UNRAVELING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP:
A SELF-STUDY IN BECOMING A LEADER

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Current contemporary discourse surrounding American education creates a context for educational leadership that values certain kinds of primarily external, behavioral leader traits. Systems of standardization and accountability perpetuate sociocultural and political appreciation for qualities such as interpretation of data, raising student achievement, and producing tangible results. Ignored in this discourse is the continued professional development of educational leaders through critical reflection of the self and one’s practices.

This work is grounded in Palmer’s (1998) belief that being an educator is moral and ethical work necessitating self-understanding. To this end, the focus was to explore how one educational leader, myself, embarked on a journey toward self-understanding using self-study methodologies and Pinar’s (2012) narrative currere. I begin with an exploration of the leader qualities I envisioned for myself as a new Curriculum Director in a rural Midwestern school district, which included having a democratic disposition and a commitment to critical reflection. My vision of a democratic leader was one who “recognizes and taps the collective intelligence and energy within an organization to generate productive growth and effective solutions” (Klimek, Ritzenhein, & Sullivan, 2008, p. 2), and my understanding of critical reflection was as “a process of inquiry
involving practitioners in trying to discover, and research, the assumptions that frame how they work” (Brookfield, 1998, p. 197). In addition, I was interested in exploring theoretical underpinnings of integral leadership (Putz & Raynor, 2005; Volckmann, 2012) and reconstructive postmodernism (Kegan, 1994) and the ways in which these theories were the basis for my understandings of adult development and leadership. The study spanned five months and resulted in uncovering several influences that created the context for my professional work. These included internal influences such as personal beliefs, my need to create a leading role for myself, trying to balance leading role and self, and relating as an individual to the collective, as well as one external influence based in how others defined my role responsibilities.

Through a personal study of leader identity, I aimed to present one method through which educational leaders could further their own professional development in a sociocultural and political discourse that values external behaviors over internal understandings.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The most practical thing we can achieve in any kind of work is insight into what is happening inside us as we do it.

~ Parker Palmer (1998, p. 5)

In The Courage to Teach, Palmer (1998) wrote about teaching as an outward manifestation of what rests inside the souls of teachers. “As I teach,” Palmer said, “I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together . . . teaching holds a mirror to the soul” (p. 2). At the very core of a teacher’s work, he said, is “knowing thyself” (p. 3), taking an introspective look at oneself in order to more fully understand and serve others. Though Palmer specifically referred to teaching, he also referenced the similar inner journey good leaders must follow: “It is a journey beyond fear and into authentic selfhood, a journey toward respecting otherness and understanding how connected and resourceful we all are” (p. 161). Like teachers, leaders also “project the conditions” of their souls in every interaction they have (and choose not to have); therefore, as “good teaching requires self-knowledge” (p. 3), so too should good leading.

Current studies in educational leadership, however, do not encourage self-knowledge as an essential component of leading. Despite the 1,500 definitions for “leader” and “leadership” and at least 46 different theories of leadership (Volckmann, 2014), the field is markedly underdeveloped in understanding how leaders, in this case, school leaders, come to know themselves as individuals negotiating complex role
expectations and interpersonal relationships. In the field of education, attempts have been made to define leadership as it relates specifically to school leaders, but they focus solely on the external behaviors of school leaders, neglecting the internal sense-making processes that dominate the work. These attempts at providing definition are in the form of professional standards called the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards. As the basis for college programs in educational administration, ISLLC standards influence the kinds of leaders that are cultivated (and not cultivated) while setting expectations for their beliefs, mindsets, behaviors, and actions.

The standard statements themselves are broad in nature as they attempt to define expectations, for example:

- **Standard 1: Vision and Mission**—“An educational leader promotes the success and well-being of every student by ensuring the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a child-centered vision of quality schooling that is shared by all members of the school community.”

- **Standard 2: Instructional Capacity**—“An educational leader promotes the success and well-being of every student by enhancing instructional capacity.”

- **Standard 3: Instruction**—“An educational leader promotes the success and well-being of every student by promoting instruction that maximizes student learning.” (ISLLC, 2014, pp. 16-17)

These standards provide principles of guidance for the ways in which a school leader should view her role. One should “aim for a child-centered vision” and “promote success . . . of every student,” and although both are general statements, they do not clearly
articulate a vision for what kind of person a school leader should actually be. In fact, the standards explicitly declare their broad nature:

The 2014 ISLLC Standards are *broad policy standards* that provide direction and guidance. The knowledge, skills and dispositions of the standards may need to be further articulated in order to ensure the Standards are meaningful and useful at different career stages and at varied points of influence. (ISLLC, 2014, p. 7, emphasis added)

Such broadness does not provide helpful guidance for how school leaders should make sense of their role responsibilities in idiosyncratic contexts. Nor do such standards guide leaders toward understanding themselves as they enact leading roles.

In addition to the broad, ambiguous definition of leadership proposed by the standards, we also see a focus on the school leader as technician, which implies a singular lens through which leaders should align their identities. The standards were written based on a belief in an “increased sense of urgency” for reform in response to “accountability for student outcomes” and the need for educational leaders to “drive student achievement” (ISLLC, 2014, p. 7).

The field of education is rife with standardized processes and procedures for addressing student outcomes and accountability (see the What Works Clearinghouse, for example). This seemingly singular focus leads the school leader, according to ISLLC standards, to become a technician responsible for figuring out what Heifetz and Linsky (2002) called “technical problems” or problems for which people already “have the necessary know-how and procedures” to solve (p. 13). The functions associated with
each standard further emphasize this focus on the technical. For example, under Standard 1: Vision and Mission, the following functions are listed:

- Collaboratively develops, implements, and promotes a shared vision and mission for quality teaching and learning
- Collects and uses data to identify goals, assess organizational effectiveness, and promote organizational learning
- Creates and implements plans to achieve goals
- Promotes continuous and sustainable improvement
- Monitors and evaluates progress and revises plans
- Acts in ways that consistently reflect the school’s/district’s vision, mission, and values. (ISLLC, 2014, p. 16)

Again, these “functions” are lists of technical tasks for leaders to perform in order to exemplify the standards. School leaders, according to their guiding professional standards, are leaders because they enact specific, observable behaviors and perform specific, observable tasks with a goal of improving student achievement.

Statement of the Problem: Self-Knowing in Leadership

As the guiding principles for today’s school leaders, the ISLLC standards are broad in nature and only exemplify one type of leader (the technician) through observable behaviors. What cannot be observed—what happens inside the leader as she seeks to know herself and to know the soul that influences her interactions with those she leads—is not represented. According to Blakesley (2011) research literature in educational leadership, like the standards, has focused primarily on observable behaviors. There are
no offerings to leaders who might want more out of their professional work than to simply adhere to this one definition. Leaders may not find support in embodying visions of different qualities of leadership, such as more professional depth in understanding, more idealization for the possibilities of educational leadership, and more insight into the relationship between the soul and a professional identity that includes all of the above.

Such depth and defining of leadership cannot be found in the professional guiding standards. Because the standards neglect to make any reference to the psychological and ethical processes of leading, school leaders are left with many challenging questions about not only what to do, but how to do it and why. Palmer (1998) argued that the actions taken by educators (teachers as well as leaders) are manifestations of what lies within the individual’s soul; therefore, who one is as a moral and ethical being becomes the basis for one’s professional decision making. Personal identity and self-knowledge are internal understandings that ultimately influence one’s beliefs and values, impacting what leaders do and how they go about doing it (Adamson et al., 2010; Walker, 1970). However, research is lacking in exploration of these understandings:

We know little about how school leaders come to interpret, adapt, and transform the problem at hand, how this process of sense-making is shaped by interactions with others who are directly and indirectly engaged in the same endeavors, and how school leaders’ sense-making shapes strategic choices and influences their leadership practices. (Sleegers, Wassink, van Veen, & Imants, 2009, p. 154)

And yet, according to Palmer’s (1998) views on the souls of teachers and leaders, this should be important work of all educators—knowing the self well enough and
establishing a professional identity to understand why one negotiates competing influences, makes decisions, and makes sense in certain ways. To further complicate the matter, school leaders must engage in this challenging, soul-searching, internal work in the context of an ever-changing educational climate in a system of accountability with high-stakes consequences for districts (Ylimaki, 2010).

Varied stakeholders combine with “competing priorities, scarce resources, external scrutiny, complex regulations, high expectations, and high stakes” (Klimek, Ritzenhein, & Sullivan, 2008, p. 15) to create a high stress environment for school leaders. Making sense in this context causes some to “resort to comfortable and known methods, too often settling for doing just what’s needed to survive each day as successfully as possible” (p. 15). Having the time and space to begin the work of searching for one’s identity in the leader role becomes a peripheral concern to a continuous barrage of other responsibilities.

**Developing a Holistic Leading Identity: Integral Theory and Reconstructive Postmodernism**

According to Palmer (1998), one’s identity is holistic, it “lies in the intersection of the diverse forces that make up [a] life” (p. 13). Ylimaki (2010) used a definition for identity focused on separation between self and others and how identity influences our various social roles (she mentioned, for example, the role of mother, African American, and female principal). One way to think about these two definitions is to see identity as both an integrated whole (holistic) and its differentiated parts (“diverse forces,” various social roles) as related to a certain context. Ylimaki (2010) clarified this:
The roles people play in society are fluid and affected by the ways in which we see ourselves in relation to others as well as by the ways in which people identify us. For example, teachers may see someone as an African American principal, but her husband identifies her as a wife and mother. Others may identify her as a community organizer or church member. In other words, we generally ignore the other contexts that create identities beyond the one with which we interact. (p. 18)

The whole in my work was an integrated and holistic self as leader identity, which lay at the “intersection” of differentiated self and contextual influences. Such thinking is closely aligned with integral leadership, which is a certain line of theory developed from Wilber’s (1998) integral theory and evoking elements of Kegan’s (1994) reconstructive postmodernism. Each presents a theoretical means by which to “integrate” parts into a whole. Wilber’s (1998) theory, also known as a “Theory of Everything”, does not seek to prove or disprove other theories; instead, it aims to contextualize existing and new theories by uncovering both their validity as well as their limitations (Reams, 2005).

Wilber defined “integral vision” as:

A genuine Theory of Everything [that] attempts to include matter, body, mind, soul, and spirit as they appear in self, culture, and nature. A vision that attempts to be comprehensive, balanced, inclusive. A vision that therefore embraces science, art, and morals; that equally includes disciplines from physics to spirituality, biology to aesthetics, sociology to contemplative prayer; that show up in integral politics, integral medicine, integral business, integral spirituality. (as cited in Reams, 2005, p. 119)
Integral theory is aligned with what Kegan (1994) called reconstructive postmodernism in which thought goes beyond modern thinking, which has deconstructed knowledge into absolutist categories, in order to reconstruct anew. Like integral theory, Kegan’s reconstructive postmodernism recognizes the existence of multiple truths—that all ways of thinking have some “rightness”; that we do not exist in a binary world of “either/or.” Kegan also discussed a “Complete Theory” that some would define as an ultimate goal of reconstruction; however, like Wilber, Kegan argued against such an endpoint and for an ongoing process of continual “theory about theory-making” (p. 330). Accordingly, my work might serve as an attempt at an integrated snapshot reconstructing many differentiated influences including self, context, and my knowledge of ways of thinking about leadership into an integrated, but temporal view of my vision for leadership. Thinking about leadership that informed this work included Palmer’s (1998) reflections on the leader’s search for self-knowledge; Brookfield’s (1995) vision of critical reflection in education; Sleegers and colleagues’ (2009) sense-making theory, which questions how leaders make sense of their roles; and Klimek and colleagues’ (2008) definition of the multidimensional leader.

While these (and surely other) lines of thinking along with other self-attributes and contextual elements influenced the ways in which I constructed a holistic view of myself as leader, they did not provide me with a practical way to understand differentiated influences on leadership. I was lacking a framework for thinking about the various influences; therefore, I was lacking the necessary details to develop a holistic view. In order to pull together the aforementioned lines of thinking, self, and context into
cohesive self as leader identity, I needed to first deconstruct my professional identity as leader because “differentiation always precedes integration” (Kegan, 1994, p. 326). To do this, I used Volckmann’s (2012, 2014) four-quadrant view of integral leadership.

**Four-Quadrant Framework for Leadership**

It was only recently that I came to think about my own leading using Volckmann’s (2012, 2014) four-quadrant framework based in integral leadership theory. In its simplest form, integral leadership theory is an off-shoot of Wilber’s integral theory in that it is about growth of individual understanding and functioning within complex and fragmented social structures (Volckmann, 2012). In applying this thinking to educational leadership, complexity and fragmentation result from the many competing influences on school functions. A constant bombardment of messages from various stakeholders, policies, and situations creates a consistent climate of complexity through which school leaders must learn to navigate in the moment. Such competing messages have manifested themselves in my own work experience in a variety of ways. For example, the messages I may receive from the state Department of Education regarding my responsibilities may include explicitly delineated administrative tasks such as completing documents, addressing compliance issues, or submitting data. Concurrently, the message I may receive from teachers regarding my responsibilities may include purchasing for classroom, reviewing curriculum, or managing online programs. Still more messages about my responsibilities may come from the superintendent’s expectations. The multitude of messages has caused me to feel pulled in many directions as my workday is disjointed and fragmented while trying to meet the needs of others. Integral leadership
addresses both how leaders negotiate these conflicting complexities and fragments, as well as the reasons behind their sense-making processes.

To better understand the various components of leadership, Volckmann (2012) conceptualized leadership through a four-quadrant holistic model based on internal and external influences on how one leads. The first of these quadrants is the **Internal-Entity**: Internal influences from within the entity of the leader (my personal values, beliefs, and experiences that influence my leader identity). Elements of internal-entity create what Walker (1970) has defined as the platform for curriculum, or the beliefs a curriculum developer brings into approaching her tasks. The second quadrant is the **Internal-Context**: Internal perceptions of one’s context (how I understand my situational context and influences). Third, is the **External-Entity**: Influences on the leader that are not necessarily controllable (for example, signs of nervousness when speaking in front of a group—uncontrollable and yet, an influence on how one’s leadership is perceived) and how others perceive these behaviors. Finally, the fourth quadrant, which is the **External-Context**: Manifestations of culture through structure, processes, and artifacts that impact the leader (contextual issues that exist on the leader’s periphery and influence the work, but are not immediately in the area of concern).

Self-knowledge through the four quadrants invites one to adopt a distanced, critically reflective view of leader practices through separation of self and leader. Such separation enables what Heifetz and Linsky (2002) called a “balcony perspective.” In describing this perspective, they use a dance analogy in which one excuses oneself from a dance floor and moves to the balcony to view the entirety of the dance floor. By doing
this, the leader establishes critical distance and is able to see a situation without being caught in the middle of the chaos. Palmer (1998) may also align this thinking with objectivism, which he defined as “disconnecting ourselves physically and emotionally, from the thing we want to know” (p. 51). In a school context, the school leader guiding a committee toward discussing educational aims for the building might propose an aim and then adopt a balcony perspective within the meeting by remaining silent and “stepping away” from the chaos of interactions to see how the idea permeates (or not) throughout the conversation. In my self-study, I aimed to use this thinking in two ways. The first way was to help process happenings in the moment by trying to establish critical distance as happenings occurred, such that I would be able to record my thoughts and feelings as data about the moment in hindsight as it would not be feasible in all situations to immediately record as the action occurred. The second way I aimed to think using a balcony perspective was in analyzing my data and practicing critical distance—making myself and my data the subjects of my distanced observation.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore how I, as a newly-hired Curriculum Director in a rural school district, learned to understand myself as *leader* in a new professional context. My own personal search for self-knowledge began several years ago after reading Palmer’s (1998) text. At the time, I was making a shift in my profession from teaching to administration, and my goals were primarily external: I thought it was important to create space for teachers to do Palmer’s soul-searching work while developing teachers’ voices through Brookfield’s (1995) critical reflection. At the
time (and still), I subscribed to beliefs shared by critical thinkers such as Pinar (2012) and Ravitch (2010) that the teaching profession had become the scapegoat for the ills of society and becoming increasingly de-professionalized. I believed helping individual teachers find their souls and voices would also help the profession re-professionalize itself in spite of a given sociocultural and political context.

Over time, however, my interests shifted toward the internal, specifically in regards to how I self-identified as a leader. As I attempted to help teachers develop themselves, I began developing my own self-knowledge as leader while becoming increasingly critically reflective of myself and my practices. I, too, felt a sense of de-professionalization in educational leadership and felt called to better understand my own soul and my own voice. When I noticed and cultivated this turn to self, I felt connections between what I wanted to do for others as a leader and the self-knowing work I needed to do for myself as well. My reading of Palmer (1998) helped give language to this work: “Becoming a leader . . . who opens, rather than occupies space—requires the same inner journey we have been exploring for teachers” (p. 161).

My aim for this research journey was to better understand who I was as a leader and how I embodied what I envisioned as my leading role in answer to the following research questions:

1. What influences provide the context for my leading role?
2. How do these influences affect my ability to be a democratic and critically reflective leader?
3. How do I deconstruct and reconstruct my role identity through past and present professional experiences?

**Research Design**

Because of the personal nature of this work, I turned to self-study methodologies for a systematic means of collecting data, analyzing it, and revealing temporal snapshots of influences on my professional role at a given time. Like Volckmann’s framework (2012), self-study invites an aesthetic distance between self and practice because data collected by the researcher about the research is then systematically interpreted by the researcher to reveal emerging understandings of practice. In doing this work, those using self-study methods must be open and committed to critical examination of practice (Samaras, 2002). This critical examination allowed me to engage the primary research questions.

Through seeking to understand these questions, I was able to continue formally unraveling knowledge of myself as well as my leader identity—a process that has been ongoing since I experienced a turn to self and will continue to occur as I continue to develop. The research was intensely personal with contextual considerations unique to my personal situation; nonetheless, I hope the significance of this work comes from not the substance of the situation, but the substance of critical reflection on my own sense-making processes.

It is also important to acknowledge that although this study took place in a given context at a given moment in time, it was a personal moment interwoven into past moments and weaving in to form what will become future moments. This constant
reconstruction is part of my own process of becoming; it is my own continual journey of understanding toward becoming whoever I will become. I am, in the words of Greene (2011), choosing “to create an identity in the light of what I am not yet, in pursuit of possibility” (p. 1). It is the act of making meaning as being human “as an activity . . . not about the doing which a human does; it is about the doing which a human is” (Kegan, 1982, p. 8). At the moment of this writing, I defined a vision for myself as the kind of leader I wanted to be (democratic and critically reflective) based on what I understood to be an effective leader, and subsequently, I defined a vision of the kind of person I wanted to be (one who more effectively understands and can separate her various role identities), but these visions were based on my understanding and experiences at a moment that has now passed. In a previous pilot self-study in which I examined the following research question: What are the underlying concepts driving my practice, and how do these concepts influence how I self-identify as a curriculum leader?, I determined that my vision of leadership is a constant process of unraveling temporal influences and my perceptions of them—in hindsight such a determination was already aligned with what I would later come to understand as integral theory and reconstructive postmodernism. Because of this belief, as I continue to reflect in future moments, my vision for my role as leader and self is always changing.

To explore this process of becoming with a focus on emergent understandings through self-study data collection and analysis, I used currere for focused reflection on past and present experiences influencing my understandings. Pinar (1975) proposed currere as a self-reflection strategy that is both “temporal and conceptual” but also
“trans-temporal and trans-conceptual” (p. 1). Learning and growth, according to Pinar, are based in journeys of self-exploration toward self-understanding that are not necessarily linear in nature (\textit{currere} is not the process of examining linear, chronological elements of one’s biography), but are multi-dimensional, overlapping. I previously used the words “interwoven” and “weaving” to explain how moments in my personal journey fit together as a means of capturing my understanding of this multi-dimensionality. \textit{Currere} is the “investigation of the nature of the individual experience of the public” (Kincheloe, 1998, p. 129).

Similar to Volckmann’s framework (2012), which allows for the separation of the leader role from the self, according to Kincheloe (1998), \textit{currere} may enable a certain kind of similar distanced view of self by “loosen[ing] our identification with the contents of consciousness” to “see those psychic realms that are formed by conditioning and unconscious adherence to social convention” (p. 129). Self-study data analysis presented emerging understandings of influence on my leadership in present moments upon which I then reflected using \textit{currere} to uncover intertwined past and present moments.

\textbf{Conclusion}

To summarize, this opening chapter began by setting an imperative for the educational leader’s self-knowledge using Palmer’s (1998) arguments for teaching and leading as a reflection of the soul. However, as examined, the ISLLC standards, professional standards, which guide college programming for educational leaders, focus solely on external behaviors of school leaders and ignore inner sense-making processes
and self-knowledge work. Then, I addressed the purpose of this study as a self-exploration into my own leadership in an effort to understand

1. What influences provide the context for my leading role?
2. How do these influences affect my ability to be a democratic and critically reflective leader?
3. How do I deconstruct and reconstruct my role identity through past and present professional experiences?

In defining identity, I proposed leadership as a certain holistic role (Ylimaki, 2010) made up of component differentiated parts (Palmer, 1998), and I examined how this view of identity was aligned with integral theory (Wilber, 1998) and reconstructive postmodernism (Kegan, 1994). In order to reconstruct a holistic identity, it was necessary to first deconstruct those influences affecting my leading identity (Kegan, 1994). Volckmann’s (2012) four-quadrant framework provided a practical means by which to understand and differentiate influences on my leadership in the following domains: Internal-Entity, Internal-Context, External-Entity, and External-Context.

Chapter 2 provides further clarification on the definitions, theories, and framework described above. I begin with an examination of one view of contemporary educational leadership discourse through the sociocultural and political context of standardization, accountability, “market model” (Burch, 2007) leading, and standardized management (Henderson & Gornik, 2007). Then, I explore how Ylimaki’s (2010) “new professional curriculum leadership” based in “good sense” and Henderson and Gornik’s (2007) “curriculum wisdom” paradigm based in “practical judgments” make necessary a
need for continued leader development through, particularly, Kegan’s (1982) stages of consciousness. Next, I revisit Volckmann’s framework (2012) and examine how the framework developed from Putz and Raynor’s (2005) definitions of integral leaders, which function at Kegan’s fifth order of consciousness. Finally, I further clarify two particular qualities I envisioned for myself as leader, a democratic disposition and an inclination toward critical reflection, which both lend themselves to Putz and Raynor’s (2005) definition of the integral leader.

In Chapter 3, I begin with a review of purpose and context for the self-study and then proceed to describe the two stages of study. These stages included first, the systematic collection and analysis of data through self-study methodology, and second, an interpretive approach to examining data and using currere to draw connections between past and present professional experiences. I then examine each stage of the process in more detail before exploring issues of ethics and trustworthiness and my efforts to establish credibility with my readers.

Chapter 4 details findings from the research and ties together elements of currere narratives with areas of influence developed through self-study. This chapter is organized around two overarching areas of influence that emerged through the data: internal and external. I begin by defining each of these areas, and then I more closely examine first the internal area and second the external. Although several internal influences emerged, only one influence emerged in the area of external. Therefore, I also provide explanation for the lack of additional external influences.
Finally, Chapter 5 was organized first, to answer my research questions and then to expand from the personal in order to situate this work in a broader context. I begin by answering my first research question with a summary of findings about my leader identity by concisely addressing the influences I discovered to be providing the context for my leadership. I then address my second research question by examining how those influences reflect my vision for leadership. Finally, I address my third research question through summarizing how I have deconstructed and reconstructed my leader identity. I then pose personal avenues for my own future self-study considerations. Next, I broaden my work to discuss possible implications of integral theory, reconstructive postmodernism and integral leadership in educational administration, including a brief commentary on the use of Volckmann’s (2012) framework for future educational leader self-study work. Then, I reflect on the possible potentials of self-study work and search for identity in educational leadership, and finally, I make recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The expectations upon us that run throughout these literatures demand something more than mere behavior...They make demands on our minds, on how we know, on the complexity of our consciousness.

~ Robert Kegan (1994, p. 6)

The chapter that follows provides further clarification on the definitions, theories, and framework described above. I begin with an examination of one view of contemporary educational leadership discourse through the sociocultural and political context of standardization, accountability, “market model” (Burch, 2007) leading, and standardized management (Henderson & Gornik, 2007). Then, I explore how Ylimaki’s (2010) “new professional curriculum leadership” based in “good sense” and Henderson and Gornik’s (2007) “curriculum wisdom” paradigm based in “practical judgments” make necessary a need for continued leader development through, particularly, Kegan’s (1982) stages of consciousness. Next, I revisit Volckmann’s framework (2012) and examine how the framework developed from Putz and Raynor’s (2005) definitions of integral leaders, which function at Kegan’s fifth order of consciousness. Finally, I further clarify two particular qualities I envision for myself as leader, a democratic disposition and an inclination toward critical reflection, which both lend themselves to Putz and Raynor’s definition of the integral leader.
Context for Leading in Today’s Schools

Previously, I briefly explored the “survival mode” in which school leaders operate that causes a high stress environment (Klimek et al., 2008, p. 15). Klimek and colleagues contend it is the stress of this environment that often pushes leaders to settle “for doing just what’s needed to survive each day as successfully as possible” (p. 15). Embarking on a journey toward self-knowledge for the sake of good leading (Palmer, 1998) may be a challenging step to take for school leaders existing in this survival mode. Because leadership identity is informed by both sociocultural and political influences (Blakesley, 2011; Ylimaki, 2010), we need to better understand school leaders’ complicated contexts to more fully grasp implications of the identity-seeking journey Palmer encouraged all educators to undertake. In doing so, I also examine some of the broader sociocultural and political contexts surrounding my own experience in school leadership.

The American educational system is saturated by standardization, which has had an effect on the responsibilities of school leaders. By its definition, to standardize means, “to change (things) so that they are similar and consistent and agree with rules about what is proper and acceptable” (Merriam-Webster, 2015). In the context of education, standardization has been defined as “a method of educational quality control . . . where the ‘process of teaching and learning is predetermined’” (Mahiri, 2005, as cited in Rubin & Kazanjian, 2011, p. 94). This process has “simplicity of purpose” in that school administrators become managers of teachers, focusing primarily on students’ learning achievements (scores) on standardized tests (Henderson & Gornik, 2007, p. 8). Au (2011) agreed with this definition, defining standardization as that in which teachers’
“labour is controlled vis-à-vis high-stakes testing and pre-packaged, corporate curricula aimed specifically at teaching to the tests” (p. 25), and the leader’s role is to ensure the occurrence of fidelity to standards-aligned curriculum. These definitions evoke a certain image of the state of today’s education system that is seemingly aligned with expectations set forth in ISLLC standards: administrators who exhibit management behaviors and decisions based on testing data. In keeping with this image, curriculum devolves into documents: pacing guides, maps, progression charts, model curricula, deconstructed learning targets (Apple, 1990).

This environment of standardization has, according to Ylimaki (2014), redefined the prevailing concerns of principals through its central argument that school leadership has a direct result on student testing outcomes. Educational leadership research perpetuates this belief by its focus on the relationship between leader inputs and student outputs (Ylimaki, 2010), and focusing on questions such as which leading behaviors are “good” for improving student scores and which are not. The sociocultural and political climate of accountability uses this belief as its foundation by drawing connections between student scores and teacher, leader, and district quality. Current accountability systems hold teachers and schools (not parents, communities, or students themselves) responsible for student performance on assessments (Pinar, 2012). Many states have adopted some form of consequential accountability, which has been defined as “any education accountability mechanism that has the following three elements: (1) explicit, publicized standards; (2) regular testing against those standards; and (3) consequences linked to performance” (Kress, Zechmann, & Schmitten, 2011, pp. 185-186). Such
consequences include tying assessment scores to teacher and leader evaluations and pay, school performance, and school funding formulas. However, the link between leadership and student standardized performance remains inconclusive (Ylimaki, 2010).

Because of standardization and consequential accountability, school leaders are now valued for their abilities to quickly analyze and improve student data, provide efficiency, and produce tangible results (Ylimaki, 2010). In his research, Blakesley (2011) found that contemporary principals may align their identities with this thinking as the principals in his study did not refer to themselves as “educational leaders,” instead defining their roles in terms of being a “good administrator” and “manager who runs the school” (p. 31). These qualities align with Burch’s (2007) definition of the “market model” of leadership. According to Burch, this model reflects capitalism and competition with a positivistic slant and a focus on student performance data in proposing, evaluating, and revising policy. In Burch’s explanation of the model, leaders compete for students via standardized test scores, and in her research, she found district administrators were more apt to use market model data orientations. For market model leaders, “data constitute one of the most critical forms of capital that administrators can employ” (Burch, 2007, p. 200). Burch also found that district-level administrators tended toward leadership models reflecting individual efforts rather than models emphasizing collective voices. They operate within what Henderson and Gornik (2007) have termed a “standardized management paradigm,” in which a paradigm is a way of organizing concepts (much like assembling a puzzle) as a means by which to study the issue. In this case, they argue the dominant educational paradigm is one with a singular, simplistic
focus on standards alignment in an effort to impact test score data and improve student scores.

The current state of education is significantly challenging for instructional leaders as constantly changing new assessments and criteria for “proficiency”, paired with implications of consequential accountability present a sense of urgency for realigning, redefining, and updating current school curricula. If we recall the previous discussion of ISLLC standards, the professional standards for leaders were born out of increased focus on standardization and accountability because of an “increased sense of urgency” for reform in response to “accountability for student outcomes” and the need for educational leaders to “drive student achievement” (ISLLC, 2014, p. 7). Such singular focus has “created a situation in which it is hard to hear anything else” (Apple, 2012, p. xii). As a pervading discourse in educational culture and one of the current ways in which educational leaders are viewed, the market model and standardized management paradigm with their focus on productivity and outcomes may be the context Klimek and colleagues (2008) are describing as the high-stress environment school leaders face. Survival mode, then, may be the way in which leaders function specifically in relation and in response to this environment

**Developmentalism and Leading**

The context for school leadership described above cultivates and reinforces a particular type of school leader, but ultimately, leaders make choices about the kinds of beliefs, behaviors, and interactions they exhibit: “Whether and how reforms reach students . . . depends on how [leaders] interpret reform objectives and act on these views
in the context of their decisions and interactions with teachers” (Burch, 2007, p. 197). Therefore, how leaders make sense of the sociocultural and political climate impacts what happens within the school. Ylimaki (2010) proposed a vision for curriculum leadership in which leaders think differently about the contexts surrounding their work. Though they may recognize some value in the system of accountability, specifically in its representation of achievement gaps, Ylimaki’s new model of curriculum leaders “‘read’ and reread sociocultural and political influences” in an effort to engage their own understandings of curriculum theory to develop curricula that “contribute to achievement on various kinds of assessments” (p. 21). These curriculum leaders must have a foundation in curriculum theory in order to more fully understand the broader influences of policies and trends affecting education.

Ylimaki’s (2010) model of leadership is different from Burch’s model (2007) and standardized management (Henderson & Gornik, 2007) in that it invites leaders to think beyond survival mode. She encourages the use of “good sense” and sets the imperative for a democratic approach through “discourse as an analytical tool” (p. 55). This model is in keeping with Henderson and Gornik’s (2007) curriculum wisdom paradigm in which educators would use “practical judgments” to make decisions about curriculum to teach for democratic values. As sociocultural and political influences are always changing, so too must a leader’s understanding of “good sense” (Ylimaki, 2010) and “practical judgments” (Henderson & Gornik, 2007) in changing historical moments. One kind of leader that could emerge from this view might be in line with both integral thinking and reconstructive postmodernism. As discussed, both integral theory (Wilber) and
reconstructive postmodernism (Kegan) are committed to how various theories and lines of thinking come together. In a way similar to how Ylimaki (2010) addressed the leader’s role in “reading” and “rereading” present moments to make sense of what opportunities exist for schools, Wilber and Kegan proposed continual theories of making theories to make sense of what opportunities exist for given contexts—in neither view is there an ultimate “truth”; there is only an ongoing quest.

One way to engage in this ongoing quest in order to become a leader who can see possibilities beyond the dominant educational discourse might be through individual development in orders of consciousness; if the leader, for example, continues to develop conscious understanding of self, others, and context, perhaps she could also develop leader identity that is beyond dominant discourse. According to Kegan (1994), researchers have spent a lot of time studying human development in children but not enough time trying to understand continued human development in adulthood. In connection to this self-study, the lack of understanding in adult development might raise questions concerning why educational leaders exist in “survival mode” (Klimek et al., 2008) and how they might develop beyond this mode in their high-stress environments. Developmentalism is defined by Kegan (1982) as a belief that “organic systems evolve through eras according to regular principles of stability and change” (p. 8). Reams (2005) expanded on this definition detailing developmentalism as “a fusion or identification with one level, a differentiation from or transcendence of that level, and an integration and inclusion of the new level” (p. 121). As used in integral theory, it is the idea that humans develop through stages that are hierarchical and unfold sequentially
(Wilber, 1998). Wilber used a biological model to explain: “You first have to have molecules, then cells, then organs, then complex organisms” (p. 58). As humans develop vertically through a progression of growth, Reams (2005) said developmentalism may also be applied “horizontally” (deVos, 2013) to various lines of growth, including intellectual, emotional, and spiritual, meaning the self may be in various stages across various lines of development depending on which area is currently developing at a given time. Therefore, the self as an intellectual being may be in a different stage of development than the self as an emotional or spiritual being. The “overall self”, then, could be defined as an “amalgam of all these ‘selves’ insofar as they are present in you right now” (Wilber, as cited in Reams, 2005, p. 122).

Kegan’s Subject-Object Theory is central to developmentalism as it is the process of “decentration” by which the “whole becomes a part to a new whole” (Kegan, 1982, p. 85). In each stage of sequential development, an aspect of the previous stage becomes further distanced from the subject. Objects have been defined as:

- Elements of our knowing or organizing that we can reflect on, handle, look at, be responsible for, relate to each other, take control of, internalize, assimilate, or otherwise operate upon . . . it is distinct enough from us that we can do something with it. (Kegan, 1994, p. 32)

Subjects, on the other hand, are defined as “elements of knowing or organizing that we are identified with, tied to, fused with, or embedded in . . . we cannot be responsible for, in control of, or reflect upon that which is subject” (p. 32). Kegan’s theory (1982, 1994) understands five stages of development that he called “a succession of qualitative
differentiations of the self from the world” (1982, p. 77), including (a) Impulsive (recognizing objects as separate from self; motivated by emotions); (b) Imperial (self as having needs; motivated by desires); (c) Interpersonal (self as conversational, existing in a shared reality with others; motivated by relationships); (d) Institutional (self is an identity, but is identified “with the organization it is trying to run smoothly; it is this organization” (p. 101); motivated by organization); and (e) Interindividual (self as separate from the organization; motivated by greater good). Both the fourth, “institutional,” and fifth, “inter-individual,” orders could be considered world-centric as they present the greatest distance between self as subject and object while also allowing the self to reach levels of development in line with integral theory—those levels at which one can recognize multiple truths of varying “trueness” (deVos, 2013). Wilber (1998) described similar stages using the metaphor of a ladder with each stage representing a rung on the ladder. As an individual climbs the ladder, she has a broader view of the world around her, further distancing self from world.

Putz and Raynor (2005) used Kegan’s five stages to define an “integral” level of leader self-development that is aligned with the interindividual fifth order of consciousness. An integral leader who has developed to the fifth stage is able to see herself as a “continually evolving person” who is “aware of development in [self] and others.” Such leaders also have a “flexible sense of identity that embraces complexity . . . on a personal level . . . but nevertheless has clear values and boundaries” (as cited in Reams, 2005, p. 129). Putz and Raynor’s integral leaders see themselves through the lens of many different paradigms and see others through these lenses as well. They are
flexible to change and see the organization as nonthreatening to their personal identity. They are supportive of the self-development in others. These traits make this kind of integral leader capable of both critical reflection and a democratic disposition, and potentially better equipped to develop a leader identity that can see “good sense” (Ylimaki, 2010) within and beyond the temporal sociocultural and political influences on education.

**Framework for Examining Influences on Leadership**

Volckmann’s (2012) four quadrants build on the work of Putz and Raynor (2005) by deconstructing a definition of leadership that is both integral and holistic (all four quadrants together) as well as differentiated into component parts. He argued the reason there is no definitive definition of leadership is because “leadership” itself is an ambiguous, convoluted, context-bound concept; therefore, he defined leaders, leading, and leadership as three distinct concepts. Although he deconstructed the components of “leadership” in this way, his work basis in integral theory with a fundamental belief in holistic wholeness, ultimately requires the components to be integrated together and viewed holistically—we fragment the pieces first in order to integrate them anew.

A *leader*, according to Volckmann, is a role, not a person; it is temporarily filled by a person, but that person is not a “leader” all the time every day. Expectations of the leader are impacted by expectations of the stakeholders, which Volckmann (2014) defined as “any individual who places value on the role” (p. 259). These expectations, however, are unlikely to be the same from each stakeholder, which leads the leader to
experience stress in role ambiguity, role complexity, and role conflict (Volckmann, 2014).

Importantly, it is not just the expectations of others that define the leader; how the leader role is enacted also reflects the values and beliefs of the person fulfilling the role at a given time. This has been found to be true in how leaders implement initiatives (Adamson et al., 2010) and how they make sense of situations (Burch, 2007). The perceptions, intentions, assumptions, and worldviews of the leader “play a critical role in how individuals behave and how they are perceived” (Volckmann, 2012, p. 7). Further complicating a leader’s role, as Becker and Goodman (2006) indicated, is the difference between a formal leader, one who is appointed to the leader position, and a leader who emerges as such. My professional position, for example, is an appointed one because I was formally hired by a committee having not previously belonged to the district in any way. This creates a challenge for the leader seeking to approach her role from a democratic and collaborative perspective:

When a leader is appointed . . . some (or most) of the people who fall under the auspices of that leader had nothing to do with promoting that particular person to the position of power, and feel no compelling reason to follow him/her. (Becker & Goodman, 2006, p. 42)

Leading, according to Volckmann (2012, 2014), includes the observable behaviors and actions of the person fulfilling the role. Leading, then, becomes a subjective experience as perceived by and relative to those who are being led. Research on educational leadership tends to focus on the actions of leaders rather than the reasons
behind those methods (Blakesley, 2011). Becker and Goodman (2006) encouraged us to consider “following” when thinking of “leading.” That is, in order to lead, someone must follow. People follow because “they are compelled to do so by an individual, or group of individuals, that has something meaningful and valuable to offer” (p. 42). We also cannot assume people will follow simply because a leader has a title, particularly in the case of an appointed leader (Becker & Goodman, 2006). An assumed expectation of having a district leader role is a following of teachers and others within the district; however, given these arguments by Becker and Goodman, one cannot assume followership despite having a leader title.

Finally, acknowledging the various and many definitions of leadership, Volckmann (2012, 2014) offered his own definition: leadership is the nexus at which the role (leader), as influenced by his or her values and beliefs, enacts leading actions within a given context:

Leadership is an inclusive concept involving the integration of (a) the leader, (b) leading in the role and (c) the context (culture, systems, processes, technologies) creating an integral perspective of leadership, including all domains and levels of leader development. (Volckmann, 2014, p. 259)

Through his differentiation of components in leadership, Volckmann has provided us with a framework for reflective school leadership. Specifically, the objective space between self and “leader” (a person filling a role) allows me to observe the tensions related to my leader role at a distance from self as an individual. Thinking about the relationship between leading-following and formal versus emerging leading allows me to
see interrelationships among my practice and those over whom I have an *assumed* authority.

Through his four-quadrant framework (internal-entity, internal-context, external-entity, and external-context), Volckmann (2014) combined two sentiments of leadership: (a) leader roles enact leading within a systemic process, and (b) as a self-enacting leading from personal perspectives and worldviews. Avolio (as cited in Volckmann, 2014) further defined this separation of sentiments:

> [As] a system and process, we can explore the context in which leadership occurs, the characteristics of followers, the timing of events, the history in which leadership is embedded, and so forth, [*sic*] When discussed as persons, we get into names, personality characteristics, values . . . experience, how intelligence plays a role in successes and failures, and so forth. (p. 262)

The integral approach to leadership brings together these two ways of viewing leadership to simultaneously include the person, the role, and all the circumstances surrounding both the person and the role as leadership is exhibited.

At the heart of integral theory is how the leader, existing at a stage of development (Kegan, 1982), ultimately negotiates complexity and fragmentation in order to make sense of her situation in a given context. Sense-making is what Sleegers et al. (2009) have defined as “an active process of constructing meaning from present stimuli mediated by prior knowledge and embedded in the social context” (p. 153). Although they do not reference integral leadership theory in their work, there are many similarities between work in sense-making theory and integral theory. In defining sense-making,
Sleegers and colleagues were indirectly looking holistically at how personal values and beliefs and contextual understandings are intertwined in leaders’ sense-making, which I liken to what I am calling “negotiating” complexities. According to sense-making theory, action or behaviors enacted by leaders are determined by “how human agents interpret, adapt, and transform information from their environment and make meaning of that information” (p. 154). Both sense-making theory and integral theory understand making meaning as a constructive process because understanding is influenced by previous understandings; new understandings can adjoin or replace previous understandings (Sleegers et al., 2014), which Volckmann (2014) called “little deaths.”

Another similarity between sense-making and integral leadership theory is a foundational belief that making sense in situations is not done in isolation. In integral theory, multiple components influence leadership including the leader’s internal values, beliefs, and previous experiences; one’s understandings and perceptions of contexts; internal functions beyond one’s control (biological influences, for example); and external contexts to which one may not give attention but that influence one’s work regardless (Volckmann, 2012, 2014). Similarly, in sense-making theory, construction of meaning is done through social interactions with others with an ultimate goal of constructing meanings for the collective: “shared meanings or shared frames of references within communities, occupational groups, institutional environments, cultures, and networks” (Sleegers et al., 2009, p. 154). This is very similar to how integral leadership approaches professional growth and learning, which comes from understanding ambiguities and certainties of social structures and learning to exist within them as they form and re-form
around us. We are, individually, a whole (person) who exists as part of another whole (people) within a system (context) that influences us all (Volckmann, 2014).

**Envisioning Self as Leader**

This work served as a personal journey toward a holistic understanding of self as leader through an exploration of differentiated influences on identity. It is important to acknowledge that although this study took place in a given context at a given moment in time, it was a personal moment interwoven into past moments and weaving in to form what will become future moments. It is a “theory of making theories” (Kegan, 1994), an identity of making identities. This constant reconstruction, in keeping with integral theory and reconstructive postmodernism, is part of my own process of becoming; it is my own continual journey of understanding toward becoming whoever I will become. At the moment of this writing, I defined a vision for self of the kind of leader I wanted to be (democratic and critically reflective). I now further explore each of these leader qualities in more detail.

**A Democratic Disposition**

The integral worldview invites leaders to share a democratic disposition. According to Chemers (1997), the responsibility of school leaders (or any leader in any organization) is fundamentally to “enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task” (p. 1). Through this definition, the necessity for a democratic disposition seems appropriate. Through a democratic approach toward challenges, school leaders have the best chance at “achiev[ing] the systemic transformation needed to prepare our children well for the increasingly complex world
they will encounter” while also “challeng[ing] the imaginations of our students and teachers” and “uncover[ing] the liberating opportunities concealed within daunting challenges” (Klimek et al., 2008, p. v). These authors seem to propose a leader who will tackle challenges in a way that makes “good sense” (Ylimaki, 2010) and uses “practical judgement” (Henderson & Gornik, 2007) in an effort to transform schools away from the standardized management paradigm and towards more democratic educational aims. Accordingly, Klimek and colleagues (2008) argued effective leadership today must be “multidimensional:”

> It must focus on relationships and interdependencies within every organization and work from a mental model of organizations as systems rather than as structures. Leadership must set creativity and intelligence free, not just control time and materials. It must welcome the inclement of many and tap the intelligence of all. Leaders must pose powerful questions rather than just impose directives . . . [these questions] generate energy, focus inquiry, reveal hidden assumptions, and so open new possibilities for action. We need leaders who are proud to be continual learners and who see their main job as leading the collective learning of their organization. Our times call for leaders who give up some control in order to get collaboration, creativity, and the collective intelligence surrounding them. (p. viii)

The leader proposed here is a democratic leader who “recognizes and taps the collective intelligence and energy within an organization to generate productive growth and
Klimek and colleagues used several key traits to describe leaders by their words and actions:

- They see their school as a dynamic system and every individual as an integral element of that system, affecting its present behavior and future conditions.
- Their leadership is more collaborative than authoritarian and is intent on realizing the potential and possibilities inherent in their students, their staff, and the entire school.
- They recognize the pervasive influence of individual and collective mental models and constantly questions the assumptions embedded in them.
- They see the future as very shapeable but neither precisely predictable nor controllable to the last detail.
- A focus on initiative, ideas, and innovation dominates their working style, with strong directive action reserved for moments that truly require it.
- A constructive spirit of collaboration in envisioning and achieving an outstanding future is genuinely present in every interaction, from meetings and presentations to individual encounters. (p. 15)

These characteristics and the definition of leadership posed here is in keeping with that as defined by Putz and Raynor (2005) operating in Kegan’s (1982) fifth stage of consciousness. It is also very different from the kind of leadership seemingly supported by the ISLLC standards as well as different from the current contemporary understanding of a school leader as posed previously. This is the vision I have for self as a democratic leader in the present moment.
An Inclination Toward Critical Reflection

The integral worldview, especially Kegan’s fifth stage of consciousness, also lends itself to an inclination toward critical reflection. Brookfield (1995) differentiated critical reflection from simple reflection by its multidimensionality. Reflection is a one-sided process, being strictly internal and unilateral in nature. Critical reflection, on the other hand, is a 360-degree view of how one’s behaviors, actions, and words, are interpreted by others. This kind of reflection is influenced by all four of Volckmann’s (2012) leadership quadrants because it takes into account one’s thinking, perception, and experiences (Internal-Entity and Internal-Context) as well as how those internal qualities manifest in behaviors and are perceived by others (External-Entity and External-Context). Critical reflection is defined as “a process of inquiry involving practitioners in trying to discover, and research, the assumptions that frame how they work” (Brookfield, 1998, p. 197). By this definition, critical reflection resembles a self-imposed challenge for self as leader—an ongoing process causing one’s own disequilibrium and disruption, a challenge to one’s own identity.

Because it is personal and interpretive in nature, Brookfield (1998) argued critical reflection is impossible to do in isolation:

Becoming aware of our assumptions is a puzzling and contradictory task. Very few of us can get very far doing this on our own. No matter how much we may think we have an accurate sense of ourselves, we are stymied by the fact that we are using our own interpretive filters to become aware of our own interpretive filters. (p. 197)
Therefore, he proposed four “lenses” through which leaders can view themselves. The first of these lenses is through autobiographical experiences as reflective learners. This lens incorporates both Volckmann’s (2012) Internal-Entity and Internal-Context quadrants as well as Pinar’s (2012) currere because it addresses one’s personal experiences in learning and how those experiences influence perception and action in the present moment. This presents “one of the most important sources of insight into practice to which we have access” (Brookfield, 1998, p. 198). For school leaders, this may mean reflecting on experiences as a student in classrooms as well as reflecting on experiences as a teacher subjected to various types of school leaders (Brookfield, 1998).

The second and third lenses Brookfield (1998) described focus on the experiences of others by allowing one to see the self through the eyes of learners and colleagues. This allows one to focus on how actions and behaviors are perceived by others, and “often we are profoundly surprised by the diversity of meanings people read into our words and actions” (p. 199). Especially in communicating with colleagues about issues, one begins to feel like he or she is not alone and his or her problems are not as idiosyncratic as we may think (Brookfield, 1998). An inherent challenge to accessing this information is getting others to provide honest feedback about their perceptions, which can be done more effectively through the promise of anonymity.

Finally, the fourth critical lens Brookfield proposed is that of theory, which he said enables one to name practices. By understanding the researched and generalizable effects of certain behaviors and actions, one may begin to see problems not as personal failings, but as the “inevitable consequence of certain economic, social, and political
processes” (1998, pp. 200-201). Additionally, a theoretical lens allows one to make sense of thoughts and actions by grounding them in research.

Often, critical reflection is brought about by a moment of disequilibrium (Brookfield, 2000), propelling the person into a circuit of inquiry (Ryan, 2011). Brookfield (2000) described the critically reflective process initiated by such personal trauma as one through which individuals may try out and adopt new belief systems that help them better explain and learn from the discomfort. Volckmann (2014) referred to the process of replacing beliefs with new beliefs as “little deaths”. For the school leader, the use of critical reflection and Brookfield’s multiple lenses for gaining perspective not only aids one in embodying the work of adaptive challenges, it also mirrors Dewey’s circuit of inquiry (Ryan, 2011) in a way that allows leaders to think about and learn from their sense-making processes.

**Self-Study as a Democratic, Critically Reflective Practice**

Through self-study, school leaders can become inquiring practitioners through a systematic process that is both democratic and critically reflective. Self-study researchers have drawn a line between narcissism, defined as “extreme self-absorption, an exaggerated sense of self-importance, and a need for attention and admiration from others” (Merriam-Webster, 2015) and legitimate self-study work. The heart of self-study, for example, does not meet the criteria of being narcissistic work given its definition. The goal of self-study is not to extoll one’s personal grandiosity, but instead, to explore areas of contradiction between intent and perception (critical reflection) by making focused inquiries into problems of practice, researching, collecting, and analyzing data to
improve (Samaras & Freese, 2009). Russell (2002) described the self-study researcher as one who is “acutely aware of the potential for contradiction between the content and the process of our teaching and who wishes to minimize such contradictions” (p. 3).

Hamilton and Pinnegar defined the methodology as:

The study of one’s self, one’s action, one’s ideas, as well as the ‘not self.’ It is autobiographical, historical, cultural, and political and it draws on one’s life, but it is more extensive than that. Self-study also involves a thoughtful look at texts read, experiences had, people known, and ideas considered. These are investigated for their connections with and the relationships to practice. (as cited in Samaras & Freese, 2006, p. 32)

These definitions demonstrate reflection, contemplation, and introspection, not ego, personal esteem, or delusions of grandeur.

The characteristics of self-study research further connect the methodology to democratic and critically reflective leadership. According to Samaras and Freese (2009), Barnes identified three characteristics of self-study research in his analysis of papers submitted at the first Castle Conference. These included: (a) openness, (b) collaboration, and (c) reframing. Self-study research puts the researcher in a place of vulnerability as she exposes contradictions between her beliefs and practices:

This type of research is . . . about taking chances, being open, exposing one’s practice willingly, allowing for both the positive and the negative aspects of practice to be seen and explored. This can be a very daunting experience. (Tidwell & Fitzgerald, 2004/2007, p. 70)
Often, as is the case in LaBoskey’s *The Ghost of Social Justice Education Future* (2012), researchers aim to study a problem or question that is intensely personal. In this article, LaBoskey aimed to focus on an area of the curriculum seen as “being a hard-to-teach, yet central, component of social justice teacher education” that was also something into which she has “invested much mental and emotional effort” (p. 228). Exposing a concept of this nature to data collection and analysis without knowing the outcome and then sharing the outcome with others is an intensely reflective and open process.

Such openness and vulnerability begets Barnes’ second characteristic: collaboration. This work requires a “disposition that is open to the ideas from others” (Samaras & Freese, 2009, p. 8); a self-study without “others” is no longer a self-study, it instead becomes an exercise in narcissism because the only perspective at hand is that of the researcher and her singular/unilateral collection, analysis, and interpretation of data about herself. In self-study, collaboration can be done through all stages of the research, including data collection, analysis, interpretation, and dialogue with others, such as critical friends, who allow the researcher to see varying perspectives on a problem. One such way collaboration is achieved is studying practice within a collaborative group of researchers; another method of achieving collaboration is to involve students, colleagues, and peers. This represents the aforementioned “lenses” through which one may critically reflect (Brookfield, 1998) on professional practices.

Through these varying perspectives, then, the researcher is able to frame and reframe the research question or problem, which Samaras and Freese (2009) said “provides an opportunity for the researcher to think about things differently, change how
he/she looks at what’s going on in classrooms, and ultimately change one’s practice” (p. 8). Through reframing, our “premise distortions,” which Brookfield (1995) defined as “deeply embedded internal injunctions that define the boundaries of what we allow ourselves to think . . . self-censorship devices—nagging voices of denial,” become “jarring and dissonant,” heard instead as “false envoys whose messages are refuted by experience” (p. 45). The process of reframing premise distortions and contradictions between intent and perception enables improved efficacy, and subsequently, empowered voice:

As teachers talk about and ‘name’ their experiences, they learn about what they know and what they believe. They also learn what they do not know. Such knowledge empowers the individual by providing a source for action that is generated from within rather than imposed from without . . . Teachers who know in this way can act with intent; they are empowered to draw from the center of their own knowing and act as critics and creators of their world rather than solely respondents to it. (Richert, 1992, as cited in Brookfield, 1995, pp. 46-47)

Self-study is about transformative personal and professional growth, and through this growth, through the vulnerability of being open and collaborative and the process of reframing, self-study research is an empowering, efficacy-building enterprise.

Conclusion

This chapter has situated the current self-study among extant research across various disciplines of study. I began by describing the current sociocultural and political context within which educational leaders operate. Then, I proposed a possible vision for
leadership that thinks beyond the status quo to focus on making “good sense” (Ylimaki, 2010) through “practical judgments” (Henderson & Gornik, 2007). I explored integral theory, developmentalism, and integral leadership as theoretical underpinnings of consciousness that could allow a leader to begin to study the self as more than part of a standardized management context. Then, I offered Volckmann’s (2012) framework as a way for leaders to think about themselves as a differentiated human fulfilling a leader role while leading to exhibit leadership. Finally, I described my personal vision for leadership, which centered around two qualities: a democratic disposition and critical reflection. I also explained how self-study is one way to practice critical reflection. In the next chapter, I detail the research process through self-study methodology and currere.
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

Recognizing the discrepancy between what is and what should be is often the beginning of the critical journey.

~Stephen D. Brookfield (1995, p. 29)

This research undertaking was conducted during the first half of the 2015–2016 school year beginning in August with my new position as Curriculum Director in a rural Midwestern school district. This was my ninth year in education having begun my career as a high school English teacher in a small, rural district for four years. My second role in education was as a kindergarten through 12th-grade literacy specialist. Having served in that role for a year, I moved into district leadership where I spent three years in one district as secondary curriculum coordinator before moving into my current position.

This chapter is formatted in such a way as to reflect the two stages of this study that occurred simultaneously. The first stage was a systematic approach to data collection through self-study methodology. This stage lasted five months and addressed the primary questions:

1. What influences provide the context for my leading role?
2. How do these influences affect my ability to be a democratic and critically reflective leader?

I clarify this stage of research by first defining each method of data collection, then detailing data analysis by including images from throughout the process.
The second stage of study was an interpretive approach using *currere* to review data and determine possible connections between past and present professional experiences and how these experiences connected to emergent understandings developed through self-study. *Currere* narratives intertwined in self-study generated areas of influence to address my secondary research question: How do I deconstruct and reconstruct my role identity through past and present professional experiences? I describe this stage of the study by defining sources of data and describing analysis procedures.

After describing both stages of research, I address issues of ethics and trustworthiness that may be unique to self-study and *currere* work. In doing so, I also describe efforts taken to establish credibility and trustworthiness with my readers.

**Research Stage One: Self-Study**

The first stage of research was a self-study. Data collection, generation, and analysis lasted five months and addressed the primary questions:

1. What influences provide the context for my leading role?
2. How do these influences affect my ability to be a democratic and critically reflective leader?

During this stage, I used several data collection methods as described below.

**Tracking of Work-Task Time**

Using a spreadsheet, I set alarms for designated times throughout the day for each day during a one-week period at 1.5 hour increments (9:00am, 10:30am, 12:00pm, 1:30pm, and 3:00pm), and at each of these times (or as close to the time as possible), I
paused in my work and recounted what I did during that 1.5 hours. I approximated how much time was spent on various tasks and recorded as much detail about the tasks as I could. The purpose in tracking work-task time was to uncover what kind of tasks I completed in a given day in order to understand what influences affected my enactment of leading. By purposefully pausing in my work and recording tasks, I was better able to capture even smaller tasks that I may not otherwise notice while working without pause. Though I initially intended to replicate this time tracking at three different points, specifically at the beginning, middle, and end of the study, because of the daily commitment necessary to pause and track, I was only able to accomplish the task during a single week from August 17–21. Data obtained through this single week of tracking demonstrated in-the-moment survival mode as I moved from task to task throughout my work day. However, it was void of in-the-moment reflection. This realization later fueled my understanding of a leader’s potential inability to reflect in-the-moment—as role responsibilities fill one’s professional time, the ability to critically reflect is hindered. I found my journals to be much richer sources of data for reflection on daily tasks; therefore, having only completed work-task tracking over the course of one week had no substantive impact on the study. Figure 1 shows the spreadsheet I used and actual data as collected.
I used online Google documents to record 21 journal entries for over 80 pages of journaling. Though I intended to journal at least once a day at approximately 3:30 in the afternoon, in actuality, I was only able to journal approximately 2–3 times a week. The focus of this personal journaling was to record whatever I needed to reflect upon, which included events and conversations, but I also used journaling as a way to process my thoughts. Journaling provided the majority of my data and was a rich source for making the self a subject of study and applying Kegan’s (1982) subject-object thinking. I have included many direct excerpts from these journals in Chapter 4.

Work Emails

While I did not plan to cite work emails from others in my research in any way, these communications were one of the most tangible, practical indicators of how I

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**Personal Journaling**

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**Figure 1. Work-Task Time Spreadsheet**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planned Time</th>
<th>Actual Time</th>
<th>Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:00</td>
<td>9:25</td>
<td>Achieve 3000, a program in use in language arts grades 5-9.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:30</td>
<td>10:30</td>
<td>Last hour spent with a spreadsheet trying to sort out correct data and match teacher codes to teacher names via school schedules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00</td>
<td>12:16</td>
<td>From 10:30-10:50, continued working on data and sent email to Intermediate because their data is not yet available. At 10:50, I went with a colleague to pick up pizza lunch for our New Teachers. From 11:10-noon, I ate lunch with new teachers and informally talked about Resident Educator, their classrooms, their past teaching experiences, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:30</td>
<td>1:34</td>
<td>Emails about CCP textbooks and procedure; email about data to Achieve 3000; required meeting with American Fidelity representative 12:50-1:10; 1:10-1:34 returned emails and communicated with colleagues re: CCP Textbooks (continued); processed MOU with one college and Brian / Carolyn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:54</td>
<td></td>
<td>1:40-1:59 Emails about CCP including sending back MOU and emailing guidance counselor and gifted coordinator about science course progression in accordance with email from ODE re: updated Science testing information; 1:50-2:09 Checking various social media accounts for information / updates on any policies; 2:05 Call from principal about KRA teachers. Also need to re-pull Intermediate data from this morning as Tech has worked on the issue and says it should be fixed (email at 2:15--not fixed and will not be done until a few days after school starts); 2:20-2:50 Manually entering teachers into KRA as users so they can access training updates before they start administering tests on Wednesday. 3:05 Received email from tech coordinator with her 5-year plan from 2014 and a link to a tech page from another district that she liked as an example / resource for what she would like to do in BLS. Spent time reading her plan and reviewing the website. I’d like to see us start with a needs assessment of teachers, students (in secondary) and principals to get their perspectives / data on things. I sent Sprint in an email to her.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
interact with others throughout the workday. I found myself reflecting on work emails in my personal journals, specifically as a way to understand why and how I experienced emotional responses to communication with colleagues and how I come to understand others through their email communications. Although this will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, one such email communication spurred an angry emotional response and served as the impetus for removing my work email account from my personal phone.

**Insight from Critical Friends**

One of the biggest challenges I aimed to curb from the onset of data collection was my potential inability to identify biases or alternative explanations for data. I am often completely unaware of ideas and beliefs that I consider to be universally accepted. Throughout the course of data collection and preliminary analysis, I met with at least one critical friend on a monthly basis. In the early stages of data collection, I shared my initial thoughts about what might be potential connections in coding. My critical friends were able to survey this initial data and suggest alternative connections I might not otherwise have noticed. For example, I worried about having separate codes for “role as self” and “role as human”. Through early conversations, my friend recommended reading Ylimaki (2010) for assistance in defining identity through roles. She helped to clarify a conscious “self” from those activities I tried to define specifically as “human,” and in doing so, I was able to draw connections between the initial codes. In more advanced stages of data collection and early analysis, as I began naming these connections and comparing across my data, these same critical friends were able to offer
other perspectives, which would later influence how I continued naming codes in my data. For instance, as I struggled with naming a category, specifically using internal “influences” versus Volckmann’s (2012) “internal-entity”, I was able to talk through my thinking with these friends, who suggested clarifications based on my descriptions. These colleagues served as sounding boards for coding and analysis, thereby allowing me to “move beyond self to examine practice” in order to provide rigor and validity through more objectivity in the research process (Tidwell & Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 70).

**Data Analysis**

In describing my analysis process, I begin with a brief, broad overview of my coding cycles and then I describe each of them in more detail. Analysis was an ongoing process that started while I was collecting data and continued through the writing stages. I used codes, which are defined by Saldana (2013) as a “word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 3), to make sense of the data. Codes are researcher-generated, and they provide “interpreted meaning” for pieces of datum that are later used for detecting patterns (Saldana, 2013). Assigning these words or short phrases was initially done through three cycles of open coding, which has been defined by Corbin and Strauss (1998) as a process “through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data” (p. 101). As coding is a “cyclical act” (Saldana, 2013, p. 8), each cycle of coding work further focused and refined the analytical work at hand by providing more data for revealing similarities and differences while clarifying linkages.
After the second cycle of coding, I began developing categories (which I would later rename “areas of influence” because the phrase more specifically connected emerging findings to my research questions) by looking for patterns of “similarity and regularity” to “actively facilitate the development of categories” (Saldana, 2013). Saldana likened categories to “families” in that the coded data are grouped because they share similar characteristics.

Going into the third cycle of coding, then, I switched from open coding to axial coding, which Corbin and Strauss (1998) defined as “the process of relating categories to their subcategories, termed ‘axial’ because coding occurs around the axis of a category” (p. 123). Because I had categories (later “areas of influence”) in mind when I approached new data for analysis, I was no longer engaged in open coding. In the paragraphs that follow, I further explain each step of this process.

I began analyzing three weeks into data collection with my first cycle of open coding in which I used NVivo software to create first cycle codes (Saldana, 2013) as I read and re-read through the data. It was important that I allowed codes and categories to emerge on their own rather than applying any preconceived *a priori* categories to the data. The first coding session included seven personal journal entries and five days of tracking my work-task time. This created 21 different emerging codes, as shown in Figure 2. As this was the first cycle of coding, my codes were not well defined because I did not have a large amount of data to review. In NVivo, however, I was able to provide notes and definitions for each code as it was created. The code “Communication,” for example, from this first cycle was defined as “any reference to communicating with
others including improving communication, and my thoughts/reactions to a communication (email, phone, face-to-face etc.).” This code, and other codes created through the first cycle, was broad and all-encompassing because I did not yet know what I might eventually uncover about communication.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>Created On</th>
<th>Created By</th>
<th>Modified On</th>
<th>Modified By</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Today, 2:20 PM</td>
<td>CH</td>
<td>Today, 3:25 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Today, 3:07 PM</td>
<td>CH</td>
<td>Today, 3:24 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Today, 2:27 PM</td>
<td>CH</td>
<td>Today, 3:10 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependency on Others</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Today, 2:30 PM</td>
<td>CH</td>
<td>Today, 3:23 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Politics</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Today, 2:08 PM</td>
<td>CH</td>
<td>Today, 2:50 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ego</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Today, 2:50 PM</td>
<td>CH</td>
<td>Today, 2:51 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Today, 2:34 PM</td>
<td>CH</td>
<td>Today, 2:37 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gathering Feedback from...</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Today, 2:46 PM</td>
<td>CH</td>
<td>Today, 3:25 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glue</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Today, 2:58 PM</td>
<td>CH</td>
<td>Today, 3:24 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing Self</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Today, 2:52 PM</td>
<td>CH</td>
<td>Today, 3:13 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multitasking</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Today, 2:16 PM</td>
<td>CH</td>
<td>Today, 3:24 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTES</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Today, 2:19 PM</td>
<td>CH</td>
<td>Today, 3:21 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Philosophies</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Today, 2:35 PM</td>
<td>CH</td>
<td>Today, 3:16 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy &amp; Legislation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Today, 2:17 PM</td>
<td>CH</td>
<td>Today, 3:20 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure-Stress</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Today, 2:23 PM</td>
<td>CH</td>
<td>Today, 3:17 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident Educator</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Today, 3:14 PM</td>
<td>CH</td>
<td>Today, 2:24 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self as being human</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Today, 2:39 PM</td>
<td>CH</td>
<td>Today, 3:19 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Today, 2:21 PM</td>
<td>CH</td>
<td>Today, 3:12 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Today, 3:05 PM</td>
<td>CH</td>
<td>Today, 3:24 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Today, 2:13 PM</td>
<td>CH</td>
<td>Today, 3:25 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding Others</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Today, 2:04 PM</td>
<td>CH</td>
<td>Today, 2:50 PM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2.** Codes from First Coding Cycle

To come to future coding cycles without preconceived categories, I hid these codes in a folder within NVivo. Several weeks later, during a second cycle of open coding, I started from a blank slate and did not revisit codes from the first coding session. This second coding session, shown in Figure 3, using six new journal entries amounted to 18 different codes. In comparing codes from both the first and second cycles, I noticed “Communication” by itself was not a code in the second cycle; however, “Role as Communication” became a new code. This code was defined by “any moment when data
revealed a perceived personal responsibility for communication via email, phone, face-to-face, etc”.

![Figure 3. Codes from Second Coding Cycle](image)

After this second cycle, I began using the constant comparison method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, 2015) to examine how these 40 codes might fit together, which required comparing pieces of data within each code to others for similarities and differences. For example, as I compared the definitions and samples of data connected to my definition of “Communication” from the first cycle to “Role as Communication” in the second cycle, I realized there were similarities in that data primarily addressed how I communicated with others. Similarly, data connected to the code “Disseminating Info” from the second cycle, which I defined as “Personal need to communicate in certain ways (ex. together, same time, clear/succinct) for certain kinds of information,” also related to the idea of how I communicated with others. In the process of doing this, I was able to group
together similar data to create three initial categories: (a) Building Relationships, (b) Inside Influences, and (c) Outside Influences. In doing this, I began thinking of each category as an “area of influence” because this phrase better matched both my research questions and what began to emerge in the data. I also developed preliminary specific influences within each area, which I likened to “subcategories” as they have been defined as “specify[ing] a category further by denoting information such as when, where, why, and how a phenomenon is likely to occur” (Corbin & Strauss, 1998, p. 119). The specific influences within each area met this definition of subcategory.

One such area of influence with its preliminary specific influences with related similarities is shown in Figure 4. In these early stages of analysis, I mistakenly referred to the emerging “category” (later “area of influence”) as an emerging “theme” as shown in the figure. Also in this figure, I have included my notes to myself defining why I thought the codes were related.
At this point, I exported all the records of data by code from NVivo and imported them into Google Docs. In doing this, I was able to see each piece of data that was combined through the process of categorization, to more easily employ Hatch’s (2002) suggestions for analyzing data through an interpretive structure: reading each source multiple times to extract personal memos and assigning specific codes (or multiple codes) to each memo. For example, Figure 4 shows the area of “Inside Influences” with a potential specific influence of “Creating Role for Self”, a code that contained 10 coded pieces of data at this stage of analysis. Within that specific influence were additional influences of “Communication” (with 12 coded pieces of data) and “Disseminating Info” (with 4 coded pieces of data). When I merged these influences together on one Google Docs page, a process of recoding allowed me to see if all data seemed to fit into the
bigger specific influence of “Creating Role for Self”. Electronically, I was able to do this using inserted comments (see Figure 5). Figure 5 shows the area of “Internal Influences” with my notes at the top in which I created a working definition for what I meant. It then shows aggregated pieces of data from the “Personal beliefs” influences, which included additional influences of “Feedback” and “Gathering Feedback,” “Knowing Self,” “Personal Philosophies,” and “Streamline.” The right side of Figure 5 shows memos I developed to better understand what each piece of data demonstrated and how it was (or was not, in some cases) connected to the influences and areas. I also moved some data from one influence to another if it seemed to better fit somewhere else.

Figure 5. Coding Through Electronic Comments

During my third coding cycle, I stopped using open coding because I had already developed preliminary areas of influence (Internal and External), and I used an axial coding approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, 2015) to analyze 8 additional personal journals. These were coded using preexisting codes to see if the new data fit with
previous data. I copied and pasted appropriate data segments from the additional journals into the already-existing Google Docs.

From this point, as I continued using constant-comparison analysis, I was able to further define and refine my areas of influence and specific influences. To make this process easier to visualize, I used an online application called Padlet as I defined my thinking. Figure 6 shows the development of one of my areas, “Inside Influences”. Again, I believe I erroneously referred to this area as a theme, as indicated in the image.

Though Corbin and Strauss (2008, 2015) seemed to use “categories” and “themes” interchangeably, Saldana (2013) differentiated theme from category in that a theme is “an extended phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and/or what it means” (p. 175). I did not aim to explain what the areas of influence were about or what they meant; I aimed to uncover what areas existed and whether or not they reflected my vision of leadership.
Within the area of Inside Influences shown in Figure 6 are the specific influences of personal beliefs, creating role for self, role and self, uncertainty, and relating as an individual to the collective. The definition of Inside Influences (“Elements of leader role influenced by or affected by me self; things over with I may have control”) had been further defined and refined over time from its first lengthy, broad definition shown in Figure 4. Similarly, each of the specific influences had been defined and refined over time, and each specific influence had its own Google Doc in which I continued to refine. Personal beliefs, for example, had its own Google Doc from the third and fourth cycles of coding (see Figure 5). On each specific influence Google Doc, I delineated my reasoning for tying the specific influence to its overarching area. In the case of personal beliefs, I
wrote, “This fits in inside influences because personal beliefs are an element of the internal quadrants.” This is where Volckmann’s (2012) framework was most helpful for helping me to organize the influences. Finally, in reconstructing the data, I took the specific influences and areas defined in the Padlet and reconnected them to the data using an online mind-mapping tool called MindMeister (see Figure 7). This allowed me to make connections between the specific influences to organize writing in a way that would make sense. For example, I decided personal beliefs would come first in writing because those beliefs were reflected in the other specific influences. In the definition of creating role for self (see Figure 6), I stated, “Ways in which I have defined my own role responsibilities based on my perceptions;” therefore, it seemed critical to explore “my perceptions” as a way to then explore how I created my role. Mapping my thoughts in both of these visual ways concurrently allowed me to more thoroughly examine connections while also representing my thinking process.

![Figure 7. Use of Mind Mapping Tool](image-url)
Research Stage Two: Currere

The work of using currere began at the same time as the self-study; however, selecting appropriate elements of autobiographical narratives was refined once categories began emerging during self-study data analysis. Once data were analyzed to generate areas of influence depicting various leadership influences surrounding my work, I used currere, explained below, as a sort of triangulation for examining how these influences in the present moment are interwoven with other past and present moments.

Currere narratives intertwined in self-study generated categories to address my third research question: How do I deconstruct and reconstruct my role identity through past and present professional experiences? The work of currere helped me situate my present moments (self-study categories) with my past and present professional lived experiences through narrative storytelling to better understand why the influences identified through self-study exist as influences in my leading role. Because of the nature of my inquiry, self-study methods combined with currere presented an effective design through which I could examine my beliefs and practices.

Currere was done through engaging in thoughtful reflection. This work began concurrently with the self-study. Pinar (2012) defined four steps in currere: (a) the regressive, or “reactivating the past” (p. 5); (b) the progressive, or “contemplating the future” (p. 5); (c) the analytic, understanding of the past and future; and (d) the synthetic, or expansion of self to be “mobilized” (p. 5). Currere becomes a means through which one can “study the relations between academic knowledge and life history in the interests of self-understanding and social reconstruction” (p. 44). It is a “subjective
reconstruction” (p. 45) through which “we enable understanding of the public world as we discern our privately formulated way through it” (p. 45). Because the nature of currere differs from a typical explanation of “data collection” and “data analysis,” I have organized both data collection and analysis into Pinar’s (2012) four steps.

Reactivating the Past

In keeping with Pinar’s (2012) four steps, I began reactivating the past by reading and rereading through the following data sources throughout the self-study:

Personal journals. I have maintained years of journals from throughout my life including multiple journals from within the last decade while I have been involved in the field of education. Stories held within these personal journals highlight intimate and personal reflections on occurrences. In one entry, for example, I remark on my struggle with being a “good” first-year teacher, and in another entry, I recount a teaching experience that brings into question my sense of “calling” as an educator. Such personal entries provided a starting point for activating my past experiences.

Public journals. Since April 2011, I maintained a public weblog with frequent posts related to teaching and education. As these journals are public, they are much less personal than the personal journals, but they provide insight into my growing and changing understanding of what it means to be an educator. In the earliest entry, I reflect on my fears about making any public statements about anything related to education and how that might impact my workplace. In much later entries, I write about my perspective on the problems with the American educational system. These journals provided a rich source for examining how my thinking has grown and changed in my time as a school
leader while also allowing me to remember various lived experiences that may not have been recorded in such a public entry, but set the stage for whatever I wrote in the weblog.

**Work from doctoral studies.** I have kept all of my tasks and assignments from doctoral work including reflections and reading notes. Many of these documents include “journey of understanding” reflections from various courses through which I discussed how my knowledge had changed as a result of the course. These documents are more academic-based lived experiences—thorists I read, ideas that opened my mind, readings that changed my understanding of myself. Some of this reactivated experience has already appeared in this work (such as my discussion of Parker Palmer’s impact on my understanding). These works provided reactivation of the academic knowledge I have gained that has impacted my growth.

Pinar (2012) stated the emphasis in this first step is the past as it was “not (yet) its reconstruction in the present” (p. 45). By reading and rereading these sources, I tried to re-experience moments. For instance, I tried to remember how it felt the first time I stepped into my own classroom as a teacher and the first time I had my own office as an administrator. I remembered the experience of moving to a new city far from my hometown to take a position in leadership. I remembered students I taught, teachers with whom I worked, conversations I had, and feelings I felt. These were reactivated by this first step.

**Imagining Possible Futures**

In the second or progressive step, Pinar (2012) stated one should look toward what is not yet the case: “The student . . . imagines possible futures, including fears as
well as fantasies of fulfillment” (p. 46). I did this work in setting the stage for this self-study. I consulted literature on leadership theory in order to develop a vision for myself as leader. This was a kind of holistic leadership identity (Volckmann, 2012) that existed beyond the high-stress educational environment and its consequential survival mode (Klimek et al., 2008). My vision was to embody the principles of an integral leader as set forth by Putz and Raynor (2005) functioning at Kegan’s (1982) fifth stage of consciousness with enough separation between self and the sociocultural and political organization of education to make “good sense” (Ylimaki, 2010) in my role responsibilities. I wanted to be both critically reflective (Brookfield, 1998) and to have a democratic disposition.

Going into this self-study, I did not presume to be a perfect (or even near-perfect) embodiment of this vision for myself. It was an ideal future leader identity created in a present (now past) temporal moment. At the beginning of this endeavor, this was the future I imagined for myself.

**Examining Past and Present**

In the third step, one begins to analyze the past and present (Pinar, 2012). Pinar further defined this step: “One’s distantiation from the past and extrication from the future functions to create a subjective . . . space of freedom in the present . . . wherein we attempt to discern how the past inheres in the present” (p. 46). The findings of this self-study become an enactment of Pinar’s (2012) third step in that they attempt to bring together past professional moments (reactivated through the first step) and present
moments. The purpose in doing so is to understand how contemporary culture and past historical moments “become particularized” in one’s subjectivity in the moment.

Working through this step necessitated first, identifying present influences, which I did through self-study analysis. As I collected and analyzed data for self-study, I continued to read and reread the data sources listed for currere work (personal and public journals and doctoral work). I engaged the help of my critical friend in critically reflecting on these lived experiences and their possible relation to present moments. Brookfield (1998) contended that critical reflection cannot be done in isolation; therefore, in the same monthly meetings through which I met with one of my critical friends to discuss self-study data collection and analysis, I also engaged this critical friend in discussions of my personal story. This particular critical friend and I have a personal relationship spanning several years, which enabled her to make specific references to stories from my journey that may have connections to this research. As areas of influence and specific influences emerged, my critical friend and I were able to better refine our discussions of my experiences to draw more succinct connections between my narrative and my data.

In writing Chapter 4 of this self-study, I identified past and present moments that were interwoven with the areas of influence found through self-study work. These moments were the result of the first three steps of Pinar’s (2012) currere method, intense reflection, and personal discussions with a critical friend who was familiar with my professional experiences. They were an effort to embody the point of currere, which is
“an intensified engagement with daily life, animated, paradoxically, by an ironic detachment from it” (Pinar, 2012, p. 46).

**Synthesizing**

In synthesizing, the personal becomes public, as is the case with this self-study undertaking, which will be shared publicly. Boler (as cited in Pinar, 2012) stated self-reflection “may result in no measurable change or good to others or oneself” (p. 47). In keeping with this, I did not begin this work in an effort to make measurable changes for either myself or others, but instead, I aimed to understand myself in a given historical moment while aiming to continuing developing as both a leader and human being. Pinar (2012) said synthesizing is the “moment in which self-study becomes reconstructed as public service” (p. 47), and I hope to offer the work completed through this self-study as a public demonstration of one person’s search for identity.

**Other Considerations**

The personal nature of this work begets unique considerations in terms of both ethics and trustworthiness. Below I explore each of these considerations and the efforts I took to establish trust and credibility in my work.

**Ethics**

Corbin and Strauss (2015) identified three key areas of concern in regards to ethics in qualitative research. The first of these areas is participants. Because of the nature of this research and its focus on myself as the source of data, data collection device, and interpreter, participants were not utilized as they are often utilized when interviews, surveys, and observations are conducted. Any feedback collected from
teachers and colleagues about my leadership was done through anonymous means with voluntary participation posing no danger or threat to potential participants. This study also met the requirements of the university’s Institutional Review Board protocol.

The second area of consideration is ethics in the research, itself, which is likened to “integrity of method . . . [consideration of] time and financial constraints . . . [and] responsibility to participants and the profession to publish the results” (pp. 13-14). I have addressed integrity of method through a detailed description of my data collection and analysis methods that are also reflected in my research journals from throughout the process. These journal entries also allowed me to be transparent and to have ethical fidelity to the method of self-study. As the subject of study was myself and I also served as the researcher, there were no issues regarding time and financial constraints that I experienced during my work. Finally, the obligation to publish is both inherent in the dissertation process and an expectation extolled in Pinar’s (2012) fourth step to currere. I intend to make my work readily available through the Electronic Theses and Dissertation Center.

The third element of ethics, according to Corbin and Strauss (2015), is the researcher. To this end, the “researcher has an ethical responsibility to self, to participants, and to the profession to produce the highest quality work that he or she is capable of” (p. 14). Corbin and Strauss cautioned against becoming too involved in the research process and becoming physically or emotionally drained, which contributes to one’s inability to think critically. I believe what fueled this work was a deep and personal desire to really understand myself as a leader in a new context. I needed a
systematic method by which to understand my new context, new role, and my vision of myself as leader. These intrinsic motivations paired with a critical friend undergoing the same life experiences concurrently allowed me to meet these ethical responsibilities.

Trustworthiness

One of the great challenges in self-study and currere work is to establish trustworthiness and credibility in the data and findings. In both self-study and currere, the researcher is the instrument, analyzer, and interpreter, which means objectivity of interpretation and rigor of data collection can be brought to question.

Lincoln and Guba (1993) posed four criteria that lend themselves to the “trustworthiness” of research. These criteria include: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Self-study acknowledges and honors the postmodern assumption that the ‘self’ cannot be separated from the research process or in teaching (Samaras & Freese, 2006, p. 13), nor can “self” be separated from the intensely personal nature of currere reflection; therefore, trustworthiness, a commonly-accepted term in self-study research as it reflects the socially-constructed nature of “truth” (LaBoskey, 2004), depends on how the reader accepts the researcher’s interpretation of data and transparency in reporting findings. I contend that what is “true” in my self-study is a self-perceived, temporal moment of self-understanding. In order to best capture this temporal moment, I articulated my beliefs in the temporal in my discussions of being human (Kegan, 1982) and “. . . not yet” (Greene, 2011, p. 1). I also explained the ways in which I engaged critical friends as sounding boards throughout the study as a way to look at my work from varying perspectives, for a more refined temporal “truth.”
According to Loughran and Northfield (1998), “truth” for the reader can also be established through the inclusion of “sufficient detail of the complexity and context of the situation” (p. 13). In describing both the sociocultural and political context surrounding the work of school leaders and, more specifically, the context of my professional work in my own situation, I wanted to impart to my readers the complexity and context surrounding my work. Specifically, I wanted to relay the feeling of a “high stress environment” and survival mode. My findings convey these contexts as well.

Also, findings should include triangulation of data to further develop trustworthiness. Triangulation occurs “when you collect data from a variety of data sources” and it serves as “a way of strengthening the validity of your study” (Samaras & Freese, 2006, p. 87). In my findings, I tried to let the data speak for itself by providing many direct and indirect references to occurrences found in my collection methods (journals, emails, etc.). Use of currere also helped to triangulate as the narratives I have included show that the areas of influence identified in this work have connections to my previous lived experiences. In the spirit of total transparency, I also included screenshot images from throughout my data collection and analysis process that show my precise thinking at each stage, and I highlighted examples of my changing thinking in my description of analyzing data. I also maintained a researcher’s journal through which I detailed the actual data analysis process and currere reflection as it happened.

While interpretive in nature, both self-study and currere require critical reflection. As previously described, critical reflection is a 360-degree view of how one’s behaviors, actions, and words are interpreted by others, which means it must involve others in the
process. It is defined as “a process of inquiry involving practitioners in trying to
discover, and research, the assumptions that frame how they work” (Brookfield, 1998, p.
197). Another method I used to aid in establishing trustworthiness while also fulfilling
the needs of critical reflection was through involvement of a critical friend. I met with
two separate critical friends who served a variety of purposes throughout the process.
The first, I met with once a month and communicated consistently via email and text.
The second, I met with bimonthly. In each case, I shared my data and what I thought the
data were saying. My critical friends were able to offer alternative perspectives and
suggest other explanations for what the data might be saying. In doing this, I was,
essentially, the subject of our discussions through the review of my collected data and
organizing thoughts. These discussions provided a platform for more public critical
reflection as a means of establishing trustworthiness in my work.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I traced my actions in data collection and analysis through each of
two concurrent stages of research. The first stage was focused on systematic self-study to
answer my first two research questions, and the second was focused on interpretive
currere narratives to answer my third research question. In the following chapter, I share
the findings of this research organized around two overarching areas of influence:
internal and external.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

“Identity lies in the intersection of the diverse forces that make up my life.”

~ Parker Palmer (1998, p. 13)

Revisiting Purpose

The current contemporary discourse defines quality leadership in terms of inputs and outputs—what leading behaviors amount to improved student test scores in an era of accountability (Ylimaki, 2010) and standardized management (Henderson & Gornik, 2007). I envisioned for myself a kind of holistic leadership (Volckmann, 2012) that exists beyond this high-stress environment and its consequential survival mode (Klimek et al., 2008) to make “good sense” (Ylimaki, 2010) out of the sociocultural and political educational climate and to embody critical reflection (Brookfield, 1998) and a democratic disposition.

The act of self-study undertaken through this project necessitated thinking beyond survival. In the moment, data collection (journaling, tracking tasks) was a reflection of survival mode in that it captured a response, a behavior, or an action as it occurred or soon after it occurred. However, through the systematic process of “read[ing]” and “reread[ing]” (Ylimaki, 2010) this data, I was engaged in the embodiment of my vision of critical reflection in leadership. This work also propelled me into a perpetual circuit of inquiry (Ryan, 2011) in which I invoked Kegan’s (1982) fifth stage of consciousness because self as leader in an organizational context became the subject of study.
I undertook this research endeavor as an attempt to understand the current influences on my identity as a school leader in my professional context as Curriculum Director in a rural school district. I wanted to better understand the following research questions:

1. What influences provide the context for my leading role?
2. How do these influences affect my ability to be a democratic and critically reflective leader?
3. How do I deconstruct and reconstruct my role identity through past and present professional experiences?

This chapter also serves as an examination of past and present, or the analytical third step in Pinar’s (2012) method of currere. Throughout this chapter are narratives identified through the first two steps of Pinar’s method as past and present moments that were interwoven with the areas of influence found through self-study work. I have italicized these passages to signify their development through the method of currere and to differentiate this work from self-study data and analysis.

**Organization of Data Analysis**

In the spirit of both integral theory (Wilber, 1998) and reconstructive postmodernism (Kegan, 1994), these findings are first presented as differentiated influences. The holistic self as leader has been deconstructed into some of its component pieces—those that were consciously identified through self-study work as having an influence in a given historical moment. These differentiated influences are divided into two areas: (a) Internal Influences and a single (b) External Influence. After closely
examining each of these areas, I then reintegrate the influences to reconstruct a holistic understanding of myself as a leader based on what was revealed through the data. My aim in looking at myself holistically was to understand how my envisioned qualities of democratic and critically reflective leadership manifest through these influences.

**Deconstructing Areas: Internal and External Influences**

I defined internal influences as influences in my leader role that are either affected by something within myself, such as personality traits and personal biases or values, or perceived through a personal interpretive lens. Influences that were internal were affected by who I was in the given historical moment in my journey of being human (Kegan, 1982). As detailed in the previous chapter, through a process of cyclical coding and recoding to hone into emergent understandings data indicated four specific influences: (a) Personal Beliefs, (b) Creating a Leading Role for Myself, (c) Balancing Leading Role and Self, and (d) Relating as an Individual to the Collective.

I defined the area of external influence as elements of my leader role influenced by or affected by other entities—things over which I do not necessarily have direct control. During the process of data analysis, I began with several specific external influences, including “co-dependent impact”, “directional pull”, and “expectations of others.” However, as I refined the specific influences, I realized data I had connected to “co-dependent impact” and “directional pull” did not fit how I had defined external influences—I had direct control over how I perceived my co-dependency on others, and I had direct control over which tasks I completed during my work day (directional pull). Therefore, both co-dependent impact and directional pull were subsumed into specific
influences contained within the area of internal influences. This left only one specific external influence: expectations of others. It is important to note that although I have defined this as an external influence, I as the researcher and interpreter of data am still applying an internal, personal, interpretive lens to analyzing data.

I differentiated external from internal by causation. Internal influences stem from something within myself, they start with who I am and my understandings of my leading role. Expectations of others, however, are external influences, because they start with something beyond me, reflecting someone else’s understanding of my role, and I am left to act in response. In most cases, as I explore, external influences seep into my work from somewhere/someone else and become internal influences—affecting my role from the outside in.

**Area 1: The Internal**

Internal influences were defined as influences in my leader role that are either affected by something within myself or perceived through a personal interpretive lens. This area is most closely aligned with Volckmann’s (2012) internal-entity and internal-context quadrants, though I found it challenging to clearly articulate a difference between “entity” and “context” because both were the subjects of a personal, interpretive lens. Data related to this first area yielded four main types of interrelated internal influences: (a) Personal Beliefs, (b) Creating a Leading Role for Myself, (c) Balancing Leading Role and Self, and (d) Relating as an Individual to the Collective.
Personal Beliefs

Data connected to this area of influence related to personal values, beliefs, philosophies, and ways of thinking that have developed over time. These beliefs are reflected throughout each of the internal influences, which demonstrated Walker’s (1970) definition of a platform, or the beliefs one brings into approaching tasks. My early experiences in teaching taught me that not all educators had the same personal beliefs driving their practices.

There was a moment when I began teaching that I realized not everyone thought the same way I did. I was relatively new to the classroom and the school district, having only taught a single year before this moment, but I was assigned to lead a grade level teacher team with very little direction from the building principal about what that actually meant. I wasn’t sure if we were supposed to sit around and talk about our students, make parent phone calls, grade, or discuss happenings in the school, but somehow I was supposed to lead. There was a lot going on politically in education at that moment: discussion about a first attempt at national standards for English and math content areas, conversations around merit pay tied to student performance on tests, and political movement on a brand new evaluation system for teachers that promised to get the “bad teachers” out of the classrooms.

As a teacher, I thought these were the issues in which all teachers were interested. I was personally very interested in staying informed about these issues, and I wanted to discuss them with my colleagues who I thought naturally
shared the same interests. During my first meeting as team leader, I had a list of subjects to cover centered around what I thought was happening socioculturally and politically in education. I was excited and invigorated at the thought of this discussion because I believed all my team members would come to the meeting with the same knowledge that I had, the same excitement I felt, the same interest in what I thought was of the utmost importance.

My colleagues humored me for the first few minutes of the meeting while I tried to engage them in conversations, but it soon became clear that what was happening in my head was not also happening in my colleagues’. We did not have the same understanding of what was important to discuss; we hardly had the same understanding of the purpose of these team meetings!

Merely ten minutes into my first experience leading a team of teachers, I realized who I was, personally, was different than who each of them were. We were all bringing something entirely different to these team meetings, and no two of us thought exactly alike. As I felt myself beginning to construct an identity for myself as being different from my colleagues, I also felt a reconstruction of my identity as a teacher—for I learned that being a teacher was not what I initially envisioned it to be because each individual teacher had his or her own personal beliefs.

**Belief in multiple truths.** The first personal belief influencing my identity is a reflection of lingering influences from those early professional years; it is a belief in multiple truths. Recognition of my own different thoughts and interests, which I later
connected to the influences of a belief in continual reconstruction (Kegan, 1994) and developmental process of becoming (Greene, 2011), became a personal commitment to acknowledging that others have their own truths and people think and believe differently than I. Such thinking appeared to drive my perception of educators as a whole: “I really believe at our core educators think they are doing what’s best—even if one person’s ‘best’ is very different than another person’s ‘best’” (Author’s personal journal, August 13, 2015). The belief also pushed me to question how organizations function and how decisions are made with so many differing opinions at stake (Author’s personal journal, August 13, 2015).

**Commitment to seeking feedback.** A second personal belief showing influence was a commitment to seeking feedback and input from others, which manifested itself in the form of frequent surveys, such as a district-wide needs assessment I created and worked with principals to administer at the beginning of the year. The assessment was revised to include not just *needs*, but also culture and climate questions to gather feedback about these elements of the district. Certified staff were asked several questions about professional development including two Likert scale questions (“In the past, PD provided by the district has been helpful” and “I frequently use Google apps in my classroom”) and several open-ended, short response questions, including: “The most helpful PD experience was . . .?” “This was helpful because . . .;” and “The least helpful PD experience was . . .;” “This was not helpful because . . .” Certified and classified staff were also asked Likert scale questions about climate and culture, including: “I am satisfied with [the district],” “I am able to share my ideas and opinions with school
leadership,” and “I am involved in decisions that affect my work.” This feedback became the basis for conversation during the first district leadership team meeting of the year during which we drew collectively discussed and drew insight about professional development and the district.

In addition to formal surveys inviting feedback, I also used professional networks to obtain feedback about what other districts were doing. In a survey of network curriculum directors and superintendents, I elicited information about how districts were implementing certain specific state mandates, which helped our district leadership better understand our progress in comparison. I also did this in another email with countywide curriculum directors to understand their advanced science course progressions.

All of these examples were concerted efforts to consider as many different perspectives, “multiple truths,” as possible. Feedback from others on my performance emerged as a core personal belief, but despite this, feedback from others about myself has been a struggle for me.

*At a previous workplace, my supervisor used a districtwide survey to gather feedback about how well I was fulfilling my role responsibilities. The questions were created by our department collectively, which gave me the ability to customize questions about myself to what I saw as fulfilling my role. Effectively, I was asking teachers how well I was embodying what I determined (at that time) to be my ideal vision of leadership.*

*No one saw the results other than my direct supervisor, but given the opportunity to see all of the feedback, I chose not to do so. I was nervous that*
others would not see me the way I saw myself—I thought I was doing an alright job as I was only in my second year in the role and district, and I thought things were going smoothly. I was scared the results would not reflect what I wanted them to say, and I didn’t know how I would handle thinking I was letting people down. I could not impart distance between myself as leader and myself as human being, and I saw feedback as a potentially threatening personal attack. My identity as a person was tightly constructed around my identity as a leader.

Because I never looked at the feedback, I never knew what constructive input I could have gleaned from the rest of the district.

**Belief in consistent expectations.** A third personal belief that influenced my work was a belief in consistent expectations. Although data suggested I believed in multiple truths, I also held to a single standard (mine) of expectations for colleagues. I extolled this set of standards in a reflection.

[I expect] teachers to behave like professionals. I expect them to use their resources and to access information that is readily available to them. I expect the same out of principals as well as my own family. I want the best for people, and I expect them to rise to high standards. (Author’s personal journal, September 11, 2015)

I later defined these standards more specifically as:

- expecting others to put forth adequate and appropriate effort to get the information and learning opportunities they need to progress in the education profession,
to conduct themselves professionally in all professional situations,
and to hold themselves as teachers and leaders to the same standards to which they hold their students. (Author’s personal journal, September 11, 2015)

Another standard of expectation I set was a belief in educators as moral and ethical professionals, which meant I believed they made sound moral and ethical judgments, specifically in relation to their professional responsibilities. Such beliefs showcased themselves in an administrative-level conversation about the use of social media in the district. Having participated in similar discussions in previous districts, I anticipated and received a fearful response to the idea of unblocking Internet-based social networks. I met this fear with an argument about the moral and ethical responsibility of educators to teach children digital literacy. High expectations and my belief in educators’ moral and ethical judgments played a significant role in my response to a request to create board policies detailing acceptable teacher behavior on social media:

95% of our teachers will use Twitter appropriately, and maybe 5% will do things we don’t want them to do. Why would we write policies and restrictions to address the unprofessional 5% when we should concentrate on the good that will come out of the other 95%. (Author’s personal journal, September 11, 2015)

One response to this comment began, “What if someone…” and veered into expecting the worst of educational professionals. My response again reflected the personal beliefs I set consistently for others, “Then it is our responsibility as an administrative team to address that teacher’s lack of professionalism” (Author’s personal journal, September 11, 2015).
All of these beliefs affected my professional work both consciously (in that I recognized and processed which beliefs were affecting a moment) and subconsciously (in that the beliefs were present, but I did not recognize them in the moment). While in some cases, such as with the aforementioned formal surveys, I was actively and consciously acting in-the-moment on a personal belief (feedback, in that situation), in other cases, such as in face-to-face interactions, my varying perspectives at play in the act of communicating were more relegated to my subconscious.

**Creating a Leading Role for Myself**

This second area of internal influence was defined as ways in which I self-defined my role responsibilities based on my perceptions of what my role should be. Defining my role began on my first day in this new position.

*When I became the Curriculum Director, I became the first to hold this position in my current district. Previously, there was a curriculum “consultant,” hired through the county Educational Service Center, who played a distinctly different role. According to the superintendent, the “consultant” distinction created a different set of expectations for that individual than the “Director” designation I was given. Along with the title change, I came to the role with a personal idea of how my responsibilities would be different than the previous responsibilities, and the district had its changing expectations as well.*

*On my first day in my new office, I was met with a desk covered in binders, a bookshelf filled with curriculum books, standards, and additional binders, and a filing cabinet with archived documents and standardized assessment score*
records. I received my email account soon after the Board of Education accepted my contract in June, so I had already been receiving a few sporadic emails throughout the summer, but not enough to fully understand what I was to do in my new position.

As I sat at my desk and signed on to my computer for the first time, I was faced with figuring out what I needed to do, how I needed to start, what was important to accomplish as quickly as possible. This was not the first time I was given a blank slate in a leader role. As both a secondary curriculum coordinator (previously) and (prior to that) a literacy specialist, I also started my first days on the job with a blank desk and a computer. I have learned through these experiences that role responsibilities, and therefore, role identities develop over time as I muddle through beginning each new position.

Much of what I did during the first days, weeks, months, was to establish my responsibilities by sharing with others what I thought I should be doing (versus what I thought I should not be doing) based on what I knew about what other curriculum directors often do, creating tasks for myself based on what I have done in the past as well as what it seemed needed to be accomplished, and establishing myself by using my knowledge and skills to address whatever I could address in the functioning of the district. Creating a role became one of my first priorities in each of my “blank slate” jobs.
Though I address the district’s expectations of me as an “external influence,” in this current discussion I more closely examine how I created my own leading role identity in three main areas: curriculum, streamlining, and consistency.

Much of what I accomplished during data collection for this self-study in the area of curriculum was to complete technical challenges (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002), in that I chose to spend time setting up and understanding processes. For example, one of the binders on my new desk was filled with lists of district-adopted textbooks and programs. Beginning in August, I immediately received questions about when new books and programs would be purchased for courses and content areas. I felt it was necessary for me to quickly create a single database containing all textbook purchase information and to share this database with principals and teachers as a way for us all to see when purchases would be made. The process became a means to an end: in order to share information for the sake of making collaborative decisions and involving others, I felt the need to make a shared document that would give us a common reference point. In order to embody the quality of democratic leadership, I felt I had to first complete this technical task.

Another technical curriculum challenge involved cleaning up various course progressions at the secondary level. Such work reflected the pressures of a standardized management paradigm (Henderson & Gornik, 2007) because “cleaning up” entailed reading through curriculum documents and making sure standards were taught within and across grade levels. Accomplishing this work involved several repeated meetings with various parties (secondary principals, science or math teachers, all junior high staff,
career center representatives), but conversations were, for the most part, focused around technical aspects of making curriculum changes, such as who would teach the course, in which grade level would it fit, and how the course could be coded to fit certain teaching licenses. This example highlights both current educational discourse as well as survival mode in that it was something we “had” to “get finished” in order to be “aligned” with state expectations and testing mandates. Deeper conversations, those more readily aligned with ideas of making “good sense” (Ylimaki, 2010) and “practical judgments” (Henderson & Gornik, 2007), occurred in content-area meetings such as my meeting with the high school and junior high science teachers to discuss content progression. These meetings were born out of a need to meet mandates, but I tried to embody democratic leadership by facilitating discussions to make collaborative (rather than unilateral) decisions. I went into the meeting with high school teachers prepared to treat the situation as one of technical merit with a focus on higher-level courses and testing mandates.

[The district] currently has no advanced track at the [junior high], which hurts students at the HS level because they struggle to make it up to the higher end science courses.

Testing changes in [our state], however, require that 8th grade students this year can ONLY either take an 8th grade science based test OR a Biology test. So, I wanted to propose to the secondary science teachers that we incorporate an 8th grade Biology class into our tracks and flip Physical Science (traditionally a 9th grade course) and Biology (traditionally a 10th grade course). Not knowing
the content well enough to understand if this would make sense, it was important to talk to the content experts for their feedback.

Going into the conversation, the only real support I had was the testing mandate, the need for getting kids to advanced science opportunities, and previous science conversations I have had about how kids are not ready for the Algebra components of Physical Science (by flipping bio and physical, all kids would have completed Algebra 1 before taking Physical Science as well, which should have helped with this issue). (Author’s personal journal, October 13, 2015)

However, this meeting allowed me to venture out of the role of curriculum worker as technician (Apple, 1990) and into the role identity I envisioned as transformational leader.

Our conversation meandered through discussion about the culture of the district’s students and community with a concentration on teacher’s content knowledge expectations for graduating students. The teachers spoke freely, and whether I agreed or (in some cases, vehemently) disagreed, we were discussing with each other rather than “at” each other. We discussed preparedness and how learning the content builds over time. (Author’s personal journal, October 13, 2015)

In a leader role, I have engaged in other discussions like this in the past. These discussions began with me coming to discuss facts and information, and soon they transformed into what I think were more democratic conversations about coming to collective understandings. I believe my participation in the meeting helped me to
establish myself not as a content expert, which is not something I have ever aimed to be, but as someone who can engage in transformational discussions in an intelligent way with actual content experts, which is exactly the kind of leader I aim to be.

In addition to engaging with content experts, data emerged detailing my perceived role responsibility as being a “resource” in regards to curriculum. Having explicitly stated in my journals at one point, “I’m like a resource for everyone” (Author’s personal journal, September 11, 2015), I later differentiated the type of resource I was willing to be from the type of resource I was uncomfortable being. I, specifically, addressed this issue in terms of “levels of dependency,” which I defined as the level to which others are dependent on my role to do certain tasks for them. The level of dependency with which I was comfortable was “when principals and teachers rely on me for policy information and knowing the ins and outs of required mandates. I get a lot of questions about various things: evaluation procedures, current legislations, changes to testing and graduation requirements, etc.” (Author’s personal journal, November 2, 2015). The reason I appreciated being a resource for these kinds of questions was because it allowed me to give consistent answers to everyone in the district. Also, “when I don’t know the answers to questions, having them raised enables me to go and get the information I need to be able to answer them” (Author’s personal journal, November 2, 2015). The level of dependency with which I was uncomfortable occurred when others did not rise to my perceived high expectations and, instead, attempted to have me complete tasks that I believed rested within their own role responsibilities. Essentially, I saw myself as
embodying the role of a helpful resource, but I did not prefer to be “helpful” to the point of doing what I perceived as the work of others.

As I defined my role in curriculum leadership throughout this process, I also found myself defining what my role was not. This revelation came as a result of critical reflection; therefore, the act of reflecting critically on self-study data helped me realize how multiple moments of similar disappointments contributed to my role identity. When I experienced disappointment in myself for the ways in which I was inadvertently establishing my role, I was able to more clearly articulate how I did not want to be perceived as a leader. One example of this is how little I was able to get into classrooms:

I am not happy with myself because I am not getting into the buildings. I wanted to establish myself as a curriculum director who was always around, checking in on classrooms, getting out to see people and kids, but I have spent 95% of my time glued to the computer since I started. (Author’s personal journal, August 31, 2015)

Being a curriculum leader, then, did not consist of spending every day in my office—instead, I needed to define my role as one for being in the classrooms. Sitting in front of a computer amounted to being alone, and all of the visions of leadership I had for myself involved interpersonal relationships with others. In another instance, I felt like I had disappointed one building’s principal and staff because I had not made it to their opening day meeting to introduce myself:

Today, then, I feel like I have to go meet the teachers individually—I let the principal down by not going to his meeting (and he was the first to email me his
meeting time!), and I don’t want to let the teachers down by not saying hello.

(Author’s personal journal, August 19, 2015)

Defining my curriculum role meant being present for teachers and principals, building interpersonal relationships (Klimek et al., 2008), not missing out on opportunities to touch base with them. This thinking seemed to relate back to my first experience exploring the role of curriculum director:

*I was interviewing a very well-known curriculum director as part of my licensure program to become an administrator. I say well-known because educators throughout the state have seen her presentations at various conferences and she runs a weblog that many frequent. She is a leader on state committees and has done work on behalf of the state at the national level. Obviously, she was (and is) someone whom I have admired as a model for myself.*

*In this interview, I asked about the basics of her job. Having no experience as a curriculum director, her answer was my first experience in knowing what a curriculum director actually does. She told me she spent most of her days in the buildings and classrooms. She said she stopped in to see people throughout the day, and she made it a point to walk through the halls when students were changing classrooms so that she could get a teacher’s attention and show him/her something that might help with a lesson she observed them teaching. I learned through that interview that her definition of good curriculum leadership was in being with teachers and helping them better themselves through the resources she had.*
My experiences in defining my role seem to relate to these early experiences in beginning to establish an identity for the role of Curriculum Director.

Another area in which I established a role for myself in the district was in streamlining district processes, which occurred when I identified processes that were cumbersome (to me) and/or convoluted (to me) and used my personal skills and knowledge (such as with technology) to make such processes run more smoothly. I defined streamlining as an internal influence for two reasons: (a) No one explicitly asked me to do these things (in many cases, no one recognized or mentioned recognizing that a process could run more smoothly) in such a way that I consciously recognized being asked to do them, and (b) I felt I had some control as to if and how a process was put in place depending on whether or not I could figure out a way to make it better.

One example of this was pushing district administration toward using Google Docs, which is widely used in classrooms as collaboration tools. Klimek and colleagues (2008) stated leaders reserve “strong directive action” for “moments that truly require it” (p. 15), and although I did not believe I was making a “strong directive,” I was functioning in a unilateral way to move administrators. In hindsight, I would not attribute my actions to a collaborative effort or to democratic leadership, but I felt it was important to streamline because I thought it would make our work together easier and that we could collaborate more readily through shared online tools. I began pushing by initially copying and pasting administrative meeting agendas from Microsoft into Google Docs (Author’s personal journal, August 25, 2015). Then, I began taking notes at administrative meetings in the Google Doc until I realized all administrators were
suddenly coming to meetings with devices and taking notes in the document themselves (Author’s personal journal, September 11, 2015). Others joked that I was “hurling the district into Google” (Author’s personal journal, September 11, 2015).

Along the same lines, I also began setting up various Google Forms because I thought it would help technical procedures in the district run more smoothly. I felt the easier I could make some of the technical tasks through automated and online tools, the more time I could free for all educators to enact their own role responsibilities. For example, at one of our initial technology team meetings, our technology staff said that when programs or items involving technology were purchased without their knowledge, they did not have an opportunity to review the purchase to make sure it would work with our systems. When the program or item arrived, then, technology staff were forced to suddenly divert their attention from other matters to make the program or item work. To help with this (and streamline communication between principals, teachers, and tech), I created a Google Form for requesting to purchase a program or item. At each technology team biweekly meeting, we went through the tech form requests and discussed each item, leaving comments and developing plans for contacting the initial requestor. My work in the area of technology and streamlining reflected my value of collaboration—if I could set up systems that enabled others to collaborate (with or without my direct involvement), I felt like I was both embodying my vision for democratic leadership while also, somewhat subversively, engaging others in their own democratic and collaborative work as well.
The third area in which I inserted myself as having a leading role is in the area of consistency. I defined consistency as an internal influence in two distinct ways: (a) How I inserted myself into the district as the point of contact and resource for consistent information, and (b) how I pushed for consistency in communication. Consistency meant reminding others about upcoming meetings (ex. Author’s personal journal, August 14, 2015). It also meant making sure information was shared at similar times throughout the district to avoid miscommunication and to stop the “rumor mill” (Author’s personal journal, August 21, 2015). I wanted us to be “clear as a team about needs and expectations” (Author’s personal journal, August 21, 2015), and “solv[e] problems with as little disruption as possible to the organization” (Author’s personal journal, November 2, 2015). It is important to note that the kinds of information to which this belief seemed to apply were most often in reference to political mandates, once again, somewhat forcing me to adopt a standardized management style of leadership. Because of the barrage of policies creating Klimek and colleagues’ (2008) “high-stress environment,” it helped me to handle the “high-stress” by attempting to support communication consistency something it seems I have been passionate about for some time:

When I first developed my public weblog, I titled it “Turn On Your Brain,”
(because it was a poster I had hanging in my classroom at the moment when I was thinking of a title), with a subtitle, “Resources and Reflection on Contemporary Issues in Education.” Whether I realized it at the time or not, my weblog posts became (in my mind) a central hub for “correct” information for teachers. I
described myself as someone who was “interested in happenings” and who could “make policy palatable” for educators.

When I wrote, I wrote as if I was an authority on topics and while maybe I did have greater interests in educational politics than others might have, my goal was to spread “correct” information—my information based on my readings and understandings. I shared links to various documents and tried to “dispel myths” about contemporary issues because it was important to me to do the “heavy lifting” of reading legislation because I needed to be informed, but also, because I wanted to inform others.

While I was a self-proclaimed “resource for consistent information” in the district, I believed others saw this in me as well because I received frequent emails both from those within my current district as well as colleagues in other districts asking questions about interpreting policy. These were the kinds of questions I enjoyed getting (as mentioned previously) because I could provide the same answers over and over again, which I presumed kept everyone on the same page. For example, at the beginning of the year, everyone seemed confused about the changes to Student Learning Objectives, and I received several phone calls from principals and staff at two neighboring districts as well as emails and phone calls from principals, teachers, and union leadership within my own district asking for clarification. Also, at administrative team meetings, I realized questions about current happenings in legislature were directed to me—further solidifying my perception of myself as the resource for consistency.
A second element of establishing consistency in which I created a role was in how information was shared across the district. While I did not know how communication within the district occurred in the past, I found that I was the person always asking principals to wait to disseminate information until we could share it as a district. For example, with updates to the teacher evaluation system this summer, I asked principals to wait to talk to their staffs about the changes until I could create a single document highlighting the changes that could be shared across the district. Another similar example occurred when the principals finalized their testing schedules for this school year, and I asked them to share their calendars at the same time so that everyone in the district knew when the testing windows were and how many days of instruction would be affected. In other instances, I wrote email language for the principals to copy and paste into their own emails and disseminate to staff. In doing this, I inserted myself as the resource for the information while also pushing consistency in our communication.

**Balancing Leading Role and Self**

The third area of internal influence came from learning how to separate my other role identities (Ylimaki, 2010) from my professional role. It was recently that I learned to think about myself in terms of various roles:

*I was far too personally embedded in my work at a previous employer. So embedded, in fact, that I was not mentally or physically healthy. I was always tired, always stressed. As a single mother of a toddler at the time, I could not give her my energy because I was more invested in my professional life than my personal.*
It was through the course of completing an assigned literature review for a doctoral class that I happened upon Volckmann’s (2012) framework for leadership. It was a short article, hardly 20 pages in length, but after reading it, I realized I was not my work. I was a “leader” only when I was in that role; I was “leading” only when I was fulfilling those work responsibilities. The framework gave me a way to think about my inability to separate my personal and professional while also, at the same time, seemingly giving me a personal identity. Simply thinking through the framework and Volckmann’s (2012) definitions of leadership allowed me to see the various roles I played—it was a first step toward finding balance in my life.

In my analysis of this specific influence, I invoked my understanding of Volckmann’s (2012) differentiations between leader, leading, and leadership while also attempting to reach Kegan’s (1982) fifth stage of consciousness to view two identities (self as leader and self as human) as the subject of exploration. I defined balancing leading role and self in two ways: (a) Through self as leader—the balancing and intertwining of who I was as a leader fulfilling a leader role, and (b) Through self as human—who I was in the moment as a human with various roles (such as wife, mother, human) as well as who I was in the moment as a human with personal dispositions (such as exhaustion, annoyances, emotional reactions) that affected my work.

Establishing, maintaining, and protecting the balance between my various role identities is something with which I have struggled personally throughout my life. To me, being a healthy self means understanding how to prevent the stress of any single role
identity from infringing as a stress on all the other role identities—it means acknowledging and honoring the role identity separations. One way my lack of balance has manifested itself in the past is when I have allowed myself to work from home by making phone calls at all hours of the evening, continuously checking and responding to work emails all day and night and on the weekends, going into the office during my personal time, and always talking about work and education.

However, being in a new environment presented itself with a blank slate on which I could draw a line defining what I was willing to do for work during my personal time, thereby allowing for better balance between the identities. I soon realized that my new district had an established culture of not working outside of work, something I reflected on early in the school year.

One positive at least of this new district is that I don’t feel pressured to take my work home with me every day. There have been many times that I have emailed teachers, principals, or even the superintendent during out-of-work hours (ex. the weekend) and haven’t gotten a response until we were back in for work. This tells me that it’s ok to shut down when I’m away from the office. In my previous district, that was not the case. My phone rang at 10:00 at night; I received texts and emails all the time, and I was expected to respond quickly. The expectation was that you were on all the time. My new superintendent makes it clear that family is supposed to come first—which helps me keep my professional role in perspective. I’ve argued before that this is the busiest time of year for everyone in education because it’s the period during which things get set up for the year—
even with a new job and learning my role . . . I can still enjoy being a mom and the fact that [my daughter] is going to kindergarten in just a few days. In fact, tonight, we will be going to her meet the teacher night, and I’ll be able to attend without stressing about work or assessments or data. (Author’s personal journal, August 17, 2015)

Although the pressure was not there to work all the time, I still sometimes put that same pressure on myself. When I was having such a difficult time in August getting data set up for the state’s Kindergarten Readiness Assessments (KRA), the stress and worry were often enough to force me to work from home. In one occurrence, I woke up early on a Sunday stressed and worried about uploading KRA data and found myself working at 6:30am. “I woke up early this morning thinking about work. It’s a Sunday, and yet at around 6:30, I was stressed about the fact that school starts this week and I haven’t managed to get the KRA data uploaded” (Author’s personal journal, August 16, 2015).

At another time, I tried to work on the same data upload after my children were in bed: “After getting the girls to bed tonight, I decided to try again . . . just one more time to get this done since teachers are already struggling because it’s not set up” (Author’s personal journal, August 25, 2015).

Significant stress and personal struggle with accomplishing tasks tended to still encroach into my personal time and other roles, but when I could sense undue stress (those tasks and occurrences that could be postponed and dealt with at another time) and find a way to draw a more succinct boundary, I did so.
Three years ago, work emails controlled me in that my phone automatically sent a notification at the moment a new email was received, which created an immediacy—I had to read it at that moment, and I had to respond quickly. Two years ago, I used settings on my phone to prevent the immediate notification, and instead, I had to manually go into my email to sync the inbox. The downfall of this approach was that if I received 20 emails between the times when I would manually check it, and I didn’t immediately read all of those emails, the email icon on my phone would show the number of unread emails—like a constant reminder that I was “failing” to respond to people in a “timely” fashion. A year ago, I outsmarted the notifications by moving that particular icon to another screen on my phone, which meant the only way I saw the number of unread emails was if I manually changed screens and sought out that icon.

In my new position, however, I struggled from the beginning with whether or not to even put my work email on my phone. I soon realized that in order to have access to my work calendar (linked to my email account) on my phone, I had to have the email account at least set up. I tried it at the beginning. I turned on both the email and calendar settings and thought my approach with having the icon on a separate screen would be enough to separate myself from work. After reading a few frustrating emails from home late at night and spending too much time ruminating on frustrations while my children were running around, I made the decision to take email completely off my phone.
That decision came as a result of one particular email exchange: “Getting angry about this [email] . . . I just decided to remove my email from my phone. I don’t need to deal with that kind of stress when I’m at home any more” (Author’s personal journal, September 3, 2015). I also reflected on my reasoning.

Last night, I took my work email off my phone. I’m not sure if it’s because of the change in environment/culture or what, but I don’t feel obligated to have to work at home any more . . . I have a life and some freedom when I leave in the afternoon—it’s a much healthier work/life balance for me. (Author’s personal journal, September 3, 2015)

Though much of the entanglement between professional and personal identities seemed to be related to completing specific tasks (for example, the aforementioned KRA data uploads and email communications), overriding the task itself was an emotional, human response causing the blurring of lines among my various roles. For instance, KRA uploads caused “stress and worry,” an internal, which made me feel the need to work at 6:30 in the morning on a Sunday. Emails elicited an “angry” emotional response at home, which prompted me to make changes in my home life.

Another component in balancing role and self, then, that influenced my work was learning to understand and process human emotional responses as they related to and affected my professional work. The two emotions that showed most frequently were frustration and irritation, which seemed to occur simultaneously in many instances.

I became both frustrated and irritated anytime I was uncertain, which I defined in my analysis as coming from personal lack of experience or lack of prior knowledge on a
given task or subject. This occurred in various situations such as in understanding district politics and interpersonal relationships (e.g., “I can’t talk about what I’ve heard about them or reference other conversations I’ve had about them because I don’t know where people stand” [Author’s personal journal, August 13, 2015]), and clarifying everyone’s role responsibilities (e.g., “I wasn’t sure if that was what was expected or if I was overstepping into the principal’s work.” [Author’s personal journal, August 16, 2015]). Anytime I did not know something, I experienced an emotional response. For example, when I handled data uploads at the beginning of the year, I expressed frustration and irritation:

I’ve also been uploading data to other district systems, such as Achieve 3000 and Naviance. *I have no clue if I’m uploading correctly or what else I need to do.* For the Achieve 3000 stuff, for example, I uploaded just a small sample of the data on Monday and asked their tech team to let me know if I’m doing it correctly. By Friday, I hadn’t heard anything, and I see no updates in the data online. So, I uploaded a larger data sample (and entire building rather than just a grade), and I emailed our customer support rep to verify it was received. I didn’t get a response as of today. (Emphasis added. Author’s personal journal, August 16, 2015)

Uncertainty, though, was also an emotional motivator that compelled me forward in my professional work; therefore, frustration and irritation with my own lack of experience and know-how had constructive implications for the advancement of my work. In the example of the KRA data uploads, I struggled with the unknowns of learning the job responsibilities of an EMIS coordinator (the individual who would
typically upload data) because there was not an EMIS coordinator in place when the KRA data was needed. Fulfilling this task meant researching what the coordinator did and how to manage data files (see Author’s personal journal, August 14, 2015). In this particular situation, no one explicitly asked me to complete the data upload, but there was a need for it to be done. I saw the need and filled it, and in the process, my discomfort with being uncertain drove me to learn the coordinator’s role, struggle through figuring out the upload process, and complete the task.

Because I was so driven by my need to be a resource for legislative information as well as my need for the district to have correct information via consistent communications, frustration and irritation with myself when I could not answer questions compelled me to seek out answers. I did what was necessary to acquire whatever information I needed. For information about policies and state programs, I spent tremendous time reading through documents from the Department of Education, including nearly daily email updates from their various listserv email groups. In order to be more informed about district procedures, I held meetings such as a Title I meeting in response to meeting with a Title I teacher and realizing I did not know anything about Title I services. I also called together and led technology team meetings as a way to be more informed about technology and curriculum integration. When I needed more information than what I could gather alone to understand, I asked many questions. Again, no one explicitly asked me to do these things, but I was compelled to do so in order to have the information I needed to answer questions and make sure the district was consistent and communication was clear.
While uncertainty invoked such emotional responses, I also became frustrated and irritated with talking in circles, which occurred either when forward movement on a particular project was stifled or derailed by some entity or when a miscommunication created the need for repetitive corrective communications. I became easily frustrated when I wanted to move forward on decisions.

The emotional responses brought about by these kinds of situations, which all felt like high stress eliciting a survival mode, probably fed my commitment for consistency in information and communication; I felt the clearer we could be in initial communications and understanding of information, the less time we would need to spend in ongoing cyclical or repetitive conversations. I wanted less dialogue, less “confusion,” and more action.

Exhaustion was yet another human response influencing my work. It was particularly impactful in my ability to collect data throughout this process:

I never feel like I can get these journals written as I described in my initial data collection and analysis plan. I feel like I’m flying by the seat of my pants all the time, and by 3:30, I’m either exhausted (too exhausted to reflect on the day) or in a meeting, or busy working on something still. There have been days where I’ve sat at the computer all day long, digging away at a task, and suddenly, it’s just time to go home. (Author’s personal journal, September 11, 2015).

Being tired affected my ability and willingness to interact with colleagues. When I should have went to socialize with the teachers and continue focusing on building relationships, I was too exhausted . . . I am mad at myself for not taking
advantage of that opportunity, but I can’t go back and change that now. (Author’s personal journal, September 11, 2015)

I cannot help but to think about the source of such exhaustion, which I think stemmed from the busy nature of my schedule as well as the multitasking I did throughout the day.

My goal in understanding and processing these emotional responses was not to fix, correct, or stifle them, but to recognize they existed through systematic critical reflection and, potentially, develop strategies for myself to compensate for emotional responses if and when they affect my interpersonal relationships with colleagues. The better I understand my human, emotional responses and their triggers, the more I understand how who I am has an impact on my leading role.

**Relating as an Individual to the Collective**

The final internal influence realized in my data was a combination of two separate specific influences: building relationships and understanding others. As I worked through analyzing these two influences separately, I realized they were somewhat reciprocal in nature in that building relationships seemed dependent on understanding others. Both are connected to my need to have a place within the organization.

I defined building relationships as my efforts to control my behavior and responses and to act and communicate in ways that make others feel included, important, heard, and appreciated. When I thought my actions made others feel this way, I, selfishly, felt satisfied for thinking that I had an impact, but also, I believed I created a rapport of respect, collegiality, and collaboration between myself and others. As Klimek and colleagues (2008) placed interpersonal relationships at the core of their definition of
multidimensional leadership, and Putz and Raynor (2005) defined the integral leader as one who works to cultivate self-development in others, I believed that embodying these qualities of leadership meant it was my responsibility to cultivate these relationships.

One way I did this was through thinking very carefully when I responded to emails, especially those that invoked an angry or annoyed emotional response. In one such instance, I received an email that caused the following response:

My gut response to this email was 1) She wants to piggyback on my idea, 2) If she wanted to be a part of the . . . process, she should have been at the meeting in the first place, and 3) If I do this WITH her, she will want to control the entire process. (Author’s personal journal, August 18, 2015)

Because of a commitment to building relationships, I “told myself to wait and respond the following day” to prevent “my emotional response from bleeding through and destroying the relationship” (Author’s personal journal, August 18, 2015). When I did respond the following day, I was less emotional and better able to use inviting words such as “everyone will have an opportunity to provide feedback” and “I will send it to you for your review before we move forward” (Author’s personal journal, August 18, 2015).

Taking time to respond has been a valuable lesson for me:

I have learned not to reply to emails when I am angry. This has taken so much time. Sometimes I want to fire off responses when people do or say something via email that annoys me, but I have to wait until my language can be more positively tempered before I respond. I have definitely responded too quickly to a
few emails this year . . . and I cannot easily go back and fix those relationships.

(Author’s personal journal, November 2, 2015)

Another way I tried to cultivate relationships was through face-to-face interactions with others. In a conversation with a member of the committee who hired me, I was told they “wanted someone who could smile and be friendly and make people feel better about education and their jobs” (Author’s personal journal, August 16, 2015), and I tried to carry this into my interactions by smiling and being friendly but also by being transparent in my thinking. I shared my understandings and the reasons for these understandings willingly with others as a way to build trustworthiness and, thereby, rapport.

In both email and face-to-face interactions, I tailored my actions and communication to those with whom I was interacting. In order to do this effectively, I made a concerted effort to understanding others, which came from the aforementioned personal belief that people’s actions and beliefs are a result of their own personal life journeys. These individual life journeys become each person’s motivation, their attitudes and dispositions; they temper verbal and nonverbal communication styles; they create the background for how individuals present themselves to others. How I came to understand others was through two methods: (a) second-hand through gossip (e.g., “everyone is telling me everyone else’s dirt” [Author’s personal journal, August 13, 2015]), or (b) first-hand through my perception of face-to-face, phone, and email interactions. In each of these methods, coming to an understanding was a multilayered endeavor. Second hand gossip, for instance, was influenced by the motivations and intentions of the
gossiper as well as my perception of the gossiper and the subject of the gossip. In my journals, I reflected after a gossipping incident centered on how I was enacting my role:

When [a colleague gossiped to me about another colleague’s perception of my leadership], I was instantly on the defensive—feeling like I was somehow failing the organization because I am not [my predecessor]. Because I became defensive, I didn’t take the time to think more about the situation and try to understand [the colleague’s] motivations in telling me this. It was only after several days (a week) of processing that I started to [see the multiple layers of perception involved in the exchange]. (Author’s personal journal, November 2, 2015)

First-hand understanding was also influenced by a layer of my perception; my own background and experiences with others influenced how I perceived (and understood) others. For example, in my first meeting with teachers’ union leadership, I reflected on my perception as I walked into the room:

Yesterday was my first ‘run in’ with the union. I call it a ‘run in’ because it always seems like no matter how open your disposition may be when going to meet with union leaders, it always feels like everyone is going to battle. Having been a union leader myself when I was a teacher, I don’t feel like I was always on the defensive or angry, but being on the ‘other, non-union’ side of education now, every time I walk into a room knowing a union issue is to be discussed, I sense the palpability of dissonance as soon as I walk in. (Author’s personal journal, October 28, 2015)
What is important about this initial perception is that it influenced how I perceived the entire conversation and my understanding of other individuals in the room. Each person was defined by his or her “position” of leadership or “side” of education.

Throughout these first months, I asked questions and met with others to “ascertain their perspectives and philosophies” (Author’s personal journal, October 20, 2015), and I tried to understand district politics, such as the dynamics among and between people. No matter how much I tried to commit to understanding in these situations, in the moment of interaction, my perception always influenced understanding. I did not recognize this until I was able to critically reflect on multiple similar moments to see a compounding effect. Again, by placing self as leader in the organization as the subject of exploration (Kegan, 1982), I could draw connections between my perceptions and their impacts on interpersonal relationships. In light of this understanding, I am better equipped to continue my efforts to acknowledge and appreciate the diversity of experiences of others while also continuing my process of being human.

**Area 2: The External**

The external influence on my leader role was a result of an “other”—dynamics over which I did not necessarily have direct control. It is important to note that although I have labeled this as “external influence,” I as the researcher and interpreter of data, was still applying an internal, personal, interpretive lens. I differentiated external from internal influences by their causation. Internal influences stemmed from something within myself, they started with who I was and my understandings of my leading role. Data revealed one significant external influence: Expectations of my Role From Others,
an influence that I perceived to start with something beyond me, situated within someone
else’s understanding of my role. I perceived a lack of personal control over the influence.
Allowing others to define my role for me presented professional challenges:

I have never responded well to being told what to do. My previous supervisor
once said I am not someone who can ever be micromanaged. I guess it can be
seen as both a positive and a negative—positive in that I tend to have a sense of
what I feel like needs to be done and I do it, but negative in that I don’t like being
derailed from what I see as my own personal responsibilities.

A few months into my role as literacy specialist, I had established my own
responsibilities. I was running a blog for the organization, developing the
website, and building social networks through which I made connections for
presentations at school districts across the state. I felt comfortable in the way
that I had designed my role.

My supervisor, paired with my colleague, the other literacy specialist,
wanted me to spend more time finding lesson plans online and reviewing them
against English language arts content standards for inclusion in our library of
lesson plans, but I felt as if it were a complete waste of time. After all, with the
Internet growing and expanding every day, the speed at which I could
individually review lesson plans and get them into our library was much slower
than many organizations (set up for that specific purpose) could review them. I
did the task for a few days and quickly became bored with the role.
In the same work context, I was later told a new responsibility would be to review online programs and courses and compare them against content standards for alignment. Every day, I was to sit at my computer and work my way through these resources. It was slow and tedious work, and with both the lesson plans and program reviews, I quickly missed the role I had created for myself. The expectations of others trumped my expectations of myself.

I did not remain in the position for much longer because I needed to get back to work I loved.

Expectations of my Role from Others

As mentioned, the position of Curriculum Director was technically new to the district because my predecessor held the position of consultant and was employed through the county educational service center. This being the case, my colleagues seemed as unsure of my role as I was upon starting the year, which created the need for them to “make use” of me in such a way as to define for myself and them what they needed me to do. From this process, I determined an area of external influence on how I self-identify my leader role was in how others defined my role. This was an external influence because it started with their needs and showed itself in the holes in their knowledge, experience, or abilities that it became necessary to them for me to fill. The greatest “holes” I was expected to fill seemed to rest in the areas of policy and legislation, testing, and curriculum development, which reflected the dominant discourse of educational leaders that sees leadership as an input with a direct connection to student
achievement as an output (Ylimaki, 2010). What was expected of me seemed to match the standardized management paradigm (Henderson & Gornik, 2007).

I realized these expectations in several ways beginning with my initial interview for the position. In the first round of interviews, the hiring committee consisted of all the building principals; the second round was with the superintendent. In both rounds, questions asked and discussions held helped shape my understanding of their needs, which focused primarily on testing, policy and legislation, and statewide initiatives such as Resident Educator and the College Credit Plus program. During the first administrative team meeting in August, the superintendent asked me to present updates on summer legislation, and as I presented, I realized I was the only person in the meeting room who knew the information I was sharing. Such a request coupled with the nonverbal and verbal communication cues I received in the meeting again helped define the role I was expected to fulfill. Part of my responsibility was to know, in detail, about these concepts, to share that information, and to answer questions or find answers to questions as they arose.

Teachers also depended on me for similar information regarding policy and legislation. I began receiving emails from teachers in early August to answer questions related to Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) and Student Growth Measures (SGMs) (Author’s personal journal, August 17, 2015). I also received questions from teacher mentors in the Resident Educator program about changes to the program and what they needed to modify in their plans with mentees. I also heard from several teachers who wanted to meet specifically with me and discuss committees as they existed in the district.
in previous years. I noticed these requests bypassed building principals, which told me teachers felt I was the responsible party. These expectations of my role by others reflect the findings Burch (2007) found in her study of instructional leadership models: “Ninety-four per cent of school administrators across the three districts identified district administrators (and the materials generated by their offices) as the portal through which they were kept informed of district policy developments” (p. 204).

In terms of testing, I realized I was the district test coordinator when others labeled me as such. The district treasurer communicated with the state Department of Education to give me various roles on behalf of the district including PreK and Elementary Data Manager, K–8 Testing Coordinator, 9–12 Testing Coordinator, Ohio’s Computer-Based Assessment Coordinator, and many others. In doing so, I became designated for many different tasks. By declaring me the PreK and Elementary Data Manager, for example, I became the point of contact for the KRA (which explained why I spent so much time on it at the beginning of the year). I also received direct questions from the primary principal and primary teachers about KRA data, which told me I needed to accomplish the task. My colleagues began forwarding every testing email they received from the state Department of Education to my email, and I noticed in most cases, no one was reading them other than I.

During administrative meetings, I realized if I did not put testing coordination on the meeting agenda, we did not discuss it. Being the only intimately-informed person in regards to testing, others waited on me to present new information or to coordinate testing dates and devices. As increasingly more questions arose throughout fall for the
fall testing window, I was the district’s primary contact for teachers, secretaries, and principals. The district reinforced my role as testing coordinator and defined for me what I needed to coordinate. The kind of leadership it seemed I was expected to embody was not the kind of leadership I aimed to embody—there was no calling for a democratic disposition nor for critical reflection. Conversations were about keeping students in-district instead of losing them to colleges (reflecting Burch’s [2007] market model leadership), and my value seemed to reside in what knowledge I had about testing and data analysis. My development as a leader and stages of consciousness were moot in comparison to my role as a part of the “implementation machine.”

Ironically, as the Curriculum Director, actually doing any curriculum work seemed to be a low priority in others’ expectations of me. Nearly all the questions I received throughout data collection for this self-study were related to technical tasks: read a document and answer questions, follow legislation and keep everyone informed, review SLOs and SGMs, set up a system for Resident Educator, organize a schedule for testing. The superintendent did, however, focus one of my professional yearly goals on creating a five-year plan for curriculum adoptions and alignment work, which reflected Apple’s (1990) commentary on curriculum leaders as technicians. Many questions I received in regards to curriculum were about purchasing programs and textbook adoptions, so I understood one of my tasks to be setting up and sharing a plan for purchases with the district. Other questions, primarily from the elementary building, centered around instructional practices related to building initiatives and bringing in consulting presenters to work with teachers. One teacher explicitly said to me, “You have to be in the
classrooms. How will you know anything about curriculum or instruction in this district if you aren’t in the classrooms?” (Personal communication, July 14, 2015), but overall, I received little feedback from others about what they needed me to do with curriculum. This limited range of expectations from others in terms of curriculum allowed me the room to create my own role identity in this area as I discussed in internal influences.

Others’ expectations of me, as I perceived them, helped me understand my role in the district, but it was a simplistic reflection of contemporary discourse and the expectations of leaders. It seemed my value as a leader lay in my ability to read and understand data, to provide efficiency within the district, and to produce assessment results, which were the very same values Ylimaki (2010) described for leaders. From their external cues, I was able to interpret the needs of principals and teachers and build those needs into my own internal understandings of my role. Because the expectations were so limited to one style of market model, standardized management leadership, I had enough professional autonomy to continue working toward defining my own vision for leadership. Defining the new Curriculum Director position, then, became a team effort as both my internal and their external influences shaped the role.

**Reconstructing Identity: A Holistic View**

In keeping with the ideas of integral thinking (Wilber, 1998), reconstructive postmodernism (Kegan, 1994), and Volckmann’s (2012) quadrants that function together to give a holistic depiction of one’s leadership, in this section, I pulled together the differentiated areas of influence and specific influences that were affecting my identity.
My aim was to determine how my envisioned qualities of leadership, democratic and critically reflective leadership manifested through these influences.

In sum, there were influences from within myself as well as from outside myself that affected my daily enactment of my leader role. These influences became the personal context within which my professional responsibilities existed. In a given moment, in my conscious awareness, I was unable to identify which influence was acting upon my actions, which reflected the high-stress environment (Klimek et al., 2008) previously discussed. I did not know, for instance, why I felt defensive in the moment of my first meeting with union leadership, nor could I explain why I cared about doing so many surveys. It was only through the purposeful collection of reflections on and remembrances of these moments in my data sources that I was able to demonstrate critical reflection. I say “purposeful” because without the intent of thinking about them critically, I do not know if that kind of reflection would have been an enacted behavior; I do not know that I would have thought to do it.

No single moment revealed an influence on identity, but across many moments, understandings of myself emerged that I would not otherwise have recognized. For example, I was able to link the lived experience of the union leadership meeting with other lived experiences that elicited an emotional reaction and develop an understanding of myself as a leader who exhibits and is influenced by my emotional reactions. This kind of understanding would not have been possible without stepping aside from the complexities of the profession to process these moments. As a leader, critical reflection became an act of thinking through moments in hindsight and making sense of my actions.
It also allowed me to weave together and make sense of my personal professional story and long-past moments that continue to interact with my current context.

Also as a result of critical reflection, I was able to understand myself as an emerging democratic leader. I use the word “emerging” because while I noticed strides toward being democratic, such as was the case with my need for engaging feedback and trying to understand others, I also noticed a reluctance to a spirit of democracy in my references to doing what I thought was “best” and “pushing” people along. I did exhibit a commitment to relationships and working collaboratively in some situations, but there were also moments when I exhibited a need to control, such as in sharing information or needing to be the resource for policy information. This process of reflecting critically on what I do and how I act helped me expose the differences in these enactments of democratic dispositions, and in doing so, have given me more understanding into what I could do differently to be more democratic in my practices.

**Conclusion**

Chapter 4 began with a reminder of the purpose of this study, including restatement of the initial research questions. In keeping with the ideas of integral theory (Wilber, 1998) and reconstructive postmodernism (Kegan, 1994), I then organized the entirety of my findings around first, differentiating them into component parts, and then reintegrating them into a holistic view. I first examined influences that were internal in nature, meaning they stemmed from something within myself, such as personal beliefs, creating a leading role for myself, balancing leading role and self, and relating as an individual to the collective. I then examined the external influence centered around
expectations of others. Finally, I reintegrated these differentiated elements into a holistic view summarizing if and how my envisioned leader qualities (a democratic disposition and critical reflection) were reflected through the data and as part of this research process.

The following chapter, Chapter 5 was organized first, to succinctly answer my research questions and then to expand from the personal in order to situate this work in a broader context. I begin by answering my first research question with a summary of findings about my leader identity by concisely addressing the influences I discovered to be providing the context for my leadership. I then address my second research question by examining how those influences reflect my vision for leadership. Finally, I address my third research question through summarizing how I have deconstructed and reconstructed my leader identity. I then pose personal avenues for my own future self-study considerations. Next, I broaden my work to discuss possible implications of integral theory, reconstructive postmodernism and integral leadership in educational administration, including a brief commentary on the use of Volckmann’s (2012) framework for future educational leader self-study work. Then, I reflect on the possible potentials of self-study work and search for identity in educational leadership, and finally, I make recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

“Adulthood itself is not an end state but a vast evolutionary expanse encompassing a variety of capacities of mind . . . It remains for us to look at the curriculum of modern life in relation to the capacities of the adult mind.”

~ Robert Kegan (1994, p. 5)

Revisiting Purpose

The ISLLC standards, professional guiding standards for school administrators, are broad in nature and exemplify one type of leader (the technician) through observable behaviors. They do not, therefore, acknowledge or cultivate leadership capacities in developmental areas that cannot be observed. However, Palmer (1998) contended self-knowledge is essential for all educators as the work we do is an outward manifestation mirroring what rests within ourselves. What happens inside the leader as she seeks to know herself and to know the soul that influences her interactions with those she leads becomes an afterthought in defining valuable leadership qualities.

Current contemporary discourse defines quality leadership in positivistic, binary terms of inputs and outputs—what leading behaviors amount to improved student test scores in an era of accountability (Ylimaki, 2010) and standardized management (Henderson & Gornik, 2007). However, I envisioned for myself a kind of holistic leadership identity (Volckmann, 2012) that existed beyond this high-stress environment and its consequential survival mode (Klimek et al., 2008). Through understanding the
differentiated “parts” of influence in my context, I wanted to integrate, to reconstruct the parts into a “whole” identity to better understand my research questions:

1. What influences provide the context for my leading role?
2. How do these influences affect my ability to be a democratic and critically reflective leader?
3. How do I deconstruct and reconstruct my role identity through past and present professional experiences?

In answering these questions through self-study work, I hoped to present one method by which interested educational leaders could consider their own leader identities and continue developing their own self-knowledge.

Finally, I wanted to embody the principles of an integral leader as set forth by Putz and Raynor (2005) functioning at Kegan’s (1982) fifth stage of consciousness with enough separation between self and the sociocultural and political organization of education to make “good sense” (Ylimaki, 2010) in my role responsibilities. I aimed to understand how and if I embodied those qualities of leading that I value, which are critical reflection (Brookfield, 1998) and a democratic disposition.

The following discussion was organized to move from the personal to more broad in an effort to situate this highly-context-specific, personal endeavor in a broader context. I begin with a summary of findings about my leader identity. To integrate the differentiated pieces of my self-study and develop a holistic view of self as leader, I begin this summary by concisely addressing the influences I discovered to be affecting my leadership, how those influences reflect embodiment of my vision of leadership, and how
I have deconstructed and reconstructed my leader identity. I then pose personal avenues for future study considerations. Next, I discuss possible implications of integral theory, reconstructive postmodernism, and integral leadership in educational administration. This discussion includes a brief commentary on the use of Volckmann’s (2012) framework for future educational leader self-study work. Finally, I include recommendations for future research in educational administration.

**Unraveling Self as Leader**

My goal through both the self-study and *currere* work was not to necessarily make sweeping conjectures about the meaning of my present (now past) professional moments, but instead, to create a “snapshot” in my lived experiences of a moment in time in an effort to understand current contextual influences on my role as Curriculum Director. As a new administrator in a new district, I wanted to begin to unravel this new context and in doing so, unravel how my vision for myself as a leader was reflected in how I experienced these contexts. Engaging in this process provided an opportunity to deconstruct my leader identity and professional practices into the tiniest bits of data, torn apart through codification, in order to reintegrate them and discover a holistic view of self.

To summarize, there were two main areas of influence: internal and external. Though I referred to Volckmann’s (2012) four-quadrant framework as a conceptual way to think through categorizing influences into these two areas, I struggled with knowing that all data were subjected to my personal interpretive lens. I distinguished the two main areas of influence based on their causation with internal influences stemming from a
place within myself and an external influence stemming from my understanding of the perceptions of others. Within each of these areas, I uncovered specific influences. Personal beliefs, creating a leading role for myself, balancing leading role and self, and relating as an individual to the collective were the four specific influences related to the internal, and expectations of my role from others was the specific external influence.

Each of these influences was connected in some way to my vision for myself as a critically reflective, democratic leader, and I explored these connections when I reintegrated the influences to create a holistic understanding of my leadership and the ways in which critical reflection and a democratic disposition manifest therein. I did not aim to discover or quantify how well I demonstrated these qualities but if and in what ways they were connected to the contextual influences discovered through the data. The value to approaching the data in this way was that through the process of analysis, the more I read and reread, the better able I was able to glean insight into how my vision for myself as a leader is (and is not) demonstrated in daily practice. This provides me with additional room for reflection into how my practices can better reflect this vision. For example, I am now more aware that my emotional reactions to a situation have an impact on my ability to be democratic and collaborative in such situations. Knowing this, I can at least recognize my humanness and, possibly, pay more attention to how my emotions are affecting my leadership in future moments.

Within each area, there were several instances of narrative currere reflecting both past and present professional moments as a way to weave together historical and contemporary lived experiences. Currere was included as a way to understand how I
have deconstructed and reconstructed my role identity over time. Each brief narrative was connected to a parallel understanding of self-derived from self-study data. Together, *currere* and self-study reflected the belief I shared in Chapter 1 that being human (Kegan, 1982) is an ongoing journey of development, and this self-study was simply another developmental step toward better understanding myself by understanding the ever-changing contexts of my leader role, and the ways in which these ever-changing contexts reflect my vision of leadership and identity.

**Personal Avenues for Future Study**

I am learning to feel more comfortable existing in a space of ambiguity while acknowledging both the self that has been created through the journey I have taken to this point as well as the self that is “not yet” (Greene, 2011). Present (now past) and future experiences will continue to shape who I am to become because I, personally, subscribe to the belief that being human is “not about the doing which a human does; it is about the doing which a human is” (Kegan, 1982, p. 8). I do not necessarily aim to be a better version of myself, as what is truly “better” or “worse,” but I aim to continue working toward understanding myself.

Specifically in regards to my leader identity, this self-study raised several thoughts for future considerations as I continue in my journey toward becoming a critically reflective democratic leader. I have been left particularly troubled by the emotional influences (stress, frustration, anger) that emerged, and I would like to further investigate their source and how they impact others’ perception of my leadership. As my results revealed personal challenges in exhibiting a democratic disposition, I am
interested in what barriers stand in the way of demonstrating the kind of democratic
leadership I envision and if and how I might begin to deconstruct those barriers. Also, as
I viewed critical reflection throughout this process as something I had to do in hindsight,
I would like to further investigate ways of critically reflecting more in the moment.
Finally, as this study was done at the onset of a new professional role in a new district, I
am interested in seeing how my contexts change over time in the same role. It seems
feasible that stability in a professional position may present different influences to one’s
leadership.

In addition to these more specific thoughts for the future, I also want to continue
developing as a self-studying administrator. I am not searching for a “truth” or what
Kegan (1994) called the “Complete Theory,” I am in pursuit of searching—making
theories about making theories in understanding myself. The findings contained in this
work present only one snapshot in my personal lived experiences, and they are subject to
the interpretive lens I am applying in this present (now past) moment. My personal goal
would be to always be in pursuit of understanding who I am as a way of always
understanding why I continue to do the work I do.

**Implications of Integral Theory, Reconstructive Postmodernism, and Integral
Leadership for Educational Leaders**

Because of the context in which educational leaders operate, that characterized by
standardization and accountability, it might be challenging for leaders to think beyond the
status quo. After all, as it was exhibited in my findings, school leaders are now valued
for their abilities to quickly analyze and improve student data, provide efficiency, and
produce tangible results (Ylimaki, 2010). Studies of educational leadership have supported this contemporary discourse by taking the approach of examining schools with high-achievement in student testing performance and identifying specific leadership behaviors that are believed to foster such performance (Ylimaki, 2010). Educational leadership is defined by its external nature—what we can see the leader doing, that which is easily observed by others.

The concepts I am proposing as potential influential theories in educational leadership ask leaders to exhibit a different kind of leadership, one that does not solely subscribe to the idea of the leader as a technician (Apple, 1990) or manager of teachers (Henderson & Gornik, 2007). Both integral theory (Wilber, 1998) and reconstructive postmodernism (Kegan, 1994) present an option for leaders to continue self-development through psychological stages of consciousness that allow them to observe themselves as leaders in an organization. Kegan (1994) argued that we do not pay enough attention to the continued development of adult consciousness as so many professionals become stuck at the fourth stage—seeing themselves embedded as part of a system, not a conscious being separate from the organization. Through continued consciousness development and by making the self a subject of study, interested leaders could begin to think beyond what has surfaced as contemporary expectations of school leaders and whether or not these expectations make “good sense” (Ylimaki, 2010). They could begin the self-knowledge work espoused by Palmer (1998), and thereby begin to understand what “condition of [the] soul” (p. 2) they project into their work. This is not the kind of leader cultivated by the professional standards for administrators.
Volckmann’s (2012) four-quadrant framework and differentiated definitions of leader, leading, and leadership provide school leaders with a framework for thinking about themselves outside of current discourse. In my self-study, it was challenging to neatly fit my contextual influences into the quadrants, but it did allow me to think about the influences as internal and external. This is one way a leader could begin to disentangle him or herself from the leading role as a starting place for self-knowledge. By connecting a behavior or action to an element of the internal-entity, for example, the self can begin to disengage from the action. The same may be true of the internal-context quadrant—by drawing connections between a contextual element (such as standardized tests) and one’s internal perception of it (as a “high stress” environment, for example), one may begin to disengage from the belief. Volckmann’s (2012) framework provides a practical means by which to think through contexts and one’s association to them.

Both integral theory and reconstructive postmodernism provide a theoretical foundation for educational leaders to view their contexts as one way through which to see “truth.” These theories provide space for one to believe in multiple truths, to create theories of theories (Kegan, 1994). This creates room for leaders to question their high stress situations and the implications of their leading behaviors on continually perpetuating these environments. One can begin to see multiple truths in both the sociocultural and political climates, but one can also begin to see multiple truths in his or herself. In doing so, interested leaders can become more integral in their approach to leadership by becoming more flexible, less threatened by systems, and developing comfortability with the self as an ever-evolving being (Kegan, 1994; Putz & Raynor,
The integral leader, then, can function beyond a survival mode and continue a journey towards becoming the kind of leader he or she envisions for him or herself.

**General Avenues for Future Study**

This chapter began with a review of the purpose of this study, which was a focused effort toward personal self-understanding as I continued to unravel those influences on my leadership that impact who I am as a leader. I then revisited my personal findings and proposed additional thoughts I would like to consider as I move forward in my professional life. Next, I examined possible implications of integral theory, reconstructive postmodernism, and integral leadership in the field of educational leadership and the ways in which these three ideas might allow leaders to challenge their own status quo.

Though this work was personal in nature, it raises several broader issues in the field that merit possible future exploration.

First, I argued that the ISLLC standards present one type of educational leader, one who is valued for the ability to enact behaviors that affect student achievement. This view was supported by Ylimaki’s (2010) research into educational administration. Palmer (1998), however, evoked the image of a leader as someone whose work represents the inner workings of his soul. One issue that might be considered is the kind of leadership that is appropriate for leading schools. Is it the goal for leaders to be one-dimensional and technical in nature, or should they be multidimensional? (Klimek et al., 2005). How might future iterations of professional standards support a different kind of administrator?
Second, I discussed consciousness raising (Kegan, 1982; Wilber, 1998) as an aspect of developmentalism that would allow an interested leader to see beyond his or her status quo. However, the self as a conscious being is not something addressed in educational administration programs. My own initial exposure to ideas of consciousness and viewing myself as a subject of study began in my doctoral studies through a course in practitioner inquiry. How might educational leaders benefit from advanced studies, specifically in leadership, beyond their licensure program?

Finally, in this study, I used a self-study methodology, which reinforced a purposeful approach to systematically reflecting critically on moments in my lived experiences. Had it not been for this research endeavor, I do not know that I would have taken the time from the high-stress complexities of my professional responsibilities to stop and reflect on moments or to make meaning across a variety of moments. However, this was the important work in developing self-knowledge; I needed the systematicity and focus of the research in order to engage in deep critical reflection. Another possible direction for future studies lies in the role of critical reflection among professional educators. How does critical reflection develop educators’ voices (Brookfield, 1995), and what role does educator voice play in contemporary educational discourse? What impact might collective educator voices have on the direction of education?

In sum, this work is about unraveling to become. It is about being “not yet” (Greene, 2011) and learning to accept the journey that is being human (Kegan, 1982). It is about enacting a role identity in a given context at a given time and trying to understand these temporal moments. My work is significant because it provides a new
way for leaders to think about themselves as conscious beings who are separate from the organization—the current discourse—and thereby, able to affect their interaction with the organization. I propose leaders should think beyond their survival modes and beyond the technical roles contemporary society has come to expect. Through efforts toward deeper understanding of selves as leaders, leaders can begin to make good sense of the complexities in which they exist.
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