Critical Inquiry, Instructional Leadership and Closing the Achievement Gap: Principal Learning in a University-School District Professional Development Program

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Abstract

Critical Inquiry, Instructional Leadership and Closing the Achievement Gap: Principal Learning in a University-School District Professional Development Program

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A study of school leadership in urban school districts touches central issues of educational transformation and elimination of the "achievement gap". This qualitative capstone study focused on eight K-12 Seattle School District principals completing a year-long School Leadership Program (SLP) course provided by the Center for Educational Leadership (CEL), associated with the University of Washington College of Education's Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (EdLPS) department. Study questions addressed principals' sensemaking of instructional leadership learning, the critical inquiry process and principal professional development.

Findings revealed the strong desire for SLP-type professional development—job-embedded, instructionally focused, and centered on school problems. Participants in the course also found opportunities for collegiality among leaders who seek equity and excellence.

SLP activities facilitated sensemaking of instructional leadership. A coached learning walk was significant in learning about powerful instruction. As well, creating a social context for learning, making content obviously relevant to practice and focusing on a few connected ideas around a single content area were important in ensuring principals' needs were met. Critical inquiry projects impacted sensemaking of instructional leadership by facilitating comprehension of a complex set of variables and aligning an intentional leadership response. But the findings showed that critical inquiry is highly demanding for the beginning user. Given the complexity of the process, it is not surprising that the first efforts of participants were incomplete. The limitations of

participants' development of critical inquiry underscore the need for continued engagement.

Modest gains were made in instructional leadership learning. But taking into account the complexity of the task, as well as the relatively short length of the course, this was an important beginning. Recommendations for district leaders included continuing and strengthening the SLP-district partnership, pursuing a "critical mass" strategy to increase participation; encouraging greater involvement in an in-district SLP; and relieving principals of site-management responsibilities to allow more time for instructional leadership development. Recommendations for CEL in developing future School Leadership Programs included increasing coached walkthroughs; focusing on a single subject area to facilitate sensemaking of content knowledge; supporting all aspects of instructional leadership work; and deepening engagement in critical inquiry.

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Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Problem of Practice

In this age of accountability and the increasing recognition of the "achievement gap" between mainstream and disadvantaged populations, how to assist all students to meet new and rigorous standards is an urgent question for researcher and educator alike. The disparities in learning between the haves and have-nots among our nation's children are pervasive and seemingly intractable. While acknowledging the continuing controversy regarding the authenticity of the aims of the "No Child Left Behind" act, it cannot be denied that enmeshed in these mandates is a major issue of social justice and equity, namely addressing the wide disparity in school performance between traditionally successful students and those who have high rates of failure—those from backgrounds of poverty, and with cultural, ethnic and linguistic differences:

> A sense of urgency pervades public education these days as students struggle to meet the high standards set by their state and the nation. Teachers are pressed as never before to improve education quality and equity. Achievement gaps persist, and parents of students who attend low-performing schools increasingly seek an escape from public education. The call for leadership is unmistakable—leadership that brings about significant improvement in learning and narrowing of achievement gaps (Knapp, Copland, Ford & Markholt 2003).

Clearly, major responsibility in combating these persistent inequities rests with the leadership of our schools.

A study of efforts to improve school leadership in urban school districts centers on a major theme of social justice and equity and is at the same time connected to a central issue of educational transformation. A recent Public Agenda/Wallace Foundation survey found that raising student achievement is now the top criterion for evaluating principals (Johnson, 2004). The demands of accountability outlined in this decade's "No Child Left Behind" initiative have, if anything, increased the urgency for leadership to reduce these inequities (Elmore, 2004; Johnson, 2004; Quinn, 2005).

The authorship of my capstone research stems from this urgency, having myself been born and educated in a diverse environment. As a practicing elementary principal for more than a decade, how to provide leadership that ensures that all students,

regardless of background, receive a rigorous and relevant education has been a central pursuit. But any person who has assumed the principalship with this motivation will testify to the overwhelming complexity of the task. One can spend an entire career and still be challenged to make sense of the shifting and swirling variables connected with combating the inequities in student success.

It was the desire to unlock this puzzle that first led me to become involved as a learner with the University of Washington Center for Educational Leadership (CEL), a third party intermediary organization associated with the University of Washington College of Education's Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (EdLPS) department. CEL features an explicit commitment to resolving issues of social justice and equity. Dedication to this same ideal also fuels this capstone study, which looks at my colleagues who are in the thick of leading a charge against the odds, with the ultimate goal of deriving lessons that will bolster all of our leadership efforts.

The study focuses on a group of Seattle School District principals who have aimed to strengthen their leadership by completing a year-long School Leadership Program (SLP) course provided by CEL, and describes how they made sense of the professional development experience jointly sponsored by the district and the University of Washington Center for Educational Leadership's School Leadership Program (SLP). Explicit attention was given to one particular aspect of the course content—the process of "critical inquiry", which was aimed at helping school leaders to shape their instructional leadership.

The specific research questions dealt with in this study are:

1. How have principals made sense of their learning about instructional leadership after the completion of a joint district-university professional development program?
2. How have principals used what they have learned about the critical inquiry process to make sense of and improve their instructional leadership?
3. What else was important to these principals in the professional development experience provided by the Center for Educational Leadership's School Leadership Program?

In the first chapters, I will describe the educational context for this study, outline the problems of practice, and establish a rationale for the topic. The account will continue by highlighting the supporting literature on instructional leadership, critical inquiry, principal professional development, and sensemaking that provide the framework for this investigation. I will then describe the methods of study. Following this will be a presentation of findings, and the conclusion that will include a set of recommendations.

The Educational Context for This Study

A description of the urban locale within which the principals work helps illustrate the issues they grapple with as they lead their schools. Further, the role of a university-based, third-party provider of professional development and the partnership it created with this city district provides another part of the backdrop against which the study takes place.

The Seattle School District

The Seattle Public Schools is the primary setting for the case investigation. Seattle typifies the situation of many large urban school districts in the U.S. At the time of this writing, district leadership has been in turmoil, with controversy over fiscal matters and the potential closure of schools. A number of superintendents have rotated in and out through the past decade. Its 45,000 student population is decidedly diverse, with 60% students of color, and with 42% qualifying for free and reduced lunch. Certain schools and neighborhoods have high concentrations of disadvantaged students who traditionally do not succeed, while others have populations who are relatively affluent. Although the district's overall performance in the benchmark Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) in 2006 approaches state averages, especially in the 4th grade, disaggregation shows an enormous achievement gap. In fourth grade, for example, there is an almost 30% difference between white and black students in meeting reading standards; in math it is 45%. In the same year, whites outperformed Hispanic students by 19% in reading and by 36% in math in the fourth grade (Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2006).

Seattle is a district in which the achievement gap, or "disproportionality" as it is referred to in numerous reports on Seattle Public Schools (see below), has been one of the most visible public issues for decades ("School District", 2003). But it is difficult to determine whether there has been a clear course of action for the district system. Since 1986, for example, a "Disproportionality Task Force" has been convened three times, each with representatives from various interest groups in the community. However, it was noted in news reports that "[w]hen Seattle's disproportionality action committee made its recommendations to the School Board in June, the report sounded remarkably similar to those of six and 16 years earlier ("Academic Gap", 2002)." In the most recent task force deliberations held in 2002, a conclusion was that "courageous conversations" about race were needed. From news descriptions of outcomes, resource allocation, desegregation and discipline were also major topics, but the only recommended action step that dealt with instruction was to prescribe a literacy teacher training program that district leaders promised would double the performance of African American students ("School District", 2003).

Clearly, such persistent disproportionality is a target for leadership initiatives in the Seattle School District. In fact, the "transformation plans", mandatory for all Seattle schools as documentation of school improvement under federal "No Child Left Behind" requirements, often detail such efforts. Improvement of instructional leadership is obviously an issue of high urgency.

The Center for Educational Leadership

The Center for Educational Leadership (CEL) is the third-party, fee-for-service provider of professional development to the Seattle principals in this study. As I will seek to explain how the principals think about and apply the professional development learnings from this course to their schools, CEL's Seattle School Leadership Program, together with the school district, is at the center of the study context.

CEL has a clearly articulated mission based on equity and social justice that guides its leadership development work (Center for Educational Leadership, 2005). The growth of instructional leadership capacity is at the center of CEL's work to achieve equity. CEL engages in two main areas of work, the first consisting of full partnerships

with a number of school districts on the west coast. The program side of CEL's work includes smaller scale services for individual educators, schools and districts. The School Leadership Programs (SLP's) are one of these enterprises.

The School Leadership Programs have been one of CEL's major areas of focus. The SLP is a year-long graduate-level course open to individual principals that has been offered since 2002. The in-district Seattle SLP came about in the 2005-2006 school year through a contractual relationship between CEL and Seattle Public Schools. In part, it was initiated through the efforts of a Seattle elementary principal familiar with CEL who worked with the district's professional development coordinator to put the SLP in place for one year on a trial basis.

The Seattle SLP, like the general attendance "all-comers" SLP's, featured monthly sessions focused on improving principals' instructional knowledge, and demonstrated current "best practice" in literacy and mathematics (see Appendix C, "Summary Memo, School Leadership Program"). The leadership component involved building an understanding of district and school context, clarity on how inequity operates with these contexts, the development of action resting on these understandings and a clear value orientation, and reflection on leadership practice. The culminating assignment of the course was to develop a project using the critical inquiry approach. Participants, through structured examination of school data and other information, identified a problem that manifested the "achievement gap" in their context. Then, participants developed an action plan for school improvement. Group assignments between sessions were aimed at embedding learnings into the principals' daily practice in a collegially supportive manner.

The critical inquiry framework for learning used by CEL is derived from several sources, but primarily the work of Sirotnik (1986; 1988) and Copland (2003). The framework is based on the notion that schools are centers where knowledge is generated through the process of action. Further, schools are places where change is engendered from within, rather than being a target of external reformers. The process of critical inquiry is intended to help clarify instructional leadership challenges and to assist the school leader in setting a direction and mobilizing the school for concerted action.

Copland's outline formed the basis for the problem-based inquiry projects assigned to all participants of the School Leadership Programs:

- Frame the problem: Develop an initial understanding of the problem
- Work from data: Seek information that bears upon and illustrates the problem
- Reframe to go deeper: Raise, check and clarify values, assumptions, beliefs embedded in the problem. How should we look at this?
- Take focused action: Generate possible solutions or strategies; decide on a solution, based on an identified 'theory of action'
- Evaluate: Assess your progress toward addressing the problem in light of the new data (Copland, 2003)

The term "theory of action" noted above will be often used throughout this study. Coined by Argyris and Schön (1974), it is a "theory of deliberate human behavior, which is for the agent a theory of control, but which, when attributed to the agent, also serves to explain or predict his behavior" (p. 6).

The Audience for this Research

This capstone research is aimed at all interested in better understanding how principals generally learn about and strengthen their instructional leadership. As well, those who study the use of the higher-level thinking and problem solving skills embedded in the critical inquiry approach would take interest in this study as well. The Center for Educational Leadership has a large stake in understanding this issue as critical inquiry is a central part of its curricula in much of its work. The analysis may have implications for how CEL presents critical inquiry in its professional development venues. This study helps to illuminate the depth of understanding and degree that this thinking process is used by principals in their leadership practice.

The research could also be of interest to school district leaders such as those in Seattle and current and future systems leaders who are or will be working in the area of strengthening school-level instructional leadership. Understanding the connection between the critical inquiry approach, as presented in the SLP course, with leadership for school improvement could prove useful if there are beneficial effects.

In the next section, I will describe features of the problem of practice that the Seattle School District principals grappled with through their work in the CEL School Leadership Program.

The Problem of Practice Addressed in this Inquiry: Instructional Leadership

Although the development of the Seattle School Leadership Program sought to address the district-specific needs for professional development, the leadership challenges addressed in the course were anything but local—in fact, they were endemic to the institution of American urban schools.

Much has been written about the seemingly intractable problem of ridding American schools of inequity of achievement. Many authors (Sarason, 1990; Fullan, 1993; Evans, 1996; Fullan, 2001; Elmore, 2000; Oakes, 2004; Spillane, 2002, Spillane, Reiser & Gomez, 2005) have offered explanations about a variety of obstacles, ranging from cultural, psycho-social, structural/institutional and political/economic, that have swallowed numerous attempts at transformation over the past decades.

In an attempt to grasp the enormity of the leadership challenge that the Seattle principals engaged in during the SLP, and to provide an important layer of perspective for understanding the later findings of this study, I will draw from some of these sources and briefly attempt to outline the problem of practice and its component parts that will center this investigation.

The problem of practice studied here focuses on the development of instructional leadership that can confront the obstacles to re-inventing schools. But to understand the components of this problem, it is important to examine the interconnections of instructional leadership to the issues it confronts. Each interconnection helps illuminate a specific challenge to the development of current-day instructional leadership.

The first component of the instructional leadership problem is that the quality of learning in schools that reduce the achievement gap requires deep restructuring of classroom practice. Secondly, the learning requirements for teaching professionals to effect such changes are equally deep and fraught with complexities. Third, school organizational and cultural conditions require a drastic revamping to support the needed renovation in teaching and learning. And lastly, the requisite changes in student learning,

teacher practice and the school context mean that precipitous challenges for the development of instructional leadership need to be resolved.

The four components of the problem confronting the development of instructional leadership are elaborated upon below:

Problem component #1: The quality of learning in schools that reduce the achievement gap requires a deep restructuring of classroom practice

There are many descriptive terms referencing the type of student learning that has had significant impact on achievement indicators in the standards era—"constructivist learning" (Fouts & Abbott, 2003), "teaching for meaning" (Knapp, 1995), "high-level curriculum" (Haycock, 2001), "powerful forms of teaching and learning" (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003) or "authentic pedagogy" (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). An expansive discussion of this type of learning is outside of the scope of this study. Whatever term is used, the common thread in each is the assumption that students today must interact with much more intellectually demanding content than in the past. Further, the means by which students engage in this rigorous content are radically different from traditional methods that have been rooted in a behaviorist paradigm. While all children benefit as a result of restructured teaching and learning, it is especially proscribed for historically underserved students if they are to meet challenging new learning standards.

For my purposes, I will rely on the findings from these researchers that the instructional approaches described above are central conditions for learning in classrooms in which mainstream and non-mainstream alike achieve at high levels (Knapp et al., 1995; Haycock,, 2001; Allington, 2001; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Knapp, et al. in examining high poverty schools and classrooms noted:

> Significant alternatives to this conventional wisdom [traditional approaches to teaching students in poverty—ed.]—in particular, what is widely described as "teaching for understanding" (e.g., Cohen, McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Brooks & Brooks 1993; Perkins & Blythe 1994)—have attracted the attention of educators and scholars in the past decade. These alternatives share a family resemblance (Means & Knapp, 1991). Each, in its own way, deemphasizes the teaching of discrete skills in isolation from the context in which these skills are applied. Each rests on the assumption that knowledge is less discrete, less separable into distinct subject and skill areas. Each fosters connections between academic learning and the world from which children come. And each views the

> children's cumulative experience of that world as a resource for learning; whatever deficiencies may exist in their capabilities or life circumstances, the children are viewed as being capable and possessing useful knowledge. To accomplish these goals, alternative instructional strategies in each area draw from a common pool of techniques, among them emphasis on discussion and extensive opportunities for engaging in the activities to which skills relate (writing, reading, solving mathematical problems) (p. 7).

Similarly, one study associated with achievement on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) by Fouts and Abbott (2003) concludes that constructivism, as defined by evidence of understanding, personal meaning, application of knowledge in real world contexts, active engagement, challenging curriculum and higher order thinking, was associated with a higher degree of school achievement even when controlled for variables such as family income.

Unfortunately, these practices are not yet the norm in American classrooms, especially those populated by disadvantaged students. Haycock (2001) illustrated the lack of rigor and depth in many of the high poverty classrooms she researched. Fouts and Abbott (2003) reported that while constructivist learning correlated with strong achievement on the WASL, high poverty classrooms were the least likely to see this type of instruction. Schmoker, in a recent review (2006) concurs with these observations.

Though far from widespread, the early experience in this period of reform demonstrates that greatly improving the quality of instruction makes a difference with traditionally underserved learners (Haycock, 2001; Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2002; Knapp, Copland et al., 2003; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Whatever the terminology, these approaches that share a "family resemblance" are the focus of system-wide improvement efforts. The "existence proof" that these researchers have provided has torn away any mystery regarding how to get all students, including disadvantaged students, to high levels of achievement. This reality also fuels the moral imperative to provide learning of this quality into every classroom and to every student.

Problem component #2: The learning requirements for the teaching professionals to effect such changes are equally deep and fraught with complexities.

The question that has vexed reformer and researcher alike for past decades, however, is how to provide students with the kind of learning described above. The

current standards movement calls for complex changes in instruction at an unprecedented level. The new standards require a watershed transformation in the way teachers understand and implement classroom teaching and learning.

As standards-based learning is often such a tremendous shift from how they learned as students, how they may have been trained as preservice teachers, and how they currently instruct, the teacher learning that is required is substantial, complex and difficult (Spillane, 2002). Complicating matters further, recent implementation studies, using what Spillane, et al. (2005) terms as a "distributed cognition framework" have surfaced the role of teachers' prior knowledge, or schema, about pedagogy as a further obstacle to new learning. Teachers in schools are not "blank slates"; as individuals they use prior knowledge as a framework to notice, make sense of, and interpret new knowledge. Thus, teachers may process new knowledge in ways that conform to an old schema. As a result, they may not notice or may even disregard parts of new knowledge that do not conform to their preconceived schema, and ultimately conceive of the reforms as minor changes to existing conceptions of instruction. Classroom instruction remains essentially unaltered. But even if teachers reach a level of understanding of the difference between past practice and what is intended in the new standards, they may still lack the sizeable knowledge structures needed to implement the new pedagogy (Spillane, 2002). The challenge for leaders, then, is to provide ways for teaching professionals to develop an acute awareness the deep discrepancy between old and new schemas of teaching and learning, and to engage in reconstruction of a foundation of knowledge conforming to intended changes in practice.

Problem component #3: School organizational and cultural conditions require a drastic revamping to support needed improvements in teaching and learning.

However, other research underlines the fact that the construction of new meaning is not a solo affair:

> Some recent implementation studies have underscored the influential role of social interactions as part of social context in the implementation process. Studies of the mediating role of teachers' professional communities in teachers' construction of messages about their practice from policy and other sources emphasize the importance of socially mediated sense-making in the implementation process (Coburn, 2001a; Stein & Brown, 1997). As members of

> a community interact over time on problems of shared concern, they negotiate meanings about the nature of their work and in some instances they forge shared understandings (Spillane et al., 2005, p. 56).

It can be deduced from this description that an important leadership task is to facilitate these social contexts that play such a significant role in constructing new meaning around transformed instructional practice. However, just as teachers are not blank slates, school organizations similarly contain conditions that require restructuring in order to for the abovementioned mediation of knowledge to occur.

Elmore (2000) describes "loose coupling" as an organizational and cultural characteristic that helps schools resist reform. "Loose coupling" had its roots in early 20th century industrial models of schooling, and mechanistic, behaviorist transmission of knowledge to students by teachers with minimal skill (Tyack & Hansot, 1982; Nelson, 1988; Burney, 2004). One of the durable results of this model, which has changed little in form over the decades, was the weak professionalization of teachers and the highly isolated world of the classroom teacher (Schmoker, 2006, citing Lortie, 1975; Goodlad, 1984; Powell, Farrar, and Cohen, 1985; Little, 1987, 1990). Further, isolation is strongly reinforced by cultural norms (consistent with and arising from the existing structure) that regard autonomy, inviolability of discretion and privacy within the four walls of the classroom as the badge of professionalism (Burney, 2004). The result is working conditions ill-suited to developing professional relationships that effectuate the deeper work of constructing new meaning around instruction.

Absent the restructuring of this situation, professional isolation and the norms reinforcing it explain why successful instructional practices growing out of research or examples of good practice do not transfer to more than a fraction of classrooms and schools, despite flurries of reform efforts—it is because acknowledging, studying, replicating and disseminating successful practice comes down to individual discretion. As well, the description of a "loosely coupled" school organization helps to make sense why practices that reinforce underachievement, especially among the most disadvantaged, can be so pervasive and obstinate—autonomy and individual discretion are a higher imperative than acquiring rigorous shared knowledge and skill (Elmore, 2000).

Another feature of "loose coupling" involves the role of school leadership (Elmore, 2000). Under the industrial model of the early 20th century, the business of school administration was that of management, not pedagogy. This meant that by default, decision-making regarding implementation of curriculum and instruction (described as the "technical core" of education by Elmore) which had become increasingly complex over the decades, devolved more and more to individual classroom teachers. This division of labor also meant that the function of administration became evermore engaged in the management of the structures and processes around instruction, rather than instruction itself. Elmore explains how the administrative superstructure serves to provide the appearance of "rational" management that satisfies the public while obscuring the actual quality or legitimacy of the technical core. The more publicly visible tasks of managing the system by school boards and system level leaders (budgeting, managing, dealing with disruptions, and engaging in decision-making) reinforce this external demeanor.

In serving this capacity, the administrative superstructure has become, in fact, a "buffer" the surrounds the often weak, uncertain technical core from external scrutiny and interference (Elmore, 2000). The buffering function creates what Elmore labels the "logic of confidence" among the public, or in other words, the appearance of rationality noted above. Added to this scenario, is an unstable and often incoherent policy environment in states and local districts. However, even as the stormy shifts and frequent zigzags in policy occur at higher levels of the system, the quality of "loose coupling" and the surrounding superstructure ensures that reform has often remained external to teacher-student interaction, and ensures that minimal broad-scale change actually occurs. "Loose-coupling" offers a strong explanation for a number of pathologies frequently encountered by educational reformers. The task for leaders, then, is to engage in major restructuring to develop a more professional and collegial working environment that is consistent with deep adult learning.

Problem component #4: The requisite changes in student learning, teacher practice and the school context mean that precipitous challenges for the development of instructional leadership need to be resolved.

Given the complexity of the first three components of the problem of practice, it is not difficult to understand the oft-cited finding that effective leadership at the school level is a major factor in developing instruction that will advance student achievement—specifically principal instructional leadership (Elmore, 2000, 2005; Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2002; Knapp, et al., 2003; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Togneri & Anderson, 2003; Shannon & Bylsma, 2004; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005). This finding outlines an essential part of the foundation of school improvement.

A leadership response to the first three problem components spans extensive territory. First of all, in order to lead the process of attaining the quality of learning described above, it is obvious that a principal must be clear about what it is, and what it looks like (Stein & D'Amico, 2000; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Stein & Nelson, 2003). Next, from the above account, an instructional leader must then facilitate opportunities for deep professional learning (Elmore, 2000; Blase & Blase, 2000; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, et al., 2005). And third, principals must restructure organizational and cultural conditions, providing direction so that a context is created for socially mediated learning (Murphy, 1990; Elmore, 2000; Blase & Blase, 2000; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Leithwood, Seashore, et al., 2004; Marzano, et al., 2005). Thus, the instructional leadership responsibility of a principal is as massive as it is complex.

However, the urgent need to develop instructional leadership generates three major challenges that constitute the focus of this study. First, it appears that strong principal leadership is in short supply, especially that which would succeed against the stubborn obstacles in the way of reform. Elmore (2000) observes:

> Public schools and school systems, as they are presently constituted, are simply not led in ways that enable them to respond to the increasing demands they face under standards-based reform. Further if schools, school systems and their leaders respond to standards-based reforms the way they have responded to other attempts at broad scale reform of public education over the past century, they will

> fail massively and visibly with an attendant loss of public confidence and serious consequences for public education (p. 2).

Elmore goes on to acknowledge the many exceptions to the rule, visionary leaders who overcome great odds, and specifically those who are strong instructional leaders. However, he notes that engendering this type of school leadership on a broad, system-wide scale has been largely unsuccessful. Camburn, Rowan and Taylor (2003), citing studies that established instructional leadership as a factor for learning improvement, also noted the same research concluded that a typical present-day principal is more often engaged in management tasks than with instruction. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) observed that there is currently a renewed focus on improving school leadership at the policy level, citing major reports dating back over a decade providing a rationale for improvement of principals' performance, and noting the framing of new evaluation standards such as those developed by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). Clearly, the future of school reform will be hobbled unless ways are found to address these deficiencies. How can leadership skill and knowledge be improved by practicing school leaders?

The quest to develop instructional leadership is further complicated by a second challenge. Providing a clear definition of instructional leadership has proven to be exceedingly complex (Heck, 1992; Hallinger, Bickman & Davis, 1996; Leithwood & Duke, 1999; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, Marzano, et al., 2005). Past studies that have attempted to trace a direct link between principals' behavior and the learning of students have been inconclusive. The more recent studies, attending to the murkier area of the indirect linkages between leadership and student performance have succeeded in determining a positive relationship (Heck, 1992; Hallinger, et al., 1996; Leithwood & Duke, 1999; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, Marzano, et al., 2005). But what are the critical attributes of this leadership activity? And how well are they understood in the world of practice? And once understood, do principals have the knowledge and skill to exercise this type of leadership?

A third challenge, related to the first two, is that if the instructional leadership of principals is a critical factor for school and student success, what is known about how

practicing principals acquire these knowledge and skills? I find little on this subject, although there are some writings on pre-service preparation. Leithwood, et al. (2004), in a major review of leadership research, concurs, noting that not much is known about the types of experiences that enhance capacity to guide the learning improvement process.

Capstone focus: Studying a response to the problem of developing instructional leadership

This capstone study centers on the challenges of learning and developing instructional leadership practice outlined in Problem Component #4; namely, given a definition of instructional leadership, how can a district's principals increase their knowledge and practice on a broad, system-wide scale? The research questions are again reiterated here:

1. How have principals made sense of their learning about instructional leadership after the completion of a joint district-university professional development program?
2. How have principals used what they have learned about the critical inquiry process to make sense of and improve their instructional leadership?
3. What else was important to these principals in the professional development experience provided by the Center for Educational Leadership's School Leadership Program?

To assist the examination of these questions, in the following chapter I first define sensemaking as an overarching framework that helps illuminate the learning needs of professionals effecting needed changes in student learning. Then, I will outline the specific major categories of instructional leadership emerging in the literature found to contribute to learning improvement—setting and fostering adherence to an organizational direction, developing the instructional capacity of others, and restructuring the organization to build a professional learning community (Murphy, 1990; Hallinger et al., 1996; Hallinger & Heck, 1999; Leithwood, et al., 2004; Marzano, et al., 2005). I will then look at the critical inquiry approach, a central part of the SLP course, as a sensemaking process aimed at improving instructional leadership. Finally, I will explore what is known about principal professional development.

Chapter 2: Framing Ideas

In order to understand the significance of the questions in this study, I will examine where they are situated in the literature. First, I will explore the literature on sensemaking as an integrating framework connecting the other knowledge bodies with each other. Second, I will examine instructional leadership in order to create the working definition used in this study. Third, I will consider the critical inquiry process, its supporting literature, and its connections to how principals effectively enact instructional leadership. Fourth, to provide background regarding how principals learn the critical inquiry process, principal professional development will be investigated. Within each of the latter three areas of knowledge, their link to sensemaking will be explained. The chapter will conclude by tying together these sets of ideas into a conceptual framework to help understand this study of principal learning.

Sensemaking

Sensemaking theory will be used to provide a structure to organize and integrate the important concepts that provide the conceptual framework in my case investigation of principals. Sensemaking scrutinizes how people make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness (Patton, 2002) or, more precisely, how an individual notices and interprets stimuli, and how the stimuli interact with prior knowledge, beliefs, values and emotions to construct new meaning (Spillane, Reiser & Reimer, 2002). Sensemaking provide the basis of individual enactment, as in the case of an implementer of change in an organization such as a school. Further, sensemaking theory examines how an interactive web of social context, artifacts, symbols, language and other cues provides both a backdrop and a constituting element to an individual enactor's sensemaking. These understandings are highly important to the implementation of the deep reforms needed to restructure learning outlined in Chapter 1. The quality of sensemaking of the actors within a school has direct implications on the depth of the transformation of practice within its classrooms.

What is sensemaking?

Sensemaking derives its methods from organizational theory on the cognitive processes found within organizations. Sensemaking is a term originated by Weick (1995)

to describe the cognitive process of constructing "sensible" and "sensable" events (p. 4). Sensemaking "structure(s) the unknown" (p. 4), and places information within frameworks that allow comprehension and the expression of meaning.

Weick (1995) outlined seven properties of sensemaking:

Sensemaking relates to identity. A core function of sensemaking deals with the continual interaction of self with the environment in order to meet these three self-derived needs that define ones identity: 1) a positive cognitive and affective state about the self, 2) the self-perception of competency and efficaciousness, and 3) self-consistency and coherence (Weick 1995). A leader, for example, is constantly redefining his/her leadership in the process of interaction with the organization.

Sensemaking is retrospective. Weick (1995) notes that one aspect of sensemaking involves a process of capturing mental objects from the continuum of an individual's past "meaningful lived experience". These mental representations from one's experience interact with cues from the present environment to construct meaning.

Sensemaking is enactive. Sensemaking is not merely an act of comprehending meaning; it also involves creating action which engenders further meaning. While the external context forces individuals to contend with and to make sense of it, the quality of enactment acknowledges human agency in its ability to in turn respond to and shape the environment. In so doing, individuals and groups create constraints and opportunities that they end up facing.

Sensemaking is social. "Sensemaking is never solitary because what a person does internally is contingent on others" (Weick, 1995, p. 40). This is true "whether those others are imagined or physically present" (Weick 1995, p. 39). Sensemaking focuses on the relationship of individual meaning-making to the social context in which it occurs. Sensemaking is ongoing. Weick (1995) describes the constant stream of events within organizations in which people are immersed from which they derive cues to make meaning: "Sensemaking never starts. People are always in the middle of things, which become things, only when those same people focus on the past from some point beyond it...To understand sensemaking is to be sensitive to the ways in which people chop moments out of continuous flows and extract cues from those moments" (p. 43).

Sensemaking focuses on extracted cues. From the seemingly infinite stream of stimuli in an environment, "[e]xtracted cues are simple familiar structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring" (Weick 1995, p. 50). Context determines what cues were extracted in the first place, and also determines what the extracted cue will become. They are crucial to the creation of a point of reference, and the action that is derived from such meanings.

Sensemaking focuses on plausibility. Rather than an exact representation of reality which would be overwhelming to construct, sensemaking deals with an approximation of it that is "plausible". The function of plausibility in sensemaking has to do with constructing the "filters" that "separate signal from noise....if they are not to be overwhelmed with data" (Weick 1995, p. 57). As well, it relates to the elaboration of extracted cues (which are only a small portion of the actual amount of stimuli) into larger meanings ("sense").

Sensemaking and educational reform

Sensemaking theory has guided the approach used by a growing number of studies looking at how leaders and teachers cope with the new environment of standards and accountability (Coburn 2001; Leithwood, et al. 2004; Louis, Febey et al. 2005; Spillane 2002, 2005; Spillane et al., 2001; Spillane et al., 2002). Leithwood, et al. (2004) point out that sensemaking provides for explanatory power in understanding the dynamics of change. Sensemaking studies the cognitive processes of school actors in a context, and how they relate to the difficulties, shortcomings or success in implementation of reforms. In so doing, it creates vast implications for school leadership.

Spillane (2001) holds that the study of sensemaking goes beyond the "what" of implementation, and gives attention to the intricacies of "how" implementation is conceived and enacted. Spillane, et al. (2002) developed a sensemaking framework in two stages: 1) the individual implementing agent as sensemaker 2) the implementing agent in a social context.

The implementing agent as sensemaker. Spillane outlines how studies of cognition illustrate how individuals' repertoire of prior understandings and experiences shape sensemaking and the subsequent individual implementation of educational reform.

Individuals make use of the known to interpret the new. These knowledge structures, also known as schemas, mental models, or frames of reference (Spillane et al. 2002) link together concepts that guide the assimilation of new information. Once constructed, these structures are extremely durable. New information (analogous to Weick's [1995] "cues") is categorized within these knowledge structures in such a manner as to make the unfamiliar, familiar (Weick's "plausibility"). Information that is discrepant to these frameworks, rather than resulting in change, is often overlooked, disregarded or rejected out of hand (Spillane, et al.).

As different individuals may have different schema, new information may be interpreted in equally differing ways. For implementation purposes, this may be problematic as educational reform initiatives can be interpreted in ways that could be far from what policy-makers intended. As examples, Spillane, et al. (2002) detailed studies of mathematics and science initiatives aimed at major transformation of pedagogy that found that many teachers constructed understandings conforming more to their existing schema in these subject areas, resulting in mischaracterizations of the reforms as minor changes in practice:

> Thus the sense-making framework implies that learning new ideas such as certain standards-based instructional approaches is not simply an act of encoding these new ideas; it may require restructuring a complex of existing schemas, and the new ideas are subject to the danger of being seen as minor variations of what is already understood rather than as different in critically important ways (Spillane, et al., 2005, p. 51).

Individual history is a factor in the development of knowledge structures. Spillane, et al. (2005) in an implementation study of mathematics reform, identified different life histories of teachers (including when and how they learned mathematics, as well as when and how they were trained as preservice teachers) affected how they made sense of, and responded to, the information contained in these initiatives.

Furthermore, sensemaking has an affective component (Weick, 1995; Spillane, 2002) that tends to bias individuals toward interpretations of new information consistent with their prior beliefs and values. This can have an effect of preserving the status quo among an interactive social group. On the other hand, emotions and values can be a strong transformative factor in sensemaking leading to change, especially if there is a

moral commitment and a sense of shared responsibility involved. Self-image may also play a role; if the new initiative calls into question individual feelings of competency and confidence, adoption of the ideas could be in jeopardy (Spillane, 2002).

Spillane et al. (2002) emphasizes that major transformations in pedagogy will require an equally profound restructuring of many teachers' schema about the target subject:

> ...because the reforms press for instructional changes that require teachers and other school personnel to give up existing schemas or frameworks for thinking about instructional practice. They will have to unlearn a considerable amount of what they already know and believe about instruction....Policies that seek more complex and fundamental changes in local behavior are more prone to implementation problems because they require such fundamental changes in implementing agents' knowledge structures (p. 415).

This deep restructuring of individual schema is extremely difficult. Such transformations require first of all, a clear recognition of the yawning discrepancy between old schema and the new information. Secondly, "sustained engagement with a sequence of problematic ideas and an explicit goal of making sense of them and reconsidering what is already 'known' are required" (Spillane 2005, p. 53).

The implementing agent in a social context. Spillane (2002), in a similar manner as Weick (1995), outlines how sensemaking occurs in a social context. Spillane outlines an overlapping set of contexts, from the macro level (such as the state or district) to the micro (informal groupings within a school) that interact with sensemaking. Studies of implementation have also traced how, for example, the role of teachers' professional communities were powerful mediating forces in the development of meaning around policy initiatives in areas such as literacy or mathematics (Coburn, 2001, Spillane, et al., 2002). Such contexts can be a double-edged sword; they can serve to reinforce conservative tendencies as groupings with similar worldviews congregate to preserve meanings that conform to old schemas. At the same time, social context can play a powerful role in mediating the development of new idea structures:

> Teachers whose enactment zones extended beyond their individual classrooms to include frequent and ongoing deliberations with other teachers and other experts about the policy proposals and their implications for practice understood the standards in ways that resonated with policymakers' proposals. Those teachers

> undertook fundamental changes in their instructional practice, changing its core in response to the standards. Most teachers in the study, however, had enactment zones that were mostly private and individualistic and afforded them few opportunities to grapple with the meaning of policymakers' proposals for revising practice. They undertook less fundamental, frequently surface-level, changes in their practice. Thus, although the teachers in this study all received the same policy message, the presence of a social context that supported productive group sense-making led to more substantial engagement with the policy ideas (Spillane et al., 2002, p. 407).

This quote also illustrates that aside from informal groupings, organizational arrangements can impact sensemaking. The classic description of a "loosely coupled" (Elmore, 2000) school organization, with its "egg-carton" structure reinforcing isolation, privacy, and individual discretion comes to mind. On the other hand, restructuring professional relationships that break down the walls separating teachers positively impacts the development of sensemaking and the resultant construction of new schema around pedagogy.

Spillane (2001) points out that the environment in which sensemaking takes place does not just consist of the human actors, but is "situated" amongst a complex web of things that serve as cues with which individuals interact. He gives the analogy that a pilot's cognitive processes in landing an airplane can be best understood within a framework of the social and material context of the entire cockpit; here they can be best understood as the interaction with the various layers of social context, artifacts such as curriculum, standards documents, assessment information and other material supports. As well, a situated perspective examines implementation as it evolves over time. An understanding of sensemaking is diminished by abstracting it from the context in which it took place.

Through utilization of the lens of sensemaking, this study aims at a more detailed and deeper understanding of the instructional leadership challenge school leaders face in their environments. The challenge of profoundly transforming classroom practice so that students have opportunities to engage in more intellectually demanding learning rests squarely on teachers' ability to engage in deep sensemaking around re-invented pedagogy. The challenge of leading teachers to successfully engage in this sensemaking

and transformation of practice lies at the heart of principals' instructional leadership. In the next section of this chapter, I first define instructional leadership and then look at how sensemaking provides a framework for understanding leadership effects on the school context. In the third section, a sensemaking framework aids in understanding how leaders can "make sense" of their instructional leadership learning through use of the critical inquiry process. Finally, in the last section of this chapter, I will also scrutinize how principal professional development helps school leaders' own sensemaking processes.

Instructional Leadership

Developing the instructional leadership of principals is a central issue in the quest for improving student learning and meeting current accountability challenges (Quinn, 2002; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Duvall & Wise, 2004; Elmore, 2004; Chisman, 2005; Elmore, 2005; Ruff & Shoho, 2005). However, defining instructional leadership has proven to be a complex endeavor. There appear to be a variety of ways to portray instructional leadership, and the warrant for its practices. As well, the nature of the principal's effects on student learning has been poorly understood in the past (Hallinger, et al., 1996).

One reason for this ambiguity of articulation on the topic may have to do with the profile of the large body of literature. Though there have been studies that find a relationship between the variables of instructional leadership and student learning, the conclusions drawn depend much on how examination of the relationship took place. "Bivariate" investigations, in which a direct link is traced between principal behaviors and student achievement have proven to be ambiguous and conflicting (Hallinger, et al., 1996; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Leithwood, et al., 2004). Leithwood identified three major types of instructional leadership studies. The first were quantitative studies tracing the effects of leadership to student learning. The studies found limited, but significant, effects. The second were qualitative studies, often of exemplary cases in which leadership made an exceptional difference. The improvements described in these studies, as to be expected, were quite considerable. The third type of study examined the effects of specific qualities of leadership measured quantitatively. These syntheses studies made

a moderately successful attempt at establishing a correlational relationship between leadership and student learning. Despite the inherent difficulty in defining terms and establishing clear linkages between instructional leadership and the improved learning of students, a considerable amount of literature of different types has posited the claim that school leadership does indeed make a significant difference (Andrews, 1987; Heck, 1992; Hallinger, et al., 1996; Hallinger & Heck, 1999; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Marks & Printy, 2003; Marzano, et al., 2005).

But recent studies attending to the indirect linkages between leadership and student performance have been more definite in determining a positive relationship. The answer seems to lie in the major finding that leadership effects exercised themselves on "mediative" variables, which in turn impacted the quality of student learning (Hallinger et al., 1996; Blase & Blase, 2000; Blase & Blase, 2001; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Marzano, et al., 2005):

> More robust conceptualizations of principal leadership suggest that the effects of principal leadership are most likely to occur indirectly through the principal's efforts to influence those who come into direct contact with students in the instructional setting (Hallinger et al., 1996, p. 531).

And:

> Theoretically defensible models of principal effects incorporate intervening variables into causal chains that link principal leadership to student outcomes... The findings suggest that elementary school principals who are perceived by teachers as strong instructional leaders promote student achievement through their influence on features of the school-wide learning climate. We believe that exploration of these indirect paths through which principals influence student learning represents the most potentially productive approach to understanding the principal's role in school effectiveness (Hallinger et al., 1996, p. 543).

The significance of establishing this "causal chain" from principal leadership to student achievement is that it greatly assists in giving the knowledge base on instructional leadership more definition (Hallinger et al., 1996).

What, then, are the interactions between school leadership and mediative variables that can realize positive results in student achievement? Examining the literature reveals an interesting convergence. There are authors who differ in terminology, but appear to have parallel ideas groupable under three similarly named

categories (Leithwood, et al., 2004). Hallinger and Heck describe these interactions as "purposes", "people", and "structures and social systems" (Hallinger & Heck, 1999). Leithwood's categories are "setting directions", "developing people" and "redesigning organizations" (Leithwood, 1996; Leithwood, et al., 2004). Conger and Kanungo list "visioning strategies", "efficacy-building strategies", and "context-changing strategies" (Conger & Kanungo, 1998). Murphy emphasized sets of activities with implications for instruction: developing the school mission and goals; coordinating, monitoring, and evaluating curriculum, instruction and assessment; promoting a climate for learning; and creating a supportive work environment (Murphy, 1990). The more specific competencies in the literature, such as Marzano's 21 leadership practices (Marzano, et al., 2005), seem to align with the abovementioned broader categories (Leithwood, et al., 2004). Glickman's (1985) and Smith and Andrews' (1989) observations, or Blase and Blase's two major themes with eleven subcategories (Blase & Blase, 2000), would also fit as well, if looked at as ways in which principals interact with the factors that influence student learning. As well, some of the imperatives regarding the instructional skill and knowledge set required by school leaders outlined by Elmore (2000) and Stein (Stein, et al., 2000; Stein et al., 2003) can correspond to the groupings, in the category of "efficacy building strategies". The terminology used by the different authors will be combined to name the three major categories: 1) Setting and fostering adherence to an organizational direction 2) Developing the instructional capacity of others 3) Restructuring the organization and building a professional learning community. The next section will relate these categories to the sensemaking process.

Instructional leadership and sensemaking

The first section of this chapter traced the indispensable need for teachers to engage in deep sensemaking processes, to reconstruct their knowledge structures around instructional practice to the point in which they are implemented in the way that they were intended. Instructional leadership can be characterized as leadership of these processes. As Hallinger et al (1996) pointed out, a principal's impact on "mediative variables" is an indirect but decidedly important means by which he/she affects student learning. In this meaning, teacher sensemaking is the most overarching "mediative

variable" impacted by a principal's instructional leadership. Teacher sensemaking, in turn, will directly impact how instructional practice in the classroom is restructured. Framed in this manner, a leader is not only a maker of meaning, a "sense-maker", but in his/her interactions with the organization, he/she is a "sense-giver", one who:

> ...alters or guides the manner in which his followers 'mind' the world by giving it a compelling 'face.' A leader at work is one who gives others a different sense of the meaning of that which they do by recreating it in a different form, a different 'face,' in the same way that a pivotal painter or sculptor or poet gives those who follow him (or her) a different way of 'seeing'—and therefore saying and doing and knowing in the world. A leader does not tell it 'as it is'; he tells it as it might be, giving what 'is' thereby a different face (Weick, 1995, p. 10, quoting Thayer, 1988, p. 250).

How does a leader facilitate sensemaking that will construct new knowledge, practice and accompanying values and beliefs through work in the three categories of instructional improvement?

Setting and fostering adherence to an organizational direction. Leadership practices in this category include "identifying and articulating a vision, fostering group goals and creating high performance expectations" (Leithwood, et al., 2004, p. 24). Hallinger, et al., (1996) clarified what was meant by school mission; what is clear is that the meaning goes beyond the mere development of a "mission statement":

> School mission refers to the school's orientation toward improving student learning. Mission reflects the degree to which teachers share the view that student learning is the school's preeminent goal. Prior research on school improvement has shown that schools in which there is a clear, academically oriented mission are better able to make decisions in the interests of students and to allocate resources toward the improvement of teaching and learning....This indicates that principals may be able to influence teaching and learning effectiveness through their role in developing a shared school-wide mission (p. 534).

Elmore (2000) described how effective schools possessed collegiality that focused a school's purpose and "translates those purposes into tangible activities related to teaching" (p. 16). This process is in itself a form of sensemaking described by Weick (1995) involving the "extracting of cues" from the environment, and developing "simple familiar structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring" (Weick, 1995, p. 50), thus providing "plausible" meaning to the activity of

those in the organization. A leader can have great effect on a school faculty's sensemaking by constructing shared goals or purpose. Such elements as vision/mission/purpose that are compelling, and challenging, but achievable help people to make sense of their work. Setting direction provides members of the organization with a value-based rationale for the momentous enterprise of changing instructional practice to meet the learning needs of all students.

Developing the instructional capacity of others. School leaders cannot rely on a common direction to foster improvement. They must also be directly responsible for increasing the instructional capacity of teaching staff. To engage in this work, leaders must themselves have engaged in deep sensemaking in order to recast their knowledge of pedagogy. As well, they must have the personal qualities to effectively provide individualized support. With this knowledge base, leaders can mediate and guide the sensemaking of individual teachers around instructional improvement. They can orchestrate the experiences that help individuals understand the wide discrepancy between old schemas of practice and the new, and organize the support (directly or through proxies) that helps people recreate new knowledge structures. These leaders can ensure the "sustained engagement with a sequence of problematic ideas and an explicit goal of making sense of them and reconsidering what is already 'known'" (Spillane, 2005, p. 53) necessary to build new schema. By exercising this role, school leaders can have a major effect on the efficacy of those who instruct students.

Restructuring the organization and building a professional learning community. Sensemaking is engendered in social contexts and is situated in a web of relationships, artifacts, and time. A leader plays an indispensable role in the creation of these learning contexts and developing the distributed leadership (leadership outside of formal position) to help guide the activity of these structures. By doing so, an instructional leader alters the longstanding "loosely coupled" (Elmore, 2000) organizational context that has shielded isolation and privacy, and removes the "buffer" that has historically obstructed the involvement of school leaders in the core activity of instruction. This is yet another support for the sustained reconstruction of new practice that requires time and extensive efforts. The literature often refers to "professional community" that features

organizational structures such as study groups, "communities of practice", "professional learning communities" and peer coaching that foster strong cultures oriented toward student achievement and increasing adult instructional capabilities (Eaker, DuFour & DuFour, 2002; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002; Schmoker, 2006)

To summarize, the three descriptions of the above categories represent a framework for examining the interactions between leadership and the various school factors that impact student learning. An important caution is worth mentioning here. Hallinger warns that how the interactions occur can vary considerably across different contexts, and that the different environments in which leaders work have a great impact on how effective leadership is shaped (Hallinger, et al., 1996). However, Leithwood argues in his major review of school and district leadership research that these three categories appear in all successful contexts (Leithwood, et al., 2004). The three categories within instructional leadership will assist our examination of how principals effectuate this type of leadership through the use of the critical inquiry process.

Critical Inquiry

This study examines the "critical inquiry" approach in CEL's curriculum as a thinking process integrally tied to strengthening and enabling principal instructional leadership. Critical inquiry as a process pre-dates the current standards era, and was developed as a response to the dismal failure of educational reform in the 1980's to reach a broad scale. Sirotnik (1986; 1988) was an early advocate for an inquiry-based approach to school reform. Criticizing top-down reform strategies that made the school a target of intervention, Sirotnik supported the idea that schools could instead be "centers of educational change". He pointed out that the professional practice of principals and teachers provided a rich source for "critical thinking, dialogue, decision making, action-taking, and evaluation in educational change and improvement efforts" (1986, p. 91). Sirotnik unabashedly averred that the process of interacting with problems of practice is not value-free, but instead is inextricably connected to human purposes that are entwined with social justice and equity. It is this characteristic that put the "critical" in critical inquiry. Engaging in critical inquiry meant to wrestle with the explicit question, "whose interests are served by the way things are?" Critical inquiry was seen by Sirotnik as a

means to give leadership of school renewal authenticity, depth and a powerful impetus. The process aimed at developing reflective and empowered agents of reform in the school.

The warrant for the critical inquiry approach was outlined more extensively by Copland (2003). Sirotnik's and Copland's ideas are infused in the "critical inquiry" approach that is a central part of the Center for Educational Leadership's work with school leaders:

- Frame the problem: Develop an initial understanding of the problem
- Work from data: Seek information that bears upon and illustrates the problem
- Reframe to go deeper: Raise, check and clarify values, assumptions, beliefs embedded in the problem. How should we look at this?
- Take focused action: Generate possible solutions or strategies; decide on a solution, based on an identified 'theory of action'
- Evaluate: Assess your progress toward addressing the problem in light of the new data (Copland, 2003)

What differentiates this framework from other inquiry outlines is the fact that the third item intentionally embeds the "critical" aspect of critical inquiry into the process. With the inclusion of the essential step of connecting the examination of the school to a larger set of values, critical inquiry fulfills the intent of its use as an instrument for social justice and equity.

Understanding the framework is facilitated by looking at its parts. First of all, an intentionally dialectical approach toward the process of knowing, Sirotnik and Copland hold, does not focus unmindfully on the implementation of solutions, but through a series of questions first concentrates on the problem itself, as a means to more deeply understand the school context and respond to its actual needs.

A fully-formed inquiry process also needs to be illuminated by data of all kinds in seeking information that bears upon and illustrates the problem, as the problem is situated in a much larger body of knowledge outside of the school context. The deeper knowledge generated by the practitioners themselves finding out more about the problem can also help to fully shed light on the situation.

In reframing to go deeper and raising, checking and clarifying values, assumptions, beliefs embedded in the problem and asking the question how should we

look at this? those who engage in critical inquiry connect the analysis of the problem with how it is a case illustrating a problem of equity, values and moral purpose.

Most importantly, critical inquiry is aimed not just at understanding for its own sake, but to develop focused action: Generate possible solutions or strategies; decide on a solution, based on an identified 'theory of action'.

And finally, evaluate and assess progress toward addressing the problem in light of the new data (Copland, 2003). This presentation of critical inquiry advises that the process does not have a finite ending, but is instead a cycle that includes constant evaluation and reflection.

Critical inquiry, instructional leadership and sensemaking

In analyzing the critical inquiry process, one can draw out clear relationships between critical inquiry, instructional leadership and sensemaking. Examining school leadership literature emerging in the era of standards-based reform after Sirotnik outlined these ideas produces an interesting harmony between some of his basic arguments surrounding critical inquiry and categories of practice that enable instructional leadership. The concurrences center on the findings in the above-mentioned section on instructional leadership that leaders that positively impact student learning do not limit themselves to encouraging strong classroom instruction (developing the instructional capacity of others), but are equally effective at creating a compelling adherence to goal-directed work and a vision of the future that promotes high levels of motivation (setting and fostering adherence to an organizational direction) as well as professional collaboration (restructuring the organization to build a professional learning community). As the three categories of instructional leadership help facilitate sensemaking of teachers about instructional practice, critical inquiry can be seen as helping leaders to make better sense of instructional leadership.

To illustrate how critical inquiry facilitates sensemaking of instructional leadership, let us look at one facet of the inquiry process, determining the problem. Copland (2003) noted, as Sirotnik (1986; 1988), that a clear notion by all of the system actors in a school of what constitute the important problems provides a foundation for a

strong consensus within a school. Absent this, a leader's efforts to set an organizational direction can easily become unfocused.

Weick (1995) cites Schön in describing problem-framing by a leader is in itself a form of sensemaking:

> In real-world practice, problems do not present themselves to the practitioners as givens. They must be constructed from the materials of problematic situations which are puzzling, troubling, and uncertain. In order to convert a problematic situation to a problem, a practitioner must do a certain kind of work. He must make sense of an uncertain situation that initially makes no sense. When professionals consider what road to build, for example, they deal usually with a complex and ill-defined situation in which geographic, topological, financial, economic, and political issues are all mixed up together (p. 9, quoting Schön, 1983, p. 40).

Weick, in citing Shotter, further illustrates that determining the problem is likened to authoring a conversation leading to a sense of purpose, describing it as:

> ....not one of choosing but of generating, of generating a clear and adequate formulation of what the problem situation 'is,' of creating from a set of incoherent and disorderly events a coherent 'structure' within which both current actualities and further possibilities can be given an intelligible 'place'—and of doing all this, not alone, but in continual conversation with all the others who are involved (p. 9, quoting Shotter, 1993, p. 150, 152).

Problem-framing as a form of sensemaking is reminiscent of Weick's process of "extracting cues" from a chaos of stimuli in the environment: "[e]xtracted cues are simple familiar structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring" (Weick, p. 50). A principal who brings the organization into the dialogue about the problems of student learning he/she has framed in a school context begins the process of shaping a sense of urgency that can lead to creation of a common mission, vision and purpose, a form of "sense-giving" to the rest of the school organization. The actions of a leader in this work are highly significant. In the studies examining leadership effects, mission and goals were cited as the most prominent mediative variable (along with classroom instruction) that school leaders had an influence on (Hallinger & Heck, 1999; Elmore, 2000; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Elmore (2000) cited numerous studies finding that goal-focused activity was key in making collegiality

translate into changed classroom practice within a school; without this connection, collegiality did not result in improvement.

Another facet of the inquiry process that seems connected to setting direction and fostering adherence to it is bringing information that bears on the issue. This is an aspect of critical inquiry that relates to the retrospective aspect of sensemaking, in the use of integrating mental representations from past experience with cues from the present environment to better help actors "make sense" of the issue.

The third facet, reframing to go deeper: raise, check and clarify values, assumptions, beliefs embedded in the problem, connects to that aspect of instructional leadership that influences members of the organization to adopt purpose, vision, mission and goals. This is another aspect of leadership sensemaking and "sense-giving" to the organization:

> When we set the problem, we select what we will treat as the 'things' of the situation, we set the boundaries of our attention to it, and we impose upon it a coherence which allows us to say what is wrong and in what directions the situation needs to be changed. Problem setting is a process in which, interactively, we name the things to which we will attend and frame the context in which we will attend to them (Weick, 1995, p. 9, quoting Schön, 1983, p. 40).

A leader, then, can call out and "name" the moral contradictions that are embedded in the disparities in learning evident in a school's "achievement gap."

Spillane et al. (2002) noted that these affective themes could greatly impact sensemaking. The current themes of equity and closing the achievement gap are resonant of the discussion of values and interests that are a part of developing motivation for improvement within an organization. By reframing issues and connecting them with value questions, leaders can shape the creation of mission and vision. In so doing, a leader has an opportunity to link efforts to attack the social inequities in his/her setting with the mission of improving student learning. Other authors write of the power of moral purpose in providing the motivation and rationale for change in organizations (Sergiovanni, 1991; Fullan, 1993; Evans, 1996; Fullan, 2001; Fullan, 2003; Fullan, 2005).

The facet of taking focused action and generating possible solutions or strategies; deciding on a solution, based on an identified 'theory of action' rests upon work done by

a leader in the first three areas of inquiry. In sensemaking terms, it is "enactive" and as action, creates further meaning and data, that leads to the last step, evaluate: assess progress toward addressing the problem in light of the new data. Sensemaking is ongoing; as Weick (1995) pointed out: "To understand sensemaking is to be sensitive to the ways in which people chop moments out of continuous flows and extract cues from those moments" (p. 43). These extracted cues provide the basis for another cycle of reflection and action.

In this study, I will be examining how subjects used the critical inquiry process as means to make sense of instructional leadership, and how it was an enabling mechanism for the growth and development of instructional leadership capacity.

Principal Professional Development

As was pointed out in the introduction, if learning critical inquiry that enables instructional leadership is important for gap-closing efforts, then it logically follows that another part of the problem is to better understand the ways to help school leaders themselves to make sense of the knowledge that translates to strong leadership practices.

A review of the literature on effective principal learning is somewhat thin, there being a relatively larger body concerning the development of pre-service school leaders (Leithwood, et al., 2004). A brief review partially parallels best practices for teacher professional development. This should be no surprise, as both topics deal with the quality of learning of adult educators. The convergence of some of the themes in Knapp's descriptions of strong professional development for both teachers and principals become apparent upon comparison (Knapp, 2004):

- As with the students they teach, learning opportunities that challenge teachers intellectually and are built around powerful images of teaching and learning are more likely to move them towards a higher standard of classroom practice.
- The most powerful learning environments for teachers engage them as active learners and offer concrete images of what high-quality practice looks like, at the same time taking them more deeply into the content they are teaching and how learners acquire it.
- Teachers gain more from professional development when their learning is reinforced over time through repeated and varied exposure to ideas, and through interaction with colleagues who can act as a resource for each others' learning.

- Opportunities for professional learning contribute the most to instructional improvement when they offer teachers ways to address the specific problems of practice they face, including the demands and pressures placed on them by state and local reform expectations (p. 18).

To illustrate some of the parallels, various sources describe optimal principal professional development in instructional leadership as "requir[ing] a great deal of knowledge about the details of good curriculum and teaching" (Fink & Resnick, 2001, p. 605-606). As well, it is an environment where they can participate in regular, collaborative, professional learning experiences to improve teaching and learning (King, 2002).

Knapp's observations have substantial connections to sensemaking. If these suggestions are followed, under the guidance of a knowledgeable leader, they would help generate a sense of discrepancy between old schema around practice and the new (by offering concrete images of what high-quality practice is like). Further "repeated and varied exposure to ideas, and through interaction with colleagues" (Knapp, 2004, p. 18) can result in "sustained engagement with a sequence of problematic ideas and an explicit goal of making sense of them and reconsidering what is already 'known'" (Spillane, 2005, p. 53).

Principals, however, do differ from teachers in that their learning is not confined to instruction:

> When you work on instructional leadership with a principal, Fink says, you have to remember that you are focusing on leadership, not just the specifics of instruction. Principals have to have content knowledge—enough to enable them to judge the teaching they see. But they don't have to be content specialists. As instructional leaders, principals have to be able to figure out what to do for a teacher—what kind of professional development would be appropriate for a given person at a given time. But the principal doesn't have to actually deliver the professional development; staff development specialists can do that. The principal has to lead by creating a culture of learning and by providing the right kinds of specialized professional development opportunities (Fink & Resnick, 2001, p. 600).

Sensemaking also speaks to effective learning of this aspect of leadership knowledge. Participation with others in authentic activities, focused on one's own context and on problems of practice that are "non-routine" (i.e., problems not related to day-to-

day practical matters, but rather problems that occur irregularly, yet can derail a school), in a supportive learning environment are important components of sensemaking for school leaders (Sparks, 2002; Leithwood, et al., 2004). As well, a focus on robust, "situated" knowledge around current issues has appeared to benefit principals (Leithwood, et al., 2004). This problem-based approach is at the center of "critical inquiry" utilized in the School Leadership Program. The description of instructional leadership in the above literature review hints at what could be a rich curriculum of leadership learning.

An aspect of this study is connected to whether the professional development context helped to greatly strengthen instructional leadership and to enable the use of critical inquiry approach as a means to improve instructional leadership. Although the literature base on principal professional development is thin, the School Leadership Program (SLP) had many features seen in the small amount of literature on effective learning for school leaders. As well, based on the sensemaking literature, the course had many optimal elements that would help principals make sense of and connect new knowledge with an inquiry into their environments, and learn through action. The SLP was: 1) centered on questions of improvement of instruction 2) focused on content and skills of leadership 3) infused with models of best practice; and 4) attentive to real-life, non-routine problems faced by leaders. These categories may be of use in examining how the principals in this study have made sense of their professional development experience. In examining the thinking and practice of principals around the learnings featured in the SLP, this study attempted to isolate findings that would help inform or refine curriculum and instruction in the course and that may have implications for principal professional development in general.

Conceptual Framework

The ideas drawn from the four topics above act together as a conceptual framework to assist with this study's attempt to understand principal learning in the CEL School Leadership Program. First, sensemaking is used as an overarching organizer that helps to examine the thinking processes of all the actors in the various contexts of this study. Secondly, a definition of instructional leadership illustrates how a principal would

act as a "sensegiver" through his/her leadership actions, helping the people who work directly with students make sense of transformations in educational theory and practice that aim at creating a more intellectually demanding classroom environment. Thirdly, critical inquiry is understood as a process by which the school leader him/herself makes sense of how to craft instructional leadership. And lastly, principal professional development speaks to the optimal context by which principals can engage in their own sensemaking around instructional leadership.

Figure 1, Conceptual framework: Study of principal sensemaking, approximates the relationship of the actors in this study's contexts described by the conceptual framework. The focus is on principals' sensemaking, and the dotted circle represents engagement in the SLP and in critical inquiry as means by which participants "made sense" in this study. The arrows moving in one direction do not imply unidirectionality; in fact, not only is there two-way interaction at all points, there are many more interactions within the context than this schematic represents. In this case, the arrows illustrate the calculated sequence of impetus that represents the intended impact of principal sensemaking on leadership practice, and then in turn on the sensemaking of the other actors in the context.

The next chapter outlines the strategy for inquiry, followed by findings from this study, and in the conclusion discusses what was discovered about the sensemaking that occurred among the participants.

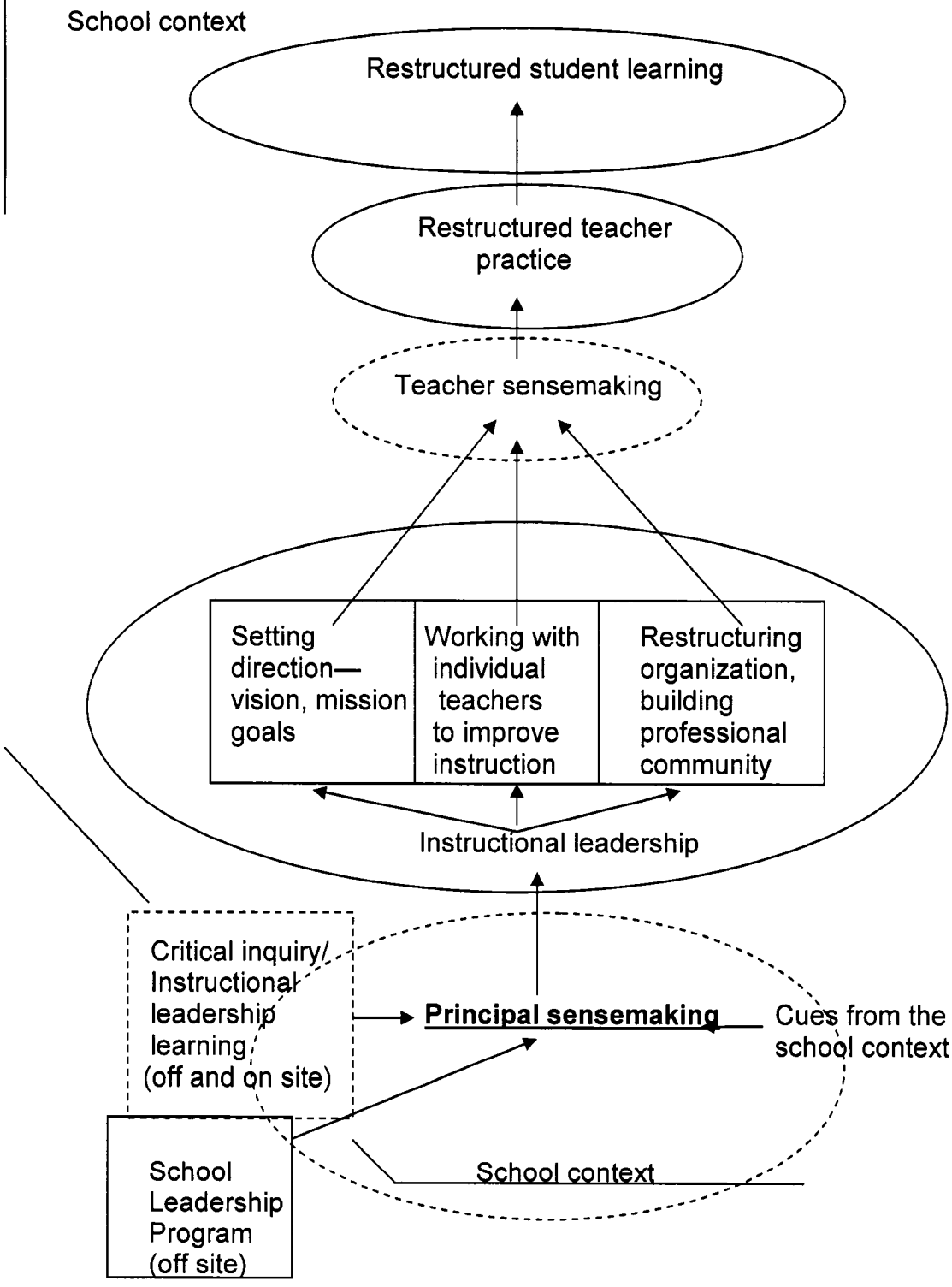

Figure 1—Conceptual framework: Study of **principal sensemaking**

Chapter 3: Strategy for Inquiry

Qualitative methods were used to facilitate this study that centered on the three research questions:

1. How have principals made sense of their learning about instructional leadership after the completion of a joint district-university professional development program?
2. How have principals used what they have learned about the critical inquiry process to make sense of and improve their instructional leadership?
3. What else was important to these principals in the professional development experience provided by the Center for Educational Leadership's School Leadership Program?

Patton (2002) clarified the theory, nature and sources of knowledge that qualitative study rests upon, and noted that this approach is used to examine issues in depth and detail, as outlined in the three research questions. Merriam (1998) pointed out that qualitative research is especially suited to "understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (p. 6, italics in original). A qualitative study assists my research goal of providing a deeper understanding of processes such as sensemaking, in a limited set of individuals. The following sections lay out the component parts of the methodology.

Case Study Approach

This investigation used a case study approach. Case studies have many different characteristics (Merriam, 1998), but the single most defining is that it is "bounded" (p. 27) in that it targets specifically an object of study, e.g., the outcomes of the Seattle School Leadership Program in the 2005-2006 school year. A case study approach seemed particularly appropriate given Yin's definition: an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon with in its real-life context, in particular when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2003); the outcomes of the SLP are inextricably tied up with the larger environment of the principals, schools, and the district context. As we saw earlier Spillane, et al. (2001, 2002) makes a strong case for the attachment of any plausible examination of leadership

to the context in which it is practiced. Merriam (1998) also delineates a case study's particularistic nature, in that it can examine a specific instance that may be related to a general issue; as Chapter 2 illustrated, the SLP is definitely connected to the larger issue of instructional leadership. Its descriptive nature can, among other things, "have the advantage of hindsight yet can be relevant to the present" (p. 30); this quality relates to the study of principals' sensemaking. And finally, Merriam notes that case studies can have a heuristic quality, of helping to "[e]valuate, summarize, and conclude, thus increasing its potential applicability" (p. 31); as noted in the introductory section, this study aspires to isolate learnings about principal professional development.

This case study aimed at surfacing both comparisons (common themes) and differences between the individual principals' sensemaking. A case study protocol (Yin, 2003) was developed to guide the investigation of each principal and school context; these are detailed in the sections below.

Participant Selection

A sample of eight principals was selected to participate in the study. The two Center for Educational Leadership instructors also served as informants.

Purposeful sampling methods (Patton, 2002) were used as much as possible in the selection of informants. Development of criteria for selection of principals who went through the Seattle SLP was made to strive for "maximum variation" (Patton, 2002, p. 234) of participants, although due to limitations in obtaining agreement to participate in the study, a certain amount of "convenience sampling" (Patton, 2002, p. 241) occurred. Selection was affected by the following criteria:

1. Variation in school contexts where these principals served was used in selection, with a balance of schools more and less impacted by poverty, cultural and language differences, taking into account Hallinger's et al. (1996) premise that application of instructional leadership may look different in dissimilar settings. Four of the eight schools were highly diverse and more impacted by poverty than the mean district indicators; four were average to somewhat affluent according to these measures (see Table 1, below).

2. Representation from different K-12 levels was sought in order to further differentiate context (see Table 1, below). Five of the school leaders were from elementary schools, one was from a middle school, one was from a K-8 alternative, and one was from a high school. Although this was not part of the original criteria, there was a difference in school role; among the eight leaders, two were assistant principals.

3. The sample size of eight was selected as it comprised approximately 1/5 of the participants who completed the course, which seemed to allow for breadth of representation. Eight informants also allowed for proportional representation from the levels of K-12 school leaders who completed the SLP. Of these approximately 35 attendees, about 25 were elementary principals; the rest were secondary or alternative K-8 school leaders. The sample size was also determined by researcher limitations of time and lack of assistance, a "convenience" factor.

4. An attempt was made to vary experience levels. The final sample had a somewhat limited experience range (from one year to six years) partially due to the "convenience" factor of willingness to participate noted above, as well as the fact that it appeared that most of the attendees had less than ten years' of experience in the principalship.

5. Diversity of gender and ethnicity was not critical to the purposes of this study, though it was achieved in the actual selection: six women and two men; one African American, one Asian American, and six whites.

The following table illustrates K-12 school level and demographic information related to the school principal informants. Included is an illustration of the variation of ethnic and economic diversity to illustrate the selection criteria noted above:

Table 1: Principal informants and school demographic information[1]

Principal/School	Demographics
Wade Y. Dalton Elementary	82% White 18% Students of color 7% Free/reduced lunch
Rita S. Bayview Middle	45% White 55% Students of color 40% Free/reduced lunch

[1] All names of informants and names of schools in this study are pseudonyms.

Table 1, continued

Irina R. Parkhill Elementary	7% White 93% Students of color 73% Free/reduced lunch
Pat A. Columbia K-8 (Assistant principal)	80% White 20% Students of color 8% Free/reduced lunch
Vicky O. Lakeview Elementary	21% White 79% Students of color 55% Free/reduced lunch
Gil N. Lawrence Elementary	58% White 42% Students of color 28% Free/reduced lunch
Terry G. Cook Elementary	5%White 95% Students of color 80% Free/reduced lunch
Paula D. Grant High (Assistant principal)	62% White 38% Students of color 24% Free/reduced lunch
Seattle School District	41% White 59% Students of color 41% Free/reduced lunch

Sensitizing Concepts Guiding the Investigation

Patton (2002) defines sensitizing concepts (p. 278) as set of ideas providing an initial guide to qualitative study. Sensitizing concepts provide a starting point for organizing an agenda for inquiry, but are not meant to preclude the emergence of inductively-derived findings. Sensitizing concepts also help a study by giving "special attention to the words and meanings that are prevalent among the people being studied" (p. 278). The sensitizing concepts listed here are essentially names of categories that were used to shape questions in the data collection process, as well as a starting point to organize the analysis process:

- Instructional leadership
    - Setting and fostering adherence to an organizational direction
    - Developing the instructional capacity of others
    - Restructuring the organization and building a professional learning community.
- Critical inquiry and its component parts

- Framing the problem, informing the problem using data, reframing and connecting with values, developing a theory of action and an action plan, evaluating

- Leadership content and pedagogical knowledge
- Principal professional development

The initial sensitizing concepts listed here were derived from the framing ideas of this study, as well as an examination of the course content of the School Leadership Program; as they have been discussed in other parts of this study, no attempt to strictly define them is made here. Other themes and sub-themes, of course, arose inductively from the study process and are detailed in the chapter on findings.

Data Collection

Data collection procedures were part of a case study protocol specifically designed for this investigation. The data collection methods of interviews of all informants, observations within the school setting, and collection of documents were related to the research of all three of the research questions noted at the beginning of this chapter. The strategies, sources and timeframe are outlined in Table 2:

Table 2: Data collection strategies

Strategy/strategies employed	Data source/sources	Timeframe
• Interviews • Observations • Document and artifact analysis	• Selected principals • UW CEL instructors • Documents and artifacts from CEL • Documents and artifacts from selected principals' schools • Principals' critical inquiry project papers • WASL data from the OSPI website	• September 2006-March 2007--collection of interview and observation data • Fall 2006--collection of documents and artifacts from CEL • September 2006-March 2007—collection of school document and artifact data

The data collection procedures consisted of:

Interviews. Principal interviews formed a large part of the study in the school year following participation in CEL's School Leadership Program (held in 2005-2006) in order to understand their sensemaking process after the completion of the program. The

interview method consisted of the use of a semi-structured interview guide (Patton, 2002), which ensured that the same basic lines of inquiry were pursued in all cases, but with the flexibility to explore, probe and further question in order to further illuminate the subjects. I asked principals open-ended questions such as: 1) What does it mean to lead through a critical inquiry approach? 2) What impact, if any, is there as a result of learning and practicing the critical inquiry process on your instructional leadership work? 3) Any other discoveries, surprises, vexing problems or questions that arose from the practice of the critical inquiry process? 4) What are your reflections on the learning experience in the School Leadership Program? Principals were interviewed once for approximately one hour, and were digitally recorded. Verbatim transcriptions were made of all interviews by the researcher with their permission.

Interviews were also conducted with the main CEL instructors, with the focus on obtaining a deep understanding of CEL's curriculum and instruction on critical inquiry and instructional leadership in the School Leadership Program to learn about the objectives of the program from their perspective. Questions posed included: 1) What were your intended outcomes in assigning course participants the critical inquiry projects? 2) What has been the match between your hoped-for outcomes and the results as typified by the completed project assignments? The instructors were interviewed once for approximately an hour, digitally recorded, and verbatim transcriptions made.

Observations. Observations were conducted of school leadership team meetings or a staff professional development events facilitated by the principal, with a focus on how instructional leadership and critical inquiry had been applied to the instructional improvement work of the school. An observation took place at all eight school leaders' sites, dating from October, 2006 to March, 2007. Selected events were mutually agreed upon by the principal and myself that appeared to demonstrate instructional leadership in teacher professional development or shared decision-making on instructional matters. Verbatim field notes were taken, and transcribed into word processed documents. Appendix D, "Principal Observations and Topics/Themes" illustrates the nature of the data collected in the observations. Observation data was used as another means by which to triangulate interview information from the principals (Merriam, 1998, Patton, 2002).

Documents and artifact study. Documents were investigated as yet another source to triangulate data from the principal interviews (Merriam, 1998, Patton, 2002). A separate document examination of CEL's School Leadership Program such as syllabi, readings, and other print materials was conducted. This provided a body of information encompassing what the CEL instructors intended the principals to learn during the six sessions of the SLP. Examining the SLP course content, particularly around instructional leadership and critical inquiry, helped derive the "sensitizing concepts" used as starting points for the investigation and analysis. A summary memo was created arranging course notes into a chronology of events and content (see Appendix C, "Summary Memo, CEL SLP 2005-2006").

With permission, the study principals' critical inquiry project papers were obtained and read. The critical inquiry project papers were useful in determining how the principal respondents were able to apply the learnings from the School Leadership Program to their instructional leadership sensemaking. Table 4 on page 64 outlines the main ideas of each informant's critical inquiry project, and is intended as a later reference for findings related to the course.

The main documents that were available and accessible were the school improvement plans, which are called "transformation plans" in Seattle. Examination of the transformation plans proved to be highly valuable in examining whether principals' critical inquiry project efforts had some connection with, or influence over the goal-focused work going on in the school at large. Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) data was collected from the state Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) website on the schools in the study. The data available on the website was disaggregated by ethnicity and economic status, and was available over several years. As critical inquiry involves the use of data as a means to develop a statement of the problem (Copland, 2003), this was another helpful triangulation tool that informed whether principals incorporated achievement gap information into their critical inquiry projects. The disaggregated WASL data, combined with demographic information, is presented in Appendix E, "Demographic and Achievement Gap Information".

As can be seen from the WASL data, almost every school except Dalton and Columbia K-8 had an "achievement gap" apparent just by looking at differences between white and African American students. Dalton and Columbia K-8 had too small of a cohort of African American students to measure.

Data Analysis

An analytic strategy from Yin (2003) of relying on theoretical propositions was followed in analyzing the case study data. The research questions supplied two of the propositions used in the analytic process. The first proposition was that participation by Seattle district principals in professional development developed by a university-based provider, the Center for Educational Leadership, would have an impact on the growth of instructional leadership. The second proposition was that the critical inquiry process would effectuate principal sensemaking of instructional leadership.

The strategy of using sensitizing concepts (Patton, 2002), or "categories the analyst brings to the data" (p. 456) was also used. "Using sensitizing concepts involves examining how the concept is manifest and given meaning in a particular setting or among a particular group of people" (p. 456). The sensitizing concepts listed on page 40 of this chapter were used as a starting point for data analysis. However, an inductive examination revealed other themes, particularly around the participants' learning experiences.

The entire data corpus was read, and comments were inserted into the word processed text. The development of comments was guided by a combination of theoretical propositions, sensitizing concepts and an inductive approach aimed at identifying themes as they emerged (Patton, 2002). Initial codes were constructed from these comments (see Appendix A, "Code List"). The interview, observation and School Leadership Program summaries were then coded. The coding system was revised to refine descriptions and reduce redundancies (Merriam, 1998). The entire data set was then coded and segmented to develop individual case summaries. After this step, all the word processed data were arranged across cases into the coding system. Figure 2 illustrates a sample category of codes relating to the use of the critical inquiry process.

Figure 2—Code Sample

Critical inquiry—making sense of
35. Critical inquiry: Prior exposure
36. Critical Inquiry: Personal meaning of critical inquiry process
37. Critical inquiry: Focus and usefulness of inquiry project
38. Critical inquiry: Obstacles to implementation

I then conducted individual case analyses. The data set for each principal, including interviews, observation information, documents from his/her school, and disaggregated school achievement data, was examined. Initial memos were written on each principal to begin developing assertions regarding principals' sensemaking around critical inquiry and their professional development experience in the School Leadership Program. As well, an analysis of the CEL instructor interviews was done, and the data put together with the CEL course information. An initial memo was written on the course itself (see Appendix C, "Summary Memo, Seattle CEL SLP"). Following this, I conducted cross-case analyses (Yin, 2003) in order to surface common themes, as well as the range of responses. The coded data set was examined to determine what each principal said about the themes that emerged from the data. Initial memos were written on this examination. These initial memos were followed by analytical memos (see Appendix B, "Analytical Memo Sample") that began to refine the analysis (Merriam, 1998; Miles and Huberman, 1994) that developed into the broader themes leading to the assertions outlined in Chapter 4. Table 3 illustrates in an abbreviated fashion how the data were catalogued around a theme, in this case the finding on how both participants and an instructor valued the SLP because it engendered principal collegiality; the actual section was much longer.

Table 3: Illustration of data cataloguing around a theme[2]

Principal/School	Theme: Value of the SLP in generating principal collegiality
Neil W., CEL instructor	"....it's such a rare and precious commodity to have time to reflect with your colleagues when you're in these roles...time to reflect critically upon your work doesn't happen in and of your own accord...."
Rita S. Bayview Middle	"I also think that collaborating with our colleagues is great too ....I would just say one other thing is that you learn so much from your colleagues that are in practice. I mean, those are the people you learn the most from because they are doing the job that you're doing."
Irina R. Parkhill Elementary	"....Now to me, tell about the cycle of inquiry, partnering with UW, give me a chance to collaborate and work with my colleagues, with an emphasis on actual practical work, we get to put this thing together, as well as names like Deborah Meier—then, I'll go."
Pat A. Columbia K-8	"....one of the most beneficial things was meeting with other principals and networking ideas and that was critical, and then also that accountability piece....I liked to be able to know that I'm going to meet with someone in two weeks and this is the work that I needed to get done and I'm holding myself accountable."
Vicky O. Lakeview Elementary	"I enjoyed each time we were going to meet. I was going to meet with my colleagues at a certain school to go do a walkthrough or to have a discussion about what we did in the last walkthrough. It was refreshing to be with my colleagues, to engage like that, because we say that teachers need to organize relations but I think it's even worse for administrators."
Gil N. Lawrence Elementary	"I think the whole idea of a formal process I could meet regularly with colleagues who were doing similar work, to share ideas and get advice, that's initially what attracted me..."
Terry G. Cook Elementary	"So the school leadership program that we did in Seattle last year I thought was very powerful because it was a cohort. And so trust started to build, relationships build."
Paula D. Grant High	"....what I love about it was the critical inquiry process—coming together and working together as a group on different issues....It really was a part of me working with my peers on issues that were common, and sometimes different...."

[2] All quotes are from transcripts.

Throughout all memos, notations were inserted referencing the original data in order to maintain a "chain of evidence" (Yin, 2003). The analytical memos formed the basis of Chapter 4, "Findings". Assertions were developed based on the patterns and themes found through the analytic process. The assertions were re-examined against the full body of the data. When disconfirming data were encountered, assertions were revised or qualified to accommodate the discrepant evidence.

Enhancing the Quality of Inquiry

Some of the components that helped ensure high standards are outlined here.

Attention to researcher and respondent reactivity as reinforcement to credibility and confirmability. One of the main issues to be considered here was the author's affinity with the mission, goals and methods of the Center for Educational Leadership, attained through a number of years of supporting its work. Further, the researcher was identifiable as an associate of CEL, and a proponent of its beliefs. Thus, a reasonable question to be posed as part of this inquiry is: how much of what was told in informant interviews was a function of the "correct response" syndrome (i.e., telling the interviewer what he wants to hear)? Triangulation (described below) was an approach that significantly helped discern the discrepancy between an espoused theory of action and the actual theory in use[3].

Triangulation as reinforcement to credibility and dependability. The use of a variety of cases, as well as the collection of multiple sources of data, maximized the opportunity for triangulation (Merriam, 1998). Triangulation ensures that the researcher develops a "holistic understanding" of the phenomena being studied (Merriam, p.204). Following up the interviews of principals with observation of events such as meetings and professional development sessions, provided another form of illustrative evidence. As well, studying artifactual evidence such as transformation plans and the school documents attached to them, and disaggregated WASL data from the OSPI website proved to be highly valuable triangulation tools, exposing both strengths and shortcomings in principals' critical inquiry work.

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[3] Argyris and Schön (1974) define a "theory in use" as "the theory that actually governs his actions is his theory in use, which may or may not be compatible with his espoused theory; furthermore, the individual may or may not be aware of the incompatibility of the two theories" (p. 7).

Peer review as a reinforcement to credibility and trustworthiness. Peer review with capstone advisor and two other cohort members was conducted three times during the analysis process. Coding, arrangement of the data, development of memos, and the initial attempt at developing assertions from the data were topics of the peer review meetings.

The use of "member checks" to reinforce credibility and confirmability. Interview transcripts were submitted to all participants for review of accuracy and clarity of meaning. This is a strategy to enhance fairness, completeness, perceived validity and to verify participant perspectives (Patton, 2002). Participant response did not alter the content or meaning of the transcripts.

The methodology ensured an ample amount of data to inform the research questions around principal sensemaking. The next chapter outlines findings and interpretive comments from this study.

Chapter 4: Findings

Analysis of the data sources provided ample evidence that participation in the School Leadership Program led to a considerable amount of involvement in growth processes. Their responses illuminate the research questions on principal sensemaking around instructional leadership, critical inquiry, and their professional development experience with the SLP.

As they expressed their ideas on these questions, themes emerged that better organized the data about how the learning took place, the extent of its depth, and the pace at which principals absorbed a highly intricate and voluminous body of knowledge and then attempted to translate it into practice. Three major categories of response emerged; the first regarding participant perceptions of the district and school context in Seattle that shaped the deep need for learning by its principals. Second were the principals' views on the SLP course and how it did or did not facilitate their sensemaking. The third category outlines the outcomes around how participants made sense of instructional leadership and critical inquiry. Within the three categories are six main themes that highlight the data from this study:

What was revealed about the Seattle School District context?

- **The study illustrated important principal professional development needs in the Seattle School District**

How did the School Leadership Program meet the professional learning needs of the Seattle principals?

- **Participation in the CEL SLP course elicited a strong felt need for mutual support within the school district for leaders who accept the challenge of fighting for equity and excellence.**

- **Certain features of the SLP were perceived to assist or detract from principal sensemaking around instructional leadership.**

How did the School Leadership Program impact Seattle principals' sensemaking of critical inquiry and instructional leadership?

- **Critical inquiry made an initial positive impact on principal sensemaking about instructional leadership.**

- **At the same time, there were limitations in the implementation of critical inquiry during the first year of the SLP course.**

- **Almost all subjects reported that SLP participation resulted in improvement in some aspect of instructional leadership**

These themes provide the foundation for next chapter's conclusions and an initial set of recommendations for the Seattle SLP.

What was Revealed About the Seattle School District Context?

This section makes clear that the principals share a common lot with the rest of the profession today in facing extensive professional learning needs. However, one of the discoveries out of the data collection was a greater sense and appreciation about the specific leadership challenges about being a principal in Seattle.

The study illustrated some important principal professional development needs in the Seattle School District.

It should be no surprise that the conditions that principals see on a daily basis in their urban schools create a constant thirst for learning that is not being satisfied. A few school leaders had experienced professional development that was job-embedded rather than traditional in the sense that the activities were interactive and located in school contexts rather than out of context and unidirectional. These principals were looking for more of this type of professional learning experience. All of my informants had been disappointed that most of their professional learning activities had not helped them meet the seemingly intractable challenges they faced in their urban schools.

One clear statement made by all principals was that the state of principal professional development in Seattle was unsatisfying. Principals noted the managerial focus of district meetings, even the ones that purported to be about principal learning. Some complained that these meetings were unidirectional, and often irrelevant to instructional challenges, or that any learning was "one shot" and sporadic. This was true whether provided in the district or otherwise. Rita S. in commenting on how the SLP was different from prior professional development illustrated what almost all principal respondents expressed:

> Oh, much different. And it was, and that's probably one of the reasons why I wanted to do it because I hate sit and get, even week-long institutes I hate because they don't go anywhere. They're not relevant, they're not meaningful, they're not purposeful. They just don't seem to me to move your practice forward. Something that is ongoing, embedded in your practice and with colleagues that have the same struggles, being that we're all Seattle colleagues it made sense for us to collaborate and work together and it made the ongoing nature of it (Rita S., transcript).

A gap that was deeply felt by the principals was in the area of leadership content knowledge, an important area in instructional leadership targeting the quality and type of student learning in their schools. The participants cited that one of the biggest deficits in principal learning has been around getting smarter about instruction. Wade Y. was quite specific about this.

> In terms of professional development for principals at the district level, there hasn't been a whole lot that has had an instructional focus. And you know, I hate to say that about Seattle, but it's certainly honest, and more of our work is focused on the managerial side of things....and its almost eaten up our time we've been able to get to practice and look at instructional practice in the classroom, look at teachers working, and being able to identify specific instructional strategies that are best practice, and to be able to call out best practice, a common language, a common vision of what it looks like (Wade Y., transcript).

One of the biggest holes in professional development seemed to be the broader area of sorting out how to lead the work of learning improvement of the whole group of professionals and creating a strong culture of learning among them in the school. This side of the work was described by Hallinger et al. (1996) and noted in Chapter 2; principal leadership that makes a difference with student learning had more to do with the highly complex "causal chain" by which a school leader, influenced by the surrounding context, develops and exerts effects on the "mediative variables" that in turn affect student learning. I earlier described how the literature illustrates that instructional leadership goes beyond the skill of working with individual teachers and deals with issues of setting organizational direction and forming a professional community. The vexing question is: what does the principal do to ensure an entire culture of high engagement by the school professionals in instructional improvement? The state of unclarity is such that not one of the principals in the study framed this as a specific

challenge. Yet the interviews and observation visits showed that most if not all of them were wrestling with this complex task:

> We visited each other's schools several times, and we got to know—and we got to see instruction over time. And we got to know something about the culture of the school and the players involved, and so we could talk with one of the people about something they were thinking about, or frustrated about, and get a better sense of the context that it happens, and that was really helpful. You get a sense for all of it when you're there (Gil N., transcript).

Another example was seen in a school observation of a building leadership team meeting where the principal and team members attempted to make sense of an outside audit finding that the school needed to work on its vision. The principal and the group tried to understand how an articulated school vision would connect to their overall work and what sort of statement might be useful; as there were no agreed-upon answers, this appeared to be a discussion that would continue for some time.

Despite the lack of clarity, one can infer that this was a deeply felt area of concern for all the principals in the study. Some principals detailed how they engaged in major changes in the way they led their respective staffs. An example was found in Wade Y.'s comment about how a benefit of participation in SLP over the years was the re-casting of his leadership style from solely "managerial" to one of being a "lead researcher". Another theme, outlined by the newer principals, was that of struggling to engage their staff in some area of instructional improvement and searching for answers. The response pointed to a well-founded inference that by participating in the SLP, principals were looking for mutual support for the often solitary task of crafting leadership for their schools which results in a culture of high-powered engagement by their teaching staff.

Another major observation of respondents related to the social setting for their learning. The subjects appeared, at least intuitively, to understand that their learning and sensemaking about instructional improvement and leadership would continue to be stunted unless it was to occur in an interactive and social context such as the School Leadership Program. The high value placed by subjects on "collegial interaction" specifically with other Seattle School District principals as the most beneficial feature of the course typifies this understanding. Conversely, informant principals attributed the

lack of such collegiality as one of the characteristics of unfulfilling prior professional development experiences.

The study also highlighted some major challenges that exist for principals that are specific to Seattle in exercising instructional leadership, and exacerbate the need for principal professional development. Seattle principals have to expend considerable effort to meet the particular district requirements of site management. They currently have a measure of responsibility for constructing school program and site budgets that far overshadows most other districts' principals. Contained in these responsibilities is the development of program delivery models unique to their sites and budgeting for the compensation to staff these models. For example, principals make decisions regarding the type of principal assistance (assistant principal vs. dean of students on teacher pay scale vs. counseling/family support worker), number and type of support staff, programs such as full-time kindergarten, and each of their requisite costs. In addition, district policy proscribes that principals must also build processes by which the school's adult community is involved in all aspects of these decisions (Seattle School District, 2007; Seattle Education Association, 2007)[4]. In fact, five out of the eight school observations conducted for this study involved a shared-decision making event. Principals are also required to use these processes in planning and allocating resources for professional development. These responsibilities, while providing opportunities to match resources to local needs in fine detail, also consume a huge amount of energy and time of both the principal and school staff. This was described by one of the CEL instructors familiar with many of the Seattle principals:

> ...and principals who are just really overloaded, the district had pursued what I call a "miniature CEO" or a "mini-CEO" model where they put a lot of responsibilities on them and divested a lot of stuff centrally and gave it to the principals to do. And so, they gave the principals the budget, they gave principals curriculum decisions, they gave principals a whole bunch of stuff that in a lot of districts gets handled more cohesively apparently from the center. And now I see them trying to pull some of that back to much more of a coherent focus so that everybody's working on similar things and there's support from the central office in the form of time and training to help bring that about (Neil W., CEL instructor, transcript).

[4] Site-based decision-making is highly proscribed, specific process, outlined in the district-Seattle Education Association bargaining agreement.

The study's school observation data illustrated that these site-based responsibilities were especially burdensome when the process resulted in conflict. This particular model of shared decision-making seemed to create its own demand for support as school leaders attempt to negotiate these processes.

The overall conclusion regarding principal professional development is that Seattle principals would appreciate more professional development opportunities that focused on all aspects of instructional leadership (Setting and fostering adherence to an organizational direction, developing the instructional capacity of others, restructuring the organization and building a professional learning community). However, the opportunities must be job-embedded in order to deal with the real issues they are struggling with, and they must be collegial in nature. Finally, in order to assist principals in focusing on their learning, other work responsibilities must be adjusted.

How did the School Leadership Program Meet the Professional Learning Needs of the Seattle Principals?

A major finding focused on the professional development process itself. Informants had strong feelings and much to contribute about how their learning took place.

Participation in the CEL SLP course elicited a strongly felt need for a mutual support system within the school district for leaders who accept the challenge of fighting for equity and excellence.

Participants identified themselves as leaders with a belief system supporting the power of instructional improvement to combat the achievement gap. The theme of "preaching to the choir" was mentioned numerous times by principals and SLP instructors alike:

> If you look at people in the group, CEL's preaching to the choir. Those are people who know the benefits, who want to be there, and are already working towards those kinds of structures and atmospheres in a school, environments in a school (Paula D., transcript).

> I think in many ways we were preaching to the choir. I think we are preaching to the choir in both SLP and the Seattle group and I think what this does is sort of

> validate for individuals their own social justice agenda (Rose M., CEL instructor, transcript).

Participants often expressed the feeling of inadequacy of their own knowledge and/or the necessity to continue to build their efficacy regarding how to lead these improvements to better serve the underserved students of the district. CEL, with its explicit value-based agenda, was a strong attraction for these individuals in Seattle that understood and supported this charge. The study principals' comments were also echoed in the post-course evaluations of the 25 other SLP participants.

The way people enrolled themselves into the course was another interesting indicator of a similar mindset—every one of the study principals signed up either because of their affinity with the University of Washington Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (EDLPS) department and its explicit value base or because of having similar beliefs with someone else who was enrolling.

The explicit value base of the SLP was important in taking this original mindset and creating a loosely formed common identity based on social justice and instructional improvement to fight the achievement gap in the district as a whole. The most salient indication of this was the appearance by Deborah Meier[5] and the spontaneous debriefing session the next day in which a common agenda for advocacy for the disenfranchised was passionately discussed:

> ...it was after Deborah Meier came that it really took a turn to focus on some of the stuff that was part of our jobs. And that was an interesting conversation that happened that I think it was kind of floating out there, and it was interesting because it felt like a call to action, a sense of connection that there was this inequity happening in our building, so what are we going to do about it? That was a really interesting conversation, I think you probably remember it—I remember it. It was a small group, and we were sitting at Bayview, in their library. And I'd be interested if other people talk about that too. But I remember that pretty clearly. It seemed like a pretty pivotal moment for that group. And I don't know if we got to a level where people felt 'ok, this is what I'm going to do'. But—it was definitely out there. And I can imagine that it's still in people's heads (Irina R., transcript).

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[5] Deborah Meier is an educator, activist and author, and often considered the founder of the modern small schools movement. Meier documented her story and experience at Central Park East Secondary School in *The Power of their Ideas: Lessons for America from a Small School in Harlem* (1995)

Newer principals, as would be expected, appeared to speak to the need for even more support than those with several years experience. Irina R., who was in her second year during the SLP, illustrated a picture of a new principal struggling alone with how to engage her staff in some area of instructional improvement and searching for answers from SLP participation. Vicky O. also recounted her difficult and complicated efforts as a new principal to raise the level of urgency and focus among staff members. Terry G., in her third year, had as a first year principal tried to address a difficult staff situation by committing tens of thousands of grant dollars creating a multiyear relationship with a University of Washington facilitator to help with this very issue of school direction and professional engagement. The struggles of the novice principals seemed to be more intense than those with several more years experience. However, similar to the other principals participating in the SLP, the beginning principals seemed to share the common desire for mutual support for the often solitary task of crafting leadership for their schools which results in a culture focused on instructional improvement.

One unexpected theme came up about readiness of principals to participate in the work of the SLP. A number of participants went out of their way to remark about other district principals who would not see the value of such an experience. Gil N., for example, related how another principal told a participant that the SLP was a "waste of time", and how another new Year Two SLP participant saw participation simply as a way to get out of work for a day. Gil N. felt that a certain mindset was required to appreciate the SLP:

> ...I think the course is nothing but an invitation, and I think it really takes, it really mirrors what we are looking for in teachers, too. It takes people who are committed to the idea of lifelong learning. To know that we're never done, there always more we can learn from, and ways we can enhance the effectiveness of what our school does for kids....So for whatever reason that I believe that principal has not, either he's too caught in the management stuff to see his way clear or he never had any experience where he's can actually see that, some time where he's spent some thoughtful deliberation in inquiry, about a problem or a question you have....It's not going to be, yeah, it's not going to be effective if they're not ready for it (Gil N., transcript).

Other principals mentioned administrators who they thought were too mired in management, too individualistic, or too unaware of their need for new learning to want to participate in the SLP experience as they did:

> I think there's different levels of effective—there's a school that I see is doing amazingly well. And she doesn't want to spend her time anywhere else; she could care less what other people see, totally focused on her building. And maybe that works for her building. I don't know—pretty abrasive to everybody else. On the other side of the spectrum, there are principals that are completely overwhelmed. And walking through somebody else's building doesn't seem feasible to them. And I think that we enable ourselves to think that too—'the building needs me'. And granted, I pay when I'm gone for an entire day ....But the value you get out of the day, it was definitely worthwhile (Irina R., transcript).

These observations further established a demarcation line of sorts between SLP participants and other school leaders in Seattle. This distinction may have implications for how an SLP-type program would be used in the district; this will be explored in a later section.

The strongly felt need by participants for a gathering of leaders like the SLP seemed to illustrate a leadership vacuum around an agenda for combating the achievement gap through instructional improvement. One indicator of this was the fact that the Seattle SLP was essentially a "bottom up" initiative from the ranks of elementary principals (CEL SLP Memo) as a comment from Rose M., CEL instructor, explained:

> The Seattle program is an outgrowth of several principals really around Van M., who had been in CEL programs previously and felt very strongly about the work that we do. And so through his leadership he rallied a group of principals, really there were about 65 originally who were very excited about bringing the leadership development program into the Seattle school district.... And so what they were looking for was something beyond what they were getting in the school district as far as professional development was concerned. So when they came to us it was about how can we do something that we actually can apply in our schools, not make work for ourselves that really isn't related to the achievement gap but really take some time for ourselves to work with our colleagues, which we also don't have time to do (Rose M., transcript).

The way in which the SLP originated was yet one more indicator of this finding about the strong desire for collegiality among Seattle principals.

Certain features of the SLP were perceived to assist or detract from principal sensemaking around instructional leadership

Out of the various SLP activities, the learning walk seemed to be a paramount sensemaking experience for most of the participants. In the SLP course, the facilitated walkthrough (the event had a number of different names in the SLP course materials) featured a selected school, a team of fellow district principals, and a CEL facilitator. In the initial meeting, a purpose was set (identify patterns to see if professional development is taking hold, etc.). During the walk, short debriefing occurred after every classroom visit. Afterward, a final debriefing took place and key learnings were identified. There were some principals who were vocal about the impact of the walkthroughs:

> ...mostly what I was looking for was a way, I think the whole idea of a formal process I could meet regularly with colleagues who were doing similar work, to share ideas and get advice. That's initially what attracted me, and then what I discovered was the power of observing an instruction with others, it just helps calibrate what we're looking for when we're looking at effective teaching and learning—the ability to really home in on aspect of instruction and look for evidence whether it is there or not, and then talk together, about how we provide leadership for helping a teacher to take the next steps, where they go from there. So for all those reasons, this seemed like the professional development that was going to help with those things (Gil N., transcript).

Statements such as this illustrated realizations on the part of principals about the nature and depth of what they needed to learn regarding instructional improvement. Only one participant expressed some diffidence about the walkthroughs; however, it should be pointed out that she had worked with a University of Washington facilitator two years prior to the course to make learning walks a routine at her school. The significance that many of them attributed to the learning walk was phenomena noted by Spillane, et al. (2002, p. 418-419):

> So it is key to create a sense of dissonance in which agents see the issues in their current practice rather than seeing the new ideas as achieved with their current practice. This dissonance, or dissatisfaction with one's own behavior, is essential to the reinterpretation of one's beliefs.

It is not insignificant that the SLP instructors later decided that it was important to include four coached learning walks in Year Two of the Seattle SLP.

On the other hand, subjects did not hold in high regard the speakers CEL brought in. One exception to this opinion was Deborah Meier's appearance, and for some, Katherine Casey's[6] presentation. It is possible that the speaker format too closely resembled prior professional development experiences that emphasized a unidirectional transmission to a passive audience.

The one favorable response to a sponsored speaker appeared, however, to meet a different need than mere information. Deborah Meier spoke to the higher purpose of education, and in spurring a discussion on equity, seemed to contribute to the principals' framing of a moral context for their instructional leadership work. In this way, she appeared to serve as a "sense-giver" (Weick, 1995) in helping to frame principals' actions with values of equity and democracy. It is likely that this illustrates how "moral purpose" can be both a rationale and powerful motivator (Fullan, 1993, 2001, 2003, 2005) for the protracted effort and relentless attention needed to develop one's instructional leadership.

Both instructors and participants agreed that some aspects of the SLP could have been focused better. It was said that the course featured too many different frameworks for analyzing instruction and leadership for the participants to absorb, which was what the CEL presenters that were brought in generally spoke about. The instructors went further, concluding that the focal points of the leadership content knowledge, inquiry projects and the learning walks were also somewhat global, ranging from literacy, to math, to high school discipline. The instructors held that principal sensemaking would have been stronger if there had been a tighter focus around a single subject area.

A final note of observation mentioned by the instructors in describing the course: scheduling difficulties meant that the Seattle SLP was limited to six day-and-a-half sessions, two less than a typical "all-comers" SLP. This meant that the learning was constrained by shortened time as well as the fact that there was nearly a two month gap between the December and February sessions.

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[6] Katherine Casey is a former teacher in New York District #2 and a presenter for CEL.

How did the School Leadership Program Impact Seattle Principals' Sensemaking of Critical Inquiry and Instructional Leadership?

A careful examination of all the data revealed that the principals seemed to make important gains in their sensemaking of critical inquiry and instructional leadership. However, there are cautionary notes in the limits to this progress.

Critical inquiry made an initial positive impact on principal sensemaking about instructional leadership

The critical inquiry process in the SLP course was a systematic, structured, and guided exercise within a social context aimed at how to make sense out of the dynamics of instructional leadership. The subjects rated critical inquiry as a highly positive feature of the SLP, as did the larger participant group filling out post-course evaluations. They attributed the projects, as well as the small inquiry groups during the class sessions, as helping to make sense of their settings and how to provide instructional leadership to their school. Table 4 is an illustration of the principal informants' critical inquiry projects and some of the components:

Table 4: Critical Inquiry Project Topics and Themes

Principal/School	Problem focus	Action plan
Wade Y. Dalton Elementary	"Lack of sense of urgency" due to affluent demographic. Little growth in writing organization and conventions	Restructure staff meetings to reflect on student work
Rita S. Bayview Middle	Black students not achieving in math as shown by WASL scores in the last five years	Expand opportunity to learn (after school program) for black students
Irina R. Parkhill Elementary	1) Lack of strategic approach to eliminate disproportionality 2) Classrooms that are curriculum centered rather than student centered, 3) Limited opportunities toward constructivist learning, resulting in diminished collaboration, leadership capacity sustainability.	1) Assessment to inform instruction, develop more holistic look, with family partnerships. 2) Connect transformation plan to shared vision and purpose for education 3) Further define shared vision and goals 4) Group themes from prior year transformation plan. 5) Curriculum mapping on Transformation Plan strategies; 6) Develop capacity via systems thinking
Pat A. Columbia K-8	While WASL scores have increased, writing has stayed flat; no cohesive, comprehensive writing plan for the school	Form writing study group; develop K-8 continuum based on state GLE's, mutually observe teaching writing
Vicky O. Lakeview Elementary	23% drop in Math WASL scores two years prior	Create specific forms of data and examine individual student profiles. Develop strategies based on examination.
Gil N. Lawrence Elementary	Lack of meaningful collaboration. Working independently, teachers create inconsistent, haphazard program	Develop professional learning communities to look at assessment, align instruction at each grade level
Terry G. Cook Elementary	Not explicitly defined; appeared to be lack of cultural responsiveness among staff	Learn about student background through home visits; this will raise student engagement, achievement and parent involvement
Paula D. Grant High	Not explicitly defined; appears to be lack of influence over students to accomplish accountability mandates	Develop Critical Friends Groups; observations, discuss student work. Form group of teachers to do their own inquiry projects

The most cited benefit to participants was "problem identification"—including reframing in the light of value orientation. As Wade Y. put it:

> It's really taking a much more of a reflective approach around 'hey, here's something that's taking place, why am I thinking it's taking place, what are some things that might be impacting this?' So it's really a lot of questioning in order to find a solution, or to find some way to resolve the question (Wade Y., transcript).

The relevance of the critical inquiry exercise was illustrated by principal subjects who integrated their inquiry project focus with the overall goal-focused work going on in their school contained in their school transformation plans. Half of the principal subjects integrated their critical inquiry project with the aforementioned school focus. For example, Paula D.'s inquiry focus in increasing professional learning and collaboration, curriculum alignment, cross-disciplinary project-based learning, and the effectiveness of math and literacy instruction aligned closely with Grant H.S.'s transformation plan. Paula D. also began her own critical inquiry study group at her school so that she could model the process and begin helping teachers use the method in approaching instructional improvement. A smaller number of three principals explicitly described in their interviews how critical inquiry caused them to re-examine and begin transforming their own leadership of instruction.

SLP participants demonstrated how they used the critical inquiry process to grapple, with varying levels of success, with the extremely complex "causal chain" (Hallinger et al., 1996), a process in which a school leader first makes sense of the context, then via instructional leadership, exerts influence on the "mediative variables" (relating to those actually doing the instructing) that in turn affect student learning. Table 4, in its highly abbreviated form, only hints at the complex effort that is entailed in integrating a broad span of information that ties together threads from a series of issues, each that are quite complex; from isolating school-level student achievement problems from the vantage point of the underserved and disadvantaged, to then determining the changes indicated in teacher practice, developing a course of action and its rationale, and then conceptualizing and enacting the requisite changes in leadership practice to effect instructional change. In some cases, the principal was able to develop a succinct

description of the problem and an action plan that aligned with elements of it (see, for example, the inquiry focus of Gil N. and Pat A. in Table 4).

Because of the classic isolation of school leaders, subjects indicated they greatly enjoyed a social context in which to co-create a definition of the problem and leadership "theory of action" for their school. Participants in the small inquiry groups often voluntarily extended their relationships between course sessions, thus forming a context for learning beyond the course. The complexity of this work is commonly in direct proportion with the isolation and the lack of opportunity to engage in the types of conversations that have been noted in the sensemaking literature (Spillane 2002, 2005; Coburn 2001) as being important to building new cognitive structures. It should be no surprise that subjects attributed high value to the critical inquiry process.

At the same time, there were limitations in the implementation of critical inquiry in the first year of the SLP course

The sheer number of variables, and their complex interactions within the "causal chain" (Hallinger, et al., 1996) (for example, linking the school's context, principal's sensemaking, and the impact of different components of leadership on the school's faculty) also help explain why participants had difficulty developing a cohesive critical inquiry process in their initial attempt. Table 4, for example, reveals that in some cases, certain elements described by the SLP course related to critical inquiry were not elaborated, such as a missing problem statement. Interview data also illustrated tentativeness in understanding or describing some of the components of critical inquiry.

Possibly the most difficult aspect of critical inquiry for participants was to understand the concept of a leadership "theory of action". As noted before, it is a "theory of deliberate human behavior, which is for the agent a theory of control, but which, when attributed to the agent, also serves to explain or predict his behavior" (Argyris and Schön, 1974, p. 6). The importance for principals to grasp this as a part of the critical inquiry process was intended as an antidote to shallow, reflexive action. However, Paula D. typified the tentative understanding of this concept:

> This is probably a weaker place for me, and you know, I think there was probably one day where he talked about theory of action, and there was a couple of days where we talked about it, and I've gone back over the notes about the theory of

> action, and I'm looking at the Critical Friends Group has something on the theory of action, and I think what I've gotten out of it is just the whole idea of being able to, the whole idea of looking at a problem, identifying what a problem is, and determining what it is you can do as an intervention documenting it, what indicators can you find? Before you've done the intervention, after you've done the intervention and if it's working. So to me, it's still a little fuzzy (Paula D., transcript).

Irina R. illustrated the difficulty participants had in translating a theory of action into implementation:

> I suppose that it's the scientific method, what does it look like? It's a hard thing for me because I get backed up. I think with the theory of action, the follow-through is challenging with the realities of the position. For that reason, I don't think I have a good conceptual understanding of what that actually means. There's so much that I don't have a deep understanding of what it is, because I haven't gotten deep into implementation (Irina R., transcript).

SLP participants were able to decide on an "action plan." But this was not necessarily an indication that they understood the concept of "theory of action". One of the most important aspects of the critical inquiry work was to develop one's own theory of leadership action in a reflective manner that was scrutinized later by evaluation and reflection (see below) as a part of a recursive process, as opposed to the more common reflexive, non-intentional approach. As pointed out in the above section, only three of the eight participants used the critical inquiry process to address their own leadership practice in addition to creating an action plan for the school.

Although some participants' written critical inquiry projects were embedded in the larger activity of the school, for others there seemed to be weak connections in the project papers to goal-focused activity in the school. This was true even if other evidence showed that they were providing strong instruction leadership. In these cases, the expressed "focused action" did not seem integral to goal-oriented activity indicated from other sources such as the school transformation plan or otherwise the rationale was only briefly explained. In Table 4, for example, one of the principals seemingly used data to identify a problem and develop an action plan. However, a separate examination of the school's transformation plan revealed a more fundamental school-wide problem related to the quality of classroom instruction that was not mentioned at all in the inquiry project.

In a few other cases, the problem outlined in the critical inquiry project did not seem to be directly connected to the action steps.

Another weakness that seemed common to participants' inquiry projects was that problem identification of subjects in almost all cases did not encompass sometimes glaring inequities that can be found by casually perusing the schools' disaggregated WASL school data on the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) website (see Appendix E, "Demographic and Achievement Gap Information"). This was true even with problem definitions that contained data. Specifically, all the principals in the study had various difficulties with creating a definition of the problem that took into full account student achievement problems found in the school's data, connecting them to instructional variables, and basing the resulting "theory of action" on an appropriate response to the defined data-based problem. This was the intent of the CEL instructors in presenting critical inquiry. Only in one case did an inquiry project seem framed around a problem of student achievement found in WASL school data.

In all cases, there were sketchy evaluations of results and impact on improvement of practice and little in the way of written reflection. Admittedly, this may have proven difficult as the course ended in April of the school year; however it was also true six months later when the interviews took place. The importance of this, as outlined in the description of critical inquiry in Chapter 2, is to ground efforts in a recursive cycle of sensemaking of the school learning context.

Prior experience with critical inquiry seemed to have some relationship to how principals were able to use it. It appeared that participants exposed to critical inquiry in the past were able to get farther along in developing its components, although for almost all there were still weak connections with their school data. As outlined in Table 4 above, Wade Y. and Pat A. seemed to have a theory of action with a relatively clear rationale. On the other hand, two of the three principals with no prior experience with critical inquiry for the most part had difficulty arriving at a focus for their project or connecting it to a defined problem. It appeared that experience with inquiry tended to give somewhat of an edge in embedding it in leadership thinking and practice

The instructors concurred that the coursework supporting critical inquiry could have been strengthened, citing a lack of time in the small inquiry groups, as well as in guiding the process. Nevertheless, the instructors both note their experience shows that it takes time to develop sophistication in the use of critical inquiry, as Rose M. observed:

> My sense, I'm going into my third year of this but I think just because of the nature of the class it almost takes until the next to the last session for people to be really clear about what the problem of practice is, its history and what they're going to do about it. So if I had all the power in the world and money was no object I really think it would be even a more powerful program if people committed to a two-year process in SLP because that first year they're just really getting clear and really the task they're setting for the next year and we don't see them.... I again think it's that two-year period of time before you really look at your own practice as opposed to teacher practice (Rose M., transcript).

SLP instructor Rose M.'s observations seem to illustrate the developmental nature of the process. It appears that the cognitive challenge of developing a critical inquiry focus integrating a broad span of information that ties together the threads from a series of issues that are each quite complex. The issues range from isolating school-level student achievement problems, connecting them to the changes needed in teacher practice, and then conceptualizing and enacting the requisite transformation of leadership practice. Such multifaceted work may require several years of structured, guided engagement to develop the sophisticated use of the thinking tool. The difficulty of participants to deeply absorb the critical inquiry process probably illustrates Spillane's (2005, p. 51) observation of the need for a "sustained engagement with a sequence of problematic ideas and an explicit goal of making sense of them to reconstruct complex new schema." From Rose M.'s comments, it can be inferred that several guided critical inquiry cycles, applied in the school context, would be helpful in making the complex connections involved in the process.

Almost all subjects reported that SLP participation resulted in modest improvement in some aspect of instructional leadership

The principals' interviews often generated an animated discussion on improvement initiatives in their schools. In assessing the impact on sensemaking by their participation in the SLP, it was important to ask them to differentiate what they said they learned from the course from what they were already doing or had learned from other

sources. What was apparent was that most attributed some form of improvement in their instructional leadership to participation in the SLP, albeit modest and incremental.

There were a variety of benefits mentioned. Some discussed how SLP helped them to develop a sense of urgency among their staff members to target an achievement goal, even though WASL scores were generally high in their affluent schools. A component of the Seattle SLP emphasized the importance of classroom presence and conversations with teachers giving them feedback on instruction. Gil N. recounts how this affected the evolution in his daily practice:

> I see myself starting, first of all, to be more systematic so that I'm more organized about which classrooms I'm visiting, where I want to go so I can see what I want to see....before, I was just a presence in the classroom....now when I'm there, I think I'm more purposeful. You know, I more often have an idea of something in mind I'm looking for. So I'm seeing myself get better at looking for something—so now what I'm trying to do is really marry what I'm looking for with my staff's professional growth goals so that I'm really trying to help them focus their professional growth goals on professional issues, both their own pedagogy and their student growth. I can also, when in their classrooms, use that as a lens (Gil N., transcripts).

The two assistant principals in the group contributed to a sub-theme—the assistant principal as an instructional leader. Both, although having an instructional focus to begin with, credited the SLP with helping them to better resist the incessant pull of management and administrivia that is an even bigger part of an assistant principal's job as compared to the principal's.

Restructuring the organization to develop professional community, as noted in Chapter 2, is an important aspect of instructional leadership. In the SLP coursework, this was not a developed theme; however, the principals told of their effort in this area. Although almost all the principals were already engaged in some form of work to improve professional community in their buildings, some reported how the SLP boosted these efforts. As examples, principals had developed collaborative structures in their schools which they attributed to their participation in the SLP, such as inquiry groups, "professional learning communities" (Schmoker, 2005) and learning-focused staff meetings.

Concluding Remarks to Study Findings

The framing of this study in Chapter 2 illustrated that the task of sensemaking of principal instructional leadership is enormously complex. Within the three categories of district context, evaluation of the SLP course and learning outcomes that comprise these findings, a picture can be seen of participant principals engaging energetically in the thought processes generated by the School Leadership Program. Principals worked to acquire the understanding of instruction they sought for their classrooms, and to simultaneously craft their leadership so they could engage their school professional communities in improvement efforts. Another thread running through each theme is the appreciation of each principal for the collegial support obtained through SLP participation. At the same time, what also stands out is that the complexity of the challenge means that despite active engagement by the principals, learning progress is necessarily protracted. Given the enormity of the task, it should be no surprise that a single year of professional development, despite benefits to principal sensemaking, would result in outcomes that can only be described as partial. However, in the face of the overwhelming realities confronted by the urban principals in this study, the growth exhibited in the SLP is encouraging. In the spirit of augmenting this progress, the next section presents conclusions and recommendations based on the first year experience of the Seattle School Leadership Program.

Chapter 5: Conclusion—Discussion of Findings and Recommendations

My capstone study focused on developing leadership that can meet one of the most obstinate of societal challenges: the profound inequities in school performance in urban schools today. As I noted in the beginning of this report, school leadership development is an issue of great import. But relative to its weight, there has been little written that provides clear guidance; programmatically, there is even less that has been successfully accomplished.

In focusing on the University of Washington Center for Educational Leadership's effort to develop an in-district School Leadership Program for Seattle School District principals, my study investigated an innovative attempt to provide external support for urban principals seeking to develop their instructional leadership capacity. The qualitative case study design used here explored the impact on eight principals who participated in the program for one year.

In the final section of this capstone report, I discuss my findings and synthesize them with the research ideas laid out in framing this study. I follow this discussion with recommendations for both the Seattle School District and the Center for Educational Leadership for strengthening the instructional leadership capacity of its principals. I will conclude by noting the limitations of this study and outlining questions that might guide a deeper inquiry into the topic of this report.

Revisiting the Inquiry Questions

The framing ideas of this study in Chapter 2 illustrated the depth and breadth of the instructional transformation needed for students today, the equally profound re-structuring of teacher knowledge and practice to accomplish this change, and the re-invention of professional organizational relationships within the school to support the conversion of practice.

The typical principal faces a prodigious challenge in leading this endeavor. Developing a principal's instructional leadership entails the acquisition of the requisite knowledge to craft a direction for the school. Instructional leadership also requires a large skill set for working with individual instructors, and an understanding of how to create structures that will engender a professional learning community. Principals must also do

their work in the face of numerous obstacles, with intermittency of support, and in what is typically a solitary enterprise.

It is against this backdrop that the progress of the School Leadership Program instructors and participants should be assessed. With this in mind, I would like to return to the starting point for my inquiry. The outline for this study was framed by these questions:

1. How have principals made sense of their learning about instructional leadership after the completion of a joint district-university professional development program?
2. How have principals used what they have learned about the critical inquiry process to make sense of and improve their instructional leadership?
3. What else was important to these principals in the professional development experience provided by the Center for Educational Leadership's School Leadership Program?

In this concluding section, I reflect on what was learned from these queries with another set of questions emerging from the study: 1) How could the Seattle School District assist in developing the instructional leadership capacity of its principals? 2) How could the Center for Educational Leadership and the School Leadership Program best help Seattle principals make sense of instructional leadership? and 3) How can CEL help future SLP participants better make sense of and use critical inquiry?

I first discuss findings relevant to the Seattle School District. I then turn my attention to how the School Leadership Program can best support principals.

How Could the Seattle School District Assist in Developing the Instructional Leadership Capacity of its Principals?

My association in this study with the Seattle principals involved in the CEL School Leadership Program left me with strong impressions of their sincere dedication to the mission of erasing the massive societal disparity in learning they confront every day. They were deeply reflective about the issues and obstacles related to this charge. I believe my observation about these principals generates an important implication that should be heeded by school district leadership. Specifically, they made it quite clear that

there is a deep-felt need for principal professional development that enables their leadership for the core task of fighting the achievement gap. It currently appears that there is no clear district-wide approach for principal professional development; from the accounts of informants, it is self-initiated (the Seattle SLP was a "bottom up" initiative) or depends on the capriciousness of resource availability. Yet I have noted in many places in this study that much is at stake in increasing principal capacity. This leads me to recommend that the CEL-Seattle School District partnership continue in the form of joint sponsorship of the School Leadership Program. Further, the partnership should be a part of intentional efforts to develop a system-wide approach toward principal learning. I believe my findings have shown the strong merits of this in-district model of principal professional development. I will further discuss these advantages here.

First of all, the findings reflected the high level of principal interest and engagement with instructional leadership learning and the benefits of critical inquiry in developing their thinking and action. As leadership is one of the most critical levers for carrying out the mission of eliminating the achievement gap, this involvement is of central importance. Given the apparent lack of principal professional development opportunities, district leaders can ill-afford to ignore or underestimate the importance of the CEL-District partnership at this time.

This study has illustrated how the learning that occurred in the SLP squarely targeted what principals need to lead their schools to combat the achievement gap. The framing literature in Chapter 2 defined instructional leadership and showed the benefits of critical inquiry. These elements are at the heart of the SLP curriculum. I further outlined how the SLP's approach closely aligns with what is known about best practices in principal professional development. While the findings characterized the quantity of growth principals experienced in the program's first year as modest, in my view, this only points to the urgent need to extend and strengthen the ongoing and consistent participation of principals in the SLP. As I observed several times in Chapter 4, the breadth and complexity of instructional leadership learning calls out the need for sustained engagement over a number of years. A long-term CEL-District partnership

could make possible a coherent program of principal professional development that in turn creates a high level of sophistication in leadership knowledge and skill.

Secondly, the district would benefit in a number of ways by nurturing the sense of principal collegiality originating from the School Leadership Program around fighting the "achievement gap." Whether or not it openly affected their work with the orientation of their schools, participants spoke to the strengthening of the "will" around equity, social justice and instructional improvement because of the explicit value orientation of CEL and the SLP. The importance of this aspect of sensemaking was noted by Spillane (2002), in underlining how emotions and values can be a strong transformative factor leading to change, especially if there is a moral commitment and a sense of shared responsibility involved. A recurrent theme within my findings was the collegiality that the principals felt, in some cases for the first time, around the common mission of combating the inequities found in Seattle schools. This was referred to as "preaching to the choir" among the participants of the SLP.

But there are larger implications for this collegiality beyond maintaining the vitality of principals. This study has also underlined several times the importance of building a social context so that practitioners mutually deepen learning and sensemaking (Spillane, 2002; Spillane, et al., 2002). With its explicit value base and rigorous content, a program such as an in-district SLP could be a part of a calculated approach to bring together the most committed principals to develop a "critical mass" and set a standard for instructional leadership. This, in turn, could serve as a lever to develop the capacity of the entire body of school leaders in the district, through opening future possibilities for wider collegial interaction, mentoring and other professional support, utilizing the advanced instructional leadership knowledge of principals. Fullan (2005), in looking at successful improvement efforts, noted the advantages of "lateral strategies" in which optimal learning comes from peer interaction in an ongoing, purposeful exchange:

> There are a number of obvious benefits from lateral strategies....People learn best from peers (fellow travelers who are further down the road) if there is sufficient opportunity for ongoing, purposeful exchange; the system is designed to foster, develop and disseminate innovative practices that work—discoveries, let's say, in relation to Heifetz's adaptive challenges ("solutions that lie outside the current way of operating"); leadership is developed and mobilized in many quarters; and

> motivation and ownership at the local level are deepened, a key ingredient for sustainability of effort and engagement (p. 19).

The strategy of developing a "critical mass" is particularly important in light of my unexpected finding from some participant observations that there were a significant number of other Seattle school administrators who clearly did not comprehend the value of the SLP. The SLP members were quite adamant that absent this understanding, the type of learning experience offered by the program might not result in the same level of commitment. In the participants' opinion, the reluctance stemmed from a variety of reasons, such as individualism or a sense of being overwhelmed. In any case, in my view, a differentiated approach is in order.

If the district leaders see value in a SLP-type experience as a support to principal instructional leadership, they need to provide clear direction to school leaders about the importance of participating in the kind of learning exemplified by the SLP—job-embedded, and centered on the problems of equity in student achievement encountered in the school setting. The rationale for collegiality is not just to create a feeling of mutual support—the issue is to, as Fullan (2005, p. 19) pointed out above, "develop and disseminate innovative practices that work" so that the whole system improves.

Furthermore, district leadership must also deal with how to develop adherence to the underlying beliefs that appeared to drive the commitment of the Year One cohort. In Chapter 2, I noted the power of a common sense of vision and mission as a way for individuals to make sense of and have a clear rationale for transformation efforts (Hallinger & Heck, 1999; Elmore, 2000; Leithwood, et al., 2004). It was clear from participants that their values of equity and excellence were strong motivators for their efforts. District leaders should make an explicit connection to the same sense of vision and mission in calling out the need for broader participation. In so doing, the "moral purpose" (Fullan, 1993, 2001, 2003, 2005) of combating the achievement gap becomes synonymous with the complex and difficult endeavor of improving instructional leadership. Simply replicating the existing SLP in the district without addressing the issue of expectations for participating in SLP-type principal professional development may not garner the desired participation of the broader population of principals. On the

other hand, confronting the readiness issue, combined with a tactic of developing a "critical mass", would be a compelling strategy to leverage growth of instructional leadership capacity of the larger group of Seattle principals.

A third issue I see as critical for strengthening instructional leadership is to find ways of freeing principals' time and energy so they could better engage in more powerful forms of growth. As detailed in Chapter 4, Seattle principals have a uniquely intense and broad school management workload. One avenue to help them might be to provide some relief from their expansive site management responsibilities. Other measures could be explored to help expand principals' leadership capacity.

Finally, while I believe that providing opportunities such as an in-district School Leadership Program would be highly beneficial to leadership development, it is also important to acknowledge the limitations of this strategy. An examination of other third-party intermediary organization efforts demonstrates that leveraging deeper instructional change in a district system as a whole may require work at several critical junctures besides the improvement of principal instructional leadership (Marsh, 2005; Gallucci & Boatright, 2005; Gallucci & Swanson, 2006). As an example, preliminary study results from CEL's full district partnerships seem to indicate that intentional and coherent work at the district leadership level, the principal level, and teacher development level has a reciprocal and mutually reinforcing effect within the entire system. The results of the CEL-district full partnership studies suggest that without a coherent strategy on the part of a district to learn and reshape itself to support school-level instructional leadership, the fostering of principals' growth will not proceed as quickly or deeply. As well, without focused and aligned assistance in the form of instructional coaching[7], demonstration classrooms, and other forms of distributed leadership to assist teachers, principals are still left to their own devices to deepen their understanding of instruction and develop support for teacher growth. While participation in an SLP-like program may promote growth in pedagogical knowledge as well as leadership for principals, one can imagine how

[7] It is important to note that school observation data indicate that instructional coaching exists in a number of Seattle schools (Cook Elementary observation transcript). My point here is that the power of such efforts would be increased when principals, coaches and other teacher leaders are all engaging in common professional learning and have a coherent implementation effort.

powerful it would be if there were the simultaneous development of system-wide support of instructional improvement.

Despite these limitations, in a loosely coupled, large urban district such as Seattle, CEL's School Leadership Program represents a promising approach to facilitate principal learning of instructional leadership. The strategy of developing an in-district SLP can be at least a partial solution to address the problem outlined by Elmore (2000) and mentioned at the beginning of this study: the engendering of strong instructional leadership on a system-wide scale. In doing so, this strategy could be an important way to advance an equity agenda for the underserved students of the Seattle School District.

Recommendations. The following four recommendations are drawn from the above discussion, and are most relevant to the Seattle School District leadership. However, they may also be of use to the Center for Educational Leadership in advising district leaders:

- **The partnership between the Center for Educational Leadership and the Seattle School District to develop School Leadership Programs should continue and be strengthened.**
- **Seattle School District leaders should pursue an intentional strategy of developing a "critical mass" of principals through participation in the School Leadership Program to leverage future learning opportunities for all school leaders.**
- **If district leadership sees value in an in-district SLP and seeks to broaden participation, readiness needs to be taken into account. District leadership should give clear expectations and provide a rationale for principal involvement in professional development exemplified by the SLP.**
- **Measures should be taken to free time and energy of Seattle School District principals for instructional leadership development. This could involve lessening some site-based management responsibilities. Other means should be explored to expand instructional leadership capacity.**

The next section turns its attention to the School Leadership Program itself, and how it can assist principals in their work.

How Could the Center for Educational Leadership and the School Leadership Program Best Help Seattle Principals Make Sense of Instructional Leadership?

In Chapter 2, I outlined how understanding sensemaking was extremely useful in providing insights in how teachers learn and proceed to transform their practice. In so doing, I discussed how sensemaking also helped with a deeper comprehension of how and why the different aspects of instructional leadership—setting direction and fostering adherence to it, working with individual teachers to increase their skill, and restructuring the organization to develop a professional learning community—lead to the profound changes in teacher practice in order to re-invent student learning.

In my findings, I outlined principals' descriptions of the modest gains in their knowledge and practice of instructional leadership. But seen in the light of the complexity and breadth of the cognitive demands of developing instructional leadership, as well as the equally modest amount of time that constrained the Seattle SLP (only six sessions, with a large time gap in the middle), such evidence of learning should be viewed as an important beginning.

What were some of the elements of the SLP that helped engender the growth in sensemaking noted in the findings? The first example had to do with the single coached learning walk during the Seattle SLP. For many of the principals, it turned out to be a signal event in initiating sensemaking around the need to learn about good instruction. Spillane (2002) noted the importance of an experience that can raise to the level of acute awareness the deep discrepancy between what is known and what needs to be known. The coached walkthrough seemed to help principals understand instruction in the context of their own setting, a critical part of developing leadership for improvement. Through this single activity, principals in the course became attuned to the state of instructional practice and need for its transformation within their school. Combined with the SLP course's emphasis on learning about powerful instruction the activity amplified the principals' urgency about developing their leadership capacity and improving their own daily practice. Increasing these opportunities in future SLP sessions would align with Spillane's, et al. (2005, p. 51) observation that "sustained engagement with problematic ideas" is important in constructing a new schema for instructional practice.

Another example of assistance to principals was the opportunity to delve into instructional content itself. I noted in the Chapter 2 the importance of principals' "leadership content knowledge" in evaluating learning and helping make a multitude of leadership decisions. However, a feature of the Seattle SLP that the CEL instructors noted was the somewhat global discussion of pedagogy that ranged over literacy, mathematics and student discipline. For future consideration, a focus on a single subject area would allow for deeper sensemaking of school leaders. A single-subject focus would permit a specific discussion of instructional theory, language and practice within the course structure of an SLP. Stein, et al. (2003) described this process of obtaining meaningful understanding of "leadership content knowledge" through becoming intensely familiar with one subject area as "postholing." In my view, if future SLP's combined an exacting inspection of instruction in one's own setting through multiple coached walkthroughs together with a study of "leadership content knowledge," all in the same subject area, it would be a powerful impetus to the learning of principals.

In Chapter 2, I noted that along with helping teachers improve their skill, instructional leadership also features the essential components of setting and fostering adherence to a school direction and developing a professional learning community. There was evidence that the SLP influenced these aspects of instructional leadership. Principals were inspired to restructure the ways teachers interacted in order to improve professional learning in their schools. In so doing, they struck blows at the "loosely coupled" (Elmore, 2000) organizational structure that inhibits instructional transformation.

The instructional leadership component of setting direction for the school, in my view, needs some attention in SLP course content. In Chapter 4, I noted that this was an area the principals seemed to be grasping for assistance. But I pointed in Chapter 2's section on instructional leadership that setting and fostering adherence to a school direction, vision or mission is a critical part of a leader's "sense-giving" to the members of the organization. As Hallinger, et al., (1996) pointed out, "School mission refers to the school's orientation toward improving student learning. Mission reflects the degree to

which teachers share the view that student learning is the school's preeminent goal" (p. 534). This was elaborated in an implementation study by Newmann, et al. (2001):

> Secondly, connecting the work of different teachers to common purposes, activities and practices that are pursued over an extended period gives teachers' work more meaning, thereby increasing their motivation and commitment to reach goals. In contrast, when a teacher knows from prior experience that ideas and initiatives are often introduced and then quickly abandoned, it makes little sense to expend much effort to change one's practice (p. 12).

A future SLP might find ways to better support principals in the area of fostering adherence to a school direction. This would make the most sense in the context of working on critical inquiry, where a leader would identify the specific problem of student learning and adult sensemaking in their school. It is based on this investigatory work that a leader can be guided in creating a sense of urgency, crafting a mission/vision, and developing a clear sense of purpose with other professionals that help give transformation efforts deep meaning for all in the school community.

The findings highlighted certain experiences that appeared to facilitate principal learning, as well as those that did not. Making certain that the content is obviously relevant to practice; focusing on a few connected ideas around a single content area, and providing a social context for learning are what stood out as useful. Avoiding the presentation of too many different instructional frameworks and minimizing unidirectional presentations were also important. What made engagement more meaningful and successful was that participating principals already had the belief that improving instruction was tied to fighting the achievement gap. This provided a powerful motivation to learn the requisite leadership skills in the SLP in order to meet these challenges. Therefore, participants strongly felt that the SLP was worth the investment of time and energy despite an already intense workload.

Recommendations. The recommendations for CEL in developing future SLP's based on this discussion are:

- **Increase the number and depth of the coached walkthroughs to facilitate deep understanding of the need for instructional improvement in their school.**

- **Focus on a single subject of leadership content knowledge over time to better facilitate principal sensemaking around leadership content knowledge.**
- **School Leadership Programs should provide guidance to other important aspects of instructional leadership in addition to developing leadership content knowledge, specifically setting and fostering adherence to an organizational direction and restructuring the organization to develop professional community.**

I next turn to an important part of the curriculum of the SLP: critical inquiry.

How Can CEL Help Future SLP Participants Better Make Sense Of and Use Critical Inquiry?

As detailed above, critical inquiry facilitates sensemaking of instructional leadership by helping principals to knit together an extremely complex understanding of interacting variables in one's school context, and then developing and aligning an equally sophisticated, intentional leadership response. What is the most salient feature about critical inquiry is that it is fundamentally a thinking process to be used in an ongoing fashion for continual improvement, rather than a product/project that has a finite end point. In analyzing a school context, critical inquiry is a highly useful tool aiding a principal's sensemaking. But as well, it aids a principal's capacity to be a "sense-giver" to the rest of the organization. Critical inquiry provides a means to think about one's "theory of action," or in other words, reflect on the totality of one's own leadership activity in order to make it more deliberate, intentional, and aligned with a goal focus. Finally, the "critical" aspect of the process helps an individual connect inquiry to a larger sense of moral purpose and values.

All the principals in the study had an appreciation for the thinking process entailed in critical inquiry. But the findings showed that critical inquiry is a highly demanding process for the beginning user. Given the complexity and broad span of variables that need to be linked together, it is not surprising that the first efforts of participants were incomplete and did not encompass all elements of the environment. Even those who had prior exposure in another program were not able to quite manage critical inquiry in the manner that the instructors intended. As well, the instructors

acknowledged that they should have allotted more time within the six sessions to guide the process.

The limitations of informant principals' development of critical inquiry underscored the necessity of continued engagement in the process in order to deeply comprehend its purpose of developing the quality of instructional leadership. Copland (2003), in writing about a similar model of inquiry used in schools facilitated by the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC), noted a parallel finding. Inquiry took several years of continuous use to take root and mature to the point where it began to impact classroom practice.

One difficulty in Seattle, however, is the optional nature of this engagement and the many competing demands on school leaders' time and attention. In order for critical inquiry to take root in the district, CEL will need assistance. First of all, to help with this disciplined and intentional approach to making sense of their instructional leadership, it would be ideal if principals could interact as colleagues in a structured effort focused on critical inquiry. I take note of the finding that within the SLP, informants pointed out that the formation and development of the small inquiry support groups were significant as they provided social environments that greatly assisted sensemaking of critical inquiry. An observation that both the instructors and participants themselves made was that there needed to be more time for these groups, with more structured interaction. Clearly, these groups should be fostered as an important support to professional development. Secondly, to facilitate the continuous use of the process over time and help principals prioritize these efforts, sanctioning critical inquiry as a district-wide leadership expectation is important. If district leadership understood the value of critical inquiry and worked with principals on it, the process could move from being seen as simply a part of a professional development course to becoming a central tool in developing instructional leadership.

Recommendations. The obvious recommendations here from the discussion to both district leadership and CEL are:

- **Continued engagement in critical inquiry over time is essential to increase the sophistication of its use and its impact on instructional leadership.**

- **In order to ensure long-term benefit, group structures should be developed for principals to support each other in critical inquiry efforts.**
- **District leaders should consider making critical inquiry a leadership expectation within the district.**

This concludes my discussion of findings and recommendations derived from it. I now move to the limitations of my study and topics for future inquiry.

Limitations of This Study

The conclusions reached in this capstone study are circumscribed by a variety of limitations that originated in logistical and practical realities shaping the methods. These constraints narrowed the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the data, as well as the subsequent analysis.

One practical reality was due to the organizational timeline of this study, in that data collection took place only after late fall-early winter of the 2006-2007 school year, six months after the completion of the School Leadership Program, and was limited to a window of several months. The first major limitation that stemmed from the data collection schedule is that it did not examine the sensemaking of the subjects as they participated within the School Leadership Program. Thus, the impact on principals' cognitive process that took place as participants were exposed to the learnings within the program was not recorded. Without tracing the development of thought processes during the actual time of the SLP, it was somewhat more difficult to assign attribution to SLP's impact, or to surface "rival" explanations for the understandings targeted in this study.

Another limitation related to the schedule was the relatively short time that sensemaking was examined. One of the qualities of sensemaking Weick (1995) outlined is its ongoing nature. It must be clearly acknowledged that this study undertook no more than a figurative "snapshot" of the cognitive processes of school leaders within their ever-evolving contexts. It is clear that a longer study would better capture the evolution of these interactions. In particular, an intriguing study would be to follow the participants of the Seattle School Leadership Program Year Two on an ongoing basis to observe the development of their instructional leadership and critical inquiry thinking.

The limitations of this study also precluded greater triangulation. The depth of the investigation would been assisted by a wider collection of documents such as staff and parent communications, transformation plans over several years, and other artifacts of the school. A greater variety of observations would have also contributed much more data on the principals' interactions with the instructional staff. The collection of this information would have required a larger amount of time spent on-site than the practical limits of the study allowed.

The small sample size (eight principals and their contexts) was a limitation on transferability and dependability. However, the aim was to contribute to the discussion on how principals can be supported in their efforts to enact instructional leadership. The study was able to collect a considerable amount of principal's reflection, as well as get a picture of the current issues they were working on in their sites. Depth over breadth was the priority due to this overarching goal.

A strong note of caution should be noted regarding the recommendations, as the warrant for them is necessarily constrained by the study limitations, particularly the fact that data that they are based on was only collected on the Year One SLP. Obviously, they could be subject to adjustment based on the experience of subsequent SLP's in Seattle.

Questions for Future Study

The limitations of this study generate a variety of questions for further research.

What would a larger sample size show? Although the eight subjects comprised about one-fifth of the principals that completed the School Leadership Program, there was a diversity of cases that remained untapped. As a result of "convenience sampling", for example, I did not find or include a principal beyond ten years' experience. The sensemaking process of an experienced principal, with a well-developed schema of leadership practice, would be of interest. Furthermore, perspectives of several non-school leader participants from the central office, including a few that supervised principals, may have provided an interesting juxtaposition of views.

What would a long term study determine about the use of critical inquiry? In particular, what would be evident in a principal's leadership practice after several years'

participation in principal professional development typical of a SLP? Given the finding that professional development in instructional leadership is a complex and protracted affair, a longitudinal study would seem to give more definitive idea of the depth of impact of a structure such as the School Leadership Program model.

What would a more complete triangulation reveal about the practice of the principal, and the interaction between the principal and the "mediative variables" that instructional leadership directly affects? Combined with a longer time span, a more in-depth examination of the leader interacting with the school context would provide a richer portrait of the sensemaking of all the actors and would better highlight the impact of instructional leadership learning, as well as provide a better understanding how critical inquiry works as a sensemaking tool.

What would a complete and effective study of the complex "causal chain" between the leadership effects of the principal and its impact on student learning, entail? What would it reveal? The impact on student learning, of course, is the most important question that embarking on a study in the same direction as this capstone could consider. It is also the most difficult, and would demand the major expansion of time, depth and breadth outlined in the above questions. However, in consideration of the essential role of leadership, and the fact that it has proven to be so ineffable, a study of this nature would be worthwhile.

Concluding Remarks

This capstone report deals with the problem of practice of how to develop the leadership needed to succeed against one of society's most intractable issues—the disparity in learning between the haves and have-nots among our nation's children. As I noted at the beginning of this study, each constituent part of this central problem is in itself clouded in some degree of ambiguity:

- What is the quality of learning in schools that needs to be put in place to reduce the achievement gap?
- What are the learning requirements for the teaching professionals to effect such changes?

- What are the school organizational and cultural conditions that need to be revamped to support required transformations in teaching and learning?

And the capstone question of the study:

- What are the components of instructional leadership that can effect these transformations, and how are they developed among school leaders?

It is fortunate that research is making progress in achieving clarity on these questions, even if it is still emergent in nature.

In the field of practice, however, the knowledge base regarding these subjects is so undeveloped it takes on almost a folkloric character. Efforts to help practitioners find answers are still few and far between. There is still not a clear understanding among educators of how to define leadership to close the achievement gap and how it can be developed right within the context of an urban school district and its day-to-day work with teachers and students.

My capstone examined what is certainly a novel response to these problems in looking at the beginnings of the partnership of the University of Washington's Center for Educational Leadership and the Seattle School District. This relationship represented an innovative attempt to use what is known from the research and integrate it closely with a problematic system issue in the world of practice. This study, then, explored new territory in the quest to develop leadership for resolving educational inequities.

The significance of contributing to an understanding of what happens in these efforts has great import for both urban school districts such as Seattle's, as well as university-based entities such as CEL. The component issues raised in the capstone—instructional leadership, and principal professional development—are ones that have immediate importance to system leadership. At the same time, insight into how a university-based organization can best provide urban districts with access to vital knowledge to guide practice, using such tools as the critical inquiry process, is equally pressing.

The observations made in this study may also contribute to the ongoing discussion, as well, as to ways in which the Seattle School District can attack the continuing and persistent malady of disproportionality in student success between

different populations that was noted at the beginning of the capstone report. Certainly the efforts to improve instructional leadership detailed here targets teaching and learning in the classroom, an origin of the inequities to be found in the Seattle system.

In this manner, it is hoped that study findings can affirm and further focus the approaches CEL has developed to make inroads into an extremely complex problem. As well, conclusions from this study are meant to provide advocacy to district leaders and any others who can augment the learning efforts of urban principals.

If this study was to reach any conclusion, first and foremost it would be to encourage a quantum increase in the recognition and support for the anonymous endeavors of urban principals such as those in Seattle. The obstacles to educational transformation highlighted in this report are formidable and constitute only a portion of the problems encountered in changing the status quo. However, this exercise also contains a measure of optimism in the small but significant advances toward the development of strong school leaders who possess an array of powerful tools.

Enabling urban principals to succeed in their mission connects to a fundamental responsibility essential to continuing our democratic system. These school leaders are on the front line to break down the walls that now prevent students, particularly those who traditionally fail—those from backgrounds of poverty, and with cultural, ethnic and linguistic differences—from obtaining the education that, in a democracy, should be a birthright.

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Appendix A

Code list

(Numbers after codes refer to pages in data set)

Categories—CEL SLP: Structure and Content of Course

CEL Seattle SLP Theory of Action of Course—1

1. CEL Seattle SLP: Origin of CEL Seattle SLP course--2
2. CEL Seattle SLP: CEL's Theory of action behind Seattle SLP, comparison with "all-comers" SLP--3
3. CEL General SLP: Lack of evidence of impact on leadership--4

CEL Seattle SLP Course Content—6

4. CEL Seattle SLP: Identification of significant components--6
5. CEL Seattle SLP course: Readings/presentation on instructional leadership--6
6. CEL Seattle SLP course: Speakers, content and frameworks presented to the class--6
7. CEL Seattle SLP course: Critical inquiry project: Description of approach, developing problem statements, use of data, theory of action, Role of critical inquiry projects in development of instructional leadership--7
8. CEL Seattle SLP: Coached walkthroughs--12
9. CEL Seattle SLP: Leadership content knowledge--13
10. CEL Seattle SLP: Evaluation--14
11. Critical inquiry: Role of collegial reflection related to capacity to develop instructional leadership knowledge--15
12. CEL and Seattle Public Schools: Context—creation of critical mass around an instructional focus--16

CEL Seattle SLP Course Outcomes--18

13. CEL and Seattle Public Schools: Context—creation of critical mass around an instructional focus, increased collegiality around instruction and the achievement gap--18
14. CEL Seattle SLP: Year 2 changes and efforts at improvements —instructional focus in general, focus on math--19
15. CEL Seattle SLP: Year 2 changes and efforts at improvements—focusing content presenters--20
16. CEL Seattle SLP: Year 2 changes and efforts at improvements—more coached walkthroughs--21

17 CEL Seattle SLP: Year 2 changes and efforts at improvements—time structure and impact on attendance--22

18. CEL Seattle SLP: CEL's Theory of action behind Seattle SLP, Role of CAO, and development of year 2--22
19. CEL Seattle SLP: Overall impact on leadership growth--24
20. CEL Seattle SLP: Questions CEL itself has--26

Categories—Principal subjects--27

Subject background, training, prior learning—27

21. Administrative Training Program—27
22. CEL General SLP: Prior involvement in CEL SLP—28

Appendix B

Analytical Memo Sample

The following is one example of an analytical memo collating the various forms of data about principals in the study. All names of individuals and schools are pseudonyms.

Memo—Gil N.

- Administrative training program: Central University. At Lawrence Elementary for six years.
- Inquiry Project focus:
    - Framing the problem/ Work from data: 1) Initial focus was the need to align math curriculum K-5.
    - Reframing to go deeper: 1) However, upon reflection of a coached learning walk through school, challenged original assumption and saw that achievement was less to do with curricular sequence, more to do with lack of coordination and meaningful collaboration. Working independently, teachers select own emphasis, sequence and determine own standards for quality work. Result is haphazard program, experiences for students uneven and inconsistent.
    - Theory of action: For 06-07, issues to address: 1) Develop school culture of adult learning 2) Develop time for team meetings, study groups and teachers learning from each other. Take teachers on walkthroughs, visits to other schools 3) Improve trust.
    - Evaluation/results: None
    - Reflection/learnings: 1) Through examining school, see variation in student centered vs. teacher centered instruction, rigor in grade level work 2) Unclear sense of differentiated instruction in the school 3) Evidence of common practice in literacy, less so in math.
    - Inquiry project and the school transformation plan—There was a strong theme of Gil N.'s learning in the plan—he and the staff had written into the plan in each subject area the development of teacher teams to develop enhancements to instruction, write common assessments, and evaluate student work. As well, congruent with a strong theme in Results Now, the school did not bring in more outside professional development, but emphasized the use of prior learnings from trainings.
    - Inquiry project and school data: Lawrence Elementary is less diverse than district average. An examination of WASL demonstrates features of their achievement gap. In reading, there is little disparity in performance by groups. Elsewhere, the gap between low income vs. white students is most pronounced, with 26% in writing, and 29% in math, and Asian and Hispanic students also perform less well. What is striking is that given that the school is quite a bit more affluent and less diverse than the rest of the district, their performance stands at district average in reading, and

below in writing and math. Compared to like schools, their performance would look considerably lower. Multi-year trend lines (not shown) for various groups show that low income students have made variable progress, with 40% growth in reading, -10% in math, 40% fluctuation in writing from 21% two years ago. Math is a problem area compared to the district, with scores staying flat, except for a 20% spike year before last. These elements are not encompassed in his inquiry work. The reason for this is not clear, but seems a part of a common feature of inquiry projects that have not taken important features of their data or transformation plan into account.

- Interview:
  - How he got involved in SLP: "...dissatisfaction with the amount and type of professional development I was getting." It wasn't targeted, sporadic, didn't feel professional. Mostly what I was looking for was a formal process I could meet regularly with colleagues who were doing similar work, to share ideas and get advice", What I discovered was the power of observing an instruction with others, it just helps calibrate what we're looking for when we're looking at effective teaching and learning, the ability to really home in on aspect of instruction and look for evidence whether it is there or not, and then talk together about how we provide leadership for helping a teacher to take the next steps, where they go from there. So for all those reasons, this seemed like the professional development that was going to help with those things.
  - Clearly got the most out of the walkthrough process in interview. Gil N. did this several times beyond the SLP visit. He was able to get familiar with the culture and other players as well. Credits SLP for starting to be more focused and intentional in his classroom visits: "before, I was just a presence in the classroom, you know, I had a sense where things were going well, and weren't going well and it was, well I sort of came in, you know, I felt good about it, and I didn't feel good about it. And now when I'm there, I think I'm more purposeful. You know, I more often have an idea of something in mind I'm looking for. So um, I seeing myself get better at looking for something—so now what I'm trying to do is really marry what I'm looking for with my staff's professional growth goals so that I'm really trying to help them focus their professional growth goals on professional issues, both their own pedagogy and their students' growth."
  - Also got a large amount from being able to interact with his colleagues on a regular basis. Aside from helping Gil N. "see" better in the classroom regarding instruction was indirect help on other issues he was concerned with: "An example of that is, um, in the past year I've spent a lot of time and effort in building some alignment around some common assessments, and really enhance my teachers' abilities to work as a professional learning community, and to use the time they have together in ways that

enhance their instruction." He learns best from conversation, and talking things through.

- In emphasizing the classroom visits' value, Gil N. was clear that the class sessions were not as helpful, particularly the speakers. However, he enjoyed Deborah Meier.
- He credited participation in critical inquiry in forcing him to peel the onion back on an broad, ill-defined problem and see that math articulation wasn't really the key issue, but the lack of collegial interaction round instruction. This launched Gil N. in a different direction into a whole area of work in transforming instruction through greatly increasing the amount of opportunities to work collegially. This was significant as teachers at a particular grade level might be working on common outcomes, goals and objectives, but there was little communication, common curriculum or practices, and unclarity on student work expectations. He appreciated being guided to this realization, instead of being simply told what to do, and would have resisted a presentation in this manner.
- The idea of "preaching to the choir": in his first Year Two sessions, he encountered administrators who did not understand the value of this—saw that the value was as much who came: "It's also really as much as who's going to be a part of it that's going to make it. "
- Year Two—greatly encouraged at work with CEL coach on further classroom observations.
- Comparing it to prior professional development: "What feels like a waste of time to me is when I'm told what my professional development needs to be whether it's what I'm thinking about or whether I think I need it at all at the time, and that's a miss sometime when you get something that's helpful, what are you going to do about it right away, it's just more information." Inquiry was something that could not be a waste of anyone's time: "But I don't know how the inquiry could be a waste of time. I don't know how thinking about instruction in a way that really helps teachers improve their practice could be a waste of time. And I think as a teacher, if I had an administrator anywhere along the line that had that belief at a minimum and had that ability, it would have gone much more differently for me in my classroom, particularly at first. But I didn't look at my administrators as support. In fact, in my first year teaching when I would struggle with management and the things that happened in my first year, the last thing I did was to let my administrator know what was going on. There was no way, I'd never talk to them about it or ask for his help."
- Another way Gil N. characterized the SLP was as an "invitation" that would be confusing for administrators who were accustomed to "to people who are used to showing up and hearing what the speaker has to say, and doing whatever they might do with it.": "Maybe, I think I talked about it, I never thought about it before, but I think the course is nothing but an invitation, and I think it really takes, it takes, it really mirrors what we are

looking for in teachers, too. It takes people who are committed to the idea of lifelong learning. To know that we're never done, there always more we can learn from, and ways we can enhance the effectiveness of what our school does for kids. And I think CEL is an invitation to do that, also to think of something really meaningful that is going on with you right now that you can spend some time thinking how to affect and impact. So I see it as an invitation that is right on, that it will transform the principalship as we have a role to play in not behaving the way the group of people that I was a part of yesterday and today. So for whatever reason that I believe that principal has not, either he's too caught in the management stuff to see his way clear or he's never had any experience where he's can actually see that, some time where he's spent some thoughtful deliberation in inquiry, about a problem or a question you have." "There's room for baby steps, there's room for giant leaps, room for a little bit of effort, or a whole lot of effort, that door is wide open, they'll come in however they need to do it. It's not going to be, yeah, it's not going to be effective if they're not ready for it."

  - As a result of the inquiry, attached himself to the book Results Now by Mike Schmoker, which pointed him in the direction of setting up professional learning communities. Seeing the importance of breaking down the norms of privacy, he is now very protective of the time from the usual encroachments of administrivia. Talked with enthusiasm and in detail about the more in-depth work that teachers are doing.
  - Improvements—Aside from speakers, would've liked more time to work in small inquiry groups: "...in hindsight, I would have liked to have, I would have liked to have had time to talk about our inquiry process with our like group. Because I think for me, the ability to sit with the people who had collective ideas, the time to talk it through would have been helpful to me."

- Meeting observation: Gil N. invited me to their regular Wednesday staff meeting, which had been given over to Professional Learning Communities. Gil N. had described the process in his interview. We toured each grade level meeting. The visit was confirmatory of what Gil N. had described—all the groups save one were working on structuring classroom assessments based on the GLE's, tied to classroom instruction. Gil N. described the process of creating the PLC's after the tour. After reading the book Results Now over the summer, a light went on—Gil N. thought this was what was needed. In the spring, Gil N. had asked the question if staff had the time, what would they do? Gil N. knew there had to be some agreements. When Gil N. read Results, he sent the first two chapters to his staff, and then had the staff study Chapter 8 on "Professional Learning Communities" in August. He said that many staff members said they'd been waiting for this for a long time. He had partnered with Van M., who had sent teachers over, then Gil N. talked to them, which was exactly what was needed. He commented that this would not have been as successful last year, when there

were more elements on staff who would have been quite reluctant to participate, preferring to preserve their practice and not subject it to the scrutiny of others.

- My overall impressions: Gil N. exhibited a strong desire to be a learner in several directions. 1) The strongest and most salient learning was his awareness that he needed to understand what powerful instruction looked like 2) He also grappled deeply with how to lead his staff to the next step of development, ascertaining that training had only a limited effect on staff, and that he needed to do something to expand the impact of the knowledge in his classrooms. 3) Was very self-aware about why he had a high readiness level about getting a lot out of an SLP—that had to be an active seeker of knowledge, and have to have a desire to synthesize it to leadership ideas and courses of action.
- What he got out of SLP: 1) He definitely was seeking out what he is getting through the coached learning walks 2) The opportunity to engage in a deep dialogue and problem-solving process regarding how to move his school forward—important to him as he actively applies these learnings to his leadership of the school.

- Data (blanks indicate sample size too small to compute)

4th gr. WASL	Reading		Writing		Math	
	School	District	School	District	School	District
All	82%	80%	55%	64%	55%	60%
Asian	86%	84%	64%	73%	64%	66%
Black		62%		45%		31%
Hispanic	91%	72%	50%	51%	58%	40%
White	82%	91%	64%	73%	52%	76%
Low income	82%	67%	38%	49%	33%	39%

Demographics	School	District
Asian	19%	23%
Black	10%	22%
Hispanic	11%	12%
White	58%	41%
Low income	28%	41%

- Less diverse than district average.
- Trend lines: for low income variable progress, with 40% growth in reading, -10% in math, 40% fluctuation in writing from 21% two years ago. Math is a problem area compared to the district, with scores staying the same, except for a 20% spike year before last.
- Achievement gap: Reading has relatively no gap. Elsewhere, low income gap is most pronounced, with 26% in writing, and 29% in math. What is striking is that given that the school is quite a bit more affluent and less diverse than the rest of the district, their performance at district average in reading, and

below in writing and math. Compared to like schools, their performance would look considerably lower.

Appendix C

Summary Memo: Seattle CEL School Leadership Program[8]

1. Syllabus—"Ensuring equity and excellence for all students poses an enormous leadership challenge for all school leaders. The ability to "keep the flame alive" in the face of difficult social, political, cultural, and economic problems is fundamental for sustaining the kind of leadership schools need today. This course focuses on sustaining that passion by further developing the leadership capacity (knowledge, skills, tools, values, and will) of practicing principals and assistant principals, and rekindling the leadership spirit and desire necessary to sustain the pursuit of equity and social justice for all students."
    a. Six institutes, September-April.
    b. Started with about 60 participants; by the end down to 35.
    c. Readings: 1) Teaching and the achievement gap: Darling-Hammond, L. (2000) How teaching knowledge matters. Thinking K-16, The Education Trust 2) Redefining leadership: a. Leadership and current-day standards-based reform: Elmore, R. (2000) Building a new structure for school leadership. The Albert Shanker Institute b. Redefining instructional leadership: Fink, E. and L. Resnick. (2001) Developing principals as instructional leaders. Phi Delta Kappan. 598-606 c. Defining instructional knowledge and its connection with instructional leadership: Stein, M.K. and B. Nelson. (2003) Leadership content knowledge. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 25:4 pp. 423-448. A general overview of leadership practice that promotes equity and excellence: Scheurich, J. and L. Skrla. (2003) Leadership for equity and excellence. Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press 3) The inquiry process and its relationship to school reform and improvement: Joyce, B. and E. Calhoun. (1995) School renewal: An inquiry, not a formula. Educational Leadership.
2. Session 1—9/22-23/05
    a. Keynote: Bill Miller. Inspirational
    b. Norms
    c. Sarah Reese: The Motivational Framework and instructional leadership, and school-based work in the community (Rainier View—visiting parents in the home)
    d. Introduction to critical inquiry, Neil W.: Overview of what it is, and what it means to conduct critical inquiry in schools. Focus on framing problems of practice. Overview of SLP inquiry project. First assignment: Developing problem statements
    e. Assigned to inquiry small groups based on interest
3. Session 2—10/20-21-05
    a. Debriefing school visits: Participants were assigned to school visits with use of observation tools
    b. Connecting student achievement (data) to inquiry problem statement

[8] All instructor and speaker names except for Deborah Meier's and Katherine Casey's are pseudonyms.

   c. Katherine Casey—Leadership content knowledge
   d. Casey-Demonstration lessons
4. Session 3—11/17-18/05
   a. Betty Julian and Mary Hendrix: Leading an improvement of instruction agenda. Math video observations—analyze what students are learning, support teachers in providing powerful instruction, and inform professional development. Practice in giving feedback.
   b. Critical inquiry: Reframing and theories of action. Using qualitative data in decision-making. Key reasons—sense of urgency, determine areas of strategic action, test assumptions and get smarter about problems
   c. About structured school walkthroughs: Assignment to pair up and walk through partner school
   d. Critical inquiry assignment: Theory of action
   e. Reading discussion: Elmore
5. Session 4—2/8-9/06
   a. Deborah Meier: Creating communities of learning, and instructional leadership in action. Readings: Common sense: Creating democratic schools, and Standards vs. standardization, NCLB and democracy and Re-energizing public schools
   b. Reflection on Deborah Meier: Discussion of how the members to change the Seattle system to become instructionally focused for equity—how to become a critical mass within the system for the disenfranchised in Seattle vs. the affluent who speak with the voice of privilege.
   c. Adrienne Yeats: Administration and a focus on instruction
   d. Critical inquiry: Rationale for theories of action, and why they might lead to particular outcomes
   e. Book talk: Scheurich and Skrla
   f. Turn in theory of action papers
6. Session 5—3/1-2/06
   a. Prepping for instructional walkthroughs
   b. How does theory of action improve teaching and learning?
7. Special session—3/27-28/06
   a. School walkthroughs with CEL instructional coaches in teams with host schools, with guiding questions re: student learning and teacher actions.
   b. Debrief with walkthrough team and coach to host principal
8. Session 6—4/21-22/06
   a. Discussing inquiry projects—critical friends
   b. Discussion with Chief Academic Officer—detailed discussion of professional development needs
   c. Themes:
      i. Walkthroughs—and instructional leadership (3 mentions)
      ii. The time to interact
      iii. Time to reflect
      iv. Modeling collaboration to the rest of the staff
      v. Power of inquiry

vi. Not one shot—ongoing and integrated
vii. Utilize the expertise of others
viii. Is a group of the "willing"
ix. Now a cohort with trust, a critical mass
x. Empowered to "do it ourselves"
xi. Relationship with the UW valuable
xii. Collegial discussions about problems of practice
xiii. Celebration
xiv. Good that the directors are involved
xv. Need another year of learning

Appendix D

Principal Observations and Topics/Themes

Principal/ School	Event	Sample notes/ dialogue illustrating theme	• Topics and Themes Observed
Wade Y. Dalton Elementary	Staff meeting	Reflection afterward in W.'s office—W. and I discussed the reaction of some of the teachers to the assessment, and noted that some of the teachers were a minority of long term veterans.	• District classroom assessment rollout • Principal involvement in administering assessment • Decisions on after-school and staffing funds • Staff challenges/push-back to assessment
Rita S. Bayview Middle	Leadership Team meeting	Agenda item: Mission and vision. Rita S. pointed out that she had resisted developing a vision statement because of pushback (from staff). But the research shows the need to be clear about this…there is no hurry on this, so propose to table the conversation—maybe the staff can contribute some points (for the statement)	• Approval of funds to send staff to conference • Brief discussion on need for vision • Push-back by staff member on WASL preparation for African American students (note: this happened to be Rita's critical inquiry action plan) • Minor "new business" items

Appendix D, continued

Irina R. Parkhill Elementary	Leadership Team meeting	I—There is not one answer to meetings—there are many places to talk about these—staff meetings, leadership team, team meetings—but we have to make sure that they are learning focused. T1(pushing back)—We need to talk about school functioning—like how some classes are not in control. Or hallway behavior. Positive Discipline issues…..	• Development of professional development calendar for school year • Numerous and sometimes conflicting initiatives in literacy, serving English language learners, math, character education, cultural competency • Extensive pushback of a few staff members to professional development— need for focus; push to instead meet on complaints about school behavior
Pat A. Columbia K-8	Elementary K-5 Team Meeting	Pat A. introduces the math adoption meeting as a look at the curriculum, then review, then feedback process as a school to the committee. She explains, though, that Seattle has postponed adoption. She asks for the first "wave" going around the group to comment.	• Leader (Pat A.) enables other teacher leaders to lead the discussion • Evaluation of proposed district math adoption materials • Protocol used to draw out opinions on materials • Decision on how to present input to district from school • Approval of plan for Family Math Night to clarify constructivist math

Appendix D, continued

Vicky O. Lakeview Elementary	Leadership Team meeting	The team looks at the list and debates whether the ideal priorities should be on the list regardless of how realistic they are, or should they take the ones off that have little possibility of being funded.	• Approval of list of values/priorities regarding school program components in preparation for upcoming budget process • Debate over organization of long list • Conflict over priorities • Conflict over process
Gil N. Lawrence Elementary	Professional Learning Communities	We stopped into the 4th, 5th and 6th grade teachers' meeting. They were discussing how to develop an assessment around geometry using WASL released items.	• Small teams working on learning targets • K-5 grade levels each developing classroom assessments, planning learning
Terry G. Cook Elementary	Leadership Team meeting	Walkthrough notes: 2 teams doing "wows and wonders", written as it would go to the teacher immediately. Groups split, Team 1 walks in, interacts with kids—they seem practiced at talking with kids who were writing in science journals. The debrief discusses anchor charts on wall.	• Co-facilitation by principal and University consultant • School walkthrough and debrief by Leadership Team • Planning of presentations of staff work on school-home interaction, and school lesson study to outside venues • Leadership goals—how team members are going to support other staff

Appendix D, continued

Paula D. Grant High	School day late start departmental and staff meeting	We went to the library for the post-department meeting gathering.... ...The first question asked what was done. At our table, the math department guy reported that they had aligned curriculum within the department, and that it had been the best meeting they had ever had.	• Departments conducting meetings to coordinate common practices and vocabulary • Begin integration with other departments • Looking at student work

Appendix E

Demographic and Achievement Gap Information (WASL scores are % met standard; all scores are 4th grade unless otherwise indicated)

Principal/ School	Demographics	WASL	WASL, white stud.	WASL, Af. Am. stud.
Wade Y. Dalton Elementary	82% White 18% Students of color 7% Free/reduced lunch	90% Reading 76% Math	91% Reading 76% Math	**% Reading **% Math
Rita S. Bayview Middle	45% White 55% Students of color 40% Free/reduced lunch	58% Reading† 46% Math†	68% Reading† 62% Math†	36% Reading† 16% Math†
Irina R. Parkhill Elementary	7% White 93% Students of color 73% Free/reduced lunch	48% Reading 22% Math	**% Reading **% Math	36% Reading 10% Math
Pat A. Columbia K-8 (Assistant principal)	80% White 20% Students of color 8% Free/reduced lunch	98% Reading 75% Math	97% Reading 81% Math	**% Reading **% Math
Vicky O. Lakeview Elementary	21% White 79% Students of color 55% Free/reduced lunch	81% Reading 61% Math	100% Reading 80% Math	70% Reading 55% Math
Gil N. Lawrence Elementary	58% White 42% Students of color 28% Free/reduced lunch	82% Reading 55% Math	82% Reading 52% Math	**% Reading **% Math
Terry G. Cook Elementary	5%White 95% Students of color 80% Free/reduced lunch	64% Reading 29% Math	**% Reading **% Math	56% Reading 11% Math

Appendix E, continued

Paula D. Grant High (Assistant principal)	62% White 38% Students of color 24% Free/reduced lunch	91% Reading* 68% Math*	95% Reading* 75% Math*	71% Reading* 24% Math*
Seattle School District	41% White 59% Students of color 41% Free/reduced lunch	80% Reading 61% Math	91% Reading 80% Math	62% Reading 31% Math

†7th grade WASL *10th grade WASL **Cohort less than 10 students, no score reported

Vita

Kyle Kinoshita was born and raised in the south Seattle area. After graduating from Rainier Beach High School, he obtained his Bachelor's degree in Social Studies/Ethnic Studies from Western Washington University. He then received his Elementary certificate, Master's degree in Educational Administration, Principal certification, Superintendent's certification, and the Doctor of Education degree from the University of Washington. He is a member of the Leadership for Learning Ed.D program, cohort 2.

Kyle is currently principal at Meadowdale Elementary School in the Edmonds School District. Previously he was a principal in the Highline School District and taught in the Shoreline and Seattle School Districts. He is a specialty faculty member in the Western Washington University Educational Administration program, and a member of the WWU Educational Administration Department's Professional Education Advisory Board.

In 1993, he was awarded as a teacher the Christa McAuliffe-Excellence in Education Award from the state of Washington; in 2000 he received the Snohomish Region Distinguished Principal Award from the Association of Washington State Principals, and in 2004 was presented the Excellence in Educational Administration award by the University Council for Educational Administration.