

THE PRINCIPAL AS AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATOR:
INCREASING PARENTAL AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT THROUGH THE USE OF
DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

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Brian D. Fox

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AUTHORIZATION TO SUBMIT DISSERTATION

This dissertation of Brian Fox, submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education with a major in Educational Leadership and titled "The Principal as an Effective Communicator: Increasing Parental and Community Engagement Through the Use of Digital Communications and Social Media," has been reviewed in final form. Permission, as indicated by the signatures and dates given below, is now granted to submit final copies.

Committee Chair



Dr. E. Michael Poe


Date 4-11-16

Committee
Members



Dr. Donna Allen

Date 4-11-16



Dr. Timothy Yeomans

Date 4-11-16

Doctoral
Program Director



Dr. Heidi Curtis

Date 4-11-16

College of Adult
and Graduate
Studies, Dean



Dr. Paula Kellerer

Date 4-11-16

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this mixed-methods research study is to find evidence which supports building principals in the implementation of research-based practices which engage students' families in ways which contribute to student learning and achievement. The accountability inherent to educational reform efforts, resulting competition among schools and school districts to attract students and families who have begun realizing their options for school choice; and the tendency for parents and community members to “shop” for schools using the internet, social networking, and established relationships has placed the building principals in a position of extreme challenge. The growing expectation that educational leaders use digital communications and social media to engage others, market their school, and promote their school district has been met with some success by some building administrators and school district leaders.

This study focuses on the specific communication skills and behaviors of effective principals and the resulting effects on public perception, and parent and community engagement which leads to improved student achievement. Qualitative, focus-group interviews were conducted, with principals at both the elementary and secondary levels purposely selected to participate. Data was gathered from parents and community members in an effort to measure attitude, perspective, and impact. Questions guiding this study include the following:

1. In what ways do building administrators use digital communications and social media tools to communicate with and engage staff members, parents, and community members?

2. Is there a significant relationship between communication efforts of the building administrator and the level of parental and community engagement in individual schools?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the strategic communications and marketing strategies of a building administrator and the resulting image and reputation of the school?

Description of Terms

Social media, websites, blogs, social networking sites, digital communications

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Chapter I

Introduction

Research provides clear evidence for the relationship between student achievement and the engagement of parents and community members with their local schools through meaningful involvement of parents, families, and members of the community (Curtis, 2013; Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011; French, 2014; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Grujanac, 2011; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, & Sandler, 2005; Jeynes, 2012; O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2014; Sonnenschein, Stapleton, & Metzger, 2014; Topor, Keane, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010). Joyce Epstein (2011) leads much of the research supporting the benefits associated with parent involvement and student success, and her contribution to this topic is noteworthy (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Curtis, 2013; Engeström & Sannino, 2010; Epstein et al., 2011; Grujanac, 2011; Hoover-Dempsey & Sander, 1995; Sanders, 2008; Sanders, Sheldon, & Epstein, 2005; Wanat, 2010). Epstein et al. (2011) promote the collaborative efforts of parents, community members, and local schools and educators in providing students the support necessary for adequate progress in school. Identified as “Spheres of Influence” in her theoretical framework (Epstein et al., 2011, p. 5), Epstein (2011) challenges the most influential people in a child’s life to work together on behalf of the children for whom they are responsible. This framework, and the results of Epstein et al. (2011) provide a critical foundation for school leaders to use when seeking to engage families and members of the community in ways which support student learning and improve student achievement (Epstein et al., 2011; Grujanac, 2011; Sanders, 2008; Smith et al., 2011; Wanat, 2010). Epstein’s theoretical framework will contribute an important foundation to the two-part Theoretical Framework used in this study of principals as effective communicators.

Building principals play a critical role in developing a welcoming culture and a mutual sense of trust among all three spheres of influence: the school, parents, and the community (Epstein, 2013; Epstein et al., 2011; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; MacPherson, 2010; Oplatka, 2007; Turner, 2013; Whitaker, 2009). Turner's (2013) study of the characteristics and skills of effective principals led to the identification of strong interpersonal skills and positive efficacy as important traits which can impact student achievement. In an effort to better understand the work of building principals, many have studied their daily work, leadership style, and effectiveness (Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, & Gundlach, 2003; Whitaker, 2009). Portin et al. (2003) found principals serve in a variety of roles and are responsible for the facilitation of several activities in service to staff and students.

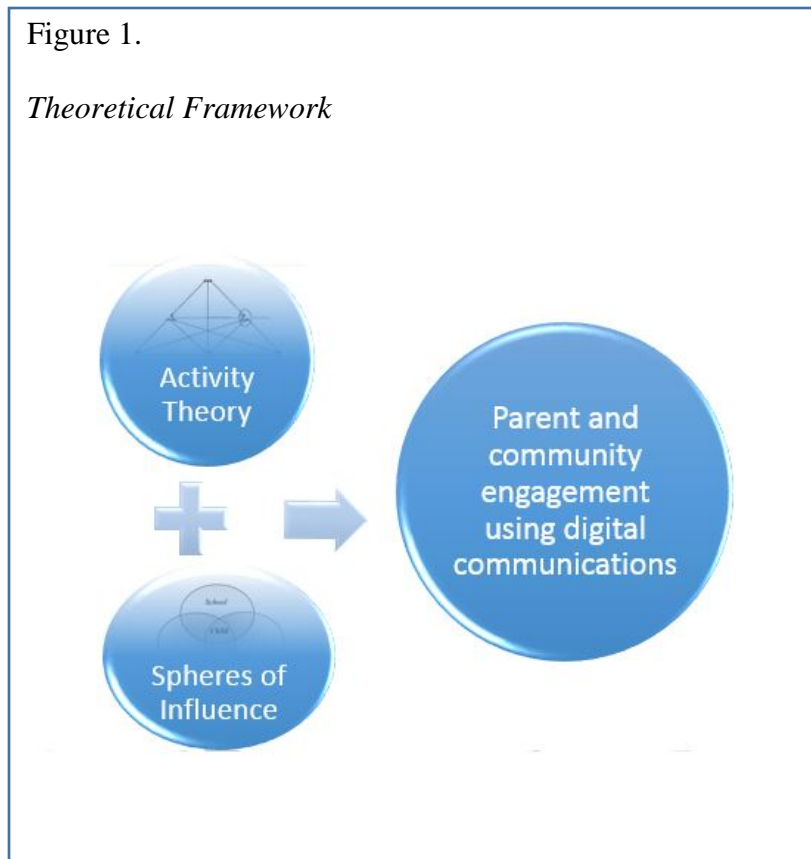
School choice, and the growing behavior of parents as consumers has added new responsibilities to the role of the principal, whose job description is increasingly emphasizing behaviors once only found in the private sector - in the business and commercial world (Catri & Barrick, 1996; Hanson, 1992; Henderson, 2002; Jones, 2008; Scott, 2013; Sheninger, 2014; Sochowski, 2011). Tasks now include strategic communications, marketing, and public relations (Bell, 1999; English, 2009; Hanson, 1992; Henderson, 2002; Jones, 2008; Longfellow, 2004; Macpherson, 2010; Oplatka, 2007; Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2004; Scott, 2013; Sochowski, 2011; Turner, 2013; Unal, 2008). Posing questions related to the responsibility for ensuring communication and parental participation, Hanson (1992) uses the term, "customer orientation" when discussing parents. He suggests that as consumers, parents and community members need more than the traditional back-to-school events which most schools sponsor annually. Hanson (1992) concludes parents, schools, and community stakeholders can all benefit from the serious application of marketing techniques. He suggests schools and school districts should use

sophisticated marketing techniques to resolve some of the same problems found in the private sector. Viewing the work of educational leaders through the lens of the business world, Hanson (1992) promotes the use of marketing strategies as ways to build greater involvement by parents, whom he calls clients. To begin with, Hanson (1992) presents natural market forces for consideration: (1) product orientation, (2) production orientation, and (3) customer orientation. It is suggested that schools with a product or production focus will attend to only on what is taught, whereas schools with a customer orientation will pay more attention to what is learned. Hanson (1992) prioritizes the latter. A primary strategy Hanson (1992) promotes is simply for school leaders to know their markets. Within one community can be subsets of other communities, or what one might call various demographics. Hanson's (1992) recommendation for educators is to use a market segmentation approach, rather than mass marketing, to reach targeted audiences.

In an effort to analyze the work of a building administrator as they attempt to facilitate coordination among all three spheres of influence (parents, community, schools) this study will also make use of cultural-historical activity theory as a framework for analysis of work. Originally introduced in the 1920s by Vygotsky (1978) and Leont'ev (1978), Activity Theory is an approach being used more today in the study of work and technologies. Engeström (2000) uses cultural-historical activity theory as the framework for an analysis of work in his research. Activity Theory represents the relationships between and among individual participants, each having their own motivations and actions (Engeström, 2000, pp. 960-964).

It is using these two theories, Epstein's (2011) Sphere's of Influence, and Vygotsky's (1978) and Leont'ev's (1978), Activity Theory, which will form a theoretical framework for the study of the principal as communicator and the impact on parents, community, and ultimately on

parent involvement and student achievement. A graphic representing these theories is seen in Figure 1.



The notion that the role of building administrator is growing to include marketing and public relations work on a regular basis is a reality for many principals, and presented as an expectation by a growing number of researchers (Catri & Barrick, 1996; Cox, 2012; Hanson, 1992; Jones, 2008; Scott, 2013; Sochowski, 2011; Stockwell, 2010). The role of the principal is directly impacted by the changing landscape of technology and its influence on communications and society. Cox (2012) suggests the effective use of technology, digital communications and social media will allow for greater interaction between schools and parents and community members. The use of these communication platforms to inform, engage, and tell one's story has become an expectation rather than an option (Cox, 2012). The communication skills and strategies now necessary for building administrators to know and be able to understand is the

primary focus of this study. The gathering of evidence from principals who effectively engage parents and community members through the use of digital communications and social media is the objective behind each research question.

Background

Significant changes in education have led to more parent choice when enrolling their children in school (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Parents are becoming more discerning consumers in an education market, and are heavily influenced by the perceptions of peers and culture in which they live, and the marketization of performance measure and choice which some schools are becoming increasingly effective in promoting. Perceptions are becoming a driving force for the decision-making in which parents are engaged (Childers Roberts, 2012; English, 2009; Hastings, Kane, & Staiger, 2005; Hoxby, 2000).

It appears the role of the building principal has become more and more central to the development of perception and choice. While improved student achievement is more likely in an environment where parents are engaged in their children's education, parents must first perceive the school and teachers as effective in their efforts. A study of literature reveals the identification of characteristics and skills of those building leaders perceived as "effective" in their work. Those perceived as most effective demonstrate strong interpersonal skills and positive efficacy (Macpherson, 2010; Turner, 2013; Whitaker, 2009). These are the skills necessary to effectively market the school and promote a positive perception of the teaching staff and ability to positively impact student achievement (Henderson, 2002; Horng, Klasik, & Loeb, 2010; Jones, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

Principals are faced with numerous challenges, including, but not limited to: 1) the accountability inherent to educational reform efforts, 2) resulting competition among schools and school districts to attract students and families who have begun realizing their options for school choice, and 3) the tendency for parents and community members to “shop” for schools using the internet, social networking, and established relationships (Childers Roberts, 2012; English, 2009; Henderson, 2002; Hoxby, 2000; Turner, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

The work and responsibility of the principal continues to grow. In addition to serving as instructional leader, change agent, and building manager, changing expectations require the building principal to serve as marketing agent and public relations director for their school community (English, 2009; Hanson, 1992; Henderson, 2002; Jones, 2008; Macpherson, 2010; Mun, 2008; Oplatka, 2007).

The problem which unfolds concerns the building principal as the educational leader, effective communicator, and strong promoter of the school and staff. Some building principals are either unprepared, or uncomfortable with the need to be engaged in public relations and other forms of marketing their schools (Epstein, 2013; Epstein et al., 2011; Oplatka, 2007). However, some building administrators are learning the importance of using multiple modes of communication with the parents, families, and community members in an effort to reach all demographics of their community, increase involvement and enhance engagement in the local school. They make efforts to engage parents and community members using traditional methods, digital communications, and even social media, but may not be aware of the impact their efforts are having on attitude and perception, particularly given cultural differences among parents and families (McKenna & Millen, 2013; O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2014).

Research Questions

In an effort to support building principals in the implementation of research-based practices which engage students' families in ways to contribute to student learning and achievement, this study will focus on (a) parents as consumers (b) principals as marketing specialists, and (c) research-based communication strategies. The following questions will guide the research:

1. In what ways do building administrators use digital communications and social media tools to communicate with and engage staff members, parents, and community members?
2. Is there a significant relationship between communication efforts of the building administrator and the level of parental and community engagement in individual schools?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the strategic communications and marketing strategies of a building administrator and the resulting image and reputation of the school?

Description of Terms

Social media – a variety of technology-based channels through which we can share information with others quickly (Lockhart, 2011, p. 144). Social media provide the way people share ideas, content, thoughts, and relationships online. Social media differ from so-called mainstream media in that anyone can create, comment on, and add to social media content. Social media can take the form of text, audio, video, images, and communities (Scott, 2013, p. 54). Participatory online media where news, photos, videos, and podcasts are made public via

social media websites through submission, normally accompanied by a voting process to make media items become “popular” (Evans, 2012, “Social Media and Marketing,” para. 4).

Blog – a blog is a personal website written by someone who is passionate about a subject and wants the world to know about it (Scott, 2013, p. 198). Most blogs are interactive, allowing visitors to leave comments. This is what distinguishes a blog from a traditional website (Porterfield & Carnes, 2012, p. 26).

Facebook – Facebook (www.facebook.com) is a social networking service letting individuals connect with others who share similar interests (Porterfield & Carnes, 2012, p. 25).

Twitter – Twitter (<http://twitter.com>) is a tool allowing people to communicate and stay connected through the exchange of brief (no more than 140 character) message (Porterfield & Carnes, 2012, p. 26).

Digital communications – the electronic exchange of information (Isman, 2014, p. 74).

Significance of the Study

While members of the business and corporate world have embraced digital communications, social media, and evolution of the marketplace, educators have been slow to realize the benefit, and the expectations which exist to communicate and engage using tools of the 21st century (Cox, 2012). Few studies have been done with a focus on educators and their use of advanced technology, such as digital communications and social media.

Recommendations for further research by Cox (2012) include a qualitative study of the ways social media is used to brand schools or districts to families within their geographical area.

It appears many researchers have studied the behaviors of effective principals (Horn, Klasik, & Loeb, 2010; Macpherson, 2010; Oplatka, 2007; Rapp & Duncan, 2012; Turner, 2013). Newer research examines the principal’s use of technology in communications and their support

and mentoring of technology among teaching staff (Afshari, Bakar, Luan, & Siraj, 2012; Cox, 2012, Grujanac, 2011). However, little, if any research exists which measure the parental and community response to the communications efforts of principals employing digital communications and regular use of social media tools. It is in an effort to fill this gap that this study will examine the lived experiences of principals who regularly use information and communication technologies to engage with parents and community members. In addition, this researcher will gather perspective from the parents and community members to measure level of engagement and the resulting perception of the school, the staff, and success of the school in educating students.

Overview of Research Methods

On a daily basis, building administrators are called to serve in many roles including key communicator (Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, & Gundlach, 2003; Whitaker, 2009). Leading through effective communication can be evidenced in a number of ways, including strong interpersonal skills and positive efficacy, (Macpherson, 2010; Turner, 2013; Whitaker, 2009). In addition, changes in school choice have increased the tendency for parents and community members to “shop” for schools using the internet and social networking, (Childers Roberts, 2012; English, 2009; Henderson, 2002; Hoxby, 2000; Turner, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2003). With the advent of the Internet and resulting daily use of online spaces for digital communications, building administrators have a greater variety of communication methods available to them today than in the past (Scott, 2013; Sheninger, 2014). Therefore, the focus of this study is on building administrators who develop effective communication skills and strategies. Research will focus on describing the behaviors of all principal participants in their

use of various communication tools including traditional strategies and newer tools such as digital communications and social media.

Research will begin with intentional sampling of building administrators and a corresponding sample of the parents and community members associated with each site. The primary method of collecting information from administrators will be focus group interviews conducted in person. Data from stakeholders will be gathered through electronic questionnaires. Having gathered data via interviews, the researcher will analyze and sort data in an effort to develop a narrative describing both the common and unique experiences of each individual. As Creswell (2013) suggests, this study will examine the lived experiences of a number of individuals and seek to develop descriptions of the essence of these experiences. Therefore, this study will be conducted as a phenomenological study, one which according to Creswell, (2013) “describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept of phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76).

Beginning with an examination of the ways in which building administrators use a variety of communication tools, including digital communications and social media, this researcher will then focus on the resulting perceptions of parents and community members. Conclusions will advance the study of principals as effective communicators, and hopefully encourage those practicing only traditional methods of communication to explore new possibilities for enhancing communication effectiveness, building efficiency in daily tasks, engaging more parents in meaningful school-related conversations and activities, and as a result, improving student achievement.

Chapter II

Introduction

“Student achievement in a performance-based school is a shared responsibility involving the student, family, educators and the community. The principal’s leadership is essential. As leader, the principal is accountable for the continuous growth of individual students and increased school performance . . . Pivotal to the success of this shift is a new type of principal leadership.” (Association of Washington School Principals Leadership Framework, 2013, p. 2).

Thus begins the Association of Washington School Principals Leadership Framework, first drafted in 2010. In an effort to promote the professional growth of building administrators in the State of Washington, The Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP) developed a Leadership Framework which eventually included eight leadership responsibilities to serve as evaluation criteria for all building administrators in Washington State. Referencing the establishment of state standards in 1992, AWSP acknowledged student achievement would become evidence of an effective school. Recognizing the power of parent and community involvement, this document includes as Criterion 7, Engaging Communities: Partnering with the school community to promote student learning (AWSP Leadership Framework, 2013, p. 33). According to the framework, a proficient building principal builds effective communication systems through which all stakeholders will participate. Parents, staff, and community members will be encouraged by the principal to become engaged in school activities and involved in school decision making which leads to improved teaching and learning. This framework clearly identifies the building principal as having great influence, and great impact on student achievement.

In addition to the impact building administrators have felt, educational reform has created new opportunities for parents as consumers of the educational system, and in many places this has affected relationships between families and educators. Because the relationship between student success and parent involvement has been widely researched (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Curtis, 2013; Epstein et al., 2011; French, 2014; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Grujanac, 2011; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, & Sandler, 2005; Jeynes, 2012; LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011; O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2014; Sonnenschein et al., 2014; Topor, Keane, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010), it is important for schools, parents, and community members to work together for the benefit of students. It is well-known that there is a positive impact on student achievement when parents and community members become invested and involved in supporting local schools (Epstein et al., 2011; Fan & Chen, 2001; French, 2014; Jeynes, 2007; Sanders, Sheldon, & Epstein, 2005). Some research indicates general parental involvement can yield statistically significant outcomes with regard to student achievement (Jeynes, 2007). In addition, Hill and Taylor (2004) found parental involvement can have a positive effect on parents in the development of parenting skills – a benefit for society in general.

The positive impact of parent engagement in a child's education is well-established. Epstein (2013) reminds us, however, there is still a big gap between knowing and doing what needs to be done to involve parents as well as community members in their local schools. It is Epstein's (2011) theory of partnership program development, the *Overlapping Spheres of Influence*, which provides an initial theoretical framework for this study.

This literature review expands on the established understanding that student success is improved through parental involvement and suggests school leaders must attend to parents as education consumers who are influenced by the perception of peers and culture, often through

digital communications and social media, when making decisions about schools and their level of involvement (Childers Roberts, 2012).

Parents as consumers

Under the *No Child Left Behind Act* (PL 107-110, 2002), parents of children attending schools in need of improvement have been given the opportunity to transfer their student(s) to other public schools within the school district. Public school choice has become a normal operating procedure for many school districts with struggling schools and many of their students annually migrate to neighboring schools, with the local districts required to pick up the costs for transportation (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Thus, a season of increased competition among schools and school officials has developed. Public school principals are not accustomed to having to compete with other schools for students who are living within their attendance boundaries. However, some researchers suggest this kind of competition can result in increased student achievement (Holmes, DeSimone, & Rupp, 2003; Hoxby, 2000). For example, Holmes, DeSimone, and Rupp (2003) found when a public school faced competition from a charter school there was an increase in student achievement. Hoxby (2000) found having this kind of choice available among public-school districts actually raises achievement and lowers spending. Other researchers, however, have found the extent to which this competition leads to educational improvements for all socio-economic families depends a great deal on parental choice behavior (Childers Roberts, 2012; Hastings, Kane, & Staiger, 2005; Hill & Taylor, 2004).

The notion that parents have choice among schools, permission to shop for schools, so to speak, has changed many attitudes, added emotion, and has created a new dynamic within neighborhoods and social groupings (Childers Roberts, 2012; Cucchiara, 2013; Curtis, 2013; Hastings, Van Weelden, and Weinstein, 2007; Henderson, 2002; Steedman, 2014). Wanting the best for their children, some parents become emotionally stressed with the overwhelming

responsibility. Cucchiara (2013) found when professional middle class parents begin planning for their children to attend school they become quite anxious. In her review of literature, Cucchiara (2013) argues parents' concerns are growing to be more about safety, economic competition, and the need for parental involvement in order for their children to succeed. Furthermore, Cucchiara (2013) found notions of "good parenting" are becoming increasingly connected with that of being a "good consumer." Parental perceptions and behaviors are being influenced by many factors, including the growing desire to research and shop before enrolling their child. Significant changes in education led English (2009) to pose questions regarding choices parents make when enrolling their children in school. After studying the marketing material produced by a non-government school, English (2009) interviewed parents to begin gathering evidence of the "cultural capital" she predicted would become a driving force in their decision-making. Conclusions of English's (2009) study support the notion that parents are becoming consumers in an education market, and they are heavily influenced by both the perceptions of peers and the culture within which they live as well as the marketization of performance measures and choice which some schools are becoming increasingly effective in promoting (English, 2009).

The discrepancy between parents with social capital and those without is leading many researchers to conclude there is yet another factor which contributes to the achievement gap - the growing divide enhanced by digital communications and social media (Childers Roberts, 2012; Hill, & Taylor, 2004; Hastings, Kane, & Staiger, 2005; Hastings, Van Weelden, & Weinstein, 2007; Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003; Wanat, 2010; Warren et al., 2009). Hastings et al., (2007) found the kind of information shared with parents, as well as the simplicity with which the information is communicated using technology can have a significant impact on the

preferences expressed and choices made by parents for their children. Childers Roberts (2012) defines school choice and parent involvement as forms of social capital and the results of social networking. Horvat et al. (2003) defines social capital as the material and immaterial resources that individuals and families are able to access through their social ties. Horvat et al. (2003) also suggests social networks available to families of lower socio-economic status are less valuable than those available to families of higher socio-economic status, particularly when it comes to negotiating the school environment. Childers Roberts (2012) maintains school choice and parent involvement are the results of social networking. Participants making choices about their family's schooling represented racial and socioeconomic diversity. In this study, when options were abundant, racial segregation took place. Where there was a lack of formal option, racial integration resulted (Childers Roberts, 2012, p. 200).

Building social capital requires resources and networking. Horvat et al., (2003) touts social networking sites on the Internet as a research opportunity which is easy for parents to access and use; and its use can build inside knowledge and social capital. Parents participating in the purposeful social networks of Facebook for example, yield strategic social capital and access to information which benefits the education of their children. Researchers find there is a difference between the ways middle-class parents relate to schools than working class or poor parents, in part because the later are less likely to become involved in healthy social networks (Horvat et al., 2003; Wanat, 2010). Researchers maintain relationships establish a sense of community and a shared sense of accountability for children, and the school serves as an institutional site for building social capital among parents and families (Hill & Taylor, 2004; O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2014; Wanat, 2010; Warren et al., 2009). In fostering parent engagement, Warren et al. (2009) suggest both the school and the families in need of greater

social capital should focus on bonding and bridging. Bonding ties, say Warren et al., (2009) come from people who are like each other, and bridging ties are built across differences. Promoting a community-based approach to building relationship and overcoming social barriers, real or perceived, is the responsibility of the school as much as it is of the family (Warren et al., 2009).

The study of social capital is rooted in relationship and perception, and researchers maintain local educators have some of the greatest impact in developing communities of caring and supportive adults (Hill, & Taylor, 2004; O'Donnell, & Kirkner, 2014; Wanat, 2010; Warren et al., 2009). Common in each study is the effort to improve student achievement and ensure student success. Parents wish the very best for their own children, and will work towards obtaining the very best for their children. (Childers Roberts, 2012; Cucchiara, 2013; Curtis, 2013; Wanat, 2010). Specifically, Wanat (2010) found all parents want collaborative relationships, but some lack the strategies, time, or social interactions to develop them. As one of the three spheres of influence, the educators at a school can enhance these relationships through attitude and behavior. Wanat (2010) found when parents and school professionals demonstrate respect for each other's knowledge, find ways to collaborate, and recognize the unique roles each could play in helping children, there is a sense of balance. Wanat (2010) made use of both social networking theory, and social influence theory. As the data was studied and organized, it became evident to Wanat (2010) that satisfied parents had developed relationships with their children's teachers because of their involvement at school. This led to greater comfort discussing their children's progress. The dissatisfied parents felt uncomfortable engaging with teachers, had no social networks with parents, and visited the school only if there was a problem

or issue requiring their presence. Wanat (2010) concluded all schools benefit when making an effort to be more welcoming to all parents.

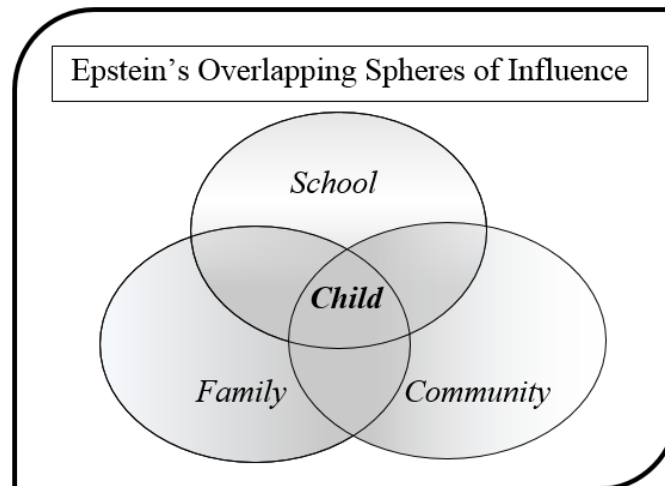
Hill and Taylor (2004) report parental involvement increases skills and information because of relationships developed with school staff and the resulting familiarity parents have with the way a school functions. As parents learn about the school's expectations for students, meet other parents who discuss how to navigate the system, and develop a level of comfort with the educational setting, they grow social capital and are thus better equipped to help their children find success in school. It is through the strengthening of social capital that children learn to understand the importance of education which in turn increases motivation and desire to become more engaged in school. Hill and Taylor's (2004) review of literature suggests families from lower socio-economic status are less likely to be involved in their local school and that schools in communities with lower socio-economic status are less likely to promote parental school involvement than schools in wealthier communities. Consequently, the children who would benefit most from involvement are those who are least likely to receive it unless a special effort is made (Hill et al., 2004, p. 163).

Theoretical Framework: Overlapping Spheres of Influence

For several years, researchers have found parent involvement to have impact on students and their success in school, and Joyce Epstein (2009, 2011) has been at the center of much of this research (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Curtis, 2013; Epstein et al., 2011; French, 2014; Grujanac, 2011; LaRocque et al, 2011; Sanders, Sheldon, & Epstein, 2005; Wanat, 2010). Epstein's (2009, 2011) theory of partnership program development – *Overlapping Spheres of Influence* – represents the contributions of schools, families, and communities as the main contexts for learners. In this model, each sphere represents the individual efforts of schools, families, and

communities, and some efforts which are conducted simultaneously to influence a child's learning, growth, and development. Researchers have found Epstein's (2009, 2011) model to be quite helpful in representing the impact of each influential group (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Curtis, 2013; Grujanac, 2011; Sanders, Sheldon, & Epstein, 2005; Wanat, 2010). For example, Curtis (2013) used Epstein's model of parental involvement to explain the partnership which should exist among home, school, and the community. She explains the different forces of Epstein's sphere of influences have differing levels of influence at various times in the child's education experience, but that the forces work most effectively when they overlap (Curtis, 2013, p. 38). When the spheres, or forces, initiate their involvement in other spheres, or forces, the overlap is increased beyond what is expected. In addition, each sphere also has the ability to move closer or further apart from the other spheres, and each has equal status. Figure 2 provides a graphic example of this theory.

Figure 2.

Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence Theory

Note. Adapted with permission from Epstein, J. L. (2011). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Second edition. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

With the child as the common focus, this model identifies student achievement as the primary objective and shared responsibility of those who can have the greatest influence on student success (Epstein, 2011). Epstein's (2011) full model has both an external and internal structure, which cannot be fully represented in a simplified outline such as the one above. However, for the current study, this basic understanding will align well with the overlay of another theoretical framework, Activity Theory, and the addition of communication tools.

In 1996, the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) was formed with a focus on schools and school districts creating family and community partnerships in an effort to support students and increase student achievement. In an effort to evaluate the success of the NNPS, Sanders, M., Sheldon, S., & Epstein, J. (2005) conducted a study to determine if the length of time a school maintains membership with the NNPS could have an impact on a

school's ability to develop partnership programs of high quality. High quality partnership programs are defined by Sanders et al. (2005) as being directly aligned with the six types of involvement for which Joyce Epstein is well-known and as becoming a normal and "natural" part of the school organization. The findings in this research indicate support and services provided by the program at Johns Hopkins University are likely to lead to greater long-term success for schools wishing to increase parent involvement. The tools, guidelines, and communications offered to schools through the NNPS program were found to assist in increasing collaboration among school leaders and consequently grow their partnership programs. Of note in the finding of Sanders et al. (2005) is that the quality of partnership programs was directly dependent upon teamwork, support found within a network of colleagues, and guidance from the national organization. In addition, Epstein, Galindo, and Sheldon (2011) have focused upon the impact when educational leaders join together in promoting family and community involvement. In an effort to determine if facilitative support from district leaders would lead to better progress in programs designed to increase family and community involvement at the schools, the researchers built upon, and extended earlier studies. The quantitative analyses of data led to the conclusion that when school-based partnerships were facilitated by district leaders there was greater progress in developing family and community involvement programs (Epstein et al., 2011).

The Overlapping Spheres of Influence Theory, and the results of research conducted by Epstein et al. (2011) provide a critical foundation for school leaders when seeking to engage families and the community in ways which support student learning, improve student achievement, and assist in parenting skill development (Sanders, 2008; Smith et al., 2011; Wanat, 2010).

The Role of School Administration

In order for the spheres of influence: schools, parents, and community to work together for the benefit of students there must be coordination of effort, and this role typically falls to the building administrator as key communicator (Ärlestig, 2007; Grujanac, 2011; Macpherson, 2010). Research examining effective schools and the characteristics of their leader is plentiful, thus establishing the role of the principal as key to student achievement (Epstein, 2013; Epstein et al., 2011; Henderson and Mapp, 2002; MacPherson, 2010; Oplatka, 2007; Rapp & Duncan, 2012; Turner, 2013; Whitaker, 2009).

Good leaders understand the impact of their own communications style, and will capitalize on their leadership strengths to increase parent involvement (Ärlestig, 2007; Turner, 2013). Turner's (2013) research resulted in a list of characteristics which were found to be present in effective principals. Among these characteristics were "strong interpersonal skills" and "positive efficacy" (Turner, 2013, p. 177, p. 181). Turner (2013) concluded when it comes to public relations and strategic communications, having effective communication skills and belief in self can positively influence a building principal's impact on student achievement. Ärlestig (2007) maintains effective communication must be used by school leaders to unify staff members and conduct the work necessary for student achievement and school improvement.

Since so much research indicates parents involvement can have a positive impact on student achievement, Rapp and Duncan (2012) maintain school leaders must prioritize the development and implementation of an effective parental involvement model. They conclude since students of involved parents have been shown to have higher achievement in school, the principal should facilitate a collaborative, democratic environment in which opinions, beliefs, and ideas are listened to and acted upon, so that a community of practice could form in which all

members work towards student success (Rapp & Duncan, 2012, p. 12). Rapp and Duncan (2012) also suggest the principal is responsible for the implementation of a parent involvement plan which is respectful of the different cultural views of parental involvement, and designed to make parents feel they are valued and belong.

It is the development and maintenance of relationship which Macpherson (2010) considers the most important intangible asset to an organization. Maintaining a belief that public relations strategies are a basic management function of any leader, Macpherson (2010) considers the establishment, and maintenance of mutually beneficial relationships between the school and the public being served to be of utmost importance. McCoach, Goldstein, Behuniak, Reis, Black, Sullivan, and Rambo (2010) found the teachers and administration in schools with more positive than expected performance indicators seem to have more positive perceptions of their parents. These educators believed the parents were more involved and more interested in their student's education. McCoach et al. (2010) concluded both communication and collaboration among all parties: administrators, teachers, and parents, are very important factors in facilitating student success.

The AWSP Leadership Framework (2013) provides building administrators with specific language to measure the effectiveness of efforts to engage communities in student learning.

Criterion 7 is explained in the following way:

“An effective leader engages with the community in sensitive and skillful ways such that the community understands the work of the school and is proud to claim the school as their own. An effective leader understands the greater community to be a valuable resource and works to establish a genuine partnership model between home and school. An effective leader understands that aligning school

and community efforts and values is an ongoing work in progress that must be nurtured, sustained, and monitored, and is able to influence others to adopt the same understanding” (AWSP Leadership Framework, 2013, p. 33).

Theoretical Framework: Activity Theory

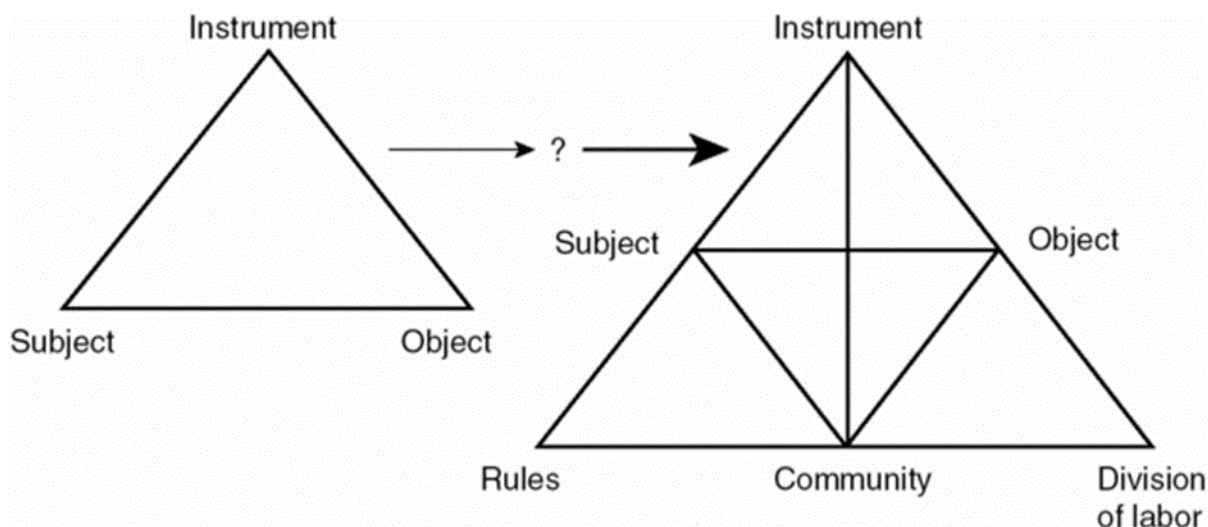
Having established student achievement is positively impacted by parental involvement (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Curtis, 2013; Epstein et al., 2011; French, 2014; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Grujanac, 2011; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, & Sandler, 2005; Jeynes, 2012; LaRocque et al., 2011; O’Donnell & Kirkner, 2014; Sonnenschein et al., 2014; Topor, Keane, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010); parents are behaving more and more like consumers in an educational world of choice (Childers Roberts, 2012; Cucchiara, 2013; English, 2009; Hastings et al., 2007; Henderson, 2002; Steedman, 2014), and principals play a critical role in effectively communicating with parents and facilitating relationships among all parties of influence (Ärlestig, 2007; Epstein, 2013; Epstein et al., 2011; Grujanac, 2011; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; MacPherson, 2010; Oplatka, 2007; Rapp & Duncan, 2012; Turner, 2013; Whitaker, 2009), this review now turns to another framework from which to build – one which suggests that good intentions are not enough. With Activity Theory, involved parties must use tools to carry out activities which will benefit the recipient(s). Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural approach, known as Activity Theory, is a conceptual framework used to analyze how individuals and groups work together under a set of rules and using tools of some kind for a common purpose (Engeström, 2000; Grujanac, 2011; Lim, 2002; Olmstead, 2012). With Activity Theory, thinking is studied not simply from an individual’s point of view, but with an emphasis on the individuals and groups coming together and effectively using tools to carry out goals – a system of activity which is driven by shared motive (Engeström, 2000, p. 964). Actions taken in a sociocultural setting are studied and

evaluated. Lim (2002) believes that Activity Theory provides a conceptual map for researchers and can help one study the point from which cognition and behaviors originate. This can be useful when the goal is to facilitate collaboration among stakeholders who may each have their own point-of-view, communication styles, or personal agendas.

Activity theory was first presented in the 1920s by Russian psychologists Vygotsky (1978) and Leont'ev (1978). Vygotsky (1978) originally presented activity theory as a simple triangular model representing the complex interaction among a subject, object, and some kind of artifact or instrument. The first generation of the activity theory model was later expanded by his student, Leont'ev (1978) who explained that people working toward a common goal use tools in their environment with which to do so, and these tools come from the cultural rules found in the group or community. Leont'ev's (1978) framework is represented by a second generation model which includes the important components of community as well as the rules, relationships, and interactions which are in play during the entire process of activity, called division of labor. Leont'ev's (1978) inclusion of cultural artifacts into the triangular model meant an individual could no longer be studied and understood without also understanding the culture and the society within which he or she was living. Within the last several decades Vygotsky's (1978) foundational work has inspired several researchers, most notably Yrjö Engeström (2000, 2015).

Engeström (2000, 2015) explains the second generation activity theory model as one where individual actions transition to collective activity. Figure 3 is a graphic representing this transition.

Figure 3

Engeström's Transition From Individual Actions to Collective Activity

Note. Used with permission from Engeström (2015). *Learning by Expanding*. Second edition. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

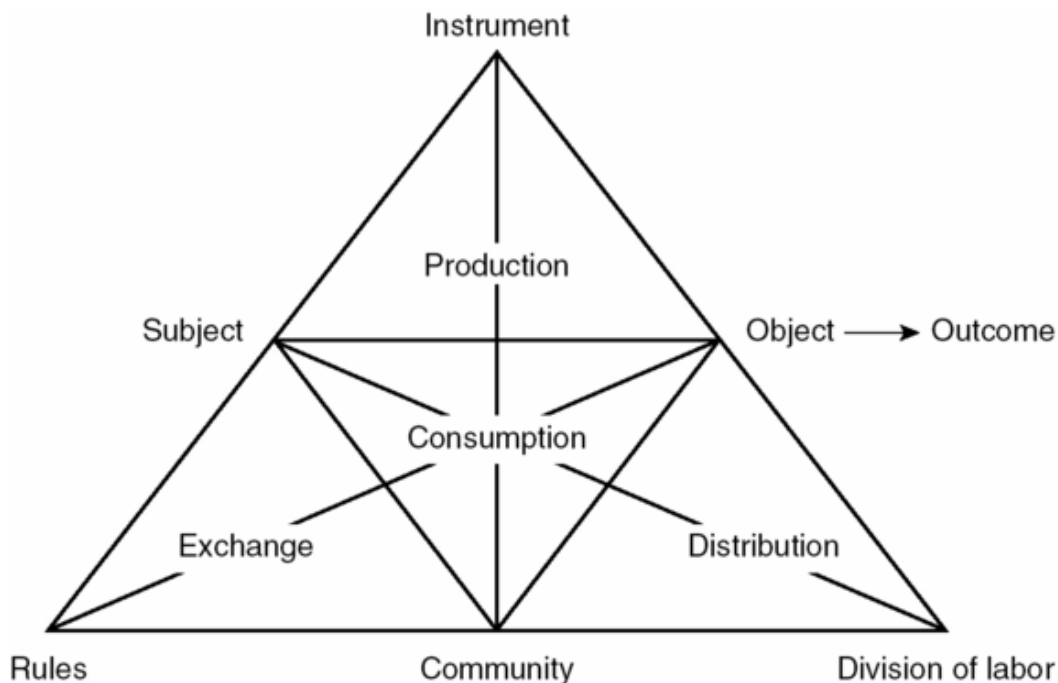
The simplistic triangular first generation activity theory model appears to represent a solitary process in which the subject remains an individual processing mentally as he or she interacts with an instrument. With the inclusion of community, culture, and rules there is a transition to collective activity. Engeström (2000, 2015) suggests the interaction between goal-directed actions and object-oriented activity is directly influenced by the fact that there is a living human being centered as the focal point, and his/her health and well-being is the responsibility of the community involved. Engeström (2000, 2015) determines the activity system described is motivated by a common goal - what he calls a “deeply communal motive.” Work then is driven by the object of the activity, which in the case of education, is the student.

Engeström’s (2000, 2015) early research program was conducted in Finland where he began distinguishing a third generation of the activity theory in which greater sensitivity was given to multiple perspectives within community as influenced by cultural diversity. Recognition

of the differences in cognition as found in cultures, social groups, and in professional and organizational practices led to the inclusion of another layer of the model which represents dialogue and discourse, collaboration and conflict. Most recently, Engeström (2015) published a new edition of his original work defending a more complex graphic of the model, identified as the structure of human activity. Figure 4 shows the inclusion of consumption, which is then broken into three aspects of human activity – production, distribution, and exchange (or communication).

Figure 4

Engeström's Structure of Human Activity



Note. Used with permission from Engeström (2015). *Learning by Expanding*. Second edition. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Engeström (2015) maintains the simpler triangular model of activity theory's second generation represents activity learned or developed from genetically earlier forms which does not allow for new activity generated from the dynamic relations which take place in a complex

society where learning is more than the repetition and reproduction of known activity.

Engeström (2015) thus presents a model which represents the expansive development of a new activity which is learned, rather than the recycling of activity which is being passed down.

Engeström (2015) identifies this as activity-producing activity. The inclusion of human processing (consumption, distribution, exchange, and production) changes the model from an activity theory to a learning theory. This third generation of the framework makes visible the ways in which participants work with one another and process their efforts for the benefit of the subject and with a common intended outcome. In this form, Engeström's (2015) Structure of Human Activity Theory compliments Epstein's (2011) Overlapping Spheres of Influence Theory giving researchers a tool with which to analyze human behavior when groups of people come together for the benefit of another.

Technology as a Tool

For years, educators have used tools to communicate with parents. Messages have been sent from school to home in an effort to keep parents informed. However, we now live in an age in which two-way communication is expected – in real time (Porterfield & Carnes, 2012, Scott, 2013; Sheninger, 2014). Literature reflects an interest in the effective use of technology and internet facilitated communications as a tool used by building leaders and teaching staff for the purpose of engaging families and community members and for improving student achievement (Afshari, Bakar, Luan, and Siraj, 2012; Anderson & Dexter, 2005; Arokiasamy, bin Abjullah, and Ismail, 2014; Cox, 2012; Engeström, 2004; Grujanac, 2011; Janicki & Chandler-Olcott, 2012; Levin and Arafah, 2002; Lim, 2002; Longfellow, 2004; Olmstead, 2012; Sheninger, 2014; Unal, 2008; Wilmore, 2000).

In today's world, advances in technology now provide leaders with many tools from which to choose. Consider Sheninger's (2014) opening statement:

Advances in technology have led to changes in the way people communicate, collaborate, solve problems, create projects, and consume content. These changes have shifted how key stakeholders in education (parents, students, community members) prefer to receive information and communicate with schools (Sheninger, 2014, p. xvii).

Technology and tools associated with technology are defined using many terms: Internet, blogs, social media, email, cell phones, texting, websites, chat rooms, etc. The list can go on and on. For consistency, in this review, communications using technology and tools associated with technology will be referred to as Digital Communications. Literature is filled with research and studies about digital communications and the world of education: how it is viewed by students, (Casero-Ripollés, 2012; Greenhow & Robelia, 2009; Kearney & Schuck, 2006; Levin & Arafeh, 2002), the attitudes of principals and teachers (Janicki & Chandler-Olcott, 2012; Polizzi, 2013;), and the call for educational leaders to establish, vision, and plan to implement digital communications into the culture of a school (Cox, 2012; Macpherson, 2010; Porterfield & Carnes, 2014; Sheninger, 2014; Wilmore, 2000).

Building principals have been encouraged to make better use of technology as a tool for effective communications (Anderson & Dexter, 2005; Grujanac, 2011; Jones, 2008; Longfellow, 2004; Sheninger, 2014; Wilmore 2000). Anderson and Dexter (2005) assert principals should learn how to effectively use technology to carry out their own duties, especially for communication with others, and go on to suggest their role is to ensure other staff are able to do the same. Wilmore (2000) maintains the principal's roll is crucial to the successful introduction

and use of information technologies in schools. Wilmore (2000) suggests principals are responsible to accept the challenge to inspire their teaching staff to use technology in the classroom. It is their role to create supportive conditions for the innovative use in each classroom.

In his book, Sheninger (2014) presents “pillars of digital leadership” which simply represent areas in a school’s culture which can be positively impacted through the use of digital communications, especially social media. These pillars include communication, public relations, branding, student engagement/learning, professional growth/development, re-envisioning learning spaces and environments, and opportunity (Sheninger, 2014, p. xxii). Sheninger’s (2014) interest in communication focuses on the ability to provide stakeholders with current and relevant information in real time. His interest in public relations suggests leaders must take charge and tell their own story rather than relying on someone else. He suggests given the negative rhetoric about education, educational leaders should provide transparency regarding schools. Regarding branding, Sheninger (2014) promotes the use of social media in order to emphasize the positive characteristics of a school’s culture, build a reputation which would increase community pride, and attract families as consumers.

Grujanac (2011) is quite specific in her research and pinpoints the relationship between internet communications and student achievement. Grujanac (2011) suggests when partnerships extend to the community, academic concepts extend from the classroom and become more meaningful. Grujanac’s (2011) study supports the findings that communications from the school are an important factor in helping parents decide whether or not to become involved. In her use of Engeström’s (2000, 2015) second generation of the activity theory triangular model she places emphasis on internet facilitated communications as the tool used by parents and teachers in the

community. The school district rules for communication contribute to the culture impacting behavior among adults. With the student identified as the subject, and student achievement as the object Grujanac (2011) transforms activity theory into something practical for the study of the principal as an effective communicator increasing parental and community engagement through the use of strategic communications.

Generational Preferences

Today's technology provides educators and stakeholders with many communication tools from which to choose. While the variety may be of great interest to some, it can be a frustration for others. Levin and Arafah (2002) found students themselves have become sophisticated consumers of their education and of technology. Having grown up with technology, students have developed expectations when it comes to its use, and they are able to articulate their needs quite clearly. Levin and Arafah (2002) found middle and high school students demonstrate attitudes regarding uses of the Internet for their schoolwork. For these young people, use of the Internet is simply part of who they are and what they do. Students demonstrate frustration however, when their teachers fail to recognize the powerful tool of the Internet. For some older members of our society, digital communications and the many platforms which make up social media are beyond their understanding or interest. The generational disconnect creates perceived and real roadblocks that are frustrating both young and old.

Generational gaps have been evident for ages and much has been written in reference to the shared perspectives and similar characteristics and behaviors found in people within a common age-group (Buckingham & Willett, 2013; Howe & Strauss, 2007; Werth & Werth, 2011; Yuan, Hussain, Hales, & Cotton, 2016). Some researchers, like Howe and Strauss (2007) have devoted years of study to the topic of generational theory, predicting recurring cycles of

particular moods within society. The characteristics and behaviors identified as common for groups of people are referenced in literature in many ways. Most recently, Yuan et al. (2016) highlighted the importance of learning communication preferences of older American adults. Noting that this generation appreciates face-to-face communication the most, Yuan et al. (2016) discovered a variety of opinions regarding internet-based communication, influenced by several factors including the behaviors of younger family members. In their study of the so called digital generation, Buckingham and Willett (2013) suggest that technological change affects everyone, but cautions against giving too much credit to technology alone. They maintain the impact of technology depends more on how it is used and what it is used for. In a practical way, Werth and Werth (2011) relate generational characteristics to the classroom and the training of a new workforce. Ultimately, Werth and Werth (2011) urge instructors to become aware of the characteristics of younger generations as learners and competent in using best practices when planning and delivering instruction. The impact of technology, digital communications, and social media on subgroups of our culture is a study in and of itself. The literature is broad, and becoming more so as researchers learn more about generational differences, communication styles, and the tools we use to interact.

A proven method of improving student achievement is to inform, engage, and involve more parents and families in their children's education. (Curtis, 2013; Epstein et al., 2011; French, 2014; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Grujanac, 2011; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, & Sandler, 2005; Jeynes, 2012; O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2014; Sonnenschein et al., 2014; Topor, Keane, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010). With increasing competition among schools and school districts, and with a growing population of parents and students behaving as educational consumers, building and district administrators are being challenged to develop strategic communication plans which

include marketing and public relations activities (Catri & Barrick, 1996; English, 2009; Hanson, 1992; Jones, 2008; Oplatka, 2007). Use of technology has become the expectation of younger generations, and the norm for today's students (Buckingham & Willett, 2013; Casero-Ripollés, 2012; Cox, 2012; Greenhow & Robelia, 2009; Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011; Kearney & Schuck, 2006; Sheninger, 2014; Werth & Werth, 2011). Education and communication has evolved over the last several years, and some question whether or not educators and district leaders have kept pace (Afshari, Bakar, Luan, & Siraj, 2012; Anderson & Dexter, 2005; Arokiasamy, bin Abjullah, & Ismail, 2014; Lemke, 2011; Levin & Arafah, 2002; Longfellow, 2004; Maio-Taddeo, 2007; Wilmore & Betz, 2000).

Principals and Digital Communication

Within the past two decades technology has changed the way in which we do many things, including the way we relate to each other, communicate with each other, and work with each other (Cox, 2012; DeBruyn & Lilien, 2008; Dobebe, Lindgreen, Beverland, Vanhamme, & Van Wijk, 2007; Hanna, rohm, & Crittenden, 2011; Macnamara, 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Scott, 2013; Wilkins, 2012). Digital communications and participation in social media now appear to be the most efficient and effective way to reach the most people with the most important information (Cox, 2012; Mcnamara, 2010; Scott, 2013).

Increasingly, digital communications and social media are being identified by researchers as important components of a communication plan and effective in engaging the public (Cox, 2012; Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011; Macnamara, 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Scott, 2013; Sochowski, 2011). Advantages include the blurring of lines between advertising, marketing, and public relations (Sochowski, 2011), and the suggestion that many consumers are turning away from traditional sources of advertising, and turning more frequently to social media

(Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Those promoting the more frequent use of digital communications and social media have become quite specific when identifying the benefits – many related to enhanced conversation among people (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008; Macnamara, 2010; Treem & Leonardi, 2012). De Bruyn and Lilien (2008) suggest a direct result of social media is the propagation of conversation and word-of-mouth communications among participants. Likewise, Treem and Leonardi (2012) note the positive results which come from sharing work across organizational boundaries. Treem and Leonardi (2012) promote conversations and collaborations through the use of social media, which they maintain includes four advantages:

- **Visibility** at all times for anyone interested in finding information improves accessibility.
- **Persistence** in existence and visibility allows for greater accuracy in interpretation and sharing.
- **Editability** allows authors to modify information to enhance clarity and understanding.
- **Association** creates social ties and grows relationships.

Within the world of business, leaders are learning how to use digital communications and social media to better engage customers. Sochowski (2011) explored the basics of public engagement given the current state of the public relations industry. Sochowski (2011) considers the media landscape as ever changing with new technologies bringing social and traditional media to new levels and provides multiple definitions for “public engagement,” suggesting the term is broad enough to now be considered a theory - identified and examined in and of itself. Promoting a move from monologue to dialogue, Macnamara (2010) suggests public relations practitioners are transforming their work into more socially-engaging behaviors. Hanna, Rohm, and Crittenden (2011) agree. They believe the tools of digital communications and social media have grown to become a world of its own. Hanna, Rohm, and Crittenden (2011) view online

social media as an integrated system which they call an “ecosystem.” Assisting in the navigation of this ecosystem, Scott (2013) provides readers with a clear understanding of social media focused upon marketing to specific audiences. He outlines the old rules of marketing and public relations, then explains the new rules for users of digital communication platforms. Scott (2013) suggests communications which interrupt people, brag about their products, or simply come across loud and declarative are less influential than those who engage readers with interesting content designed specifically for a certain demographic, listen to feedback, and develop an understanding of what the customer is looking for. Scott (2013) introduces blogs, news releases, podcasting, online video, viral marketing, and social media as necessary networks for public relations directors. He also promotes the development of marketing and public relations plans. In an effort to bring consistency among all learning about social media, Scott (2013) declares,

Social media provide the way people share ideas, content, thoughts, and relationships online. Social media differ from so-called mainstream media in that anyone can create, comment on, and add to social media content. Social media can take the form of text, audio, video, images, and communities (Scott, 2013, p. 54).

A metaphor presented in his book suggests social media is a cocktail party, where people mingle and get to know each other, developing relationships of sorts before discussing business. Scott (2013) suggests those who know how to handle themselves in such a setting develop friends, and networks of friends, which can later lead to business opportunities.

Educational leaders must realize the power of digital communications and the impact of social media, and build credibility with their students, parents, and community members by joining in the conversation on-line (Cox, 2012; Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011; Treem &

Leonardi, 2012; Tubin and Klein, 2012; Sochowski, 2011). As building leaders consider ways in which they can transform a culture, improve relations with parents and community members, and improve student achievement, they must recognize the power of digital communications and demonstrate technology leadership to their staff and stakeholders (Afshari, Bakar, Luan, & Siraj, 2012; Anderson & Dexter, 2005; Maio-Taddeo, 2007; Tubin & Klein, 2007).

In an effort to better understand the impact of digital communications and building leadership, Maio-Taddeo (2007) has studied school websites, finding great variance between sites in terms of content and design. He finds there are categories in which building leaders can fall with regard to the level of experience and successful use of websites for effective communications. Maio-Taddeo (2007) found “novices” used websites to disseminate information, and communicate with others by informing. “Experts” were those who designed websites to inform, communicate, entertain, and showcase innovation (Maio-Taddeo, 2007, p. 110) with a clear focus on student achievement and accomplishment. Recognizing a school’s website as an effective marketing tool, Tubin and Klein (2007) highly recommend its integration into strategic communications plan.

Cox (2012) compares the field of education to that of the business world where corporate and nonprofit employees have had to embrace social media tools in order to stay competitive and meet the expectations of colleagues and customers. Cox (2012) reminds readers that the education world moves much more slowly regarding change initiatives, probably due to the lack of competitiveness within the organization. However, as information and technology continue to make rapid advances, educators and education leadership will no longer have an option with regard to participation. In his study of principals and superintendents across the nation and in one province of Canada, Cox (2012) intended to describe, analyze, and interpret the experiences

of building leaders in their use of multiple social media tools such as blogs, microblogs, social networking sites, podcasts, and online videos with stakeholders as part of their comprehensive communications practices. Cox (2012) found educational leaders revealed four themes which include:

- social media tools allow for greater interactions between school administrators and stakeholders,
- social media tools provide stronger connections to local stakeholders, to fellow educators, and to the world,
- social media use can have a significant impact on a school administrator's personal and professional growth, and
- social media use is an expectation, it is no longer optional (Cox, 2012, p. 73).

The level of accountability placed on building administrators has grown to become enormous, with the expectation that they serve as educational leaders, effective communicators, and strong promoters of their school and staff. Public perception, and the consumer-like attitude of parents now requires principals to market their schools and engage the community much like businesses do in the world of public relations. Yet, rarely are building principals adequately prepared to develop marketing strategies and communication plans which will lead to improved student achievement (Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2004), and rarely are building principals prepared to be engaged in promotion, public relations, and other forms for marketing their schools (Epstein, 2013; Epstein et al., 2011; Oplatka, 2007). Since use of digital communications and participation in social media now appear to be the most efficient and effective way to reach the most people with the most important information (Cox, 2012; Mcnamara, 2010; Scott, 2013) educational leaders must begin using these tools to build

credibility with their students, parents, and community members and ensure others know their school's story (Cox, 2012; Sochowski, 2011).

Marketing and Public Relations

It is not enough for building leaders to appreciate parents' engagement, value relationships, and agree that marketing is a good idea. Principals must act on this knowledge. In Epstein's (2013) charge to colleges and universities to better prepare teachers and administrators, she points out that there is a big gap between *knowing* and *doing*. Epstein (2013) is joined by several researchers in providing encouragement to principals to take action in marketing schools and promoting students and staff (Beckwith, 1997; Brown, Fisk, & Bitner, 1994; DeSiegardt, 2013; Driscoll, 2008; Epstein et al., 2011; Hanson, 1992; Horng et al., 2010; Jones, 2008; Lockhart, 2011; Mun, 2008; Oplatka, 2007; Turner, 2013). Some are doing just that. In an effort to develop mutually beneficial partnerships with parents and community members during a time of greater competition for students and families, principals have been commissioned more and more to market their schools to education consumers in an attempt to attract students and their parents as clients and to secure positive reputations within their community (Hanson, 1992; Jones, 2008; Lockhart, 2011; Porterfield & Carnes, 2014; Richardson, 2013; Scott, 2013; Shenger, 2014). Their job description is increasingly emphasizing behaviors once only found in the private sector - in the business and commercial world. These tasks include strategic communications, marketing, and public relations (Bell, 1999; English, 2009; Hanson, 1992; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jones, 2008; Longfellow, 2004; Macpherson, 2010; Oplatka, 2007; Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2004; Turner, 2013; Unal, 2008).

Hanson (1992) suggests schools and school districts should use marketing techniques to resolve some of the same problems businesses face, such as reputation, resource development,

recruitment and hiring, and customer satisfaction. In the world of education, the client is often viewed as the parent, and Hanson (1992) promotes the use of marketing strategies as a way to build greater involvement by parents (clients). Hanson (1992) suggests “Even though school systems across the country can, and many often do, function largely through symbolic and ritualistic exchanges with their local communities, there are many reasons why all parties can benefit through serious application of marketing techniques (Hanson, 1992).

Some researchers consider marketing to be an indispensable managerial function, one which is necessary given the growing competition among schools and school districts (Macpherson, 2010; Oplatka, 2007). Many have examined the principal’s role as strategic communicator and public relations manager (Horng et al., 2010; Oplatka, 2007; Turner, 2013) and some researchers are finding principals know very little about the development of communication plans or marketing plans (Bell, 1999; Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2004). Oplatka (2007) found principals’ attitudes are mixed, and feelings towards marketing are mixed as well. Some express discomfort with the inconvenience, frustration with the time consumed, and unprepared to carry out the work as expected. Interview results indicated principals were uncomfortable promoting their teachers and programs, participating in public relations work, and otherwise marketing their schools (Oplatka, 2007, p. 212.). However, the review of research indicates the responsibilities tied to marketing and public relations are playing a prominent role in the life of a school principal (Catri & Barrick, 1996; English, 2009; Hanson, 1992; Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Jones, 2008; Longfellow, 2004; Macpherson, 2010; Richardson, 2013; Unal, 2008).

Some building administrators have developed a new mindset and realize the benefits of strategic planning for communications (Horng et al., 2010; Lockhart, 2011; Macpherson 2010;

Turner, 2013). In their study of how principals of more effective schools spend their time, Horng et al (2010) found principals at higher performing schools spent more time on external relations which included working with local community members. Turner's (2013) research found principals of more effective schools had strong interpersonal skills and used those skills to build relationships with and among stakeholders. Macpherson (2010) found relationship-building to be the second highest strategic approach identified by principals interviewed about public relations, noting the work is never complete, but requires maintenance and on-going attention. Attitude may follow skill and an internal belief in one's own abilities. Turner (2013) found effective school leaders demonstrate positive efficacy. They believe they can produce a desired result or effect. In order to believe one can produce what is expected of them, one must first have a mindset that growth can take place – that learning is possible. Lockhart (2011) suggests educational marketing is simply a mindset that everything done at school and in the community is a demonstration that the students, parents, and staff members are dedicated to serving students and meeting their educational needs. When this mindset is adopted by all members of the school staff, perception by others can be greatly impacted.

Some researchers have promoted the notion that effective marketing is primarily about perception (Beckwith, 1997; Brown, Fisk, & Bitner, 1994; DeSiegardt, 2013; Lockhart, 2011). In *Selling the Invisible*, Beckwith (1997) suggests marketing is about perception, and it is the responsibility of everyone in an organization to help craft an accurate perception. DeSiegardt (2013) concurs and provides greater specificity by suggesting patrons want educators to understand their expectations for students in the school district, and then show them the real-life, everyday steps being taken to meet those expectations and turn out students who will be successful, no matter what they choose to do in life. This is a daunting task, but represents what

DeSieghardt (2013) believes is the patron-focused approach to delivering messages to parents and community. Lockhart (2011) maintains the “business-like” feeling of marketing and public relations fades when educators develop a new mindset about strategic communications, and simply consider all they do to be marketing of their school and their profession. Lockhart (2011) suggests having to “sell” the school becomes less important than creating an awareness of what the school has to offer (Lockhart, 2011, p. 4).

With regard to internal marketing, Brown, Fisk, and Bitner, (1994) present findings from literature suggesting everyone in an organization has a “customer” and is responsible for serving and satisfying patrons. While Brown et al. (1994) are clearly focused on the business world, with an emphasis on communications and marketing, the application to the world of education is evident. Brown et al. (1994) identify a number of subfields of services marketing, including education. Lockhart (2011) supports the focus on internal marketing, and suggests successful marketing of a school is simply about meeting the needs and wants of stakeholders.

With internal trust established, the principal and staff can begin forming communication plans based on marketing techniques proven in the private sector (Hanson, 1992). Viewing parents and community members as consumers, Hanson (1992) discusses customer orientation in his study and promotes the focus on reputation building, program development, client satisfaction, and community good will. However, Henderson (2002) advises caution when applying marketing strategies from the private sector to education. While Henderson’s (2002) research provides readers with material related to consumerism, marketing, education, and perception, he reminds us the consumer who must participate in compulsory education is very different from the customer who may, for example, decide whether or not to purchase property insurance. Even with the caution, Henderson (2002) suggests consumers may make judgments

of service quality based on the communication style offered by any provider. Henderson's (2002) reminder is when schools and families work together to develop their connections, families become powerful advocates for their schools, and allies in the work.

Conclusion

Parents are consumers of public education and many will use their social capital to identify what they determine to be the best schools for their children (Childers Roberts, 2012; Cucchiara, 2013; Hastings et al., 2007; Henderson, 2002; Steedman, 2014). At the same time, the world is becoming increasingly social using the Internet and much more digital in communications (Cox, 2012; DeBruyn & Lilien, 2008; Dobebe, Lindgreen, Beverland, Vanhamme, & Van Wijk, 2007; Hanna, rohm, & Crittenden, 2011; Macnamara, 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Scott, 2013; Wilkins, 2012). As transformational leaders, building principals are seeking ways to increase parent involvement and find ways to engage families and community members in meaningful ways (Afshari et al., 2012; Shields, 2013). More than ever before, educational leaders have effective and efficient tools available to them in digital communications and social media. Using technology, building principals have the ability to develop relationships, build trust, and tell their school's story in a way the traditional media cannot (Cox, 2012; Porterfield & Carnes, 2012; Scott, 2013; Sheninger, 2014). Educational leaders must develop the mindset that everything they do and say is actually marketing their school (Lockhart, 2011). When "activities and behaviors consistently and affectively promote the school as the best education choice for students and parent, an asset within the community, and a responsible administrator of taxpayers' money," (Lockhart, 2011, p. 1) they will communicate the deeply felt philosophy most educators project when entering their career – dedication to children, our world's most precious resource.

Chapter III

Design and Methodology Outline

Introduction

The accountability inherent to educational reform efforts and resulting competition among schools has placed the building principal in a position of extreme challenge. When parents realize their options for school choice and begin to “shop” for schools using the internet, social networking, and established relationships, the role of the principal changes (Childers Roberts, 2012; English, 2009; Henderson, 2002; Hoxby, 2000; Turner, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2003). The growing expectation that educational leaders use digital communications and social media to engage others, market their school, and promote their school district has been met with some success by some building administrators and school district leaders.

Theoretical Frameworks developed by Epstein (2011) and Vygotsky (1978) provided a structure for the researcher in identifying the most influential adults in a child’s life, and a system for finding not only the tools with which to communicate, but for understanding the relationships and connections the influential adults have with one another. These frameworks proved to be helpful to the researcher in organizing and coding the data gathered in the study, which is in line with Green (2014) who defines Theory as an organized and systematic set of interrelated statements that specify the nature of relationships between two or more variables, with the purpose of understanding a problem or the nature of things (Green, 2014, p. 34). However, what Green (2014) points out is definitions are far less important than the way in which frameworks are used in a study. Terms seem to be used interchangeably, and so it is recommended readers (and researchers) not get hung up on the definitions, but rather work hard to use frameworks wisely to ground their studies, methodology, and analysis. Green (2014)

suggests theoretical and conceptual frameworks can be used effectively in the design of a study whether it is blatantly stated as such in the dissertation or not. It is also suggested the framework can give researchers some confidence in the evidence provided by the findings, or in a way, validate the study and the findings. Green (2014) also believes use of a framework can help organize, or link the findings of a study together, thus making them more useful, understandable, or accessible to readers. It is for these reasons the researcher made use of two theoretical frameworks developed by both Epstein (2011) and Engeström (2000, 2015).

In an effort to clearly hear the lived experiences of building administrators responding to the call to engage parents and community members using digital communications and social media, this researcher employed phenomenological methodology. Ehrich (2005) teaches readers phenomenology is a philosophy and explains its origins in Edmund Husserl, a nineteenth-century philosopher who developed a philosophical method which kept mind and matter united. Husserl (1970) believed one's experience, and one's consciousness of that experience is a central feature of life and worthy of study. He was interested in identifying what is essential, or what might be a universal knowledge. It was his suggestion that a researcher should bracket, or suspend their own natural attitudes pertaining to a topic, or response. Husserl's (1970) goal was to separate everything in the world, including the researcher's ego, from the data being collected, in an effort for to identify the common phenomenon being shared. Ehrich (2005) provides perspective in the use of phenomenological methods for certain kinds of research and recommends "phenomenology as an appropriate research approach to explore human related experiences within management studies" (Ehrich, 2005, p. 8). Since phenomenological methodology is interested in shedding light on the meanings of human experience, it is a recommended methodology for management-related topics (Ehrich, 2005, p. 8).

For this study, the researcher intentionally sampled a group of building administrators and a sample of the corresponding parents and community members associated with each site in an effort to capture the essence of many communications experiences. It was also believed this would result in information rich data. Creswell (2002) reminds that with regard to qualitative inquiry, the intent is to understand and explore the central phenomenon, not to develop a consensus of opinion from the people studied (Creswell, 2002, p 130). When considering the communication behaviors of building administrators and the perceived consequences of chosen strategies, it became evident that to best understand the decision-making of building principals, one must take the time to inquire of the building principal whom Creswell (2002) would regard as “information rich.” Therefore, this study examined the perceptions of principals first, and later included the perceptions of parents and community members. Data collection began with focus group interviews of building administrators.

This researcher believed preparation for the interviews was of utmost importance. While it was important to prepare for interviews with printed copies of questions and topics, functioning recording equipment, snacks, and a fully prepared transcriber, it was of greater importance to prepare the interviewer for the work to be done in an ethical and professional manner, free from bias and influence. Rapley (2001) recognizes the interviewer as a critical component of the production of data during open-ended interviews. He views the interview as a social encounter and suggests there are social norms at play during the interview. Awareness of the context, and awareness of the roles of interviewee and interviewer are most important when analyzing data and interpreting result (Rapley, 2001, p. 315).

For this study, data collection from administrators was completed through two focus group interviews and interview questions were open-ended. Six administrators were invited to

participate in each focus group. The setting was formal, yet relaxed. Creswell (2013) recommends respectful and courteous behavior, staying to the questions, and completing the interview on time (Creswell, 2013, p. 166). This bracketing of the researcher was an important consideration given his current job assignment to lead a school district into a more digitally based communication system. Part of the procedure for conducting each interview was to set the tone, explain the process, prepare the recording device, and discuss the purpose of the study, and remain as neutral as possible (Turner, 2010, p. 759). An effort was made by the researcher to become what Husserl (1970) referred to as a “disinterested spectator.”

Online data collection was done by the researcher in advance of the interview and provided examples of the digital communication efforts of the administrator. Having the chance to review websites and social media in advance of the interview gave the interviewer the chance to come with an idea of the possible responses.

Research Design

This study began by questioning the communications strategies and behaviors of building administrators, and was purely qualitative in design. Having studied the literature, it became evident that missing in the research is an analysis of the perspective which parents and community members may have – critical data from people who are also important and influential players in the communications process. This research continued to focus on the specific communication skills and behaviors of effective principals and grew to include the resulting effects on public perception, parent and community engagement which is known to lead to improved student achievement (Epstein et al., 2011; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Grujanac, 2011; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Jeynes, 2012; O’Donnell & Kirkner, 2014; Sonnenschein, Stapleton, & Metzger, 2014; Topor, Keane, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010). To gather data reflecting

the parents' point of view, as well as that of the community, it was decided a simple multiple choice survey would be administered. At this point, the research evolved into a mixed-methods study investigating not only the building administrators' use of digital communications and social media, but the impact of these efforts as reported by parents and community members.

Eventually, this researcher sought to answer the following questions:

1. In what ways do building administrators use digital communications and social media tools to communicate with and engage staff members, parents, and community members?
2. Is there a significant relationship between communication efforts of the building administrator and the level of parental and community engagement in individual schools?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the strategic communications and marketing strategies of a building administrator and the resulting image and reputation of the school?

This mixed-methods study has been focused on ways in which building and district administrators use digital communications and social media to engage others and the resulting response of parents and community members.

Participants

Using Google as a search engine to identify building administrators who maintain a professional Facebook page, blog, or Twitter account, this researcher chose 12 school administrators to invite to participate in this study. Having secured permission to conduct research in three school districts in Washington State, a review of social media and school websites resulted in a limited number of qualified participants. Building administrators from two

public school districts, representing both elementary and secondary levels were invited to participate in the study via email inquiries. Permission was obtained through agreements made with superintendents of each of the targeted districts (See appendices A-F. or whatever they will be). Interviewees were primarily female ($N = 8$). Participants represented elementary (7), junior high (3), and high school (2) campuses.

Focus group interviews were conducted in person at a local school district's central office. At the beginning of each interview, each participant was asked to sign a consent form. In the days following each focus group interview session, parents and community members from the attendance areas of each school participating were contacted and made aware of the research project being conducted. It was noted that the study focused on building administrators and their use of digital communications and social media with parents and the community. Parent and community perspective was valued and requested. The ten multiple choice questions in the survey were provided through a link in the email sent.

Data Collection

Marshall and Rossman (2010) suggest it is through systematic and sometimes collaborative strategies we can find data for studies. Information about decisions made and actions taken can be collected, organized, reflected on, evaluated, and eventually interpreted during qualitative research. For the social scientist, Creswell (2002) recommends purposeful sampling in order to select individuals and sites rich with information. This researcher followed the advice of these scholars in identifying experienced building administrators showing success in their use of digital communications and social media.

Rapley (2001) reminds researchers some judge qualitative data gathered through interviews as "accounts" or "versions" of the interview and builds a foundation for his study of

the analysis of interview data. Rapley (2001) provides examples of marking techniques which represent pauses in the interview, action in the interview, and interactions between the interviewer and the interviewee. He believes often these parts of the interview are unconsidered even though they represent norms and behaviors which can have an influence on the responses produced and the data gathered. A critical point of Rapley's (2001) is that portions (or quotes) from interviews should be presented in the context from which they came. This includes the prompt offered by the interviewer, as well as the talk which takes place after comments are made. Rapley (2001) believes the interview data is co-constructed and should be analyzed in a way which reflects in the interaction between the two participants in the conversation.

With great regard for the recommendations of the aforementioned researchers, this researcher began data collection in the fall of 2015. Building administrators identified as effective users of digital communications and social media were interviewed to gather data on methods of communication used to engage the staff, students, parents, and community members of their school and community. Two focus group interviews were conducted by the researcher in person. Questions were open-ended, but designed to guide building administrators to identify all strategies of communication, intentionally or unintentionally employed. Transcripts were begun with the aid of a transcriber who used an audio recording to assist with transcription accuracy. No information was discussed or recorded "off the record."

One characteristic of qualitative research is to present multiple perspectives of individuals to represent the complexity of our world (Creswell, 2002). Maximal Variation Sampling is a strategy intended to build complexity into the research, and is used when the researcher determines in advance, some criteria that differentiates the sites or participants (Creswell, 2002, pp. 156-157). To reflect the differences among communities and the variety of

methods building administrators may employ in an effort to engage parents and community members within their region, Maximal Variation Sampling was used to identify a variety of principals, a variety of experience levels, and a variety of demographics from community to community. With regard to the perception of parents and community members, a wide-spread communication effort was employed to encourage many parents and community members from a variety of demographic indicators to participate, thus reflecting the differences between and among stakeholders. They were sent surveys via email which included a link to a survey tool which ensured confidentiality and assisted in data analysis. Surveys included detailed explanation of the nature of qualitative research and assurance of each superintendent's knowledge of the surveys. The survey questions, generated by the researcher, and validated as effective, were designed to identify the methods of communication used by the local school, and preferred methods of communication.

Analytical Methods

In order to maintain confidentiality among administrators and their parents/community, data gathered was labeled with aliases (Principal A of A Elementary; Principal B of B Junior High, etc.). Data from the administrators' interviews was coded (Creswell, 2002) immediately after interviews using 22 categories which were later folded into 17. These 17 categories were then organized by 7 themes. At this point, the researcher compared themes to literature on digital communications, social media, and effective leadership.

The researcher originally sought to determine if the communications efforts of a building principal could have a significant impact on student achievement. However, with the ever changing landscape of assessment taking place in Washington State and across the nation, it was determined student test data might not yet be reliable for such a study. Instead, based on the

compelling evidence presented by previous researchers, it was decided because parent involvement has been established as having positive impact on student success, a study of the impact resulting from principals' communication strategies and the level of parent involvement and community perspective would be explored.

Limitations

With any research study, there are limitations. In this study, the researcher sought to interview a diverse group of building administrators in an effort to represent users of digital communications and social media on a continuum of experience and comfort-level. Barbour (2001) advises to carefully select participant in an effort to reflect diversity means very little unless the data collected is analyzed so as to illuminate the differences, even subtle differences, in the discussion and conclusion. She reminds qualitative researchers the quality of the research design, and the skill demonstrated in execution of the study is of utmost importance and should be evident. However, given the amount of time available to conduct interviews, analyze and code the data, and draw conclusions, it may be there were too few of participants in order to represent the diversity originally sought after.

Twelve administrators participated in the focus group interviews. These administrators represented only two school districts in Washington State. When screening websites and social media sites for principals actively using digital communications (websites) and social media (Facebook or Twitter) strategically and over time, it became evident to the researcher that one district in particular excelled. In a nearby district, only two building administrators met the criteria. As a result, most of the participants invited to the focus-group interviews were colleagues from the same district.

Within this district there has been a conscious effort to improve the engagement and involvement of stakeholders through wide spread and intentional support for each building administrator in their use of digital communications and social media. A new content management system was implemented in the district and extensive training was provided for all educators. A school board initiative to better engage the public influenced mandates to regularly update the material on school websites and teacher pages. Modeling by the building administrators was expected. Frequent updates to principal's messages, news stories, and photo slide shows of students and staff were encouraged and recognized. A Facebook page for each school was created and managed centrally by staff in the Communications and Information Department. Principals were encouraged to monitor their own Facebook site and were coached to post photos and comments regularly. Many became involved and were provided with additional encouragement and support. Professional development for district administrators enhanced principals' understanding and led to better use of analytics and more strategic use of these communication platforms. Sponsorship from the superintendent, with consistent encouragement to participate in response to the school board expectations led to effective use of digital communications and social media nearly district wide.

While this unique experience for all administrators positively impacted the perspective of many in this one district, it may have limited the impact of the data gathered for this study since it represents behavior which was specifically taught and cultivated.

Chapter IV

Results

Introduction

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to illuminate building administrators as effective communicators with a focus on their use of digital communications and social media in an effort to engage and involve parents and community members in their local schools. Data gathered during focus group interviews are presented in this chapter. This data includes conversational comments among participants which contributed to a sense of rapport, as well as the data collected in response to the research questions. Additionally, this study was designed to explore the perspective of parents and community members to measure their level of involvement as a result of the principal's efforts. Further evidence of the principal's communication efforts were measured using a survey designed to identify preferred methods of communications, calculate level of involvement, and determine the perceived image and reputation of the school. Data gathered using the survey are also presented in this chapter.

Focus group interview questions and survey questions were crafted in an effort to collect evidence in response to the following questions:

1. In what ways do building administrators use digital communications and social media tools to communicate with and engage staff members, parents, and community members?
2. Is there a significant relationship between communication efforts of the building administrator and the level of parental and community engagement in individual schools?

3. Is there a significant relationship between the strategic communications and marketing strategies of a building administrator and the resulting image and reputation of the school?

To encourage sharing among building administrators in each focus group, broad questions were presented by the researcher with time provided for rich conversation. A comfortable feeling tone was attempted with questions which were written in a conversational structure:

1. Having reviewed your website and social media accounts I can see that you are making use of digital communication tools quite regularly. Will you begin by telling me how you got started using these tools professionally?
2. In the same way that teachers differentiate for a variety of learning styles among their students, it appears that you have differentiated your communication efforts for your constituents. Will you talk about the variety of communications strategies you employ and let me know if there is a specific audience you are trying to reach with each one?
3. There is already a lot of research which shows that there is a relationship between student achievement and the engagement of parents and community members with their local schools. In what ways do you believe that your communications strategies are engaging and involving parents, families, and members of the community?
4. Principals know that they have to be good communicators, but the notion that we are now called to *market our schools* can be a little challenging to consider. However, you are doing just that! In what ways do you believe your effort are influencing your stakeholders' perception of your school?

5. Is there anything else that you would like to share about your use of digital communications and social media?

Writing interview questions in this way was an attempt to create an atmosphere of collegial conversation by crafting questions which provided a brief lead followed by an open ended opportunity to share. Statements were designed to demonstrate some understanding of the context in which principals work, followed by questions which were broad enough to allow the flow of ideas and sharing. This effort was prompted by Rapley's (2001) study of conversation analysis. Rapley (2001) maintains the data produced during an interview is done collaboratively due to the interactional nature of conversation. The data obtained, Rapley (2001) suggests, are highly dependent on and emerge from the specific local interactional context which is produced in and through the talk of the interviewee and interviewer (Rapley, 2001, p. 303). With this in mind, the transcripts of both focus-group interviews were studied for relational comments made between and among principals during the conversation. Examination of the transcript shows the building of rapport among participants due to comments of interaction which fall into four primary themes: *making connections*, *extending the question*, *gathering ideas* and *affirming feeling tone*.

During each interview, participants used transition phrases which indicated they were making connections with their colleagues' comments and could understand what was being shared. Phrases such as "To piggyback on that thought . . ." and "I want to go back there now . . ." demonstrated that participants were tracking the conversation and being prompted to share more of their own experiences. Conversation was extended by participants when they began asking clarifying questions or follow-up questions of each other. Phrases such as "That is interesting. I wonder if that is because . . ." and ". . . how do you monitor that for appropriate

pictures?” demonstrated an interest level which seemed to feed the conversation and encourage more sharing. Transcripts show that participants were gathering ideas for themselves and were inspired by the conversation when they used phrases like “I have learned a lot from you all today. I think now I am going to work harder” and “You could do that in elementary even, some correct structure to it. That’s really cool.” After just a few minutes of talking with each other, participants became comfortable with each other and eager to share due in part to simple affirming comments and laughter. Simple conversational analysis is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Focus Group Conversation – Comments of Interaction

Interaction theme	Number of examples
Making connections	16
Extending the question	5
Gathering ideas	9
Affirming feeling tone	24

Focus Group Interview Results

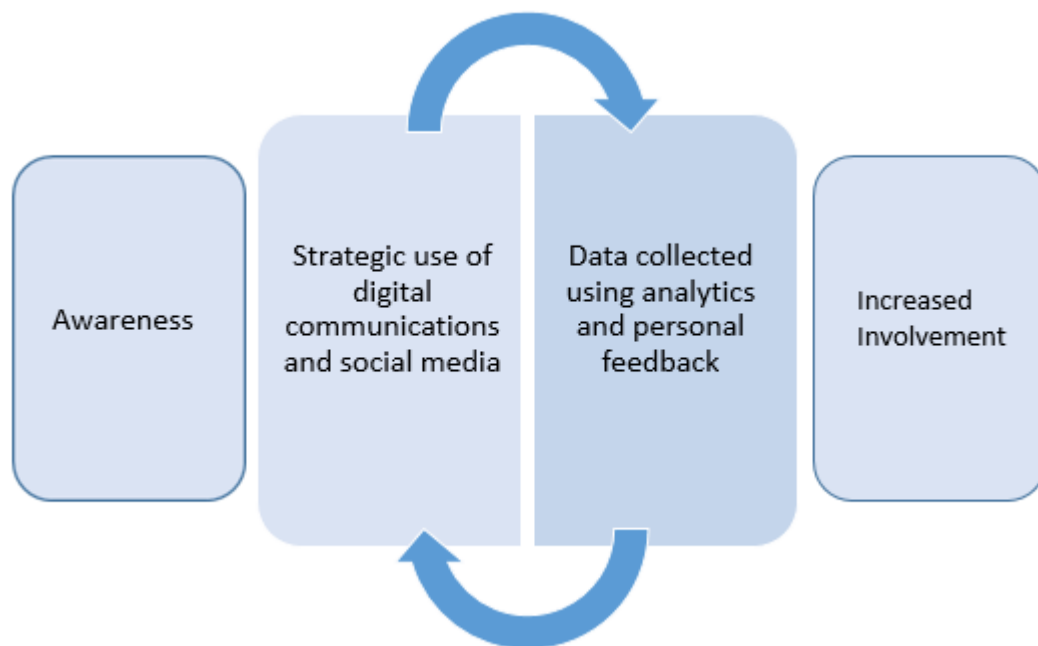
Results of the focus group interviews provided an abundance of data to answer the first research question: In what ways do building administrators use digital communications and social media tools to communicate with and engage staff members, parents, and community members?

Qualitative data gathered in the two focus group sessions were transcribed and coded for topics of similarity, and common responses. It became evident during analysis that principals

shared a common awareness of changes taking place in society with regard to the preferred communication styles of stakeholders. Principals also shared a growing realization of the impact of their use of digital communications and social media. Principals reported this realization led to their strategic use of digital communication and social media to better engage targeted parents and families. Results also indicate a common belief that one result of their focused use of digital communications and social media was an increase in the engagement of parents in their local school. Finally, with the data gathered through the survey of over 800 parents and community members, a very favorable reputation has been earned by these schools according to an overwhelming 83% of survey participants (see Appendix I). The emerging themes include *awareness*, *strategic use*, and *increased involvement*. Figure 5 represents the three themes showing a relationship between the theme of strategic use with a sub-theme of analytics. This relationship will become evident when reviewing the research data.

Figure 5

Themes from Focus Group Interview Data



Awareness

When it comes to communication preferences, many principals are becoming increasingly aware of the changes taking place in society. When asked how they first became involved in the use of digital communications and social media some participants pointed to the changing demographics of their families and the perceived frequent use of such tools by both students and adults.

For me it was just hearing different, the kids, and different adults talking about different sources of media, (and) my own interest. (P-K)

12 years ago when we didn't have any of that stuff, it was word of mouth throughout the neighborhood. It was just if you came to the school. So now it is right here at your fingertips. (P-H)

One principal considered the purpose of such tools and decided it would help reach a broader audience of stakeholders.

When I first started using these tools I thought, "What is the purpose?" and that was to improve communication with my parents and try to get the message out to more people. (P-A)

Participants verbalized the challenges they had in deciding how best to communicate with all parents and community members, knowing changes in preferences could vary from one family to the next. For example, when considering continued use of paper newsletters versus digital communications, one principal noted:

When we first tried to get away from paper copies, people were freaked out, "I need my paper copy," to where we are now where we give families the option and we do a limited number of paper copies, but parents really don't want a bunch of

paper. They want to go to the website. They want to be able to check Facebook on their phone or whatever. Very few families want paper copies. (P-C)

Others began their venture into use of digital communications and social media with the goal of providing differentiation. Their plan was to use multiple communication strategies in an effort to reach everyone in the community. One participant explained:

It was really telling when we attended that professional development last year, looking at different generations and how they communicate. We have all that. It is not like we are in a certain age where everybody is checking their Facebook and Twitter. There are students who live with grandparents, aunts, uncles, and so it is just finding the right type of communication to use, and I think using multiple strategies ensures that everybody is getting what they need in the communication that we have for our families. (P-B)

Most principals find they can provide multiple sources of communication fairly simply. Focus group data shows principals who have used digital communications and social media for a period of time find it relatively easy to use. Two principals shared:

Facebook it is easier to use because with my phone I can update it anywhere I am at. I like that flexibility. (P-B)

I can just put up, you know, here is this great thing that is going on in a classroom right now, or just something short and casual. (P-C)

Principal participants have found a variety of purposes for using digital communications and social media with parents. In general, principals wish to reach many parents in a timely manner; teach about what is going on in the school; share data to build understanding, and become more transparent with the work done by teachers. For example, principals report they

use social media to teach about lockdown drills and safety precautions, remind of holidays, outline expectations and organizational strategies, and report on work done by teachers on non-school days.

One principal has found Facebook to be a very effective way to help others better understand assessment data.

Last year it was a big focus for me to make data accessible to families.

Sometimes we provide lots of data and it is kind of too much and so I've used Facebook for that and our website a little bit, trying to really break that down into really understandable parts. (P-C)

Another principal has found social media to be effective in providing evidence of the positive impact of Common Core State Standards.

In our community in particular, we have a lot of anti-Common Core families, but now if I get them in support of the school, if they are very pro D Elementary and I can show them other ways, like look at this data or look at our students achieving, well guess what, this was from a Common Core state standard, I can change their perception. It is winning families over; it is uniting the community, making kids feel proud of who they are. (P-D)

Principals expressed the realization of a growing population of people using digital communications and social media. All shared an understanding that in order to reach a variety of stakeholders, a variety of methods have to be employed. One principal stated:

As an administrator you strive to communicate the best you can with all your stakeholders and that is why we make a great deal of effort to make sure you put the message out there in lots of different ways. (P-A)

The enthusiasm evident in the focus groups encouraged participants to readily share their experiences in getting started with digital communications and social media. They shared successes, challenges, and failures. At several points in the conversation the common theme featured planned and calculated communications and strategic efforts.

Strategic Use

Given their initial success, and their growing understanding of the way many parents expect to be engaged, data gathered suggests principals are using the tools more and more effectively: driving traffic to the website, aligning pictures and topics to interest level, guiding parents and students in becoming digitally involved, and aligning messages with certain platforms and their corresponding typical audiences.

I am learning more and I am becoming much more intentional about what I post.

I don't want it to just be a news site, update pictures today, or change in schedule.

I find that when I do a mix of pictures and positives and questions and news, that I get a much greater participation. (P-J)

Common within this theme of strategic use was an understanding of the impact of sharing pictures. Principals have learned that Facebook in particular is a great platform for sharing photos primarily featuring students.

The community strategies that we employ really focus on . . . the pictures . . . That tends to get people coming in and we probably have a ratio of about three sets of pictures and then something that we need (to communicate), but using the pictures just to get the students and the parents used to coming to the website. (P-K)

So pictures usually get everybody going and it creates interest. I am more like that on my own, when I am watching or following someone else on Facebook, if

it is always just this dry news, I'll skip by it, but when there are other interesting and fun things, especially pictures, those always do well. So learning that magic of which and how is important. (P-J)

Principals who have embraced the use of digital communications and social media begin to develop an understanding of the communications landscape for their community. They become strategic with their messages, choosing communication tools which are in alignment with their intended audience.

The last three years, we've really used Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. We found that Facebook is where the parents are and Twitter and Instagram are where the kids are. You can connect them, so if you post it on one then it goes to all three. (P-H)

Focus group participants demonstrated a good understanding of the communication styles and preferred platforms of their stakeholders, including their students, and shared attempts to differentiate their messages in order to reach and involve specific audiences:

Here is an example, on our Instagram page, we just got this slushy machine and so we had different close-up pictures and "guess what this is" and all these kids would be guessing. And then finally when we told them what it was, then we said okay, so whichever one gets the most likes is the flavor of the week. So kids were going crazy, like "I want the watermelon one!" (P-H)

Another principal shared a similarly successful strategy targeted to both students and parents:

We have parents and kids contribute a lot. One of our most successful ones has been seeing a teacher at the fair and taking a selfie with a teacher at the fair, and I

think we had, I want to say, 86 pictures of teachers and students with some great backgrounds to boot on that, and that is a lot of fun. (P-K)

Many times, principals target parents specifically with the purpose of both informing and teaching parenting skills. For example, one principal shared:

I go online and look for quotes that I can post on Facebook but also on my Edline for parents, also giving tips on how to communicate with their students. For example, not focusing on how fast they are completing their assignments, but really focusing in on the effort and perseverance through tough problems, looking at errors and going over them again and correcting mistakes. (Teaching) that mistakes are a gift; that we learn from our mistakes. (P-B)

Principals who pursued the use of digital communications and social media in an effort to market their schools found a sense of shared pride and increase in confidence.

Pictures say a lot. It helps brand your school, it helps put out positive messages, it helps show visually what is going on in the building . . . So I think it's kind of marketing your school a little bit, but most parents want to know their kids are happy, safe and having a good time (P-A)

It is hard to dislike someone who is always saying hi to you and being nice, and so that is our public face . . . if the face that they see is positive, engaging, student-centered, nothing but positive things can come from that. (P-J)

Principals talked about the transparency they were trying to ensure stakeholders, and resulting confidence some community members were expressing as a result of their efforts.

We have been able to clear up this miscommunications . . . it is just more transparent about what is actually going on, other than through a kid filter. (P-I)

I hear from people all the time that great things are happening at C Elementary; this is such as great school. We have the same teachers we had before and we were doing great things before, but because they are seeing that all the time in different forms...you know, a teacher said to me over the summer, she was out playing with her child and people were asking her, “ What is C Elementary like? I hear great things. You are so lucky to work there,” but she’s worked there for 10 years already. The same stuff is going on but we are being intentional about the communication now. (P-C)

Principals believe they are able to provide parents and community members with a more accurate picture of what takes place at school which results in a more positive perception of the work being done by the school staff and students.

People can see and experience what you are doing. You can ask your kid how did school go and he’ll say fine, but on Facebook you can talk about it and describe it and then show it visually. That is a lot different than “school’s fine” or “we did this today”. I try to take opportunities to share different things, a science class, today it is a picture of our math department meeting before school where they did a little selfie, and those kinds of things just to market what we are doing in school with your students and your staff as well. (P-A)

Principals portray a sense of control over reputation-building, noting they have more control in “telling their own story” rather than relying on others. “We control our reputations now, much more than we ever did in the past” mentioned one focus group participant. For example, in an effort to modify a negative reputation within one neighborhood, one principal

shared strategic use of Facebook trying to repair a lingering reputation which developed several years ago:

There is a specific neighborhood that is hanging onto that 12-year old thing that happened and will say how horrible I Elementary is because of that 12-year old thing that happened, and I don't even know what it is, three or four principals ago, and yet we were getting a lot of positive feedback about the experiences they were having in real time. So we just asked people, "could you go on and rate us on Facebook and share what you just told me just now, so that some of those ideas that were created and perpetuated from way long ago were put to rest and they would stop? (P-I)

Analytics (sub-theme)

Referring to Figure 4 once again, one can see the theme of strategy is tied to a sub-theme, analytics. When coding the data, it was clear that principals became more strategic in their use of social media in part, because of the formal and informal feedback they received. Positive feedback to postings provides reinforcement for continued efforts. Principals become more strategic in their use of digital communications and social media through effective use of analytics available on each site. Participants noted the use of data showing effectiveness over a period of time. They also studied the data found in replies, likes, and sharing provided by stakeholders directly on Facebook immediately following the posting of messages.

I can tell when I do well because my likes start shooting up. It is amazing how many people join when you hit the right thing. (P-J)

There was significant conversation about the use of pictures in messaging. Some

principals explained the great effort made to obtain many photos for posting on Facebook.

Others found that photos were not as appealing as performance data.

What is interesting to me on Facebook you can go in and see how much traffic you've gotten on different posts. My assumption was that pictures of kids would be the number one thing, but data almost always gets more traffic than other things. Really, really surprising, but that shows me that that is important to people. (P-C)

In addition to the evidence provided by social media platforms, one principal noted the efforts made to gather communications preference data in general.

Every year we survey our stakeholders, so we survey our students, our certificated and classified staff and our parents. We typically ask questions about communication: how well are we communicating as a school. Then we ask about the various kinds of communication, Blackboard Connect, Edline Facebook, etc. Our CSIP team reviews that data, we talk about ways that we can do a better job or sometimes give ourselves a pat on the back, you know what, good job with that, the parent results are pretty strong and that is one way we can reassure ourselves it is working. (P-A)

For some, the analytics available provides principals a target or goal against which they can measure their success when compared to another school. This was particularly event in commentary from high school administrators.

Last time we checked, M High School was the only school that had more followers than we did. We've got our sights on them. (P-L)

The study of analytics can provide principals with concrete, quantifiable data with which to evaluate the effectiveness of their communications effort. Principals also report evidence in the perceived increased involvement of their stakeholders.

Increased Involvement

The second question in this study was intended to determine if there is a significant relationship between communication efforts of the building administrator and the level of parental and community engagement in individual schools: Is there a significant relationship between communication efforts of the building administrator and the level of parental and community engagement in individual schools? Principals report a perceived increase in the involvement of stakeholders as a result of using social media.

We've actually gone away from even publishing a newsletter this year to doing our own electronic version of In the Know or Facebook posts, and we are finding that our involvement is way higher than when we were spending the time creating a newsletter. (P-I)

Over the 6-9 months we have had the Facebook page, we have seen that audience gradually increase. So for our little school of 350, the fact that we have 215 people who are regularly looking at that, that is probably the biggest audience that E Elementary has ever had – captive audience at one time. (P-E)

I've seen, we have a higher PTA than we've had in the three years I've been there, this year . . . there are 50 of them instead of two of them coming in 50 times, so that is a marked difference. (P-I)

Principals report students are engaged in school activities and use the school's social media platform to grow a culture of engagement and inclusiveness:

Of our last 20 posts on Twitter today and yesterday, half of them are from students. A student will say, like, for example, “This is from a football player, shout out to the fans and all the band members – you guys are what make L High School a great place on Friday nights!” So it is a football player giving a shout out to the fans. So we retweeted that, it is a cultural thing. We control the message but it allows other kids to give feedback to each other. (P-L)

The increased engagement at community events is also evident with adult participation in sharing:

When I’m going to the athletic events I’ll see a parent with a great camera. I’ll look for the biggest camera in the group and say, “send me some pictures and I’ll put it on the website,” so that is a great way to get some great quality pictures, action shots, and we don’t have to take them. But it also gets parents, and the grandparents, so ours is kid- and family-related. (P-I)

I think our biggest hit this fall, we had two, and one was saying, “share with us your first day of school pictures” so we had a ton of parents that sent us first day of school pictures and posted them, you know, in response to that question. (P-I)

One principal reports making connections with a city council member whose photos were taken at an event. Joint sharing on both the city council’s Facebook page and the school’s Facebook page increased “reach” and resulted in greater engagement.

Principals suggested family members unable to volunteer in the traditional way (during the day at school) are able to engage through social media.

I also think that it engages parents who are busy . . . sometimes there are more parents working full time and it is really difficult to go into school or volunteer

and that is our way of engaging them. It is as quick as looking at their phone during their break. (P-B)

Like one working mom, single mom, said, “You know, I can’t volunteer, I have to work, so I feel like I am there. I feel like I know what is going on with my kid, just by the visuals.” (P-G)

Some family living out-of-town are able to stay involved and aware through the use of social media. Principals are making connections and watching families make connections using social media postings:

Grandma is in Florida; people from all over the country are somehow connected to one of our students. That is their opportunity to see what our kids are doing but also what is our school about. (P-C)

For me as a working mom . . . people kind of use it as a family album. When I think about all the cool things that my kids get to do during the day that I will never get to watch them do as a parent. I love school, that is why we are all here, and I love the day at school, so when I see your son do something really great in his third grade class, I want to be able to show that right away. (P-E)

Principals who seek to use digital communications and social media to engage stakeholders and build an inclusive community report relationships develop where they once didn't exist.

I’ve had several parents that said, “I saw you on Facebook,” and they had not said a word to me before that. (P-I)

So that’s one of the ways I use it, to build that relationship with parents to say, we see your kids, we know what they are doing, we know they are important to you.

We think that what's happening is worth sharing with you, and so sharing that piece of what we do. (P-E)

Enthusiastic conversations develop around the inclusion of photos and postings on social media platforms faithfully followed by students and parents. Parents express appreciation for the photos and comments which give insight to what is happening at school each day.

One of the first things we did on the first day of kindergarten, there were all these parents sobbing harder than their children, so I went in and took a little video of each classroom and posted it, saying, this is what they are doing, and the kids waved. (P-G)

The work of the teachers and students becomes more transparent to others and appears to be appreciated by the social media followers:

It has gotten to the point where they say, "You are going to put pictures on of the teachers working, right?" They love that. They love to see the teachers doing their thing on those days when I think in the past they thought, "What are they doing? I don't see any cars. What is going on?" (P-G)

In an era of extreme accountability, educators are accustomed to relying on credible evidence and tangible data when evaluating the effectiveness of a lesson, program, event, activity, etc. Today's principals are well-versed in finding valid data and using it to inform their decision-making. The data available to users of digital communications and social media provides principals with concrete evidence of communication successes and failures and is available in real time. Focus group participants animatedly discussed the growth of "likes," the impact of one posting's photo over another, and the competition which comes from visiting sites for other schools.

One principal shared with use of Facebook came an adjustment to her perspective. Using social media forced her to consider the school through the eyes of the parent. With this enhanced point of view came the realization she had the power to focus attention on that which would best represent the efforts of her staff and her students. Her belief, "What you focus on grows," gave her the impetus to open wide the doors and windows of her school and put it all on display.

Parent and Community Survey Results

Much of the current research on a building administrator's use of digital communications and social media provides insight into their thinking and behavior. What is lacking in the research is a measure of any relationship between the efforts made and the resulting image and reputation of the school in the eyes of stakeholders. Qualtrics survey reports indicate 841 parents and community members responded to the 11-question survey designed to gather evidence of school involvement and communications preferences. Question number one of the survey provided informed consent for participation in the survey. In total, 823 respondents provided this consent. Question two of the survey provided the following description of the research and the purpose of the survey:

Research is being conducted in an effort to find evidence which supports building principals in the implementation of communications strategies in order to better engage parents and families for the benefit of their students. Please indicate that you understand the purpose of this survey and that your participation is fully voluntary.

Of the 823 respondents giving consent, 810 indicated understanding of the work being done and the survey being taken. Thus, in total, up to 810 responses could be expected for each question of the survey. Table 2 provides the percentage of responses for each question when measured

against the 810 respondents who provided consent and indicated understanding of the survey.

While most questions are answered by an average of 91 percent of the 810 respondents, question eight has a dramatic dip in participation. Question eight asks, “How frequently do you visit social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) for your local school?”

Table 2

Completion Response for Survey Data

Question	Responses	Percentage
3	760	94
4	757	93
5	753	93
6	744	92
7	741	91
8	629	78
9	724	89
10	755	93
11	756	93

The resulting quantitative data sheds light on the perceived effectiveness of administrators’ communication efforts and provides data in response to research questions two and three:

2. Is there a significant relationship between communication efforts of the building administrator and the level of parental and community engagement in individual schools?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the strategic communications and marketing strategies of a building administrator and the resulting image and reputation of the school?

Surveys were taken by parents and community members from schools which were identified as having a building administrator successfully using digital communications and social media – the same principals participated in the focus group interviews. Survey questions were designed to keep participants engaged in the topic, prompted with possible responses, and successful within a short period of time. Survey questions are included in Appendix H.

Survey results indicate most parents and community members (83%) rank their local school as either “very good” or “excellent” out of a choice of four labels: excellent, very good, good, not very good. Although this was the final question of the 11-question survey, results are worth knowing up front. Continued examination of the survey data reveals an interesting pathway to the positive point of view held by most stakeholders. See Table 3 for this data.

Table 3

Survey Question Eleven: I believe that my local school is:

Answer	Response	Percentage
Excellent	320	42%
Very Good	307	41%
Good	114	15%
Not Very Good	15	2%
Total	756	100%

Survey results indicate when looking for information about what is happening at their local school, most people (40%) visit the school website while only 18% of people will use social media to find out what is happening at their local school. While principals believe many parents and community members have developed a preference for digital communications, survey results indicate (21%) continue to use newsletters or newspapers to find information about what is happening at their local school.

Table 4

Survey Question Four: When you want to know about what is happening at your local school what method of communication do you most frequently use?

Answer	Response	Percentage
Newsletters or newspapers	160	21%
School websites	304	40%
Telephone	49	6%
Social media (Facebook or Twitter)	137	18%
Other	107	14%
Total	757	100%

Note. Within the “Other” category, 72 of the responses indicated they most frequently use email.

A follow-up question, asking “What method of communication do you use least frequently?” reveals most stakeholders equally use telephones and social media the least. While 253 respondents (34%) indicate they use telephones the least, 242 (32%) say they use social media the least. This data appears to be in line with the data in Table 4 in response to the previous question.

Regarding the frequency of principal communications, survey results indicate parents and community members most frequently receive communications from their local school principal on a weekly basis (42%). Nearly as many, 39%, report they receive communication from their local school principal on a monthly basis. Survey results indicate parents and community members rely on a variety of individuals for communications about what is happening at their

local school. Many (26%) know what is happening because of communications from their own children. Equally, 26% know what is happening because of communications from the building principal. Most, (40%) rely on communications from staff members at their local school.

When stakeholders go looking for information, survey results indicate the majority of parents and community members (52%) will visit the website for their local school on a monthly basis, while many parents and community members (29%) will visit the website for their local school on a weekly basis.

Survey results indicate the majority of parents and community members (54%) are inconsistent in the frequency of visits to social media sites for their local school. They visit sites weekly (17%), every few days (16%), and daily (15%). Some (6%) will visit social media sites for their local school multiple times each day. However, 46% of parents and community members will visit social media sites for their local school only on a monthly basis.

While the stated perception of the quality of the local school was rather positive, many principals will evaluate the effectiveness of their communications through the involvement of parents and community members and attendance at special events. Survey results indicate most parents and community members (65%) will attend an event at their local school each year. Stakeholders vary in the frequency of their involvement at their local school. In Table 5 data shows survey respondents varied in level of volunteering and frequency of attendance at special events.

Table 5

Survey Question Nine: In what ways are you involved in your local school? Check all which apply.

Answer	Response	Percentage
Volunteer in a classroom every week	88	12%
Volunteer in a classroom every month	72	10%
Volunteer for special events at the school at least once each month	102	14%
Volunteer for special events at the school each year	248	34%
Attend special events at the school at least once each month	266	37%
Attend special events at the school each year	474	65%

Near the end of the survey, respondents were asked what best describes the reason they know what is happening at their local school. Data shows a mix of results indicating a variety of methods parents and community members use to gain information. Most responses (40%) show they know what is happening at the local school because of communications from staff members. Of equal value are those who know what is happening because of communications from the principal (26%) and because of kids telling their parents (26%). Finally, eight percent of those surveyed are not sure what is happening at their local school. Data for each of the 11 questions can be found in Appendix I.

Chapter V

Discussion

Introduction

The improvement of student learning tops the long list of many responsibilities faced by today's school administrator. Student achievement is a responsibility shared by many of the school's stakeholders including students, families, educators, and community members.

Research provides clear evidence that the engagement and meaningful involvement of parents and community members with their local schools can effectively improve student achievement (Curtis, 2013; Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011; French, 2014; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Grujanac, 2011; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, & Sandler, 2005; Jeynes, 2012; O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2014; Sonnenschein, Stapleton, & Metzger, 2014; Topor, Keane, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010). As instructional leader and educational change agent, it is the building principal who plays a critical role in facilitating a sense of trust and collaboration among all three spheres of influence: the school, parents, and the community (Epstein, 2013; Epstein et al., 2011; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; MacPherson, 2010; Oplatka, 2007; Turner, 2013; Whitaker, 2009).

A growing discrepancy between parents with social capital and those without requires principals to consider a variety of methods of communication in order to ensure parental access to information critical to the success of each child. Inside knowledge for those parents not yet involved in their local school can build social capital and lead to greater involvement and meaningful engagement. Horvat et al., (2003) argues social capital should be given more attention when considering the theme of inequality, and Wanat (2010) suggests some parents require strategies or social interactions in order to develop the collaborative relationships which most benefit their children in school.

With the increase in society's use of digital communications and social media, the work and responsibility of the principal has grown to include communication efforts much like that of a marketing agent or public relations director (English, 2009; Hanson, 1992; Henderson, 2002; Jones, 2008; Macpherson, 2010; Mun, 2008; Oplatka, 2007). A principal's use of digital communications, and active participation in social media have become the most efficient and effective way to reach the most people with the most important information (Cox, 2012; Mcnamara, 2010; Scott, 2013) and can foster the relationships necessary to build a sense of community among participants.

The problem driving this study is that while the building principal is expected to serve as an effective communicator and strong promoter of the school and staff, some are unprepared or uncomfortable with public relations and the marketing of their school (Epstein, 2013; Epstein et al., 2011; Oplatka, 2007). However, some building administrators are learning the importance of using multiple modes of communication and have employed strategies worth replicating elsewhere. Setting this study apart is the attempt to measure the perspective of parents and community helping principals become better aware of the impact their efforts are having on the attitude and perception of stakeholders (McKenna & Millen, 2013; O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2014).

In an effort to support building principals in the implementation of research-based practices which engage families in ways which contribute to student learning and achievement, this study focused on the collection of effective strategies currently used by principals as reported in focus group interviews. Additionally, the resulting impact on parents and community members was measured with the use of an online survey. It is the gathering of stakeholder perspective in the context of a principal's use of digital communications and social media which contributes most to the current research. Research questions driving this study include:

1. In what ways do building administrators use digital communications and social media tools to communicate with and engage staff members, parents, and community members?
2. Is there a significant relationship between communication efforts of the building administrator and the level of parental and community engagement in individual schools?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the strategic communications and marketing strategies of a building administrator and the resulting image and reputation of the school?

Summary of the Results

Focus group interviews of 12 school administrators representing elementary, junior high, and high school populations provided the researcher with two hours of recorded conversation to analyze. Eight female administrators and four male administrators came from two public school districts in Washington State to discuss their journey using technology tools for the purpose of involving and engaging parents and community members. The interviews were designed to gather evidence of successful use of digital communications and social media.

The enthusiastic conversation among focus group participants provided ample data in response to the first research question: In what ways do building administrators use digital communications and social media tools to communicate with and engage staff members, parents, and community members? Interview data was coded into 22 categories, reduced to 17 categories, reduced to 7 themes, and eventually identified as three main themes with one sub-theme: awareness, strategy and analytics, and increased engagement.

Awareness

As was found by Cox (2012), in today's society the use of digital communications and social media has become an expectation, it is no longer optional (Cox, 2012, p. 73). Likewise, focus group participants reported an awareness of the impact digital communications and social media have had in society. They also indicated an understanding of the evolving expectations of their stakeholders to participate in the new age of communications. Focus group participants were invited to participate in the research because they had already demonstrated some level of experience with this type of communication, so it was not a surprise that their eager sharing of personal accounts led to the collection of data rich in content and filled with practical and proven communication strategies. This was satisfying for the researcher, given the advice provided by Creswell, (2002) who recommends purposeful sampling in order to select individuals and sites rich with information. Data gathered demonstrates a growing realization among building administrators that use of digital communications and social media is an expectation for many people in today's society. Principals appear to be developing a common understanding that in order to reach a variety of stakeholders, many different methods of communication must be used.

Strategic Use and Analytics

Given some time to experiment, principals become more comfortable with social media platforms such as Facebook and begin using observed results and analytics to employ greater strategy in their communication efforts. As professional educators and instructional leaders, principals are well-versed in the use of data to create plans of improvement. Today's educational leaders are held to very high levels of accountability which require building principals to evaluate data, collect evidence of learning, and measure growth and effectiveness. For example, building administrators regularly conduct research and lead others in the development and

implementation of carefully crafted building improvement plans. They facilitate collaborative meetings centered on the improvement of individual students of concern based on performance data and collective understanding of best practices. Principals plan budgets, build schedules, and make strategic decisions about building management based on stated goals and careful analysis of data. This is daily work for today's building administrator.

Data gathered in focus-group interviews indicate that building administrators who begin using digital communications and social media with their parents and community want to find evidence of engagement. They look for results, which are measured both formally and informally. Interview data shows that principals study the analytics provided by social media sites as formal evidence of effectiveness. For example, they review the Reach and Engagement data of Facebook to determine the effectiveness of content posted and experiment with their postings to determine the interests of their school's stakeholders. They also rely on observed patterns of behavior and anecdotal evidence such as that shared in conversation with parents, students, and community members during school events such as Open House or evening programs. Strategic communicators study the impact of their effort, the monitor and adjust their efforts according to audience feedback.

Increased Involvement

Focus group participants indicate a perceived increase in the engagement of parents and community members as a result of the strategic use of digital communications and social media. The third theme which arose in focus group interview data, *increased involvement*, directly responds to the second research question:

2. Is there a significant relationship between communication efforts of the building administrator and the level of parental and community engagement in individual schools?

Principals report an increase in registered parent volunteers as a result of their communication efforts. While there is no measurable data to support this claim, survey results indicate most parents and community members (65%) will visit their local school each year. The survey also measured engagement when asking how stakeholders seek information about their local school. Results show the majority of parents and community members use school websites to learn about the school. Most (52%) will visit the school website on a monthly basis, while many parents and community members (29%) will visit the website on a weekly basis.

Principals also report a certain satisfaction from parents and family members unable to regularly volunteer at the school building who use social media sites to engage. Data shows an apparent feeling of connectedness from some users of social media who are able to follow the events of a school, celebrate student accomplishment, and feel included in the school community even when physically they are not present. Survey results show the majority of parents and community members (54%) are inconsistent in the frequency of their use of social media for this purpose. They visit sites weekly (17%), every few days (16%), and daily (15%). Some (6%) will visit social media sites for their local school multiple times each day. It may be these few who visit the website multiple times daily have increased their communications informally with school staff, thus developing significant relationships with staff and the school. Some principals report a sense of relationship with some stakeholders and a familiarity which didn't exist prior to the use of digital communications and social media.

Although participants report a perceived increase in parent and community engagement, without a baseline from which to measure, the data acquired for this research question is inadequate. Testimony from building administrators seem to indicate a perceived increase in parental involvement, and survey data provides some insight into the level of engagement as measured by self-reported attendance at school events. However, the study failed to provide data which could be used to conclude that any increase in any parental and community engagement occurred. Nor did the design of the study allow for one to determine any measurable increase in involvement as a direct response to communication efforts by the principal.

Resulting Image and Reputation

This study began with an examination of the ways in which building administrators use a variety of communication tools, including digital communications and social media to engage and involve parents and community members. Of equal interest is the impact these effort have on each stakeholder's point of view. In this study, over 750 parents and community members provided feedback through a simple survey designed to measure communication preferences, levels of engagement, and perceptions of the local school. In total, up to 810 participants provided useful data for each question. Results of the survey can be used to answer the third research question:

3. Is there a significant relationship between the strategic communications and marketing strategies of a building administrator and the resulting image and reputation of the school?

Survey results indicate most parents and community members (83%) rank their local school as either "very good" or "excellent." It appears the overwhelming majority of the survey participants report a most positive opinion of their local school. This single question measuring

stakeholder point of view was embedded into a survey filled with other communications-related questions. The focus of the survey was clearly on the level of communication efforts shown by a building staff, including the tools used. These results seem very positive and when asked in context of the communication efforts of a building staff might indicate a positive cause and effect. However, for many years, Phi Delta Kappa has conducted surveys of parents and community members to measure public opinion of schools in our nation and consistently parents grade their local school higher than that of the schools on average (Bushaw & Calderon, 2015; Bushaw & Lopez, 2010; Gallup & Elam, 1986; Rose, 2006). This may cause one to wonder if the positive public opinion evidenced in this study's survey results was impacted by a principal's communication efforts or by familiarity alone. When summarizing the Phi Delta Kappa Gallup Poll results in 2010, Bushaw and Lopez (2010) suggest that Americans like the schools they know, but tend to be more critical of public education on a national level. In the most current Gallup Poll, Bushaw & Calderon's (2015) summary includes perspective from political scientist Robert Shapiro who believes, "Americans form their opinions about their local schools through their own contact with the schools and what their children are saying. What they experience more personally, they tend to have more favorable views about (Bushaw & Calderon, 2015, p. 23). One could conclude that with a building principal's strategic use of digital communications such as school websites and social media such as Facebook and Twitter, stakeholders can know more and more about their local schools and could be positively influenced to increase their support of their local school. Therefore, if a principal's goal is to improve their school's image and reputation in the eyes of stakeholders, it may be beneficial to communicate strategically using the tools of digital communications and social media.

Impact of Limitations

The focus of this study was in highlighting building administrators as effective communicators who use tools to facilitate the collaborative efforts of schools, parents, and community in providing support to each student. Recently, in a study of 29 dissertations with a specific focus on social media as used in education, Piotrowski (2015) found that the unique attributes represented across all social media forums are encompassed by the following functional features: communication, collaboration, community, creativity, and convergence (Piotrowski, 2015, p. 2). These features are highlighted by Piotrowski (2015) since they encourage involvement and engagement of others. Likewise, this researcher sought to honor the communication efforts being made by those strategically using digital communications and social media to engage and involve all stakeholders. Knowing the resulting collaboration among community members, parents, and educators would be influential in the lives of students, it was questioned whether these efforts might also influence the reputation and perceived success of individual schools by their corresponding stakeholders. Planned methodology included the phenomenological study of a wide variety of building administrators and their respective communities. It was believed that by gathering examples of the many creative ways principals facilitate communication with stakeholders, and celebrate the resulting collaboration and convergence of the spheres of influence, one might advance the study of principals as effective communicators.

When participation in this study became limited to just two school districts, heavily skewed towards one, this researcher realized the more limited scope of this study, and became discouraged to consider its diminished impact. However, upon analysis of the data gathered it

may be noteworthy at this time to consider the impact of the intentional work done by leadership in the one district represented so strongly in this study. Knowledge of this work is first hand.

In the district represented by ten of the twelve focus-group participants, the impetus for change came from the elected directors of the school board. Along with the hiring of a new superintendent came the restructuring of the district's Communications and Information Department and the hiring of a new executive director. The directors of the school board made it clear that refocusing efforts in this department would be expected, and that success would be measured by improved engagement, involvement, and perception of stakeholders, including parents, students, staff, and community members. Improved relations with local media was also commissioned.

Restructuring of the Communications and Information Department included the creation of a new position. A Communications Coordinator, responsible for all website communications and social media platforms, was added to the department staff. Within the first year, a new content management platform was implemented allowing all school district departments, schools, and each of the 2,000+ classroom teachers to manage their own websites. Professional development and consistent coaching led to wide spread effort to populate websites with current and relevant information. By the end of the second year, each school had their own Facebook page and some additionally maintained a Twitter account. The expressed common goal was to consistently and effectively promote the school district as the best education choice for students and parents, an asset within the community, and a responsible administrator of taxpayer's money (Lockhart, 2005, p. 1).

The emphasis on stewardship was by design. In a region where demographics were changing rapidly, schools were becoming overcrowded and the school district simply could not

provide adequate facilities. Maintaining over 230 temporary instructional spaces, also known as portables, the district had been unable to garner enough support to pass a bond election for nearly a decade. During the first year with a new superintendent, a new executive director of communications, and the collective effort of many other educators in new leadership positions, an attempt was made with a proposed school bond placed before voters in a Special Election. The bond measure failed with only 54.5 percent voter support in a state-where a 60 percent supermajority of yes votes are required.

In the two years which followed, as schools continued to grow in enrollment, the district and building administrators embarked upon a campaign using digital communications and social media to better engage parents, students, community, and local media. A variety of communication methods were strategically used to meet the various communications preferences in the community. Printed newsletters were mailed to 53,000 homes six times each year. Highlights from school board meetings were sent electronically to the email boxes of nearly 5,000 stakeholders who signed-up for updates. Automatic phone calls were recorded and scheduled for more personal messages of importance. Relations with local newspaper and television reporters were improved and positive stories became more frequent. Building principals were commissioned to develop “Welcoming Schools” and ensure that all who entered their buildings would feel included. In addition, an emphasis on the frequent and strategic use of digital communications and social media came in the form of published talking points called “Common Messages” which provided reluctant principals with wording they could cut and paste into messages on their websites and social media. Trained photographers began site visits to each school and photos began showing up on school websites and Facebook pages. Principals fearing negative feedback on social media were relieved to know that the Communications

Coordinator would monitor conversations and remove any inappropriate postings. As building administrators became more comfortable, analytics were shared and strategies such as scheduled postings and boosted postings were tested. Many building administrators became proficient communicators using digital communications and social media.

Along with a rebranding of the district using new logos, improved instruction in the classrooms thanks to Washington State's Teacher/Principal Evaluation Program (TPEP), positive relations with the community developed by the superintendent, and record-setting graduation rates, the time was right for another school bond election attempt. An active and eager committee of private citizens ran the promotional campaign and district administrators rallied to promote student achievement and success using a wide variety of communications strategies including a focus on the use of digital communications and social media. After nearly 12 years of failed bond elections, voters came out in record numbers and approved the bond measure by a 69.09 percent vote. In two years, the community perception of schools improved by 14 points.

While focus-group interviews were conducted prior to this election, it's no wonder why participants were so enthusiastic in their conversation. The collection of principals represented those most consistent and most effective in their use of digital communications and social media during the bond election informational campaign. The positive feeling tone was generated by colleagues who were celebrating together, sharing successes and failures, and learning from each other. They had been on a journey together and were eager to relive their own experiences.

The data gathered for this study was heavily skewed with the perspective of administrators influenced by one district's very successful experiences with digital communications and social media. The make-up of focus group participants was not as intended, and the data gathered does not represent the diversity hoped for. This limits the results of the

study making replication of results less likely elsewhere. However, in the end the results of this research can still be used to advance the study of principals as effective communicators, and hopefully encourage others to explore digital communications and social media.

Conclusion

Aware of the proven benefit to student achievement, some building principals have made it a priority to engage parents and community members in their local school. Many have found they can best reach more stakeholders with current and relevant communications using digital communications and social media. Twelve administrators who have proven themselves as effective communicators using digital communications and social media participated in focus-group interviews in the fall of 2015. Participants shared ideas with each other in response to pre-determined interview questions. Once the interview transcript was coded, four primary themes became evident: *awareness*, *strategic use*, *analytics*, and *increased involvement*. Lively conversation provided rich data in response to research question one:

1. In what ways do building administrators use digital communications and social media tools to communicate with and engage staff members, parents, and community members?

This question was broad enough that data gathered during interviews exposed a wide variety of thoughts. Participants explained their growing awareness of the influence of digital communications and social media, and found common experiences with their colleagues during the focus-group interviews. The conversations allowed participants to admit their challenges and share their successes. Throughout the discussion there was a shared understanding that the communications strategies with which they were experimenting were necessary in order to fully reach all demographics of their school's community in today's society.

An equally important finding became evident as participants discussed their strategic use of digital communications and social media. In an era of extreme accountability, today's building administrators are trained to provide evidence for any evaluative statement they may make, and implement changes only with data close at hand. During the interviews, participants often referred to analytics they had studied, and feedback they had received informally. It is apparent that principals are looking for some measure of success with which they can form new communication strategies, replicate those having greatest impact, and eliminate those which appear to be ineffective.

Following interviews, stakeholders from each administrator's school community were invited to participate in an online survey. The survey was taken by over 800 volunteers. Over 750 completed the entire survey. Survey results have helped respond to research questions two and three:

2. Is there a significant relationship between communication efforts of the building administrator and the level of parental and community engagement in individual schools?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the strategic communications and marketing strategies of a building administrator and the resulting image and reputation of the school?

Data gathered through the survey helps principals realize the impact of their efforts on the attitude and perception of stakeholders.

Recommendations for Further Research

The data discovered in response to research question one is valuable and can inform current building administrators, especially those interested in reaching and engaging a broad

demographic of stakeholders. The benefit of this research may last for some time. However, since the use of technology as a communications tool must change as frequently as the tools themselves, this kind of study could be replicated several times over a period of several years and still provide meaningful data. Technology is ever changing and it is hard to predict what the future holds in the way of digital communications and social media. Continued research gathering data from experienced administrators skilled in the strategic use of a variety of communications strategies will add to the body of existing research and inform new administrators. Continued research in which the communications preferences of stakeholders is also recommended as a measure of changing demographics and diversity within society.

The study of Engeström's (2000, 2015) activity-theoretical approach to developmental research leads one to question in what ways an individual's expanded learning can influence genuine learning activities in others within the same field or profession, and to what degree the fear of change or attitude of indifference stifles the progress and effectiveness of a group or community. When discussing the practical application of theoretical models, Engeström (2000, 2015) suggests that expansive learning activities can help influence more advanced forms of activity for the collective, rather than just for the individual. However, he reminds us of the conflict which is in play during human processing (consumption, distribution, exchange, and production) and the struggles often necessary prior to finding breakthroughs into a more advanced form of some kind of practice. The human interaction is not always smooth and collaborative when participants work with one another and process their efforts for the benefit of a common subject. Engeström (2015) reminds readers:

. . . the participants of the activity system face intense conflicts between the old and the given new ways of doing and thinking . . . These conflicts take various

forms. They may be struggles between the old rules and the new instruments, or between the old division of labor and the new communication emerging in the microcosm. They may also be clashes between the traditional and the novel instruments, often experienced as fear, resistance, stress, and other intense psychic conflicts within individuals and collectives (Engeström, p 261, 2015).

With this in mind, instead of focusing all attention on the most successful of building administrators and their use of digital communication and social media, phenomenological research should be conducted measuring the apprehension of those building administrators not willing to learn the strategies highlighted in this study. Using Engeström's (2000, 2015) third generation activity theory model, Structure of Human Activity, new research could make visible the ways in which participants rebel when challenged to use new instruments and tools for communication, involvement, and engagement. Engeström (2000, 2015) suggests this is the most difficult and the most rewarding step of expansive research. Typically, researchers have a commitment to some new instrument or model and must bracket themselves, giving up advocacy and simply record responses. This kind of study would focus on the human dynamics during change rather than the perceived benefits of instruments or strategies.

The reward awaits in the careful analysis of such data. The researchers face the fact that all their skillful efforts to make the participants acquire and apply the culturally more advanced models according to a plan have been partially futile. A genuine expansive cycle inevitably produces not only civilization but also an ingredient of wilderness. To gain a theoretical grasp of this wilderness, to find and understand something unexpected as a piece of the history of the future is the reward (Engeström, p. 262, 2015).

Implications for Professional Practice

The effectiveness of today's building administrator is measured by student achievement. Washington State's own association for principals declared a significant shift had taken place when it introduced a leadership framework in which all major responsibilities of a school principal lead to the improvement of student achievement (Association of Washington School Principals Leadership Framework, 2013, p. 2). The Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP) recognizes a new role for educators and promotes eight evaluation criteria for building principals:

1. Creating a school culture that promotes improvement of learning and teaching for students and staff.
2. Ensuring school safety.
3. Leading the development, implementation and evaluation of data-driven planning for increasing student achievement.
4. Assisting instructional staff with alignment of curriculum, instruction and assessment with state and local district learning goals.
5. Improving instruction through monitoring, assisting and evaluation effective instruction and assessment practices.
6. Managing both staff and fiscal resources to support student achievement and legal responsibilities.
7. Engaging stakeholders by partnering with the school community to promote student learning.
8. Demonstrating commitment to closing the achievement gap (Association of Washington School Principals Leadership Framework, 2013, p. 3).

Since research provides clear evidence for the relationship between student achievement and the engagement of parents and community members with their local schools through meaningful involvement of parents, families, and members of the community (Curtis, 2013; Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011; French, 2014; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Grujanac, 2011; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, & Sandler, 2005; Jeynes, 2012; O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2014; Sonnenschein, Stapleton, & Metzger, 2014; Topor, Keane, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010), it seems prudent for building administrators to attend to criterion seven of the AWSP Leadership Framework by planning and working to engage the school community to the fullest.

The discrepancy between parents with social capital and those without contributes to a growing achievement gap among children (Childers Roberts, 2012; Hill, & Taylor, 2004; Hastings, Kane, & Staiger, 2005; Hastings, Van Weelden, & Weinstein, 2007; Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003; Wanat, 2010; Warren et al., 2009). Since access to information using technology can have a significant impact on choices made by parents for their children (Hastings et al., 2007); since use of social networking sites on the Internet is an easy way for parents to access information (Horvat et al., 2003); and since parent involvement can be a form of social capital and the result of social networking (Childers Roberts, 2012), it also seems wise for principals to plan and work to engage the school community in an effort to close the achievement gap – criterion eight of the AWSP Leadership Framework.

Effective leaders understand their parents and community members to be valuable resources and will skillfully establish partnerships among the Spheres of Influence in a child's life. They will understand that aligning the efforts of school, family, and community is work which is never complete, but requires planning, collaboration, monitoring, and evaluation. Distinguished principals will develop relationships with their parents and community members,

gaining trust and credibility. With this rapport they will effectively market their staff and school as the best choice for a child's education and an asset to the community. Effective leaders will develop programs for parents and community members to become directly involved in the success of the school and the students in attendance. They will skillfully reach all demographics with communication strategies which honor generational preferences and multiple levels of ability. They are aware of society's growing use of digital communications and social media and the current expectation of many for information that is shared immediately and often. Effective principals will use a variety of communication tools knowing how and when to employ each. They recognize the need for face-to-face conversation, large group addresses, and the power of simply being present. They also use effective writing skills and will communicate through email, newsletters, and memos.

Effective principals will learn how to use technology as a tool – one which saves time and money, and one which builds common understanding and engages others. They will maintain an online presence using websites and blogs with current and relevant information, knowing that by doing so they are able to communicate 24 hours a day, seven days each week. They will use some social media platforms to push out timely messages which celebrate student achievement and accomplishment, and they will use other platforms to welcome feedback and engage in conversation. Principals who pay attention to the analytics available on social media platforms will use this information to target their audiences and provide more opportunities to engage in school-related material. In an era of extreme accountability, where educators are accustomed to relying on credible evidence and tangible data when evaluating the effectiveness of a lesson, program, event, or strategy, principals will seek concrete evidence of communication successes and failures, available in real time, and use it to inform their communications decision-

making. All communication efforts will be designed to improve student achievement by engaging and involving the most influential people in a child's life.

Effective principals understand the impact of their own communications style, and will strategically use their leadership strengths to increase parent involvement (Ärlestig, 2007; Turner, 2013). They understand the impact of effective communication skills and are confident in their ability to impact student achievement. Distinguished principals realize effective communication must be used to unify staff members, engage families, and involve community members for the benefit of their students.

Effective principals find that, like everything else in their job description, the oversight and management of digital communications and social media must be carefully considered and methodically executed. Some will delegate the responsibility, some will share the responsibility, and some will assume the responsibility. Many develop guidelines and protocol - for themselves to rely on, and for others to reference. Most understand there will be times when communication errors lead to confusion or frustration, and most know some users will be inappropriate at times. Principals who have used digital communications and social media for at least a year and are successful in their attempts still express an attitude of wonder and desire to learn how to be more effective. They demonstrate a growth mindset in their responses and keep trying new strategies. Recognizing the diversity within their school community, effective principals will expect a variety of perspectives as a result of the differences in cognition as found in various cultures, social groups, life experiences, and generational points of view. They understand the impact of human activity and expect a certain level of conflict and discourse. They maintain professional dialogue and are persistent in their efforts to engage all members of the community.

Some principals, experienced in the use of digital communications and social media use these platforms for their own professional development. They search for excellent and engaging posts and consider ways to provide the same kind of valuable information for their own staff, parents, and community. Those who use social media themselves, or who maintain their school's account(s) find that they learn from the work of their colleagues and can become motivated to try new strategies with their own community. Principals effectively using digital communications and social media for their schools realize these efforts used in isolation will not impact all stakeholders. They create communication plans which involve many traditional communication methods in addition to digital communications and social media in an effort to meaningfully engage a variety of parents and community members knowing their involvement can lead to improved student achievement.

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APPENDIX A**Human Research Review Committee Approval**

Northwest Nazarene University lwerth@nnu.edu via email.submittable.com

10/1/15

Dear Brian,

The HRRC has reviewed your protocol: Protocol #142015 - THE PRINCIPAL AS AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATOR: INCREASING PARENTAL AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT THROUGH THE USE OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA. You received "Full Approval". Congratulations, you may begin your research. If you have any questions, let me know.

Northwest Nazarene University

Dr. Lori Werth

HRRC Member

623 S University Blvd

Nampa, ID 83686

APPENDIX B**National Institute for Health Certification**

APPENDIX C

School Districts Research Approval

Fox, Brian D.

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, June 15, 2015 11:42 AM
To: Fox, Brian D.
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Research Authorization for Brian Fox

Dear HRRC Committee,

Brian Fox has been granted permission to conduct dissertation research in the [REDACTED] School District. Our Communications Department has reviewed the dissertation proposal which includes proposed research methods and a comprehensive overview as it relates to subjects involved, data collection procedures and data analysis.

Authorization is offered with the following stipulations:

- Research is to be conducted between August 15, 2015 and December 31, 2015
- The school district will receive a copy of the research study results and/or dissertation

If you have any questions, please call me at [REDACTED]

Regards,

[REDACTED]
Superintendent

[REDACTED] School District

A Great Place to Learn

Excellent Instruction, In Every Classroom, For Every Student, Every Day

May 27, 2015

Northwest Nazarene University
Attention: HRRRC Committee
Helstrom Business Center, 1st Floor
623 South University Boulevard
Nampa, ID 83686

Re: Research Authorization for Brian Fox

Dear HRRRC Committee,

Brian Fox has been granted permission to conduct dissertation research in the [REDACTED] School District. Administration of the [REDACTED] School District have reviewed Mr. Fox's dissertation proposal, *The Principal as an Effective Communicator*, including proposed research methods (both qualitative and quantitative methods), subjects, data and collection procedures, and data analysis.

This site authorization is offered with the following stipulations:

- Research is to be conducted between August 15, 2015 and December 31, 2015.
- Participation by [REDACTED] School District employees in the research study is voluntary.
- The school district will receive a copy of the research study results and/or dissertation.

I support this effort and will provide assistance for the successful research implementation of the proposed study. If you have any questions, please call me at [REDACTED]

Sincerely,



Executive Director of Assessment, Accountability and Student Success

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

A. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Brian Fox, doctoral candidate in the Department of Graduate Education at Northwest Nazarene University, is conducting a research study to find evidence which supports building principals in the implementation of digital communications and social media to engage students' families in ways that contribute to student learning and achievement. This study will focus on the specific communication skills and behaviors use by building administrators, and the resulting effects on public perception, and parent and community engagement which leads to improved student achievement.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a healthy volunteer, over the age of 18.

B. PROCEDURES

Data will be gathered for this study during focus group interviews, and on-line surveys of parents and community members. The procedure will be as follows:

- Interviews will be scheduled to take place over three months beginning August 1, 2015.
- Participants will meet with the researcher in person in a focus group setting for approximately 60 minutes during a mutually agreed upon time. Effort will be made to NOT disrupt the participant's regular work schedule.
- Following the interview, participants may provide links to artifacts discussed in the interview. Artifacts may be provided in hard copy as well.
- Participants will be asked to encourage parents and community members to take a short on-line survey designed to evaluate the perceived effectiveness of school and district communications. This survey will be available to participants on the world-wide-web for three weeks following the interview.

C. RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

I anticipate that there is minimal risk involved for your participation, and the participation of parents and community members.

Some of the discussion questions may make you uncomfortable or upset, but you are free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time.

All information gathered during this research project will be kept strictly secure and identities will be kept confidential from the public. The results of this study may be used a research paper and presentation, however, pseudonyms or codes will be substituted for the names of participants and the school and school district. This helps protect confidentiality.

D. BENEFITS

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information you provide may help educators to better understand the implementation of digital

communications and social media to engage students' families in ways that contribute to student learning and achievement.

E. PAYMENTS

There are no payments for participating in this study.

F. QUESTIONS

If you have questions or concerns about participation in this study, you should first talk with the investigator. Brian Fox can be contacted via email at Brianfox@nnu.edu, via telephone at 253-223-1940 or by writing: 10707 – 264th Street East, Graham, WA 98338 or the research supervisor, Dr. Heidi Curtis at hcurtis@nnu.edu.

Should you feel distressed due to participation in this, you should contact your own health care provider.

G. CONSENT

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point.

I give my consent to participate in this study:

Signature of Study Participant

Date

I give my consent for the interview and discussion to be audio taped in this study:

Signature of Study Participant

Date

I give my consent for direct quotes to be used in this study:

Signature of Study Participant

Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

THE NORTHWEST NAZARENE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH REVIEW COMMITTEE HAS REVIEWED THIS PROJECT FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH.

APPENDIX E

Email Invitation to Principals

Dear Administrators,

I am interested in talking with you about your use of digital communications and social media to engage families in ways that contribute to student learning and achievement.

I am working on a doctoral degree. My research study will focus on specific communication skills and behaviors used by building administrators, and the resulting effects on public perception, and parent and community engagement which leads to improved student achievement.

I have studied your use of social media and would like to invite you to participate in a focus group interview on Monday, October 12, from 4:30 – 5:30 at the [REDACTED] School District's Educational Service Center (ESC) located at [REDACTED].

I have 5 questions I'd like to ask you to discuss as a group. I will facilitate conversation while a transcriber takes notes and records the conversation. I will analyze the data and make sure that you have access to it. For the dissertation, you will have pseudonyms.

Following the focus group interview, I will ask you to encourage parents and community members to take a short on-line survey designed to evaluate the perceived effectiveness of school and district communications.

Are you game?

Do you have questions?

Will you reply or give me a call? (253-223-1940)

Brian Fox

NNU Doctoral Student

APPENDIX F

Email Invitation to Parents and Community

Below is a script you could use for conversations with parents or community members, should you find yourself discussing this survey in person. This script could also be used when sending the invitation via email, on your website, or in any of your digital communications or social media sites. For consistency in this study, I ask that you keep the body of this message intact. However, if you would like to adjust some of the language in order to use your own “voice,” please feel free to do so.

Special Invitation to Parents and Community Members

Recently, I was interviewed as part of a research project being conducted by a graduate student at Northwest Nazarene University. The study is focusing on building administrators and their use of digital communications and social media with parents and the community. As you know, we work hard at _____ (school) to use many different forms of communications, including _____ (identify methods).

Your opinion is equally important to this research. Please consider answering 10 multiple choice questions in the survey linked below. It should only take a few minutes for you to complete the survey. Results of this survey will be used by the researcher, and provided to me in order to more effectively communicate with the _____ (school) community.

If you have any questions about this survey, please contact the researcher, Brian Fox, at Brianfox@nnu.edu

Take the survey at the following link:

http://nnu.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_5pubAVDwAXUumZn

Thanks very much!

APPENDIX G

Focus Group Questions

Principal focus group questions:

1. Having reviewed your website and social media accounts I can see that you are making use of digital communication tools quite regularly. Will you begin by telling me how you got started using these tools professionally?
2. In the same way that teachers differentiate for a variety of learning styles among their students, it appears that you have differentiated your communication efforts for your constituents. Will you talk about the variety of communications strategies you employ and let me know if there is a specific audience you are trying to reach with each one?
3. There is already a lot of research which shows that there is a relationship between student achievement and the engagement of parents and community members with their local schools. In what ways do you believe that your communications strategies are engaging and involving parents, families, and members of the community?
4. Principals know that they have to be good communicators, but the notion that we are now called to *market our schools* can be a little challenging to consider. However, you are doing just that! In what ways do you believe your effort are influencing your stakeholders' perception of your school?
5. Is there anything else that you would like to share about your use of digital communications and social media?

APPENDIX H

Parent and Community Survey Questions

Parent/Community member survey questions:

My participation in this on-line survey authorizes Brian Fox, graduate student at Northwest Nazarene University, Nampa, Idaho, and/or any designated research assistants to use this information from me on the topic of principal use of digital communications and social media to engage parents and families.

I understand that the general purposes of the research are to find evidence which supports building principals in the implementation of digital communications and social media to engage students' families in ways that contribute to student learning and achievement. I am aware that I may choose not to answer any questions that I find embarrassing or offensive.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may refuse to participate or discontinue my participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

I understand that if, after my participation, I experience any undue anxiety or stress or have questions about the research or my rights as a participant, that may have been provoked by the experience, Brian Fox will be available for consultation, and will also be available to provide direction regarding medical assistance in the unlikely event of injury incurred during participation in the research.

Confidentiality of research results will be maintained by the researcher.

1. Research is being conducted in an effort to find evidence which supports building principals in the implementation of communications strategies in order to better engage parents and families for the benefit of their students. Please indicate that you understand the purpose of this survey and that your participation is fully voluntary. **YES NO**
2. Please identify yourself with all which apply:
 - a. Parent of a current student attending my local school
 - b. Parent of a former student attending my local school
 - c. Community member
3. When you want to know about what is happening at your local school what method of communication do you most frequently use?
 - a. Newsletters or newspapers
 - b. School websites
 - c. Telephone
 - d. Social media (Facebook or Twitter)
 - e. Other _____
4. What method of communication do you use LEAST frequently?
 - a. Newsletters or newspapers
 - b. School websites

- c. Telephones
 - d. Social media (Facebook or Twitter)
 - e. Other _____
5. Identify the frequency of communications from your local school principal:
 - a. Daily
 - b. Every few days
 - c. Weekly
 - d. Monthly
6. How frequently do you visit the website for your local school?
 - a. Daily
 - b. Every few days
 - c. Weekly
 - d. Monthly
7. How frequently do you visit social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) for your local school?
 - a. Multiple times each day
 - b. Daily
 - c. Every few days
 - d. Weekly
 - e. Monthly
8. In what ways are you involved in your local school? Check all which apply.
 - a. Volunteer in a classroom every week
 - b. Volunteer in a classroom every month
 - c. Volunteer for special events at the school at least once each month
 - d. Volunteer for special events at the school each year
 - e. Attend special events at the school at least once each month
 - f. Attend special events at the school each year
9. Which statement best describes your feeling?
 - a. I know what is happening at my local school because my kids tell me
 - b. I know what is happening at my local school because of communications from the staff members
 - c. I know what is happening at my local school because of communications from the principal
 - d. I'm not sure what is happening at my local school
10. I believe that my local school is
 - a. Excellent
 - b. Very good
 - c. Good
 - d. Not very good

APPENDIX I

Survey Data

Question #1

Informed Consent Form

A. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Brian Fox, doctoral candidate in the Department of Graduate Education at Northwest Nazarene University, is conducting a research study to find evidence which supports building principals in the implementation of digital communications and social media to engage students' families in ways that contribute to student learning and achievement. This study will focus on the specific communication skills and behaviors use by building administrators, and the resulting effects on public perception, and parent and community engagement which leads to improved student achievement.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a healthy volunteer, over the age of 18.

B. PROCEDURES

Data will be gathered for this study during one-on-one interviews of principals, and on-line surveys of parents and community members.

- Participants will be asked to encourage parents and community members to take a short on-line survey designed to evaluate the perceived effectiveness of school and district communications.

C. RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

It is anticipated that there is minimal risk involved for principals, parents and community members.

Some of the questions may make you uncomfortable or upset, but you are free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time.

All information gathered during this research project will be kept strictly secure and identities will be kept confidential from the public. The results of this study may be used a research paper and presentation, however, pseudonyms or codes will be substituted for the names of participants and the school and school district. This helps protect confidentiality.

D. BENEFITS

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information you provide may help educators to better understand the implementation of digital communications and social media to engage students' families in ways that contribute to student

learning and achievement.

E. PAYMENTS

There are no payments for participating in this study.

F. QUESTIONS

If you have questions or concerns about participation in this study, you should first talk with the investigator. Brian Fox can be contacted via email at Brianfox@nnu.edu, via telephone at 253-223-1940 or by writing: 10707 – 264th Street East, Graham, WA 98338 or the research supervisor, Dr. Heidi Curtis at hcurtis@nnu.edu.

Should you feel distressed due to participation in this, you should contact your own health care provider.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point.

I give my consent to participate in this study:

I give my consent for direct quotes to be used in this study:

THE NORTHWEST NAZARENE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH REVIEW COMMITTEE HAS REVIEWED THIS PROJECT FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH.

#	Answer	Response	%
1	I agree	817	99%
2	I do not agree	6	1%
	Total	823	100%

Question #2

Research is being conducted in an effort to find evidence which supports building principals in the implementation of communications strategies in order to better engage parents and families for the benefit of their students. Please indicate that you understand the purpose of this survey and that your participation is fully voluntary.

#	Answer	Response	%
1	I understand	806	100%
2	I do not understand	4	0%
	Total	810	100%

Question #3

Please identify yourself with all which apply:

#	Answer		Response	%
1	a. Parent of a current student		708	93%
2	b. Parent of a former student		130	17%
3	c. Community member		204	27%
4	d. C Elementary		86	11%
5	e. B Elementary		42	6%
6	f. D Elementary		68	9%
7	g. F Elementary		91	12%
8	h. E Elementary		27	4%
9	i. A Junior High		88	12%
10	j. Other		195	26%

Question #4

When you want to know about what is happening at your local school what method of communication do you most frequently use?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	a. Newsletters or newspapers		160	21%
2	b. School websites		304	40%
3	c. Telephone		49	6%
4	d. Social media (Facebook or Twitter)		137	18%
5	e. Other		107	14%
	Total		757	100%

Question #5

What method of communication do you use LEAST frequently?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	a. Newsletters or newspapers	162	22%
2	b. School websites	82	11%
3	c. Telephones	253	34%
4	d. Social media (Facebook or Twitter)	242	32%
5	e. Other	14	2%
	Total	753	100%

Question #6

Identify the frequency of communications from your local school principal:

#	Answer	Response	%
1	a. Daily	18	2%
2	b. Every few days	130	17%
3	c. Weekly	309	42%
4	d. Monthly	287	39%
	Total	744	100%





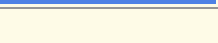
Question #7

How frequently do you visit the website for your local school?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	a. Daily	23	3%
2	b. Every few days	114	15%
3	c. Weekly	215	29%
4	d. Monthly	389	52%
	Total	741	100%





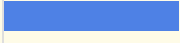

Question #8

How frequently do you visit social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) for your local school?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	a. Multiple times each day		40	6%
2	b. Daily		96	15%
3	c. Every few days		98	16%
4	d. Weekly		107	17%
5	e. Monthly		288	46%
	Total		629	100%





Question #9

In what ways are you involved in your local school? Check all which apply.

#	Answer		Response	%
1	a. Volunteer in a classroom every week		88	12%
2	b. Volunteer in a classroom every month		72	10%
3	c. Volunteer for special events at the school at least once each month		102	14%
4	d. Volunteer for special events at the school each year		248	34%
5	e. Attend special events at the school at least once each month		266	37%
6	f. Attend special events at the school each year		474	65%


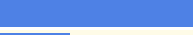


Question #10

Which statement best describes your feeling?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	a. I know what is happening at my local school because my kids tell me		193	26%
2	b. I know what is happening at my local school because of communications from the staff members		305	40%
3	c. I know what is happening at my local school because of communications from the principal		197	26%
4	d. I'm not sure what is happening at my local school		60	8%
	Total		755	100%

Question #11

I believe that my local school is

#	Answer		Response	%
1	a. Excellent		320	42%
2	b. Very good		307	41%
3	c. Good		114	15%
4	d. Not very good		15	2%
	Total		756	100%

APPENDIX J

Coding Information – Original 17 Categories

Focus Group #	Question #	Transcription line #	Comment
2	2	224-254	analysis
2	2	266-284	analysis
1	3	241-249	analysis
1	3	300-308	analysis
1	3	309-325	analysis
2	4	480-481	analysis
2	2	316-317	attitude of learning
1	3	250-253	attitude of learning
1	3	309-325	attitude of learning
1	3	326-331	attitude of learning
1	4	403-417	attitude of learning
1	4	465-480	attitude of learning
1	4	502-516	attitude of learning
2	4	499-511	changing perspective
2	3	438-439	colleageal sharing
2	3	440	colleageal sharing
2	3	441-443	colleageal sharing
2	3	444-445	colleageal sharing
2	3	446	colleageal sharing
1	4	517-518	colleageal sharing
2	1	87-98	differentiation
2	1	102-106	differentiation
2	1	137-147	differentiation
2	1	148-152	differentiation
2	1	156-161	differentiation
1	2	137-152	differentiation
1	2	153-163	differentiation
1	2	175-180	differentiation
1	2	189-199	differentiation
1	2	200-205	differentiation
1	2	206-211	differentiation
1	2	212-214	differentiation
1	2	217-227	differentiation
2	2	341-346	differentiation
2	1	172-176	digital society
2	1	177-184	digital society

2	1	196-204	digital society
2	1	211-220	digital society
2	2	255-265	digital society
2	4	512-515	digital society
2	4	520-523	digital society
2	4	525-532	digital society
2	6	640-642	digital society
2	6	643	digital society
2	6	644-645	digital society
2	6	646-652	digital society
2	6	660-679	digital society
1	4	403-417	doesn't replace other forms of communication
2	4	469-473	doesn't replace other forms of communication
2	5	574	doesn't replace other forms of communication
2	5	575	doesn't replace other forms of communication
2	5	576-577	doesn't replace other forms of communication
2	5	578	doesn't replace other forms of communication
2	5	579	doesn't replace other forms of communication
2	5	580-586	doesn't replace other forms of communication
2	5	587-603	doesn't replace other forms of communication
1	1	56-59	easy
1	1	60-64	easy
1	1	91-110	easy
2	1	122-136	easy
2	1	196-204	easy
2	2	255-265	easy
2	1	205-210	easy
1	2	164-169	evolving communication expectations
1	2	170-174	evolving communication expectations
1	2	181-188	evolving communication expectations
2	4	533-546	evolving communication expectations
2	5	553-569	evolving communication expectations
1	3	326-331	for PD
1	4	481-498	for pd
2	1	162-166	inclusive involvement
2	1	168-169	inclusive involvement
2	1	205-210	inclusive involvement
2	2	244-254	inclusive involvement
2	2	255-265	inclusive involvement
2	2	300-308	inclusive involvement
2	2	310-315	inclusive involvement

1	3	254-278	inclusive involvement
2	3	391-405	inclusive involvement
2	3	406-421	inclusive involvement
1	4	499-501	inclusive involvement
2	3	353-367	increased involvement
2	3	368-375	increased involvement
2	3	376-390	increased involvement
1	4	481-498	increased involvement
1	4	397-402	increased involvement
2	5	570-573	levels of understanding
1	2	175-180	marketing/branding
2	2	332-340	marketing/branding
1	4	375-382	marketing/branding
1	4	383-391	marketing/branding
1	4	465-480	marketing/branding
1	4	481-498	marketing/branding
1	4	502-516	marketing/branding
2	4	454-467	marketing/branding
2	4	474-479	marketing/branding
2	4	487-490	marketing/branding
2	4	492-493	marketing/branding
2	4	494-498	marketing/branding
2	4	516-517	marketing/branding
2	3	426-437	monitor
2	1	221-229	Oversight
2	2	266-284	Oversight
2	2	318-319	Oversight
1	4	403-417	oversight
1	4	418-431	oversight
1	4	432-445	oversight
1	4	446-450	oversight
1	4	451-462	oversight
2	5	604-606	oversight
2	5	608-609	oversight
2	5	612-613	oversight
2	5	617-623	oversight
2	1	137-147	purpose - documentation
1	1	65-74	purpose - improve communications
1	3	332-362	purpose - improve communications
2	5	625-634	purpose - improved communications
2	1	75-86	purpose - inform and teach

2	2	321-331	purpose - inform and teach
2	2	332-340	purpose - inform and teach
1	3	241-249	purpose - inform and teach
1	3	280-292	purpose - inform and teach
1	3	293-299	purpose - inform and teach
2	3	406-421	purpose - inform and teach
2	3	422-425	purpose - inform and teach
1	4	392-396	purpose - inform and teach
1	4	465-480	purpose - inform and teach
1	1	75-86	purpose - quick communications
2	1	196-204	purpose - quick communications
1	1	91-110	purpose - relationship
2	2	255-265	purpose - relationship
2	2	266-284	purpose - relationship
2	2	321-331	purpose - relationship
2	2	321-331	purpose - relationship
2	2	332-340	purpose - relationship
2	3	376-390	purpose - relationship
2	1	111-114	strategic
2	1	122-136	strategic
2	2	266-284	strategic
2	2	286-299	strategic
2	2	300-308	strategic
1	3	254-278	strategic
1	4	418-431	strategic
2	1	185-187	Student achievement
2	1	188	Student achievement
2	1	189	Student achievement
2	1	190-192	Student achievement
2	1	194-195	Student achievement

APPENDIX K

Coding Information - Comments of Interaction

Focus Group #	Question #	Transcription line #	comments of interaction
2	1	193	gathering ideas (9)
2	1	194-195	gathering ideas (9)
2	3	444-445	gathering ideas (9)
2	3	446	gathering ideas (9)
1	2	212	gathering ideas (9)
2	3	438-439	gathering ideas (9)
2	3	440	gathering ideas (9)
1	3	279	gathering ideas (9)
1	4	517-518	gathering ideas (9)
2	1	107	making connections (16)
2	1	109	making connections (16)
2	1	111	making connections (16)
2	1	115	making connections (16)
2	1	122	making connections (16)
2	1	148	making connections (16)
2	2	300-301	making connections (16)
2	2	304-305	making connections (16)
1	2	200	making connections (16)
1	3	327-328	making connections (16)
1	3	332-333	making connections (16)
1	4	397-398	making connections (16)
1	4	458	making connections (16)
1	4	493-494	making connections (16)
1	2	153	making connections (16)
1	3	309	making connections (16)
2	1	167	extending the question (5)
2	2	316-317	extending the question (5)
1	1	87	extending the question (5)
1	3	250	extending the question (5)
1	3	254	extending the question (5)
1	5	541-542	affirming feeling tone (24)
2	1	147	affirming feeling tone (24)
2	1	170	affirming feeling tone (24)
2	1	171	affirming feeling tone (24)
2	2	283-284	affirming feeling tone (24)
2	2	309	affirming feeling tone (24)
2	4	468	affirming feeling tone (24)

2	4	482	affirming feeling tone (24)
2	4	484	affirming feeling tone (24)
2	4	487	affirming feeling tone (24)
2	4	491	affirming feeling tone (24)
2	4	494	affirming feeling tone (24)
2	4	518	affirming feeling tone (24)
2	4	519	affirming feeling tone (24)
2	4	524	affirming feeling tone (24)
2	4	533	affirming feeling tone (24)
2	5	575	affirming feeling tone (24)
2	5	578	affirming feeling tone (24)
2	5	607	affirming feeling tone (24)
2	5	624	affirming feeling tone (24)
2	5	659	affirming feeling tone (24)
1	3	363	affirming feeling tone (24)
1	3	367	affirming feeling tone (24)
1	4	384-385	affirming feeling tone (24)

APPENDIX L

Member Checking

February 18, 2016

Building Administrators,

Thank you, again, for your participation in my doctoral study illuminating building administrators as effective communicators with their use of digital communications and social media. Since our focus group interviews, I have analyzed the data and coded it for common categories. Eventually, I determined three emergent themes with one sub-theme.

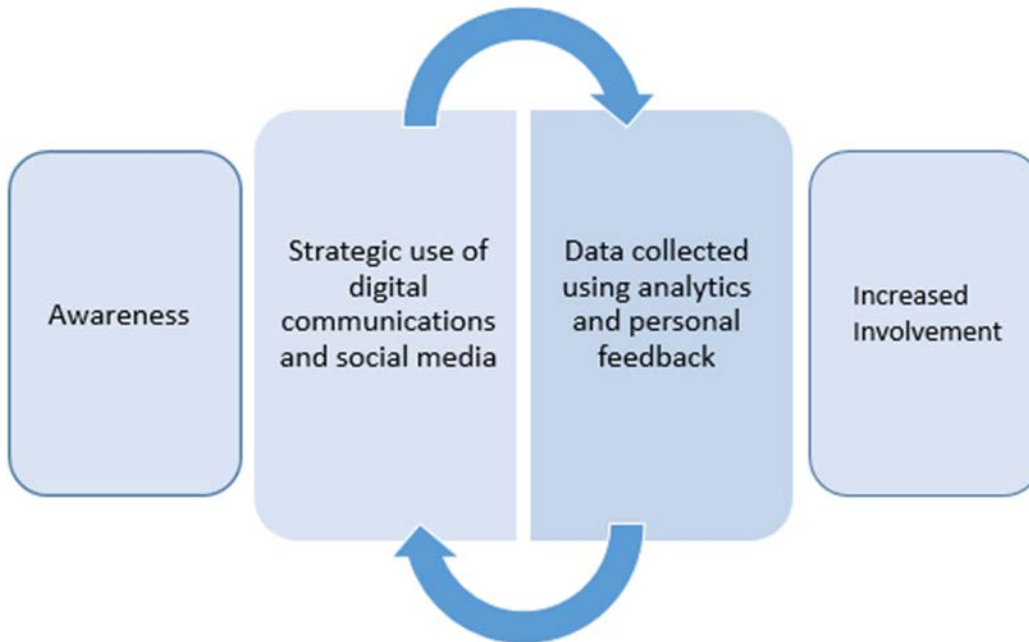
Creswell suggests researchers contact interview participants and share with them the outcome of data collected. With this letter I am conducting *member checking*. I want to give you the opportunity to review the themes and provide me with any feedback you may have.

Focus group interview questions and survey questions were crafted to collect evidence in response to the following questions:

4. In what ways do building administrators use digital communications and social media tools to communicate with and engage staff members, parents, and community members?
5. Is there a significant relationship between communication efforts of the building administrator and the level of parental and community engagement in individual schools?
6. Is there a significant relationship between the strategic communications and marketing strategies of a building administrator and the resulting image and reputation of the school?

Focus Group Data

The emerging themes include *awareness*, *strategic use*, and *increased involvement*. The figure below represents the three themes showing a relationship between the theme of strategic use with a sub-theme of *analytics*.



1. **Awareness** - Data gathered demonstrates a growing realization among building administrators that use of digital communications and social media is an expectation for many people in today's society. Principals appear to be developing a common understanding that in order to reach a variety of stakeholders, many different methods of communication must be used.
2. **Strategic use** - Given some time to experiment, principals become more comfortable with social media platforms such as Facebook and begin using observed results and analytics to employ greater strategy in their communication efforts.
Analytics - Research data shows that principals study the analytics provided by social media sites as formal evidence of effectiveness. They also rely on observed patterns of behavior and anecdotal evidence such as that shared in conversation with parents, students, and community members. They study the impact of their effort, monitor and adjust according to audience feedback.
3. **Increased Involvement** - Focus group participants indicate a perceived increase in the engagement of parents and community members as a result of the strategic use of digital communications and social media.

Survey Data

Principals report an increase in registered parent volunteers as a result of their communication efforts. While there is no measurable data to support this claim, survey results indicate most parents and community members (65%) will visit their local school each year. The survey also measured engagement when asking how stakeholders seek information about their local school. Results show the majority of parents and community members using school websites to learn about the school. Most (52%) will visit the website on a monthly basis, while many parents and community members (29%) will visit the website for their local school on a weekly basis.

Over 750 parents and community members provided feedback through a simple survey designed to measure communication preferences, levels of engagement, and perceptions of the local school. In an effort to answer research question three, stakeholders were questioned to measure image and reputation of the schools.

Survey results indicate most parents and community members (83%) rank their local school as either “very good” or “excellent.” Few (15%) rated their school as “good,” and only 15 participants – 2% of the total – rated their school as “not very good.” The overwhelming majority of the nearly 800 survey participants report a most positive opinion of each participant’s school.

APPENDIX M**Permission to use Modified Figures**

12-11-14

To: Brian Fox

From: Joyce Epstein

Re: Permission to use graphic

You do not need permission to use the graphic you attached to your email. You need only to include a full reference to the original work, with the graphic (e.g., adapted from J. Epstein, 2011) and with the complete reference in your bibliography. The best reference for that is:

Epstein, J. L. (2011). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Second edition. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

The full model has both an external and internal structure, which, cannot be represented in a simplified outline. You may want to refer your readers to the full model to understand both the external and internal models of Overlapping Spheres of Influence.

Good luck with your project.

Joyce L. Epstein, Ph.D.
Director, Center on School, Family, and
Community Partnerships and
National Network of Partnership
Schools (NNPS)
Research Professor of Sociology and
Education
2701 North Charles Street, Suite 300
Baltimore, MD 21218

Phone: [\(410\) 516-8807](tel:4105168807)

Fax: [\(410\) 516-8890](tel:4105168890)

Email: jepstein@jhu.edu

Web: www.partnershipschools.org

From: Brian Fox [mailto:brianfox@nnu.edu]
Sent: Sunday, September 28, 2014 4:19 PM
To: Joyce Epstein
Subject: permission to use graphic

Dr. Epstein,

I am a student at Northwest Nazarene University working on my dissertation and would like to use a graphic I have developed representing your Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence. I believe that this graphic, simple as it is, will compliment my review of literature, and give credit to you for your contribution. The graphic is attached.

Should you give permission, your response will be included as an appendix to my paper.

Sincerely,

Brian Fox
Graham, Washington

Engeström, Yrjö H M
yrjo.engestrom@helsinki.fi

February 24

Dear Brian, you have my permission. However, please check the correct form of the diagram (it now lacks a couple of connections) and, when you reproduce it, give appropriate reference (it is in my book 'Learning by Expanding', 2nd edition, 2015, on page 63.)

With best regards,

Yrjö Engeström

On 15 Feb 2016, at 23:16, Brian Fox <brianfox@nnu.edu> wrote:

Dr. Engeström,

I am a student at Northwest Nazarene University working on my dissertation and would like to use a graphic I have found representing Activity Theory. I believe that this graphic, simple as it is, will compliment my review of literature, and give credit to you and Vygotsky for your contributions. The graphic is attached below:

