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# Voices of Leadership: A Narrative Study of Four Vermont Superintendents and Their Experience with Policy Governance

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VOICES OF LEADERSHIP: A NARRATIVE STUDY OF FOUR VERMONT  
SUPERINTENDENTS AND THEIR EXPERIENCE WITH  
POLICY GOVERNANCE

A Dissertation Presented

by

Daniel M. French

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Education  
Specializing in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

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Accepted by the Faculty of the Graduate College, the University of Vermont, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, specializing in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies.

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## ABSTRACT

In 2006, the Vermont School Board's Association launched a pilot implementation of Policy Governance® in four Vermont school districts. Policy Governance is a coherent governance model that requires boards to establish policy in four policy quadrants (Carver, 2006). Key features of Policy Governance include the clear delineation of roles and responsibilities between a board and its CEO and the articulation of Ends policies which describe the desired outcomes for the organization from a future-oriented perspective (Carver, 2006). These characteristics of Policy Governance are in many ways antithetical to traditional Vermont public school governance practices which are grounded in a long-standing tradition of local control (Cate, 2006). This study focused on the experiences of the four superintendents involved in the 2006 pilot implementation of Policy Governance in Vermont as they attempted to reconcile the coherence of Policy Governance with local school board practices. The purpose of the study was to understand the beliefs and perceptions of these superintendents about Policy Governance, and to understand to what extent Policy Governance implementation created ethical dilemmas for their leadership. A series of in-depth interviews was conducted with the superintendents, and data from the interviews were analyzed using a narrative inquiry approach. The findings of this study suggest superintendent beliefs and perceptions about Policy Governance can be categorized into three themes: responsibility, trust, and vision. Using a theoretical ethical framework based on the work of Starratt (2003, 2004), a further analysis of the findings suggested a series of ethical dilemmas were confronted by the superintendents when implementing Policy Governance. These dilemmas included: developing an organizational vision through ends policies which transfer control over vision from the superintendent to the school board, assisting school boards with engaging their communities in the development of ends policies while at the same time ensuring those ends meet the moral purposes of schooling in serving the needs of all students and the larger public good, enforcing a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities while also serving a school board in its work, and assuming responsibility for transforming school systems to meet the future needs of students while at the same time supporting the success of students and educators in the current organizational structures. This study concluded that Policy Governance can provide an intellectual and practical framework for educational leaders to engage in the necessary ethical action to ensure the success of public schooling in postmodern society.

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To my wife Hilary and daughter Lauren for their love and support, and for tolerating my many evenings out as a superintendent of a large, multi-district supervisory union.

## DEDICATION

To the educators in my family, past, present, and future,  
whose service to students and our democracy  
has made and continues to make the world a better place.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction to the Study

In Vermont, communities connect with their schools at a political level through locally-elected school boards, and at the center of this governance model is the superintendent. Although there has been interest in examining the role of the superintendent as an instructional leader (Murphy & Hallinger, 1986; Wirt, 1990; Carter, 1993), less attention has been paid to examining how the superintendent functions as an educational leader, and how that leadership impacts the ability of school boards to serve the learning needs of students (Berg & Barnett, 1998).

School boards meet the learning needs of students by using governance practices that focus on student learning (Schlechty, 1992). The National School Boards Association delineates these practices into nine areas of school board key work (Gemberling, Smith, & Villani, 2000). These areas include accountability, alignment, assessment, climate, collaboration, continuous improvement, standards, systems thinking, and vision. It is interesting to consider that many of these areas of key work are often seen as being chief responsibilities of the superintendent in his or her capacity as a district's Chief Executive Officer or CEO (Candoli, 1995). This confusion over roles and responsibilities often inhibits the ability of school board members and superintendents to work together collaboratively (Proulx, 2007), and such collaboration has been found to be necessary in order to create the requisite organizational trust to make good organizational decisions (Aiken, 2007).

The difficulty of Vermont school boards and superintendents to collaboratively

reach effective organizational decisions is a common feature of Vermont's complex school governance structure:

Vermont school districts lack clarity in defining differences and interrelationships among the three critical functions of management, instructional leadership and educational leadership. This ambiguity and confusion leads to much duplication of effort, breakdown in communication systems, mixed allegiances and marginalization of specific administrative units (Proulx, 2007, p.1).

As a practicing Vermont superintendent, I witnessed this dysfunction firsthand, and I regularly sought out opportunities to improve my governance practices and the governance practices of my districts. One such opportunity presented itself in 2003 when the Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA) held a conference on Policy Governance® (PG) in Montpelier. PG is a comprehensive model of organizational governance developed by John Carver (2006). PG requires boards to set policy in four distinct policy quadrants, and is widely used in non-profit organizations including school districts. These policy quadrants include:

1. Governance Policies – These policies describe how board members will work together. Under PG, good organizational governance becomes the responsibility of the board itself not the CEO;
2. CEO Limitations Policies – These policies are written in the negative and delimit the boundaries of unacceptable CEO action which then leaves the CEO free to creatively choose other means to achieve organizational ends;
3. CEO-Board Relations Policies – These policies describe how the board and the CEO will work together and include specific monitoring policies which become the chief means of CEO evaluation; and

4. Ends Policies – These policies describe what organizational services will be provided, to whom, and at what cost (Carver, 2006).

Carver, an organizational consultant, developed this model in response to the dysfunction he observed in traditional board governance practices (2006). As these traditional governance practices pertain to school boards, Carver described typical school board governance practices as being a combination of micromanagement and rubber stamping, and he characterized school boards as being the least disciplined, least rational, and most disordered element in the public education system (2000, pp. 6-8).

I attended the 2003 VSBA conference as did many Vermont school board members, superintendents, and educational leaders. In fact, the conference was sold out and there was standing room only. I was already somewhat familiar with PG because as the president of a local health center board, I had led that board through the implementation of the PG model. The enthusiasm and interest for PG by Vermont educational leaders as expressed by their significant attendance at this conference was curious to me, however, because in many ways I considered PG to be antithetical to Vermont school governance practices which, based on my experience as a Vermont superintendent, seemed to be largely unwritten, ritualistic, and deeply entangled in the local history of families and communities. In particular, Vermont's tradition of strong local control for which many Vermonters express a fervent emotional attachment seemed to be contradictory to a system of governance such as PG which has as its fundamental tenet the concept of a strong CEO who is given great latitude in decision making as long as organizational Ends are achieved and unacceptable Means are avoided (Carver, 2006).

Nevertheless, the enthusiasm for PG from this conference led VSBA to obtain a grant to pilot PG in four Vermont school districts from 2006-2007. The pilot project consisted of providing PG training to these school boards and superintendents, and direct support to assist them in adopting new policies based on the PG model. The four districts involved in this pilot project represented the complexity of Vermont's public school governance structure. One of the features that contributes to this complexity is the lack of uniformity in governance structures: no two Vermont school districts or supervisory unions are alike (Proulx, 2007).

The fundamental building block of Vermont's school district structure is the town school district which has as its boundaries the same boundaries as the town municipality (Cate, 2006). In the 1950s and 1960s, policies were enacted in Vermont to encourage the formation of union school districts which are groups of town school districts joined together to operate a school or schools at specific grade levels (Cate, 2006). All Vermont school districts, including town school districts and union school districts, are grouped by the State Board of Education into administrative entities called supervisory unions with a superintendent serving as a shared CEO among the supervisory union's member districts. The first school district selected for the VSBA PG pilot project was a union school district which governed the operations of a single high school with students from several communities attending that high school. The second school district was a town school district composed of one community with several schools. The third school district was a town school district with a single elementary school, and the fourth pilot school district was a supervisory union composed of several communities, several school districts, and

several schools.

In order to better understand the issues surrounding the implementation of PG in the pilot project, VSBA contracted with the University of Vermont to study and evaluate the implementation of the pilot project, and I served as a member of the research team for the first district which I will refer to as the Maple Union School District. My practical experience with PG as a health center board president prepared me well for understanding the challenges of PG implementation at Maple Union, and as a practicing Vermont superintendent, I was also alert to how PG might affect the role of the superintendent. At Maple Union, PG seemed to cause dissonance for board members and the superintendent because it seemed to call into question the efficacy of how things had been done in the past. For example, school board members often worried about how they would explain PG in the local grocery store where it would be perceived as “giving away the farm” in terms of giving away control of district operations to the superintendent. PG also seemed to present challenges for the superintendent who was hesitant to give board members authority over Ends, an area usually controlled by administrators through the articulation of action plans, strategic plans, and mission statements but not often described through board policy. The need to better understand the causes of this dissonance from the perspective of the superintendents involved in the VSBA pilot project became a primary intellectual motivator for me in designing and implementing this study.

PG also seemed to challenge the legal delineation of roles and responsibilities between board members and the superintendent. Under Vermont law, the superintendent

is the CEO of a school district but each superintendent usually serves multiple districts within a supervisory union. A Vermont supervisory union, however, has little authority over its member school districts which creates the potential for different boards to place competing if not different demands on the superintendent and therefore diluting the capability of the superintendent to achieve the organizational objectives of each district (Angney, 1986). A fundamental principle of PG, however, is the unity of governance control (Carver, 2006), meaning there should be a single board of directors and a single CEO for the organization.

I observed dissonance among Vermont school board members and superintendents when PG was implemented. I believed this dissonance could be attributed to the difference between traditional Vermont school board governance practices and PG as a coherent governance model. The dissonance caused by PG implementation presented a unique opportunity to study the perceptions and beliefs of superintendents about PG, and to better understand to what extent PG implementation surfaced ethical dilemmas for superintendents since PG seemed to call into question the value and effectiveness of traditional school governance assumptions and practices. In this study, I examined the perceptions of the four superintendents who participated in the VSBA pilot implementation of PG. My inquiry focused on better understanding superintendent beliefs and perceptions about PG, and to what extent PG challenged their leadership from an ethical perspective. Through analyzing the stories of the superintendents involved with the PG implementation project, I utilized the dissonance created by PG implementation to develop a better understanding of their common experience with PG,

and to understand to what extent that experience presented ethical challenges to their practice as educational leaders.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Review of the Literature

This literature review begins with an overview of the current research on PG in educational organizations. PG has been in existence for nearly twenty years but research on its implementation in educational organizations is fairly limited. The review then moves on to describe the broader theoretical context for this study by focusing on the connection between educational leadership and ethics in order to provide a historical perspective on understanding the evolving definition of educational leadership in postmodern society. I conclude the review by exploring the literature on the specific role of the superintendent as it pertains to school governance practices.

#### *Policy Governance in Educational Organizations*

A good portion of the research on PG in educational organizations is focused on community colleges. A qualitative study completed by Smith (1997) focused on the governing board of the Central Oregon Community College. According to Smith, this was the first community college in the nation to adopt PG and she was interested in understanding how the implementation of PG affected the board and the college. This study consisted of interviewing twenty-two board members and staff members and then triangulating the interview data with governance documents such as policies and plans. PG was attributed to having caused an improved delineation of board and CEO roles, an improved future orientation on the part of the board, and giving the CEO more authority over operations without board interference (Smith, 1997). Administrator productivity was perceived to increase, but indicators other than those obtained from interview data

were not identified to confirm these outcomes.

Webster (2002) also conducted a study of PG with a community college board. Webster focused on the perceptions of board members towards the outcomes of PG not just on the implementation of PG itself. This study consisted of board member interviews, a review of governance documents, and the use of a summary questionnaire to confirm data revealed in the early phases of the study. The findings from this study supported Smith's conclusions (1997) regarding PG's positive impact on clarifying administrative roles and responsibilities. Webster also concluded PG assisted board members with connecting back to the owners of their organizations, what Carver refers to as fulfilling the trustee function of board members (2006).

A quantitative study that attempted to determine the effectiveness of PG boards in achieving outcomes was conducted by Gordon (2000). This study utilized a board self-assessment questionnaire administered to thirty-two educational and non-profit organizations some of which used PG and others that did not. Gordon found board members using PG perceived themselves to be as effective as board members who did not use PG. Similar to Smith's study (1997), these conclusions were based on perceptions of effectiveness and were not confirmed through other organizational data. A chief weakness in the design of Gordon's study (2000) was it assumed traditional governance practices were the same in all of the nonprofits not using PG. Carver (2006) and PG consultants such as Dawson and Quinn (2000) and Natale (2000) claim that PG is the only coherent and complete model for nonprofit organizational governance in existence. Indeed, Carver cites the incoherence and variation of traditional governance

practices as one of the chief motivators for designing PG as a model (2006).

Bridges (2004) carried out a mixed-method study that looked at how PG affected student outcomes. This study used student grade three reading scores on the Colorado state assessment as a measure of student achievement. The quantitative aspect of this study employed an ANCOVA-based analysis to compare student scores in PG districts to student scores in non-PG districts. Bridges also used a survey to confirm his findings from the analysis of the student assessment scores. The survey results indicated districts using PG perceived PG to cause greater achievement levels for students. Based on his quantitative analysis of the assessment scores, however, Bridges concluded there was no significant difference in student scores between districts that implemented PG and those that did not.

The literature on PG in educational organizations appears to be moving from eliciting an understanding of the perceptions of the participants in a PG system to focusing on establishing a connection between PG and organizational outcomes. Although there has been interest in investigating the relationship between these two variables in both quantitative and qualitative studies, the connection as described by the research is not clear (Bridges, 2004). The research does seem to indicate PG enhances the perception of board members that they are establishing a stronger connection to organizational owners. This is a key tenet of PG (Carver & Carver, 2007), a concept Carver attributes to Rousseau's concept of a social contract and Greenleaf's work in the conceptualization of servant leadership as it pertains to boards (Carver, 2000). This trustee function as described by Carver (2006), requires board members to connect back

to the true owners of an organization to determine organizational ends which is the most important quadrant of policy in the PG model (Dawson & Quinn, 2000). The research also indicates PG reinforces a clear delineation between board and CEO roles and responsibilities. This delineation has been identified as a key variable for student success in schools by several large studies including *Leadership for Student Learning* (Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 2001) and a meta-analysis published by Waters & Marzano (2006). The need for a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities, a major theme from the literature on PG, can also be found in the literature on the superintendency in Vermont. For example, a study conducted with Vermont superintendents by Angney (1986) indicated superintendents and board members often have different perceptions about the role of the superintendent.

A recent narrative study conducted in Vermont by Stanley (2009) analyzed the voices and stories of school board members who participated in the 2006 Vermont PG pilot implementation project. The focus of this study was an examination of the function of policy from the postmodern perspective of community which indicates community involvement and engagement is declining (Stanley, 2009). This study proposed a new and expanded definition of community based on inclusion, acceptance of difference, and adaptability (Stanley, 2009). In order to better understand the historical context of these postmodern societal forces as they relate to PG and public school governance, it is helpful to examine the changing theoretical discourse on educational leadership and ethics.

### *Educational Leadership and Ethics*

The connection between educational leadership and ethics is not a new concept in the literature. The concept has its roots in the Progressive Era and is a prevalent theme in the writings of one of its more influential educational theorists, John Dewey (1916). Modern theorists, including Maxcy (1994), Sergiovanni (1999), and Strike (2004), have attempted to articulate a description of ethical educational leadership from the perspective of civic morality: re-asserting the primacy of the mission of public schools in promoting the larger public good. Much of this work has been focused on promoting a response to the challenges educational leaders face in leading in the postmodern era, an era characterized by an increased use of connective technologies, a lack of faith in organizations and leaders, and the frequent restructuring of organizations (Lipman-Blumen, 2000).

Furman (2003) believes the renewed interest in examining the connection between educational leadership and civic morality is becoming a significant theme in the literature on educational leadership. Furman gives the following reasons for this renewed interest: the triumph of the secular humanist perspective of the 1980s, the increasing recognition of the new challenges of the social context of our schools, and a growing tendency to reject the principles of scientific management as it pertains to the function of leadership in schools (Furman, 2003).

The tension between scientific management as compared to a broader definition of educational leadership which includes the traditional, moral foundations of public service, is a common theme in much of Sergiovanni's work (1992). Sergiovanni argues moral leadership is a necessary precondition for transforming schools into communities.

He portrays moral leadership as a force that inspires teachers and principals in creating a climate of virtuous professional collegiality. By emphasizing accountability, Sergiovanni believes school leaders have shifted the control of schools to bureaucratic authority as opposed to its traditional moral and ethical foundations (1994). To counter the more scientific or rational view of school leadership, Sergiovanni proposes a framework for school leadership that includes moral leadership, servant leadership, and leadership for stewardship (1993). A central theme in Sergiovanni's work is the necessity of school leaders to reconnect to democratic traditions. He believes cultural pluralism is too weak to hold society together and that educational leaders need to renew their commitment to a democratic legacy (1995). This is Sergiovanni's leadership for stewardship, the public school leader's special commitment to protect and nourish the larger civic good:

It is through morally-held role responsibilities that we can understand school administration as a profession in its traditional sense. School administration is bound not just to standards of technical competence, but to standards of public obligation as well. The primacy of public obligation leads us to the roots of school leadership – stewardship defined as a commitment to administer to the needs of the school by serving its purposes, by serving those who struggle to embody its purposes, and by acting as a guardian to protect the institutional integrity of the school (1995, p. 7).

Starratt (2001, 2003) is another modern theorist who is concerned with educational leadership from an ethical and moral perspective. Starratt argues authentic educational leadership is dependent on developing a solid ethical orientation. Starratt's multidimensional ethical framework for educational leaders places the moral obligation of educational leaders squarely within the broader tradition of democratic public service and civic morality. Schools and educational leaders must connect with their communities to reestablish the primacy of public education's mission in serving the larger public good

by ensuring a quality education for all students (Starratt, 2003). According to Starratt (2003), educational leaders need to balance three ethics in their practice in order to support democratic educational leadership. These ethics are the ethic of critique, the ethic of justice, and the ethic of care. These ethics represent an attempt to bring together three important themes in the postmodern literature on educational leadership.

The ethic of critique has its origins in critical theory, a stance which requires educational leaders to expose power structures in society that limit the potential of disenfranchised groups (Lees, 1995). Grogan (2004) argues that educational leaders need to conduct action research in order to expose social injustice and to counter the homogenizing effects of national standardization policies. This is very similar to Fullan's perspective (2002) that one of the fundamental functions of moral school leadership is using authority and power to make a difference in the lives of students.

Starratt's ethic of justice requires educational leaders to balance the rules of the organization with the need for individual human rights (Starratt, 2003). On the one hand, there is the need for an organization to have rules and to act in a fair manner by treating all citizens the same. On the other hand, there is a need for ensuring justice for the individual. It is the interaction and conflict between the organization and the individual that Starratt believes creates a new definition of social justice for each generation.

The ethic of care is a common strand in many theories of educational leadership and has its origins in the scholarship of theorists such as Noddings (1992) and Grogan (2000). For Starratt (2003), the ethic of care means being open to the uniqueness of each individual and respecting the intrinsic dignity and worth of each person. Starratt is not

speaking of care as unconditional regard for the individual as do Hoyle and Slater (2001), but rather he means respecting and celebrating the integrity of human relationships (2003).

Starratt's model is multidimensional because it requires educational leaders to construct a point of view based on a firm commitment to each of these ethics. Starratt also identifies three key virtues as the foundation for moral and democratic educational leadership. These virtues are responsibility, authenticity and presence (Starratt, 2004). The virtue of presence connects a leader's personal morality, or authenticity, to his or her responsibilities towards students, colleagues and to the larger community. Starratt's characterization of authenticity is similar to Begley's onion metaphor which depicts the relationship between an individual's values and ethical action (Begley, 2001). In Begley's metaphor, an individual's values or beliefs are at the core layer of being, and are then connected to action through various social layers such as organizations, community, and culture.

Langlois applied Starratt's multidimensional ethical framework to examine decision making among superintendents in Quebec (Langlois, 2001). This study determined there was a high degree of correlation between superintendent decision making and superintendents having an ethical orientation. The questionnaire used in this study was later validated in additional research by Langlois (Langlois et al., 2014) using item response theory to determine question reliability.

The literature on educational leadership and ethics points to an emerging definition of educational leadership that includes a moral foundation connected to the



historic traditions of public education. Furman (2003) categorizes the scholarship on moral educational leadership into *why* moral educational leadership is necessary today and *how* moral educational leadership might be practiced. The *why* of moral educational leadership has been explored at some length in the literature (Bhola, 2002; Fullan, 2002; Sergiovanni, 1992, 1995; Starratt, 2001, 2003, 2004; Strike, 2004), but this literature does not distinguish between moral educational leadership at different organizational role levels. To further explore the *how* of moral educational leadership, I will focus on the leadership of the superintendent because the superintendent connects the new moral imperatives of educational leadership to the practical, day-to-day business of school governance (Houston, 2001).

#### *The Superintendent and School Governance*

In many states, including Vermont, there is a great deal of confusion over the roles and responsibilities assigned to organizational leaders within school districts (Harris, 1987; Dawson & Quinn, 2000; Cox-Buteau, 2005; Saenz, 2005; Proulx, 2007). This overlap of responsibilities in school governance leads to what Carver (2000) characterizes as micromanagement or rubber stamping. School boards tend to either interfere in administrative decision-making or adopt recommendations of the superintendent without having a deeper understanding of the issues at hand (Carver, 2000, pp. 6-8). Saenz (2005) published a study on the effect of board micromanagement on superintendent decision-making. In this study, Saenz used a mixed method approach consisting of interviews and a questionnaire to ascertain to what extent the decision-making of Arizona school superintendents was influenced by the micromanagement of

school boards. Saenz concluded micromanagement of school boards exists, but Saenz was not able to conclude such micromanagement had any adverse effect on student outcomes. This study did identify nineteen categories of behavior for superintendents to utilize or avoid in order to deal with school board micromanagement so apparently micromanagement was a rather significant issue for the superintendents in this study. Proulx (2007) also cited micromanagement as a significant cause of superintendent turnover so this phenomenon must not be solely confined to Arizona, and its impact on leadership stability, an important variable in positive student outcomes, has been found to be significant (Waters & Marzano, 2006).

Another study that examined the condition of superintendent and board decision-making was published by Harris (1987). This study employed a grounded theory method to determine whether or not superintendent decision-making authority had been diluted with the expansion of the democratic forum in which contemporary superintendents operate. Harris concluded the superintendent now has greater authority over decision-making because he or she now interacts with a much wider and complex constituency. In another study that looked at the efficacy of superintendent and board decision-making, however, Workman (2003) concluded that superintendent and board perceptions about decision-making were not in agreement. In the six areas of governance examined in Workman's study, the one area where superintendents and boards had the most disagreement was in the area of the efficacy of their relative decision-making.

The degree to which superintendent and school board decision-making is considered to be effective varies greatly in the literature. Geisick (2006) used a

descriptive approach to measure superintendent and school board perceptions about collaborative decision-making. This study concluded collaborative decision-making approaches were more likely to be used with issues related to instruction, but in other areas such as in business decisions no clear pattern of decision-making could be identified. A study conducted in New Hampshire seems to contradict this conclusion (Cox-Buteau, 2005). This study also utilized a descriptive approach but included qualitative data from interviews with superintendents and board members. In this study, board members identified instructional matters as being an area dominated by superintendent decision-making but the superintendents believed this was an area where they were less likely to dominate decision making.

The research on the superintendency as it relates to school governance is largely focused on the relationship between the superintendent's power and authority as compared to that of a school board (Berg & Barnett, 1998), and is dominated by an examination of decision-making processes. Also, the research on superintendent-board decision making is inconclusive and in many ways contradictory. Several studies have looked at the connection between a superintendent's instructional leadership and student outcomes (Davidson, 2005; Alonso, 2006) but the focus has been on instructional leadership beyond just the superintendent to include other instructional leaders in a system such as principals and teachers. It is also notable that limited attention has been given in these studies to highlighting the voices of superintendents themselves.

There is a trend in the literature, however, to examine the perspective of superintendents who represent groups who historically have been disenfranchised from

leadership positions within public education (Grogan, 2000, 2004; Bruner & Grogan, 2007). Sanders-Lawson (2001) studied the work of black female superintendents through examining their personal backgrounds and the stories of how their struggles for opportunity informed their commitment to creating socially just and equitable learning environments. Johnson (2005) studied black superintendents in Texas to identify the barriers and bridges to their success.

Barbie (2004) used biographical questionnaires, participant observations, and organizational documents to triangulate findings from the narrative analysis of female superintendents in order to better understand their common ethic of caring. McLean (2006) used a similar approach to examine the experiences of five female California superintendents in order to determine the variables that contributed to their success as educational leaders. Fuller (2004) studied the story of the life work of a female Hispanic superintendent who worked in a Native American community.

The literature on superintendents who represent traditionally disenfranchised groups seems to recognize the significance of the ethics of critique and care in superintendent leadership, ethics deemed by Starratt (2003) to be important for successful educational leadership in postmodern society. The themes emerging from these studies focus on the role of the superintendent in exposing and confronting injustice (Sanders-Lawson, 2001; Johnson, 2005), and in supporting individuals and their communities (Barbie, 2004; McLean, 2006; Fuller 2004). Another common aspect of several of these studies was the use of narrative as a research methodology. It would seem that when the voices of superintendents are brought forward using narrative inquiry, themes consistent

with the literature on educational leadership and ethics are surfaced.

Narrative inquiry is considered to be an ideal approach for understanding the experience of people as opposed to using the experience of people to confirm a theory (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These studies employed narrative inquiry as a methodology for bringing the voices of non-traditional superintendents to the theoretical discussion on the nature of the superintendency as it pertains to educational leadership.

The use of narrative as a research methodology to capture the perspective of disenfranchised groups is consistent with the postmodern view that society is complex and composed of rich and diverse points of view (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Narrative inquiry is also a methodology used to better understand the connection between the personal and professional beliefs of individuals (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Webster and Merova (2007) argue narrative inquiry as a postmodern research tool is more sensitive to the subtleties of the human experience than other forms of research. It would seem then, that the use of narrative inquiry to better understand the beliefs and perceptions of superintendents towards PG and to what extent PG implementation creates ethical challenges for superintendents would be a promising means by which to contribute to the understanding of these complex themes.

#### *Summary*

The literature on PG in educational organizations is limited. There are important themes emerging from this literature, however, which are relevant to the concept of educational leadership as it relates to the superintendency. When these themes are considered with emerging concepts in the literature on educational leadership and ethics

being developed as a response to a postmodern critique of society, certain patterns begin to emerge. First, there is a call for increased connectedness. Carver (2000) builds on this theme based on concepts from Rousseau and Greenleaf, but simultaneously theorists such as Sergiovanni (1995) and Starratt (2003) are calling for educational leaders to connect back to the same philosophical tradition as a means of articulating a future vision for schooling. The need for a future orientation is also another common theme. In the PG literature, a future orientation is synonymous with a board shifting its focus to ends as opposed to means. In the literature on ethical educational leadership, a future orientation is necessary in order to articulate a new vision for schooling based on fundamental changes in postmodern society.

The literature on the superintendency and school governance seems to be focused on understanding how decisions are made within school organizations. One theme that can be identified is the necessity for clear organizational roles and responsibilities as a means of avoiding micromanagement practices on the part of a school board. Here too, PG seems to offer some applicable relevance in PG's clear establishment of ends and prohibited means (Carver, 2006). The literature focused on using narrative as a means of developing a richer understanding of the lives of superintendents and their perspective towards educational leadership seems to be filling a void in the literature. Adding to the understanding of the complex experiences of superintendents themselves would seem to complement and build on this body of work.

A review of the literature points to the need for further study of PG as it relates to the school district context since unlike traditional school district governance practices,

PG is a coherent model which when used as a reference point, can help bring these traditional school governance practices into focus. PG, with its clear delineation of responsibilities between the CEO and the board, also offers an opportunity to better understand the educational leadership function of the superintendency. PG's underlying concepts seem to have much in common with postmodern themes emerging from the literature on educational leadership and ethics. This study, which examined the common experience of four Vermont superintendents to understand their beliefs and perceptions about PG and the extent to which PG implementation created ethical dilemmas for their leadership, fills a void in the literature that to date has been given short shrift. A narrative inquiry methodology was seen as the best means to not only explore the complexity of the experience of superintendents as educational leaders, but also to surface themes related to the postmodern context.

These conclusions, based on an analysis of the literature, described a need to better understand PG from the perspective of superintendents. With the VSBA PG implementation project, an opportunity presented itself to implement such a study, a study that utilized a narrative approach to elicit an understanding of superintendent beliefs and perceptions towards PG, and to what extent PG implementation created ethical dilemmas for their leadership. The focus of this study was to give some insight into PG and Vermont school governance practices from the perspective of four Vermont superintendents, and to understand how these superintendents perceived their role as educational leaders in serving the moral and democratic needs of postmodern society.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methods

#### *Purpose and Rationale*

The purpose of this study was to better understand the beliefs and perceptions of four superintendents towards PG, and to what extent PG implementation created ethical dilemmas for their leadership.

#### *Participant Selection*

This study focused on four Vermont superintendents and their experience with PG. These four superintendents received foundational training in PG through the 2006 VSBA PG pilot implementation project, and then went on to apply this training in a variety of Vermont school district settings. This dissertation study was implemented after the conclusion of the VSBA PG pilot implementation project, but participation in the VSBA pilot project served as the basis for selecting the four superintendents to participate in this study.

The VSBA PG pilot project was a grant-funded project which required districts to submit competitive grant applications. Members of the VSBA leadership team selected the participant districts and superintendents for the project. The VSBA leadership team included the Executive Director of the VSBA, the Associate Director of the VSBA, and several officers of the VSBA. Grant applications were evaluated based on the following criteria:

- a) A basic understanding of the principles of Policy Governance;
- b) Sustainability of leadership in the district during implementation;



- c) A commitment to the facilitation process by key leaders in the district, i.e. the superintendent, the school board chair and other district administrators; and
- d) An understanding of systemic change. (The University of Vermont, 2007).

The four superintendents chosen for the pilot project were experienced Vermont superintendents. Each superintendent had at least fifteen years of experience as a Vermont educational leader. A key variable for their selection was their demonstrated interest in PG as described by an application essay (The University of Vermont, 2007). Another selection criteria was the likelihood of each superintendent remaining in their district for the duration of the pilot project. Stable superintendent leadership was considered to be an important variable for successful PG implementation (The University of Vermont, 2007).

After the conclusion of the VSBA pilot project, two of the four superintendents left their districts but they continued to work as superintendents in Vermont and implement PG in their new districts. This dissertation study was implemented in the 2008-2009 school year. The two superintendents who moved had each been in their new districts for one year when they participated in this study. The other two superintendents remained in the same districts as the VSBA PG pilot project but in both of these supervisory unions the majority of the member districts did not adopt PG. A further description of the districts and the superintendents can be found in Chapter Four.

Since the focus of this study was on understanding superintendent beliefs and perceptions about PG, the change in work assignments with two of the superintendents and the degree to which PG was implemented or not did not affect the reliability of the

data. Rather, the variation in job locations of the superintendents and the variation in the degree to which PG was successfully implemented across districts enhanced the trustworthiness of this study since the perspectives of the superintendents were based on broad experiences working across multiple districts and not as dependent on the circumstances of a specific context.

The common experience among these superintendents was being selected to participate in the VSBA PG implementation project. The VSBA PG pilot project was a foundational educational experience that these four superintendents then utilized in their later work. Regardless of their job assignments or the degree to which they achieved success in getting school boards to adopt PG, all of the superintendent participants were actively engaged in implementing PG in their Vermont school districts at the time of this dissertation study.

### *Methodologies*

The primary methodology used in this study was narrative inquiry because of the need to better understand the unique experiences of these superintendents. Narrative inquiry is a methodology well suited for this type of research because it lends itself well to understanding the experiences of people within a specific time context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The overall structure of this study was a case study, an approach often used when the phenomena to be studied are bounded or limited to a specific system (Glesne, 2006). For this study, the case was the four superintendents who participated in the VSBA PG pilot project. By limiting this study to just these four superintendents, an in-depth understanding of their beliefs and perspectives was obtained.

In addition to the voices of the four superintendents, I also considered my perspective as both a PG practitioner and a successful Vermont superintendent. My contribution functions as a fifth data source for the findings of this study. Such an approach is consistent with the postmodern perspective on inquiry which acknowledges the researcher as an equal participant in a dialogue (Glesney, 2006). The dialogues that produced the data for this study pointed to the importance of considering my contribution as an equal participant.

My qualifications to be considered an equal participant in this study were not insignificant. I had been the president of a local health center board and had successfully led that board in the adoption of PG. In 2009, I was designated Vermont Superintendent of the Year and was then elected to a two-year term as President of the Vermont Superintendent's Association. The significance of my perspective as both a PG practitioner and a Vermont superintendent was supported by a documented track record of successful leadership across a variety of organizational settings including two Vermont multi-district supervisory unions.

### *Data Collection*

In this study, each of the four superintendents was interviewed three times. The superintendent interviews occurred during the 2008-2009 school year. Further analysis of the data occurred during the Summer of 2010. The final development of findings and recommendations from this study occurred during the 2013-2014 school year. Each superintendent interview lasted approximately ninety minutes. The interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder to ensure accuracy of the data. The recordings

were uploaded to the Internet as MP3 files and transcribed by a professional transcription service into Microsoft Word documents. The superintendents were given transcripts of the interviews and were allowed to make clarifications of their earlier remarks.

### *Data Analysis*

The development of the interview protocols followed an iterative process. The protocol developed for the first interview (Appendix A) consisted of approximately eight questions based on themes identified from the literature and my personal understanding of the superintendency in Vermont. After the data from the first round of interviews was reviewed and organized, I identified emergent themes by working with the data to search for patterns across all of the transcripts. These emergent themes were shared with members of the VSBA PG pilot project evaluation team for confirmation. Analysis of the data from the first round interviews was used to develop an interview protocol for the second round of interviews (Appendix B). After the second round of superintendent interviews, I identified preliminary findings by performing a cross-case analysis of the data in order to reduce the data for significance, an approach considered to be effective for analyzing data in case studies (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I used these preliminary findings to create the protocol for the third round of interviews (Appendix C). This protocol contained several questions which pushed the superintendents to consider future possibilities as much as current realities.

Data from all of the interviews were organized and coded to identify common themes. Initial coding was performed by me after a close reading of the transcripts to conduct “key word” searches of the Microsoft Word interview transcripts. Passages

containing key words were assembled and arranged to identify deeper meanings and patterns. I then re-read the transcripts by considering the themes in order to identify additional patterns and relationships among the data. Through the lens of my experience as a PG practitioner and Vermont superintendent, the themes were also analyzed to surface ethical dilemmas based on the work of Starratt (2003, 2004). The themes and dilemmas were then considered in the context of contemporary Vermont education policy in order to describe the significance of the findings.

### *Trustworthiness*

Measures were taken to establish the trustworthiness of this study by addressing the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These criteria are considered to be important in establishing trustworthiness in qualitative studies (Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004).

Credibility was addressed through several approaches. A proposal for this study was reviewed and approved by the University of Vermont's Institutional Review Board to ensure the rights of the research subjects were adequately protected. The participants were offered the opportunity to decline to participate in the study which established a rapport of openness and honesty between the subjects and the researcher. Interview protocols were shared with dissertation advisors to ensure the questions being asked aligned well with the research questions. Draft copies of the interview transcripts were shared with the subjects to ensure their responses matched their intentions. The subjects were offered the opportunity to make corrections to the transcripts if they thought such corrections were warranted.

Interviews were the sole source of the data for this study since narrative was seen as the best means to surface postmodern themes among superintendents in several other studies (Sanders-Lawson, 2001; Johnson, 2005; Barbie, 2004; McLean, 2006; Fuller 2004). The data were triangulated by utilizing a team of Vermont school leadership experts to confirm preliminary findings. An extensive cross-case analysis was performed across all of the superintendent interviews to identify common patterns and to determine significance. I used my experience as a PG practitioner and a Vermont superintendent to ensure the data responded to the research questions of the study. Other typical means of triangulation utilized in narrative studies such as document review or participant observation (Glesne, 2006) were not used in this study since the intent of this study was to bring forward the voices of the superintendents in order to describe their beliefs and perceptions, not to confirm a theory or to identify any relationship between their beliefs and organizational outcomes.

Transferability was addressed by selecting a group of superintendents with common experiences but with diverse governance situations and contexts. Vermont provides a highly complex school governance context that lends itself well to ameliorating concerns over transferability. The primary focus of this study, however, was in obtaining an in-depth understanding of the experience of these superintendents, not in establishing an experimental design which could be replicated as means of addressing concerns over external validity.

Dependability was dealt with by organizing this study around a series of in-depth interviews. Every aspect of the study was described in detail. I maintained a field log as

a means of reflecting on my role as a researcher and a practicing Vermont superintendent. I checked my interview protocols, perceptions, and conclusions with several leadership experts who were familiar with my work as well as the condition of the superintendency in Vermont. This input helped me generalize my findings based on their perspectives of working with school districts and superintendents state-wide over several decades. I also invited several executive-level Vermont educational leaders to respond to my conclusions.

I was attentive to confirmability by considering my objectivity. As a practicing Vermont superintendent, I was keenly aware of my subjectivity in this study. All of the superintendent participants were colleagues but none of them were close friends. Although I was not professionally committed to the success of the PG model, I was, and remain, committed to the success of the superintendency. I believed the superintendent was the most important leadership role in our school governance system, and I had to be careful this perspective did not contaminate my ability to be objective. I also believed the conclusions from the postmodern literature were accurate in that educational leaders need to have a solid commitment to an ethic of democratic service. I anticipated this study would affirm my belief in the necessity of examining the ethical basis for educational leadership. My interest in seeing outcomes from this study that might reinforce my beliefs in this area was another concern for subjectivity. To assist with maintaining objectivity, all of the interviews were digitally recorded and the transcripts were produced from the digital recordings using a commercial transcription service. This ensured accuracy of the data. I also maintained field notes of the interviews to capture my

subjective perceptions for later consideration and review.

At the same time, however, I acknowledged that my role as a superintendent gave me unique insight into the stories of these superintendents. My perspective as a practicing superintendent enhanced my ability to attenuate the significance of these findings relative to the larger political conversation about school governance in Vermont. Through the study and analysis of the stories of these superintendents, I gained a deeper understanding of my own thinking about educational leadership, ethics, and school governance practices.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Context: The Districts and the Superintendents

Vermont's options for governing education are many and complex. Each has some unique guiding legal regulations and procedures. Each has its own nuances and implementation issues and practices that may differ from other structures within the same supervisory union (Proulx, 2007, p.4).

Vermont has a very complex public school governance structure. Vermont has approximately sixty superintendents. Each superintendent supervises either a group of school districts organized in a supervisory union or supervises a supervisory district which is a single school district acting as its own supervisory union (Cate, 2006). Of the sixty superintendents, approximately fifty serve multi-district supervisory unions and the remaining ten serve a supervisory district comprised of a single school district with a single school board. The situation and governance experience of Vermont superintendents can therefore vary widely. There is a significant difference between being a superintendent in a multi-district supervisory union with nine school boards and sixty school board members as compared to a superintendent who serves a supervisory district with a single school board and perhaps as few as five school board members (Angney, 1986).

At the time of this dissertation study, the four participant superintendents were serving in school district governance configurations which mirrored the variety of school governance structures found in Vermont. Since the governance structure of Vermont school districts does vary significantly, it is important to describe the specific school governance situations and contexts of these four superintendents in order to better understand their individual beliefs and perceptions about PG. For the purposes of this

study, the names of the Vermont counties, the school districts, and the superintendents have been changed to preserve anonymity.

*County Demographics*

The four superintendents served the following school districts at the time of this dissertation study: the Metro Supervisory District, the Lakeview Supervisory Union, the Maple Supervisory Union, and the Valley Supervisory Union. Table 1 below describes key features of the counties where each of these districts was located.

Table 1.

Demographic Data for Selected Vermont Counties, 2008-2012

	City	Mountain	Farm	Lake
Population	156,545	36,821	28,936	27,231
College Degrees	46.3%	34.2%	28.2%	20.0%
Per Capita Income	\$32,021	\$28,550	\$26,824	\$21,658
Poverty Level	11.5%	11.1%	11.9%	15.6%

The Metro Supervisory District is located in City County. City County is in northwestern Vermont and home to Vermont's largest city. The Lakeview Supervisory Union is located in Mountain County. Mountain County is south of City County in the western section of Vermont, and is bounded by Lake Champlain to the west and the Green Mountains to the east. The Maple Supervisory Union is located in central Vermont and is largely in Farm County along the I-89 corridor. The Valley Supervisory Union is for the most part in Lake County in north central Vermont. Lake County is a part of Vermont's Northeast Kingdom, a relatively rural area characterized as being Vermont's Last Frontier (Vermont's Northland Journal, 2014). Of these four counties, City County

is the most populous, has the most adults with college degrees, and has the highest per capita income levels (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2010).

According to Vermont school district data from 2007 (Agency of Human Services, 2007), these variations in demographics at the county level do not necessarily translate into significant variations in basic school district performance indicators. See Table 2 below.

Table 2.

Supervisory Union Demographics, 2007

	Metro	Lakeview	Valley	Maple
0-9 Population	1,907	1,295	758	2,006
10-17 Population	1,782	1,468	893	933
School Attendance Rate	95.8%	95.5%	95.4%	94.6%
4 <sup>th</sup> Graders Meeting the Standard – Reading	79%	64%	77%	63%
4 <sup>th</sup> Graders Meeting the Standard – Math	75%	69%	68%	52%
High School Completion	85%	87%	86%	78%

These school districts have comparable attendance and high school graduation rates.

These rates are relatively high from a national perspective, but these same data indicate Vermont has state-wide attendance and graduation rates equally as high as these districts (Agency of Human Services, 2007). Student performance on state-level assessments among these districts is also fairly comparable. One area of significant difference among these districts is the demographic distribution of the ages of children. It is interesting to note that Maple Supervisory Union has more than twice as many children ages 0-9 than it does children ages 10-17. None of the other districts has a similar demographic context.

All of the other school districts have populations of children spread more equally across these age spans.

### *Governance Structures*

Since these school districts were fairly comparable in several respects, one would expect them to have similar governance structures. This was not the case, however, since Vermont's public school governance structures have remained largely unchanged since the early 1900s (Cate, 2006). Vermont's school governance structures seem to be more a function of history than current demographic realities.

These four districts represent the variations found in Vermont's school district governance structures. The simplest district of these four districts is the Metro Supervisory Union. It is one of the few supervisory districts in Vermont. It is comprised of a single school district governed by a single school board. The district has five schools: three elementary schools with about three hundred students each, a single middle school with five hundred and fifty students, and a high school with just under nine hundred students. The elementary schools feed into the middle school and the middle school feeds into the high school (VSA/VSBA, 2010).

The Maple Union Supervisory Union, on the other hand, has a very complex governance structure. The Maple Supervisory Union is governed by seven school boards, and has one kindergarten through grade twelve school with one hundred and fifty students, two town school district elementary schools ranging in size from forty students to sixty students, a union district elementary school with two hundred and fifty students, and a union district high school with about four hundred students (VSA/VSBA, 2010).

Union school districts are districts which are formed by two or more town school districts for the purpose of operating a school. In Maple Union, the supervisory union contains two union districts but the union districts are not composed of the same town school districts. Another complicating feature of Maple Union is not all of the students in the supervisory union's elementary schools feed into the same middle school, and students attend one of two high schools.

Other key variables which contribute to governance complexity are the number of school boards, school board members, and the relative geographic size of the district. Vermont supervisory unions with a large number school boards and school board members spread out over a large geographic area can present challenges to leadership, and these features have been cited as a cause of leadership turnover and burnout (Proulx, 2007). Table 3 below summarizes the variations in governance complexity among these four school districts.

Table 3.

School District Governance Complexity

	Metro	Lakeview	Valley	Maple
Number of Schools	5	6	5	6
Number of Boards	1	7	6	7
Number of Board Members	5	65	36	60
Board Meetings per Month	2	7	9	9
Area in Square Miles	30	210	210	209

The data in Table 3 indicate Metro has a much simpler governance structure, and several of the variables which can add complexity to a superintendent's work such as the

number of evening meetings per month and the distances between and among districts are much more manageable in Metro than they are in the other districts. Lakeview, Valley, and Maple are fairly typical Vermont multi-district supervisory unions although each has features and structures that makes them different from one another.

This variation in governance contexts is important to acknowledge when trying to make sense of superintendent beliefs and perceptions about PG. The four superintendents in this study worked in different types of districts and came to the superintendency with different academic and professional backgrounds. In the next section, I introduce the superintendents and describe their personal and professional backgrounds and how they became interested in PG. I tell their stories in a narrative format.

#### *Metro Supervisory Union - Superintendent Red*

Superintendent Red did not initially choose a career in education. He said, “I kind of defaulted into education.” He majored in engineering at the undergraduate level but found interest in some of the psychology courses he was required to take as an undergraduate. He also studied computer programming, a skill that he would utilize throughout his career. It is clear Superintendent Red was a natural leader, and he sought out opportunities to serve organizations through his leadership. He said, “I was deeply engaged in student government and leadership. In fact, I did leadership as far back as I can remember, as far as church groups and all that stuff.” During the Vietnam War era, Superintendent Red's leadership abilities were acknowledged when he was elected president of the university's student body.

After drifting a bit, his interests in psychology and leadership would bring him to

a career in education, and a need to be closer to family brought him to Vermont. “I went back to school to really get engaged in community psychology and loved it. My wife and I then just picked up and came to New England because her mom had been from Maine and we just happened to drive through Vermont, Rochester Vermont actually, and we fell in love with Vermont and felt it was a really cool place.” He and his wife lived out of their car for some time while he tried to enroll in a graduate program in psychology at the University of Massachusetts. He was not admitted to that program, but while walking through the campus one day he saw an advertisement for a teaching job at the Landmark School in Vermont. The Landmark School was established to support students with learning disabilities. When Superintendent Red saw the advertisement, he thought, “I could teach these kids math.”

The teaching job at Landmark was Superintendent Red's first teaching job and the beginning of a long career in education. He did not have any formal training to be a teacher at Landmark. He said, “I called them up and went down there and talked to them; watched a math class for about two hours through a window, that was my teacher training, and then they put me in a class that afternoon.” He relied on his logical thinking developed through his computer programming background to figure out teaching. As he stated, “I used my training in computer programming. I broke things down in parts for the students.” He was very successful teaching learning disabled students and enjoyed the experience a great deal.

Superintendent Red eventually left Landmark to participate in Vermont's consulting teacher program, a program that allowed him to gain more experience as a

teacher and also experience as an educational leader. As he recalled, “I moved into a district that was just starting a special education program, and I was like their first special education teacher and special education administrator, so I started my teaching career with administrative responsibilities as well.” His leadership abilities came to the forefront again when he was elected an officer of the state special education administrators association.

He then decided to change his job because, “I sort of got tired of doing that,” and he took a job as an elementary school principal for a year. He loved the kids, but it wasn't the level of work that he was interested in, and in his words, “the community was kind of wacky.” He decided working at the elementary level was not a good fit, so he took a position as a high school special education teacher in a neighboring district, and did that for three years. When his wife was offered a new position in a different part of Vermont, Superintendent Red and his family moved and he started working at a different school teaching emotionally disturbed students.

He and his wife then started a family which ultimately caused him to leave education for a bit. He said, “We just had too much going on with three little kids and my wife doing an internship so something had to give. So I said okay I will give.” Superintendent Red used his time as a stay-at-home parent to develop a small computer software business. He developed a special education management system for student individual education plans (IEPs) which was quite successful. He became frustrated, however, when teachers used his software to put thousands of learning objectives in IEPs because the software was so easy to use. As he stated, “It was frustrating because it



worked fine, but instead of people writing IEP's that were sensible because it was so easy, they put thousands of objectives into plans. It was like I created the atomic bomb.” He abandoned the IEP software system out of a sense of guilt and instead developed a product for managing school district finances. This was how, “I got to know the ins and outs of the financial aspects of running a district.”

Eventually, Superintendent Red's interests in education, leadership, and organizational systems would bring him to the superintendency. He was working from home in his successful software business during the period of the Gulf War and watched a great deal of the war on television. This caused him to reconsider his life's work:

This was during the time of the Gulf War and every day at lunch I watched the Gulf War, and after a period of time I couldn't figure out what was going on but I was so depressed, and I've never been depressed in my life. I mean clinically depressed, and I could tell something was wrong. I realized I was reliving this war, and it had gotten into my head. I realized that doing computers was not my life's work. My life's work was back in education.

He then took a series of positions as a special education director. In one of these districts a principal position opened up, and he was concerned about finding someone qualified for the job so he decided to take the position himself. In Red's words, “We either got people that were coming there to die or young guys who we wouldn't sacrifice to the veteran staff, who would eat a young guy alive, so I said to the superintendent I will do it and he said okay.” He worked as principal and special education director at the same time. He was able to make positive changes at the school, changes he characterized as “getting some things done,” and “shaking things up a bit.” He then transitioned to being a curriculum director for a few years. When a superintendent vacancy occurred in a neighboring district, he applied and was offered the job.

As a superintendent, his interest in organizations as systems prompted him to learn more about PG:

When I was a superintendent, I got interested in Baldrige [Baldrige Performance Excellence Program] and that played a part in my thinking. The thing about Policy Governance for me, it was the governance side of how you do Baldrige. So my model of thinking is the Baldrige model criteria, it is not Policy Governance. The Baldrige criteria is very clear about what is the work of both the leadership and what is the work of the workers, whether it is the classroom level or school superintendent. Policy Governance answered the question of how you have a board appropriately engaged in setting the end game and goals of the organization without what the Baldrige people would call going below the line, getting down into the running, the micromanagement. So, that was the big draw for me; here is a way to do the Baldrige work.

To Superintendent Red, PG also presented a practical framework for the superintendent-school board relationship. When he became the superintendent, one of the prior superintendents had been there for a long time. The prior superintendent, according to Red, “pretty much ruled the place with an iron fist, just did what he wanted to do.” The superintendent who followed this long-serving superintendent, the one Superintendent Red replaced, was as he described, “a nice guy, but he did not have systems in place nor did he have the political clout that prior superintendent had.” As a result of these leadership changes, Superintendent Red inherited a fairly dysfunctional situation from a systems standpoint. Superintendent Red found satisfaction in “cleaning up messes” and learned, “the jobs that attract me, where there has been a fit, are where there is something for me to clean up.” Part of what needed to be cleaned up was establishing proper roles and responsibilities between administration and the school board. The school board was, “deep into micromanagement” and he described board meetings as being “chaotic,” where “principals used to come to board meetings and play

with Pez dispensers.” According to Superintendent Red, “Policy Governance helped explain to the board how they should do the right thing.”

*Lakeview Supervisory Union – Superintendent White*

As a young adult, Superintendent White was not sure what she wanted to do with her life. She was fairly certain she did not want to be a school administrator since her mother had been a teacher, and her mother, “did not look on administration particularly with a positive view.” During an interview she shared, “I had not a clue as to what that might be about or whether I had any interest in it.” She perceived her only two options for a college education were to pursue either nursing or teaching, so she chose teaching. She started her career as a Kindergarten teacher and loved it. It formed what would be a life-long interest in reading and literacy. She also found teaching gave her an opportunity to be creative. As she stated, “I never did anything the same way twice, never. I mean I was constantly creating and recreating and recreating.”

Her first teaching job was in a small school in the Northeast Kingdom, and this small setting would allow her to pursue administrative work in spite of her mother's perspective against it. This school had three teachers and about sixty students. One day she was asked to be the teaching principal and she said, “Sure, why not?” Eventually she enrolled in a graduate program in educational administration because as the teaching principal she felt she needed to learn more about how to operate the school. She observed, “If I’m going to be a principal in the building then I should know how to do things. It was just sort of a constant kind of grasping for new ideas.” She was the teaching principal in this small school for five years and then came to the point where, “I

was either compromising what I was doing in the classroom because I was trying to support someone else or I was compromising the role, you know principal in the building.”

Ultimately, she left this job to focus solely on being a principal because she had “developed a vision for what it was I should be doing if I was really going to be an educational leader.” Her first full-time principalship was also in the Northeast Kingdom. Her position was still split, however, because her role as principal was shared between two small schools. One of her first tasks as principal was to support the building of an addition on to one of the schools. Once the addition was complete, the school decided it wanted its own principal and she was forced to look for work again.

She then applied for a principal job in the southern part of the Northeast Kingdom but was offered a curriculum director position instead. Her interest in literacy education prompted her to take the position, but as she remembered she was, “devastated to learn she was not going to be offered a principalship.” The curriculum director position was her first exposure to work in a district central office. Next, she moved to New Hampshire to be the curriculum director in a larger district. The position became an assistant superintendent position but she did not have any responsibility for working with the school boards. It was at this New Hampshire district where she first heard about PG. She attended a presentation by a consultant in the region and remembers thinking that it sounded interesting. As she recalled, “There are some things that are board work, and there’s some things that are administration, and I think – you know, all the time I was sort of carrying around that, but I didn’t have a way to think about it.”

Superintendent White's New Hampshire district, organized in a manner similar to a Vermont multi-district supervisory union, started to fragment into smaller units when some of the districts started a process to leave the district. This process gave her the opportunity to reflect on her role relative to her superintendent and school boards:

So they went off with their own like part-time superintendents, and so it gave me a chance to focus a little bit, although I didn't really have a role at the board table. I just had the experience of working with my superintendent and just sitting through meetings after meetings and trying to anticipate the questions, you know, that whole dilemma. So I sort of had those ideas [PG] in my head, but when I came over here [Vermont], I think I was really naïve about wanting to do whatever the board asked of me – just be in service to your school board because that was going to be in service to the community. What I realize now in sort of looking back over these nine years, is number one, I didn't have a sense of boundaries for myself, for the board or anything. It was sort of like I didn't like some of the things and ways that people worked, but I just didn't have a framework for it.

She left New Hampshire to accept a superintendent position in a large multi-district supervisory union in Vermont. Her experience in New Hampshire had given her some insight on how to manage the multiple school boards, but at first she followed the lead of the board chairpersons. She said, “Whatever they chose to talk about at meetings, it was my job to at least try to manage that, if I could.” She came to the conclusion that this approach was unmanageable and was not a sustainable lifestyle for her:

You know, all the time I think I acknowledged that this is a lifestyle that is simply unreasonable. I mean, when you're out every single night. You leave at 8:00 a.m. and you're back at 9:00 p.m., 10:00 p.m., and in the early years it was 11:00 p.m. or 12:00 a.m. I guess as I've become more thoughtful and efficient about the way that I try to do things with boards, I've at least reduced those really late hours. And now when we get, if it goes past 9:00 p.m., it's sort of like, what are we doing? Does this really make sense? And I think now with some confidence I can tell them when I think they're off their rockers about how to get work done.”

Even though Superintendent White was a-tuned to operational inefficiencies of a

multi-district supervisory union, she remained convinced that the work of school boards was essential to democracy. PG would ultimately help her bridge the connection between the need for both democracy and organizational effectiveness. She said, “I think I even – at that point, I was convinced that school boards were like the last vestige of democracy.” She tried to reconcile her interest in supporting democracy and local decision making with the need to effectively manage a large school system. She observed much of what the boards were doing really was not about improving educational opportunities or outcomes for students, but actually interfering and distracting her and her principals from accomplishing these ends. One comment was particularly telling, “The boards were slowing us down. It distracted me from – and actually limited what I could do in terms of working with principals and with teachers.” Her initial exposure to PG in New Hampshire made her enthusiastic about trying to implement it in her Vermont districts and when the whole PG topic came back onto the table in Vermont she thought, “Wow. I remember this.”

*Valley Supervisory Union – Superintendent Blue*

Superintendent Blue majored in Scandinavian Studies as an undergraduate without a firm idea of what he would do with his life. He applied for a rural secondary teaching position in the National Teacher Corps and was accepted, but they sent him to Trenton, New Jersey instead of a rural district, and to an elementary teaching assignment instead of a secondary one. He taught elementary school in Trenton for fifteen years and went to graduate school at a college in New Jersey where he received his masters degree in education. Then he, “went through a midlife crisis.” A friend had gone to Harvard,

and Superintendent Blue thought, “Harvard's program was a cash cow, and they'll take anybody off the street, including me, and being a resolute, I didn't know what to do with my life so I applied to the doctoral program.” The doctoral program at Harvard allowed him to obtain an “unspecified masters degree” so he declared a concentration in administration, planning, and social policy since the bulk of his coursework was in administration.

After completing his second masters degree and his doctorate, he took a series of part-time jobs including working for the Massachusetts Department of Mental Retardation in direct care, and the National Education Association school reform programs in Rhode Island and Maine. He then decided to go into school administration, and he accepted his first position as a principal in central Vermont. When he started his job search, he had applied to districts from around the country including districts as far west as Moorehead, Minnesota, as far south as Birmingham, Alabama.” Within twenty-four hours after searching, he was offered two positions, one in New Hampshire and one in southern Vermont. He took the Vermont principal position and was employed as principal there for five years.

He eventually moved to the Northeast Kingdom to accept an assistant superintendent position in a large multi-district supervisory union. He worked in that position for five years, and then became a superintendent in smaller, central Vermont supervisory union for three years. At the time of this study, he was in his first year as superintendent for a larger supervisory union in central Vermont.

Superintendent Blue attended a conference on PG in Montpelier presented by the

VSBA. This was the first he had heard of PG. He remembers thinking, “What they said made sense.” His future board chairperson was also at this conference. This board chairperson was a college professor who was interested in PG. Superintendent Blue and the board member talked about PG for a while and thought that it would be interesting to explore. As he indicated, “We explored it [PG] to the point where just before I left, that district had adopted it.”

Superintendent Blue brought the concepts of PG to his new, much larger district, and was starting to work on its implementation at the time of this dissertation study.

When I asked him to describe how he was going about implementing PG he said:

There are vestiges of it here, but I have not advocated openly for it. That is not my leadership style. I believe that you can’t always advocate up front for where you want to go; you’ve got to lay some groundwork. My metaphor is a waiter with a loaded tray can’t go through the door frontwards. But, so, that being said, I started day one looking at these five disparate school’s school districts who have begun to do a little more collaboratively. I began by saying in the next three to five years education in the valley will not look the same as it does now, and that mantra – I’ve chanted that mantra for probably five or six months, and finally one of the board members said I hear you saying that it won’t look the same; what do you think it might look like? And I went, “Damn, caught.”

*Maple Supervisory Union – Superintendent Green*

Superintendent Green followed a fairly typical career progression to the superintendency: teacher, assistant principal, principal and then superintendent. He started his career as a middle school science teacher. According to Superintendent Green, “I was a middle school science teacher – they called it junior high then - did some coaching. I really got into it.” He taught middle school science in the same system for ten years and then, as he said, “the question came along when you get to be thirty – time to do advanced study.” He decided to go into educational leadership because he was



encouraged to do so by his principal. When he was a teacher and his principal left the building, Superintendent Green was, “the guy upstairs he [the principal] would go to when he had to leave for a meeting.” He completed his masters degree in educational administration and obtained his principals license but had “no idea” what to do next.

One day the superintendent showed up in his classroom, and he remembered thinking he had been teaching in the district for ten years had never seen the superintendent in his classroom. It made him think that either he “really screwed up, or something else is going on.” The superintendent wanted Green to serve as an interim principal while they conducted a search for a permanent replacement. The superintendent said, “Well, we’ll pay you some more money,” and Green said, “Well, that’d be good because I’ve got a young family, and I’m starving mostly.” After a one-day training with the outgoing principal, he assumed the role of interim principal for six weeks, his first position in educational administration. This brief training included the following advice:

Be visible every day. See all the people. Make sure you have lunch with the cooks. They always cook a little special for the principal before they eat. Do that. Check in with the custodians and listen to the secretary. That’s how you begin. And here’s the alarm code for the alarm system.

Not surprisingly, Superintendent Green did not feel well prepared to be a principal. He characterized this brief six week stint, however, as “a great awakening.” It “triggered” his thinking. He remembered thinking, “You know, I think I could do this, and it’s kind of interesting.” Shortly after his position as interim principal, Green decided to pursue school administration as his career goal. He applied for assistant principal positions and was hired by a high school in the Northeast Kingdom. He worked as an assistant principal for three years, and then accepted a principal position for a small

school in the same region. He shared how he, “hooked up with the superintendent there who became my mentor as a superintendent for a long time.”

Superintendent Green had a successful career as a high school principal in Vermont including serving as the principal of one of the largest high schools in the state. Eventually, he became involved with the Vermont Principals Association (VPA) through his work in a state-wide educational leadership group whose focus was examining the turnover rate of principals and what could be done to sustain principals in their work. He found the state-level work informative because it confirmed his observation based on experience that many Vermont districts struggle with clarifying roles and responsibilities among the school board, superintendent, and principal:

It made sense to me that there was something going on. And so I went to that experience really with a pretty much wide open template and some direction to identify what was causing this and what we do about it. I later coined it to be “Mission Impossible,” but – you know, I mean – but in there I found out the clear and abiding thing that made sense to me was that people – good people of good intention spend a lot of time hurting each other, very confused about their roles and what their expertise is and who should do what. And I found it particularly confusing and hurtful to school board members. They were both being hurtful and being hurt quite frequently because of their exposure to the way the system was treating them.

When the grant which funded the VPA work expired, Green had to look for other work. His old district in the Northeast Kingdom, where he began his career as a principal, was interested in having him become the district's superintendent. They invited him to come discuss the possibilities. He initially told them that superintendent work was, “work I am not interested in,” but they were open to trying something different. The district was a large, multi-district supervisory union. At first, the conversation focused on having Green be superintendent for just the high school and

having another superintendent serve the other member districts. Ultimately, they agreed to split the administration of the district down the middle with two co-superintendents to make the job more doable, but it was the district's interest in addressing the confusion over roles and responsibilities, and the potential opportunity to implement PG which sealed the deal for Green:

I interviewed the board at the high school before I came for my school district superintendent's interview. And I say interviewed them because that's exactly what I was doing. I'd heard they were the problem child in the district, and I heard things from them that were enlightening. It lined up with my research. They were really wanting to work at clarify roles. And the Chair, after I got there, had said, "I heard about this thing called Policy Governance."

### *Summary*

The four superintendents in this study worked in different demographic contexts and school districts, and the districts had different governance structures. They came to the superintendency with different academic backgrounds and professional experiences. Their common experience was participation in the VSBA PG pilot project. All of them found value in the PG training provided through this program, and all of them reported PG affected their practice as an education leader in some manner. The questions I wanted to answer were what were their specific beliefs and perceptions about PG, and to what extent did PG create dilemmas for their educational leadership. In the next chapter, I answer these questions through an analysis of their stories as captured in the data from this study.

In the next chapter I also introduce my voice and perspective as a Vermont superintendent. When I interviewed these superintendents in the 2008-2009 school year,

all of them were two years or so away from retirement, and they were very interested in reflecting back on their careers and their practice as Vermont educational leaders. As I listened to the stories of these superintendents, I could not help but feel both respectful and somewhat in awe of their collective wisdom. At the same time, I was able to listen critically from the perspective of an experienced Vermont superintendent. Reviewing the transcripts of these interviews, I found myself not only listening as a critical friend, but also at times being an equal contributor in the dialog, adding my experience as both a PG practitioner and a superintendent of a large multi-district supervisory union. As a researcher, I was familiar with the theoretical underpinnings of PG. This combination of practical experience and theoretical understanding placed me in a unique position to bring forward the importance of the voices of these superintendents while at the same time being able to make sense of their experiences from both a practical and theoretical perspective.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Findings

In this chapter, I present the findings resulting from a narrative coding of the superintendent interviews. I interviewed each of the four superintendents three times, and each interview lasted approximately ninety minutes. I also consider the data from my perspective as a superintendent.

The purpose of this study was to answer two questions. The first question sought to obtain a better understanding of superintendent beliefs and perceptions about PG, and the second asked to what extent PG implementation created ethical dilemmas for their work as educational leaders. From a coding of the data, several themes emerged which describe the superintendent's beliefs and perceptions about PG. These themes were responsibility, trust, and vision. I describe these themes by citing and analyzing specific quotes from the interview transcripts.

To surface ethical dilemmas created by PG implementation, I evaluated the data based on my experience as both a PG practitioner and an experienced Vermont superintendent. To explore ethical connections in the data, I utilized Starratt's theoretical framework on virtues (2004). Starratt's work on virtues builds on the work of other theorists such as Sergiovanni (1992), Fullan (2002), and Furman (2003) who highlight the need for moral school leadership as a response to the complexities of postmodern society. These postmodern complexities include the increased use of connective technologies, a lack of faith in organizations and leaders, and the frequent restructuring of organizations (Lipman-Blumen, 2000). I conclude PG implementation presented these

superintendents with ethical dilemmas in four areas. These dilemmas included:

1. Developing an organizational vision through ends policies which transfer control over vision from the superintendent to the school board;
2. Assisting boards with engaging their communities in the development of ends policies while at the same time ensuring those ends meet the moral purposes of schooling in serving the needs of all students and the larger public good;
3. Enforcing a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities while serving the board in its work; and
4. Assuming responsibility for transforming school systems to meet the future needs of students while at the same time supporting the success of students and educators in the current structures.

I also conclude a significant aspect of PG is that it creates an intellectual and practical framework which sets superintendents on a course of action to confront these ethical dilemmas.

#### *Theme #1: Responsibility*

The superintendents in this study all observed how PG made them feel more responsible. One aspect of this responsibility had to do with the focus PG puts on ends which in a school organization are an articulation of outcomes for students. Another aspect of responsibility identified by the superintendents was a responsibility to the system of governance itself, to ensure the system functioned well so it could achieve its necessary ends. Superintendent Red observed:

PG is one of the things that has overwhelmingly heightened my sense of responsibility for what I'm supposed to be doing. The amazing part of PG, this is

the affect part I was alluding to earlier, it makes me take my job so much more responsibly, and to take responsibility for the outcomes so much more seriously.

Superintendent Green made a similar comment:

I think the national accountability measure is probably an important precursor to this work towards ends – towards Policy Governance because in the culture – in the climate people are sort of expecting now to see results from education. We have to be responsible. Before, the results that they sort of valued were kind and caring people, knew what they were doing, they were experts, and they just sort of expected we knew what we were doing and didn't really ask us, "So what?" It was the doing that was important, not the result. Now we had a – somehow an instinctive sense that doing would get us results. If we had the right people acting in the right way helping kids – smart people – Somehow it's all gonna come together.

PG requires school boards to engage their communities to determine desired outcomes and to articulate those outcomes in policies called ends policies. This process firmly places boards in a trustee relationship with the public on outcomes and places outcomes for students front and center in the governance process. As a superintendent, I embraced this approach because in the complexity of our school systems it is easy as a superintendent to lose sight of the organization's purpose. As superintendent Blue said, "PG helps keep your eyes on the prize," and that prize is more than student performance on national or state assessments. When my boards engaged their communities in an ends develop process, most of the communities came back with the same goals for students, and those goals could be easily grouped into three categories: core academics, dispositions towards student learning, and civic ethics. See Appendix D for a draft copy of our districts ends policies which further describe these goals. It is interesting to note none of my communities identified positive student performance on government accountability assessments as a desired outcome for students.

The issue of accountability, however, is not the same as responsibility. Pasi Sahlberg, a former official in the Finnish Ministry of Education, describes this well when he talks about Finland's educational success (Sahlberg, 2010). Sahlberg believes accountability can be seen as an external force and responsibility an internal one, meaning responsibility is internal to the school organization whereas accountability originates from an external force usually a government (Sahlberg, 2010). A responsible teacher ensures all students can read on grade level, and a responsible superintendent evaluates systems to ensure they are achieving the desired student outcomes. I found PG to support this type of responsibility by allowing superintendents and board members to be actively responsible as opposed to being passively accountable. I think a key difference between the two is that PG requires boards to connect to their local communities to achieve community-determined ends, as opposed to the government school accountability system which is designed to provide assurance to the state and federal government to show that tax dollars are being well spent.

Another aspect of responsibility apparent in the data was the superintendents' perceived responsibility to ensure organizational systems ran well. The definition of "well" was student outcomes and the achievement of organizational ends.

Superintendent Red noted:

Under PG if there is something that comes to the board that is questionable, I failed. Whereas before, it's just fun to watch the board take responsibility for things, like oh no you can't go on a field trip. I start having much more serious talks with the people that work for me, you know my direct reports. Under Policy Governance, I just feel it has led me to feel so much more responsible and I find that interesting. It is not that I have not had people responsible to me in the past, but it just seems like lighting the nerve ends. It's my responsibility. The how is my responsibility. So if I am wasting resources for this or for that then it's my



fault. I am the one that has to answer for it not the board. Somehow for me it has been a very deep internalization of responsibility.

A key aspect of keeping systems working well was an attention to roles and responsibilities. A key function of a superintendent's responsibility was perceived to be ensuring key players in school district governance such as board members, the superintendent, and principals, worked within the boundaries of their legal roles.

Superintendent Red mentioned:

It's [PG] about a different number of things, but it has not only given me the license but responsibility to keep boards doing what they're supposed to be doing, keeping them in their place. I once said to someone on our administrative team who was also a school board member in another district, that I thought one of the most important jobs of the superintendent was to protect principals from school boards. He was going to strangle me at first but he later came to understand what I meant by that responsibility.

Superintendent Blue felt that:

In one district, for example, we've got a rare personnel issue, and I recommended a non-renewal of a first year teacher. We screwed it up procedurally. I was hoping that the union would lay down and die; they didn't. They walked through the door and said, "Here are your violations." And I looked at them. They cited chapter and verse, and I looked at them and said, "I can't tell you you got me, but let's work something out." So, but the board's letting us do this. I went to the board and said, you know, "We're taking a risk here." And they're saying let administration handle it. It is your responsibility not ours. With that particular teacher, she's coming back. We've got an improvement plan, got some outside facilitation and group dynamics. When it came time to move her from one position to another the board said this is an administrative function. We [the board] don't want this coming to the board. We don't want to be in a position to adjudicate this.

Superintendent Green made a similar observation:

I think what it [PG] does is it does this other piece of work, which is to clarify the roles and responsibilities so we know how it works, and we know what his job is, or her job is, and we also know that it defines the relationship that says, "As a board member, I'm evaluating this person all the time." That's not like, come on over and let's have a beer type of thing. It is a personal relationship, but it has a

professional basis. And so, I believe that policy governance provides that clarity, or the clarity of the job, so that then they can feel a greater sense of accountability.

I agree with this perception that one of the superintendent's primary responsibilities is to ensure good governance through adherence to proper roles and responsibilities. This is probably more true in Vermont, where role confusion is a common feature of supervisory unions (Proulx, 2007). PG was perceived to help with this in that it supports a clear delineation between organizational ends and means. Ends are setup to be the responsibility of the board whereas means are the responsibility of the superintendent. In exchange of letting go of means, boards are given a system of monitoring which allows them to better provide assurance to their communities that the school is actually achieving the desired outcomes for students. PG gives superintendents clarity of purpose and freedom to explore new approaches. Superintendent Green described it this way:

I think things are changing so fast that we need people to take responsibility and freedom for what they're doing under sort of a guiding, this is what we want to accomplish. A central planning group can't do it. Leaders need to take responsibility. If people don't want to do it, they're going to get left behind.

Superintendent Red said:

I find the model [PG] helps me understand the leadership job to help the organization set the game and to have the strategic goals and measures and to watch to see if you're getting the results you want. And of course there are certain processes, professional development, etc. so I see my leadership role as as getting all that done, sorting into boxes, and the whole information system underneath with a clear understanding that you can't do any of it without relationships.

I think these comments underscore the perception the superintendents had that there is a sense of urgency to change governance practices in Vermont if the system is to be successful in meeting the future needs of students. Making the necessary changes will

take a lot of work, and a necessary component of that work was perceived to be trust.

*Theme #2: Trust*

The superintendents all perceived trust as being an important component of their leadership in PG. Superintendent White mentioned:

Before we started [with Policy Governance], there was no way to have a conversation around the future– and I don't know whether it's a trust factor or what it is. I mean, I think people know me now, but – and the board members, for the most part – I have sort of – there's a level of trust that I'm not gonna do anything really destructive. And in fact, I've had some really tough issues recently, and they've really stood behind me – and some yet to be aired. So in a sense, I've felt like they were willing to go to this place because they have a sense of trust in the administration, and I know that the question has sort of bubbled up a couple of times. But the question came up of whether or not a district was in a place where they could begin to talk about it because they had enough trust in the administration. So if you don't have that, then people feel like they're giving away authority.

This quote points to how significant a change PG is compared to traditional Vermont school district practices. I characterized this significance as being “dissonance” based on my experience as a researcher for the VSBA PG pilot implementation project. PG asks Vermont school boards to change significantly, and the premise is superintendents will lead this work on behalf of their boards. This requires a great deal of trust between the superintendent and the board members. Common approaches used by the superintendents in this study to build trust included transparency and competence.

Superintendent White commented further:

I just keep saying to people, here is what I think you want me to report on. This is the information you want and need. When it's not enough, you need to tell me so that I can go back and re-frame the monitoring report or whatever.

Superintendent Red observed:

I'd recently just finished negotiating a support staff contract, just myself. There

were no board members present, and able to influence it, not a contentious, normal negotiation but let's just talk this through, work it out, build trust. I guess I'd say I'm pretty proud of that. It was a relatively short amount of time. We got it done in about ten weeks or so and got great feedback. They were pleased with the contract; I was pleased with the contract. The amount of money didn't become a huge issue, which is kind of crazy these days. I think it gave me time to build trust with them and then just being very transparent and open about even the amount of money. I just don't have much money. I can't go there, but that came after we had built a lot of trust, so we got good feedback.

In this instance, the transparency had to deal with negotiating a new staff contract. The transparency led to trust being built with staff, but I think this quote also demonstrates the connection back to building trust with the board who, in my experience, often assesses the abilities of a superintendent by how a superintendent treats staff. School board members in Vermont are very close to school staff from an organizational perspective. Building organizational trust is a larger task than attending to the relationship between the superintendent and the board members. It is based on the how the superintendent interacts with all organizational stakeholders including students, parents, community members, and teachers. The Vermont superintendent sits not in a hierarchy, but at the center of a complex web of relationships where trust is the currency that enables the superintendent to make changes to a system. Superintendent White gave this example of building trust with teachers by working with them directly. They trusted her because she respected their opinions and because of her expertise and competence with literacy instruction:

This spring there was an interesting scenario that developed where I had a couple teachers in the high school for reading specialists. Their focus is about primarily working with teachers so that reading and writing is taught across the curriculum and then doing some additional work with maybe with individuals but their primary work is about working with classroom teachers. So you can just imagine how hard that is. And every year, you know I have to tug on that a little bit cause

it keeps slipping away. They start asking those people to intervene on an individual child basis and they're not busy enough because the classroom teachers don't have time to sit and work with them. So I'm always kinda yanking on that chain a little bit. But who has the power to make these decisions? So I went and sat with them and worked through it – you know and it's so far out from what my role should be, but they trusted me.

Superintendent Green described how PG and its focus on organizational outcomes brought the issue of trust to the surface:

So I saw that I wasn't thinking as much of the outcomes. The outcomes expected – the only reason to be in business is to produce. When you apply that to education – I don't think I was clear enough. I didn't get the clarity of it at first, that it wasn't so much about results; it was setting conditions that could allow you to produce results. That was sort of an assumption there that that would work. But PG sort of turned that on its head and said, "You know, you gotta start with this, and you start to build the organizational trust."

Focusing on outcomes in a transparent manner can go along way to earn trust, but a superintendent must simultaneously be prepared to accept responsibility for results. In my experience, being transparent and responsible around results goes a long way to building trust not only with the board, but also with the community and taxpayers. Superintendent Green further described the relationship between transparency and responsibility and how it can play out in the current political context of high stakes testing and accountability:

We as an educational system were waving the banner that said, "Trust me; I know what to do," and then when the testing started to come along and saying, "You know what? We need more evidence of that" – that's a – there was a large – I think there was a ten or fifteen-year period in education where we really felt betrayed by the public because at one point we had this position of respect and trust and all that stuff and convinced ourselves that we knew what we were doing, when in fact we were good about doing stuff, but we didn't know if it was gonna make a damn bit of difference or not.

I think trust is important to be successful as a superintendent. It is a function of

several factors including transparency, competence, and relationships. I think PG provides a framework to build trust with the larger community through the monitoring process. PG monitoring policies formally describe when certain policy outcomes need to be measured. The superintendent needs to produce a monitoring report which provides the board adequate assurance that policy objectives are being meant. The specific content of the monitoring report is left up to the superintendent. I have found monitoring to be a very rewarding experience, and I know it has contributed to the trust my communities have in our schools, and the trust that exists between me, my principals and our staff.

A good example of this trust was the monitoring report I put together for the boards on the ends policy categories of Dispositions Towards Learning and Civic Ethics. As a leadership team, we believed these were important outcomes for students but we were not sure how to report out in these areas. Ultimately, we decided to build a single Google Docs presentation. The presentation can be viewed on the Internet at <http://goo.gl/3jBMSI>. The principals tasked their teachers who then tasked their students to come up with examples of student work demonstrating competence in these areas. The only guidance from the leadership team was the presentation had to include evidence from a range of grades and include all types of students. I delivered this Google presentation to the boards at televised meetings, and published the presentation URL in local newspapers in a large block ad with the heading, “Because education has always been more than just test scores.” We received many positive comments from community members, teachers, and students, about this work, and I think we gained even more trust from our board members because they perceived we were on the right track. Being on

the right track is a function of having a future vision. The importance of vision was also a theme which emerged from the data in this study.

*Theme #3: Vision*

PG puts the ownership of the vision in the hands of the board through the articulation of ends policies (Carver, 2006), but traditionally vision has been the province of administration. Indeed, superintendents are often hired to bring a vision to a district. To implement PG, a superintendent has to assist a school board with assuming responsibility for ends policies while at the same time letting go of control over vision. The ends policy creation process provided these superintendents a significant opportunity to reflect upon their educational leadership.

Several superintendents observed how difficult it was to lead boards in the creation of ends since board members were not accustomed to doing this type of work. Superintendent Red described the vision process relative to the creation of ends policies as being the most difficult part of the PG implementation process:

Board members continue to want to drop back to below the line terms of Baldrige and not focus on Ends. And just like I'm holding myself accountable for things which are difficult, they're scared about making decisions about the answer to what it all means. So now they're really put into being accountable for what we are supposed to accomplish. It is hard for them. It is really hard for them.

Superintendent White echoed this observation about the difficulty working with boards on the creation of ends policies:

They're [school board members] not quite – they haven't quite figured out what that work is yet, and this is where I also have a lot of difficulty – seeing how to help people make that transition because a lot of people that come to board work with the expectation that they show up at a meeting and that's where they do their work – that their work is basically listen to reports, ask questions – sort of like gather information and then critique something – or listen to the

community and make sure that the administration knows all of the negatives that are out there or complaints.

Superintendent White describes a board meeting where ends policies were on the agenda this way:

I've got a consent agenda that's a mile long, but everything is in the packet, and they need to know about all those items under the consent agenda. So, I'm reserving most of the time for conversation about Policy Governance and ends. And the meeting just stops when we get to it. It's sort of like what are we going to do next? They have not a clue. It's not a territory in which they, even coming from their own work experience, have anything to relate to. So as soon as I get to the philosophical stuff or the vision-building stuff – *whshhew*. So now my job is – it's just like with – you know, if you're working with a staff or a group of teachers and you want them to process or to think about a topic and sort of generate some thinking and plans for, I've have to design this whole structure for conversation because it's not something that they know how to do or know where to begin on it.

My experience working with boards was somewhat similar. As a superintendent for a multi-district supervisory union, I had to reconcile how to approach ends from a decentralized standpoint. Although our districts had made progress in working together as a single system, the boards were not yet ready to adopt a single set of ends. Each of the communities, in spite of their similarities, considered themselves unique and each wanted to engage their communities in separate ends processes. To address this issue, I created an ends policy script as a starter for each board to use in order to structure the ends policy community engagement process. See Appendix E for a copy of this script. Some of my boards were able to handle this independently and others needed my direct support. I observed the boards who had the most difficulty were the ones who had communities who were not that interested in the process. This was another aspect of the ends policy process that was challenging. Sometimes boards became very engaged in the process



only to find limited interest in their communities. It was discouraging for them.

A key aspect of the model ends script was an intentional use of the word “education” instead of the word “school.” I thought asking people about “what school should do” would bring them right back to “when I was in school” conversations. By asking about education, on the other hand, the conversation opened up and people from different backgrounds could join in the conversation together. I did this because I think education is going through tremendous changes and the future structure of schooling is not clear. This need to have a vision that is future-oriented to address rapid changes in society was also identified in the data. Superintendent Blue said:

I think you need to be helping develop the community of purpose especially given how fast things change. I don’t think superintendents really had to deal with a lot of that in the past. I think things moved so slowly. You could take a year and a half to develop a curriculum in something and not do anything else. I don’t think you can do that anymore.

Superintendent White observed:

I haven’t rushed or hurried the board in the ends process, but I wanted to. Now I’ve six different statements, and the question is, why are we talking about these kids as if they are in and going to remain in six separate little communities? Aren’t there some common threads here? Aren’t there some things that we need to help people think about if we’re going to be forward thinking about what 21<sup>st</sup> century skills are?

There were several sources of frustration for the superintendents in developing ends with school boards. One source of frustration was assisting boards in understanding their new role of owning the vision as described by ends. Another source of frustration was the pace of the process, especially when the process dealt with multiple boards. The superintendents often expressed a sense of urgency to change systems to meet future needs, but they were frustrated by slowness of the board ends process. I know in my

districts, it took us about two years to have all of our boards adopt their ends policies. One board in particular had difficulty, and since the boards wanted to have a common approach to the means under a single monitoring policy, the other boards became frustrated when their neighboring district had difficulty moving forward.

In spite of these challenges, PG helped these superintendents think about a future vision for education, and the importance and power such a vision can have when implemented in a system. Superintendent Green said:

I think that the public school systems need advocacy and voice and they need to be creating a vision for kids and the future but also ensuring that every day is seen as the quality of life because its important as we are looking ahead. So we want kids to be good citizens and good listeners and good speakers and have empathy and be creative and be risk-takers, then we have to make sure that we're doing that every day – living that every day, living well every day in a community that works.

Superintendent Blue put it this way:

I have somewhere plucked out a Chinese proverb that says, “A vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare.” So I see myself caught somewhere in between a daydream and a nightmare, and I think for me I do exist between the daydream and the nightmare, and yet it's energizing. I have my daydream moments and I have my nightmare moments, but as long as I don't remain there very long it's very exciting.

Superintendents often perceived themselves as being responsible for stimulating a board to think about a future vision. Superintendent Blue commented further:

Now some of the folks who are concrete and sequential have a problem because it's a vision without a plan, but I can't move this vision for anything unless I've created some sense of discomfort, and I put it out and said at the same time if the people in this valley don't make the decisions themselves, then somebody else somewhere else will make those decisions for them. I was raising an emotional thought. One of the items that has emerged, we have some goals that the SU [supervisory union] has set up, but one new one that emerged is we want to keep all of our schools local. It doesn't say that they want to keep them in the same

structure. It doesn't want to say that we can't have kids moving but that we want our schools local. So part of the vision piece is engaging others in clarifying what the core values are and what their sense of purpose suggests, and then showing them some ways that that might happen.

This comment reminded me of a common paradigm in historiography called continuity vs. change (Wineberg, 2001). This construct is useful when thinking about cultural change in terms of either being continuous with the past or a departure from it. I think of this paradigm as a continuum with a pivot or fulcrum. At the fulcrum is the leader. The leader's job is to have one foot in past and one foot in the future so he or she can help decide which aspects of the past should be brought forward and which things should be jettisoned in favor of new approaches. I think education is on the precipice of significant change, and I think the things we need to ensure that are carried forward are our values of community and the commitment to the success of each student.

Superintendent Blue observed:

I think they've [superintendents] got to be a visionary in this day and age. If they are very successful interpreters of the status quo and they think that that can sustain them, I think they're in for a rude awakening. They need to get a vision or be open to the fluid dynamic that leads to a vision. I think we're at a juncture where it's increasingly important. We've got an educational system that is largely predicated on a nineteenth century industrial model. It's been particularly successful for the last fifty-sixty years, but things are changing particularly at the secondary level, and unless we look at how we provide education differently, we will atrophy into a bifurcated education system, one private and elitist, and the public dealing with the leftovers, and I don't think that's good for the democracy. I don't think that's good for kids, and I certainly don't think it's good for participation in a heterogeneous world culture. We've got to really challenge our assumptions. We've got to create that stridency, that discomfort that forces people to say, "How can we do things differently?"

In my experience, boards are deeply concerned about the future success of their students. This fear of not being able to meet student needs in an uncertain future can

provide some energy for them to contemplate changing the structure of schooling. The data from this study suggest vision can serve several important functions in an organization from helping to determine desired organizational outcomes to motivating and enticing stakeholders to engage in systems change.

From a narrative approach, the data revealed three major themes pertaining to the beliefs and perceptions of these superintendents about PG. Those themes were: responsibility, trust, and vision. A narrative methodology was helpful in telling the stories of these superintendents and in surfacing these themes in order to create a better understanding of how these superintendents perceived PG.

In the next section, I answer the second design question of this study which pertained to what extent PG implementation created ethical dilemmas for the superintendents in their educational leadership. I answer this question by analyzing the data through my perspective as both a PG practitioner and an experienced Vermont superintendent. As a superintendent, I had experienced some challenges in implementing PG because although the ideals of PG as described by the themes of responsibility, trust, and vision were consistent with my personal beliefs, PG required me to cede control over essential elements of school district governance. This struggle between personal beliefs and the practice of leadership in PG implementation can be understood as a series of ethical challenges for superintendents. To help make sense of the data from an ethical perspective, I utilize Starratt's construct of virtues (2004) since this model attempts to describe the connection between an educational leader's beliefs and his or her actions.

### *Ethical Analysis*

Starratt, like Sergiovanni (1992), Fullan (2002), and Furman (2003), believes educational leadership needs to serve a moral purpose:

The work of educational leadership should be work that is simultaneously intellectual and moral; an activity characterized by a blend of human, professional, and civic concerns; a work of cultivating an environment for learning that is humanly fulfilling and socially responsible (Starratt, 2004, p.3).

Starratt identifies three foundational virtues of ethical educational leadership (2004).

These virtues are responsibility, authenticity and presence. He describes a dynamic among these virtues where the presence of an educational leader connects the leader's various responsibilities to the leader's beliefs (Starratt, 2004). From the perspective of the superintendency, I interpret this dynamic to mean superintendents have multiple responsibilities including a responsibility to themselves, students, teachers, board members, and a larger responsibility to ensure the success of the school system. At the same time, the superintendent must believe in the necessity of the school system's success, that schooling is essential to the personal success of students and teachers and to the success of the larger goals of democratic society. The superintendent connects his or her responsibilities to his or her belief system through the virtue of presence, or acting in a manner that acknowledges the myriad of responsibilities while at the same time staying true to his or her belief system. Starratt portrays this model as a framework for educational leaders, "when they attempt to lead" (Starratt, 2004, p.5).

The findings of this study suggest PG can act as a framework which enables superintendents to act with presence "when they attempt to lead" (Starratt, 2004, p.5) since they must intellectualize and work within a defined policy structure which supports the twin ideals of democracy and organizational effectiveness. In my own experience, to

place oneself in the center of such a system is akin to traveling to the eye of a hurricane. Along that journey, one encounters several ethical dilemmas which represent the complex challenges facing educational leaders in today's postmodern society. An advantage PG presents is that it inescapably launches a superintendent on this journey, and I believe we need superintendents to be on that journey if schooling is going to continue to be successful. I believe the tension around these dilemmas is most likely the source of the dissonance I observed when superintendents attempted to reconcile the framework of PG with traditional Vermont school board practices. Through the lens of my experience and by considering Starratt's framework of virtues (2004), I identified four ethical dilemmas confronted by the superintendents in PG implementation: creating ends policies and ceding control over vision in ends policy development, ensuring ends policies serve the larger needs of the public, enforcing roles and responsibilities, and transforming systems.

As seen from the data, the creation of ends was one of the more difficult aspects of implementing PG. Part of the difficulty had to do with the fact that board members were, "just not prepared for the work," or as one superintendent described it, the board members, "had no clue" as to how to develop ends. A significant source of the tension had to do with control over vision. PG requires the board to develop ends based on "owner" input (Carver, 2006). In the case of a school district, the organizational owners are the taxpayers not the superintendent, teachers or other members of the instructional staff. Under PG, organizational employees such as educators are part of the organization's means and therefore by definition cannot be organizational owners (Carver, 2006). The tension then comes from how a superintendent supports a board in

engaging the public in ends policy development while at the same time letting go of the authority over organizational vision. The data from this study suggest superintendents can reconcile this tension by realizing that the ends gained from broad community involvement will strengthen the democratic purposes of schooling while at the same time providing clear organizational purpose, a benchmark against which program success can be determined.

Another dilemma around ends policies had to do with the increased pluralism of postmodern society. What if broad community engagement around ends enables certain groups to gain power over others and therefore undermine the democratic purposes of schooling? If the primary function of moral educational leadership is to protect the school and its democratic purpose (Sergiovanni, 1995), how does a superintendent act to support broad community participation in determining ends while at the same time ensuring the fundamental moral purpose of school in serving all students is protected? This dilemma underscores the need for the superintendent to play a leadership role in helping a board develop ends policies. Soliciting community feedback is an important part of developing ends, but the authority over ends, like any other policy aspect, resides with the school board not the community. The board has to reconcile community input with its understanding of the legal and regulatory requirements which govern all public schools. All of the superintendents in this study expressed a belief that “it is about all students achieving at high levels.” A superintendent needs to believe this, and needs to have the virtuous presence in his or her authority to ensure the increased pluralism of postmodern forces can be harnessed to support the long standing, historic and moral

purposes of schooling.

Another dilemma had to do with enforcing roles and responsibilities. As pointed out by Proulx (2007), true collaboration in school district governance can only occur when there is a deep understanding and respect of the different roles among the board, principal, and superintendent. At the same time, superintendents often come to the role with a service mentality, and traditional Vermont school district governance practices tend to reinforce this role. There is an inclination on the part of superintendents to “serve boards by letting them lead.” PG firmly delineates roles between board and superintendent, and it also draws a clear line between means and ends. What happens then when board members step out of their role, what one superintendent described as “falling below the line” as in the case when a superintendent needed to “protect the principal from the board?” The data suggest superintendents reconcile this tension by acknowledging it openly with a board and discussing why role clarity is necessary for positive organizational outcomes. Positive organizational outcomes can be the common ground between the board and superintendent. A piece of this common ground is accountability for the superintendent. It is difficult if not impossible for a board to hold a superintendent accountable for organizational ends if the board is also involved with organizational means.

A fourth dilemma had to do with transforming organizational systems. PG, with its focus on ends, creates a new emphasis on program success as defined by student outcomes. Previously, many school system programs were determined to be successful or not by what extent they met the needs of educators. Teachers might describe a new



curriculum approach as being “good” based on the extent they felt fulfilled by doing the activity not by to what extent the approach had a positive impact on student outcomes. One superintendent described this as “wing flapping,” or a tendency to define program success based on the subjective perceptions of professional satisfaction.

Another aspect of this dilemma had to do with the growing perception that the current structure of school systems is inadequate to meet the future learning needs of students in a larger, more global and interdependent democracy (Zhao, 2012). Changing the structure of schooling to meet these future needs has been termed “transformation” since the changes deemed to be necessary are significant (Vermont State Board of Education, 2008). How does a superintendent lead the transformation of a school system while at the same time being responsible for the successful operations of that system today? The data suggest the response to this dilemma comes from the power of ends policies, particularly if the ends policies are truly future-oriented and describe outcomes for students beyond academics. Superintendents can leverage ends policies with staff to not only put more focus on student outcomes as a measure of program effectiveness, but also to contemplate future possibilities. Ends policies can, as one superintendent said, “be a source of inspiration to teachers.” I think part of the challenge here is the superintendent must believe the structure of schooling needs to change. Following from Starratt's framework of virtues (2004), a superintendent cannot be authentically present to lead school transformation unless he or she truly believes such change is necessary. Part of the challenge of this dilemma is a requirement on the part of the superintendent to admit that he or she is part of a system that needs to change, and that the change will

transform him or her as much as the organization (Evans, 1996). The ethical challenges of this type of systems change recently became manifest in a Vermont conversation pertaining to school district consolidation. A description of this context is helpful in understanding the postmodern complexity encountered by educational leaders attempting to lead transformational change.

The Vermont conversation on school district consolidation goes back for a century or so (Cate, 2006). The recent conversation, however, has been fueled by a steady decline in the number of school-age students, rapid increases in per pupil costs, and commensurate increases in property tax rates (Lawrence O. Picus and Associates, 2012). Also, similar to the observations of Zhao (2012), there has been an increasing recognition that Vermont's school system needs to be transformed to meet future needs, and that although there are places in Vermont where schools are making progress toward that end, in many places in Vermont student opportunities continue to be limited (VSBA/VSA, 2013).

All of these concerns came forward in the 2013-2014 Vermont legislative session in the form of H.883, a bill that proposed to eliminate supervisory unions and many school districts in favor of establishing single, kindergarten through grade twelve school systems (H.883, 2014). The major rationale presented in this legislation to justify these significant changes to the structure of Vermont's education system was a concern for the future and the need to provide equal opportunity to all students:

Technology and globalization and other societal demands are changing what our students need to know and be able to do in order to contribute to building a strong economic and civic future for the State. Notably, our students need to acquire what are generally called “21st century skills,” which include the ability to

innovate, adapt, handle non-routine problems, reason from evidence, synthesize and analyze complex data, work confidently with technology, collaborate in teams, and communicate effectively through a variety of media. Just as importantly, because many of the low skill jobs that paid a livable wage are being replaced by technology or sent overseas, we have to ensure that all students acquire the capabilities they need to hold or create meaningful work, so that growing inequality does not cripple the economic vitality of our State. The remaining low skill jobs will likely be poorly compensated and inadequate to comfortably support a family (H.883, 2014).

This was a very contentious piece of legislation, and the bill was ultimately defeated after a very difficult, state-wide debate. Thinking on the bill transcended political party lines, and in several school organizations such as the Vermont School Board's Association and the Vermont Superintendents Association, membership opinion on the bill was significantly divided. A central theme in this division of opinion was a perceived loss of local control. In spite of the fairly widespread agreement that Vermont's school district structure might need to change in order to better meet the future needs of students, there was a general reluctance to let go of the current system. Several outspoken superintendents came out against the bill because they saw it as assault on local control, community integrity, and democracy itself. Many of these same superintendents would readily admit, on the other hand, that the current structure of multi-district supervisory unions was unsustainable and on the brink of financial catastrophe. The debate around H.883 and school district consolidation underscored the significance of educational leadership from an ethical perspective. It is challenging to engage in systems change while also needing to protect the success of the current system. H.883 is indicative of the complex moral and ethical issues that await educational leaders willing to engage in school system transformation.

The findings of this study begin to describe the complex ethical context of educational leadership in postmodern society. Starratt (2004) provides a useful framework for educational leaders to evaluate their ethical perspective to better understand the moral implications of their actions. The question remains, however, on how best to encourage superintendents and other educational leaders to engage in this type of self-examination, and equally important, how to ensure that this introspection translates into moral action, action that has been deemed to be necessary for the success of schooling in postmodern society (Sergiovanni, 1992; Fullan, 2002; Furman, 2003; Starratt, 2003). The findings of this study suggest PG can act as a framework which can lead educational leaders forward down a path of ethical leadership while at the same time providing them a concrete framework for action, action which can help ensure the future success of schooling. From the lens of Starratt's virtues construct (2004), PG can provide a “presence framework” that connects a superintendent's moral belief system to his or her authenticity. In the next chapter, I consider the significance of these findings from a Vermont policy perspective, and describe the limitations of this study and make recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Conclusions

The Vermont policy implications of the findings of this study are significant in several areas including superintendent development, school district policy development, redefining legal roles and responsibilities for superintendents and school boards, and the necessity for a systems vision for school districts. Also, the findings point to the need to better leverage superintendent leadership as a means of transforming Vermont's schools to meet the future needs of students.

Vermont does not have a coherent approach to superintendent development. In acknowledgement of the need to create such an approach, the Vermont Superintendents Association created a Superintendents Leadership Academy in 2013, but this program did not provide any training on PG. I think any superintendent development training should include a component on PG in order to better prepare superintendents for the complex work that awaits them, and to provide them with a practical framework to engage in the necessary ethical action to ensure the future success of Vermont's public school system. The PG work in Vermont to date has been focused more on better governance as an end unto itself. It is clear from Carver (2006), Stanley's work (2009), and the findings of this study that PG is not an end in itself.

Additionally, there are other groups involved in superintendent development and educational leader development in Vermont such as the University of Vermont, the Vermont State Colleges, and the Snelling Center for Government. I believe PG should be included as an essential component of these programs. The focus of any leadership

development program using PG should be on both the theoretical and practical aspects of PG, with an emphasis on highlighting the ethical dimensions of PG implementation surfaced by this study. PG should be portrayed as a concrete framework which can enable school leaders to confront the many ethical challenges associated with leading in postmodern society. Along the same lines, I think it would be helpful to extend PG training to community leaders such as town managers. This would assist with building awareness of PG as a coherent governance model, and offer an alternative to traditional governance practices which can vary greatly in their effectiveness.

The findings of this study have significant implications for school district policy development. PG is a coherent governance model which anticipates a single board with a single CEO (Carver, 2006). H.883 illustrates the challenges around the school district consolidation conversation in Vermont. Central to this piece of legislation was an attempt to replace multi-district supervisory unions with single, albeit fewer, K-12 governance systems. The findings of this study support such an approach and underscore the need to implement a coherent and uniform policy structure among Vermont's school districts. Short of school district consolidation, statutory language should be changed to give sole policy authority to supervisory unions. Currently, authority over policy is shared between school districts and supervisory unions. School districts are required to set policy in approximately twenty-seven areas and supervisory unions are required to have about three policies. With sole policy authority, supervisory unions and supervisory districts could successfully implement PG and articulate a single set of policies to cover all of their districts. The mandatory policies prescribed by statute could be quarantined in a

fifth policy category to isolate them from the other PG policy categories. PG policies should be required of supervisory unions, and public engagement processes should be mandated in all member communities to assist with the development of ends policies. In terms of ends policy development, I think it would be beneficial for superintendents, school board members, and policy makers in Vermont to convene a work group to discuss the desired future ends of schooling before engaging in further governance reform. The demise of H.883 indicates what can happen when the ends are not clearly understood by the public or by leaders themselves. Clarifying and describing ends is, and remains, a chief responsibility of leadership at all levels.

Another significant implication of the findings of this study pertains to the need to redefine the legal roles and responsibilities of superintendents and school boards. PG establishes a firm boundary between means and ends, with the CEO having the responsibility over means and the board being responsible for ends. In Vermont, there is a great deal of role confusion over means and ends with school board members often becoming entangled in means as an exercise of local control (Proulx, 2007). This role confusion has been seen as a contributor to organizational dysfunction (Dawson & Quinn, 2000; Saenz, 2005), and was recently attributed to be a major cause of superintendent turnover in Vermont (Freese, 2014). PG can aid with clarifying roles and responsibilities as a means of improving organizational effectiveness and reducing superintendent turnover but there is still a need to address the underlying role confusion which originates from Vermont's statutes. The statutory confusion over school roles and responsibilities contributes to organizational dysfunction as much as traditional

governance practices.

This study points to the need for school districts to function as systems. Hargreaves (2003a) argues systems thinking will be an essential requirement for schools and other social organizations to be successful in meeting the increasingly complex demands of postmodern society. PG anticipates groups of schools working as systems with a common set of ends in what Hargreaves calls “lateral innovation networks” (Hargreaves, 2003b, p. 5). Vermont's school governance structure, however, remains largely focused on individual schools. In many cases, Vermont school districts only have a single school (Cate, 2006). Multi-district supervisory unions place schools into groups for the purposes of administrative convenience from the state's perspective, but the degree to which schools in supervisory unions work together as a system varies greatly across the state (Proulx, 2007). PG would enable systems thinking among groups of schools by creating a single policy framework among them with a well articulated common purpose in the form of ends policies. Such a system would reduce the significant duplication of effort that currently exists to manage organizational means while at the same time enabling districts to have a better future orientation.

A common school governance theme in Vermont is Vermont has too many superintendents (Hallenbeck, 2007). This is perhaps true, but Vermont probably has too many superintendents because Vermont has too many school districts. One solution often politically popular with school board members, however, is reducing the number of superintendents but not reducing the number of school districts. Vermont Governor Shumlin has suggested the number of superintendents could be reduced as a cost cutting



measure (Hannah, 2014). In a speech he gave at the Fall joint conference of the VSBA/VSA in 2010, Governor Shumlin suggested superintendents could serve an even larger number of districts by “Skyping in” to board meetings when school boards needed help with especially complex issues. He envisioned the role of the superintendent becoming more like that of an organizational consultant rather than an organizational leader. The findings of this study underscore, however, the importance of systems leadership at the superintendent level. Such leadership will be essential in dealing with the complexities related to the necessary transformation of Vermont's school system. It would seem that PG, if promoted as a statewide policy model for school district governance, could provide policy makers with a concrete action step to advance school system transformation.

The findings of this study have significant implications to Vermont's educational system on several levels. These findings, however, are largely applicable only to Vermont. In the next section, I identify some of the limitations of this study and make recommendations for further research which could be applied to a larger context.

#### *Limitations and Recommendations*

A basic limitation of this study was that it was confined to four Vermont superintendents. The generalized findings of this study were a function of this small participant group and the geographic boundaries of Vermont. A larger sample of Vermont superintendents or a sample that included superintendents from other states might yield different beliefs and perceptions about PG.

Another limitation was this study was implemented by a practicing Vermont

superintendent. Although I believe this added value to the study, the unique rapport established during the interviews because of this relationship might have limited the subjects in their responses. An “outsider” might have provoked the superintendent participants to respond in a different manner.

This study was limited by a relatively narrow time period. Generalized statements about superintendent beliefs and perceptions about PG might change over time, or different ethical dilemmas might emerge over time. The intention of this study was to capture the experiences of these superintendents during this specific time period, but the ability to transfer or replicate the generalized findings of this study to other contexts is somewhat limited due to the small time frame.

In terms of recommendations for further study, I believe voices of superintendents are underrepresented in the literature on educational leadership. Research on educational leadership tends to be generic across all leadership positions, and I believe the unique role of the superintendent warrants specific attention. I think this is especially true in the postmodern context where the importance of systems leadership in education as a solution to increasingly complex societal problems is gaining more attention (Hargreaves, 2003a). The superintendent position sits at the center of these systems, and as such, occupies a pivotal role in organizational success.

This study was focused on a small group of Vermont superintendents. This approach gave me the opportunity to obtain a rich record of their beliefs and perceptions, but I think it would be useful to perform a larger study to include superintendents using PG from other geographic locations to see if how these perceptions vary based on the

specific leadership contexts. Such a study would also add to the research on PG in K-12 education which deserves more focus. I think it would be particularly helpful to interview superintendents in states that were not local control states. I think the extreme differences between Vermont's traditional governance practices and PG as a coherent governance model created significant challenges for the Vermont superintendents in this study. I wonder if superintendents from states where there was less local control would have similar perceptions towards PG or experience similar ethical challenges.

Through this study, I became interested in superintendent perceptions of their efficacy. I think PG is appealing to superintendents because they can achieve a better sense of accomplishment from their work since successful organizational performance is clearly measured against ends policies. I think it would be interesting to conduct a descriptive study among a group of superintendents who use PG as compared to a group who do not to see if PG superintendents feel more effective in their work. It would be interesting to see how a strong perception of efficacy on the part of a superintendent correlated with the superintendent's longevity in his or her position.

This study was focused on PG and ethics in the school district setting. The call for an increased focus on ethics on the part of public leaders seems to have broader application than to just educational leadership, however. In particular, Copper (1991, 1998) has raised this concern in the area of public administration. It would be useful to examine connections between superintendent leadership and the leadership of other public leaders. I wonder if other public leaders confront the same ethical challenges as superintendents in responding to the complexities of postmodern society. I think it would

be interesting to examine to what extent PG has presented similar challenges for other types of public leaders, and to see if PG has been described as a concrete framework for ethical action among public leaders who seek to serve the democratic purposes of organizations in our increasingly complex and interdependent postmodern society.

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## APPENDIX A

### Interview Protocol #1

Opening Narrative: I am here today to talk about your experience with Policy Governance as it pertains to your role as an educational leader.

1. What attracted you to PG as a governance model?
2. Talk about how has PG changed your understanding of educational leadership.
3. In what ways has PG affected your commitment to public education?
4. Think about how PG has affected your ability to act in the interest of students – what has your experience been in this area?
5. Tell me about how PG affected how you work with school boards.
  - Can you give me some concrete examples of how this work has changed?
6. Tell about how PG has affected your thinking about the function of policy and how policy should be developed?
7. Talk about how PG has changed how you go about formulating a future vision for your districts?
8. How do you feel about your relationship with board members – has PG affected your ability to collaborate with them?

Thank you so much for your time today.

## APPENDIX B

### Interview Protocol #2

Opening narrative: Thank you for giving me more of your time today. I want to spend some time focusing on themes that emerged in the first interview.

1. There are many routes to becoming a superintendent, and it is demanding work. Tell me about what motivates you in this work.
  - What do you find to be the most rewarding aspect of the position?
  - The most challenging?
2. Before you became a superintendent, what was your perception of the position? How has that perception changed?
3. What advice would you give aspiring superintendents?
4. Describe for me a specific time or situation when you were really proud of your work as a superintendent.
5. To what extent do you think the role of the superintendent is changing or needs to change?
6. Do you believe superintendents are respected? Why/why not?
7. Tell me what successful school governance looks like to you.
8. To what extent do you believe the position of superintendent important to successful school governance?
9. How should superintendents use their the power and authority to serve boards?
10. To what extent should teachers, principals, superintendents and other educational professionals determine a district's strategic direction?

11. How do you think teachers, principals and others who work in the system view school board governance?
- How do you feel about that perception?
  - How would you change this perception?



## APPENDIX C

### Interview Protocol #3

1. If you were interviewing for position as a superintendent in a different district, what things would you be looking for to ensure the new position would be a good fit for your beliefs as an educational leader?
  - a) Capacity for change based on an understanding of culture
  - b) moving culture towards a focus on outcomes for students
2. Based on your experience as an educational leader working with school boards, what do you see as the pros and cons of local control?
  - a) Can you give examples when local control of an issue served a district well or when it did not?
3. To what extent do you think local control of public education should be a focus of public school governance in the future?
4. I wonder about board member turnover – what has been your role in developing the capacity of board members to fulfill their duties?
5. To what extent do you think board members acknowledge that a superintendent should be responsible for developing the governance capacity of board members?
6. If PG were fully implemented in your district, how do you think it would change your role in supporting the development of board members?
7. How does developing a personal relationship with board members allow you to build organizational trust?
8. What affect to do you think PG has on a superintendent's ability to cultivate a personal relationship with board members and the related trust?
9. To what extent has being a superintendent allowed you to be creative in your work? How important has this been to you? Can you give me some examples of how you have been creative as an organizational leader?
10. Is it necessary for a superintendent to be a risk taker? Can you give me some examples of risks you have had to take?
11. It has been said that all politics is local. It has also been said that politics is the art of possible. How have your political abilities assisted you in your work?

12. Thomas Friedman and others have suggested that the world is getting flatter and organizations are getting flatter as well – have you observed this trend in education? What does it look like? How do you see things changing?
13. What skills and dispositions do you think superintendents will need to be successful in a flatter world?

## APPENDIX D

### Model Ends Policy

#### GLOBAL ENDS (EP1)

All schools will educate all of their students so they become self-fulfilled people and active, civic-minded citizens of the world at a cost comparable to other Vermont supervisory unions of a similar size.

#### EDUCATIONAL ENDS (EP2)

All students will demonstrate competence in the following areas.

##### EP2.1 Core Academics

- English Language Arts
- Mathematics
- Science
- World Ecology
- Visual and Performing Arts
- Physical Education and Health

##### EP2.2 Dispositions Towards Learning

- Creativity
- Resilience
- Self-motivation
- Curiosity
- Critical thinking
- Effective communications
- Flexibility

##### EP2.3 Civic Ethics

- Respect for individual differences
- Inclination to work with others for the common good
- Willingness to contribute time and expertise in service to the community
- Stewardship of the world's resources
- Responsibility for making a positive contribution
- Democratic leadership

## APPENDIX E

### Ends Policy Event Script

#### Participants:

Members of the public, invitations to specific stake holders

#### Setting:

Room large enough to accommodate group, round tables for groups of 6-10, tables covered with paper that can be written on, markers on each table, one person with laptop to type notes of conversation. Screen, projector, laptop, sound, Internet for streaming video projection. Blog site setup for general comments for participants and others.

#### Process:

Focus Group. Entire group will view short videos together. After each video, smaller groups at table will discuss videos based on provided study guide questions. Groups then will be reorganized and assigned to new tables for each subsequent video. Data will be collected and analyzed by Board group and distilled down to draft policy language. Blog available with embedded videos for participants and non participants to record thoughts.

#### Program:

1. Welcome and Introductions (Board Chair)
2. Purpose of Ends Policies and Overview of Process (Superintendent or Board Chair) – focus on thinking about the future
3. Facilitation of process (Board Chair or outside facilitator)
4. Video #1 (11 min.): Sir Ken Robinson – Changing Education Paradigms (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDZFcDGpL4U>) – a conversation about content and pedagogy, which content and practices from the past should be brought forward into the future
5. Video #2: (12 min.): Dan Meyer – Math Curriculum Makeover ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BlvKWEvKSi8&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BlvKWEvKSi8&feature=player_embedded)) – a conversation about how to teach math, how our students learn, and the role of technology in delivering curriculum
6. Video #3: The Shift in New Brunswick Public Education ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bDM3D4MNQBs&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bDM3D4MNQBs&feature=player_embedded)) – a conversation about what schooling should look like in the 21st Century.
7. Wrap up and Thank You (Board Chair)