SUPER-GENERATORS? EXPLORING THE CAREER TRAJECTORIES AND LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF WOMEN SUPERINTENDENTS

by

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ABSTRACT

JOYCE Y. LOCKHART. Super-Generators: exploring the career trajectories and leadership practices of women superintendents (Under the direction of DR. LISA G. DRISCOLL)

This investigation explored how the personal history, career trajectories, and leadership practices of women public school superintendents were influenced by generativity theory. Generativity (vs. Stagnation) is defined as the seventh stage of the eight stage process of psychosocial development advanced by Erikson (1950) in which midlife adults place contributing to society and actions to benefit future generations as the current focus of their life goals. Adults in this stage ask: How can I make my life count for something? They are motivated to pursue employment and activities that contribute to the growth of others, whether that is one child or as a "Super-Generator" an entire school of children.

The methodology used for this study was qualitative, phenomenological research design with data collection through the use of three in-depth face-to-face interviews, observations, field notes, and documents. Narratives of selected practicing women public school superintendents were used to examine how generativity theory could inform their personal narratives, their professional career trajectories, and their leadership practices. Triangulation of data sources primarily involved interview data.

The findings were organized into personal narratives (4 themes), career trajectories (5 themes) and leadership practices (9 themes) that supported key features of relative generativity (Leffel, 2008).

This study may add to the research on generative theory as a convention of understanding the patterns of actions taken by individuals as possible explanations to how leaders are developed over time. Generative theory, in the context of this study, may function to understand, explain, and predict the value of restructuring socialization in the development of women leaders in public education.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my family and friends who supported me throughout this process. I only hope that I can support you in all your future endeavors as well.

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First, giving honor to God who gives me strength to do all things. I thank God for his grace and mercy.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Dr. Sharon Smith is 52 years of age and a practicing public school district superintendent in rural South Carolina. She began her career in education 31 years ago as a middle school language arts teacher. Her career trajectory led to the position of public school superintendent. Sharon's love for the education profession and the care of children were the forces that led her to the top leadership position in public schools.

As a teacher, Sharon spent countless hours preparing individualized lessons for the diverse academic needs of her students. Sharon was not much different as a school level administrator. She made sure children had breakfast, lunch, school supplies, and clothes for school. Sharon was the school level administrator that parents sought to express their concerns when their children were experiencing academic or other hardships that affected the family.

After serving more than three decades as an educator, Sharon continued to give more of her to the children and the profession. In her opening address to the education community she commented that she "understood the importance of a good education in shaping the future of the next generation of youth." Sharon continued her address with "being committed to ensuring every student-every day is successful, engaged, and challenged to think critically." She wanted the educational community to know that she valued "giving back."

Why would a woman who has established and identified herself in the education profession with a solid career continue this career trajectory at her age? What is her purpose and drive for continuing with her career? Is there more to her story? Is she experiencing “symptoms” of generativity? This research sought to explain how generativity theory informed women’s personal narratives, career trajectories, and leadership practices in their roles as public school superintendents.

Context of the Study

This study draws from generativity theory (Erikson, 1950, 1964) and the individual's ability to challenge community culture and social expectations for a chosen career through relational and moral implications of generativity (Leffel, 2008; McAdams, 2006; McAdams & St. Aubin, 1992). Grounded in the theory of generativity, Figure 1 (Leffel, 2008) is discussed to establish a theoretical framework for this study. Figure 1 describes the seven features of generativity (McAdams and St. Aubin 1992; Leffel, 2008) and the interaction of motivational sources which inform the thoughts, plans, virtues, and behaviors of generative adults.

Problem Statement

In a profession in which women have contributed so much, the question presents itself as to how does generativity theory inform the career trajectories of women who have reached the pinnacle of their career as top leaders in public schools? There has been much research conducted on strategies and barriers that women in the public school superintendence face (Alston, 2005; Amey, 2002; Buckles, 2009; Edgehouse, 2008; Dana & Bourisaw, 2006), but there is no direct research that examines the degree to which generativity informs women's personal histories, their career trajectories, and their leadership practices in the role of school district superintendent. For more than 30 years after *generativity* as a life stage was introduced by Erikson in 1950, little research on the topic existed. (Kotre 1984; McAdams 2006; McAdams & St. Aubin 1992) led the cause for research on generativity and women.

The career trajectories and leadership practices of women may be explored to determine the ways a woman's personal history, career trajectory, and leadership

practices are consistent or inconsistent with tenets of generativity theory. As shown in Figure 1, Leffel advanced a model that described how each of seven psychosocial features contributes to a different dimension of generativity conceived in terms of motivational sources, thoughts and plans, moral affective capacities, behavior, and meaning.

The guiding questions for this study were:

1. How, if at all, the features of generativity are evident in the personal narrative of a public school superintendent who is a woman?
2. How, if at all, the features of generativity are evident in the career trajectory of a public school superintendent who is a woman?
3. How, if at all, the features of generativity are evident in the leadership practices of a public school superintendent who is a woman?

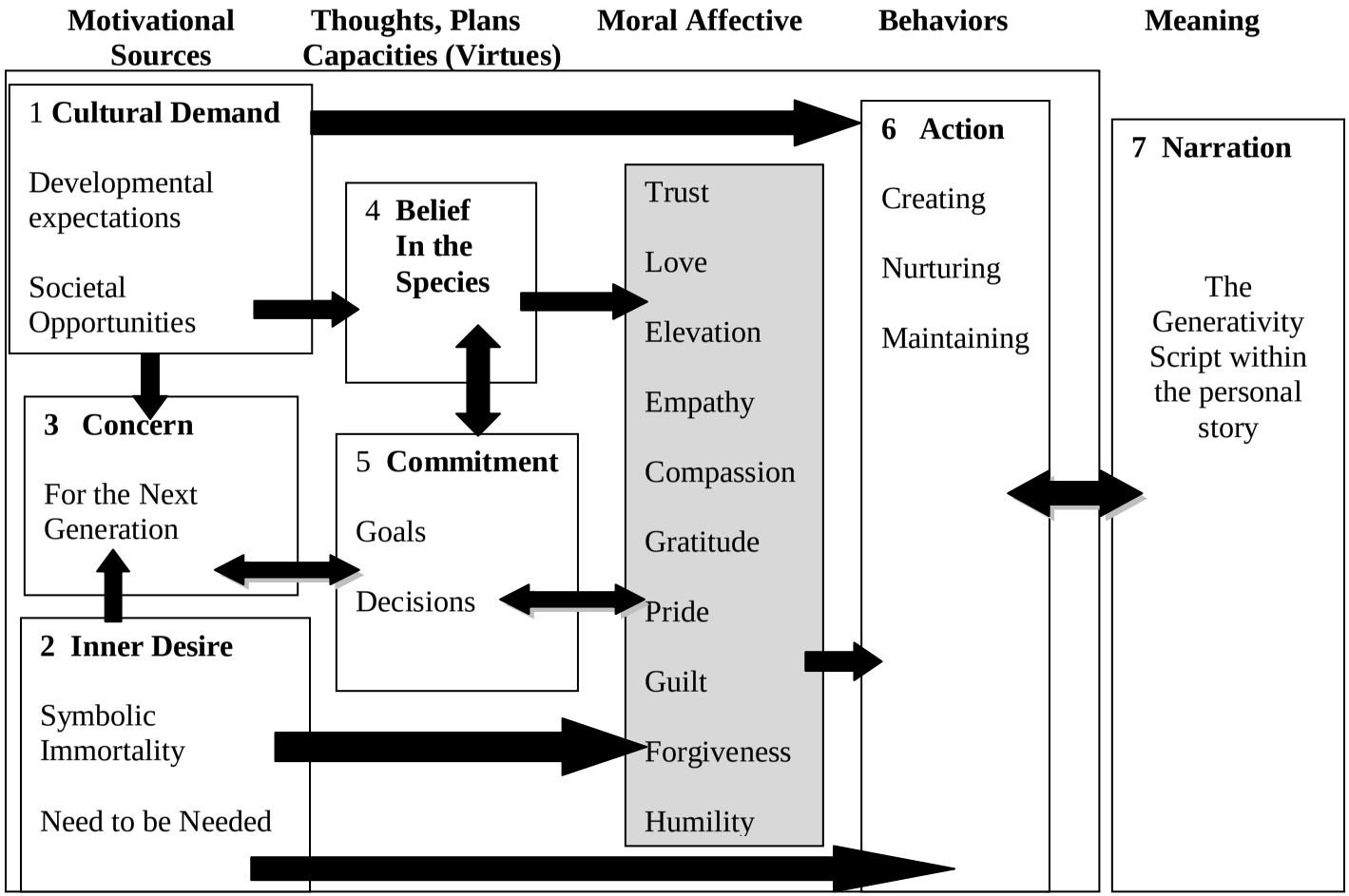

Figure 1. Seven features of generativity

Source: Adapted from Leffel, M. G., (2008). Who cares? Generativity and the moral emotions, part 1, advancing the psychology of ultimate concerns. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, *36*(3), 161-181. Copyright 2008 by Rosemead School of Psychology, Biola University. Adapted with permission.

Purpose of the Study

The overall purpose of this research was to explore how the personal history, career trajectories, and leadership practices of women public school superintendents are informed by generativity theory. The research sought to identify and analyze generative actions in the lives of practicing women public school superintendents. This research will add to the body of research on relative generativity and the women who choose to lead in education.

Overview of Methodology

This study utilized qualitative research with a phenomenological approach. In phenomenological approaches to research, the role of theory should be to limit the literature review and not influence the research process to the extent that it drives preconceived ideas; instead, it may be used in late stages of the research process "as a basis for comparison with other theories" (Creswell, 1994, pp. 94-95). Phenomenology seeks to identify perceptions and views from one person's account of their experience (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Lester, 1999). This type of research is particularly useful in bringing forth the life experiences of individuals as the individual sees life. Phenomenological research can use a variety of means to collect data—in-depth-interviews, observations, and documents, and field notes.

The personal narratives of five women who were currently practicing in the position of public school superintendent in school districts within a120 mile geographical distance from University of North Carolina at Charlotte were solicited through a recruitment letter. Initially, one potential participant was recruited. The first recruited superintendent participated in a pilot study. The results of the pilot study are included in this study. A total of five women superintendents agreed to participate and five women superintendents were purposefully selected to participate based on proximity of location. Participants were not assigned to any "group."

The study was designed to answer this research question:

> How, if at all, the features of generativity are evident in the personal narratives, career trajectories, and leadership practices of a public school superintendent who is a woman?

McAdams (2006) outlined the benefits of using life experience research in the study of generativity. Self-constructed life experience narratives of adults evolve over time as individuals integrate and organize their many experiences (Leffel, 2008). Each participant had a minimum of three in-depth interviews using open-ended questions. The interviews took place at the participants' offices. Each interview was voice-recorded using two digital voice recorders (in case there was a malfunction). Each session was 60 minutes or less in duration.

The interviews relied on procedures developed by Seidman (2006) regarding the three interview protocol and the development of the use of "grand tour" questioning to build rapport with the participant. The first interview was "introductory" and involved a focused personal and professional life history (5 open-ended, in depth questions). The second interview covered the details of the respondent's present superintendent experience. The third interview addressed the meaning of the experience. Superintendents were asked to reflect on the intellectual and emotional connection between personal life and professional career.

Themes derived by analyzing data gathered from interviews, observations, documents, and field notes helped me identify adult generativity in the personal narratives, career trajectories, and experiences of the participating women superintendents.

Definition of Terms

In this section, terms used in the context of this research are defined. By carefully defining these selected terms, the reader will better understand this research as these selected terms are referenced and defined similarly throughout the literature review. The

following key vocabulary is referenced in this study: *career trajectory, career pattern, career path, superintendent, generativity, relational generativity, and Super-Generator*

Career Trajectory

For the purposes of this study, the term *career trajectory* is "an individual's total pattern of organized professional movement activity which includes all pre-established stages of preparation, promotions, and advancements in an occupation" (Shakeshaft, 1989, p. 64). It is the "work history" of an individual (Shakeshaft, 1989**)**. The course followed can be direct, interrupted, or similar to the course followed by others who have successfully reached the same career goal. Career trajectory is used synonymously with the terms *career paths* and *career patterns* throughout this research.

Career Pattern

A *career pattern* is the total sequence of jobs related to an occupation held by an individual. In education administration, one would most likely begin the job sequence with entrance in the teaching profession and include several years as a teacher. Some individuals follow a planned and sequentially organized course to reach their career goal.

Career Path

A career path might be described as the course followed through a planned and logical sequence of work experiences over a progression of time chosen to reach the desired career goal. The career path includes all jobs or occupations that an individual is qualified for after completing certain basic requirements. These requirements could include course work and/or acquired skills. The key terminology in the definition of career path is "course followed."

Superintendent

Superintendent for the purposes of this study is defined as the top public school official and the administrative leader charged with providing effective leadership which yields a high quality school district with students achieving high academically (Alston, 2005; Bjork, 2000; McDade& Drake, 1982). States are responsible for establishing selection criteria, required credentials, and licensure to hold the position of public school superintendent.

Generativity

Generativity is defined as the seventh stage of the eight stage process of psychosocial development advanced by Erikson (1950, 1964) in which adults in midlife place contributing to society and doing things to benefit the future of the next generations as the focus of their current life goals. Erikson (1950, 1964) believed adults go through eight stages of psychosocial development from infancy to adulthood with each stage having a dependency on the development of the previous stage.

Each stage of the psychosocial development can be represented as follows: Stage (1) as hope, (Stage 2) as will, (Stage 3) purpose, (Stage 4) competence, (Stage 5) fidelity, (Stage 6) love, (Stage 7) care, and (Stage 8) wisdom (Erikson, 1993). The generative stage is number seven or caring. Adults in this stage ask: How can I make my life count for something? They are motivated to pursue employment and activities that contribute to the growth of others, whether that is one child or as a "Super-Generator" an entire school of children. In many individuals, the generative stage usually occurs between the ages of 40 and 64 and coincides with the pinnacle of most career trajectories.

Relational Generativity

Relational generativity is a new domain of generativity theory (Leffel, 2008) which can be conceptualized as the motive and capacity to take care of the next generation by developing their strengths and talents. *Relational Generativity* is based on the concept that the caring actions of adults are activated by certain motivational sources (Epstein, 2011; Leffel, 2008; Newton & Stewart, 2010). Adults exhibit these caring actions because of the pleasure and moral affective capacities (Leffel, 2008). For the purpose of this research, relational generativity will be used to explain a new domain of generativity theory as the domain relates to the motives of women who choose their careers based on their caring spirits. In Figure 1 (presented earlier in this chapter) motivational sources—cultural demand, concern for the next generation, and inner desires—yield actions that are expressed in the actions and narrations of generative people.

Super-Generator

An original term developed by my advisor and me. *Super-Generator* is used to describe women superintendents in their quest to serve in their school districts with a generative spirit.

Credentials for the Public School District Superintendency

Public school district superintendents spend about five years as classroom teachers before attaining their first administrative position (Brunner, 1999; Brunner & Grogan, 2005; Buckles, 2009; Farmer, 2007). About one-fourth of all superintendents were former elementary school teachers (Farmer, 2007). A large number were involved in extracurricular activities and coaching of some type of sport, but very few took the traditional route to the position of public school superintendent.

Licensure requirements for the position of public school superintendent vary by state. In North Carolina, eligibility to serve as public school superintendent must be verified by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction(NC General Statute 115C-276). The verification of the eligibility process must occur prior to being selected for the position by the local school board.In addition, the candidate must have:

- a license to teach
- one year of experience as a principal or the equivalent
- a sixth-year degree or above in School Administration

OR

- a bachelor's degree and five years of administrative experience

In South Carolina (South Carolina Code of Laws Section 59-13-10), the selection of the County Superintendent of Education is governed by South Carolina Code of Laws. The candidate:

- Is elected by the qualified electors of the county (the school board)
- Holdsthe office for a term of four years
- Gives one thousand dollars in bond to the State

- Qualifies within thirty days after notice of his election
- Possesses the superintendent certificate issued by the State Board of Education

In October 2012, there were 53women superintendents in North Carolina and South Carolina or approximately25%of women superintendents in the two states combined.

Significance of the Study

The career trajectory of women to the position of public school superintendency has been a topic studied extensively in dissertations in most recent years (Davis, 2010; Atwater, 1997; Edgehouse, 2008; Farmer, 2005). Studies concerned with the topic of career trajectories to the public school superintendency have concentrated on leadership traits and barriers to the position of public school superintendent rather than trajectories, attainment, or how to access the top public school position (Grogan, 2005).

There is no direct research that examines the degree to which generativity needs play a role in women's personal narratives, their career trajectories, and their leadership practices in the role of public school superintendent. There exists a need for an in-depth study of how the career trajectories, leadership behaviors and practices of women who hold the top position in public education are influenced by generativity theory. Research in this area could possibly explain why women continue to pursue their career to this level. This study will contribute to the existing body of generativity research and will inform two arenas of knowledge: (1) connections between gender generativity theory and the public school superintendency and (2) generativity theory expression in professional women.

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Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to the women participants currently employed as public school district superintendents. Findings in this study may not be generalized because the study participants represented women who were located within a 120 mile radius of the University of North Carolina Charlotte who are employed as public school superintendents.

Delimitations of the Study

One delimitation was identified. Selected women participants must be within the age range of 40-68 years and currently hold the top position of superintendent in their district. Males, associate superintendents, assistant superintendents, teachers, and other school employees who were not serving in the position of public school district superintendent were ineligible to participate in the study, even though these individuals may exhibit "generative" behavior and understandings.

Assumptions

The researcher assumes the following:

1. The research participants will respond to the interview questions honestly.
2. Respondents will describe situations in the past that are based on their own perceptions. There will be no attempt to validate through other parties the accuracy of their perceptions.
3. The interview instrument is valid and reliable for the purpose of this study.

Organization of the Document

Chapter 1 contains a discussion of the purpose and the context of the problem. The significance of the study, the limitations, delimitations, and definitions of key terms related to the research. Also included in this chapter is the research question which will guide the research.

Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature focusing on the body of research which describes generativity and the career trajectories of public school superintendents. The chapter includes a scope of the issue, a summary of the search process, a theoretical framework, and theories related to women's career trajectories to the position of public school superintendent.

Chapter 3 presents the research methodology and the study design. The qualitative research method was used. The study sample, data gathering instrument (interview protocol), data collection procedures, and a discussion of procedures used to advance the integrity of the research as required by the Institutional Review Board of UNC-Charlotte.

Chapter 4 presents a summary of research findings.

Chapter 5 presents conclusions from the research and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A literature review related togenerativity theory and the career trajectories of women public school superintendents is presented in this chapter. The studies reviewed in this chapter include empirical studies, scholarly articles, books, and dissertations published since 1985. These published works included quantitative research, qualitative research, and case studiesof generativity theory and the career trajectories of women superintendents.

This chapter is divided in five sections: the scope of the problem, the literature search and review process, the discussion of the literature, a summary and synthesis of the literature, and the research direction.

Scope of the Issue

Theories explaining the leadership experiences and career trajectories of women as leaders and specifically in the role of public school superintendents have advanced in stages and have been interpreted over time through several different conceptual lenses (Shakeshaft, 1989). Early research appeared to assume that women had the same motivations as men in aspiring to and practice in the superintendency. Because women were less representative in that position, the studies took a deficit stance explaining the personal and leadership characteristics of the women as lacking when compared with men. Later research, perhaps with a feminist stance, abandoned the deficit orientation and examined the gender uniqueness in accomplishments of women as superintendents.

The third stage explained women's achievement in terms of forces external to the person or an ecological approach by focusing on the *barriers* faced by women and *strengths* exhibited by the women who aspire to and become a public school superintendent. Recently, research studies have examined the perceptions, life stories and leadership practices of women superintendents, in some cases contrasting these with that of men. Limited direct research that examines the degree to which generativity needs play a role in women's motivations to become public school superintendents, especially those women who are represented in this range, has been conducted. Contributing to the current trend in research on women superintendents, a study on women's responses to generativity will extend theory in educational leadership.

There is a rich research base explaining how adults express the generative stage of adult life, and how women in mid-life approach the generative goals in work outside the home (McAdams & St. Aubin, 1992; Peterson & Duncan, 2007; Stewart & Ostrove,

1998; Whitbourne & Sneed, 2009). The generative stage usually transpires between the ages of 40 and 64 in many individuals and coincides with the pinnacle of most career trajectories. Adults in this stage ask: How can I make my life count for something? They are motivated to pursue employment and activities that contribute to the growth of others, whether that is one child or as a "super-generator" an entire school of children.

Literature Search and Review Process

A comprehensive search of the literature which pertained to the research question, “How, if at all, the features of generativity are evident in the career trajectory of a public school superintendent who is a woman?” was performed using electronic database searches of Education Abstracts, ERIC (via EBSCOhost, Education Research Complete, Dissertation Abstracts on Line, Educational Administration Abstracts, and the table of contents of published dissertations that were related to the topic. Using the key word*superintendent* returned 8,970 studies. *Women superintendent* returned 544 studies. Articles found in all searches were from empirical journals, but did not sufficiently support the topic. Limiting the studies to those specific to *women superintendents and career paths* resulted in 612 studies published between 1985 and 2012. Further limiting the 612 studies to scholarly peer reviewed articles resulted in 16 unduplicated studies. Literature related to the topic on the career paths, career patterns, and/or career trajectories of women were reviewed.

A literature search pertaining to generativity theory and women was limited to peer reviewed articles written between 1985 and 2012. Books authors by Erik Erikson (1950, 1963) were reviewed to provide background information on the theory of generativity because many of the selected articles referenced the research of Erik Erikson (1950). By searching the data base Psych articles and using the key words *generativity*, *generativity theory*, *relative generativity*, and *generativity/women*, the search yielded 42 unduplicated articles. Only 12 articles in the search were directly related to the research topic.

The literature search yielded no studies on the subject of generativity and women superintendents. This literature review included literature that was relevant, empirical, and scholarly. Studies on generativity and women which were directly related to the research question were determined to be relevant. The selected studies were supported by observations or experimental data (empirical) and reviewed by scholars in the field (scholarly). The extensive body of research on superintendents was deliberately limited to studies related to the career trajectories of women superintendents. Studies selected were mostly qualitative studies that provided clear evidence and conclusions based on the research rather than the author's opinions.

Discussion of the Literature

As a concept, generativity invites us to see the entire range of ways human beings leave their stamp on life (Kotre, 1984; Erikson 1950, 1964, 1993) described generativity in adults as the seventh stage of psychosocial development where adults in midlife develop a caring spirit for future generations. Generativity manifests through parenting experiences, but can also be present in other forms of work or anything one creates. Erikson (1950, 1964; McAdams & St. Aubin1992) categorized generativity with child rearing and having a connection with the social world. Caring for children, according to McAdams (1992) represents a generative act.

An individual's generativity is shaped by culture and is represented by individual differences predicted by a range of social involvements and the quality of parenting (McAdams, 1992). Adults in the life stage of generativity are challenged to care about themselves less, to commit to the well-being of the next generations, and to eliminate selfish desires. The emotional (thinking) and cognitive (learning) changes that occur when generativity is present are influenced by one's desire to care or give back to the next generation and the cultural expectations of society for individuals to behave generatively. This challenging stage represents a developmental stage that is achieved by some adults, but not all (Leffel, 2008). The ability to handle the generativity challenge differs across individuals. Generativity is expressed in the descriptions of a person's life experiences.

Historic Perspective

Erik Erikson (1950) introduced generativity in his first book *Childhood and Society.* Erikson developed his own interpretation of the psychosocial development of

man. He presented his conclusions by developing a concept of human development which he described as the eight “ages” of human development.

According to Erikson (1950, 1964), development into adulthood is comprised of eight stages in the life cycle. The individual progresses to the next stage only after he has fully developed his personality in the previous stage; however, some signs of the next stage of psychosocial development may present itself before the current personality stage is fully developed.

Erikson (1950, 1964, 1993), explained that each stage of psychosocial development is defined by contrasting virtues (generativity vs. stagnation, trust vs. mistrust) which may be influenced by society and culture. Generativity vs. stagnation is considered to occur during the adulthood and is the seventh stage of psychosocial development in man. Erikson noted that stagnation triggers emotions and cognitive changes quite opposite to those of the generative adult. Stagnant adults are more interested in self and act as they are their own child. They lack identify and are seeking to be identified with their career, family, or the like.

Only a few scholarly articles on generativity have been written since Erikson’s 1950 and 1964 books. Thirty years after Erikson introduced generativity, John Kotre (1984) extended Erikson’s work by linking life experience narratives to generative expressions. Kotre’s research likened generativity to an impulse that can be channeled into virtue or vice (good or evil). He used his research to support Erikson’s theory of generativity in adulthood by interpreting generative expressions in life stories.

Generativity Theory

Generative theory is a formal, predictive, and empirically based theory of on-going behavior in novel or new environments. Generative theory suggests that the development of novel (new) behavior is the result of an orderly, dynamic competition amongst previously established behaviors. The theory can predict ongoing behaviors of individuals over time (Epstein, 2011).

Social roles may influence symptoms of the beginning of generativity and generative expressions in midlife (Bond, Holmes, Byrne, et al., 2008; Erikson, 1993; McAdams & St. Aubin, 1992; McAdams, 2006). In an effort to extend the research on social roles and its influence on women generativity, Newton and Stewart (2010) conducted a study with 90 women to examine how early commitments to work and family affect changes in women's personalities and generative expression over time.

Results indicated that career minded women between the ages of 43 and 62 with a family were more likely to have generative personalities. Career minded women, 62 years of age or older without a family, had more identity concerns. These women, although older, were less concerned about caring and showed few expressions of generativity. Women with both family and career projects were more balanced in their expressions of identity and generativity. Overall, study results indicated that women across all ages exhibit more generative behaviors by midlife.

A significant body of research concludes that people who score high on tests that measure generativity tend to be more effective parents, have broader social networks, are more involved in political activities and religious organizations, engage in higher levels of volunteer work in the community, and enjoy higher levels of mental health and well-

being compared to adults scoring lower in generativity (McAdams, 2012). Research conducted by a team of five graduate students using a methodology of life-narrative interviews asked participants to describe the important aspects in their life-narratives. The aim of the research was to delineate the stories told by adults with generative personalities from those adults with less generative personalities. Eight interviews were selected from adults scoring high on a questionnaire which measured generativity and eight from a demographically matched sample of adults scoring especially low in generativity. Results indicated that adults with generative personalities would tell stories which included scenes of redemption (McAdams, 2012).

Women school superintendents may have personality traits (such as caring and mentoring) that correlate with stage seven of generativity theory. Though these personality traits may not be highly valued among those who choose public school superintendents (school boards), women public school superintendents may use these personality traits as a strategy to ascend to and remain in the position of public school superintendent. Women are caring as young girls and become more caring as they age (Tonnsen, Alexander, Topolka-Jorissen, & Jacobs, 2011). Adult women may carry this same caring spirit to the education profession. Women may demonstrate their concern and care for the next generation by engaging in community activities that will leave a legacy. Other generative activities could include parenting their own or filling the role of a parent, teaching, and mentoring.

Kotre (1984) identified four types of generativity in life stories: parental, biological, cultural, and technical. Each type of generative behavior can be expressed in the form of agentic-- when one has more interest in himself than he does in the next

generation or communal—when one has more interest in the development of the next generation. For example, technical generativity is teaching skills to the next generation. Teaching the skill to others for self-gratitude is an agentic expression of generativity while teaching the skill to help the next generation learn to better him/her is a communal expression of generativity.

Epstein (2011) conducted research with pigeons to explain his interpretation of generativity theory as ongoing behavior and operant conditionings in novel environments. Epstein described novel behavior as "competition among previously learned behaviors which eventually interconnect to create new behaviors" (p.763). Using pigeons in his research to show that learned behaviors can be transformed in novel situations, Epstein conducted a study called "nature" which involved giving pigeons various types of training before confronting the pigeons with a problem solvable only with the newly learned skills. Pigeons demonstrated that after careful consideration, their learned behaviors could be useful in solving problems. Epstein described the transformational behavior of the pigeons as an informal version of generativity theory.

Studies that focus on other Erikson concepts, such as generativity and ego integrity have been the focus of generativity research in this decade. These studies are beginning to provide empirical data regarding developmental processes in midlife. This new focus is a contrast to in previous research on generativity as prior research focused on parenting and socialization roles during midlife.

Peterson & Stewart (2002) sought to further develop Erikson's theory by assessing generativity with a new scale. He developed a new personality assessment by having scholars of generativity rank order items of the California Adult Q-sort measure

according to the traits that were most descriptive of a typical generative person. Peterson's study focused on three of the seven features of generativity introduced by McAdams and St. Aubin (1992)—generative concern, action and narration.

Peterson used two samples in his study. Both samples consisted of men and women with ages ranging from 19 to 68 in sample one. Sample two consisted of 165 undergraduate college students. Both samples completed a series of self-report scales to measure generativity. Results indicated that generativity was positively associated with having children, especially in men.

Peterson and Duncan (2007) are among this decade of researchers who are focusing on generativity and personality development in midlife. Peterson and Duncan (2007) investigated how generativity might impact the developmental process of generativity at midlife and later midlife. Study participants were part of a longitudinal study of well-educated white women, *n*=141. Participants were surveyed twice - in 1995 and 2005 - using the Loyola Generativity Scale, a 20-item test which assesses individual differences in generativity. In 2005, for a sample size of *n*=81, the results indicated that generativity predicted well-being and a positive personality in later life.

Relational Generativity

Relational generativity is another concept which extends Erikson's research. Beginning in the 1990s, more research was conducted on generativity (McAdams & St. Aubin, 1992: Newton & Stewart, 2010; Peterson & Duncan, 1999). McAdams and St. Aubin (1992) believed that any research grounded in a complicated theory such as generativity must begin with a clear and integrative theory. They viewed generativity as seven psychosocial features (cultural demand, generative concern, inner desire and belief

in the species, commitment, generative action, and personal narration) which were integrated and centered on individual and societal goals of caring for others. This integration of psychosocial features, as presented in McAdams and St. Aubin (1992) configurative model, described how the features interconnect to develop a theoretical framework for this research as it pertains to generativity and the leadership experiences of women superintendents from the perspective of relationship.

Figure 1 is based on the account of generativity known as the "life story" model of personality and mature character development (McAdams & St. Aubin, 1992). McAdams and St. Aubin described the model as the progressive construction of a cohesive moral identity organized around a "generative script" to develop one's generative identity. Seven psychosocial features interact in a specified manner to construct a generative identity.

The model further describes generativity as much more than a single construct driven by one's motivation. Rather, generativity mirrors other relational constructs—happiness, anger-that take consideration for the relation between the person and the environment (McAdams & St. Aubin, 1992). The integration of each feature of generativity forms the relational construct of care described by Leffel as a new domain of "generativity."

Motivational Sources

Leffel (2008) describes three sources of motivation that promotes generative action. Individuals are motivated by the demands of community culture, their inner desires, and their concern for the next generation. The cultural demands of the community and an individual's inner desires interconnect to generate a care and concern

for the next generation. Community culture based on societal norms may expect adults, in their roles as parents, teachers, and mentors, to take the responsibility of providing care for the next generation of young people by cultivating them in a way that they become part of an intergenerational web of generative adults (Peterson & Stewart, 2002).

Cultural Demand

According to Hofstede & Hofstede (2005), *culture i*s a pattern of thinking, acting, and feeling programmed in one's mind to distinguish one group of people from another. Culture is learned behavior. People define themselves through their culture which includes many societal aspects: norms and rules. Culture is learned, practiced and can be taken from one's social environment. After much practice, culture becomes a way of life. It is the expectations that society places upon the people of a race, community, or group. The culture of a people can be an expectation that men and women are expected to be married by 21 years of age and have more than one child. These expectations are termed cultural demands of the community or society.

Cultural demand includes all the benefits and constraints that society offers to shape and influence the life style of community people. Cultural demand "includes many external factors that affect individual behavior" (McAdams & St. Aubin, p. 1005). Age-graded societal norms and expectations act as cultural demands. The culture of the community may shape the career trajectories of women superintendents by defining expected behaviors of women in the position. Culture may influence how the leader interacts within the community of residence.

Inner Desire

Inner Desire is a second motivational source of generativity. Leffel (2008) identified two kinds of desires: (1) to be needed and (2) to leave a legacy. Desires may be expressed by the actions of generative adults. An individual's inner desire is the motivation which causes generative adults to be more mindful of the importance of making a contribution to the care and development of younger people (McAdams & St. Aubin, 1992). This concern may be interpreted as being committed to making decisions and establishing goals that benefit the next generation of life.

Thoughts and Plans

Belief

Belief describes the thoughts and plans formulated by individuals in the adult years. Erikson (1950) defined belief as being confident that the next generation is worth investing time. Belief is having confidence in the goodness and significance of caring for the next generation. Believing adults are confident that the next generation will move forward progressively. This belief is expressed by the thoughtful planning of what contributions are made in response to the cultural demands of society.

Commitment

Committing is to make a promise or pledge to take care of an obligation. Adults demonstrate commitment by their desire to make decisions and establish goals that benefit the next generation. Concern may motivate adults to pledge to care for the next generation. The level of an adult's commitment may influence beliefs and concern (McAdams & St. Aubin, 1992). Commitment provides the inspiration for the adult to act in the interest of the next generation.

Behaviors

Behaviors are the actions that result from the cultural demands and inner desires of the generative adults. Generative behaviors are "the actions that are stimulated by the desire and commitment to care and prepare for future generations" (McAdams & St. Aubin, p. 1008). These behaviors involve the selfless act of passing something which has been maintained in the community or someone on to the next generation. Behaviors may be describes as the action taken when the generative individual lets the rubber hit the road.

Action

Generative adults respond with physical activity to care for the needs of future generations. Their response might include creating opportunities for the younger generation to learn a skill. According to Erikson's theory (1950), cultural demand and one's inner desire to care for the next generation are motivators for generative action. Leffel (2008) described this relationship between cultural demand and inner desire with examples of generative adults taking action by creating, nurturing, and maintaining the next generation.

Meaning

Meaning refers to the narration of the generative individual's personal story and lived experiences. Individual life experiences will often show a relationship among culture and the other features described by relational generativity theory. The individual's personal story gives meaning to the unique pattern of seven generative features (Leffel, 2008). Meaning includes the board categories: motivational sources,

thoughtfulness, behavior, and meaning which are reciprocated by the seven features of generativity.

Narration

As the seventh feature of generativity, narration or the generative script is the life experiences expressed by the story as it is told by the adult (Leffel, 2008, McAdams & St. Aubin, 1992). It is the adult's recapitulation of experiences, contributions, and efforts made in this life toward society that supported the desire to be generative (McAdams & St. Aubin, 1992). The generative script provides meaning and purpose in life for the generative adult. Narratives convey the thoughts and experiences that influence actions in life stories which are important in understanding generativity in adult women.

Moral Affective Capacities

Ten moral emotion-related capacities or virtues are likely involved in the conversion of generative thoughts and beliefs into generative action and identity. These emotions, shown in the shaded box of Figure 1, include trust, love, elevation, empathy, compassion, gratitude, pride, guilt, forgiveness, and humility. Moral affective capacities represent generative emotions developed from caring aspects.

Guided by commitment, the generative adult takes generative action which may be expressed as creating, nurturing, and maintaining. These generative behaviors sometimes involve passing something on to the next generation or leaving a legacy (McAdams & St Aubin, 1992). Generative care involves the extension and investment of one's self for the development of others, but also a willingness to be sacrificial.

Superintendency

Studies related to the career trajectories of women in education identify the most archetypical career trajectories of women as they ascend to the position of public school district superintendent (Atwater, 1997; Farmer, 2007, Harrison-Williams, 2000; Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000). Accordingly, career trajectories for women in education begin as a classroom teacher in elementary schools. Women tend to remain in the classroom for many years before pursuing their first school leadership position. School leadership positions have traditionally been male dominated (Glass, 2000).

Women who enter male-dominated occupations encounter considerably more obstacles and barriers to advancement than do their male counterparts. Women who are assured in their efficacy to make career decisions and have the assertiveness to manage discords that arise in the workplace are much more willing to pursue non-traditional occupations or careers (Brunner, 1999). The public school superintendency is such a career.

A qualitative study of three women superintendents who had exited the position within the last three years, focused on how women navigate the socio-cultural expectations in their role of public school district superintendent. Study results indicated that women become aware of what they can do and say. Rules within the cultural and societal context of their careers were widely shared and understood. Women combine their experience and leadership practices to become successful and productive in their careers. Women leaders must adapt to their particular situation and environment to realize advancement in their careers (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996).

Brunner (1999) in a qualitative study of 12 women superintendents identified strategies for success for women practicing in the position of public school superintendent. One strategy identified by Brunner (1999) that supports the conceptual framework of this study (relative generativity as it relates to one's career trajectory) is "women superintendents should act like a woman." Cultural and social expectations for the superintendent of public school districts may include personal characteristics that are specific to men; however, women can overcome this cultural and social expectation by using their womanly characters—nurturing and caring for the education of children—to attain and remain in the position of public school superintendency.

The role of the public school district superintendent is socially constructed. Social idealism is constructed and shared through well-understood processes. These agreed upon and well-understood processes, known as "norms", are associated with a set of expected behaviors. Norms associated with the position of public school superintendency are based on the assumption that the position is masculine and males will inhabit the position (Skrla, et al., 2000).

Most women have been socialized into administrative positions associated with curriculum and instruction and have been encouraged to build communities of support for themselves (Grogan, 2005). A small but growing number of women superintendents are socialized with the responsibility of leading reform initiatives with the expectation to turn around struggling school districts where students are not meeting performance measures. Other women public school superintendents are challenged by a community culture which favors men for leadership opportunities and occupations (Dana, 2009).

To better understand the challenges faced by practicing women public school superintendents, (Skrla et al., 2000) designed a study to get women superintendents' perceptions about the cultural and social norms of gender when the superintendent is a woman. Three successful women who had exited the position of public school district superintendent participated in a qualitative study. These participants articulated the stereotypical societal norms of the female gender as passive, subservient, with defined expectations for being female. Women understand the penalties for not following socially defined rules for the female very well.

Women's roles in the home, their leadership practices as educational leaders, financial decision making, and their belief in collaborative decision-making face strong criticism. Criticism of women superintendents is immediate when they choose work over family (Dana, 2009). Other women often have the strongest ideologies regarding cultural norms for women superintendents. These cultural norms sited by other women, too, are stereotypical of women's place in society. Other women expect women leaders to make immediate decisions with little or no collaboration, be more supportive of their female employees, have a stronger public presence, dress more professionally, and lead like a man (Dana, 2009).

Pathways to the Superintendency

Pathways to leadership may not be a straight and well-traveled road for all women. Career trajectories among women in leadership roles vary tremendously (Brunner, 1999). Women's career trajectories can be determined by mediating variables or dilemmas that influence the career development of women. These aspects and dilemmas include personal, social, cultural, educational, and professional characteristics.

In school districts, there are several pathways to the superintendency. Although some begin their careers as school level administrators, school administrators go through different routes toward the superintendency in accordance with their individual and organizational situations, such as personal career backgrounds and administrative job opportunities in the school district (Brunner & Kim, 2010; Kim & Brunner, 2009). The traditional career trajectory to the top public school position begins with teaching (Ceniga, 2009; Farmer, 2005; Wolverton & McDonald, 2001) and typically passes through several "gateway" positions prior to attaining the top level position of public school superintendent.

Wolverton and MacDonald (2001) conducted a study of school superintendents in the northwestern region of the United States to determine the most common trajectories exercised by both men and women superintendents. Women often take the path from central office support to the superintendent's position. Usually a candidate must be a successful classroom teacher, engage in state or district required certification or licensure process, and take at least one intermediary administrative position before ascending to the top public school position of superintendent. For example, a typical pathway for women to the public school position is from teacher, to principal, to central office position, to the district superintendency (Wolverton & MacDonald, 2001). Glass (2000) agreed that this career trajectory would seem to be a valuable way for women to get their foot in the door as public school superintendent, but "many women take positions from the classroom to curriculum and instruction".

Twenty practicing superintendents in the Midwest who participated in a study led by Maienza (1986) affirmed that persons who are selected for superintendency evidence

in their backgrounds specialized academic training, specific work experiences, extraordinary visibility, and strong alliances in their careers.

> Women public school superintendents were older than men superintendents when they attained their first public school superintendency, had more administrative experience, and had served in lower- and middle-level administrative positions in preparation for the position of public school superintendent. (Maienza, 1986, pp. 66).

Most public school superintendents began as teachers, followed by two administrative positions. About 50% of superintendents move from positions as assistant principal or principal to principal to central office administration to superintendent (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000). In a study of women superintendents, Wolverton and McDonald (2001) found that women dominate the career trajectory of teacher to central office to superintendent or teacher to elementary principal to superintendent. Respondents in the study named the high school principalship as the position that resembles the superintendency.

To determine to what extent the principalship and leadership in extracurricular activities and were routes to the top public school office, 147 public school superintendents in the state of Tennessee were sent a survey form requesting information about their career trajectories (positions held, chronologically; coaching). The survey response rate was 75% which translated into 106 participants. The dominant career trajectories for female superintendents were equally divided between: teacher to central office supervisor to superintendent (33.3%); teacher to central office supervisor to principal to superintendent (33.3%); teacher to elementary principal or assistant principal

to superintendent (33.3%). Females tended to begin their administrative careers as central office supervisors (66.7%). Like males, a majority (66.7%) had served as principal at some time in their careers, but only one had served as a high school principal (Farmer, 2005).

Career trajectories of superintendents in Texas were analyzed to determine whether a dominate career pattern could be identified to the position of public school superintendent. Farmer (2007) surveyed superintendents in northern Texas, western Texas, and in the urban public school districts in Texas which included Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, Fort Worth, Austin, Corpus Christi, and El Paso. Farmer mailed 443 surveys to potential participants, 358 responded and only 32 (9%) respondents were women. From the survey results, Farmer (2007) identified 71 unique career trajectories. The most common career trajectory to the top office in the public school is from secondary assistant principal, to principal, to the Central Office as Assistant Superintendent or Superintendent. The high school principal position seemed to be a natural step to the superintendency.

Farmer's (2007) study results identified five dominate career trajectories and 112 others:

- *high school teacher, high school principal, superintendent*
- *high school teacher, high school assistant principal, high school principal, assistant superintendent, superintendent*
- *high school teacher, high school assistant principal, high school principal, superintendent*

- *high school teacher, high school principal, assistant superintendent, superintendent*
- *high school teacher, elementary principal, high school principal, superintendent*

The key preparatory position for the superintendency appeared to be the secondary school principalship regardless of school or district size. This position was common amongthe five dominant career trajectories. These findings indicated that aspiring superintendents should seek secondary school principal positions, particularly high school principal positions (Farmer, 2007).

Time of ascendancy to administrative positions impacts women's pathways to the superintendency. Historically, women enter school administration much later in their careers. The fact that women often assume a larger role in caring for theirchildren and tending to family obligations could be one explanation. Cognizant of the time demands of the position, women may hesitate to pursue and accept public school superintendent positions, if there are young children in the household.

Many women, instead, are choosing to be involved at the district level by taking on central administrative positions such as director of curriculum and instruction that may not require as much time away from home in the evenings instead of the high school principalship or the assistant superintendency in preparation for the top level of superintendent (Wolverton & MacDonald, 2001). Surprisingly, choosing a career trajectory that includes an elementary principalship could hinder the chance of a woman becoming a superintendent. The elementary school principalship could be considered a

terminal position as most superintendents have been secondary principals (Ortiz and Marshall, 1988).

Of the 120 Ohio women superintendents who led public city, local and exempted village school districts, and career technical/JVSD and Educational Service Centers as identified by the Ohio Department of Education in April 2008, 77 women completed and submitted a survey, for a return rate of 64.2%. The purpose of the survey was to identify differences in career trajectories of women superintendents. More than half of the participants had masters' degrees. Thirty participants (39%) were classroom teachers for 6-10 years, and only 3 participants (3.9%) taught for 21 or more years. Teaching experience ranged from 0-27 years, and the most frequently cited response to the number of years of teaching was 10 years. Administrative experience ranged from 3-32 years, with the most cited response for years of administrative experience prior to obtaining the first superintendency being 10 years (n=20, 26.0%). Only 20.8% of women moved from the elementary school principalship directly to the superintendency, and 67.5% did hold some sort of central office position before attaining the superintendency (Edgehouse, 2008).

Synthesis and Summary of the Literature

This review of the literature examined two theoretical bases: theories of generativity of the individual and the career trajectories of women who have attained the position of public school superintendent. Literature reviewed within these theoretical frameworks was summarized to examine the existing body of research on generativity theory and the career trajectories of women public school superintendents. The literature review included empirical studies, scholarly articles, and dissertations published from 1985 to 2012. These published works included quantitative research, qualitative research, and case studies relative to the career trajectories of women superintendents and generativity of women.

Much research over the last three decades has focused on barriers to women rising to the public school superintendency and comparisons of women's perceptions of leadership practices (Alston, 2005; Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002; Atwater, 1997; 2008; Farmer, 2005). Women who enter traditionally male-dominated occupations encounter considerably more obstacles and barriers to advancement than do their male counterparts (Brunner, 1999; Glass, 2000; Shakeshaft, 1989; Skrla, et al., 2000). Women who are assured in their efficacy to make career decisions and have the assertiveness to manage discords that arise in the workplace may be more willing to pursue non-traditional occupations.

Literature related to relative generativity theory in the context of women and leadershipis more recent. There is no direct research base that combines generativity and women in the superintendency; however, there is a literature exploring how adults express the generative stage of adult life, and how women in mid-life approach the

generative goals in work outside the home (Bond et. al, 2008; Kotre, 1984; McAdams, 2012; McAdams & St. Aubin, 1992; Newton & Stewart, 2010; Tonnsen, et.al., 2011). Adults in this stage ask: How can I make my life count for something? They are motivated to pursue employment and activities that contribute to the growth of others, whether that is one child or as a "super-generator" an entire school of children.

There appears to be a gap in the literature that addresses how the personal history, career trajectories, and leadership practices of a woman public school superintendent are explained by generativity theory. Generativity (vs. Stagnation) is defined as the seventh stage of the eight stage process of psychosocial development advanced by Erikson (1950) in which midlife adults place contributing to society and actions to benefit future generations as the current focus of their life goals. Adults in this stage ask: How can I make my life count for something? They are motivated to pursue employment and activities that contribute to the growth of others, whether that is one child or as a "super-generator" an entire school of children. The generative stage usually occurs between the ages of 40 and 64, in many individuals, and coincides with the pinnacle of most career trajectories. Recent research has explicated relational generativity as a complex pathway (Leffel, 2008; McAdams, 2006; McAdams & St. Aubin, 1992) incorporating four tenets: (1) having deep motivation as informed by culture, concern and inner desire; (2) possessing plans that derive from beliefs and commitment; (3) informed by one's moral capacities for trust, love, compassion, and other virtues; and (4) the capacity for action for nurture, creativeness, and maintaining.

Some researchers suggest that generativity begins long before one enters into mid-life (Kotre, 1984; McAdams & St. Aubin, 1992). However, there is little direct

research that examines the degree to which generative needs play a role in women's motivations to become public school superintendents, especially those women who are represented in midlife.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Overview of the Study

This phenomenological study seeks to explain how relative generativity is described and perceived by five women who are currently employed as public school district superintendents in two southeastern states. The overall purpose of this study Super-Generators? Exploring the Career Trajectories and Leadership Practices of Women Superintendents, is to explain how the personal history, career trajectories, and leadership practices of women public school superintendents are informed by generativity theory. This study may add to the body of research regarding generativity and women in the superintendency.

Research Question

The study was designed to answer this question:

> How, if at all, the features of generativity are evident in the personal narratives, career trajectories, and leadership practices of a public school superintendent who is a woman?

Design of the Study

This study of the career trajectories of women school superintendents employed a qualitative research design, and in particular, used a phenomenological approach. In qualitative research, data are gathered by a variety of means which allows study participants the opportunity to share their attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and feelings. Qualitative designs are considered naturalistic. Naturalistic in that the research setting is worldly or in a real world setting. There is a natural unfolding of the events in a qualitative study (Patton, 2002).

To gather the most comprehensive information, I gathered data via personal interviews, observations, field notes, and documents. Interviews were conducted with in-depth, open-ended questions to generate as much spontaneous information as possible. Observations took place in real world settings and research participants were observed in places and under conditions that were comfortable and familiar to them.

Summary of the Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted on the instrument to establish the credibility of the interview protocol. I interviewed one practicing superintendent to satisfy the requirement of conducting a pilot study and I found that the interview protocol and procedures were appropriate. It was so fortunate to have Dr. Della participate in the pilot study. Dr. Della gave me an opportunity to become comfortable with the instrument and the interview process. The data and the analysis from the pilot study are included in the final study.

Interview Research Design

Role of the Researcher

I am a graduate student completing my dissertation in partial fulfillment of the doctoral degree. My goal is to produce an empirical study with a credible outcome that will add to the body of research on generativity as it pertains to women in the superintendency. As a career school administrator who is a black woman in an urban school district in the southeastern United States, I find this topic important because of women's historical contribution to education and their status in education.

I acknowledge being biased to the belief that in general women are socialized to be caring, nurturing and are expected to respond in a noncompetitive manner. Being mindful and aware of my own biases which include having been an educator for over 30 years, working in extremely difficult situations with sometimes difficult leaders of both genders, and raising my own child as a single parent, I strove to be aware of my biases in order to craft a better understanding of women's responses to generativity for the study. I do realize that my unknown biases did enter this study. Interviews, documents, observations, and field notes were collected by myself, and thus, were filtered and limited

by my personal experiences and understandings. I transcribed each of the 15 interviews and coded each before engaging in a comparative coding analysis with my advisor. My advisor helped me to recognize and confront my biases from time to time. I grew professionally, as a scholar and psychologically from the experiences this research study afforded me.

Selection Process

I identified all North Carolina and South Carolina public school superintendents listed with the 2011 for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) and the 2011 directory for the South Carolina School Board Association (SCSBA). These directories contained the name, address, telephone number, and email address of each superintendent within each of the two states. The directory of public school superintendents in South Carolina listed 31 women and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction listed 22 women as currently holding the top position of public school superintendent. I identified them by assuming they would possess first names that were traditionally female.

Women public school superintendents located within 120 miles of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, who were currently serving in the position of public school superintendent at the time of the study, were invited by letter to participate in the study. At the time of the study, there were approximately 20 women practicing within 120 miles of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

The stipulations in the selection process made this a convenience sample. It drew from a population that was close, readily available, and convenient. Each selected woman superintendent received a letter explaining the study. Potential participants were

asked to respond to the letter by email directly to me if they were willingness to participate in the research; however, the slow response prompted me to telephone their offices to query their availability and willingness to participate. My phone calls were received professionally and pleasantly by their administrative assistants. The administrative assistants arranged for the selected women superintendents to call me personally to discuss. All woman indicated that they had received and read the materials, were inclined to participate, but had not taken any action because they wanted personal contact. I stopped this intervention of telephoning the superintendent's offices once five agreed to participate, but I left open the possibility I might need to recruit additional women in the event that data saturation was not occurring. In total, I telephoned seven women; two women declined, and five women superintendents indicated their interest in participating. Once I received their signed consent forms, I arranged their first interviews. Each of the five women superintendents participated in the three interviews.

Setting

The women superintendents' school district offices were the primary setting for the research. Three private face-to-face interviews were conducted in each of the five participants' offices.

Informed Consent and Permission Procedures

Assurance of Confidentiality

Maintaining confidentiality is vital with any research involving human subjects. Interview participants selected their own pseudonyms to replace their real names. Data were kept in files that reflected the pseudonyms. Participants' specific work sites and all identifying information were kept confidential. The document linking the pseudonym to the participant's real name was stored separately from the secure storage of the interview, observation notes, and other data regarding the school district. Only I and the dissertation advisor had access to the actual data. Data were stored at my home and at the dissertation advisor's office in locked file cabinets. Data will be kept for no longer than 3 years. The interview voice recordings were transcribed by myself and offered to the participants approximately 1 week later to amend or add to (member check).

Data Collection

Interview Method

Interviewing was one of four methods used for data collection in this study. The fundamental principle of interviewing is to provide a framework within which respondents can express their understandings in their own terms (Patton, 2002). There are three approaches to interviewing in qualitative research—conversational, interview guide, and the standardized open-ended. Each has its pros and cons. For the purposes of this study, a life history interview with standardized open-ended questions was the chosen interview method. Interviews were conducted in a real life setting that was comfortable for the interviewees, their private offices.

Interview Protocol

The interview protocol used in this study is an original instrument developed by myself. The protocol is made up of three parts. Part I, used in the first interview instrument, has five open-ended questions. Part II, used in the second, has four open-ended questions, and Part III, to be used in the third interview, has three open ended questions. I followed the interview protocol by using an interview guide to ensure that the same questions are asked of each superintendent. When I felt that more information was necessary, I probed for more detail, but was careful not to let the respondent deviate too far from the original question. As Patton (1990) said, the interview guide keeps the interaction focused, but allows individual perspectives and experiences to emerge.

Observation

In my observations, I took written notes on everything related once I arrived at the location. My observations included the size of the town or city, the types and ownership of business, the office environment, wall hangings, superintendents' desks, receptionist area, age of the building, and all other things that captured my attention.

Field Notes

Field notes are descriptive. They should be dated and should record basic information as where the observation took place, which was present, what the physical setting was like, what social interactions occurred, and what activities took place. My own feelings and reactions to the experience, reflections, insights, interpretations, beginning analyses, and working hypotheses became part of the field notes. These were recorded in the field at the time and at other times.

Many options exist for taking field notes. Variations include the writing materials used, the time and place for recording field notes, the symbols developed by observers as their own method of shorthand, and how field notes are stored (Patton, 2002). The fundamental work of the observer is taking "field notes" (Patton, 2002). I wrote field notes to help me process consistencies and differences and to help me understand the context, the setting, and my experiences.

Documents

At the beginning of the research and fieldwork, I negotiated access to potentially important documents and records which were official and unofficial documents. The documents may reveal exchanges, goals, decisions, and things that took place in the past (Patton, 2002). These kinds of documents can provide information about many things that cannot be observed. Documents were collected from the internet as well as in the receptionist area of the superintendents' offices.

Data Quality Procedures

All research must respond to criteria against which the trustworthiness of the project can be evaluated. These criteria can be phrased as question in which all social science research must respond (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

- Credibility-How credible are the particular findings of the study? By what criteria can we judge the findings?
- Transferability-How transferable and applicable are the findings to another setting or group of people?

- Dependability-How can we be reasonably sure that the findings would be replicated if the study were conducted with the same participants in the same context?
- Confirmability-How can we be sure that the findings reflect the participants and the inquiry itself rather than a fabrication from the researcher's biases or prejudices? (Marshall & Rossman, 1999)

Credibility

The goal of credibility is to demonstrate that the inquiry was conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the subject was appropriately identified and described (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To achieve credibility in the research process, the results of the research must be believable from the perspective of the participant. I used interviews, observations, and field notes to triangulate data from the setting. I attempted to present an accurate description of the data collected from interviews, observations, documents, and field notes.

Transferability

The assumption that the researcher's findings will be useful to others in similar situations with a similar research question and the degree to which the results of a qualitative study can be generalized to other situations is transferability (Mertens, 1998). In qualitative research, the burden of transferability is on the reader to determine the degree of similarity between studies and usefulness of study findings to the new study. Readers of this study may determine how to use data from this study.

Dependability

Dependability concerns with stability over time with the given sample (Kvale, 1996). Yin (1994) describes dependability as the process of maintaining a protocol that details each step in the research process. I intended to establish dependability in the research process through data triangulation from varied sources--interviews, observations, field notes and archival documents--to check the completeness and reliability of collected data.

Confirmability

Confirmability means that the data and the interpretation of these data are logically connected and not figments or illusions of the researcher's imagination (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Field notes, interview transcripts, and other data can be traced to the original source. That is, the participant, upon reviewing the interview transcript, will be able to validate the data.

Data Management and Interpretation

Data Management

Data management involves "organizing" the data (Patton, 1990). Organizing the data begins with an inventory of what has been collected—the field notes. The first thing that I did was to make sure the data were complete. A master copy of the data was stored on a portable flash drive. The flash drive was password protected and stored in a locked cabinet at my home and in a locked file cabinet at the office of my faculty advisor.

Digital voice recordings of interviews were transferred from the recorder to a computer and saved to a portable flash drive. The portable flash drive is kept in a locked file cabinet. Data collected from interviews was transcribed and organized by themes

according to the superintendents' individual responses or group responses. Emergent themes presented in the findings and conclusions were determined by me in consultation with my faculty advisor based on the interpretation of the participant's own words.

Data Interpretation

Data interpretation is the final stage of data management. Interpretation involves explaining the findings by answering the research question. For each question, interviews and other evidence was coded first.

Coding and Analysis

The analysis of qualitative data involves creativity, intellectual discipline, analytical rigor, and a great deal of hard work (Patton, 2002). I began the coding analysis process using an open coding technique, which involved reading and re-reading each of the 15 interviews, five sets of observations, numerous documents, and extensive field notes. *Atlas ti*, a qualitative computer software program, was used to classify the interview, observation, document, and field notes for the coding analysis. I extracted codes from interviews, documents, observations and field notes. I coded independently and my doctoral advisor coded independently before coming together to debrief on our codes. Many of our codes we developed independently were the same. Concerning codes that were different, we discussed the evidence to negotiate the final code. For each research question, I triangulated codes from each source of evidence. Next, we jointly discussed the development of themes from multiple related codes. I developed a summary table documenting, by research question, the themes and the codes that confirmed or disconfirmed each theme which is shown below. These themes were organized and compared with the relational generativity theory.

Initially, coding gave rise to five personal narrative themes, but after three iterations, these themes were reduced to four major themes. Our coding gave rise to three career trajectory themes; but after discussion and recoding, we increased to five themes. For leadership practices, coding resulted in nine themes that remained the same. We reached consensus that supported the rigor of the study (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002).

Coding Scheme

An outline of the final coding scheme follows, which was organized into three main categories (in connection to the research question), and consisted of 11 themes. Coding was whole-text to develop the themes throughout within each of the categories.

Personal Narrative Themes

Theme 1 – Parental Expectations

Theme 2 – Confronting Social Inequities

Theme 3 – Realization of Agency

Theme 4 – Responsibility

Career Trajectory Themes

Theme 1 – Mentors

Theme 2 – The Journey-women

Theme 3 – Timing

Theme 4 – Readiness

Theme 5 – Imposter-ism

Leadership Practices Themes

Theme 1 – Compassion Tempered by Due Diligence

- *Sense of Place*
- *Giving Back*
- *Paying Forward*

Theme 2 – Personal and Professional Overlap

- *Personal Sacrifice*
- *Ambivalence*

Theme 3 – Communication

Theme 4 – Collaboration

Theme 5 – Creativity

Theme 6 – Commitment

Theme 7 – Trust

Theme 8 – Concern (for the Next Generation)

Theme 9 – Love

Summary of Methodology

A phenomenological approach was utilized in this study which addressed generativity as it informed personal history, the career trajectories and leadership practices of women public school superintendents. Five women, who are currently serving in the position of public school superintendent in North Carolina and South Carolina, were selected to participate in the study.

An interviewing technique with standardized open-ended questions was the primary data gathering source; however, observations, documents, and field notes were also data sources. I analyzed the data by assigning codes to the text in the interview transcripts, observation notes, field notes, and documents. Interview data were

triangulated and other types of data were used to support methods triangulation efforts, where needed. Common themes derived from the data were used to answer the research question. Steps were taken in the research design to address ethical concerns. I promised and adhered to anonymity of participant responses by assigning each participant a pseudonym. Some superintendents participated in choosing their pseudonym.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In this chapter, the findings that emerged from the interview transcripts (my primary source), the observations, the documents, and my field notes are discussed for the research question. Triangulation of the whole-text analysis of the interview transcripts yielded multiple themes. Where needed, other data sources were employed to support additional findings. Following the participant profiles, the major thematic findings for each sub-question are discussed.

Participants' Profiles

Due to the anonymity agreement, I was careful in this discussion not to make the respondents identifiable to others. Commonalities among the women participants are discussed followed by information specific to each.

Participants

The five women superintendents all lived and held the top school district position in school districts located in rural counties or small cities in North Carolina or South Carolina. Each of the women superintendents described the students in their districts as diverse in economic status, and most cited an increasing diversity in their student body's race and ethnicity. Most served jurisdictions that exhibited a high level of poverty among the students and their families.

All the women were Caucasian. Their ages extended from the early 40s to the early 60s – well within the generative stage according the adult development theory.

Four of the women were married with children, one had never been married, and one was divorced but had since remarried. The children of the participating superintendents attended schools in districts where they served.

The women were poised, articulate and energetic. They were personable and possessed the ability to engage the listener (and interviewer) in a compelling way. They were matter-of-fact and appeared to be as honest describing their failures as their successes. They all said that "luck" had played a part in their current happiness and self-satisfaction with their lives.

They were abstract and creative thinkers rather than concrete or point by point in the way they responded to the interview questions. For example, when asked to describe a defining moment in their lives, they stated experiences such as overcoming a serious illness, facing adverse situations, going away to college, shattering dreams due to divorce, and having others see in them what they could not see themselves and nurture that quality.

Prior to becoming a superintendent, most had worked in different geographic locations other than their current one, and some have been educators outside the United States. Currently, as district superintendent, most of these women serve in the same community where they spent their childhood years. They all expressed a deep commitment to give back as the current motivating force in their lives.

Participants

Dr. Della

Dr. Della serves as the district superintendent in a rural county located approximately an hour's drive from a large metropolitan area. Her district has over 20 schools that enroll approximately 12,000 students.

Dr. Della began her career as an elementary school teacher in the same district 25 years ago. This is her first superintendency in which she has served approximately 2 years.

Dr. Anna

Dr. Anna serves as a district superintendent in a small city not far from a large metropolitan area. There are 27 schools in the district enrolling over 17,000 students.

Dr. Anna began her career as a classroom teacher and has worked in multiple states in the southeastern United States. This is her 32nd year in education. This position is her first superintendency in which she has served for 7 years.

Dr. Mary

Dr. Mary serves as a district superintendent in rural county approximately 75 miles from a major city. Her school district has 18 schools and enrolls over 10,000 students.

Other than attending the state university located a few hours away, she has lived in this county all her life and has spent her entire career in this district. She has been an educator for 27 years, the last three of which she has served as the superintendent. This is her first superintendency.

Dr. Ella

Dr. Ella serves as the superintendent of a small public school district in a rural, mountainous school district. The district operates 13 schools for approximately 6,500 students.

Dr. Ella lived in five states while growing up and settled in North Carolina. After attending a nearby college on scholarship, Dr. Ella had planned to go to law school. Yet, in a heart-over-head decision, she married her now husband of 25 years and moved overseas. She taught for four years outside the United States and upon returning has been employed in one school district. She and her family relocated to assume the superintendent position one year ago.

Dr. Grace

Dr. Grace serves as district superintendent in rural county located about 30 miles from a medium-sized city. Approximately 4,200 students enrolled in 9 schools are educated in the district.

Dr. Grace has been an educator for 22 years, of which she spent the first 6 years as a classroom teacher prior to holding multiple administrative positives in several different districts in two states. She has been superintendent for the last three years. This is her first superintendency.

Personal Narrative Themes

There were 4 themes that were supported by the coding process in addressing the research question. These themes were (1) parental expectations, (2) confronting societal inequities, and (3) the realization of agency, and (4) responsibility. At times these parental expectations were consistent with the community cultures in which the women

grew up in, and at other times, the women were vividly aware that these expectations made them the exception – different from the other kids in their opportunities and emerging worldviews. The culminating sense of agency fostered by their parents directly and through experiences indirectly stimulated empathy in the women on behalf of their contemporaries that did not have such opportunities. Of note, but not mentioned by the women, was whether the women superintendents saw their own generative actions as having been modeled by their parents. Finally, responsibility was seen by the women as a precursor to generative actions.

Parental Expectations

The first theme, parental expectations, encompasses the emphasis respondents perceived that their parents placed on motivating the women's success in primary and secondary school, on graduating from college, and on providing experiences that would broaden their horizons. Each of the participants reported that their parents expected them to graduate from high school and college, because education was a priority beyond all else of the parents.

Several women noted that their parents believed that education would provide a better life for them. They described their parents as encouraging them to learn as much as they could and to always "do their best," regardless of the challenges this goal presented. According to Anna, in her parent's eyes, "there was nothing more important than your [her] education."

Most of the women related that college was a challenge academically, financially and personally. For some, they were the first in their family to go to college. Some had never been to such a large and complex an institution as a state university and felt

overwhelmed; others felt the pressure to work harder than their classmates to succeed, because their hometown schools had not prepared them for the rigors of college academics. A few were motivated by the financial sacrifice made by their parents to enable them to attend college and live the dream. Despite the challenges, all persevered to earn undergraduate degrees.

Dr. Anna grew up in a small rural community. Her parents were college graduates and were educators, quite unusual; for her hometown. She relates that although going to college was an expectation of her parents, it was an atypical expectation for the community. She describes herself back then as an *average* child, an *average* student with *average* desires "to be married and…to have a couple of children." Tempered with her modest sense of her abilities was an emerging sense of self-reliance that when the large state university she attended felt overwhelming to her, she dug in and "studied hard, because I was an average student from a small little rural school and college was very hard for me…" Later in life, after an unsuccessful marriage and single motherhood, she admits that expecting her spouse to take care of her was not working out and caused her to examine what she was looking for in life. Drawing on her store of self-reliance and the economic and social independence her education provided, Dr. Anna explains that "when I realized that I did not need to be taken care of, I could take care of myself…" was an important turning point for her.

Later at different points in their lives, with the expressed goal of learning more over obtaining an educational credential, each would balance career, family, and often, internal self-doubts to earn masters' degrees. Eventually, all would earn the highest degree in education – the doctorate. In their interviews many attested to the intensity of

the doctoral experience and their ambivalence toward whether they were worthy to pursue the degree. One woman related how her superintendent explained that the doctorate would not necessarily get her the promotion, but it she would not be closed off from new opportunities that absent the degree she certainly would be. She stated, "He gave me one hundred reasons why you will always have an excuse for why you are not doing that and it may not necessarily open doors for you, but it will ensure that doors are not closed to you in the future." Another woman mentioned how she had to start a doctoral program for a second time at a different university such that she could accept a job promotion in another state. The impressive diplomas and licenses that hung on the superintendents' office walls testified to fact that these women valued and took pride in their educational and professional milestones, but the immense effort to earn each one would be hidden from view.

For these women self-development was not limited to academic achievement and formal schooling. All the women described occasions where their parents introduced them to experiences which they would mature from: travel, camps, and performance activities outside the immediate community that would help them to grow in confidence, resilience, and self-discipline – personal traits they currently identified as necessary for their work today. Dr. Grace so eloquently stated that,

> …it was the influence of my parents pushing me and exposing me to so many things and places…outside of my community that definitely shaped me to be the person I am. My parents always took me to fine arts events and we traveled and I studied at different camps… [As a result] I love learning.

Several of the women internalized this "love of learning" in their adult life as they stated that they attended conferences and short courses more for what they could learn rather than to earn the continuing education credit (CEU) that was awarded.

The women's parents acted in a generative manner that helped these women to become superintendents. The women, cognizant of the challenges they faced and overcame, apply these experiences to better understand how children in their school district struggle personally and academically in light of their opportunities.

Confronting societal inequities

For the second theme, *confronting societal inequities*, many of the women remembered that they had become aware that the high parental expectations and experiences made them different from other persons their age in their communities. They noted that these expectations, which they sometimes disliked and made them feel different from their peers, was a determining force in the personal characteristics they would come to value later in life. This personal awareness of how striving to satisfy parental expectations came into conflict with community cultural or societal norms was an acute observation for many of the women. Confronting the stereotypical reasoning that suggested that poor kids did not have parents that cared about academic success - Superintendent Mary recalled from her middle school period, "I was aware that we did not have everything that everyone else had, but…I was certainly aware that I had good parents…who had high expectations for all their children." Perhaps remembering the divide among children who had the resources (parents and materials) and those who did not, Mary is deeply committed to ensuring an equitable opportunity to learn among all

the students in her district. One initiative that she had a part in leading was when the district,

> delivered 6,000 computers…to all 6-12 students…for students to use at school and home. One of the things that satisfied my inner desires was that…we know that for a lot of those families that's the first computer that's ever been in that home…It was very clear that we had a digital divide in this county [before then].

As the parental high expectations helped to stimulate a love of learning in the women, the personal awareness and pride in those differences could be a slippery slope that foreshadowed future difficulties as classroom teachers.

Grace remembered,

> They [my parents] exposed me to things [the arts, camps and travel] that my friends did not necessarily get exposed to…Those made me want more and not to be afraid to venture outside my community or to think differently…I did not mind being different and did not mind being a leader in thought.

Along the same line of thought, Dr. Mary, who had friends that eventually dropped out of school, recalled that "it would not have been acceptable to my family" for me to consider dropping out of school. Yet, years later, when confronted as classroom teachers with students who had low motivation to succeed and displayed behavioral issues, four of the women admitted having difficulties and being unprepared to understand how to overcome these barriers to teaching and learning. Perhaps using the sheer force of will that had buoyed them through previous challenges, they described how they worked harder, read professional materials to learn more, and tried not to become discouraged. Dr. Grace conveyed the seriousness of the consequences, if this disconnect with her

expectations and training was allowed to be overlooked or dismissed, in that she "…would have walked out the first week, because I knew I had picked the wrong path." She credits her principal at that time for "saving" her and her career in education. Another superintendent who was as a teacher hand-picked for a special program recalled,

> I had an opportunity to work with high-risk students as a high school teacher through [funding] from a private foundation. I was known as somebody who was caring as a teacher and had high expectations for students…But I didn't really relate to those kids.

Like the other teachers whose hard work and achievements seemed invalidated by this group of students who had not experienced the connection between their efforts to learn and successful outcomes, these women did not shirk from the challenge. All the women expressed developing strategies that put an individual focus on students in place of the ineffective practice of labeling and addressing these students as a group with problems, i.e., at – risk or lacking in skills. All were deeply moved by the apparent intractableness of the problem and all have today making these students successful graduates as a cornerstone in their leadership agenda.

Dr. Ella used the metaphor of *getting the starfish back into the sea*. In this parable a passerby laments the arduous task of throwing potentially thousands of starfish back into the sea to save their lives from being washed up on the shore where they will surly die. "Why do you bother? You are never going to get all those starfish back into the ocean?" he queries. After tossing one more starfish into the sea, the person answers, "But, it matters to this one." In their adult life as educational leaders, the women recognized and softened these differences in education and experiences from their

surrounding cultural expectations by seeking to build trusting relationships with members of the community, while they parlayed their worldview into a vision that reached individual student's aspirations in the district. Dr. Della told how she promoted strategies to involve the business community to provide a future vision of success for students who were not going to college. All the superintendents spoke of how it was essential to advocate for and prepare *all* students to be competitive in the workforce.

The differences that the future superintendents accrued from the benefits of parental generativity were both stimulating, and potentially, devastating in terms of how the women would react when these differences had to be reconciled. Each of the women developed effective strategies that prepared the next generation in their classrooms and districts.

Realization of Agency

In the third category, the *realization of agency*, that supports the theme, Believing in myself in a different way, depicts how the women identified the passage from being a classroom teacher to an administrator as one that forced them to make a choice between accepting the status quo and taking a risk to further the emergence of personal agency. Taking a risk for many of the women occurred when they were encouraged to apply for an administrative position. To many persons being encouraged to apply for a promotion seems hardly a risk. However, for these women who juggled multiple responsibilities, change, even what appeared to be a positive change – could set off a Rube Goldberg cascade of intended and not so intended events. "I realized that the only barrier to success is me," Superintendent Anna related as a mantra she learned in her youth.

Many of the women described this encouragement to apply for a position in school administration as quite flattering; yet they were fearful of how it could provoke an uncontrollable transition point in their personal and professional lives. Many women stated that they unwittingly (at the time) made excuses to support their reluctance to visualize themselves in another role, especially one that would change the dynamics of their family responsibilities when the timing might not be right for their children or husband. Other women expressed self-doubts in their capabilities and qualifications to assume an administrative position and feared being found out as an imposter.

In their narratives, two women spoke of how positions had been defined by a current longtime administrator's qualifications and leadership style which provoked insecurities in the women as to how their acceptance of the position would play out in the community. Would they be perceived as unqualified? Could they weather the community firestorm that would undoubtedly ensue? And, could they in good conscience accept a position long held by a trusted and helpful colleague who was being demoted and replaced by them? Initially, these questions nagged at their heartstrings, but with critical support they weathered the storm, the sun rose the next morning and they moved forward.

Often their superintendent or another superior, a trusted colleague, a college professor, or even one's husband served as a sounding board for all their self-doubts. These encouragers often played the devils' advocate to confront the excuses that blocked going for the opportunity. According to one woman, her husband provided a *put up or shut up* approach to her self-described incessant "venting" about how things could be done better,

> if you think that you have something to bring to the table in terms of how you would do it differently…then you either need to step up and try to do it or you need to accept that you are not going to make the influence you want to make on your school or school system.

Statements such as that voiced by her husband negated the fears she had that moving into administration would harm her marriage were allayed. One other woman said that she could take a promotion, because her husband's occupation had flexibility in where he could earn a living. So, the approval and encouragement of a spouse was instrumental in these women's realization that they could exercise their agency in making things better for the next generation.

Responsibility

For the first research question regarding how the personal narratives of the women superintendents inform generativity, the fourth theme emerged as Responsibility. The women took responsibility to enhance generative action in their professional organizations and in their personal life.

In the women's viewpoint with advancement comes increased responsibility in an organization. One woman explained it this way,

> I think you also have to be ready to give a part of your life making sure you can perform the responsibilities that are given to you… This [the superintendency] is not a *job* for me. It is a *responsibility* that I have been granted the opportunity to try to fulfill.

A second woman viewed her superintendency as occurring at the generative stage in her life, "of this stage that I am now in of my life, which is the privileged responsibility of

working with the children of this county." Juxtaposed with privilege, Dr. Ella emphasized the gravity on an organizational level of the responsibility that one accepts,

> You've got to resolve yourself to the fact…that you are responsible, not only for the employment of thousands of people and their livelihood by the decisions you make, but you are responsible for shaping thousands of children's lives which in turn shapes the community you are serving.

Thus, women saw the role of the superintendent as one having responsibility to be generative for all the children in their district.

The superintendents' individual narratives regarding how and why they felt the need to accept responsibility and commitment were not always for organizational goals. In four cases the women found themselves in personal situations that were not totally of their choice or making. Calling these situations "defining events" in their personal lives, the women explained that while the administrative positions provided greater responsibility and commitment, these positions also addressed personal concerns of the women. The concerns for financial stability and security, newfound self-efficacy from a recent divorce, and lessons learned from a life-threatening illness intervened to become part of the back-story for their generative behavior. These defining events provoked a strong sense of duty or responsibility for the future course their lives would take.

In contrast to the humility to some of the women felt regarding being selected for career advancement, at least two of the women admitted feeling the stark realization that they *had* to seek promotions, because at this stage of their life their families depended on them to be the consistent and long-term breadwinner. For the woman to be the main earner is a responsibility that for these married women which was non-traditional or at

the least, a contradiction. This paradox appears in three narratives in which the women were concerned about how their promotions in a traditionally male field (school administration) would be perceived, accepted by their families, including their husband's career requirements, and coordinated, which implies that the woman's employment was secondary, even to some extent marginal, compared with their husband's. Yet, the women's earnings were in major way essential to the economic well-being of the family. One woman, who found herself suddenly a single mother of two after a divorce stated, "…the turning point was…when I realized that I did not need to be taken care of. I could take care of myself [and the family]." Another whose husband's career was subject to interruptions in income echoed a similar sentiment in that her education credentials were the ticket to promotion opportunities which would provide financial stability to the household. In a disconfirming way, the increasing status of the women in terms of responsibility and income may not have translated to an increase in status a within the family constellation. So, in a personal sense the rise to an administrative position, including the superintendency, allowed the four of the women to provide for the next generation through care and concern for their own children, and all of the women to perform generative activities for children in their school district.

In two different examples that follow, we learn that during childhood each of these women was hostage to a circumstance with externalities they did not invite and could not control. As a result each woman personally developed a sense of responsibility and commitment that has served them as they have become superintendents. One woman was thrust into a situation during her youth that prematurely made her think deeply about how she would like to be remembered in the event that she died from an illness. "I

thought about why I didn't die when the other children in our community had…It made me focus on the things that were important." stated Dr. Mary after describing her recovery from a bout with a life-threatening illness (from which the sister of a friend died). She continued,

> It caused me to miss some things [in competitive sports]…So, I think in a way it made me explore other areas of interest…it made me a believer in the fact that none of us are guaranteed another day and that growing up…whatever I did, I wanted to do something that [would] - it sounds cliché to say - 'make a difference.'

Having been to the brink of death and back, elements of Dr. Mary's career and leadership exhibit great courage and commitment in her decision making, "We are making decision on what's the right thing to do for the children and that's not always the easiest choice."

In a second vignette that indicates how the obligation to fulfill an unwelcome task may instill a sense of responsible action and commitment to see a job through, Dr. Ella intimated that in her early teen years she felt "trapped by my parents" to perform in the family's bluegrass and gospel music band. The regular traveling, performing in front of an audience, making conversational small talk with people who were different from her, and missing doing things with her friends have in hindsight been a "defining" experiences for her. She states that today in the superintendent's job, she employs the self-discipline, resilience and interpersonal skills she learned quite reluctantly during her childhood.

In summary there were two themes that emerged primarily from the interview data for how the women's personal narratives supported or did not support the features of

generativity: (1) Parental Expectations, (2) Confronting Social Inequities, (3) Realization of Agency, and (4) Responsibility. The findings for each of these themes indicate that the unique aspects of these women's personal narratives were derived from cultural demands and inner desires as generative motivational sources. These themes become expressed in the women's thoughts and plans and moral affective capacities. The women exhibited generative actions that derived from these features.

Career Trajectories

The second question for this study involves how women superintendent's career trajectories influenced features of generativity. There were __ themes that emerged for this question.

The career trajectories of the women superintendents followed is fairly common for women leaders in education; however, there are important differences. Three women wanted to become teachers from childhood, one prepared to be an attorney, and another thought about becoming a pediatrician. Although their preparation was varied, for their first job in education they stated that they began their careers as classroom teachers. As classroom teachers they assumed leadership roles and were picked to implement new programs. At widely different levels of experience as a teacher they were each tapped for opportunities to lead outside the classroom as administrators.

Mentors

All had mentors, either formally or informally. Dr. Della related that as she was mentored in her early years, she sees her current position as allowing her opportunities to give back to others in the same way, "I started off talking about someone seeing in me what I did not see and helping me develop that what was in me. I would like to see that

for our students…To me, it is cyclical." Thus, the mentoring experience serves as an impetus for the women to facilitate generativity among their staff.

The "journey-women"

All the women stated that they did not map out a plan to become a school superintendent – ever. Dr. Anna emphasized, "I don't think I had a big purpose of becoming a superintendent…even ten years ago, I am not sure if it was even on my radar." Similarly, Della remembered, "None of my career has been *on purpose* opportunities – I just did not say as a classroom teacher, I want to be a superintendent when I grow up."

In the tradition of journeymen professionals, the women simply *journeyed about* taking the next job that opened up which was compatible with their family needs and responsibilities and becoming more capable in the trade. Each woman stated that every position prepared them for their next position up and the maturity gained through personal and professional mistakes was essential. "It's not been something…that was strategically planned, but it just ended up where positions were opened and it ended up being stair steps," explained Della.

After classroom teaching, the next "steps" (as 3 women described this succession of jobs) for these "journey-women" included central office directors, program coordinators, building administrators or another administrative capacity before leading the school district as public school superintendent. Finally, in striking contrast to the idea that the women's experiences were haphazard in their preparation for the superintendency, most noted that in hindsight the dots are there to connect. Grace concluded,

> I have worked in 9 positions in 22 years…I can see how each one played a part in developing the kind of leader that I am…But looking back, it's very obvious where those dots were coming into place in my formation to be a superintendent.

Della asserts that her path to the superintendency was indeed "strategic" when she looks back, "So the *stair steps* have been, although not necessarily strategic, *have really been* strategic." This career trajectory is strategic in the sense that their preparation has allowed most of the women to remain in their home district where their community knew them and trusted them. As mentioned in other places in this chapter, the existence of trust between the superintendent and the community allowed for change, especially change in the best interest of the students, to be implemented.

When speaking of their journey three of the five women visualized the superintendency as being at the top of a staircase by describing the passage from one position to the next as the natural next "step" or "stair steps." In their elaborations, they often stated that these series of positions undoubtedly prepared them for the position of superintendent.

Through the journey each woman climbed her own individualized staircase into the top position. She could fashion her philosophy of generativity through her various experiences.

Timing

The women all described their acceptance of administrative positions was dependent on the timing. Timing meant to the women what grades their children were in school or the flexibility of the employment status of their husband or fiancé. Timing, also, figured into whether a woman entered a masters' or doctoral program and the time

period at which they completed their dissertations. This complex constellation of responsibilities, including its financial demands, figured into what opportunities the women could consider and candidate themselves for.

Four of the women completed their advanced degrees commensurate with the logical next steps in their careers, while one completed most of her graduate before she was an administrator. Prior to entering administration, their tenure as teachers was quite variable: 6 years, 8 years, 9 years, 16 years, and 21 years. Documents, internet vitae and biographies, and observations confirm this range of time periods.

Important to timing was the mix of competencies that each woman had developed along her career trajectory. Similar to the theory of punctuated equilibrium the women observed that at certain times whether they believed they were ready or not, opportunity presented itself. As Dr. Mary observed, "In looking back, I see that there was this window of several important things that were happening to me…All of that kind of rolled in together, I would say it shaped my professional life more than any one situation."

A second impetus related to timing was the women's feeling of wanting to come back to their childhood home to "give back." This homing instinct seemed to become louder to the women as they entered middle age and the final third of their careers. In framing it as a logical part of her career goals Dr. Grace stated,

> One of those [accomplishments before I retired] was coming back to give back. When I returned I came back as the high school principal where I went to school. It was important for me to give back…I wanted to give back to my [home] community…and raise my children where I came through.

Mary confirmed this homing need.

> I wasn't looking out to be – I wasn't sending my resume and application to be superintendent anywhere…It was specific to this place. I wanted to be a superintendent her. I wanted to give back to the community where I grew up. I wanted to ensure that students who lived in this place that I loved when they go off into the world – whether it is a job or…college or anything – that they are competitive with other students, because they have a high quality education.

Dr. Della never left the district where she is superintendent, but as she took on special projects and administrative positions on the way to her present position, she had the opportunity to travel widely and visit other districts. When asked, if she could envision seeking a superintendent position outside her district, she says,

> No. I have grown up in this district, have an investment in this district, and have affinity for it…I have had the opportunity to broaden those horizons and know that there are other things out there, too. To have a broader perspective, I would not change anything for that…[But], I always come back here, because I felt the investment and ownership here.

Each of the women expressed a need to give back to the school district that had given them so much. Four of these districts were the childhood homes (or within 100 miles) of the women whereas one superintendent (Anna) was serving in another state from where she grew up.

Readiness

What does it mean to be *ready* to assume the superintendency? Many women qualified their answers by stating that they don't think one is ever *ready* to become a superintendent. Dr. Anna shared an insightful observation, "I just don't think you can be

ready for the superintendency, until you have done it for a while." This chicken and egg dichotomy illustrates the interplay between the constantly changing demands of the position and how the women view success in the role as having their communities get to know and trust one's leadership.

Reflecting on her career trajectory to district superintendent, she credits her personal experiences and the leader supervisor who encouraged her to take on a position as an educational director with preparing her for the challenges and opportunities in her career. Dr. Anna describes the superintendency as the next logical step in her career, but concedes one is never ready to be a superintendent, until "you sit in the seat. You learn it as you go and you perfect it a bit over time." Her career trajectory included classroom teacher, central office director, college professor, and public school superintendent.

Mindful of the likelihood of these women in the mid-life generative stage, a question on the interview protocol queried whether a person who was 30-something in age was ready for the job. Interestingly, the women all used vignettes of young men to explain that this situation contrasted negatively with how they viewed the personal and professional maturity to do the job of superintendent. The women all stated that today they possess a sense of perspective they did not have in their 30s and projected onto the younger 30-something men that absence of maturity. The women remarked about having been seasoned by a variety of earlier leadership positions they held and by the "opportunities to make mistakes." Reflecting on the personal and professional growth borne out of working through challenges, she related,

> I can imagine that there is a 30 year-old that can be a superintendent, but it would take a different level of maturity because you really have not had the opportunities for failure that teach you those life lessons.

Like the other study participants, she says that each day or year is different. Dr. Mary compared then with now,

> I don't think I had the life experiences at age 30 that impact my ability to be a good superintendent today…We develop a certain humility in learning from mistakes that we make…I know for me, a lot of the things that people value in me or think I do well – that comes from hard fought experience and going through some …difficult situations…I just don't think at age 30, I would have had those life experiences…I understand now the mix of responsibility plus privileges it [the superintendency] brings.

Each of the women superintendents reflected about the specific ways they had matured over time regarding problem solving and making decisions that had negative consequences for students, parents or employees. The common thread that emerged was that they had become more skillful at collaboration with the various stakeholder groups and allowed change to take its time by educating the community.

In her view, Dr. Della defines the superintendency "as not one person…To me it is a collection of those within the organization and we are all focused and are areas are aligned toward student achievement." Many times over the course of the interviews she related that two-way communication and being a good listener were essential to leadership. She described effective communication as seeing the "big picture" and seeking out multiple voices and viewpoints. Having to reach out and involve different

community constituencies and partners, including business and industry, to build a common vision were new skills she has developed and sharpened since assuming the superintendency.

Once a decision was made, superintendents it was important to establish trust (mentioned specifically by 3 women) and fairness through consistent application. Having once fallen victim to the lure of arbitrary decision-making, Grace explained,

> When I was younger, I would let the emotional side of the people weigh in much more so. This creates its own mess when you make decisions that way because people don't understand when you don't do it that way the second time around.

Imposter Phenomenon

Luck is the presence or absence of good fortune. *Imposter-ism* is having the feeling of not being intelligent or worthy of a position or recognition. Women project the cause of success outward to an external cause (luck) or to a temporary internal quality (effort) that they do not equate with inherent ability (Rose & Imes, 1978). The women superintendents believed that hard work was necessary, but not always the deciding factor in the opportunities they received. All the women cited that being ready personally and professionally for the opportunities that others approached them about was a concern. They even expressed a feeling unqualified for the position at the time they were approached. Dr. Ella exclaimed,

> I tell people all the time that I'm one of the luckiest people I know in life…I love what I do. I love getting up every day and finding what the day is going to hold as far as my professional life is concerned.

In summary there were five themes that emerged primarily from the interview data for how the women's career trajectories supported or did not support the features of generativity: (1) Mentoring, (2) the Journey-women, (3) Timing, and (4) Readiness. The findings for each of these themes indicate that the unique aspects of these women's career trajectories were derived from generative motivational sources and expressed in the women's thoughts and plans. The women exhibited generative actions in their trajectories.

Leadership Practices

Themes identifying leadership practices of the superintendent in the study were identified (1) Compassion tempered by due diligence, (2) Personal and professional overlap, (3) Communication, (4) Collaboration, and (5) Creativity, (6) Commitment, (7) Trust, (8) Concern for the next generation, and (9) Love. These themes are leadership practices of the women.

Compassion tempered by due diligence

When one of the women worked in a state where unionized labor was the norm, she indicated that she had to rethink the ways in which she interacted with subordinates. In other words, she learned to document in written the facts and then to use the facts to make decisions rather than emotions. A second woman related an incident where she had to testify against a valued colleague when that colleague committed an act that broke the law. She felt she grew from the experience and gained respect from others in the process, "If I can get through that, if can survive that, then I know I can handle tough things." Another woman shared how she had to make difficult personnel decisions that affected

the livelihood of employees that lived in her community, which she saw in the grocery store and at places of worship and who were related to other employees.

Closely related to compassion tempered by due diligence is one's sense of place. The women discussed the thin line that delineates the challenges for a woman superintendent of living in and giving back to the community where they are from. Most of the women voiced a deep need and sole preference to become the superintendent in districts nearby or in the districts they grew up in. They sought specific places that held emotional value for them. In their comments, all expressed a "love" that bonded them to the institutions, the citizens, and the children of a particular community. In assuming the superintendency, they were not looking to travel to an unknown locale in order to snag the position. Responding to her sense of *place* trumped relocating for ambition for every woman.

Interestingly, despite the positives for leadership about how these women had traveled outside their districts and regions to international venues, national conferences, and to assume positions that were preparatory to the superintendency, "giving back" and "paying forward" as rationales for becoming the superintendent was exclusively *place-centric* as contrasted with a cosmopolitan worldview the women saw as strength. The women noted that there was a "cost" in exercising due diligence while giving back to the community that they were from and planned to stay in. Superintendent Mary explains,

> It is just challenging to have relationships with people that sometimes your professional life with them is having a negative impact on them or someone they love…It can be painful. It is the reason that sometimes at night I wonder why I wanted to do this job…It zaps a toll. On the positive side it is very rewarding to

> me to feel…[that in] the community where I live and work that I am making a difference in a positive way. So, you can't have one without the other…I want to give back to the community where I am from without accepting that there will be parts of that that come at a cost.

The other women indicated similar feelings, but also, remarked that through the years their ability to deal with the "cost" became easier than and not as debilitating as it was initially in their career.

Personal and professional overlap

Each of the superintendents agreed that their personal and professional lives overlapped and that the overlap was part of the job. When time for personal activities gets crowded out by daily professional responsibilities, this scheduling results in almost a constant stream of obligations on the superintendent calendar. Often, the extracurricular activities of students are scheduled in the evenings and on weekends to allow for parental participation. Even if the dates and times at various schools were staggered, it would mean that the district superintendent would work in excess of 6 days and nights per week – almost every week during the school year. All the superintendents voiced having supportive husbands (or fiancés) in the lives.

Dr. Della voiced that personal plans are sometimes crowded out by what she sees as professional responsibilities, even if these activities occur on a weekend. She sees her life as "integrated" both personally and professionally.

Like Dr. Della, Dr. Anna sees her personal and professional life "intermixed" but in a different sense. Dr. Anna says that she takes concepts and what she learns in each to apply to the different sphere of her life. Dr. Anna believes the purpose of education is to

ensure that each child learns to think, reason, and exercise creativity and imagination to their own potential. She asserts that facts that she has learned as an educator – such as reading to her children, the harm of cyber bullying, and the dangers of teen drinking – have helped her to be proactive in addressing issues with her own and relatives' children. On the other hand, being the mother of two very different children regarding their individual facility with learning and personalities and preferences has helped her to fully see each child in the school district as a unique individual. "If I can't answer the question with, 'it will work for both of them [my children]', then I know there are a lot of children we are missing [in teaching]." Thus, her personal experiences as a mother help to inform how she leads with a child centered focus with decisions "in the best interest of children." One important sub theme within is Personal Sacrifice. The professional wins over the personal because of their hard work ethic. Women participants unanimously described their "personal life and professional life as merging." Their relationships and friendships are within the educational community. It is "hard to separate the two." All aspects of professional life and personal life seem to "kind of merge" in that their professional friends are also their personal friends. As far as relationships, their friendships are within the educational community. Dr. Della explained, "I have some outside friendships, but generally gatherings are related to people who are in education. It's hard to separate the two." Drs. Grace and Ella, both with young children, "often interact with their professional friends at little league activities." With such a commitment to their profession, everything is so overlapped with their personal lives. Professional life often conflicts with the personal which leads Dr. Della to believe that she is not "good in terms

of relationships." Scheduling personal time to build lasting relationships can be a challenge, but she is fortunate to have a "very patient man" in her life.

Ambivalence

An important sub-theme running through the professional and personal overlap is that of Ambivalence. The women expressed ambivalence directly and indirectly in their narratives. One expressed anger that arises out of the ambivalence and the multiple roles they had to juggle. They voiced feeling envious of other mothers who could spend more time with their children. Mary indicated that she wonders, if she would if she had it do over again, would she change anything. She mused,

> I think that the thing that every mom or dad regrets when their children leave the nest and move on is, 'Did I spend enough time with my child?' Yet, I look at her, she is happy, well-adjusted…I don't know, if I would go back and change anything.

Superintendent Anna relates regarding the effort to find balance,

> There is the struggle of balance. I could literally stay in the office 24 hours a day and never get all the work done and go home. I think all of us could…So, it's trying to find time for my personal life…Sometimes I think I will look back on that [not spending more time with my kids] and I will hate it [what I see]…You know, I will wish I spent more time on the personal end.

Indirectly, one of the women perceived that superintendents who are men have it easier because of their support system,

> When I assumed the superintendency, my youngest son had just graduated. It allowed me to put in the hours. I mean, I watch other superintendents,

> particularly my male counterparts who are younger or who small children and they have had a *stay at home wife* that allows them to work 85 hours a week. It really matters, it does…The interweave between the…[superintendency] and the personal…I had to make them both work at the same time.

Communication

Communication, and two-way communication, not just doing the talking is critical to women's leadership styles. Being customer focused, listening, and hearing what other have to contribute. Dr. Della was concerned about being "customer focused." Customer focused regardless of whether it is personal or professional. She explained that working with various groups of people have brought business and industry and being able to interact with them, being the voice and the face of the district are important communication pieces. "I think it is very important for the cycle of reflecting and coming back to make changes." Along the same line, Dr. Grace stated that she "works very closely with the businesses in the community in developing workforce. "Participatory management involving those closest to the work in terms of looking at issues is critical. According to Dr. Della, "participatory management is very important because not one person has all the answers." Dr. Ella described participatory management as "informing the public and not only the non-educator public, but also our own educators for total stakeholder participation."

When superintendents were asked to describe the leadership qualities of a great leader, one superintendent stated, "This person has great communication skills. You know communication at its best has its flaws because how people filter things or perceive

things is always one of those filters in any kind of communication. I admire a person who can communicate effectively.

Public documents displayed in offices and online represented a strong emphasis on communication. School board meetings dates, minutes and other archival documents were made available to the public. Observations and field notes taken during my visits were indicative of open communication in the school districts.

Collaboration

Collaboration or collective thinking "is such strength in the thinking of the group." There is "strength in the collective thinking of individuals, not necessarily those who are thinking the same way." People bring "different aspects to the table or different experiences to the table." Collective thinking can bring different experiences, aspects, and a broader and different prospective of being able to look at the big picture to the table. There is so much strength in thinking as a group. In regard to collaboration and collective thinking, women superintendents do not think that they are "islands." It is important for them "to be able to work well with others." As classroom teachers, many of them embraced the thinking and collaboration among "kids" during class discussions.

Creativity

Creativity connotes first, that something new is made, while generativity connotes that something old is passed on (Kotre, 1984). To be creative is to be generative. In developing herself, Dr. Della described experiences acquired over her career as "an opportunity to be creative, to see what something looked like, to start from the ground up, and build it." Drs. Mary and Anna credit their creative thinking to "bringing about change in the use of technology in their school districts." According to all women

participants, taking an opportunity to "help students become thinkers and reinforce higher order thinking skills" or taking a school initiative which "becomes a district and state initiative" require creativity. Being involved in leadership opportunities, according to the women superintendents, "…were opportunities to be creative and to help students reinforce higher order thinking skills. The key of this leadership opportunity was what can this project do in the classroom for students?"

Commitment

Women superintendents are "committed to the profession." Drs. Della, Grace, Mary, Anna, and Ella described themselves as "having an investment in the district, giving back, and having infinity for it." It is not work; it is a passion. They invest themselves personally and professionally because they "love kids." Dr. Mary explained her commitment with, "it sounds cliché' to say 'make a difference, 'but I wanted to be a person who would be remembered as someone who made a difference or to be remembered well. I want to do whatever it takes to keep all children in school and going toward being successful."

The women also expressed a commitment to the future well-being of the children who attend the school district. They wished for them to be competitive with their contemporaries in whatever they chose to do.

Trust

Trust became a theme in the leadership practices, because it emerged from the narratives multiple times. Trust was often stated as a necessary characteristic of the public to the superintendent. Trust was how when parents or the public did not understand or agree with a decision made by the superintendent, they relied on trusting

that the superintendent knows more or better. They entrusted their children to the care of the superintendent. One superintendent explained,

> Sometimes people will say, 'I don't see where you're going with this, but I trust you.' My challenge is always helping people understand where it is we need to go. But I do think that…the best in me... is the ability to create change in a place that I am from.

Dr. Ella also linked her leadership to the public's view of her character,

> I think you would hear people say, 'We are not happy with the decision she has made, but we've known her for many years, we know what character she possesses, we know the direction that is trying to take the district in…we have the confidence…and understand that the decision is for the good of the children.

In the women's narratives, trust served as the bridge between the women's sense of responsibility and commitment to the children and their ability to act in a generative way.

Concern (for the next generation)

In looking at the direction women superintendents most often wanted to take and their commitment to the next generation of students, their "desire for the students in the district, to show them the possibilities" was the driving force. The women superintendents echoed the same refrain when talking about their high expectations for providing educational opportunities for all the children in their districts. Most women imagined their communities to be acutely aware of their desires to see the community's children competitive in the world of work and higher education. But they were also aware of some community members that challenged whether the change was necessary, especially if it required the community's scarce fiscal resources during the current

recession. "I heard someone say the other day; we are okay with being okay. I am never ok with being okay. I don't like being okay. I want to be better than that," urged Dr. Mary. Similarly Grace remarked,

> They always say 'it's not enough for her.' [Yes, I believe that] it's not enough for the children, if they are not getting what they could get in another district…I am going to be pushy for the children…I want all the children who come from here to be proud of the experience that they have had and to be competitive wherever they are.

Some superintendents scaled up their hopes for their own children to the entire district, "It was important for me to see that the same things that I wanted and desired – the same type of education that I wanted and desired for my child – to want that for all 9,000 or so children we serve," said Dr. Mary exhibiting super-generator characteristics.

In summary, the women superintendents' concern for the next generation was a foundation for all their leadership practices (actions). It motivated the daily activities for each woman and was the impetus for generative action on their part.

Love

All the world needs is love. "You have got to love it! You've got to love!" Ella exclaimed. "I love that school and everybody knows that I love it…[our school district] is a wonderful system. I love serving families here…I love giving back to the community that gave so much to me." Grace said. "I love it here," reminded Della. "What comes to me first of all [about myself] is a love of people," Mary explained. Finally, Anna relates, "I have been reading some books about the how the language of love inspires children."

These women easily express their love for their life's purpose and work in preparing the next generation. Their work is an act of love."

In summary, there were nine themes that emerged primarily from the interview data for how the women's career trajectories supported or did not support the features of generativity: (1) Compassion tempered by due diligence, (2) Personal and professional overlap, (3) Communication, (4) Collaboration, and (5) Creativity, (6) Commitment, (7) Trust, (8) Concern for the next generation, and (9) Love. These themes are leadership practices of the women. The findings for each of these themes indicate that the unique aspects of these women's leadership practices were derived from generative sources and expressed in the women's thoughts, plans and actions. The women exhibited generative actions in their leadership practices.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The conclusions for this study were developed from the examination of the research question, the findings, and the review of literature. The purpose of this study was to explore how the personal history, career trajectories, and leadership practices of women public school superintendents are informed by generativity theory. This chapter is divided into three sections: summary of methodology and findings, discussion, and recommendation for future research.

Summary of Methodology and Findings

I interviewed five women who currently hold the top public school position, superintendent in North Carolina and South Carolina during the school year 2012-13. A qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach was chosen as the method of research to examine the research question.

Data were gathered by personal interviews, observations, field notes, and documents. Interviews were conducted with in-depth, open-ended questions that generated extemporaneous dialogue. Each of the three separate interviews per participant was approximately 60 minutes long. Themes relative to the personal narratives, career trajectories and leadership practices were carefully triangulated across data sources. The emergent themes served to describe how the personal narratives, career trajectories and leadership practices support the features of relational generativity in the women.

These findings, as discussed in Chapter 4, extend the existing body of research by confirming the most of major features of Leffel's theory of relational generativity.

The descriptions provided by the participants through their interview data support the literature review. First, women superintendents who are assured in their efficacy to make career decisions and have assertiveness to manage discords that arise in the workplace are much more willing to pursue non-traditional occupations. Women superintendents in this study pursued a non-traditional occupation, public school district superintendent. Their career trajectory to the top public school position began with teaching (Ceniga, 2009; Farmer, 2005; Wolverton & McDonald, 2001); however, most women superintendents passed through several "gateway" or district office positions prior to attaining the top level position of public school superintendent.

Themes described in this study explain further Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1993) work by linking life experience narratives to generative expressions. Adults with generative personalities tell stories which include scenes of redemption (McAdams, 2012). Women superintendents included in this study indicated that they were motivated by their inner desires and their concern for the next generation (Leffel, 2008).

Conclusions

In consideration of the research question, the findings and review of the existing literature, I determined the following conclusion: Generativity is evidenced in the personal narratives, career trajectory, and leadership practices of women superintendents. Figure 2 describes the findings of the research. Leffel's theory of relational generativity theory served as the theoretical framework for this study; therefore, findings in this study were compared to Leffel's theory.

As did Leffel (2008), I found that women superintendents are motivated to action in their careers by sources that promote action. Women superintendents are motivated by cultural demands, their inner desires, and their concern for the next generation. Unlike Leffel's study, women superintendents were strongly influenced by the expectations of their own parents. As children, women superintendents reported being nurtured by parents who had high expectations for achievement for their children. Superintendents unanimously agreed that their inner desires and concerns for the children and the community at-large were motivational sources for their actions and leadership practices. Confronting social inequities that are more prevalent in poverty stricken communities where they serve was a top motivator for the women. Women superintendents felt the responsibility to take care of the next generation by giving every child the opportunity for a quality education.

Several new themes were revealed from this study of women superintendents. Their generative behavior is expressed in terms of love, collaboration, creativity, commitment, trust, and concern. These themes add to themes introduced in Leffel's 2008 study. Women expressed these themes in their generative behaviors by nurturing, maintaining, and creating. They expressed these actions and themes in the stories that they told.

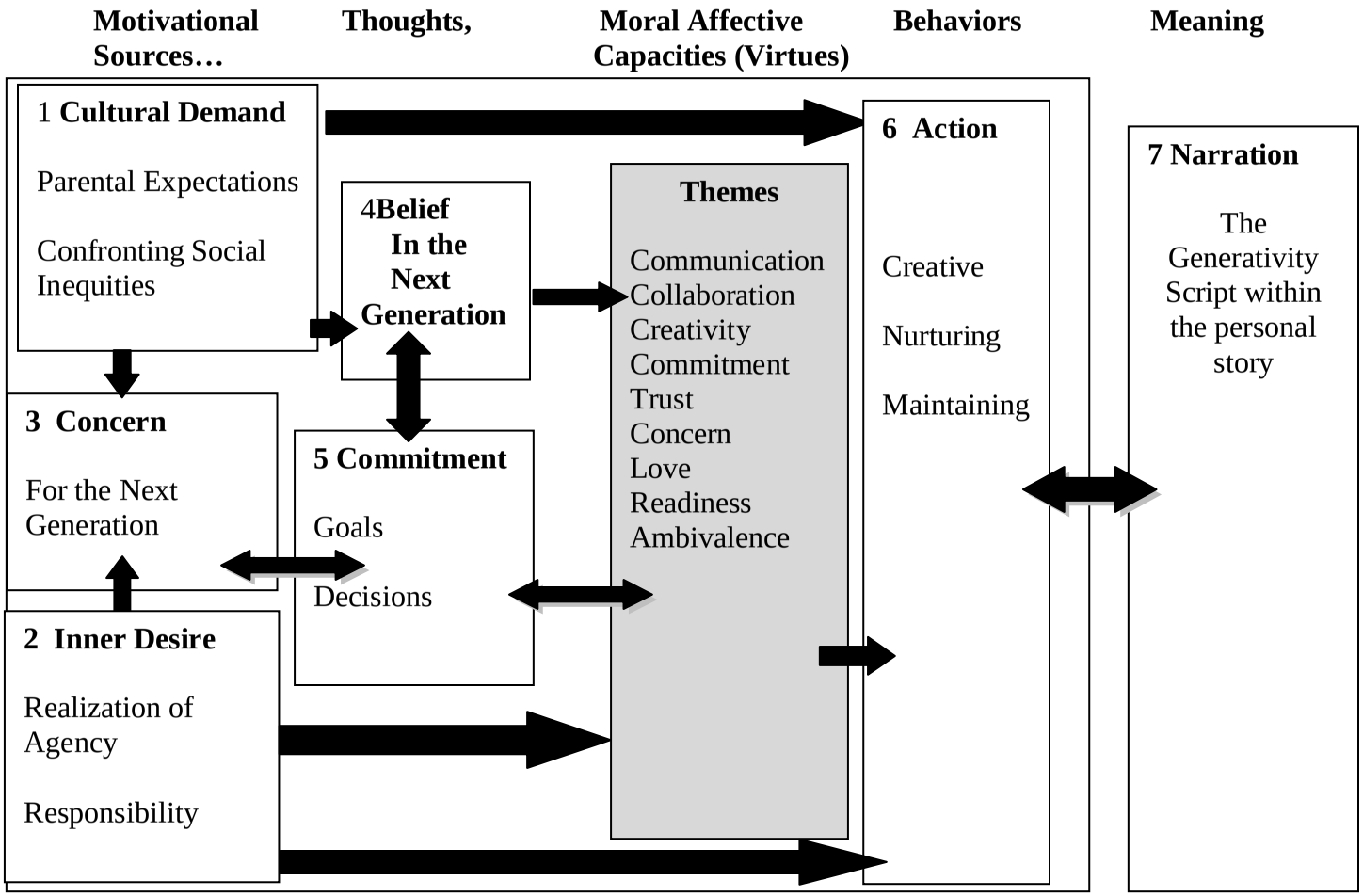

Figure 2: Antecedents of generativity, J. Y. Lockhart, 2013

Narrative

Personal narratives are the life stories of research participants. These stories describe how individuals are motivated by the demands of their community, their inner desires, and their beliefs. Cultural or community demand includes many external factors that affect individual behavior (McAdams & St. Aubin, 1992). Inner desire is the desire to be needed or the desire to leave a legacy (Leffel, 2008). Erikson (1950) defined belief as being confident that the next generation is worth investing time.

Participants agreed that they were motivated to continue in the education profession at the level of public school district superintendent because of a need to make life better, not only for the children in the schools, but for the community at large. Participants agreed that "improving the school district" meant "improving the livelihood" of the people in the community. Great schools, according to one participant, bring in job opportunities for the community." "Job opportunities mean more tax dollars to improve the schools."

Women superintendents studied most often quoted, "I want to leave a legacy or my legacy will be…." Their desire to leave a legacy those future generations could relate to their tenure as public school district superintendent. These women were, thus, mindful of the importance of making a contribution to the development of the students in the schools that they served (McAdams & St. Aubin, 1992). They unanimously expressed this concern by being committed to making decisions and establishing goals that benefit the next generation of life.

Participants were asked about their beliefs during the interviews. Again, they responded positively about their belief in caring for the next generation—making sure

that the next generation was able to move forward progressively, be competitive, and to be ready for the world of work or college. Participants expressed this belief in the next generation by thoughtful planning contributions to be made in response to the demands of the community which they serve.

Narratives or life stories recapitulate the experiences, contributions of others in their lives, and efforts made in this life toward society (McAdams & St. Aubin, 1992). Elements in these life stories support the desire to be generative, provide meaning and purpose in life, convey thoughts and experiences that influence actions which are important in understanding generativity in adult women.

Career Trajectory

Career trajectories of women in the position of public school superintendent are likely always supported by a mentor or someone with a caring spirit or of a generative nature. Participants in the study unanimously mentioned someone who pushed or encouraged them to take the step toward the next level of administration. All women mentioned their hesitancy of pursuing such a non-traditional occupation as the public school superintendent. In the context of generativity theory, these women excelled in their careers because of a generative adult who often times left a legacy. The legacies of these generative adult mentors were expressed in their leadership style or the characteristics of the ideal leader.

Leadership Practices

Decision making, collaboration, and commitment all describe the leadership practices of women in the position of public school superintendent. Generative women superintendents make decisions that are “best for the kids.” All women participating in

the study made decisions based on what was best for the kids. Dr. Della notably described herself as a "facilitative leader." In the context of the research, women superintendents committed to taking care of the next generation of children. The level of commitment may influence concern (McAdams & St. Aubin, 1992). Doing what is best for the kids may require collaboration with all stakeholders so that a clear understanding is communicated as to what is best for the kids. Part of being a great leader, according to Dr. Mary is "making decisions on what is the right thing to do for children and that's not always the easiest choice." Another superintendent stated,

> Good leadership is getting people to do things that they might never thought they wanted to do. The leader is able to empower people to become very skilled at empowering people to become very skilled at empowering others and kind of keeping the same thing going. Leadership is the legacy of a person.

Finally, Dr. Anna described leadership as "having a vision as to where you are leading the district."

Observations, documents, and field notes all support the leadership styles and qualities of participating superintendents. These document show superintendents as advocates for students and their concern for student achievement. Observations of superintendents in their work settings indicate their leadership styles. Their abilities to effectively respond to the critical needs of schools and communities are indicative of their leadership.

Recommendation for Future Research

Data gathered from in-depth interviews, extant documents, and observations offered important contributions about the personal narratives, career trajectories, and

leadership practices of women superintendents in the context of generativity theory. Conclusions from these findings will add to the limited body of research on generativity and relational generativity. These conclusions can further help practicing superintendents and research scholars understand their desire to continue their work as a school leader in some capacity. Secondly, conclusions from this research could influence research on the generative nature of both men and women in other professions.

A study within the context of generativity theory which conducts case studies of both men and women public school district superintendents in large urban school districts could offer significant insights of how generativity influence leaders in urban school districts. It is suggested that further research be conducted with practicing Black women superintendents (though not excluded from this study).

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APPENDIX A: PERMISSION TO USE COPYRIGHTED INFORMATION

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Sincerely,

Annie Fujikawa, PhD
Managing Editor
Journal of Psychology and Theology

562·944·0351, EXT. 5779 ▪ FAX 562·903·4864 ▪ *todd.hall@truth.biola.edu*

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT LETTER

Department of Educational Leadership

{DATE}

9201 University City Blvd.
Charlotte, NC 28223-0001

Dear [Superintendent Name],

As a doctoral student, I am responsible for gaining extensive experience with the methods and procedures used to conduct independent research. In accordance with the requirements of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, I would like to invite you to participate in my study of Super-Generators: Exploring the Career Trajectories and Leadership Practices of Women Superintendents.

This study is intended to explore how the personal history, career path, and leadership practices of women public school superintendents are explained by generativity theory. Generativity (vs. Stagnation) is defined as the seventh stage of the eight stage process of psychosocial development advanced by Erikson (1950) in which midlife adults place contributing to society and actions to benefit future generations as the current focus of their life goals. Adults in this stage ask: How can I make my life count for something? They are motivated to pursue employment and activities that contribute to the growth of others, whether that is one child or as a "super-generator" an entire school of children.

I will gather data via three face-to-face interviews (approximately 60 minutes each), observing you in your professional settings, and by requesting and downloading extant public school district documents that exemplify the characteristics of your leadership practices. All data will be kept confidential and secure to protect your privacy, and destroyed within one year of completion of the study.

Your input will be a valuable contribution to the research of women superintendents. Please email me indicating your willingness to participate in the study. If you have any questions, please contact me at jlockha2@uncc.edu or 704 807-8765 or Dr. Lisa G. Driscoll at Lisa.Driscoll@uncc.edu.

Sincerely

Joyce Lockhart
Doctoral Student, Educational Leadership

APPENDIX C: CONSENT LETTER

UNC CHARLOTTE
College of Education

Department of Educational Leadership

9201 University City Blvd.
Charlotte, NC 28223-0001

Informed Consent

Super-Generators? Exploring the Career Trajectories and Leadership Practices of Women Superintendents

I. Project Title and Purpose

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled, "Super-Generators? Exploring the Career Trajectories and Leadership Practices of Women Superintendents." This is a study to explore how the personal history, career path, and leadership practices of a woman public school superintendent are explained by generativity theory. Generativity (vs. Stagnation) is defined as the seventh stage of the eight stage process of psychosocial development advanced by Erikson (1980) in which midlife adults place contributing to society and actions to benefit future generations as the current focus of their life goals. Adults in this stage ask: How can I make my life count for something? They are motivated to pursue employment and activities that contribute to the growth of others, whether that is one child or as a "super-generator" an entire school of children. The generative stage usually occurs between the ages of 40 and 64 in many individuals and coincides with the pinnacle of most career paths. Recent research has explicated relational generativity as a complex pathway (Leffel, 2008; McAdams, 1996; McAdams & St. Aubin, 1992) incorporating four tenets: (1) having deep motivation as informed by culture, concern and inner desire; (2) possessing plans that derive from beliefs and commitment; (3) informed by one's moral capacities for trust, love, compassion, and other virtues; and (4) the capacity for action for nurture, creativeness, and maintaining. Some researchers suggest that this process begins long before one enters into mid-life.

Although there has been much research conducted on strategies and barriers that women in the public school superintendency face, there is little direct research that examines the

degree to which relational generativity needs play a role in women's personal histories, their career trajectories, and their leadership practices in the role of superintendent.

This pilot study proposes to employ qualitative methods to interview, analyze archived and contemporaneous documents, and observe leadership practices of one purposefully selected woman who is employed as a public school superintendent. The investigator will also utilize field notes to annotate other important impressions. The evidence collected will be used to draw interpretive conclusions on the ways one woman's personal history, career trajectory, and leadership practices are consistent or inconsistent with tenets of generativity theory.

II. Investigator(*s*)

The study is being conducted by Joyce Lockhart; UNCC Department of Education and Lisa Driscoll, Ph.D.

III. Eligibility

The ideal candidate for this study is a female, aged 40-68 years of age, who currently holds the position of public school district superintendent.

Males and females not currently serving in the position of public school district superintendent and/or are not within the age range of 40-68 years of age, are excluded.

IV. Overall Description of Participation

You will be asked to participate in three face-to-face interviews, to be observed in professional settings, and to provide the investigator with extant public school district data and documents. Field notes will be taken by the investigator of your appearance, demeanor, work setting, interactions with other adults, and other impressions. The participant will not be assigned to any "group".
INTERVIEWS: The first interview will be "introductory" and will involve a focused personal and professional life history (five open-ended, in depth questions). The second interview will cover the details of the respondent's present superintendent experinence (four open-ended, in depth questions). The third and final interview will derive meaning (the intellectual and emotional connections) from the content provided in the first and second interviews (three open ended questions). The interviews will digitally recorded and transcribed by the investigator. You will be offered the interview transcripts for review approximately one week later to amend or add to (member check).

OBSERVATIONS: Your behavior in professional or community situations will be observed. Field notes will be taken of your interactions with other school employees, interactions with other adults, and your appearance.

EXTANT PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT DATA AND DOCUMENTS:
You will be requested to provide existing data at the district level to provide context on the school district and characteristics of your leadership practices. No individual student data will be sought.

V. Length of Participation

Your participation in this project will take 6 months. You will be interviewed and observed within 3 months. The investigator will visit you three times. Each visit will consist of an interview lasting no more than 60 minutes. If you decide toparticipate, you will be the only subject in this study.

VI. Risks and Benefits of Participation

There are no known risks to participation in this study. However, there may be risks which are currently unforeseeable. There are no direct benefits of participating in this study, except that you may glean some self-knowledge from the analysis of your interview and observations regarding relative generativity. There are no costs to you to participate in this study.

VII. Volunteer Statement

You are a volunteer. The decision to participate in this study is completely up to you. If you decide to be in the study, you may stop at any time. You will not be treated any differently if you decide not to participate in the study or if you stop once you have started.

VIII. Confidentiality

Any information about your participation, including your identity, is completely confidential. The following steps will be taken to ensure this confidentiality: (1) all analysis files generated from the data will be identified with only a code name and will be stored on the jump drive. The jump drive will be password protected and stored in a locked cabinet at the home of the primary investigator and in a locked file cabinet at the office of the faculty advisor. (2) Digital voice recordings of interviews will be transferred to a computer, then the jump drive, and kept in a locked file cabinet. (3) Only the researcher and the faculty advisor will have access to these data files and audio recordings. These individuals will be the only persons with complete access to the data and voice recordings because the student will work closely with the advisor. There will be no sharing of this data with any other entities. (4) The investigator will personally transcribe the voice recordings into a Word document. (5) There will be no emailing of the source data files between the faculty advisor and the primary investigator. (6) All data

will be destroyed within 3 years by erasing the jump drive, erasing any voice recordings, and shredding any paper documents.

Statement of Fair Treatment and Respect

UNC Charlotte wants to make sure that you are treated in a fair and respectful manner. Contact the university's Research Compliance Office (704-687-3309) if you have questions about how you are treated as a study participant. If you have any questions about the actual project or study, please contact Joyce Lockhart (704) 393-3353, jlockha2@uncc.edu or Dr. Lisa G. Driscoll (704) 687-862l, Lisa.Driscoll@uncc.edu

IX. Approval Date

X. This form was approved for use on (*Month, Day, Year)* for use for one year.

XI. Participant Consent

I have read the information in this consent form. I have had the chance to ask questions about this study, and those questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research project. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form after it has been signed by me and the principal investigator.

_____ _____

Participant Name (PRINT) DATE

_____

Participant Signature

_____ _____

Investigator Signature DATE

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The responses to these questions will be kept anonymous. Every possible effort in the narrative will be made such that the content of the responses to these questions will not be linked to you, personally. Some particularly, noteworthy comments may be quoted in whole or paraphrased. You will be informed of these quotations in the final draft document and will be allowed to suggest alternative statements, if necessary.

First Interview: Focused Personal and Professional Life History

For this interview I am interested in learning about your beliefs and motivations prior to becoming a superintendent.

1. I would like you to take a moment to think over your life history and think of two events that have turned out to be particularly important to the development of yourself (1) as a person and (2) as a professional educator. Often this event is a turning point in a person's life.For each event:
    a. Describe this event? What happened? How did it involve you and affect you?
    b. Why was it a turning point? Think about this – how did the event change you?
    c. What are the differences in what was important to you prior to the event and what became important to you after the event?

2. Thinking over your development as a *person* over your life span – can you divide your *personal life* into stages or periods that describe the direction(s) that your life took? Please tell me about those stages.

3. Thinking over your development as a educator over your career – can you divide your *professional life* into stages or periods that describe the direction(s) that your life and career took? Please review those stages (periods) with me. Explain a little what was different about each stage.

4. Pretend you overhear a conversation between a parent, a teacher and a community member regarding a controversy involving students in the schools. These individuals are notably upset with some decision that you have advanced; however, they will accept it and abide by it, because they have known you over time. They make some statements about your character and motivations – what would they say?

5. Finally, what was the vision of the superintendency that encouraged you to become one?

Second Interview: Details of the Present Superintendency Experience

The purpose of this interview is to concentrate on concrete details of your present experiences as a public school superintendent.

1. Describe how you merge the requirements of the state, the expectations of the community, and your inner desires in your position as a public school superintendent.
    a. Please describe an event or a situation in which you have done that. Please provide details: expectations, inner desires, commitment, values, and actions.
    b. Please describe another...

2. Thinking about a leader that you admire: What comes to mind? What kinds of characteristics do you associate with this leader?

3. Specifically, were there aspects of your role as a school superintendent that would bring out" the best in you"? Please describe a scenario that you have experienced that explains what the "best" is in you in a very specific way.

4. Describe one recent event or initiative where things or outcomes left you feeling less than your "best"? How did you reconcile that in your mind?

Third Interview: Reflection on the Meaning

This interview addresses the meaning of the experience. Rather than life satisfaction, these questions ask you to reflect on the intellectual and emotional connections between personal life and professional career.

1. How have your personal life and professional life come together? Diverged at times?

2. Given what you have said about your life prior to becoming a superintendent and given what you have said about your work now:
    a. What does it mean to be "ready" to be a superintendent?
    b. If you had been appointed superintendent when you were 30 years old, how would that superintendency be different from your current role?
    c. What happens after the superintendency?

3. Please look back over all that you have experienced personally and professionally to this point in your life and career – would you do the same way again? Explain.

APPENDIX E: EXTANT DATA PROTOCOL

Type of Data	Research Question	How Collected	How Used
General District Information: Enrollment, Number of faculty and staff, rural, urban, suburban, expenditure per pupil	Question 1	Internet	To broadly (without identification) describe district and role of superintendent
Agenda of Principal's meeting	Questions 1	Requested from Superintendent	To triangulate with interview narrative regarding leadership practices and career.
Agenda of School Board meeting	Questions 1	Internet	To triangulate with interview narrative regarding leadership with community stakeholders.
Professional Calendar	Question 1	Internet	To broadly describe role of the superintendent; to triangulate with interview narrative regarding leadership and interaction with community stakeholders.
Field Notes	Question 1	My feelings	To describe my feelings during the data collection process.
Observations	Question 1	My observations	To broadly describe anything that I observed during the data collection process.