequal, the cost is accrued not only by the staff but by the school and community as well.

Loss of Play

Most parents and educators consider outdoor play to be a natural part of a healthy development but research by Clements (2004) suggests there is a shift in the amount of time a child in the previous generation spent outdoors and a child of today. In a nationwide survey of eight hundred and thirty mothers, it was found children spend considerable less time outside in play than the parents did when they were children. The major factors contributed to the change were an increase dependence on television and digital media, and a concern about crime and safety.

The University of Texas took the identified need for outdoor play and coupled it with concerns of parents to create the University of Texas Play and Playground Research Project (Frost, 2005). The playground is a child inspired area for play, games, vegetable and herb gardens, greenhouses, and animal habitats. It is also a science laboratory, a place for thoughtful relaxation and reflection, as well as a site for scholarly observations and research by professors and professionals.

Social play. Research by Panksepp (Panksepp 1998, 2001, Panksepp, et al. 1980, 1984) over the last three decades studied the behavioral and neural nature of two of the most important social tools that mammals are genetically predisposed, that prepare children to become productive members of society. These circuits mediate separation distress (panic states), facilitate crying and promote social bonding. These neural trainers ensure that young children value the company of others, especially those willing to invest in their welfare. The evolutionary tool to achieve full socialization and brain maturation is the play system of the mammalian brain. Our current educational policy, focusing on academics at the cost of physical education and the arts steals time away from play and thus negatively impacts our development as social beings (Sutton-Smith, 1995).

A 2003 study involving the social play in rats (Gordon, et al.) examined 1,200 brain genes in the frontal and cortical regions. It was found that after 30 minutes of a play session, the brain genes were significantly modified. If such dynamic brain changes are evoked by play and facilitate growth and maturation, there is concern about anything that diminishes the progression of the developmental process.

When play is diminished for children, results can be evident in the behavior of adults. Brown (1998) noted,

Play deficient creatures suffer from '*value laden adaptive map deficiency.*' As each brain map yields new functions, new kinds of memory, and a series of new inner value laden scenes, the player may begin (depending on its evolutionarily derived cartography capabilities) to develop a rudimentary sense of *self-other*.

The game deprived child may well become the socially dysfunctional adult who cannot handle the complexities inherent in the adult world (p. 35).

In a similar study, (van den Berg, et al. 1999) examined the deprivation of interactions in rats during weeks 4 and 5 of life. Behavioral tests were conducted in adulthood to study the effects of the deprivation. The results suggested that early social experiences are vital for the interactions and survival later in life, for rats at least.

Over scheduling. The reasons for lack of play in childhood can be as easy as an adult filled schedule. With sports teams beginning at younger ages and lessons on everything from Tae Kwon Do to painting, more and more adults are choosing the activities their children will be involved with as well as the intensity. Less time is left for unstructured play that is child chosen and child centered. The effects of a hurried childhood may not be evident until many years later, but lack of play does come at a price (Rogers & Sawyers, 1988).

The cost to individuals who deny the need for play can be high, when it is counted in terms of stress. Science has long recognized that some levels of stress are helpful and even necessary in learning (Sapolsky, 2004); however, chronic stress has been consistently associated with negative outcomes (Burts et al., 1992).

Screen time. Even the youngest child learns quickly how to swipe an iPad to activate the desired application and many television shows have an educational value that is appropriate and valuable when used in limited quantities (Chou & Lee, 2012). Too much screen time has been shown to lead to physical, emotional, and social challenges that burden our youth and adults unnecessarily (Carson & Janssen, 2012; Danielson et al.,

2011; Tandon et al., 2012). When used with discretion and attention to quality and purpose, technology has a strong position as a powerful gate to the world. Healthy and well-adjusted children and adults need time to play in all its forms, imaginative and active, with and without screen time.

Marsh and Bishop (2012) compared the impact of television throughout the 50's/60's to that of the 2010's. One group comprised of adults who had attended a particular English school in their childhood. They relied on memories and reflections for comparisons and were viewed from a historical perspective. Limitations in accessibility of technology for many caused the participants to attribute the kinds of play to be associated with the very few television shows that were available to children at that time. Examples of imaginative play reflected the characters of a popular cops and robbers type show named "The Bill" which may have been available to limited numbers of households. The other group, comprised of children in the 2010's have many more television programs aimed at their age group and would therefore be more prevalent to recreate storylines, character continuation, and child like imitations of gestures.

Screen time has positive impact when used in limited quantities and a negative impact when overused or in accompaniment of poor food choices and general inactivity (Fitzpatrick, Pagani, & Barnett, 2012). Many results were indicators of childhood obesity, heart ailments, and precursors to later health concerns.

Lack of parental involvement and education and low socio-economic status can be contributing factors to increased screen time in young children. Safety concerns may also lead to more screen time and less outdoors play (Tandon, et al., 2012). Families living in poverty reported feeling less safe and therefore hesitant about the children spending time

outside in active play. The alternative for those families was to increase screen time to keep the children inside and safe.

Stress. Continued exposure to stress could lead to a host of problems including: physical illness, emotional unrest, behavioral difficulties, lack of sleep, irritability, depression, and self-harming behaviors (Blazer, 2010). From as young as Kindergarten, students are feeling the pressure to be the brightest, busiest and best. With the evolving nature of college admissions many parents feel the push to enroll their children in outside sports, academic groups, as well as community groups. They are creating children with lives as busy as their working parents (Frydenberg & Reevy, 2011).

Conner, Pope and Galloway (2009) surveyed over 3,600 students attending seven high-performing high schools in the California Bay Area. More than 70 percent reported that they “always” or “often” feel stressed by their work at school, and 56 percent reported “often” or “always” worrying about grades, tests, college preparation and college acceptance. In all seven schools, students reported that academically related factors caused the most stress in their lives. Academics were listed higher than such life changing events as divorce, illness, and family pressure, which did not make it in the top ten causes of stress in any of the schools surveyed.

Stress in small children can take various forms, from frequent bathroom trips, thumb or finger sucking, tremors or tics, physical hostility, hair twirling, to body aches and pains (Burts et al., 1992). A recent study (Jackson, 2009) was conducted in a kindergarten classroom of 16 children to gather information regarding behaviors indicative of stress during a highly teacher structured academic portion of the school day.

Of the 16 children studied, nine exhibited stress behavior when interacting with the teacher.

The academics for today's students do not end when the dismissal bell rings. On average, most high school students will spend 4-5 hours with homework each night. That does not include time for extra-curricular activities such as sports, dance, music lessons, church involvement, and family commitments (Conner, Pope, & Galloway, 2009). Of the 3,654 students these researchers studied, fifty-four percent reported difficulty sleeping with one-third reporting fewer than 6 hours of sleep per night, far less than the recommended 8 hours for healthy living. In addition to exhaustion, many of the students reported headaches and stomach problems. For those students and their families it is hard to maintain the argument that stress can be healthy.

Students in high stress environments often demonstrate increased levels of anxiety and a recurrence of past fears, such as fear of the dark, fear of being alone, or fear of strangers (deAnda, 1997). A KidsHealth Poll asked 875 children ages 9-13 how they handled stress. When asked, "Have you ever hurt yourself on purpose when you were stressed or upset?" 25 percent of the respondents said "yes". Children reported banging their heads on an object, cutting or stabbing themselves, and hitting, biting or burning themselves (KidsHealth, 2005).

Stress causes increased levels of the biochemicals cortisol, dopac, and epinephrine. Prolonged exposure to these chemicals has been shown to play a role in the changes of circuitry in the brain (McEwan, 2008) leading to changes in personal behaviors such as poor quality sleep, drinking, overeating, and smoking. It also has been discussed in

relation to psychiatric illnesses and the negative effects of the prefrontal cortex which controls decision- making and higher level thought processes.

In a 1989 study (Berk et al.) of 10 healthy male subjects, five viewed a 60-minute humor video and five control subjects, did not. The mirthful laughter experiences provided a reduction of the stress chemicals and have implications for overall stress reduction. A later study was done on rats that increased the amount of stress hormones and resulted in the same suppression of newly generated brain cells (Czéh et al., 2002).

This elevation in stress chemicals can also be transferred from mother to child in fetal development. Chronic maternal stress compromises the normal regulation of hormonal activity during pregnancy and can allow heightened levels of cortisol to pass through the placenta. This higher level of stress chemical has been associated with preterm labor, low birth weight, and slow growth rate (Weinstock, 2005).

Cheating. Cheating has become commonplace in schools across the country (Pytel, 2007). The most common forms are unpermitted group collaboration and getting answers or questions before a test. The study conducted with students in the Bay Area of California (Conner et al, 2009) found that 95 percent of eleventh and twelfth grade students reported at least one instance of cheating, including copying homework or cheating on tests and quizzes, because of the pressure to get high grades and test scores. Advanced placement and honors students appear even more likely to cheat on a regular basis (Pope, 2010).

Cheating does not just come in the form of students looking for answers in inappropriate places. It also comes at the hands of competent, caring and capable teachers as well as entire school systems. The 2011 Atlanta cheating scandal involved 178 teachers

and principals and tarnished the reputation of an award -winning superintendent. The Atlanta Journal Constitution (AJC) and state investigators led the investigation. A pattern was found that is consistent with other cheating scandals; an equally dramatic drop would follow a spike in test scores in one critical grade the next year. A spokesman for the National Center for Fair & Open Testing reported “When test scores are all that matter, some educators feel pressured to get the scores they need by hook or by crook. The higher the stakes, the greater the incentive to manipulate, to cheat” (2013).

Stress, exhaustion, mental and emotional turmoil and cheating, have all been identified by researchers as the costs that come with the lack of play. Families, communities, and societies have to pay a price for its over scheduled and overwhelmed members. While there is detriment in denying play, there are great rewards for the encouragement and presence of play. Creativity, innovation, happiness and longevity are all associated with lifelong play behaviors. Educational leaders can create opportunity and cultures that encourage play in both students as well as staff. The benefits of play are bountiful but leaders must often be shown how to turn implications into applications.

Presence of Play

One type of leadership development plan involves potential leaders engaging in outdoor adventures and bonding experiences to help foster teamwork and a sense of play as a group (Conger, 1992). It may involve building outdoor structures, overcoming obstacles, or hunting for treasure chests. Each activity is set up to provide play opportunities for the participants.

Leadership programs that focus on the emotional connections and identification of leadership traits have had strong success in recent studies (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2011).

In a recent theory of leadership formation, DeRue and Ashford (2010) identified a leader-follower relationship that is claimed and affirmed by those participating. The leader either verbally or nonverbally claims the leader identity and by the same manner the others grant or deny the claim. There is flexibility and frequent change in order to explore the identities of leaders. Being involved in play within a leadership process is a good opportunity to test and explore the claiming and granting of roles. Play serves as the rehearsal for the leadership role. It can be tested and experimented by those that may not see themselves in a current leadership position.

In a similar case study, Kolb and Kolb (2010) found that through the use of play spaces, individuals developed a sense of “communal identity”. In the leadership development process the group was able to explore interpersonal boundaries and experience a sense of selflessness, which develops a communal identity. Within the play setting, members are simultaneously claiming and granting leadership roles while developing a perspective of the group as a whole.

Seeing the group dynamics from an individual perspective is essential for a successful leader in the future. As Kofman and Senge (1993) noted “When we fail to recognize the principle of becoming, we lose the capacity to learn...lose the child within us who lives in awe”(p15).

As school leaders begin their roles, they are setting the tone for the staff, students, and communities in which they exist. A group called The New Teacher Project, TNTP (2012), spent two years collecting data on schools they refer to as “Greenhouse Schools.” Greenhouse Schools are 250 schools across the country that value great teaching and have set the highest priority on providing a culture of learning and growing as a community.

The culture created can lead to successful teacher retention, higher achieving students and a supportive learning community (TNTP, 2012).

It is imperative we prepare our leaders to guide their school and its occupants toward the best possible success. Providing schools with playful leaders could be an answer to the needs of our ever changing and challenging educational climate (Robinson & Azzam, 2009).

Physical and mental benefits. From any age in life, health is a state of well being and not merely the absence of disease. The increase of serotonin in the body due to happiness increases health and is a factor in protection from mental and physical disorders. Positive mood within a normal range is an important predictor of health and longevity (Young, 2007). In a recent study, those in the lowest quartile for positive emotions, based on personal biography entries starting at the age of 22 years, died an average of 10 years earlier than those in the highest quartile (Danner, Snowden, & Friesen, 2001).

A World Values Survey, the US Benchmark Survey and a comparable Canadian survey were used to explore the social context of subjective evaluations of well being, happiness, and health. Social capital was measured by the strength of family, neighborhood, religious and community ties, and were all found to support both physical and subjective well being. All appeared to be independently and robustly related to happiness, satisfaction and were directly linked to physical health (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004).

Serotonin is released when the body feels joy, happiness, and pleasure. If it is absent, or in minimal supply, it can lead to depression, hostility, and anxiety. The

relationship between positive mood and serotonin activity was examined through a hierarchical regression analysis that included two hundred and fifty-four adults ranging in age from 24-60 years of age (Flory, Manuck, Matthews, et al., 2004). Each was given an end of the day analysis, which included a measure of serotonin inducing activities and a rating of positive and negative moods over 7 consecutive days. The analysis concluded a significant relationship between positive mood and higher serotonin levels and deficiencies in serotonin were found in those reporting negative moods.

One way to increase the level of serotonin in the brain is exercise (Salmon, 2001; National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence; Trivedi, Greer, Grannemann, et al., 2006; Wilson, Marsden, 1996). For people with play personalities of competitor and kinesthete this is the perfect way to join happiness and health.

Other play producing chemicals include endorphins and norepinephrine. These can be released through not just physical modes of play but through social and psychological activities as well (Brown, 2004). A survey of 340 individuals each with a perceived stress relief activity (Caltabiano, 1995) found implications for stress-management, leisure counseling and the design of individual leisure activities. Results showed varying levels of stress reduction with higher levels shown for physical activities and lower levels attributed to social interaction activities.

Creativity and innovation benefits. When we engage in play at any age, we begin the process of germinating new ideas and ways of being. Creative play takes our minds to places we have never been, pioneering new paths that the rest of the world can follow. Einstein came up with his theory of relativity after imagining himself riding on a streetcar traveling at the speed of light (Brown, 2009).

Engaging in meditation or mindfulness, which at its root is separate from play, may enhance creative play. Callois (2001) defines play as “essentially a separate occupation, carefully isolated from the rest of life.” Whereas meditation can enhance play, it is not the same as play. Similar to play, meditation reduces the chemical cortisol, which is related to stress (Matousek, Dobkin and Pruessner, 2010). Whereas play is the activity or engagement that puts a person into their flow or element of stress relief, mindfulness is a purposeful awareness of the surroundings and experience. Play is action whereas meditation is awareness (Berne, 1996).

Some geographic areas are more creative and innovative than others. The top three most creative and innovative large U.S. cities according to the Creativity Index are San Francisco, Austin, and San Diego. These cities are attracting young, talented and creative workers. They have made adaptations to their work ethos including relaxed dress codes, flexible schedules, and new work rules in the office. They are cities that have a thriving music scene, cultural diversity, outdoor recreation and a great nightlife. The Creativity Index includes such factors as high-tech industry, innovations (measuring patents per capita), and diversity. The cities that are stuck in the old paradigm of economic development, are failing to prosper (Florida, 2002). The key to a city’s economic growth lies in the ability to attract the creative class and transfer that advantage into creative outcomes in the forms of new ideas, new high-tech businesses and regional growth.

On an individual company level, businesses have used creative play to generate new ways of solving problems just by imagining a new way to see the problem. In the 1980’s Intel had gone from the top of the technology field to a precarious position behind the Japanese who were beginning to make cheaper memory chips. Andrew Grove and

Gordon Moore, the CEOs of Intel realized that if they didn't solve this problem, the board of directors would fire them and find others who would. They imagined their replacements and wondered what the super executives might do. Using a moment of make-believe, they "fired" themselves, walked out of the office doors and reentered as their replacements. Immediately after the answer was clear. They decided they must take the company out of the computer chip business. Eventually they steered the business into designing microprocessors for which they are now famous (Brown, 2009).

"The most irritating feature of play," says Fagen (1981) "is not the perceptual incoherence, as such, but rather that play taunts us with its inaccessibility. We feel that something is behind it all, but we do not know, or have forgotten how to see it" (p. 3). As we get older, play seems to fade like the memories of childhood, yet there are so many forms of adult play that enrich and enhance adult life. Using the framework of Brown's (2009) play personalities, it becomes clearer that as adults, often we look for play opportunities to meet our human needs for play.

One way to do that is to travel. The adventurer seeks out other lands to investigate. As Sheller and Urry (2004) describe how places to play are also places in play: made and remade by the mobilities and performances of tourists and workers, images and heritage, the latest fashion and the newest diseases. Collectors would count the number of stamps in the passport while storytellers would delve into the history and art of the new play place. In a 2010 study by Chih Yu and Chien Hung, 335 travelers were given a questionnaire survey that measured the satisfaction of travel after watching a television show shot in that location. Results showed a positive effect between the satisfaction of their travel experience and the marketing value of having previously

viewed the television show in which the location was shot. In a similar look at current television, Doherty (2012) notes the evidence that long plot-arc'd cable television dramas have replaced the novel as the major vehicle of complex storytelling in U.S. popular culture, most notably, through the growth of scholarly attention given to television dramas.

Storytellers and artist play personalities use fantasy and daydreams as part of their story. Psychological research, reviewed by Singer (2009) shows through psychometric, observational, and experimental studies that daydreaming and fantasy play, may be likely to enhance our everyday problem-solving abilities as well as our aesthetic enjoyment of creative novels and drama built around characters' private thoughts.

Fantasy play can lead to higher problem solving and is a positive result of play. Gossip, or the need to direct attention, can be either a form of positive or negative play. Evaldsson and Svahn (2012) used ethnography to analyze an extended gossip dispute event, in which the micro-politics of the gossip was used to strengthen social power. When used to support or rally assistance, directing attention can allow positive impact to occur.

Another way that adults play without direct intention, is through the use of humor. Humor is a form of play that appears to accompany many non-leisure activities while also being the basis for some forms of entertainment that engage people. Laughter is rooted in play and just as play is a biological need, research suggests that laughter derives from a ritualized breathing and open-mouth display found in animal play (Boyd, 2004). Humor involves play with the expectations of a shared experience used to catch one another off guard in ways that simulate risk and recovery.

In a study by Manell and McMahon (1982), the use of diaries and mood measures were used to examine the frequency and types of humorous experiences involving university students. Psychological well being was also measured throughout the day. Mass media was shown to have the fewest number of playful incidences while social interaction were shown to have significantly more with greater incidents of overt laughter.

The history of humor is intertwined with play. Throughout history there have been sociological, medical, and educational advantages for the use of play and humor (Barron, 2013). One such study looked at the effects of humor on an aged population living in a care facility (Adams & McGuire, 1986). Humor was found to have significant positive effect on perceived pain and affect. In a similar study with a much different participant group, 258 undergraduate students were studied to examine the effects of humor on stress and coping skills. The group with higher self -appraised senses of humor had a much lower sense of stress and anxiety than those with the lower self appraised sense of humor (Abel, 2002).

Given that play and humor have biological links it has led to an area of research that examines humor, play and interpersonal attraction. In one such study, 30 college aged couples were asked to rate various humorous articles, jokes, and comic strips and then rate the person they were involved with based on the Rubins Liking and Love Scales. The hypothesis that similar ratings on humor produced higher ratings on the liking and love scale was supported. Those with similar humor were more attracted to each other (Murstein & Brust, 1985). In a similar and more recent study, researchers examined the link between levels of sense of humor and attractiveness as well as the suitability as a long- term partner. It was found that those who were perceived as having a good sense of

humor where rated as significantly more attractive and higher suitability than those with average or no sense of humor (McGee & Shevlin, 2009).

Longevity benefits. Life long play provides many positive effects but in some areas, the results of early play may not be discovered until later in life. Juvenile play behavior was studied in rats for evidence of enhanced neural system plasticity in later life (Himmler, Pellis, and Kolb, 2013). It was found that the behavioral flexibility was increased by play experiences during their juvenile period, which supported earlier similar findings. Some forms of play are highlighted in childhood and then are lost as an individuals age, only for the individual to re-discover the need for that form of play.

As Flow Theory (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009) describes the creative nature of an individual is so enjoyable that a person will do something just for the sake of doing it. Creative play and art, lead artistic play personalities into “flow” as adults. In 1997, McCormick and Plugge studied the improvement of adults who had lost their creative nature and re-established the connection later in life. It was found that creative play helps individuals meet the needs that they have ignored as adults and offers opportunities to heal and live happier, healthier, and more productive lives.

For some, intentional play in childhood paves the way to bridge gaps that cannot be bridged without it. A meta-analysis by Lieberman and Yoder (2012) studied the connection between object play in autistic children and intentional communication for building language. The longitudinal correlational study revealed significant associations. These results have strong implications for implementation of effective play strategies for children with communication gaps and have been encouraged to continue review.

Other areas where play has been effective in bridging gaps that begin in childhood and continue throughout life are found in mathematics and problem-solving skills that advance with maturity and application. Lundin (2012) studied student engagement with fictions in the form of word problems. Using the work of Huizinga, Lundin shows an infusion of play with everyday life problems and mathematical logic. It was evident that the characteristics found in imagery play, bridge a gap in current methods of mathematic education with mathematical learning through play.

Connections between our present and past can be found through the linkage of play and its effects on the human brain development. Recently a Canadian archeologist (Nowell, 2013) discovered and studied a link between Neanderthals and their faster rate of brain growth compared with the human of modern times. The lack of symbolic culture and fantasy play among Neanderthals is argued to have caused a shortage of childhood and thus, the faster rate of brain growth similar to that of modern day human autistic children who show decreased social skills and fantasy play abilities.

Summary

In summary, the literature suggests that play is a key to a more healthy and fulfilling life. Play helps leaders create and sustain a successful, creative, and innovative culture over time. In the challenging world of education, most notably in the current era of accountability through test scores, creative, energized, and playful leaders could help improve the system for the students and staff they lead. Some of what is categorized as good for the business world may or may not be good for school settings but what is good for the health and wellness of human beings has no limitations on environment. Because play is a fundamental need for humans of all ages and maturation levels, it is imperative to

look at ways to infuse a playful culture into our schools as well as our workplaces (Pentrigleiri, 2011). When leaders can recognize their own needs for play and model habits of play for those around them, they will begin to feel the shift of stress and exhaustion to renewal and creativity. Ultimately, play increases brain circuitry (Pankesepp, 1998) as well as increases serotonin (Delmothe, 2005; Leven, 2010; Adamson, Stage, Laursen, Rorth, & Quist, 2011) and oxytocin (Taylor, 2006) for health and well-being (Carlson et al., 2006), it provides a catalyst for longer and healthier living (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). Research notes that there is no downside to play as it is the expression of the most authentic self. Innovation, creativity and health are all needed for creating and sustaining successful leadership. In the end, the pursuit of playful leadership is an important one, as individuals, organizations and society alike cannot afford to pay the cost that comes from the alternative.

Chapter 3

Methodology

“You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation.” Plato

Research Questions

A key part of a qualitative study is the grand tour, or central question (Creswell, 2013). In order to reach the overarching theme of the study, a researcher states the broadest question possible in order to address the research problem. In this study, the grand tour question is, “How is the phenomenon of play impacting the work of educational leaders?” Stating the question under an umbrella that gathers all education leaders who exhibit playful behavior creates opportunity for understanding the experience and the subjective aspects of their behavior (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Overview of Qualitative Research

To understand and appreciate qualitative research is to search for ways to fully tell the story of another person in rich, descriptive language. In addition, it is to look at the world from the viewpoint of an individual and construct meaning from their experiences. Educational leaders work in an ever-changing environment that is in constant demands to meet not only the state and federal mandates but also the needs of the students, families and communities with whom they serve. According to Denzin (2011) qualitative studies are the “art of the science” as they are largely using methods of reflection, construction of meaning and interpretation of multiple layers of information. Schools are social entities that have layers of storied lives that for this study are best viewed through the qualitative lens.

Qualitative studies have several common features that define them including naturalistic, descriptive, processed, inductive analysis and meaning (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). These features are elaborated below.

In the qualitative paradigm, inquiry must be without limitation of construct and instead, a naturalistic approach is employed as it is more likely to lead to discovery and new insight. Context is a vital component of qualitative research so that events can be understood adequately and not in isolation (Shimahara, 1984). Experiences are looked at as a whole and not as just parts or variables but in its entirety, from emotions, to context, to perceptions. The stories of individuals are thick with description and the intentions are to relay the complexities of life rather than the simplicity of just one piece (Sherman & Webb, 1998).

In the analysis of qualitative data, there is often a set of complex reasoning using both inductive and deductive logic. The researcher builds themes and categories by organizing data from several data collection methods to create patterns of information that represent the full picture (Creswell, 2013). This inductive process allows researchers to work back and forth between themes and data sets until they arrive at the complete set of themes. Deductive thinking is implemented as themes are built and checked against the data. The application of meaning comes from the participant and not the researcher. The participants suggest multiple perspectives on a topic with diverse views. The development of themes reflects the holistic views of the diversity of ideas as well as participants.

There are multiple strengths to qualitative research methods (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009;) each of which serve to strengthen the data that are collected in the study. Important strengths of this type of study are the many approaches a

researcher can employ in order to glean information about a phenomenon and what makes it unique.

Philosophical Assumptions

The philosophical assumptions as they apply to this study were found within the overview of the four assumptions identified by Denzin & Lincoln, (1994, 2000, 2005, 2011). They were the guiding philosophy behind this qualitative research. The epistemology, ontology, axiology, and methodology were each addressed in the framework of Social Constructivism (Creswell, 2007).

Epoche is a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment or stay away from the everyday, commonplace way of perceiving things (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology is a framework that requires the researcher to bracket her own bias and refrain from judgment in order to fully capture the experience and viewpoint of the participant. As in this study, an interview process gleaned data that is rich with description and offered a depth of insight from the perspective of those being interviewed.

Ontology relates to the nature of reality as it is seen from multiple perspectives and through many views (Creswell, 1998). Themes develop in the findings and offer a look at the phenomenon and how they are viewed differently by varying participants (Moustakas, 1994). Social constructivism paradigm relies on the realities of many and is constructed through lived experiences and interactions (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011). Every individual has his or her own preferred mode of play as well as a predominant play personality. Through the use of a social constructivist paradigm, this study reflected the experiences of the participants from their own lived stories and examined how they were formed through interaction and social engagement.

Epistemology involves knowledge and more specifically, how we know what we know (Crotty, 1998). It deals with the nature of knowledge. In a social constructivist paradigm, knowledge is co-constructed between the participants and the researcher and is shaped by individual experiences (Creswell, 2007). This research addressed the process of interaction with people and their own experiences with play and playful leadership.

The axiological and methodological beliefs that are associated with social constructivism rely on the honoring of individuals and their values as they are negotiated among other individuals. The use of literary style of writing with inductive methods of emerging ideas was gained through interviews and open-ended survey questions in this study.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is defined by Merriam – Webster as, “the study of the development of human consciousness and self-awareness as a preface to, or a part of philosophy. In other words, it is the lived experience of several individuals describing a concept or phenomenon. It focuses on the descriptions that participants have in common experiences using their own ideas and values to give it meaning. The role of phenomenology in research is to find the “universal essence” (Creswell, 2007). For the purpose of this study, the phenomenon was play and its role in the life of educational leaders. The descriptions consisted of what the participants experienced and how they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994).

The German mathematician Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is the most well known philosopher identified with the components of phenomenology. He maintained that research should have no presuppositions and suspend all judgments about what is real and

instead, rely on the “natural attitude” until they are founded on a more certain basis (Creswell, 2007).

The laying aside of bias, or bracketing of personal experiences is a part of the researchers responsibility in this type of research design. As an early childhood educator it comes as a natural part of the job to have opinions and experiences with play based instruction, leadership, and life styles. Personal experiences and opinions were identified but put aside as data was collected, compiled, and analyzed. The phenomenon was based on the perception of experiences of others, not those of the researcher.

Participants

A critical part of the research study is the careful selection of participants who will provide key information to help the researcher successfully answer the research question. All participants have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007), of play as it pertains to their roles as educational leaders and were able to articulate in detail their experiences. Therefore purposive sampling was applied to this study. This kind of sampling was considered by Welman and Kruger (1999) to be the most important kind of non-probability sampling when identifying the primary participants.

In phenomenological studies, the process of collecting information involves primarily in-depth interviews with as many individuals as it takes to reach a “saturation” of information (Creswell, 1998). Dukes, 1984; Polkinghorne, 1989 and Reimen, 1996 (cited by Creswell 1998, p. 122), recommended 3 to 10 participants who have experienced the phenomenon with an in-depth interview lasting up to 2 hours. Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted in “ purposeful sampling the size of the sample is determined by informational considerations. If the purpose is to maximize information, the sampling is

terminated when no new information is forthcoming from new sampled units, thus redundancy is the primary criterion” (p. 202). For the purpose of this study, a sample of eight, educational leaders were chosen with regards to their experiences with play in their leadership positions.

This study was based on information gleaned from a specific role in the educational field that has been termed “educational leader”. In order to be clear in the choice of whom it was intended to collect data from, it was important to define that role for the parameters of this study.

Leadership has many transitioning definitions as societal expectations and needs have changed. Ciulla (2004) defined leadership throughout periods of time from the 1920’s version of “impressing the will of the leader on those led” (p. 10) to the 1980’s where leadership was defined as the “influence relationship between leaders and followers who intend real change and reflect mutual purposes” (p. 11). Each definition refers to a process of changing another person’s behavior to match the desired behavior.

The field of education could apply the change of behavior definition to include the growth, maturation, and intention of thoughts to further a student or staff member in the pursuit of their own life’s work. The style of the leader would determine the delivery and therefore also, the reception and success.

Greenleaf (1977) introduced the term “servant leader” in reference to leadership with a focus on the needs of the followers. These leaders are motivated to put the needs of the followers before their own. They are supporters and facilitators rather than authoritarians. Servant leaders possess the intent of transforming followers to grow

personally and professionally and become more autonomous. The culture created within servant leadership is often built on trust and common vision (Boone & Makhani, 2012).

Gardner (2011) defines leaders as “ an individual who significantly affects the thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors of a significant number of individuals.” By this definition, teachers were excluded from the leadership team approach. Others (Danielson, 2006; Harris, 2003; Lambert, 2010; Little, 1988; York-Barr & Duke, 2004) bring a more broad based version that invites teachers into the arena of decision - making and paves the way for a recent initiative from the Federal government.

The Teacher- Leadership Initiative (2014) allocates dollars to districts that will promote teacher leaders based on a 3 - tiered model. Tier 1 allows a teacher to step away from the classroom and focus on leading peer teachers in staff development and collaboration in decision making with administration. This position is commonly referred to as an Instructional Coach. Tier 2 involves a teacher using 75% of time in the classroom with the other 25% used for modeling lessons to peers, collaboration with the instructional coaches and aiding in development of professional growth opportunities for the staff. This position is often referred to as Lead Teacher. The third tier involves the teacher staying in their classroom 100% of the time but attending collaboration meetings with administration, participation in professional growth planning as well as opening their classroom to visitors from other districts, and/or having lessons videotaped and disseminated throughout professional websites. Although this initiative is new to many districts several within the target research area have adopted it.

This study focused on small, mid-sized and large districts within the Midwest. For the purpose of this study educational leaders included people in the role of principals, curriculum directors and superintendents. Teachers were not included as participants.

Snowball sampling refers to the method of data collection that uses referrals from already selected participants (Babbie, 1995; Crabtree & Miller, 1992). One participant gives the researcher the name of another participant, who in turn provides the name of another. The process is based on the assumption that a bond or link exists between the initial participant and the others in the same target population, allowing a series of referrals to be made (Berg & Lune, 2004). This method of collection can be used in the constructivist paradigm as it produces a unique set of social knowledge, which is emergent and interactional (Noy, 2008). Participants were able to recommend useful potential candidates for the study after they had the opportunity to reflect on their own interview process. As the phenomenon being studied was play, participants may have had a clearer picture of how they use play in their leadership and were therefore able to identify other leaders who do as well (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Snowball, or referral sampling was used to obtain eight viable participants for this study.

Due to the nature of the sampling, Bailey (1996) refers to the nominations of participants through a “gatekeeper” who allows access by reference and may isolate the researcher from other potential interviewees. I requested the purposive sample interviewees to give, at their discretion; the names of persons in educational leadership positions who they felt exhibited playful leadership behaviors. To that extent, the study was influenced by those nominations and may have excluded other possible participants.

Data Collection Procedures

In qualitative research, interviews are often used to gather descriptive data in the participant's own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how the individual interprets some piece of the world, or in this case, the phenomenon of which they are a part (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Dexter (2006) describes the interview as a "conversation with a purpose" (p. 123). The ability to build a relationship and acquire trust is a necessary component to the qualitative interview process and may therefore be a series of short conversations or one longer, allowing the individual to discuss their background and experiences. Guba and Lincoln (1988) stated, "of all the means of exchanging information and gathering data known to man...interviewing is perhaps the oldest and certainly one of the most respected of the tools that the inquirer can use" (p. 154). People were interviewed in order to explore their views in ways that cannot be achieved by other data collection methods.

Seidman (2012) regards the building of rapport as a "balancing act" as the researcher maintains the "I-Thou" relationship and not into a full "We" relationship in which the researcher imposes his or her own views into the interview (p. 96). In order to build a rapport and a base from which to build the research questions an open-ended survey was sent to each participant regarding the types of play behaviors they prefer and any connections they may have to play in leadership.

As a requirement for conducting research using human subjects, researchers must work to ensure that the appropriate University Institutional Review Board approves the research study. This study was approved with an exempt status.

The IRB application process involves submitting electronic documentation of the proposal detailing all aspects of the research study. The inclusion of information regarding how participants would be invited to participate in the study with the knowledge that withdrawal at any time was acceptable. Participants were provided a written document outlining the purpose of the study, their rights as participants, and confirmation that any information given will remain confidential throughout the process. Confidentiality is a critical component to ensure trust between the researcher and participants.

Before the process began an informed consent form was distributed and signed. The informed consent covered the eight major parts as designed by the federal government (Protection of Human Subjects, 46.116-117). The risk to the participants provided the need for confidentiality and was discussed and agreed upon before consent was given (Siedman, 1998). There may be discomfort or emotional distress as a participant discusses his or her life experiences. The participants' names and any identifying information were changed in order to ensure confidentiality. A recording device was used to ensure accurate transcription of the interview and was made available for review by the participants for verification.

Interview Protocol

As suggested in Creswell (2007) and reiterated in Seidman (1998), it is critical that an interview protocol form be developed prior to the interviews and that the researcher adhere to the protocol to ensure that the purpose of the interview is honored. Seidman (1998) suggests an interview series, which begins with an initial contact by phone to set a time to meet the individual and discuss the study. If an individual was unable to meet in

person, an email would have served as the second contact for explanation of the study and the decision to participate or not. Although this contact may be conducted via email, only participants who were able to participate in a face-to-face in person interview were included in this study. All eight participants were able to meet in person. Next was the open-ended survey in which the participants shared ideas and thoughts, in order to guide the researcher to more specific questions during the face-to-face interview. In accordance with Taylor and Bogdan (1984) the questions stimulated free thought of the participants but were no longer than a few pages in length. There were two guiding questions with space for open-ended responses.

A face-to-face interview was the third contact with participants, and served as the time for the participants to share their experiences and insights. Seidman (1998) suggests a time limit of 90 minutes in order to give participants enough time to reconstruct their experience, put it in context of their lives and reflect on its meaning. Interviews lasted between 40 and 90 minutes.

An identified participant from a large school district in the Midwest was the first interview. The initial phone call was made to re-establish the connection as colleagues. He was provided a verbal outline of the study, the purpose, and his role within the study. Confidentiality was noted with an assurance of written confirmation and all information was provided preceding the interview and survey distribution. A date was determined for receipt of the survey and retrieval date. The informed consent was given at that time.

After the survey was received, a second phone call was provided to set a date for the face-to-face interview. A location that was comfortable for the participant was provided and he chose a location that was suitable for him. An audiotape was used to

gather information during the interview as well as the use of written notes to record nonverbal body language. At the end of the interview the participant was asked to reflect about the conversation and offer any insights gained. After the reflection conversation a referral was acquired for anyone in the educational leadership field that could offer insight to the study and their contact information.

The procedure for phone calls, surveys, interviews and reflections continued until there was a saturation of information (Morse, 1995). At that point, themes were developed and analysis began.

Survey

Think about what brings you a sense of joy, renewed energy, and a feeling of time suspension. List the activities below.

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)

List the ways that you played as a child.

Activity	Approximate Age

Interview Questions

These were the questions for the face-to-face interview. The details for each question were based on the individual survey results.

- 1) In your survey you mentioned that you enjoy spending time doing these five things. Tell me about them.
- 2) Are there any relationships between the activities you listed and your work?
- 3) What things do you do at work to alleviate stress for yourself and the people who work with you?

Data Analysis

Although a transcript can be only a partial representation of the interview (Mishler, 1986) it can reflect the interview as fully as possible by being verbatim. In addition the researcher took notes on any non-verbal signals throughout the interviews and were used in the analysis as well.

After transcriptions were complete the most significant thoughts, words and phrases were broken into underlying themes (Wolcott, 1990). The process was, as Creswell (2013) states “built from the bottom up” and created patterns, categories and themes by which it was organized and processed (p. 45). This process is what Seidman (1998) refers to as “preparing to let the interview breathe and speak for itself” (p. 117).

Data Verification

Although qualitative methods are not “classical science” in their ability to be replicated, as are quantitative methods of research, there is methodological rigor to ensure credibility and trustworthiness (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). Creswell and Miller (1998) identified eight verification procedures often used to offer validity in qualitative

design. These procedures include (a) prolonged engagement and persistent observation, (b) triangulation, (c) peer review or debriefing, (d) negative case analysis, (e) clarifying researcher bias, (f) member checks, (g) thick description, and (h) external audits (p.126-127). A sample size of eight educational leaders, five males and three females were selected to participate. Participants ranged in age, experience in educational leadership roles as well as size of school district that were led. The purpose of collecting data from three different kinds of informants is a form of triangulation – ‘data triangulation’ to contrast the data and ‘validate’ the data if it yields similar findings (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Bloor, 1997; Holloway, 1997). Data collection interviews were continued until the topic was exhausted or saturated, when no new information or perspectives were gleaned (Creswell, 1998).

Johnson (1997) adds the additional threat to validity is researcher bias and can be monitored through reflexivity by the researcher (p. 160). By engaging in critical self-reflection a researcher can become more self-aware of potential bias and predispositions. By including a discussion section directly relaying bias and positionality a researcher may add validity. For the purpose of this study, validity was offered through prolonged engagement, triangulation of data, member checks, and the clarifying of researcher bias.

Delimitations of the Study

In a qualitative study Creswell (2007), suggests that delimitations “help to further define the parameters of the research study” (p. 113). This study investigated the experiences of educational leaders who work in a K-12 school setting. The sample was delimited to Midwest schools. Few large population cities exist in the Midwest and the culture and social norms could differ from those K-12 schools located on the East and

West coasts. Further boundaries were set by selecting only educational leaders who work outside the classroom and not directly with students. Being engaged with students as part of an educational leadership role may provide other insights and reflections; it is not known if findings or subsequent results would be applicable to other levels of leadership.

Limitations of the Study

This study had several limitations, two of which are the selection of the participants and my experience as a teacher in a K-12 setting. I used purposive sampling because the study participants “suit the purposes of the study...(and) are likely to be ‘information rich’ with respect to the study” (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996). Each participant was referred by another participant in the study. The intent was to achieve an in-depth understanding of how play impacts educational leaders and their work. As playful leaders were identified by others, the identification of each individual leader may or may not match the perception of the person who referred them.

My experience may have influenced my interpretation of the data and thus, the outcome of the study. However, through the use of bracketing, I hoped to reduce or eliminate potential unwanted or unwarranted influence. Due to my experience in this area, I possess a distinctive advantage interpreting the data collected and was able to detect any subtle nuances that were present during the interviews.

Chapter 4

Participant Profiles

“Look at these faces. Each has a story uniquely their own”. Louie Shwartzberg

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how play manifests in the work, culture and life of leaders in the field of education. Included in the study were superintendents, principals, vice principals, and curriculum directors. The study was guided by the research question: How is the phenomenon of play impacting the work of educational leaders? Interviews served as the primary data gathering strategy to address this question, with a pre-interview survey and limited observations serving as supplementary data sources.

Based on the interview structure and designated questions, each profile first describes each participant’s background in educational leadership as well descriptions of the districts they have held, or are now holding positions of leadership. The profiles then describe the play personality that was identified for each based on their preference of activities that place them in a time suspended state that rejuvenates and offers stress relief. As stated earlier in the study, play is distinguished from work by contrasting the purposes, processes, and spaces in which it takes place. The ideas of work and play do not represent different activities; rather they are characterized by different ways of approaching activities or different frames for behaving (Glynn, 1994). The use of play on the job is described for each participant, as is the educational culture that is created through each leader and is described through the perspective of the participants.

This chapter presents participant profiles and the findings from the data analysis. It begins with a description of the eight participants, followed by a description of the themes with supporting evidence.

Participants

The eight brief profiles are intended to provide a background for each participant. The profiles are not intended as detailed descriptions of participants' life stories, rather a snapshot of who they are as leaders as well as their own perceptions of the cultures they encourage and create in an educational environment.

Table 4.1 provides a summary description of each participant.

Table 4.1

Name *	Gender	Approx Age	Approx. Yrs. In Leadership	Highest Leadership Position Held	Size of School District **	Play Personality
George	Male	35	10	Principal	2	Director
Carrie	Female	40	8	Curriculum Director	2	Storyteller
Cassandra	Female	45	15	Vice Principal	3	Director
Paul	Male	45	8	Superintendent	1	Kinesthete
Conner	Male	50	10	Superintendent	2	Kinesthete
Bobby	Male	50	20	Principal	2	Director
Laney	Female	65	30	Principal	2	Artist
Josh	Male	65	30	Superintendent	1	Storyteller

*Names are pseudonyms

**1 = less than 500 students in grades 9-12, 2 = 500 – 2,000 students in grades 9-12, 3 = above 2,000 students in grades 9-12

Setting

The setting for this study focused on eight participants, who were identified by their peers as having playful leadership styles. The definitions of play at their current ages were provided by each participant and are described in their individual profiles. There were six school districts represented and all are located in the Midwest. One participant was the principal of an elementary school while the other two principals in the study were representing high schools. The school districts ranged in size from less than 500 students in grades 9-12, to buildings within a district that held over 2,000 students each in grades 9-12. Specific descriptions are listed within each participant's profile as are the positions held within each district. Table 4.2 provides a summary of the play personalities presented earlier in the study.

Table 4.2

Play Personality	Description	Participant
Joker	*Finds play in nonsense *Plays pranks or tells jokes to rejuvenate and find joy	
Kinesthete	*Enjoys strengthening and moving body for energy *Movement helps think	Paul Conner
Explorer	*Love to investigate, research and learn *Can be done physically, mentally, emotionally	
Competitor	*Play to win *Strive to be number one	
Director	*Love to plan and organize *Enjoy the power and can contribute to the greater good	George Cassandra Bobby

Table 4.2

Collector	*Thrill is in having the most extensive collection *Can be physical objects or experiences.	
Artist	*Joy is found in creating	Laney
Storyteller	*Use of imagination *Have emotional connections with characters in books, movies, etc.	Carrie Josh

Participant Profiles

George

Leadership Background. Although George is the youngest participant in the study, his drive has taken him far in the few years he has been in education. He started as a teacher right after graduating college in the late 1990's and immediately felt a connection with the principal in the building. Curriculum facilitator was a teacher filled role in the district George worked, and with his principal's encouragement, he got his first taste of leadership. The role gave George the opportunity to work with the district level administration on curriculum mapping and gave him the first spark to continue on the leadership path. After a Master's degree in administration and an Educational Specialist degree it was an easy choice to continue on for his Doctorate. George says, "I find now that the doctorate really changed my focus from management to leadership."

Current leadership position. George is the current principal at an elementary school with a population of 423 students in grades K-5. The elementary is located in a suburban school district with a total enrollment of 1174 students in grades 9-12. It is a largely White student population with a median household income above the average for

the state. Parent participation is high at George's school and he is conscious of the impact outward appearances have on the community. He puts it this way "everything has to be perfect. This building has to be perfect; I want my handouts perfect, things for staff, newsletters. I want everything to be just perfect."

He noted the difference between management and leadership and made it clear that leadership is the area he is striving to spend the majority of his time and energy with the facilitation of others. "My system is the building. So if we're all leaders at those levels, how can we leverage our leadership to improve the school and help students succeed?"

Play Personality: Off the Clock. Because George defines play as "a luxury" and "anything not related to work," he chose to list activities that he does off the clock and with his family as descriptors of his play personality. Directors are people who find joy in planning, organizing and executing activities or events for others. George's list consisted of things he accomplished for the greater good of his family. Projects that enhance or support their home life such as building shelves or moving kitchen cabinets to make it more visually attractive give George the feeling of accomplishment, which for him also brings joy.

Recently George and his wife took their four small children on a quick vacation to a nearby city. He had every moment planned in his mind with each activity providing a sense of adventure and learning for his children. Only after consulting his wife did he concede to spending the bulk of their time poolside with his family. Being encouraged to go a different route does not upset George, as one might expect, but it does not bring the same sense of accomplishment and satisfaction as if they were to follow his plans. He laughed as he remembered a teacher training trip that summed up his viewpoint, "I would

rather say, here are some options, we can go here or here. Because I know where everything is at. That's just how I operate. I just like to know."

Playful Behaviors: On the Clock. Although George is a director by nature, he does not see those same opportunities at work as playful. He shared a need to make things perfect for the enjoyment of others but did not offer any insight into his own pleasure in doing them. George's project at work over the summer was to reorganize his office space. It brought him a sense of confidence going into the new school year. "I know where everything is at versus the years before when it's been very scrambled. Very harried. I feel like I already know what I'm going to do. My calendar is already filled out for the whole year. I like that feeling."

Culture: The Environment a Playful Leader Creates. George's first principal became a role model whose interest in others and encouraging a balance between work and home life struck a chord in George that he admires and strives for today. A self-proclaimed "perfectionist with OCD tendencies" he has built a culture of family first at the school and is trying to find that balance in his own life, much to his own chagrin, unsuccessfully. It is important for other voices to be heard and understood and therefore he makes himself available to his staff for conversations regarding personal as well as professional goals.

I project that with my staff, family comes first. Because I know that's the right thing. They will come and tell (me), that's not what (you) do. You always tell us to do that so why aren't you doing that?

Carrie

Leadership background. Starting in the classroom as a high school science teacher gave Carrie the background she feels she needed to have perspective when in positions of leadership. She was a high school teacher for four and half years before moving on to a district position as the science curriculum director. After five years Carrie moved forward with a position within the same district as a high school improvement leader. She was part of a team that served one large high school and learned many valuable lessons in leadership as a result.

Having had both very positive and negative experiences in a large metropolitan school district allowed her to see both models of good leadership as well as poor. When the opportunity arose for her just one year later, to lead her own building in the district she felt it was a chance to put all the she had learned into action.

For three years Carrie led a building of advanced learners from grades 7-12 and was the only administrator in the building. She would lead a staff of 35 teachers and provide all training and development as well. Recently she left the district and moved into a nearby school system in the position of curriculum director.

Current leadership position. Carrie works for the same school district as George although in different capacities, therefore the demographics are the same. Carrie serves as curriculum director for a staff of approximately 503 educators. Her office is located in the district office site and is not housed within any of the school buildings that serve students. When asked what drew her to the current position she said it was the mission statement that highlights the word joy. She emphasized the importance of joy for her working life

by saying, “that single word, joy. I think much more than pleasure or engagement it’s a great word with a big punch.”

Play Personality: Off the Clock. For Carrie life away from work can get hectic. She and her husband have an active social life and are parents to an elementary aged daughter. Carrie defines play as “something that brings me enjoyment.” When she has an opportunity to play, she chooses reading. Storytellers are people who can use their imagination to experience the emotions and thoughts of characters in books and movies. Carrie loves to immerse herself in the lives of people who lived through the tragedies of WWII.

When Carrie was in high school her family took a trip to Hawaii. She happened to be reading a story about the Pacific Theatre and remembers it as a “surreal moment.” She continued,

Then we went to Pearl Harbor and there was this guy selling books.

I bought those and started thinking of history as a story and it became what I really wanted to learn about. I found that joy in learning.

The books she reads paint pictures of lives lived from the historical fictions she prefers. She lives with the characters and feels the emotions of their struggles and strife as if they were friends and neighbors, albeit from the 1940’s, but kindred spirits none the less. “It’s very vivid in my head. Like a movie. I can read with the TV on, with music or even people talking.” Relaxation comes in the form of books, movies and spending time with her family on adventures. Travel provides the opportunity to create stories of her own escapades and she and her family are often found away from home, enjoying the

company of family and friends. She shares her love of reading with her daughter by telling bedtime stories each night as her mother did.

Play Behaviors: On the Clock. Carrie takes her storytelling personality to work with her by finding ways to tell the stories of her district. She compares it to an author's work.

Creativity is when you have the opportunity to conceive of something. The author puts the words on the page but what it looks like is mine. That's creative. When we are crafting our mission and we're defining what our department could look like and we're thinking about how we want to change.

When she reflected on her position as a school improvement leader she recalled how having toys available for her middle school students impacted her ability to reach them. When setting up the design of her office she put thought into how the furniture would support the need of the students' play to relieve their frustration. Carrie's computer screen did not face the front of her desk. So when a student came into the office angry she would provide a private area for gaining composure.

I had playdough and puzzles on my desk. When a kid comes in all amped up I'd say, 'I'm not going to talk to you when you're all upset. Pick up the playdough and I'm going to answer an email. When I'm done, if you're ready, we'll talk.'

Carrie understood the importance of listening to others' stories as she tried to gain clarity in a situation that called for administrative decisions. Having the toys on her desk

allowed the students to calm down, cry, or do whatever they needed to do until they had a clear path to tell their own story of the event that brought them to her door. She found a way to offer dignity to students by using the toys and built relationships as a result.

I can't think of a single situation where I wasn't able to get them at least to the point where they could talk to me. I might still have to suspend them, I did still have to suspend them, but when they came back it was, 'hey welcome back. We aren't going to fight like that again are we?' It's about relationships. We use that as a way to form relationships.

Carrie uses her storytelling as a way to build relationships with students as well as connections for her district. She actively searches for ways to collaborate with varying opinions and thoughts she gathers from those around her.

Culture: The Environment a Playful Leader Creates. Building relationships with difficult students or difficult leaders can be done by listening to the stories of others. Carrie finds a way to use her storytelling to enhance the creativity of those around her. Through collaboration and shared vision she creates a sense of investment from those she leads.

Now this job is called Teaching and Learning and it's very intentional. We want to align the work of those two departments. Mission, vision, values, what's it look like, how can we make this work? Lots of how's and why's right now. And it's fun. I don't think of myself as a creative person but I like to think and I like to think with other people. That kind of work is really exciting to me.

She is the first to say she loves to work and it is part of her identity but she also has a sense of what work can bring about if it is done in a playful manner. After giving birth to her daughter she was to take the common six-week maternity leave. She only made it to week four before asking to return to her job. Work is a part of who she is and without work, she missed a part of herself. In her own words, “When you find the sweet spot, it doesn’t feel like work.”

Cassandra

Leadership background. Cassandra’s experiences in leadership have all been in the service of one district for her entire career. Within fifteen years in education she has served as a middle school teacher, teacher leader, high school teacher, assistant principal, curriculum director, and a consultant for the Area Education Agency that worked with her school district on school improvement issues.

Throughout it all, Cassandra learned two things about herself; she loved to see the inner workings of a school system, and she loved to lead. Her role models included examples of what works well and what to avoid. Her summary of those experiences was, “different people behave differently under different leadership.”

Cassandra’s current position has made her the newest addition to an administrative team at a large metropolitan high school. She is the vice principal and works closely with the other administrators who are also on site. They include the principal, school improvement leaders, curriculum leaders, as well as team leaders and counselors.

Current Leadership Position. Cassandra’s school is one of five high schools in the city and one of ten schools that serve high school aged children. There are 1136 students in grades 9-12 enrolled at her high school. White students make up the largest

ethnic grouping with 41% but when all other ethnicities are combined they are the minority. The median household income for the city is below the average for the state and in the boundaries for Cassandra's school, is additionally lower. The needs of the students are high and that is, in part, what attracted Cassandra to the position. She said, "I chose situations to be in because I can make a bigger difference. This will probably be the closest to the lowest SES (socio-economic status) I've ever worked in."

Play Personality: Off the Clock. Cassandra defines play as the things that "take my mind off of work." She listed outings with friends, trips, and the activities she can do with her young son. Cassandra, like George, is a director in her play personality. She enjoys checking off the lists of accomplishments and planning things that others will enjoy. She lamented that she doesn't often feel she has time to relax or take on fun projects because of her work, as well as her husband's work schedule.

The weekends, which you'd think would be the recharging times, I got used to not being able to rest or rejuvenate because of --- work schedule. And that can make you cranky sometimes. Not only do I need a break from this, but sometimes I need a break from other things. I'm not good at that.

It was difficult for her to think of things that provided an individual sense of joy and often spoke of things she likes to do for others. She also provided accomplishments that she knows are healthy for her mentally and physically.

Her childhood was spent as a gymnast, which was a match for her play personality. She was able to accomplish events on her own and contribute to a team on her terms.

School was, ironically, not a conventional source of achievement. She recalled choosing one teacher per year to “terrorize” and control because she felt she could. She concedes it stemmed from a need for control and to be in charge but is grateful she has found other ways to meet that need in a positive and helpful way.

More than any other play personality, the director must be cautious of his or her needs conflicting with others. Power used in a positive light can bring joy and growth to others around them. Used in a negative way, it can be perceived as manipulative and damaging. As Cassandra matured she transitioned from needing power to control people to a more productive use of power, to help students overcome difficult odds.

Play Personality: On the Clock. Cassandra likes her work and feels she is the most relaxed when she can go in on the weekends to think and cross off items from her lists of things to do.

When I come to work on Saturday or Sunday morning,
I would be by myself and think, think, think. It might be
a whole day but the next month and a half will go more
smoothly. I'd have everything labeled and in stacks.
That's relaxing to me.

As the items on her list of things to do increases she employs strategies for organization. Using various colors of marker on her large white board she is able to mark off what is her responsibility, what she needs to contribute to, and what is the main responsibility of others but will need a building level oversight. Each time she is able to put a dot for completion beside a task, she feels energy renewal and stress relief. “When everything is crossed (off) I take a picture of it so I know what and when I did what I did.”

Culture: The Environment a Playful Leader Creates. When Cassandra reflected on her career and her role in leadership she settled on the word comfort. She said, “comfort in who you are and what you think. I am not afraid to say I don’t know.” She encourages that same logic in others and welcomes open dialogue and questioning with every decision that impacts students.

Because she is a director play personality by nature it is important for Cassandra to get to know each person on a deeper level so she can decide what will best suit their needs and abilities. She shared a story about a teacher who had felt slighted by her questions and held on to ill will until Cassandra confronted her in private to explain her behavior.

I think she felt badly. Unless you get to know people
and know the things that are their baggage... you
have to learn it. When people act irrationally you
have to know their background to help explain
why.

Cassandra is a straightforward thinker and a by the book leader. She is respected for her logic and insight and has earned a reputation as a much needed coach for both teachers and administration. It is not uncommon for her to question thought processes or commonly held practices and when allowed to push thinking, often arrives collaboratively at a better solution.

Paul

Leadership background. Coaching was Paul’s first introduction to leadership outside the classroom and it fit him well. As a high school social studies teacher Paul was interested in the stories of historical leaders. The bureaucracy at the highest levels rang

familiar even in those with positions at the lowest levels. It gave him the opportunity, he said, to put things into perspective. “It’s helpful to look at their challenges and think ‘I have challenges but compared to the Cuban Missile Crisis?’

He left formal coaching and teaching behind when he was asked to fill in as an associate superintendent in his district due to an unforeseen illness in the upper administrative team. After leaving that post he was offered another superintendent position in a nearby district and was there until three years ago when he accepted his current position as the superintendent of a small school district nestled within commuting distance between two larger school districts.

Current leadership position. Paul has been in his current position for three years and has had to make several difficult financial cuts within that time. The high school has 446 students enrolled in the 9-12 grades. The district is made up of 95% White students and the household income is above average for the state. In the last 12 years the average income has increased by \$30,000 due in large part to the district’s location. Paul takes pride in the fact that his small town is situated on the map where it attracts mostly well-educated and affluent families with a desire to be away from the larger cities trappings. Paul says,

We’re a veteran community where folks choose to live.

They work to the south or to the north and they don’t want to be in those larger districts. We don’t have a lot of poverty; we have educated households where people value work and education.

As a leader Paul strives to see the bigger picture as it applies to his own position as well as the district’s, in comparison to those of nearby towns.

Play Personality: Off the Clock. Paul defines play as “anything I choose to do and don’t have to do,” so when asked about how he spends his time away from work he noted that “time was very limited when it is not work related.” He continues to coach baseball and basketball teams that his two sons are involved with and feels that gives him an outlet for both his social needs as well as the need to stay connected to his first love, sports.

When he needs time to himself he slips away to a nearby golf course and hits balls. Kinesthetes are movers. They enjoy the movement of their bodies and focus on the feeling of gaining strength and endurance. Every activity Paul listed was something that had him moving. He sums up his new passion this way:

What I’ve found lately is I can take my clubs to the driving range and that’s really nice. I just completely let go. I don’t talk to anyone, it’s outside, I just think about my golf swing and hitting the golf ball. That’s something I can say an hour to an hour and a half will go by and I’m surprised. Unless I’m frustrated with how I’m hitting the ball.

Paul often combines his physical activity with social connections when he works out with a group of friends. They decide a work out regiment together and when that runs its course, choose another. Time spent with friends has always been a priority to Paul and he remembers similar activities as a child. “We lived in tiny houses so I was usually with friends outside, physically active.”

Play Behaviors: On the Clock. Although Paul could not identify his behavior at work as playful he did talk at length about his need to be up and moving, particularly when it can be connected to visiting with staff or students.

My challenge is being there (at my desk) in my office, by myself.

I struggle with that. I can usually do it for about 45 minutes to an hour and then I need to get up. I, a lot of times will just get up and go into the cafeteria and start messing with kids.

Most of the meetings he has with principals and teachers are not planned. Paul enjoys getting away from his office and driving to one of the district's buildings. As the school district is shared between four communities, each has one building in their town. Paul considers the visits a break from his own work as well as an opportunity for him stay connected and visible. "Being out and visible and showing people that interactions with kids in a playful, positive and caring manner is how we want to do business."

Culture: The Environment a Playful Leader Creates. Paul has intentionally taken time and effort to get to know the staff and students personally. Every staff member has had conversations with Paul, which not only fulfills his need for being visible and approachable, but also builds a bridge between levels of staff.

Am I accomplishing anything by going to the bus barn at 2:00 when the drivers are starting to come in and just talk with people? I'm getting to know the drivers, I am laughing with them. Hopefully when they hear me say their job is to safely deliver kids, to build a relationship with kids, and transport the most precious

cargo we have from point A to B, they're going to believe I'm sincere and genuine.

He has built a community of supporters, one conversation at a time. His support comes largely from his efforts to remain open and available to students, staff and community members. Paul underscores his view of culture this way:

The most positive way to impact the culture is to have one conversation at a time. To be visible and present and model what you think is going to have a positive impact on the district. And then where you need to explicitly set those expectations, do so.

When Paul moves from building to building, town-to-town, he models the importance of being there. His need for activity provides a springboard to get his message of positive growth out to those he serves. He expresses gratitude for all levels of educational employment and makes each follower feel as if he knows them and cares about them as people and as employees.

Conner

Leadership background. Conner was on the fast track to leadership as he went from the process of principal internship for an administrative licensure right into a leadership position. He was asked to sit on a team that would lead his district through a new scheduling design as well as have input into the development of standards and profiles of learning at a statewide level. He spent a brief time as an activities director before moving on to leading his own middle school. After another brief time he moved on to a high school position. It wasn't a comfortable speed of ascent for Conner but he felt

the opportunities were there and he did not want to waste them. When a position as a superintendent of a small, consolidated district opened in the general area he accepted.

Although it was a small district Conner recalls it as a “wonderful experience” that gave him the preparation he would need for the future. Not long after, a larger district offered their superintendency. It was a difficult transition as the move took him to a district that was in financial ruins and in a very different growth cycle than the surrounding districts. With enrollment dropping and government assistance not as readily available, Conner was forced to cut 9 million dollars from the school budget the first year, 4 million dollars the second and then an additional 5 million dollars the following school year. He recalls the experience:

I was the bad guy. Terrible work. Great place to live. Very frustrating place when kids didn't have equal opportunity. The west side of the city got \$2,000 more per student than the east side.

After a great deal of soul searching he knew he did not want to continue working in an environment of cutting programs and watching the community wither. When an opening came up in a nearby state he and his wife decided to take the opportunity to see what new page could be written in their lives. He has been in his current position as superintendent for only a few months.

Current leadership position. Conner is the current superintendent at a school district located in the northern suburb of a large city. The school district is the 14th largest in the state and employs approximately 840 people. There are five elementary schools, two middle schools and one senior high school with a current enrollment of 1728 students

in grades 9-12. It is a largely White student population with a median household income above the average for the state.

Although Conner has had many diverse opportunities in educational leadership he regrets not having more time spent in each position nor having any assistant positions before having lead positions. It has led to what he called “learning on the fly” and although he is making his way successfully, it would not have been his first choice of ascension. In order to stay ahead of the demands, Conner uses one of his strengths, planning ahead. “What I try to do is have everything done that I need for the next week because if you don’t, you can’t control your schedule sometimes, and things happen.”

Play Personality: Off the Clock. Much like Paul, Conner is a kinesthete. He identified activities that involved movement but to some degree more as a matter of staying fit and alert than that of stress relief or enjoyment. He mentioned having fun with others by using humor which may mean he has another strong play personality as a joker. He enjoys visiting schools and having the staff and students all know him by name, and is amused at some of the funny things the kids would ask. “I have a lot of funny stories. Are you the stuper-dependent? Aren’t you the game show, talk show host, or the weather man?”

Having grown up near a lake Conner finds relaxation in visiting a cabin and boating. It isn’t as convenient now that he does not live in the same area but still finds the idea of time on the lake enjoyable. When it comes to spending time together with his family, Conner shared more physically active choices.

We go to the Farmer’s Market, we like gardening, yard work.

What’s really enjoyable is to do something physical that doesn’t

take a lot of mental energy. When I'm at work all day and meetings at night, I come home and I'm just tired, mentally tired. If I can get home and do something a little bit different, I feel more refreshed.

Play Behaviors: On the Clock. Besides listening to 80's music on his computer, Conner takes a break from his daily routine by visiting with others and sharing a laugh. Making personal connections with people is important to Conner not only because it opens lines of communication but it is also a way he uses play behavior at work. "If you need a break you go tease someone or joke and laugh. We try and do social things here." Conner's sense of humor touches each part of his leadership as he explained his plans for the staff kick-off which was coming in a few weeks.

We decided to take a big risk and we got a video that a student helped us make to the "Happy" song. Even the board got involved. It's kind of funny. We hope people enjoy it. It's kind of the fun side a little bit. You gotta have fun. When the work's not fun, it's really hard to work.

Building a culture of communication and humor has allowed Conner to feel optimistic about his new position and the opportunities to make a personal and positive impact on his community.

Culture: The Environment a Playful Leader Creates. Conner puts a high priority of communication and building relationships. One of his first tasks after accepting the position as superintendent was to write to the teachers in the early

elementary grades asking for assistance in making a connection to their students. He requested letters from the students about what they thought was important to a superintendent and if they had the job, what would be their first priority. He shared some of their humorous answers at the staff kick-off meeting. The reason for doing such things, he says:

I think it's relationships. It's culture. It's breaking down barriers. The old leadership model was very much a dictatorship, 'here's how it's going to be because I'm the superintendent, and you need to respect that.' Now I think the leadership model is more of a servant model.

Breaking down old stereotypes by communication is just one of the ways Conner works at putting people at ease. He asks the staff to call him by his first name unless there are parents or students who need him in a professional capacity nearby. He added, "it's us, it's we, we're a team. There should be comfort there."

Even his choice in clothing is thought out before his day begins and each is determined by the message it sends and the needs of the day. He chooses a suit coat and tie only when the situation calls for a more formal interaction.

I try and monitor that. That sends a strong message. When you need to be serious with a parent you want that, but there are other times you want people to be comfortable. What does the suit portray? I think you become very strategic about what you do.

Conner gave his administration team a strengths and weakness in leadership assessment as part of their leadership retreat over the summer. His goal was to show how each individual works best and how they add to an idea or plan with a unique set of skills that may not be seen by others. Rather than putting similar strengths together in a working group, he strives to add at least one of each strength area to every collaborative group in order to add balance and insight. Communication is one of his leadership strengths and it is evident in his approach to his staff.

It's hard in this role because people don't come up and give you feedback. I encourage everyone to do that, because otherwise, how do I grow? I want that constantly because that's how you get better. I watch for cues. You become perceptive and usually know when you've done something wrong or upset someone by how they react. Then you have to say you're sorry. You have to be flexible. You've got to be able to change your mind and be human.

Humor, communication and investment in relationships are the cornerstones of Conner's leadership. Growth and positive gains are his goals. "If nothing gets in the way and we're careful, the sky's the limit if we work together."

Bobby

Leadership background. Bobby began his leadership career as a high school dean of students. From there he moved into the role of associate principal at the same building and then on to have two principal roles of his own in the same district; one at the middle school level and the other at a high school. He learned he had a preference and

understanding for students at the middle school level and when a job in a nearby district opened up he accepted. He spent the bulk of his leadership time at the middle school level until 2 years ago after the devastating loss of his son, chose to start fresh in a new district.

Bobby has always let his emotional side choose when it is time to leave a position and when he finds himself in a situation where he does not feel he can make it better, it becomes time to change. “At some point you just realize it’s time. I don’t think I can describe when it’s time, you just know.” Bobby has only been at his current position since the beginning of the current school year.

Current leadership position. Bobby is currently serving as the vice principal of a suburban high school. The high school serves 10-12 graders at an enrollment count of 990 students. Along with the 9th grade enrollment, there are 1445 students served in grades 9-12. It is a largely White population at 90% with a median household income above the average for the state and comparable to the other suburban schools in the area.

Part of Bobby’s mission in educational leadership is to make a difference in the lives of the students he serves. It is vital to any position Bobby has chosen that he feels he is meeting the human needs and not just the academics of his students.

That’s an important piece for me. We could tout that our school is 98% on ITBS (Iowa Test of Basic Skills), that’s easy to do but what’s really important is each kid is that they had somebody who cared about them today and that part you have to do through making sure people know that’s a priority.

When a culture has been created before Bobby's arrival that does not match his personal mission, he makes it a priority to change the relationships between the adults and children in the building. Connecting the staff to the students as people helped Bobby train them to recognize kids in crisis, which has become a cornerstone of Bobby's educational mission. "I took kids from all different ethnic groups in the building and put together a panel. The teachers had to ask the kids questions in order to get to know them better."

There is power in knowledge. Bobby retold a particularly moving story regarding a student sharing about his homeland in India and feeling so far away. Another student, who had moved from an inner city school turned to him and said, "you fit better than I do." Having parents with similar jobs to others in the community and similar educational backgrounds, made the foreign student more alike than the child who had moved only hours away. Opportunities for eye opening experiences bring Bobby a sense of satisfaction and joy.

Play Personality: Off the Clock. Bobby is a servant leader at heart. He is also a director play personality. He creates opportunities to help others. When asked to define play at his stage in life he replied, "play is what we do to make our world livable." In Bobby's personal life that means creating opportunities of growth for his immediate, as well as his extended family. He has mentored several nephews who have similar passion for education and finds joy in their success.

Having parents who nurtured others gave him role models for how to find the good in bad situations and how to foster growth in others. He uses his director skills to move others to a place of personal and professional learning.

Bobby also finds solace and rest in his faith. His father and his son both completed suicide and although there were questions, he says his faith allowed him to move on after the difficult pieces. Finding his footing again has allowed him to use his director play personality for the benefit of others who are dealing with difficult life challenges. Bobby organizes crisis interventions for kids, legislation for training, and raises awareness for kids in crisis.

Play Behaviors: On the Clock. Organizing training for staff and students is what gets Bobby's playful spirit going. He works hard at meeting people where they are and taking them a little further. It may be in skill sets or relationship building, but Bobby works best when there is someone to help.

His current principal is younger than Bobby with less experience in leadership. Bobby considers himself in a position to mentor and offers his own life lessons on balance as a warning to his new leader.

I see ---at his first year as principal on this job and he was going to come back to work after the kids are in bed. I said 'what about your wife?' That's the time you get to spend as a couple. You need to reconnect.

When it comes to mentoring, Bobby feels as emotionally connected to the success of others as they do for themselves. He takes pride in being a part of their accomplished goals and celebrates their achievements. "Being a part of that or knowing you helped somewhere along the line. I love to see people accomplish their goals."

Culture: The Environment a Playful Leader Creates. Bobby is the first to admit he doesn't always play the "contract game." When staff members need time to take

care of their families, it is as good as done, no matter the time of day. He tells them up front, “if you’re not happy at home, you’re definitely not going to be happy at work.” For Bobby that means covering teacher’s classrooms or rearranging schedules for a day to accommodate the needs of others.

Giving full attention to whoever is in the room is one way Bobby models concern and care for others. He does not make people wait and when they talk, he listens. In his previous district there was a growing number of students on free and reduced lunch. Seeing that the teachers in the building were unaware how that might affect a child’s learning and how accommodations can be made, Bobby arranged for a special training event. He invited homeless children to speak to the staff so they could make connections with the struggles of their students and understand the way interactions needed to change. Bobby regards that experience as a personal growth event as he helped both the students and the teachers see each other in new ways.

As a director play personality Bobby creates a culture of growth and learning for both staff and students. He arranges presentations and experiences to connect people with the information they need to help them achieve their own goals and in return, he feels the joy of helping others.

Laney

Leadership background. Laney began her teaching career at a time in history when the Women’s Movement was just getting in to full swing. For the first time, women were encouraged and even expected by their peers to go out and find occupations that had been held predominately by men. Her first job in education was to be temporary and was

at a high school for students with special needs. During her first year the principal asked Laney to be a unit leader for her teaching team.

It did not make the other, more experienced teachers happy, but it did cause Laney to think about what her next steps would be. She decided it would be a Master's Degree in Administrative Leadership because it was cheaper than getting a business degree. She was certain her next calling would be in business as the times suggested. There was only one problem with that plan, she did not have any interest in business.

When an opening came up as a curriculum consultant in a large district nearby, she jumped at the chance and refers to it now as an "excellent experience." She learned very quickly that her initial idea of having to "fix" teachers was not accurate and instead she was there to "celebrate them and share their strengths with others." That experience helped shape her leadership philosophy.

Coaching was a large part of a consultant's job and for Laney she found it best to have conversations versus evaluations. When she recognized their strengths, the teachers were much more open to suggestions and further learning. Later in her career she took that same philosophy and applied it to the mandatory goal setting that her state required. She worked with the district leaders and found an opportunity to have the staff create their goals, share them with others in a convention style, and get paid for the process.

It did not take Laney many years to realize she was not leaving education for business and settled into an administrative position in the same district she had been a consultant. She spent the bulk of her leadership time serving elementary schools and middle schools. After a particularly difficult year, she was contacted by a nearby district

to be the principal at a middle school. She accepted and finished her educational leadership career at that school.

Current leadership position. Laney is a retired principal and had the pleasure of seeing her staff and students grow to become better teachers and learners before her departure. At the time of her leadership, Laney's school served 824 students in the 6-7 grades. It is a largely White population with the median household income above the average for the state.

The school scored high on every state standardized test and it was a challenge for Laney to help the staff see growth in other areas as well as through the data points. She used various tools and interpretations over periods of time to show growth and ease the concern of teachers under stress with worry at having enough growth each year, as is mandated by the federal government. For the students, she taught them how to take a test efficiently, but more important to her, how to learn the foundational skills needed beyond the tests and beyond the classroom.

Play Personality: Off the Clock. Laney loves creativity. She enjoys making things with her hands and seeing the end products realized from an idea in her imagination. Laney is an artist play personality.

She defines play at her stage in life as "her work." As a retired person her time is spent quilting, basket weaving and learning things that will keep her mind sharp. She recalled spending endless hours in the creation of a quilt so she could give it to a staff member who had just welcomed a grandchild. She did not want the appearance of impropriety by giving gifts to the staff so instead gave quilts to any new grandchild that happened to have a grandparent working in her building.

That creative sense of fun also lends itself to what Laney described as meditation with the garden.

I've always gardened. It's meditation to me. I can come home, spend a little time talking to the petunias, pulling out weeds.

I can lose time in that. You can drink wine when you garden too.

I sing in my garden.

Even as a child Laney loved to be outside, alone in her tree with her thoughts. She enjoys social activities but knows herself well enough to know when enough is enough. It is important for Laney to have alone time. "My brother would say 'I want to volunteer and do Little League' and I'd think, no, I gave at the office."

Play Behaviors: On the Clock. As every leader knows, not every day will bring happy parents and staff to your door. Several of Laney's most influential experiences in her leadership were incidences with difficult staff or families. Laney used creativity to solve the issues without losing her dignity or stepping out of bounds with what is expected from a leader.

When the board of education asked each building's principal to present data on the current standardized testing scores for their building, most were concerned about the level of growth. The district is high achieving and has been for many years, it was very difficult to show dramatic growth in such high numbers from year to year. Laney had experienced this particular board and knew the information may be used to further one member's cause for accusing teachers of not measuring up to his standards. Instead of presenting the scores from the current testing cycle comparative to the last cycle, Laney looked into the archives and recovered scores from previous years.

So frequently data and statistics are only used to beat people up. It was gratifying to stand before the board and to compare these ITBS (Iowa Test of Basic Skills) reports with the results that were in the cupboard a decade ago. These were much higher.

Showing the board growth over time was not the only audience she needed to impact with those numbers. When Laney wanted to celebrate the success with her staff they were hesitant. The fear was, she discovered, that teachers did not feel they had control over the results and therefore were never sure how much of an impact they were truly making on student progress. She showed them how to read a standardized test and where to find the results that are the most meaningful and telling. By showing bands of change rather than just one set of data, she was able to bring ownership and pride to her staff.

Culture: The Environment a Playful Leader Creates. An artist play personality looks for creative ways to handle problems but also ways to build community and relationships. Laney attended workshops on what adult learners like and how best to present learning. She used current research and listened to her team in order to decide strategies to tackle the needed, but sometimes mundane, information that comes with being part of a large school district.

All the research indicates that whenever there is a successful positive change in academic achievement it is the team approach that produced it. It is the combination of resources, it is the dialogue among

educators, it is the problem solving that people that work with that child everyday use. That is what makes change in achievement.

Her team was built on trust and respect with a healthy dose of creative ideas and innovative delivery. When the copier broke at an elementary school, Laney took all the work around town to be copied within the hour. She served as a delivery person to each staff member. Laney looks at problems and challenges through the lens of an artist. The results were a staff who trusted and respected her and students who showed growth in every way.

Josh

Leadership background. Josh is the most experienced leader in the study and perhaps the most reflective. He spoke of his journey through educational leadership with introspection and insight. Before telling his background it was important to him to establish his view of leadership.

Leadership belongs to everyone, so regardless of what position I've ever had, I think there is an opportunity to lead within that position. I don't think it necessarily comes with the title.

Josh started his educational journey as a teacher but soon felt the pull to share what he knew with others. His first principalship was in a K-8 building in a small rural community. From there he went to a middle school experience in a much larger school district. He felt the opportunity allowed him to create what he thought was "special with a lot of really good people." He had the chance to learn about himself as a leader as well.

Looking back he realized one of the best lessons was “to help people understand the possibilities rather than the expectations.” That philosophy brought recognition and awards for his middle school and led to an interim superintendent role within that community and eventually the full time superintendent position.

After 5 years as superintendent he saw an opportunity at an area education agency and moved his family. During that time he has had many leadership opportunities both internally as well as for schools outside the agency. Although he maintains his position as the agency’s director of leadership support he is also the interim superintendent of a small rural district.

Current leadership position. Josh’s position at the area education agency primarily supports leadership development for administration and boards of education. What was to be a 90-day temporary fill in for the small district as the superintendent has lasted two years but will end at the conclusion of the current school year.

Initially the need for a superintendent was just to “sign off on things and attend board meetings.” It became very apparent that the needs were greater than had been explained, as the first day on the job the district had a site visit from the Department of Education, which left them with 42 citations. On the third day the state auditors came for a visit and reported the district’s financial records had not been balanced for 6 years. This was not a quick fix, nor one that would come without some tough decisions. After the end of the first year in his charge, 17 teachers had to be let go; a fact that although Josh had no choice, left him feeling less than successful. The district thought otherwise and asked Josh to return for an additional year. He is now in his final year of commitment to the now much better off financially and academically, school district.

The small district serves 138 students in the 9-12 grades and is a predominately White population. The median household income is average for the state. The area education agency is a support and consulting source of schools located in a portion of a state in the Midwest.

Play Personality: Off the Clock. Much like Bobby, Josh is a servant leader with goals of helping others succeed on their own paths. But where Bobby is a director in his play personality, Josh is a storyteller. Storytellers look to find emotional connections in others as well as in the things they read and see. They illustrate their thinking through stories or visuals to help make their point or clarify thinking.

When asked to define play Josh said, “it’s being childlike – not childish. It is seeing the good with the world and not letting the challenge of the day or my age, stop my creative imagination.”

He describes his idea of play as Sunday dinners when he is cooking and the grandkids are running around the house. He loves to talk with his children and grandchildren and see the interactions they have with each other. Josh loves to go golfing with his son, creating things for his grandkids and doing a variety of supportive activities for his family. Each of the activities is done with the intention of serving someone he loves and is a moment in time that he can relish for the experience and for the memories it will bring him as well as the recipient. It is not about the doing, it is about the story that is created in the doing.

Playful Behaviors: On the Clock. The focus of Josh’s every day is to improve himself and offer provide support for those he leads. He describes his administration style as a “Godfather versus Grandfather. I’m going to play both depending on the situation.”

When coaching young administrators through difficult situations Josh emphasizes that each mistake is a teachable moment. “The big picture was wrong but we’re going to assume responsibility and do what we can to make it right.”

With the realization that he will not have all the right answers he looks towards asking the right questions in order to create a legacy of helping others. He strives to help the next generation of leaders and in the end, make it better for kids.

In a particularly moving story he shared how it became so important for him to show others his compassion and patience. His family was very poor when Josh was a child and his father worked as a coal hauler.

I remember people coming to our house and my dad giving them what they needed. I remember watching that. They trusted my family enough to come to them.

In reference to his work Josh added, “One of the best things I can do is give. Our kids need that.”

Culture: The Environment a Playful Leader Creates. Over the course of Josh’s career he has been fortunate to have early realizations about what his strengths and gifts are to give others. He strives to create an environment of personal growth and supports everyone who crosses his path. As he looked back he recalled:

When people used to call me and say they were going to sue, I used to want to push back. Now I just say, ‘I respect that you have to do what you have to do.’ It’s a different and not quite as sharp an edge. Being more focused on what’s really important, and that’s the education of kids.

Josh spends the first few minutes of any conversation listening and getting to know the person better. He asks about their weekend, family, and other important aspects of the person's life outside the job. He says that is who he is, and by showing that to everyone on a consistent basis builds trust. When you build a community of trust it becomes easier to support each other.

I emphasize that in all my relationships. Just do what you believe is right and I'm going to support you. It comes down to a leader's personality. How they think they can move people from one position to the next.

When it comes to building a sense of community with more than one person at a time, Josh relies on his ability to tell an emotional story to connect individuals with a similar purpose. In his role as acting superintendent, Josh is expected to give a speech to all the incoming teachers before the first day of school. It is typical to want to rally the teachers to try and inspire their teaching for the upcoming school year. His plan this year is to reach the teachers at a level of who they are as professionals as well as people.

Behind a thin curtain of black will be the silhouettes of several non-proficient elementary aged children in the district. He will ask the teachers to pick which child will be the one who doesn't make it. "This is our work. We win a football championship, great. But this is what it's really about."

Summary of Participants

The participants in the study ranged in approximate age between 35 and 65 years old. All of the participants were identified as Caucasian and each came into their current leadership role through a series of other leadership responsibilities. As would be

expected, their leadership experiences were diverse with some choosing to move away from negative experiences while others stayed within to build change and improvement.

Years of experience ranged from approximately eight years to as many as thirty with each of the participants expressing thought filled reflection regarding lessons learned along the way. Those with more experience, as expected, were able to facilitate change for themselves over time as well as those led, and see the product of those changes come to fruition. Each shared a sense of accomplishment at the advancement of those around them and took personal pleasure from assisting others in professional growth.

The following section discusses in further detail the three major themes that emerged from the study. Those include; culture of play, balance between work life and home life, and playful leadership.

Chapter 5

Findings

“Play is the highest form of research.” Albert Einstein

The findings from this phenomenological research study were obtained through a phenomenological data analysis (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2007). As a result of the data analysis, three themes emerged that answered the overarching research question: *How is the phenomenon of play impacting the work of educational leaders?* The three themes that emerged, along with several subthemes from the data analysis are:

Theme 1: Continual search for balance in work and home life

- Absence vs. presence of play

Theme 2: Difficulty of identifying playful leadership

- Identification of playful behaviors in self and others

Theme 3: The intentional or unintentional creation of a playful culture

- Listening/Caring
- Trust/Shared Leadership

Prior to each interview, I found a personal connection between the participant and myself (people that we both knew or common educational backgrounds or interests). Those connections helped me to break the ice at our initial meeting and hopefully allowed the participants to feel more comfortable and therefore more open than they might have been without any connection. Participants frequently provided emotional responses, which facilitated richer discussions of the interview questions than might have been possible with a researcher who did not make an effort to connect with each participant.

Participant Interviews

Eight semi-structured interviews of educational leaders were conducted in an effort to understand, through the perceptions of the participants, how play impacts their work. I established contact with the first participant who was identified in my own life as a playful leader. He was given a brief overview of the purpose for the interview request and agreed immediately. We established a date was established for our face-to-face interview and I emailed the questionnaire a week prior to the interview. At the end of our time together he gave me a referral for other leaders who he thought would be good candidates for the study based on his perception of their playful leadership styles and also his perception of their likely willingness to participate.

There was only one perspective participant who could not make her interview after it was set. She cancelled due to the timing of the school year start and her scheduling conflicts. That interview was not rescheduled. Another prospective participant was not contacted due to the distance that would have been required to travel for the interview. Data saturation had been reached and the additional interviews were therefore not essential to gain new information or insight.

Although nine candidates were referred and contacted, eight were readily available and all were willing and enthusiastic to participate in the study. My initial concern regarding unwillingness to give up work time was unfounded. Each of the participants met during the school day hours although other times were offered. One met on a lunch break and another at a café as she was recently retired. All nine were sent the questionnaire by email at least one week prior to our scheduled interview date.

Of the eight candidates who participated in this study, five were males and three were females. Participants had each been in positions of leadership for a different length of time, which offered varying perspectives and reflections.

At the conclusion of each interview I thanked the participants for their time and undivided attention. Their attention gave us opportunity for rich discussion and reflection. They each expressed gratitude for the opportunity. It was mentioned several times that the subject matter is one of importance to the field of education and the hopes are that more studies will be done regarding similar ideas. I gave participants a \$10 gas gift card as a small token of my appreciation for their time.

Participants offered many ideas and insights as to how play impacts the work of educational leaders in response to the interviews and questionnaires. Those ideas were systematically gathered according to commonalities and then refined through the process of narrowing units of information (Creswell, 2007). Three major themes emerged, each several subthemes.

The remainder of this chapter will explore each of the individual themes and subthemes in detail and provide illustrations from the participants' transcripts.

Theme 1: Continual Search for Balance in Work and Home Life

“What other profession do you say, here is 40 minutes a day to make yourself better?” (Conner)

Participants assumed various positions of leadership in education and provided a wealth of information about the difficulties of balance. Those with small children or who were early in their leadership careers, voiced their frustration related to their inability to find a sense of balance and the toll it took on them as well as on their families.

Participants with more experience, or those with grown children saw the importance of play and were able to make more time for it.

Absence vs. presence of play

Absence of play in life balance: “**If you’re not happy at home, you’re definitely not going to be happy at work” (Bobby).** One theme that was common for all participants was the realization that there needs to be a balance of work and home life. The more time spent at work, the less they felt a part of their family. Carrie, a storyteller play personality who finds renewal in reading and is new to her current leadership role, summed up her frustrations this way:

I was going to work at --- and leaving my house at 5:45 a.m.
and not coming home until 6 on the nose. That’s a long day
and doing that 5 days a week, 36 weeks in a row is just
taxing. That’s when I start cutting things out. I don’t have
time to read. Sometimes I don’t let myself have that balance.

Children were also a factor in finding balance between work and home life. All participants had children of their own, some young and some grown adults. George and Carrie reflected on the feedback they had received from their families regarding the long hours at work and how it left them feeling as if they were on the outside looking in to the lives of those they love. Children grow up and leave home, a fact that was not lost on any of the participants.

Several participants shared laments of events missed due to professional goals and sacrificing time with family for those extra work hours. George added, “I feel like I missed a promotion chance that I thought I had earned and deserved. Part of me was like,

‘gosh, what did all that hard work get me?’ He had been working long hours with the idea that his professional gain would outweigh the sacrifice he had made spending time away from his family. When that did not come to fruition, George was left contemplating his choices and felt a sense of imbalance in cost and resources. With perspective and a renewed effort to balance work and family time, a sense of happiness and renewal could occur.

Presence of play in life balance: “Being able to balance is something that makes you a better person in the long run” (Bobby). Some participants were not highly aware of play as it is interwoven into the fabric of a working and personal day. Often they started with the thought of ‘I don’t know what I do exactly to alleviate stress, it just happens and I feel better.’ Once they started to talk through their day’s activities as well as the events they remember enjoying as children, they began to see a pattern emerge of how the enjoyable moments from their pasts connects with the things they enjoy as adults. The more time they spend on those activities, the better they feel when handling the challenges that their work as educational leaders presents. Cassandra put it this way, “make sure your priorities are straight. God, family, health, then this job.”

The more experienced the leader, the more able they felt to put work and life goals in perspective. Josh and Laney, the most experienced, shared the ways they play are often not just for themselves, but also for the good of those around them. Josh shared, “I won’t be any good to my grandkids if I have a heart attack because I’m stressed over what someone said at work. So I put it in perspective.” It is also true that the more experienced the leaders were, the less likely they were to have young children at home. It is not entirely clear if it is a lack of experience or the presence of young children in the home (or

both) that contribute to the less experienced leaders feeling more overwhelmed and less in balance than the more experienced leaders.

Two of the participants have been through incidents of personal trauma, which helped them shape the bigger life picture that placed higher value on relationships and growth outside their work. Josh was badly burned in a fire. As he recovered in the hospital the choices that lay before him became much more clear and he made a conscious decision to choose his own path.

In the hospital I thought about turning that into a positive. There is nothing and no one that will ruin my day. Because of that, when I see people out here, I greet them and ask, 'how is your day?' People say to me 'when I talk to you, you're present'.

Creating a positive attitude and the ability to see things for what they are mere bumps along the road, rather than reacting to each challenge as if it were a crisis allows these leaders to have perspective and a more calming and level approach. Bobby said it this way, "When you go through your life's priorities, things change."

Both Bobby and Josh identified themselves as servant leaders. Both find ways to play within their day, Bobby as a director and Josh as a storyteller. Both of their life changing experiences helped them put into place the importance of seeing the bigger picture, beyond their own lives and into the future of those they will leave behind. Josh said, "They aren't going to name a building after me in ---, but hopefully my children will remember when I was there for them and how I was there for them."

Summary of play personality search for balance. Experience seemed a bigger indicator of finding balance successfully but participants with similar play personalities

had commonalities as well. The directors all made comments pertaining to their lists of goals or things to accomplish, with spending adequate time relaxing as an item on the list. George said, “My goals are that I need to have more time with my kids. So if my kids enjoy that, then I derive pleasure from that.”

The storytellers in the group both alluded to a need for a legacy of memories. Having time to spend with family, friends, and doing the activities they enjoy, gave them hope for a legacy of commitment and loyalty to those they love. Part of that legacy, for Josh, is giving assistance and guidance to new leaders. “I want to have as part of my legacy that I helped the next generation of leaders. I’m here with you, paying it forward.”

Laney, the only artist play personality in the study, shared it was her husband who helped her find the line between what she needed as an individual and what she wanted as a leader. After a long few days of learning a new computer analysis program at work, and spending far more hours than he felt she could without losing balance, Laney’s husband found a solution. As she remembered, “On Monday when I came home he said, ‘I bought you a present.’ What do you think it was? A boat. He said, ‘you need a life.’”

The two kinesthetes in the study, Conner and Paul, found very different solutions to the search for balance in work and home life. For Conner the challenge was met with a specific plan and intentional time spent being active with family and friends. He is able to meet his need for movement during the time he spends time with his wife and children. After having to plan time out for several years, it finally became habit and a part of his routine. Paul fills his need for activity by spending time with his sons by coaching their various sports teams. He shared, “it’s a bit of a diversion and has nothing to do with my job. It’s engaging to me because I like sports.”

Theme 2: Difficulty of Identifying Playful Leadership

“You have to know yourself before you can identify what you need to improve.”

(Paul)

When asked about role models, all the participants were immediately able to give specific examples of leaders they admired. Each took on a softer, sentimental tone and gave examples of how those who made positive impacts had affected them. It was at this time as well, that several examples of things not to do were brought up in the discussion, and examples were given regarding what they had learned from those leaders as well. Participant play personalities are discussed as a part of the identification of playful leadership in others.

Identification of playful behaviors in self and others

Identifying playful behaviors in others: “Not owning someone else’s behavior”

(Josh). Each of the director play personalities in the study shared specific incidences of seeing other leaders handling situations poorly, in their perception. There were examples of strict adherence to rules and no shared leadership opportunities. Cassandra recalls one leader in particular as a “bull in a china shop” in reference to a leader’s handling of staff. She explained,

This is how he wanted it done and if the teacher didn’t do it, light ‘em up. It was either write them up, chew them out, or whatever. He was a great storyteller and would give you the shirt off his back, but had no idea how to get people motivated or wanting to learn.

In her own leadership role, Cassandra has taken that experience and invested in time spent getting to know the staff and her role as their leader, before designing programs or professional development opportunities for them.

The two storyteller play personality leaders each spoke of highly regarded role models and how these examples led them both to look for their own purpose in leadership roles. Josh remembers one such admired role model as having said, “before leader, define yourself as a human being.”

Conner and Paul are the two kinesthete play personalities in the study and both identified leaders who were out and about, moving through curriculum or ideas with their staff. Conner remembered his first principal as a risk taker who put together several ninth grade teachers and gave them the opportunity to use the project based approach, a very active and involved way of teaching and learning. “We had flexible scheduling so as a science teacher I could take them to the quarry for 3 hours. We did culminating assessments, we did all kinds of things.”

Laney, the artist play personality, spoke of a particularly difficult time in her leadership experience and the advice that was given by those she admired. They had encouraged her use of creativity in how she addressed issues, supported her to stand tall and walk with a purpose, and helped her trust those at her leadership level. She took the advice to heart and feels she came out of the experience a little wiser and with a broader view of leadership. Laney ended her interview with this insight, “it’s not about relationships between people but a systems approach for a greater good, children’s achievement.”

Recognition of having playful behaviors in one's own leadership: "When you feel you have the ability to be creative, you're more likely to be engaged" (Carrie).

Finding the strengths in others is often easier than looking inward and for the participants it was only a matter of seconds before each had named a colleague from their past that changed the way they lead today. For Carrie it was a fellow curriculum director who gave her the idea of having toys as a de-escalation tool for teens in trouble. She said, "It was something we had talked about before the year even started because I noticed on her desk she had her little box of toys."

As a storyteller it was important for Carrie to hear the whole version of the story from each child that entered her office. Using the toys brought the students to a calmer demeanor and after opening up and talking through the issue, built an important bridge between student and administrator was built.

Josh, also a storyteller play personality, watched his parents provide for others and carries on their legacy with those he leads. He put it this way:

Kids don't care until they know you care. People are the same way. They may not want a hug, or for you to be in their space but they want to be recognized as human. They still have a story and I'm really into people's stories.

The participants made indirect rather than direct connections between play at work and at home with the examples they provided regarding their own forms of stress relief and escape. Paul said, "You have very limited time that's not work related or family responsibilities." Once participants started to reflect on their individual time, or remembered what they enjoyed as a child, it was easier for them to discuss their needs for

play. Although none of the participants called their activities play, each gave examples of their own play personality and how it is a part of their leadership.

When asked to define play at each of their age and stage of life, all participants voiced a connection to the activities they use to relieve stress. Upon reflection, each found an important link to their lives and their play. Conner said, “I guess the lesson to this, is the importance of the relationship and positive outcomes of balancing your work life responsibilities with your recreational interests and passions.”

Theme 3: The Intentional or Unintentional Creation of a Playful Culture

“I can move the world for kids but you’ve got to move the adults to move the world for kids.” (Conner)

During each interview I sought understanding in two realms; the ways in which the participant finds rejuvenation as an individual, and how they provide stress relief to others. The creation of culture includes several subcategories that include caring and listening, respect, shared leadership and trust. All are discussed as components of the environment the leader explicitly or inexplicitly provided for those who work for them and with them.

Caring/Listening

Caring: “Someone you know really does care” (Carrie). One of the most powerful indicators of workplace contentment is the culture that a leader creates for their followership. Some participants were more explicit with the purpose and vision of their culture, while others felt the culture was a byproduct of feelings others brought into the workplace. Paul shared his intentional creation of culture, “the most positive way to impact culture is to have one conversation at a time.”

Several recalled the caring nature of their role models and the impact that had on their own lives. Carrie recalled a time when a family crisis brought to light the depth of caring from a leader that inspired her.

I remember when my mom called the school because my grandpa was in the hospital. Before I hung up the phone with my mother,--- came running in my room saying, ‘what do you need? Just go, I’ve got this.’ She cares about me as a person. I’m more than just an employee.

George, Jim, Bobby, Paul and Cassandra each made it a cornerstone of their leadership culture to create a personal connection before any other matter was discussed. A greeting, comment, or a personal acknowledgment are always put forth first, no matter what topic or agenda follows. George put it this way, “when it comes right down to it, everyone wants to know you care. The old saying that they don’t care how much you know, until they know you care.”

The participants stated that a caring culture does not just assist with interactions between leaders and followers. Its presence can lead to better staff to staff relationships as well as a more positive school and better community connection. Bobby shared his goal regarding student achievement in terms of being viable members of a community.

Yes, they need to know how to read, but in today’s world they are going to train you to do it. So we need better people. In order to do that, we need somebody to connect with them at school.

The absence of a caring leader can lead to the demise of other relationships. One particularly difficult experience gave Cassandra the opportunity to go forward with a clearer model of what not to do when she became a principal. She shared:

The entire culture of the building was so deep rooted. There was dislike for the kids, mistrust, and unprofessional behavior all the way down from the secretary to the custodian to the teachers and support people. They were just so negative.

When people know you care about them as human beings before anything else, there is an automatic sense of connection and relationship. Paul makes a conscious effort to acknowledge the work of all staff, not just teachers, to build a sense of community and purpose. He shared,

Expressing gratitude for what they do. Hopefully that resonates more with them because ‘you recognize the work I do and it matters to me. If it makes me feel valued, I can do that with staff.’ That will help make a difference. Modeling gratitude.

The more the leaders invested in their staff the better they felt both as leaders and as people. George expressed his own gain from acknowledging and celebrating his staff this way:

I like to give lots of praise to people. I love to just drop a note on their desk, catch them on the side or call them on the way home. When I do more of that I feel really good. When I do less of that I feel nasty because I’m focusing on the

negative.

Listening: “I will do my very best to watch, listen, and observe over the next few months” (Cassandra). Part of showing others you care about them and their own struggles and joys is listening with intention. Gaining insight into the personal lives of others allows the participants the opportunity to build bridges they would not have known were needed had they not taken the time to listen to what is important to their followers. Cassandra is new to her current position as vice principal of a large metropolitan high school. For her, listening will come before any decisions are made that are of great consequence. She describes her plans:

I listen more than I talk. I will do my very best to watch, listen and observe in the next few months. I need to make sure that I get to know people and form relationships first, and then after I’ve done that I will have earned my credibility and moving forward, things will be much easier.

Paul, a kinesthete play personality, was the only participant that felt his connections to people were more satisfaction for a social need rather than a conscious effort to ensure relationship building. Bobby and Conner talked about meeting people at their own level of needs, whether that is to slip away for a family event, or just meeting away from the office as a form of listening to the needs of their followers. Carrie shared the listening model of a colleague who made a large impact in her leadership style. “--- and I would come up with a plan and ---- would be the one to say ‘have you thought about..... ‘ She just made us slow down and listen.”

Shared Leadership/Trust

Shared Leadership: “So if we’re all leaders how can we leverage our leadership to improve the school, help students succeed” (George). Although the play personalities of each of the participants varied, all spoke about the importance of shared leadership with others. For Josh it has been a journey of experience starting with a more authoritarian style and as he became more confident in his own abilities, realizing the value of other opinions and insights. He shared, “I make better decisions now; I involve people better.”

George, Paul, and Bobby, with different levels of experience and play personalities, have all invested time and energy into the culture of shared leadership. For Bobby, a director play personality, it became about providing insights and improving his staff. Similarly, George and Paul have made the opinions of others invested in the decisions a matter of vital importance to secure trust, respect and a sense of community for all involved.

Along with the idea of shared leadership, each of the participants in the study valued the growth from the beginning of their careers in which a more managerial style was common to a shift in paradigms that placed an emphasis on what it means to lead. George summed up the collective thoughts with:

Management is making sure the lights are on and the things I get done between 7 a.m. and the time the teachers arrive. It’s making sure everything is in order. Leadership is more the thought process. It is my values, my ethics and my beliefs, my actions. Leadership is how they align with those beliefs, and the interaction and influence you have on others.

Participants did not think that management was a successful tool for building trust, care, or personal investment. Negative examples were given regarding leaders in the participants' pasts who amplified the downfall of districts they had been a part of, due to styles that are now outdated and unwelcome in most educational environments. Open dialogue, collaboration and cooperative learning opportunities are demanded in the current climate and are active in the participants' districts.

Several leaders also mentioned the importance of recognition of one's own personal strengths, as well as the strengths of those others. Conner stated, "As a leader you better know your strengths, you better know your weaknesses and you better know how to fill the gap between the two." Josh suggested the strengths of the followers could fill that gap and help us create a climate of collaboration and community investment in the success of students.

In order to encourage reflection in others as well as to encourage shared leadership, George has an activity that he does at the start of each year. To motivate his staff, George writes each of them a handwritten note with what he considers to be their leadership strength. Each card starts with "I believe you are a leader by..." That exercise not only raises the level of investment for the staff but it allows George to feel good about the commitment he has to each of them.

Shared leadership does not just apply to the staff of a school district. The leaders in this study also mentioned the impact that opposing styles have on students. Conner expressed concern for the lack of growth and change in educational leadership overall. When classrooms of today look too much like those of 40 years ago, he feels there should be an alarm ringing in the minds and hearts of anyone in the education field. He

expressed those concerns for his own children and their learning. “I worry as I watch my own kids learn that we will be irrelevant if we continue to do that. I watch how my kids learn however they want, whenever they want. We have to have a different role.”

Conner looks to shared leadership as an opportunity to gain insights from other resources that will help improve the relevance of schools in the future.

There is no need to memorize state capitals because anyone with a smart phone can look them up in less than 10 seconds and tell you. The real questions we need to be asking our students is what do we do with that information after we’ve learned where to find it?

Challenges in changing a negative culture to a more positive culture are a part of any job and for educational leaders it comes in the form of parent complaints, teacher and staff needs, community misperceptions, financial pitfalls, and the rules and guidelines set by outside entities. A supportive culture provides a perspective to those challenges and for the leaders in this study it was handled in different ways.

When dealing with community misperceptions there are rules that guide a leader’s behavior and dissemination of truth. Staff members and community members have the right to say whatever they feel is their complaint or the cause of any problem. The same opportunity is not afforded to those in positions of authority. They are often asked to say nothing. Leading in an atmosphere where the complete truth may not be revealed to the larger audience can be a challenge for even those with the most calm demeanor and the highest ability to relieve stress. In Laney’s situation, she was able to use her artistic play personality and humor to encourage clarity of thinking.

We'd play rumor or real. Everyone had an index card so they could write down a rumor they had heard. We'd collect them, type them up and print them in the bulletin. One of the rumors was that the P.E teacher heated the pool for the 6th grade then turned it down for the 7th. Funny things.

Trust: "People have to see exactly who you are so they can trust you" (Josh).

Along with caring and listening to others, the leaders were quick to identify trust as a key component to a playful culture. Visibility and transparency lead to trust for Paul, George, and Bobby but Josh said it most succinctly with this advice, "people have to see exactly who you are so, they can trust you."

Communication was also mentioned as a component to earning trust. Conner identified one of his strengths as letting people in the community and the buildings know what is happening at the district level. Explaining upfront allows for accurate information to be disseminated before rumors and half-truths begin to take control of the facts. Budget cuts and large building plans have been projects in several of the school districts he has led and although one is more challenging than the other, they both can get misinformation flowing out of control without proper communication. He spoke of the importance of building trust by being a part of the community he leads.

Being visible, being out and about, modeling those things. It's hard I'm a parent in the district and the superintendent. I've always done that because when I talk about raising a levy, it's my taxes. If we're cutting or changing a program for kids, it's my kids.

When challenges come up within a district or building, it is the leaders who must respond with the most transparency possible if trust is to be sustained. Laney shared, “People know if you if you have integrity. They know. You know who you trust, you know who to work around.” People watch the decisions that are made, and who is being effected to decide whether or not to grant trust. Once a leader has earned trust, it is imperative for the culture, to maintain that trust with integrity.

In her last role as a building principal, Laney had the unpleasant task of releasing a teacher during her first school year in charge. The teacher was not let go without due process and in that amount of time made several unsavory and untrue accusations about Laney. Laney continued to lead with integrity and “walk the walk” that the job required. After a few weeks, she was approached by a support staff member. The support staff member shared with Laney how she had watched her and verified that all accounts against the teacher were valid. Perhaps more importantly to Laney were the words the staff member shared with her. When she told the staff person she would need to follow up with her report, she looked at Laney and said, “Yes, I know. That’s why I came to you.”

Having others watch and take stock in your character as a leader is something that Cassandra and Carrie have learned from both sides of the leadership desk. After a negative experience modeled the “what to avoid” side of trust, they each found ways to show their intentions for leadership before decisions were shared verbally. Cassandra expressed her intentions with, “I’m not going to waste my breath saying ‘I will be firm with discipline’. I’m just going to do it. I’m going to prove myself with my actions because talk is cheap right now.”

Summary of play personality creation of culture. Play personalities were shown to be similar in their creation of culture whether it was intentional or not. Experience in education also played a role in the awareness of the culture that each individual created.

Both kinesthetes use their need to move as a way to encourage collaboration, caring, and a sense of community. They each visit other leaders, students and teachers and are both visible and approachable to all. Conner and Paul value the time investment it takes to be available and create culture that allows shared leadership to flourish. Whereas Conner is intentional with his communication and expectations, Paul is not. Conner shared, “Those are key communicators. Being visible, out and about, modeling those things. You have communication and a clear direction of where you’re going.”

The directors were very clear in their purposeful creation of culture. Bobby “leads by example” with a focus on “priorities.” Cassandra watched others in positions of leadership and then made a plan for her own culture. “Watching different people lead in different ways created more drama or were unsuccessful, I learned that 98% of that is poor communication.” George understands the importance of building communication for the positive culture in his building. He said, “I work really hard to know people’s families and know people’s names.” Each has a play personality that drives them to create events and opportunities for others. The creation of culture in an educational setting is the perfect environment to flex their directorial muscles.

Josh and Carrie, the storytellers in the study, feel that the more opportunities they have for creativity, the more they can create positive cultures for others. Josh shared, “I

have a real desire to serve people. With young administrators it's the coaching piece. Godfather versus grandfather, I'm going to play both depending on the situation."

Laney builds culture with the use of her artistic play personality. She uses humor, creative designs and implementations that create a positive culture in her buildings. Although she, like the other leaders in the study, values communication with her staff, she often found ways to make connections in unusual ways. From walking coaching sessions in the halls to playing rumor games, Laney found ways to build positive culture while honoring her mode of play. Similar to Josh and Carrie, Laney looked for ways to create opportunities to serve others. In her words, "I learned the opportunity to coach teachers isn't in the evaluation process but in the conversations you have in the hall."

Each of the play personalities framed the ways in which the participants build the culture in their educational setting. For most it is an intentional act with visibility, communication, and transparency as the goals for building the positive culture they seek. The more experienced the leader, the greater the ability to reflect on their own journey as witnesses to others and the lessons learned along the way. For one leader, a culture of communication is key to his current success but his awareness has not yet developed. All four play personalities were evident in the ways in which the leaders created their framework and each has found the greatest feelings of accomplishment when the opportunities to honor their play personalities were given.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings from the data analysis of the shared experiences of eight participants and yielded the following three major themes:

Theme 1: Continual search for balance in work and home described how the participants find balance or how the lack of balance has affected their lives.

Theme 2: Difficulty of playful leadership described how the participants identified playful leadership in others and ways in which they identified their own playful styles of leadership.

Theme 3: The intentional or unintentional creation of a playful culture delved into the environment that leaders create by providing caring, listening, shared leadership, and trust. Examples of leaders who did not offer those components were given as well as those that have built culture of play.

The following chapter provides a discussion and recommendations as well as suggestions for further research.

Chapter 6

Discussions, Recommendations, and Conclusions

“If you want creative workers, give them enough time to play.” John Cleese

Summary of the Study

This chapter is dedicated to a discussion of the findings as they address the overarching research question of this study and as they relate to the relevant literature from Chapter Two. Also presented are implications of the study and recommendations for future research. The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenon of play, as it is manifested in the work of educational leaders. The phenomenological nature of this study proved to be enlightening and refreshing. The participants provided rich data for analysis. Prior to this study there had been a great deal of research conducted regarding play for children, but very little with adults and even less with adults in educational leadership roles. The main focus of earlier educational research regarding play was linked to classrooms providing play opportunities for young learners (Almon & Miller, 2009; Graue, 2010; Christakis & Christakis, 2010; Piaget, 2013; Sutton-Smith, 1995).

A number of issues regarding the presence and absence of play throughout life were presented in the literature review in Chapter Two. These issues included an explanation of play in all forms leading up to and including playful leadership in education and how current research shows that play is a vital component in a healthy and fulfilling life. Creativity, innovation, and a culture of success can be found in not just business models of leadership, but can apply to education as well. Relevant research was also reviewed describing how the brain and body systems react to stressors and the harmful results that can happen when play is not part of an individual’s habits (McEwan,

2008; Brown, 1998; Burts et al., 1992). Also reviewed was research that examined the impact on the body when play is present and the bodily chemicals that create joy, creativity and happiness (Demothe, 2005; Levett, 2010; Adamson, Stage, Laursen, Rorth, & Quist, 2011).

Phenomenological methodology was employed in this qualitative study in order to gain an understanding of the participants' experiences with play and to explain how the participants experienced the shared phenomenon (Creswell, 2007, p. 66). The participants all experienced the phenomenon of play in their roles as educational leaders and the study explored "what they experienced and how they experienced it" (Moustakis, 1994).

Eight educational leaders were selected from six Midwest school districts to participate in the study. For the purpose of this study, educational leaders were limited to superintendents, curriculum directors, and principals. Based on the participant's roles, these eight people were "purposefully selected" (Creswell, 2009, p. 179) using a snowball or referral procedures to relate their experiences with play. Brown's (2009) categories of adult play personalities were used to describe the play preference for each participant. All eight of the participants engaged in a pre-interview questionnaire that they received via email, a face-to-face interview, and a follow-up member check, also conducted through email. Data collection consisted of transcripts, questionnaires, and field notes. The field notes were used to explore environmental aspects of the individual offices, observations of emotion and also to explore tangential discussions that took place during the interviews. Participant play profiles were compiled in Chapter 4.

After coding and analyzing the transcripts, three major themes emerged that describe the experiences of the participants:

1. *Continual search for balance in work and home life*
2. *Difficulty of identifying playful leadership*
3. *The intentional or unintentional creation of a playful culture*

In the following section, these themes are discussed as they address the overarching research question. The themes are then linked to the related literature. Implications of the study and recommendations for further research are offered at the end of this chapter.

Summary Answer to Research Question

The overarching research question of this study was: *How is the phenomenon of play impacting the work of educational leaders?* Three major themes emerged from the data analysis that answered this research question.

Continual search for balance in work and home life: All the participants in the study believed that playful behavior is a part of a healthy lifestyle. They did not label their leisure activities as “play”, however. The more they engaged in such activities, the happier and more balanced they felt throughout their life. Each felt it was important for the health and well being of their families that they strive to strike a balance, although most felt it was still a work in progress with varying degrees of growth needed.

Eagerness to focus on others: The idea of identifying play behaviors in others came much more readily for the participants than to focus on themselves. Each offered an anecdote of ways in which leaders they had known either made major missteps or accomplished great feats through the use of play in their roles as leaders. Through reflective conversation connections formed as the participants relayed their own journeys and what tools brought them success.

The intentional or unintentional creation of a playful culture: All but one of the participants spoke about an intentional creation of a specific culture at work. They listed caring, listening, shared leadership, and trust as key factors in their efforts. By the end of the interview Paul began making connections between the actions he took as a leader and the kind of culture he was seeking. He decided there might be a connection between them. Play was used in a variety of ways by each leader to design culture but each had very specific ideas of what kind of environment was important to them and to their staff.

Analyzing the transcripts brought out the identity of each play personality. The researcher had no prior knowledge regarding any one of the participants' play personalities.

Discussion of Themes with Prior Literature

Each of the emergent themes relates in some way to the relevant literature. One theme supports the existing literature, another extends it, and the final theme was present in prior literature regarding business models but not in an educational setting.

Theme 1: Continual search for balance in work and home life. The Flow Theory (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009) describes the absorption in an activity that is so enjoyable that a person will continue to do it just for the sake of doing it. All of the participants in this study recalled activities they enjoyed in the past and were searching for more ways to create similar levels of intrinsic enjoyment. Participants who found ways to experience flow were overall happier and reported more habits of stress relief and coping strategies. They also revealed an overall positive outlook regarding their family and working lives. Participants who had weathered major life events and those who had more life experiences in general showed an increased ability to see a need for work-life balance

and to put more focus on creating times for fun. Participants with young children, who were also those with less life experiences, struggled more to find balance in their lives. This could have been related to their status as parents of young children, or their years of experience, or both.

The happiness factor was reported in Chapter 2 with a look at the brain's need for the chemical serotonin. Personal health and longevity are predicted results of increased levels of serotonin in the brain (Young, 2007). The participants in this study mentioned the more time spent in enjoyable activities that was consistent with their play personalities, the happier they felt and the better their home life seemed to be. The kinesthetes in the study, Paul and Conner, both described physical activities they enjoyed with their families that are likely to increase serotonin levels and help them find a sense of happiness as a result (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence; Salmon, 2001; Trivedi, Greer, Grannemann, et al., 2006; Wilson, Marsden, 1996).

Laney, the artist play personality, shared a time when she had lost balance and her husband helped her to regain focus by purchasing a boat for them to enjoy. The results were similar to the findings of the McCormick and Plugge (1997) study, which found adults reestablishing their creative nature were living happier, healthier lives. Laney knew she needed to reclaim creativity in order to maintain a balance between home and work life and expressed gratitude to her husband for insisting that she take more time away from work.

The younger and less experienced educational leaders in the study were still struggling to find balance. Recognizing the stress caused by lack of play (Brown, 2004) is the first step to creating a plan for incorporation, but neither George nor Cassandra had the

energy to plan for their own leisure activities. Due to their age, George and Cassandra very likely had more parenting responsibilities. Having young children provides an interesting challenge for adult play opportunities. Most adults are aware of children's need for play and will put those needs before their own. Sometimes it is possible to create a win-win situation whereby child and adult play needs are met through the same activity, but George and Cassandra were not able to find these opportunities and they expressed frustration about this.

Theme 2: Difficulty of identifying playful leadership. Although the literature surrounding this theme was abundant in areas pertaining to business leadership, it was lacking in application to educational leadership. Programs that emphasize the importance of play to foster emotional connections, teamwork and problem solving, were evident in the literature (Conger, 1992; DeRue and Ashford, 2010; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2011). Participants identified leader- follower relationships and described playful behaviors in that context for the most part did not identify play as an intentional component of their own leadership.

Businesses have used creative play to generate new ways to solve problems (Brown, 2009), as have several of the participants. Participants also used play as a problem-solving technique. Laney created games to dispel rumors, Josh envisioned an emotionally charged presentation with the use of children's profiles to inspire staff, and Conner created a humorous video to create a sense of community in a disjointed district.

Humor has been studied in various forms and each form involves a sense of play (Barron, Boyd, 2004; Manell & McMahon, 2009). When identifying playful leaders the participants in this study recalled people in their own lives who made them feel at ease.

Some leaders intentionally used humor, while others relied more on their abilities to inspire, connect and show genuine concern for others. When describing their own identity as playful leaders, many of the participants spoke of their attention to others and activities that illustrated their leadership.

Role Identity Theory (Merton, 1957) describes a leader's perception of what is expected externally from a person in a position of power. All of the participants in this study found ways to balance the expectations of their roles with their own strengths and visions. Although George felt the need for perfection, he readily shared that it was an expectation he placed upon himself, rather than trying to live up to someone else's expectation. Cassandra and Carrie both had negative leadership experiences as followers which profoundly impacted the way they currently lead. By learning from the mistakes of other leaders, they were able to redefine their own leadership identities as much more positive than their earlier experiences.

Theme 3: The intentional or unintentional creation of a playful culture. Dwyer (1986) contended that successful educational leaders combine day-to-day responsibilities of meeting the needs for student achievement with the needs and resources of an entire school or school district. Being attuned to the behaviors that influence teachers and thus positively affecting student achievement is the mark of an effective leader.

All of the leaders in this study have intentionally created a culture of caring, trust, listening and shared leadership. All felt the need to show staff and students the importance of caring for one another while still modeling high expectations for achievement. Instead of letting the teachers in her building hold the impression that scores

are only used to criticize, Laney invested time and energy into explaining the positive results and building students' ownership for their own success.

Similarly, Bobby and George made certain that staff were able to attend family appointments and celebrations without feeling guilt for needing to be out of the classroom. They each ask those around them to maintain a healthy balance with an understanding that family comes first. George is still struggling to find that balance in his own life, but he knows the benefits of encouraging it in others.

The COR Theory (Hobfoll, 2001) describes the use of resources, including time given away from work to balance life demands. The leaders in this study were aware of the importance of building a community that encourages families to rejuvenate. As a result, each encourages staff to attend family events, even if it means taking time off work. Such leaders create a sense of caring and trust have been shown to generate positive effects for their employee mental health (Parzefall & Hakanen, 2010). The addition of resources for staff, and in turn the students, is a positive fulfillment of a psychological contract as reviewed in Chapter 2 (Hobfoll, 2001).

Shared leadership is present in the cultures created by all of the participants. Cassandra looked to the teachers as experts in their fields before determining how she could be of best assistance to them. In the same manner, Paul finds time in his workday to connect with and listen to as many staff members as time will allow. He and Conner both discussed the importance of being visible to followers and hearing concerns or ideas before making decisions. The uses of play spaces have been studied in business models and were presented in Chapter 2. Play spaces (Kolb & Kolb, 2010) build a sense of community and identity for individuals working within a group, while creating leadership

roles and perspectives of the team as a whole. The participants in this study were all trying, consciously or not, to create a sense of community and identity within their school setting.

Implications of the Study

The study's findings have particular implications for educational leaders in all settings. How educational leaders view the importance of play in their own lives and work is a worthy investigation because it impacts not only the lives of the educational leaders, but also their staff, as well as the students and families in the communities they serve.

“Adult play” is uncomfortable terminology. Terms such as leisure and fun felt more acceptable to participants in the study. There was a perception that play is only for young children and must be left behind as you age. Participants discussed play by using the language of stress relief.

People have their own play personalities that often reflect in how they choose to spend their free time. All adults have the ability and need for play but not all are aware of its importance for health and well being. The loss of emphasis or importance of play throughout life could be detrimental with both physical and psychological impacts (Adams & McGuire, 1986; Barron, 2013; Caillois, 2001; Christakis & Christakis, 2010; Delamothe, 2005).

In addition to the importance of play for personal well being, play can be used in work environments to benefit everyone. Companies like the Google Corporation have created play zones equipped with spaces for physical play, areas for meditation and creative work environments to promote innovation. Current research supports play for

business leadership (Kark, 2011; Panksepp, 1998) and the results of this study would suggest an extension of success in educational leadership as well.

The storyteller play personalities showed more intentionality regarding playful leadership, either in reference to their own style, or through observation of others. There were two storytellers in this study and although assumptions cannot be made for all with similar play personalities, Josh and Carrie both had identified playful behaviors in others and infused similar behaviors into their own leadership. It appears as if those with strong interests in the stories of others may be more aware of specific behaviors and the positive results of playfulness. Although Carrie was one of the younger educational leaders in the study, she adopted a playful strategy to use with troubled students after hearing about the success of this strategy and the relationships that were able to be built by a colleague using play. Josh was one of the most experienced and had gone through a traumatizing life event, both of which could be linked to his wisdom on the need for balance and play. Bobby, a director play personality, also had a traumatic life experience and adopted a broader view of life balance and playful leadership. Perhaps the combination of experience and observation, leads to a higher awareness of the need for and increased ability to orchestrate life-work balance.

Cassandra and George, the other two director play personalities included in this study, made note of negative role models in order to help craft their own leadership styles. It could be that the needs of a director to organize, make lists, and identify gaps leads to an oversight of positive outcomes due to an over-focus on the avoidance of negative outcomes. George shared the need for his perception of perfection. Cassandra checked tasks from a list of things to accomplish. Both feel there are employing vast amounts of

energy tackling the day's goals and may be missing playful opportunities along with the little successes that could pass by unnoticed.

The two kinesthetes sought role models that had matching play personalities. Each recalled a leader that was also a person who needed movement. Perhaps movers attract other movers. Conner shared a project that asked his administrative staff to identify their strengths and weaknesses. The purpose was to assist him in creating working groups. Identifying strengths in others by using an outside source could alleviate these kinesthetes' possible tendency to overlook the benefits of differing play personalities including those of a quieter leadership style.

Laney was the only artist play personality in the study. She operated with a broader perspective and a sense of vision and purpose. When her creativity was not being employed, she felt alone and stressed. She had to find ways to look at the bigger picture of test scores, building projects, and future leaders to fulfill her play personality. It is not clear if this broader perspective is related to the artist personality or not, but it is possible that other play personalities would have similar outlooks and challenges.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made for those in positions of leadership in an educational setting.

- *There is a great opportunity for educational leaders to recognize play as part of a healthy human experience. Play is not just for children any more! In the continual search of balance, creating opportunities for play that are consistent with one's play personality offers a chance to find ways to renew and rejuvenate by tapping into personal resources.*

- *Educational leaders are more effective when they connect with staff at personal levels and play facilitates this.* Playful communities offer the opportunity for exploration into the identities of leaders as well as for others to rehearse leadership roles. When connections are first made at the individual level, a common ground is found and can lead to better communication and a more positive leader-follower relationship.
- *Educational leaders are most effective when they sustain a balance in work and life.* Regular play increases the body's release of serotonin. When the body has less cortisol, which is created by stress, and more serotonin, the results are an increase in productivity and happiness. In turn, higher levels of happiness can lead to higher creativity and higher student achievement.
- *Educational leaders can benefit by recognizing the symptoms of a life without play.* Understanding the human need for play and the signs of a person in play deficit could allow for more appropriate intervention strategies for adults or children.
- *Educational leaders can provide a positive learning environment by being aware of the importance of play for students.* As leaders are making decisions regarding time spent in classrooms and curriculum that meets the common core standards, it is vital that time be allocated for playful learning. Curiosity, creativity, and the frameworks that encourage investigation through play will honor students' play personalities and offer health and well being as they learn and grow.
- *Educational leaders can benefit by creating a culture of play.* Leaders who create a culture that encourages creativity, flexibility and fosters curiosity have followers

who are more apt to be higher-level thinkers, better problem solvers and create the same results in their students.

Implications to Future Study

Recommendation 1. Replicate the study with a focus on teacher leaders in and out of the classroom (model teachers, lead teachers, instructional coaches, etc) to see whether the themes remain constant throughout leadership levels.

Recommendation 2. Replicate the study but provide a definition of adult play for the participants to see how this affects their discussion of their own play, their own play personalities and whether they offer insights not available in this study.

Recommendation 3. Use the findings from this study to develop a training program for educational leaders that help leaders identify their own and others' play personalities and creates play spaces for connections to other leaders.

Recommendation 4. More research is needed in this area to determine the effects of creating playful cultures on student achievement, student engagement, and student health and well being.

Final Thoughts

Without the openness and honesty from the eight participants it would have been very difficult to gain understanding into the challenges of educational leadership and whether or not play is used to meet those challenges. Participants showed vulnerability by sharing disappointments and difficulties as well as joys and triumphs. Playful leaders are not always aware of their own play personalities but all the participants reported situations that brought them joy or frustration and they were all clear in their reflections of how those situations changed their career paths.

The participants in this study are leaders in education at a time when it is difficult for so many to find their way through the maze of expectations. They had clear visions of what was vital and uncompromised student success based not on a test score, but on the contributions to a greater good. Play is a fundamental need for humans of all ages and maturation levels. It is good for the body, and the soul.

We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing –

George Bernard Shaw

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Appendix A

Positionality/bias statement

I have been a kindergarten teacher for over 20 years. I have two children. I value play in both my classroom and in my home for children. I also value play for myself. I am a reader, a writer, and a musical theatre lover. Those are my favorite modes of play.

Play has been a cornerstone to learning in early childhood classrooms, including my own. For teachers and leaders, it is valuable to understand the importance of play, the various patterns of play throughout a lifetime, and the cultures that encourage creativity, innovation, and success.

Ten years ago, a typical kindergartner just entering school would find herself immersed in a world of alphabet letters and bright colored blocks to aide in the acquisition of color names, and have lots of time throughout the day to explore, create, and wonder. Success was based on social, emotional, and beginning academic awareness (Kulman, 2011). That which was success then, would be considered a precursor to intense academic intervention now.

The current kindergarten report card reads more like a First or even Second Grade report from the past. Where five sight words mastered were considered an advanced grading the current standard is from 20 – 40 sight words to achieve the average (Almon & Miller, 2009). In my own school system the number of expected sight words was recently updated to include over 70 words. This demand for higher accountability and performance on rote memory tasks continues all the way through a child's educational experience.

As a kindergarten teacher nothing matters more to me more than the growth of my students as a whole child. I see play as essential to their growth and development. Academic journals and quality research have been very clear about the importance of play for children. However, I am not just a teacher, but a mother as well. I have watched as my teenagers struggle under the weight of the advancing expectations in their own progression through the school system. Play has been an important release for their stress and management of health and well - being.

The further I delve into the research the more it becomes clear that play permeates the entirety of a healthy life from birth till death. Play has become my passion. Education needs leaders who are aware of the vital role that play has in culture, creativity, autonomy, and health. It is not just for the children they serve but for the staff they lead as well as for themselves.

I am clearly biased in favor of play. For the purposes of this study, I put my bias aside in order to understand and explore my participants' views and experiences with play. This study is about their experiences, not mine.

Appendix B

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: A Phenomenological Exploration of Play Among Educational Leaders

Investigators: *Janette Seybert*

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to learn more about adult play as it pertains to educational leadership.

You are being invited to participate in this study because your career has been spent creating positive change and insight as a leader in education.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete a survey identifying ways you played as a child and things you currently enjoy that renew energy and bring feelings of time suspension.

During a face- to- face interview you will be asked to talk about your:

play history (favorite play activities as a child)

current ways you find renewal of energy

role of play in leadership

ways in which your play may influence your leadership

culture

In order to accurately relay your thoughts, I will be recording our interview. You will be given a copy of the complete transcripts within two weeks following the interview for your verification.

Your participation will last for approximately ninety minutes for the interview portion, 15 minutes to complete the survey before the interview, and approximately 20 minutes to validate the transcription at a time designated by you.

RISKS

While participating in this study you may experience the following risks: the inconvenience of time spent and away from other preferred activities.

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study there will be no direct benefit to you. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by offering a deeper understanding of the relationship between adult play and creative educational leadership.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study. In order to show my appreciation a \$10 gift card will be provided following the interview portion of the study.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.

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CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Drake University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken:

Coding will provide anonymity to all participants, all data gathered will be stored in a password protected computer file, and any information that identifies participants will be viewed by the researcher only. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study contact

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- If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 271-3472, IRB@drake.edu, Drake University, Des Moines, Iowa 50311.

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document, and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant's Name (printed) _____

(Participant's Signature)

(Date)