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An examination of ideology among selected K12 Christian school superintendents

Jimmy Dolson

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AN EXAMINATION OF IDEOLOGY AMONG SELECTED K12 CHRISTIAN SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS

by

Jimmy L. Dolson

Dissertation

Submitted to the Department of Leadership and Counseling
Eastern Michigan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Dissertation Committee:
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March 7, 2014
Ypsilanti, Michigan
Dedication

I began the process of entering the field of education when I enrolled in the master’s program at Eastern Michigan University. I entered the program in June 2006 and now seven years later, I am done. In the last three years alone, I have logged just under 1,000 hours of work on this dissertation. And no person has felt those hours more than my wife of 30 years. Cathy, you endured each of those hours as much as I did. Without your steady hand and constant encouragement I would still be dreaming of this effort. This work is dedicated to you. Thank you.
Acknowledgements

In this section, I want to thank those who have *helped* me and *allowed* me to complete my doctoral work. I have not travelled alone through this process and the work would not be complete without a proper thank-you.

First, for those who have helped me along the way. I would like to thank the administration and faculty of Eastern Michigan University’s Education and Leadership Department. I remember the day I was accepted into the master’s program and started the transformation from the automotive field to the field of education. I so appreciate the chance you took in allowing me to enter your ranks.

I would also like to thank my committee. I am fortunate to have had a committee that pushed and challenged my thinking. Dr. Williamson, I had you for a few ethics courses and enjoyed the challenge of keeping up with your thinking. Dr. Berry, I needed you on my committee to challenge my writing. I have always appreciated your demand for a great paper; I hope I have not disappointed. Dr. Ginsberg, I owe you a tremendous debt of gratitude for not giving up on me and helping me become a qualitative researcher. You have helped me to enjoy the messiness of qualitative research. And finally, Dr. Anderson, I selected you as my committee chair because you are one of the most creative and unconventional thinkers I know. I have enjoyed our Skypes and Sunday afternoon meetings as we turned inside out the ideas and concepts of this dissertation.

For those who have allowed me the opportunity to even consider taking on this challenge, a big “thank-you.” Our school board was gracious enough to allow me the flexibility to take on the tasks required of this project. The staff of Jackson Christian School,
especially the elementary staff, took on extra worry and responsibility while I was away at classes or interviews.

A great appreciation goes out to my children and their spouses for their tolerance of this process. Often times I would lock myself away to think, compile thoughts, and write. Thank you for your forgiveness and understanding.

And finally, my most important acknowledgement is to the God I serve. He gives my life purpose and has never given up on me. He is on His Throne, always. Therefore, may I always serve Him.
Abstract

This research project focused on explaining the decision-making process of K12 Christian school superintendents who were members of the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) organization. In spite of similar religious and philosophical beliefs, it was observed that ACSI K12 Christian school superintendents differed significantly in organizational decision-making. This dissertation investigated the construct of ideology as a possible explanation of this phenomenon. This project attempted to explain the ideology of selected Christian school superintendents, uncover the formation of ideology throughout life, and demonstrate usage ideology in organizational decision-making.

This study used a qualitative research methodology with narrative analysis in the phenomenological research tradition. Nine K12 Christian school superintendents throughout Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio participated in the study. The research methodology included development of a grand narrative for each participant, thematic development of ideology for each participant, and an axial thematic analysis across all nine superintendents. Transcripts, grand narratives, research journals, and artifacts were used as research records to help discover participant ideology.

Findings of the project revealed that ideology consists of four elements. Values, situations-of-conflict, commitments, and influences were important in forming participants’ ideologies. Additionally, these four elements were found to exist in a relationship to each other. The results of those relationships revealed that ideology is a blend of values to satisfy superintendent commitments; that value selection is dependent on the situation-of-dilemma; and that influences in life affect commitments and values. From those relationships a framework evolved. The framework was shown to supplement Thompson’s (2008)
organizational model and expanded his propositional hypotheses about organizational behavior.
# Table of Contents

Dedication .................................................................................................................................................. ii  
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................................... iii  
Abstract ..................................................................................................................................................... v 
Chapter 1. Introduction .............................................................................................................................. 1 
  Personal Observations about Values Conflict ......................................................................................... 2  
  The Fight over Educational Values in K12 Christian Schools ............................................................... 4  
  The Role of Superintendent Leadership ................................................................................................. 5  
  Ideology .................................................................................................................................................... 5 
  The Organizational Impact of Ideology ................................................................................................. 6  
  The Phenomenon and Research Questions ......................................................................................... 7 
  Definitions ............................................................................................................................................... 8  
  Purpose and Benefits ............................................................................................................................... 11  
  Delimitations ......................................................................................................................................... 13  
  Researcher Bias ...................................................................................................................................... 14 
Chapter 2. Literature Review ...................................................................................................................... 16  
  Introduction ............................................................................................................................................ 16  
  Ideology and the Political Domain ...................................................................................................... 18  
  Ideology and the Educational Domain ................................................................................................. 19  
  Ideology by Social Factors ................................................................................................................ 21  
  Ideology Characteristics ..................................................................................................................... 26  
  Ideology and Values .............................................................................................................................. 35  
  Ideology, Values, and the Mind ........................................................................................................... 36
Chapter 3. Methods

Introduction
Justification for the Use of Phenomenological Research
Narrative Analysis and the Inductive Methodology
Data Collection Strategy
Interviewing Strategy
The Inductive Method
Data Trustworthiness
Ethical Considerations

Chapter 4. Data

Introduction
Participant Narratives
Dan—A story of personal mission, academics, and relationships
Ken—A narrative on Christian schools, academics, and student discipleship
Paul—A story about doing what’s best for kids through culture and academics
Jason—A Story of Loving Children, Culture, Discipleship, and Grace
Tom—Christian Standards, Evangelism of Students, and School Culture
Janet—A Narrative on Vision, Relationship, Trust, and Change
Allison—Christian Schools, Authority, and Relationships
Robert—The mission of Christian Schools, Duty, and Authority
Drew—A Narrative on Discovering Truth, Trusting Others, and Grace

Chapter 5. Analysis

Introduction
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideology and the Four Themes</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Participant Values</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Participant Situations</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Participant Commitments</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Participant Influences</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology and the Relationship of the Four Themes</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6. Conclusion</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statements of Conclusion</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison to Theory and a Working Definition</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ideological Framework and Organizational Theory</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ideological Framework and Future Research</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ideological Framework and the Educator</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Reflections</td>
<td>302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Metaphor</td>
<td>306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A- Email Letter of Invitation to Participate in the Study</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B- Participant Consent Form</td>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C- Email Confirmation</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D- On-Line Demographic Survey</td>
<td>322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E- Dissertation Interview Guide</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E- Dissertation Interview Guide (continued)</td>
<td>324</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F - Code List .................................................................................................................. 325
Appendix G - Sample Verbatim Evidence for Allison .................................................................. 328
Appendix H - Sample Code Map for Allison ................................................................................ 329
Appendix I - Axial Code Map ....................................................................................................... 331
Appendix J - Ideological Storyboard ............................................................................................ 335
Appendix K - Matrix of Values: Ideological Statement by Participant Values ......................... 338
Appendix L - Matrix of Influences: Commitment and Values by Participant Influences ..... 339
Appendix M - Matrix of Situations: Ideological Statements by Participant Situations .......... 341
Appendix N - Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) Statement of Faith ... 342
### List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Participant Social Factors</td>
<td>Error! Bookmark not defined. 48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Inductive Methodology</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Participant Quick Reference Guide</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The Themes of Ideology</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Observations and Themes about Values</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Primary and Secondary Values of Participants</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Values Classifications</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Participant’s Situation-of-dilemma</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Observations and Themes about Situations</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Classification of Situations Based on Thompson’s (2008) Organizational Model</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Participant Commitments</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Observations about Commitments</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Categories of Influence</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Observations and Themes about Influence</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Map of existing research about ideology.</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Developing participant narratives.</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Developing the themes of values, situations, commitments, and influences.</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ken’s network of values based on verbatim evidence.</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ken’s simplified network of values (Ken’s Code Map).</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ken’s network of values for his situation-of-dilemma.</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The ideological framework.</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The ideological framework.</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Thompson’s (2008) organizational model based on Parson’s (1960) model.</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Thompson’s (2008) organizational model and superintendent ideology.</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Thompson’s (2008) organizational model and Janet’s ideology.</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Thompson’s (2008) organizational model and Jason’s ideology.</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1. Introduction

K12 education in America is not values-neutral. In analyzing child development and its connection to educational pedagogy and methods, Kohlberg and Mayer (1972) write,

A “value-neutral” position, based only on facts about child development or about methods of education, cannot in itself directly contribute to educational practice. Factual statements about what the processes of learning and development are cannot be directly translated into statements about what children’s learning and development ought to be without introduction of some value-principles. (p. 464)

The process of educating children cannot be reduced to prescriptive formulas discovered in child psychology or only in well-conducted research of educational practices. To do so ignores a fundamental element inherent in education: the “value-principle” of the educational leader. Every teacher, principal, superintendent, and school board member uses his or her set of values to make decisions in various domains of life, including education. Educators at all levels use their values to make important decisions about how children “ought to be” educated.

To further the point, Kohlberg and Mayer (1972) indicated that educational goals, not just methods and pedagogy, express a leader’s values. The establishment and prioritization of goals are not free from the influence of values. Kohlberg and Mayer claim that “an even more fundamental problem for the ‘value-free’ [position]… is the logical impossibility of making a dichotomy between value-free means and value-loaded ends” (p. 465). Given that educators are the “means” to achieve educational “ends,” it is impossible for teachers to separate their values from their classroom pedagogy.
An educator’s values, methods, and goals are all intimately connected and help form his or her thinking about how schools should operate. K12 schools in America are a battleground for the various ideologies of educational leaders, politicians, and unions. Each player wants to impose his or her specific thinking about what is the “right thing” for children.

The right “means” and “ends” (Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972, p. 465), however, depends on which group is creating definitions and implementing programs. In Michigan, for example, the National Education Association (NEA) has declared the “right thing” as leaving the K12 school line item untouched in the State of Michigan’s budget, even at the cost of reducing funding for higher education (Mack, 2011). Furthermore, politicians who try to do the “right thing” by reducing K12 spending in an effort to balance the budget are caught in a crossfire that threatens their political career. Efforts by governors to do the “right thing” by installing a system that will rescue and stabilize failing local schools face stiff opposition (Oosting, 2010). The vast opinions by those who exercise power in the educational field do not agree on the right “means” and “ends” (Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972, p. 465). Those who gain power in education use their values to determine what methods will achieve what outcomes.

Personal Observations about Values Conflict

The Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) is an organization whose mission “to strengthen Christian schools and equip Christian educators worldwide as they prepare students academically and inspire them to become devoted followers of Jesus Christ (ACSI Mission, 2012). In fulfillment of this mission, ACSI offers school accreditation and
other services to K12 Christian schools in the US and around the world. There are over 3,000 ACSI member schools in the US.

ACSI maintains a Statement of Faith (ACSI Statement of Faith, 2012) that superintendents at member schools agree to use as the basis for all decisions when operating their schools (see Appendix N). The Statement of Faith is an agreement on the basics of definitions about God, the Bible, Jesus, creation, and so on. It answers basic philosophical questions of belief: What is truth? Who defines truth? What are ethics? Where did man come from? What does it mean to “exist”? In the Greek philosophical construct, these are examples of epistemology, axiology, anthropology, and ontology. Thus, despite denominational differences, member schools of ACSI have a similar view of the world, a common worldview based on common interpretation of the Bible. Consequently, a common set of core values unite these schools.

However, these schools do not operate the same. They make very different decisions from each other about means and ends. They think differently about whom they hire, selection of curriculum, and how they are funded. They also have different missions, different admissions policies, and different governance structures. These schools operate very differently with different goals while being members of ACSI and subscribing to the same core values.

Christian schools behave very differently from one another even though they share common values. With that in mind, there is some other construct at work in the decision-making process of the leaders at these schools despite their common set of core values. There appears to be more than just the stated core values of ACSI at work when school leaders
make decisions about doing the “right thing” for a child’s education. Fowler (2004) summed up the challenge in his research on power and conflict in schools. During the last twenty years, …schools have become a major site of ideological conflict; increasingly, principals, superintendents, and other school leaders find themselves in the middle of heated disputes which appear to have erupted out of nowhere and to turn on points that seem (to people from other ideological camps) to be nonissues. (p. 131)

Judgment and decision making by school leaders appears to occur at the juxtaposition of multiple ideologies. Fowler goes on to say that ideology is “based on several core assumptions about human nature and the nature of the universe…” (p. 214). Fowler suggested there is a war of ideologies between the different “ideological camps” that helps explain the differences amongst schools, both public and Christian.

**The Fight over Educational Values in K12 Christian Schools**

The war between the camps in Christian K12 schools is often in an attempt to do the “right thing” for students. Coley (2010) outlined a number of issues that cause unrest in Christian schools. Selection of theology was the primary issue because it determined many other criteria: curriculum, book selection, faculty selection, and more. Definition and implementation of the school’s mission was also another source of potential conflict in a Christian school. A clear and agreed-upon admissions policy along with teacher hiring practices added to the possibilities that created conflict. Again, those in power used their values to decide methods and goals.
The Role of Superintendent Leadership

Amongst the most powerful leaders in any school district is the superintendent. Superintendents have significant power in any school district, and Christian schools are no exception. The role of superintendent leadership is displayed in formation of policies, setting goals, and working the back-channels to accomplish those goals. Fowler (2004) indicates that superintendents “offer substantive input throughout the policy-making process” (p. 153).

Superintendents are not silent about using their values to create change and make decisions. Furthermore, Minar (1964) contends that the school board is leveraged by the superintendent and “becomes an agency legitimizing the superintendent’s initiative” (p. 132). He further supports the notion that one of the roles of the superintendent is to manipulate the board toward the purpose of making decisions that support the district. “If anyone lurks behind anyone else, making ‘real’ decisions, it is the superintendent lurking behind the board” (p. 132). Superintendents need not always be out in front using their values to initiate district changes.

From research on organizational leadership, Stanford-Blair and Dickman (2005) acknowledged the importance of values when in the role of leadership. “Core values” (p. 111) and “value orientation” (p. 111) express the notion that values have an intrinsic and foundational position in a leader’s thinking. These values become the motivating inspiration that call leaders on so that they are “ready to die for” (p. 174) their convictions.

Ideology

An intense alignment to an ideological position is often at the center of the inspiration to fight for a conviction. Forsyth (1980) makes the case that values and ethical rules create an ideological cross-product that drives the conclusions and judgments of decision-makers such
as superintendents. The notion offered by Forsyth is that ideology is a blending, an amalgam, of values and principles producing action in leaders. Using a different approach, Edelman (1985) developed the idea that ideology is an expression of widely accepted values expressed in the form of words and symbols. Similarly, McGee (1980) developed the notion that ideology is tightly coupled to language, words, and symbolism and carries universal understanding within a given culture (p. 4-5). Taken as a whole, Forsyth (1980), Edelman (1985), and McGee (1980) suggest that ideologies are statements representing a mixture of multiple elements. Ideologies are composed of personal values, community values, and symbols representing community morals. Extending this view further implies that superintendents of Christian schools make decisions based upon ideological positions.

**The Organizational Impact of Ideology**

At a very practical level, superintendents at Christian schools take action on their ideological positions as they form policy, implement procedures, and conduct the daily affairs of the organization. These superintendents must operate their Christian school in such a way that they successfully engage the environment, or they face extinction (Thompson, 2008). Superintendents use their personal ideology to attract parents, donors, and church leaders who have similar ideologies. Superintendents use ideology to recruit building level leaders and teachers to operate the technology core. Hiring principals, classroom teachers, custodians, and front office staff with similar values helps avoid the “ideological conflict” Fowler (2004, p. 131) suggested was at the center of many school battles.

Moreover, in the quest to find and remain relevant in the community, superintendents continually face dilemmas that result in reaching a balanced ideological position satisfactory to all. The dilemma is often one of internal conflict—an internal personal battle regarding the
temptation to change long held values in exchange for legitimacy and, thus, increased enrollment. Schultz (2010) likens education to a battlefield where there is a “war of values” (p. 110), and Iannaccone and Lutz (1970) stress the “deadly serious importance” (p. 13) of value-laden decisions. The nexus of the “war of values” and organizational health begins and ends with the superintendent’s ideological position.

**The Phenomenon and Research Questions**

Therefore, there was an observable phenomenon at work in the decision-making process of K12 Christian school leaders. Those leaders on the ACSI membership roles claimed allegiance to a Statement of Faith (ACSI Statement of Faith, 2012). They were all dedicated to the promotion of Christian education and subscribed to a similar view of God and the Bible. Yet there was this “war of values” (Shultz, 2012, p. 110) upon which different “ideological camps” (Fowler, 2004, p. 131) fought. This was a phenomenon worth investigating. Succinctly, the definition of this phenomenon for this dissertation was: In spite of similar religious and philosophical beliefs, ACSI K12 Christian school superintendents differed significantly in their organizational decision-making.

This dissertation proposed that superintendent ideology was one variable to help understand this phenomenon. This research explored the ideology of Christian school superintendents and the impact of that ideology on organizational decision-making. This research sought to understand the following questions: What was the ideology of ACSI K12 Christian school superintendents? How was that ideology developed? And how did that ideology affect organizational decisions?
Definitions

The study of ideology required knowing and using abstract concepts such as the mind, beliefs, worldviews, philosophy, values, beliefs, ethics, and religion. While these concepts are arguably different, they are often blended together at a macro-level and used interchangeably. Deconstructing these abstractions and then regrouping them based on commonality of usage helped to maintain a common language throughout the dissertation. Many of these concepts are treated in further detail throughout the dissertation but presented at this point to help clarify reading and understanding.

Moreover, the dissertation included terms that are familiar to Christian evangelicals, but maybe not to others. Terms like *discipleship, evangelism*, and *grace* are often used in the verbiage of evangelicals. Additionally, these terms are often used in everyday discussion by K12 Christian school superintendents, as the narrative data revealed. Therefore, a brief definition of terms not generally understood outside of the Christian culture is presented to offer deeper understanding for the reader.

**ACSI (Association of Christian Schools International):** An organization committed to the promotion of Christian education around the world. The organization’s mission is “to strengthen Christian schools and equip Christian educators worldwide as they prepare students academically and inspire them to become devoted followers of Jesus Christ” (ACSI Mission” 2012). The organization also has a Statement of Faith (Appendix N) that provides a common platform of understanding for all member schools. The organization uses a membership model to provide services such as professional development material, purchasing discounts, and accreditation.

For this dissertation, all participants belonged to schools that were ACSI accredited.
Discipleship (Discipling): A term often used by Christian evangelicals to describe the act of training or mentoring other people to live the Christian faith. In this dissertation, the act of discipling involved school personnel working directly with students to help them live by the principles defined in the Bible. The term assumed that students already knew and loved God.

Evangelism (Evangelizing): A term often used by Christian evangelicals to describe the act of converting people to the Christian faith from a non-Christian faith. In this dissertation, the act of evangelizing involved school personnel convincing students to change their minds about how they see God. The term assumed that students did not already know and love God.

Grace: A term often used by Christians to express unwarranted forgiveness of offenses. For example, after being reconciled with God for sins committed, Christians view God as having grace on them. Christians also use this term with each other. After being forgiven by another person, a Christian might say that the other person had grace on him or her. In this dissertation, the term was used both ways. That is, in some quotes, people used the term to express the forgiveness from God, and in other cases, the forgiveness from (or toward) others.

Ideology. The definition of ideology is not easily untangled because there are many different views of the term as shown in the Literature Review in Chapter 2. Moreover, the definition was modified based on the research uncovered in this project. However, for the sake of a simple and general definition, Forsyth (1980), Edelman (1985), and McGee (1980) offer that a person’s ideology is a statement representing a blending of personal values,
societal values, and community symbols. For this dissertation, ideology is proposed as one of the variables at work in K12 Christian school superintendent decision making.

**Mind.** The mind was perhaps the most abstract of all of the concepts discussed in this study. Studies from Wellman, Cross, and Watson (2001), Wellman and Miller (2008), Minsky (1986), Anderson (1996), and Anderson (1971) supported various definitions of what the mind is and how it operates. For the purposes of this study, the mind was simply referred to as the seat of a person’s cognitive capacity. It was viewed as the foundation of a person’s philosophies, values, beliefs, and ethics.

**Religion (Religious, Christian Evangelical).** An often used and acceptable definition of the term religion can be found in a dictionary: “The belief in a god or in a group of gods; an organized system of beliefs, ceremonies, and rules used to worship a god or a group of gods; an interest, a belief, or an activity that is very important to a person or group” (Merriam-Webster, 2013). Beginning with this definition, this dissertation understood god to be God as known among the various Christian faiths. The “system of beliefs, ceremonies, and rules” was defined as Christian evangelical. For the purposes of this project, Christian evangelicals are defined as those who have a common view of how people are reconciled to God. While the various denominations of Christian evangelicals maintain a common interpretation of the Bible, they are divided on matters of church polity, lifestyle requirements, and worship ceremonies, for instance.

**Philosophy (or Worldview).** O’Neill (1981) offered the best definition of these two often synonymous terms. He indicated that a philosophy, or worldview, attempts to order and explain knowledge. That is, these terms help people understand the events and situations in the world. These abstractions do not call people to action but simply provide explanation for
what is going on around them. Philosophies and worldviews are “inert” (p. 14) or static, allowing people a reliable filter through which to interpret events.

**Superintendent.** The superintendent is the school’s primary educational leader in a K12 system. In most schools, the school board executes the business of school through the superintendent. Unless otherwise noted, in this dissertation the superintendent was a Christian man or woman leading a K12 Christian school.

**Values.** For this dissertation, Marshall, Mitchell, and Wirt (1989) provided the best usable definition for the term *values*. They indicated, “Values are preferences for action and belief” (p. 133). O’Neill (1981) segregated values into the categories of individual and a societal (pp. 10 & 385). This form of the definition folded together the understanding that values are formed and engaged at both an individual and a social-ethic level. Similarly, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) overlapped individual values into categories of right and wrong actions based on one of four distinct ethics. Edelman (1985) believed that values “explain preferences for some consequences over others” (p. 50). Other researchers emphasized the action component of the term *values* and encourage action to address issues, solve problems, and make policy in education (Kirst & Wirt, 2009; Fowler, 2004). Taken together, this dissertation used the following definition: values are preferences for actions by individuals to make decisions.

**Purpose and Benefits**

The purpose of this study was to offer superintendent ideology as a possible explanation for the phenomenon of variation in organizational decision making given a common foundation of core values. This research does not suggest that ideology was the only reason for the variation, just that it is a plausible part of the explanation. It is very likely that
additional qualitative and quantitative studies offer additional explanations that help bring understanding to organizational decision-making by school superintendents.

Answers to the research questions helped bring understanding to the importance of a K12 Christian school superintendent’s ideologies in the everyday operation of the school. Uncovering ideologies brought light to superintendent values and the relative priority of those values in decision-making. School boards will find the results interesting since one expressed duty of all school boards is to hire a superintendent who will represent and uphold the school’s values. The research showed that awareness of a candidate’s values, and priority of those values, was important to repel “alien ideology” (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970, p. vii) from entering the school community. Ideology provided clearer insight as to “why” a superintendent made certain decisions. Considering a decision through the lens of ideological position brought understanding to the decision. Superintendents who openly communicated ideological positions or values offered the community an opportunity to understand the basis for certain decisions.

In addition, understanding a K12 Christian school superintendent’s ideology brought greater understanding to the application of organization theory in Christian schools. For instance, in Thompson’s (2008) organizational model, ideology helped to explain the rationale of decision-making by the superintendent as he or she managed the school’s teachers and students. Superintendents in the study moved around the different organizational levels of Thompson’s model.

This study also gave a voice to those not often heard. There is much emphasis placed on the leadership role of superintendents in education. However, there is limited research and voice given to the specifics of K12 Christian schools and the unique challenges of that field.
This is not an intentional omission by the research community, but there are fewer K12 Christian schools than public, so it is reasonable that there is less specific research. This dissertation provided specific qualitative research to the topic of ideology and decision-making in the niche area of K12 Christian school superintendents.

**Delimitations**

There were also a number of intentional delimiters of the study. For example, the study limited the participant pool to only ACSI member schools. However, ACSI is not the only organization that offers services, accreditation, and training to K12 Christian schools. Christian Schools International (CSI) and the American Association of Christian Schools (AACS) are other organizations that assist Christian schools. This study was intentionally limited to ACSI for two reasons. First, selecting a single accreditation body ensured that potential participants have a common starting point for core values. This commonness of core values was part of the observed phenomenon, and increased variation in the list of core values from other organizations may have introduced other phenomenon. Second, the researcher was most familiar with ACSI, its mission, and many of the superintendents. There was a level of comfort in approaching superintendents of like-mindedness when discussing sensitive topics like values and ideology.

The study was also delimited to one specific group of Christian school leaders. Superintendents, or head administrators, in Christian Schools are the primary decision-makers. While school board members, principals, and faculty all play an important role as educational leaders, the superintendent is arguably the single most influential leader across the entire school. Delimiting the study to only superintendents provided opportunity to establish linkage between ideology and major organizational decisions.
Additionally, the geographical location of participants was a design limitation. This was more of a practical matter, as to researcher access and availability. Generally, participants were sought within a two-hour radius of the researcher’s hometown to make it easier for scheduling and conducting interviews. There was acknowledgement, however, that other regions in the US likely have different cultures and perhaps different ideological positions.

Finally, there was an intentional limit established on seeking participants only from an evangelical religious background. It is understood that studying the ideology of superintendents at Lutheran, Catholic, Jewish, and Islamic schools is valuable. However, there was not enough known about superintendent ideology to know the specific effect of major religions. Keeping the religion variable at a constant Christian evangelical setting removed some variation and kept the study bounded in a denominational realm that was familiar to the researcher. In the future, a study comparing ideologies of superintendents amongst the different religions would make for interesting and useful research.

**Researcher Bias**

The topic of identifying and understanding the ideology of K12 Christian School superintendents is important to me as a researcher. Like the participants in this study, I too am a superintendent at a Christian K12 school. Moreover, it is important to state my biases early on in this dissertation. The reader needs to understand the filter used to collect data, analyze results, and draw conclusions. Given the qualitative methodology of this study, the reader should critically challenge any analysis and conclusions drawn by the researcher.

I readily admit to a bias that Christian school administrators should have a larger view of the world and one not just from academia. In my opinion, Christian school administrators
holding a vast array of experiences forged through a series of difficult situations will make
c better decisions for students, parents, and staff.

Some information about my professional background and my personal experiences is
in order. My career and background are in automotive engineering and manufacturing. I
entered the education field in only the last six years. Over the last few years, I have
transferred my skills from my former industry to education through higher education courses.
I am a strong proponent of higher education and advanced degrees.

I have an inclination in life toward being results-driven. As such, I admire those who
can coordinate resources, manage people, plan projects, and execute the details. I have
learned through my own life experiences and through God’s influence in me to be much
more compassionate and understanding of people when they do not meet my expectations.

Ideologically, I am firm on a number of topics but struggle in finding the correct
position on others. I am a proponent of small government with limited government
interference. I do not support large social programs sponsored by local, state, or federal
governments. I admire capitalism and dislike socialism or government programs that lean
that way. I admit, though, there are times when a balance is needed between the two
extremes of capitalism and socialism to address social crises.

From a religious perspective, I am a conservative evangelical. I believe the Bible is
God’s inerrant written word provided for the expressed purpose of leading all people to God.
I am determined to live out my faith while living in society. I am not a proponent of religious
isolation but am very careful about those who are admitted into our school. I think Christians
should be involved in all forms of business and government and have the right to exercise
religious beliefs in all areas of life.
Chapter 2. Literature Review

Introduction

The body of research regarding the topic of ideology varies greatly in definition and application. As a review of available research literature revealed, any number of stratifications can classify ideology and its impact on organizational decision-making. The topic of ideology is complex and multi-faceted. For example, the domain of a person’s ideological perspective helps bring further understanding to his or her values and ethics (Edelman, 1985; McGee, 1980; Fowler, 2004; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970; Stout, Tallerico, & Scribner, 1994; Kiraz & Ozdemir, 2006; O’Neill, 1981; Forsyth, 1980).

Additionally, understanding ideological positions requires more than identifying the domain of origin. There is also deeper understanding of an ideology if viewed by social factors such as racism (King, 1991; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011), age (Strauss & Howe, 1991), gender (Gilligan, 1977), social class (Fine & Burns, 2003; Kozol, 1991), and religion (Lewis, 1952; Noddings, 2006). The literature review uncovered the effects of these social factors on the formation of ideology.

Moreover, a review of the research revealed a number of characteristics that help bring understanding to the purpose of ideology, its development, and its use in everyday life. Ideological statements, for example, tend to be holistic and describe the essence of the underlying values (O’Neill, 1981; Fowler, 2004; Edelman, 1985; McGee, 1980). People inherit ideology from their parents (Stanford-Blair & Dickman, 2005; Starratt, 1994). Additionally, ideology is engineered by intentionally manipulating and ordering values (Fowler, 2004; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970; Marshall, Mitchell, & Wirt, 1989; Kirst & Wirt, 2009; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005). People tend to change and adapt ideology throughout life.
based on experiences and life’s situations (Stanford-Blair & Dickman, 2005; Marshall, Mitchell, & Wirt, 1989; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005). A person’s ideology is also ordered; some ideologies are more important than others (Shapiro & Stefkovich’s, 2005; Marshall, Mitchell, & Wirt, 1989; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970; Schultz, 2010). Ideology also works unconsciously in the background as a person makes decisions (Stanford-Blair & Dickman, 2005; King, 1991) and inspires action (O’Neill, 1981; Forsythe, 1980; Marshall, Mitchell, & Wirt, 1989; Kirst & Wirt, 2009).

A complete understanding of ideology, however, requires more than comprehension of domain, social factors, and characteristics. Ideology is not tangible and, therefore, does not have physical properties that can be inspected. The construct of values is an abstraction and forms the bases for ideology (Edelman, 1985; Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972; Gilligan, 1977). As such, ideology finds residence in our minds. The literature review revealed structural coupling between the abstractions of ideology, values, and mind (Wellman, Cross, & Watson, 2001; Wellman & Miller, 2008; Minsky, 1986; Anderson, 1996; Anderson, 1971).

Pulling all of these stratifications of ideology together into a usable format is a challenge. Domain, social factors, characteristics, and structure of abstract elements provide greater understanding to ideology and its connection to organizational decision-making. Figure 1 provides a map of the existing research and a framework by which to track the relevant research on ideology.
One way to understand the complex nature of ideology is through understanding the various domains in which ideological statements reside. Politics and education are two domains, for example, that receive ample discussion in today’s society. This section highlights research around the nature of political ideologies, and the next section educational ideologies.

In the most basic definition available, researchers in the political domain generally define ideology as statements or symbols used to manipulate or influence others. Edelman (1985) says that politics is the “authoritative allocation of values” (p. 114). He believes that “syntax...thus implicitly express the ideology of the community, facilitate uncritical acceptance of conventional assumptions, and impeded the expression of critical or heretical ideas” (p. 126). In other words, ideology is composed of symbolic rhetoric used to promote the ideas of the dominant culture while suppressing others. Similarly, McGee (1980) indicates that ideology is best described as a “vocabulary of concepts” (p. 6) describing symbols that allow those who are in control to stay in control.

**Figure 1.** Map of existing research about ideology.

**Ideology and the Political Domain**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideology and the political domain (Section 2.2)</th>
<th>Ideology and the educational domain (Section 2.3)</th>
<th>Ideology by social factors (Section 2.4)</th>
<th>Ideology by characteristics (Section 2.5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideology is shaped by values and ethics (Section 2.6)</td>
<td>Values and ethics are shaped in the mind (Section 2.7)</td>
<td></td>
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In the vein of controlling others, Edelman (1985) continues by indicating that the oligarchies of society use political language to control the masses’ beliefs and behavior (p. 127). The political language contains myths, rhetoric, and symbols that allow those who are in control to stay in control and to control the values and beliefs of others. For both Edelman and McGee, ideologies contain the rhetoric that portrays symbols of power for the purposes of rank ordering values and influencing others.

**Ideology and the Educational Domain**

In advising educational leaders, Fowler (2004) indicates that ideologies have a basis in multiple assumptions about how society behaves, human origins, and how the cosmos operates. He states that ideologies are a “simplistic set of ideas” (p. 124) that are implicit and assumed to be true; they do not require further explanation. These ideological positions are universal and ought to be understood by everyone, according to Fowler’s definition.

When discussing power disbursement in school boards, Iannaccone and Lutz (1970) reapply the definition of ideology. As Edelman’s (1985) and McGee’s (1980) views on ideology relate to political power, Iannaccone and Lutz provide a view of power in education. Specifically, their research targeted politics and power in school districts. According to their research, local oligarchies protect the “sacred” (p. 30) values of the local school by promoting ideologies favoring community values. For example, ideologies become the guiding force in selecting curriculum aligned with local values. Thus, power in the local education system is used to keep “alien ideologies” (p. vii) out of the community.

In their research on politics in American education, Stout, Tallerico, and Scribner (1994) discuss the role of balancing values to resolve conflicting ideologies. They argue that the ideological conflict over the values of choice, efficiency, equity, and quality have been
around since the inception of the education system in the US. The ordering of those four values was highly dependent upon who exercised the greatest control of the political system. The ordering of values determined who was allowed to attend school, where they attended school, and the curriculum of the school.

The fight over ordering values to establish a dominant ideology requires time and determination, according to Kiraz and Ozdemir (2006). They indicate that “educational ideology is a system of belief that was established through a long period of time and it is hard to change” (p. 164). By way of example, their research indicates that a teacher’s educational ideology correlates to his or her use of technology in the classroom. They contend that even though user-friendly features are the primary factor regarding the decision to use technology, there is also a positive correlation between the educational ideologies of “fundamentalism, conservatism, and liberalism” (p. 163) and the decision to use technology.

When researching educational philosophies, O’Neill (1981) distinguishes the differences between educational philosophies and educational ideologies. For example, ideologies “are more specific systems of general ideas” (p. 20). In O’Neill’s ideological taxonomy, there are six specific systems found in the general idea of education ranging from conservatism to anarchism (p. 297).

Additional differences between educational philosophy and educational ideology include an action or response, according to O’Neill (1981). Ideology is a call to action and not just an attempt to order or explain knowledge, as is the case with philosophy. Ideology is “both a cause and an effect of fundamental social change” (p. 20). That is, not only can society influence ideology, but ideology can also drive changes in societal values; philosophies tend to only influence society.
Forsyth (1980) combines a number of these ideological perspectives to bring clarity to the term ideology. In his research, a typology emerges defining four different ideologies: situationist, subjectivist, absolutist, and extremist. The typology is a cross-product of individual values and social values (p. 176). From his research, people call upon a mixing and ordering of their base values to make decisions.

Ideaology by Social Factors

The literature review of existing research revealed a number of social factors creating an effect on ideology. These factors include racism, age, gender, social class, and religion. The connection between ideology and racism, for example, was evident in the literature. King (1991) states that racist ideology is an unconscious viewpoint about racist myths and assumptions. Some African Americans, according to King, unconsciously internalize “accepting the existing order of things as a given” (p. 135), meaning that the ideologies developed by a predominantly white culture are left unchallenged and assumed unchangeable. African Americans in turn unconsciously accept as fact white culture norms. Consequently, racism in both the white and black cultures promotes discriminatory ideologies.

Furthermore, in his work on racism, Bonilla-Silva (2006) suggests that ideological manipulation is even more subtle than many would admit. According to this research, there is a new racial ideology with a label of “color blind racism” (p. 2). This ideology removes the stigma associated with older forms of racism such as public labeling and overt public policies. The new ideology of “color blind racism” is less obvious but still cruel and discriminatory. For instance, the author sites practices of racial profiling, residential segregation, and subtly steering highly educated minorities toward lesser-paying jobs by
manipulation of job advertisements. Bonilla-Silva purported that the “color blind racism” ideology provides a shield for “whites [so they] can express resentment toward minorities; criticize their morality, values, and work ethic…” (p. 4).

In their research on Critical Race Theory (CRT), Zamudio, Russell, Rios, and Bridgeman (2011) offer a different view of ideology and racism. In their framework, “CRT… [goes] beyond the traditional approaches and understandings of educational inequality” (p. 2). CRT supposes that educational ideologies are conscious and deliberate attempts at “hegemony (i.e., white control and power)” (p. 9). The researchers suggest the need for “more effective solutions to the challenges students of color face in school” (p. 2).

While all of these viewpoints of ideological racism may seem divergent, they are not. Zamudio, Russell, Rios, and Bridgeman’s (2011) research suggests that ideology is engineered for the specific purpose of promoting Eurocentric values. In education, the engineered ideology plays out on the field of curriculum and teacher training. Bonilla-Silva’s (2006) work suggested that ideology becomes a shield for the white culture to hide behind, providing cover for racist attitudes and behaviors. Finally, an unfortunate complement to the consciously engineered and intentionally shielded racist ideology was the unconscious acceptance of “white” ideology by minorities as suggested by King (1991). Taken together, ideology is a tool to maintain control over people by intentionally manipulating societal values and assumptions, not unlike the suggestions of Edelman (1985), McGee (1980), and Iannaccone and Lutz (1970). Ideology, then, is used to exert political, educational, and social power over the masses. Moreover, those in power are often from different generations than those in the population.
Social scientists Strauss and Howe (1991) discuss the cyclic nature of ideological changes driven by different generations of Americans. They contend that four generational types of ideologies reoccur about every twenty years (p. 33): “Idealist, Reactive, Civic, and Adaptive” (p. 35). Different values influence these ideological differences and create different expectations for how society operates. These values range from action to introspection; secular views to spiritual views; cultural conformity to personal liberty; and a whole range of children’s rights.

By way of example, Strauss and Howe (1991) offer that during the 1950s and early 1960s, America adopted a cultural conformist ideology. In the mid-1960s, however, young Americans changed and adopted an ideology of personal liberation. The tumultuous times of the 1960s reflected this ideological shift as older adults struggled to maintain standards and conformity while younger adults pushed for more individual freedoms. Rounding out the cycle are the ideologies of nationalism and strong institutionalism as seen in the 1980s. These rhythmic shifts, driven by generational values, create ideological fault lines simultaneously present in society at any single point in time. These fault lines make it difficult to find a single ideological position that satisfies the masses, especially given complex social structures.

Research showed that social class also influences ideology. In their study of education, Fine and Burns (2003) investigated the effect of social class on K12 schooling. Their particular research studied the ideology of teachers and administrators and the changes on lower-socioeconomic students. In particular, they found that meritocracy, an ideology stating that hard work produces success, played a significant role in a teacher’s actions toward students. Teachers who saw students falling behind believed that those students were
not trying their hardest. According to the research, those teachers failed to realize that many students from the lower class of society face huge obstacles in trying to achieve just the basics of life, let alone achieving success at school. Despite their best work effort, many lower socio-economic students could not rise up to the next social class by simply working harder according to the research. More disturbing, the research revealed that students unconsciously bought into this ideology. This is similar to King’s (1991) assertion about racist ideology and the acceptance of the “existing order of things as a given” (p. 135).

According to Fine and Burns (2003), students accepted that they could never have success in life because they were not working hard enough.

In a different view of how social class influences ideology, Kozol (1991) investigates the impact of socio-economic status on America’s schools. Kozol found that there was a striking difference on how the American values of liberty and equity were viewed by the social classes. According to Kozol, members of the upper-middle class believed in ideologies such as “local autonomy” (p. 173) and that “money is not the answer” (p. 170). In contrast, members of the lower-middle class believed the state government should control schools in the hope of equally distributing funds. The difference in prioritizing the values of liberty and equity by the different social classes resulted in conflicting ideologies.

Like other social factors, gender also influences a person’s ideology. Gilligan (1977) asserted that research on the topics of values and moral judgments often neglect gender differences, specifically the female gender. Her research intentionally “seeks to identify in the feminine experience and construction of social reality a distinctive voice, recognizable in the different perspective it brings to bear on the construction and resolution of moral
problems” (p. 482). Any discussion of concepts tied to values must be done so through the window of physical gender.

As a result, Gilligan (1977) identified two major differences between men and women necessary to understanding gender values.

The moral imperative that emerges repeatedly in…women’s interviews is an injunction to care, a responsibility to discern and alleviate the “real and recognizable trouble” of this world. For the men…, the moral imperative appeared rather as an injunction to respect the rights of others and thus to protect from interference the right to life and self-fulfillment. (p. 511)

Her research indicated that women predominantly have “an injunction to care,” meaning women want to identify and remove those events in life that may be causing harm to others or themselves. Men, however, have “an injunction to respect…and to protect” the rights of others. These two injunctions are very different, according to Gilligan, and impact the ordering of values.

Finally, there was an interesting connection between ideology and religion. In his critical discourse on religion, Lewis (1952) indirectly connected ideology to religion. “You cannot make men good by law: and without good men you cannot have a good society. That is why we must go on to think [about]… morality inside the individual” (p. 40). Morality, according to Lewis, included an ordering of values for helping people make decisions. Moreover, religion helps us order those values against a standard, according to Lewis. In other words, what people believe about God and the moral standard they select affects their ordering of values, which in turn influences their ideology.
In a different view, Noddings (2006) provided warning because of the tight connection between religion and its impact on ideology. Noddings indicated that “fanatical loyalty to either principle or abstract entity” (p. 11) is not responsible. Over commitment to a position founded on religious beliefs or high morality will keep people from adopting socially accepted ideals, like “racial equality” (p. 17) or “economic justice” (p. 12). Noddings contended that religion sets and orders values that keep a person from accepting societal ideals.

In comparing Lewis (1952) and Noddings (2006), we find both similarities and differences. In each view, religion is seen as influencing a person’s ideology, values, and the order of priority for those values. In Lewis’s view, however, religion provides a boundary for the person to stay within, a line that should not be crossed. A person’s values should not extend beyond borders of religion so that ideologies remain morally acceptable to God.

Noddings (2006) also views religion as a boundary, but one that should not be entered into—also a line that should not be crossed. In her view, existence within the boundary of religion prevents people from solving societal problems like racism; therefore, people should not fanatically adopt religion and its values. These two opposing views of religion, one preventing wandering too far away and the other preventing staying too close, are indicators of religion’s close connection to ideology.

**Ideology Characteristics**

The evidence in the body of research reviewed thus far explains the differences of ideology in the various domains and societal factors. There is additional evidence in the research body supporting a number of common ideological characteristics. This section discusses the common characteristics threaded throughout the research continuum. These
characteristics help bring understanding to the commonness of how ideology develops and engage a person’s call to action.

These common features found in the research provided a multi-dimensional approach to understanding ideology. For example, holistic textual statements typically comprise ideological statements. Additionally, ideology is inherited from our parents and from long held beliefs and traditions. It develops intentionally through the influence of others; as such, it is engineered. Moreover, while we would like to believe that our ideology is static throughout life, research shows that it is not. There is an ordering, a hierarchy, to our ideological statements; not all ideologies are equally weighted. Furthermore, we unconsciously read our ideology as we go through daily life. Moreover, unlike a philosophy, which helps bring understanding to the world around us, ideology calls us into action to change our world.

**Ideological statements are holistic.** Ideologies, according to the existing research, are usually represented as basic statements, statements describing the whole understanding of underlying values. They are short phrases describing a system of values. O’Neill (1981) used short phrases such as “Educational Fundamentalism” (p. 63) and “Educational Anarchism” (p. 67) to pin the outer edges of the educational ideologies found in his research. Other phrases like “Educational Conservatism” (p. 63) and “Educational Liberalism” (p. 66) described more moderate ideological positions along the spectrum.

The statements, however, must be understood within a domain as discussed earlier. O’Neill (1981), for example, qualifies the ideological position of “fundamentalism” and “anarchism” with the word “educational,” placing it in a domain. The impact of domain is not minor. “Educational fundamentalism” is different from “political fundamentalism.” In
the educational sense of the fundamentalist ideology, “educational fundamentalism” described by O’Neill captures the idea that “Bible-centered Christian groups…feature a strict adherence to the word of God as presented in the scriptures” (p. 63). However, substituting the educational domain for the political changes the ideology of “fundamentalism” to mean a desire to “return to the real or imagined virtues of the past” (p. 63).

Fowler (2004) also supported the idea of ideological statements being short discrete statements of position that capture the essence of the underlying values. Ideological statements are a “structured but simplistic set of ideas” (p. 124). Likewise, Edelman (1985) supported the “naming of ideas” (p. 127) as the best way to capture ideological positions.

McGee (1980) also emphasized the single word or phrase notion of describing ideological positions (p. 6). He argued that ideological statements hold the “gestalt” (p. 7) of the ideology. That is, those who live in the culture and hear or see an ideological statement immediately understand the entirety of its meaning. He contended that in any society, people are “conditioned to believe that words… have an obvious meaning” (p. 6). By way of example, McGee provides phrases and words from American society that require little explanation as to meaning: “… ‘right of privacy,’ ‘freedom of speech,’ ‘rule of law,’ and ‘liberty’” (pp. 6-7). These words define basic rights as Americans, according to McGee. These basic rights are taught from a young age and reinforced throughout life.

Ideological statements are also “transcendent” according to McGee (1980, p. 5) and used by everyone, especially those in power, to sum up societal values. They are words or short phrases which would not be challenged by the community (p. 7) and are understood historically (p. 10). Ideological statements are used in everyday discourse and are believed to
be as obvious as scientific fact. Similarly, Edelman (1985) indicates that ideological statements hold the community’s values and are implicitly understood by all (p. 127).

**Ideology is inherited.** The term *inherit* is often understood as the process by which physical traits are passed along to the next generation. Taking some liberties with the term allows another avenue to describe how ideology develops. Ideology, according to the body of research below, was passed along unintentionally through family traditions, long held beliefs, and unquestioned cultural traditions. This characteristic makes ideology easily transferrable between people who live in the same culture.

Formation of leadership ideologies, for instance, starts at an early age, according to the qualitative research of Stanford-Blair and Dickman (2005). While researching leadership formation they found that “the phenomenon of family and community on leadership formation is very apparent…” (p. 14). Stanford-Blair and Dickman describe that experiences and interactions with immediate family, extended family, and the community “contributed to the development of a richly textured core of values” (p. 14). They further believe that ideologies are “shaped by family and community, cultural context, and mentor influences” (p. 35).

Starratt (1994) presents a slightly darker view of the inheritance characteristic of ideology. He contended that parents are essential to the development of values and ethics in children (p. 85). He presents the case that parents teach ideology through demonstration (p. 4). However, in his view this can lead to either a good or a bad outcome. His contention is that while many parents portray noble and worthy ideologies in front of their children, many others do not. When parents play out destructive ideologies in front of their children, the
children adopt those ideologies. Those ideologies can lead to abuse of drugs, abuse of spouses, racism, deceit, and downgrading government leaders.

**Ideology is engineered.** Current research also revealed that ideology is intentionally passed along to people. Unlike the unconsciously passed along inheritance characteristic, the engineered characteristic is intentional. That is, the ideology was pre-specified, its delivery designed, and its result measured. Fowler (2004) indicates that “ideologies are widely disseminated through [the] school system, the mass media, and advertising” (p. 124) with intent.

Specifically in the educational setting, creation and distribution of ideologies are intentional. In their research with school boards, Iannaccone and Lutz (1970) found this creation and distribution process of ideology to be not only on purpose but also systemic. They defined two types of communities in which schools reside: the “sacred” (p. 32) and the “secular” (p. 45). In the sacred community, creation of ideology occurs through the history and traditions of the community. Monolithic power structures intentionally maintain traditions and beliefs that entrench ideology and protect it from outside influences (p. 35).

Secular communities, however, are open to redesigning their ideology. The secular community maintains a pluralistic power structure ensuring adoption and promotion of fresh ideologies. In either, the sacred or the secular, creation and distribution of community ideology is deliberate via school curriculum and faculty.

Marshall, Mitchell, and Wirt (1989) emphasized that procedures, rules, and structures of organizations also intentionally carry ideologies. They indicated cultural values have roots in political ideology and that these “values are carried from the past in the accepted history, the traditions, rules, and structures of institutions (e.g. churches, schools…)” (p. 6). That is,
formal institutions such as churches and schools are very intentional about promoting ideology through rules and practices. In similar research, Kirst and Wirt (2009) point out that schools intentionally allocate the community’s values and ethics to students (p. 62).

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) encourage new action in the area of professional development for teachers. They argue that society is too intentional about encouraging the wrong ideologies and that teacher training programs should intentionally promote new ideologies amongst educators. They recommend a new specification that will stop the reproduction of “…‘isms’ in society (i.e. classism, racism, sexism, heterosexism)” (p. 15). This redesign of the professional development, they believe, will change the ideology of teachers making them “more knowledgeable, moral, and sensitive…” (p. 15).

**Ideology is adaptable.** A person’s ideology changes throughout life; it is not static. In their research on leadership formation, Stanford-Blair and Dickman (2005) found that forging of core values occur in the difficult times of life. For example, in one case study the participant noted “their experiences with adversity coupled with their core values. Such experiences eventually led to their selecting career paths… [where] the value of human worth became a focus of their calling” (p. 25). Significant life experiences changed the participant’s ideology and set him or her on a different career path.

In the domain of education, Marshall, Mitchell, and Wirt (1989) believe there are four values present in our national educational policy: quality, equity, efficiency, and choice (p. 12). These values, and the resulting ideologies, change in relative importance to each other based on national events. For example, from the 1920s until the 1950s, efficiency in the classroom was highly valued. With the launch of Sputnik in 1958 by the Russians, the value of educational quality was elevated. In the 1960s and into the 1970s, race riots and the
Supreme Court’s decision on racial integration brought the value of equity to the forefront. In recent times the value of choice has become important, as parents demand a larger scope of educational choice for their children. Educational ideologies change as national events come and go.

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) postulate that people typically operate between one of four ethical considerations causing modulation of their core values. Their research suggested that people typically experience a natural tension between core values. Throughout life, people “rethink and reframe concepts such as privilege, power, culture, language, and even justice” (p. 14). This tension causes a rationalization process and often results in a modification of values and their relative order.

**Ideology is ordered.** There is an order, or a rank priority, to a person’s ideology. A ranking of values within a person’s life will likewise order his or her ideologies, resulting in taxonomy. This taxonomy results in a unique and very personal brand of ideology for each person. Again referencing Shapiro and Stefkovich’s (2005) research, there is a tension that each person must work through to establish a distinct and personal ordering of ideologies (p. 14). For instance, while the social values of justice, critique, and care described by Shapiro and Stefkovich work together, only one is dominant in guiding action.

As mentioned previously, Marshall, Mitchell, and Wirt (1989) submit that there are four values in educational policy (p. 12). Each person, based on his or her life experiences, rank orders those values and, consequently, ideology. Iannaccone and Lutz (1970) indicate that ideology is rank ordered and that the power structure in the community attempts to use ideological taxonomy to re-order the ideologies of others.
Schultz (2010), a writer and researcher for K12 Christian schools, also levies an opinion on ideological rankings in people. When talking about the pedagogy and curriculum in Christian school classrooms, he references the ideological tension teachers experience between teaching only spiritual beliefs and teaching only academics. "It is vital that Christians fully understand this tension and know how to keep it in proper balance” (p. 32). Schultz advocates that Christian schools intentionally find an ideological position that works for their community and aligns with their school’s mission.

**Ideology is unconsciously read.** Ideology is often innate, a part of our unconscious background. We “read” our ideology automatically without even realizing we have done so, and yet it forms the basis of many actions. Stanford-Blair and Dickman (2005) indicated that ideology naturally guides people through tough times in life (p. 175). A person’s ideology is the “primal thread of inner…coherence” (p. 175) providing clarity of purpose. They go on to say that ideology “invites a natural and logical weaving-in [of behavior]…” (p. 175). Consequently, an unconscious ideological position often finds its way into actions and behaviors.

In her research on the ideology of dysconscious racism, King (1991) indicates that people “have an uncritical habit of mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given” (p. 135). The “uncritical habit of mind” is an unconscious belief that things in life cannot be changed. She goes on to say that dysconscious racism in the African-American community “tacitly accepts dominant white norms and privileges” (p. 135). There is an unspoken and unstated acceptance by some in the African-American community to accept
their position in culture without question; they unconsciously accept an ideology that is to their detriment.

**Ideology creates action.** One of the primary differences between philosophy and ideology is the effect on behavior (O’Neill, 1981).

The term *ideology* is somehow less academic and abstract than *philosophy*. It suggests not an inert body of knowledge, but a somewhat more specific and dynamic pattern of general ideas which serves to direct social action. (p. 19)

O’Neill suggests a tight relationship between action and ideology. While philosophy is “an integrated system of very general ideas to enable a person to intellectually organize his experiences” (p. 21), ideology is a call to arms.

Additionally, given that ideology is domain specific, so too is the resulting action. O’Neill (1981) indicates that in the sphere of education, someone who maintains an ideology of “Educational Fundamentalism” will “assume that moral education…is the basic and overriding purpose of schooling” (p. 309). Alternately, a person who subscribes to an “Education Conservatism” ideology will “assume that moral education is [only] one of the necessary aspects of schooling” (p. 309).

These two ideologies, though similar, are also different. They are different enough to cause different actions in the domain of education. For example, an educational leader who is a fundamentalist in the domain of education will select curriculum and pedagogy that promotes character building above all else, perhaps even at the expense of academics. Conservatives in the education domain will value building moral character, but not exclusively. Their curriculum and pedagogical choices will factor in building character *and* solid academics, athletics, and social skills as part of the school’s purpose.
Forsythe’s (1980) typology of ideologies also helps explain domain-specific responses. In his research, he found that individuals who follow the “situationist,” “subjectivist” or “exceptionist” (p. 176) ideologies were sometimes conflicted in their actions. For example, participants in the study varied their hypothetical actions based upon the situation (p. 182). They re-ordered their values based on the dynamics of the situation and took different actions.

Further complicating the ideology-action characteristic was the notion that multiple ideologies are often at work in forming a final action to a situation. Marshall, Mitchell, and Wirt (1989) claimed that cultural values have their roots in political ideology. These values form different ideologies that work together to form “overall judgments about various proposed courses of action” (p. 88). Kirst and Wirt (2009) likewise claimed that multiple ideologies that reinforce or frustrate educational policies (p. 61). In practice, multiple ideologies work together, creating a single force that shapes policy.

**Ideology and Values**

A review of existing research on ideology reveals a clear connection to values. From a cultural perspective, Edelman (1985) discusses value-laden ideological symbols in our everyday lives. Kohlberg and Mayer (1972) connect ideologies to educational values and cognitive development. Similarly, Gilligan (1977) establishes a relationship between ideology and a commitment to values in the development of critical thinking skills.

When discussing cultural language and its connection to symbols, Edelman (1985) indicates that symbols of ideology carry great power. These symbols help people identify with societal values of rightness. According to Edelman, these symbols can be as simple as the names of roads and highways, or as complex as the language of a national constitution.
Regardless of the complexity, firmly entrenched societal values are the basis for ideological symbols and “these are the values for which men fight hard” (p. 127).

Education, like culture and language, is also heavily laden with values that form ideology. Kohlberg and Mayer (1972) contend that educational ideologies form a system of “value principles” (p. 464) that is cognitively developed. These are principles founded on psychological theory, social truths, and social ethics. They further contended that “educational ideologies include value assumptions about what is educationally good or worthwhile” (p. 463). These values work their way into organizational decision-making affecting curriculum and faculty selection, for example.

As already established, gender is an important social factor in understanding ideology. To that end, Gilligan (1981) has much to say about ideology and its connection to values and cognitive development. When talking about the development of morality in students in higher education, she says, “The ideological moral constructions are realized in the moral systems and abstract principles of [cognitive development]” (p. 155). Ideology is tightly coupled to a person’s system of values and has a foundation in that person’s mind.

**Ideology, Values, and the Mind**

As previously established, ideology is an abstract construct; it does not have weight, color, or depth. Ideology is not physical. This is true because ideology sits on the abstraction of values, and values on the foundation of an abstraction known as the mind.

There are numerous theories about the mind in the research literature. There is certainly no shortage of researchers and scholarly authors attempting to explain how the abstraction of mind operates and drives human behavior. This dissertation has narrowed the discourse on mind to three explanatory models. The models were chosen because they take
different approaches to explaining human behavior and because they easily connect to values and ideology.

**Theory of Mind.** A popular and well researched approach to explaining how the human mind operates is known as the Theory of Mind. Wellman, Cross, and Watson (2001) indicated that the Theory of Mind explains the “larger topic…of folk psychology” (p. 655). Folk psychology is a broad category of psychology where people view themselves as “psychological beings, interactors, and selves” (p. 655). Theory of Mind, then, helps to explain human psychology by putting forth the notion that people see themselves, and others, in certain mental states. These states, or mental positions, result from “desires, emotions, beliefs, intention, and other inner experiences” (p. 655).

In another study, Wellman and Miller (2008) suggested that the Theory of Mind is incomplete without recognition of deontic reasoning. Deontic reasoning complements Theory of Mind by offering moral and social norms to help explain human behavior (p. 109). For example, judgment of self, judgment of others, acknowledging social authority, and acknowledging a moral authority adds motivation and conviction to the list of existing mental positions.

As to the Theory of Mind’s connection to ideology, one of the characteristics of ideology previously established in the research was the transmissibility by inheritance from parental and community influence to children (Starratt, 1994). The Theory of Mind offers insight to how ideological inheritance works. Even at young ages, children begin to formulate and test developing belief systems. Their experiences and interactions with parents, family, and close members of their community shape how they view and test the
world around them. They develop beliefs and convictions from how they see their parents’ judge others and acknowledge authority.

Another connection between Theory of Mind and ideology rests in the taxonomy of values. Marshall, Mitchell, and Wirt (1989), Iannaccone and Lutz (1970), and Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) all support the notion that a person’s ideology has an ordering because values have an ordering. The addition of deontic reasoning to the Theory-of-Mind theory (Wellman & Miller, 2008) adds social and moral factors that help understand the ordering of a person’s values. For example, motivations, goals, judgments about others, and developing beliefs are always processing in the background of a person’s mind, shaping an ideological position.

The society of mind. An interesting view of how the human mind works and explains behavior was developed by Minsky (1986). His research attempted to explain the interworking of the mind based on the metaphor of a society. In his metaphor, Minsky uses the constructs of “tiny machines” (p. 19) to describe how minds “are built from mindless stuff, from parts that are much smaller and simpler than anything we consider smart” (p. 18). Minsky’s primary goal is to reduce thinking into a series of smaller processes used in multiple configurations to achieve the higher order tasks of a person’s mind. Those higher order tasks included knowing self, resolving conflict, learning, memory, dealing with emotion, and negotiating context.

The metaphor of society used by Minsky (1986) to explain the mind introduced new elements necessary for understanding ideology. For example, fear (p. 97) and threat (p. 37) become primary motivators for the mind to drive some level of action or behavior. The mind also learns from failures as much as it does from success, according to Minsky. By
introducing the notion of “censors” (p. 96), the theory contends that our minds will change and adapt existing processes to respond differently based on the situation. A person’s mind, and consequently his or her ideologies, will adapt based on life experiences, as also suggested by Stanford-Blair and Dickman (2005).

**Theory of cognition.** In his study of how people learn and think, Anderson (1996) proposed a unified and all-encompassing theory of cognition. Anderson united the various domains of personal cognition, social cognition, and language processing under a single encompassing theory of understanding. The theory postulates the potential of measuring and manipulating personal and social values. The theory finds application in fields such as artificial intelligence.

Cognitive algebra, according to Anderson (1996), is the “key to unlock the promise of conscious purposiveness” (p. 4). Purposiveness is the intentional and conscious decision to take action according to our values. Anderson contends that values are rank-ordered, driven by multiple stimuli, and are intentionally acted upon. Combined with the potential to measure and manipulate values, responses are somewhat predictable for everyday decisions.

In earlier research, Anderson (1971) introduced the concept of integration theory (p. 172). The theory lays the groundwork for his later research (1996) that promotes the idea that cognition is quantifiable and able to be mathematically predicted. Response is driven by a mathematical relationship between stimuli and a person’s attitude.

Anderson (1971) also introduced the topic of conflict in an abstract mathematical term called inconsistency (p. 199). Inconsistency of stimuli created problems when trying to predict response. Anderson’s solution is to either change the meaning of the stimuli or adjust
the value of the stimuli, making it less important and therefore less influential in the response outcome.

Given the ability to measure and manipulate values according to Anderson, ideology then became measurable and able to be manipulated. Values, according to Anderson (1971, 1996), are quantifiable and thus capable of algebraic manipulation. Given their manipulative attribute, these values are also capable of manipulation by others. The notion of manipulating values, and therefore ideology, parallels the notion that others can engineer ideology (Fowler, 2004; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970; Marshall, Mitchell, & Wirt, 1989; Kirst & Wirt, 2009).
Chapter 3. Methods

Introduction

This dissertation uses qualitative research methods to reveal the ideology of Christian school superintendents. As such, there were a number of methodological approaches available within the framework of qualitative methods. In particular, ethnography, case study, grounded theory, and phenomenological methods were potential qualitative traditions available to give insight to superintendent ideology. In this chapter I will provide justification for the phenomenological approach used in the research and discuss the use of narrative analysis method within the phenomenological tradition as a means to discover themes and observations related to ideology. Further, I will review the data collection strategy for the project and introduce the strategy for interviewing participants. Finally, I will review the trustworthiness standards used for the research and address ethical considerations.

Justification for the Use of Phenomenological Research

Giorgi (1997) proposed that the phenomenology qualitative research tradition “refers to the totality of lived experiences that belong to a single person” (p. 236). He further indicated that a phenomenon is a “whatever” (p. 238) that is observed and understood to be true by the observer. In other words, a phenomenon is an observed event, decision, or activity and assumed to be true. For this research the “whatever” that Giorgi references was the observation that “in spite of similar religious and philosophical beliefs, ACSI K12 Christian school superintendents differed significantly in their organizational decision-making.”

Giorgi (1997) indicated that the phenomenological method has three steps. The first step requires “phenomenological reduction” (p. 239). In this step the researcher attempts to understand events, activities, or decisions in the proper context. For example, knowing the
background, environment, and location helps properly understand a participant’s decision. To assume a decision made in one situation would be the correct decision in another is a fallacy from a phenomenological perspective. The assumption that different situations can result in different decisions aligns well with the current research around ideology (Forsyth, 1980; Kirst & Wirt, 2009; Marshall, Mitchell, & Wirt, 1989; Minsky, 1986; Stanford-Blair & Dickman 2005). The assumption also holds true with the analysis results shown in Chapter 5, making the phenomenological tradition a good selection for the study.

The second step in a phenomenological study attempts to provide a deep description of the observed events, decisions, or activities. Similar to ethnography, the researcher desires to understand and then articulate all aspects of the observed phenomenon. Using a story-telling paradigm, the researcher works to understand the conflict, the actors, and the plot. By understanding the participants’ relationships with other people, their interaction with the environment, and the role of conflict in the situation, a better understanding of the phenomenon occurs. In this research project, a narrative story for each participant detailed situations and stories collected during the interview process.

The third and final step involves understanding the essence of the phenomenon. That is, the phenomenological research tradition attempts to find true meaning of the “whatever” (Giorgi, 1997, p. 238). This purpose of this final step requires the researcher to understand the core nature of the observed phenomenon.

This third step makes the phenomenological approach an especially attractive methodological fit for this dissertation. Given Christian school superintendents’ similar religious and philosophical beliefs, the particular phenomenon for this dissertation was the varying organizational decisions made by those superintendents as a group. This dissertation
attempted to see each decision in light of the values and situations that caused participants to act a certain way.

**Narrative Analysis and the Inductive Methodology**

Giorgi (1997) claims that phenomenology has varying “modes, styles and forms” (p. 236). Creswell (2005), while ignoring the specific term of phenomenology, suggests a creative analytical approach available to uncover life experiences and the essence of decisions. Given Giorgi’s openness to various forms and Creswell’s creativity for analysis, the narrative analysis approach within the phenomenological tradition provides a tool to uncover participant ideology. More specifically, the narrative approach threads stories of life experiences into elements of situation, plot, actors, conflict, and resolution. These elements reduce the ideological phenomena down to inspect-able pieces as required by Giorgi’s first step of “phenomenological reduction” (p. 239).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) further support the notion of using narrative analysis to understanding phenomena such as ideology. Their research indicates that as people tell stories, they “move back and forth between the personal and the social, simultaneously thinking about the past, present, and future…” (p. 2). A narrative analysis can help illuminate the connection between a superintendent’s ideology and his or her experiences. According to their research, “experiences happen narratively” (p. 19), making this type of analysis ideal for exploring ideology. Furthermore, narrative analysis draws on the participant’s mind as he or she considers memories, thoughts, experiences, feelings, values, and beliefs (Wellman, Cross, & Watson, 2001; Wellman & Miller, 2008). These elements of the mind helped superintendents form stories that revealed ideology.
Creswell (2005) further supported the narrative analysis approach by suggesting that life and work experiences be viewed as both stories and themes. While narrative analysis includes a heavy emphasis on understanding participants through stories, it is not absent of a rigorous thematic treatment of the data. The design of the narrative analysis approach also includes axial analysis across all participants searching for common themes. For this study, transcripts, grand-narratives (Creswell, 2005), and artifacts were the sources for thematic analysis across the study’s participants.

According to Creswell (2005), thematic analysis under the narrative analysis umbrella exposes overarching themes that develop for individual participants and across the group as a whole (pp. 481, 482). For this dissertation, themes that emerged from the participant pool helped in the development of a framework that linked ideology to values and decision-making. The thematic analysis used in this dissertation used open coding techniques on each participant’s grand-narrative (Creswell, 2005). Verbatim evidence and concrete language principles (Spradley, 1980) were the beginning points for the analysis. Axial analysis of codes across the nine participants in the group revealed broader themes used to develop a framework for understanding ideology.

Data Collection Strategy

This dissertation used interest surveys, demographic surveys, artifacts, and interviews to collect participant data. This section will discuss the interest survey, the demographic surveys, and artifacts. Data collection using the interviewing process is treated separately in the next section.

Interest surveys determined if there were stories of dilemma or conflict that the participant would be willing to discuss in a face-to-face interview setting. The interest survey
was emailed to forty superintendents at ACSI member schools in mid-Michigan, upper Illinois, upper Indiana, and northernmost Ohio. A response rate of 25% identified ten participants who were interested in the research project. One participant was eliminated from the participant pool because he was a principal and not a superintendent, leaving a total of nine participants. The interest survey is shown in Appendix A and the consent form in Appendix B.

The nine participants who expressed interest in the research received a confirmation notice and a demographic survey, shown in Appendices C and D, respectively. The demographic survey did not provide a large cross-section of participants across the social factors of gender, age, social status, religion, and race.

Of the nine participants, seven were male, two female. Gilligan (1977) established the importance of gender differences when studying ideologies. Her research indicates that women predominantly have “an injunction to care” for others, and men, “an injunction to respect…and to protect” the rights of others. With the mix of male and female participants it was possible to study gender differences.

In addition to gender, participants were also spread across different generations. Different generations have different values, according to Strauss and Howe (1991). To help label these generations, the Pew Research Center demarcated generational ages by date of birth (Millenials, 2010). People born in 1948 or before are from the Silent generation and were over 65 years old in 2013. Baby Boomers were born between 1949 and 1967, making them between the ages of 64 and 46 years of age in 2013. People born between 1968 and 1983 are between the ages of 45 and 30 and considered members of Generation X. The Millennial generation was born after 1984 but before 1995, making them between the ages of
18 and 29 in 2013. According to 2012 estimates, the Silent generation accounts for 18% of the US population, Baby Boomers 32%, Generation X 24%, and Millenials about 26% (US Census Bureau—Age & Sex, 2010).

In this study, three of the generation groups were represented. There were five Baby Boomers, three Generation X participants, and one participant older than 65, putting him in the Silent generation. The age range of the participants was from 40 to 67.

A person’s childhood social class also impacts ideology (Fine & Burns, 2003; Kozol, 1991). Lareau (2002) provided additional definition of these social classes in her research on families and social classes. Poor, or lower class, children have parents who receive “public assistance and do not participate in the labor force on a regular, continuous basis” (p. 751). Participants from working class families had parents in which neither parent held middle-class positions in the work force. In this family, one or both parents did not have managerial authority over others, and their jobs did not require highly complex or educational skill. Participants from middle-class families, according to Lareau’s definition, had one or both parents holding managerial positions and their jobs required a highly complex skill or a college degree. Although not in Lareau’s definition, children from wealthy families will be categorized separately. Participants from wealthy families would have parents who either owned major businesses or were well-compensated top-level executives.

In this study, only two social-class categories surfaced. Six participants noted that they were from working class families as a child. The remaining three superintendent participants were from middle-class families. No participants were from the poor or wealthy classes as children.
Research also demonstrated the impact of religion on ideology (Lewis, 1952; Nodding, 2006). All participants were widely considered Christian evangelical, in other words not Catholic or Lutheran. Participants identified five different religious denominations. Five identified themselves as Baptist. One person identified his or her religious denomination as Evangelical Free and another as Fellowship of Evangelical. Two others identified themselves as Bible Church and Non-denominational, respectively.

Finally, according to the latest US Census Bureau (US Census Bureau, 2010), 72% of the US population is white and 13% is black. Race was shown to be important to ideology, especially the African-American race (King, 1997; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011). Unfortunately, there were no African-American superintendents available for the research within the two-hour driving range delimitation. Future research projects investigating ideology will need to expand study borders to include a broader range of race demographics. Table 1 summarizes the social factors for each participant in the study.

Last, artifacts and documents provided by the superintendents were used to supplement participant stories. School mission statements, personal mission statements, wall plaques, books, and favorite sayings all added to a deeper understanding of participant thinking. These artifacts provided insight to ideological dilemmas faced by the superintendent.
Table 1

Participant Social Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age (Generation)</th>
<th>Social Class as a child</th>
<th>Current Religious Denomination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>56 (Boomer)</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Evangelical Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40 (Gen X)</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Fellowship of Evangelicals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>55 (Boomer)</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>43 (Gen X)</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Bible Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>67 (Silent)</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janet</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>55 (Boomer)</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allison</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>62 (Boomer)</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>57 (Boomer)</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drew</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>43 (Gen X)</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>non-Denominational</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviewing Strategy

Creswell (2005) states, “Narrative researchers explore an educational research problem by understanding the experiences of an individual” (p. 477). That is, deeply understanding the participant’s life, personal story, and professional story aids in
understanding the essence of some decisions. Similarly, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stress the importance of making a personal connection with the participants. They claim that negotiating a personal connection will help participants be open and transparent about personal experiences and life stories.

The interview strategy used in this research worked toward personal dialogue in order to illuminate the participant’s values and associated ideologies. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) indicate “for narrative inquiry, it is more productive to begin with explorations of the phenomena of experience…to begin with experience as lived and told in stories” (p. 128). Participants in the research were asked to share stories from their experiences as superintendents where they had to make decisions when faced with a dilemma. The stories shared by participants revealed moments of stressful decisions involving high emotional content, often resulting in unpleasant outcomes.

To achieve this level of in-depth story-telling, interviews with participants occurred in two parts. The audio from each interview was digitally recorded and conducted in the participant’s office or conference room at the school. The first interview lasted approximately one hour, was semi-structured, and focused on situations-of-dilemma experienced as a K12 Christian school superintendent. The second interview was a follow-up interview lasting approximately one hour and explored evolving themes from the first interview. The second interview also included discussion about life and family as a child. Questions for the first interview are shown in the Dissertation Interview Guide in Appendix E.
**The Inductive Method**

The inductive method used to analyze each participant’s data, develop his or her unique narrative, and then develop axial themes requires further description and clarification. The basis for data collection was the interview process. Each participant was interviewed two times for about an hour each time. Consistent with an open coding schema, a list of codes emerged from the interviews supported by verbatim evidence. The codes were tracked on the List of Codes document (Appendix F).

The transcripts for each interview were analyzed and memoed using the emerging List of Codes. The list was updated and amended after each interview in order to reach data saturation of emerging codes and themes. Data saturation occurred with ten different codes after five interviews.

Interviews produced a great quantity of data. Each interview produced a single audio file that was listened to again between interviews. Notes and observations from the recordings were recorded in a journal. The analyzed and memoed transcripts from each interview along with journal entries and artifacts were the basis for building the List-of-Verbatim Evidence for each participant. The List-of-Verbatim Evidence for each participant described emerging codes and developing relationships between those codes for each participant supported with quoted verbatim evidence. The second round of participant interviews confirmed these emerging codes, explored family and social experiences, and followed up on open items from the first interview. Appendix G provides a sample of the List-of-Verbatim Evidence constructed from Allison’s data.

From the List-of-Verbatim Evidence, a Code Map was developed for each participant. The map was a translation of the codes from the List-of-Verbatim Evidence to a
new form that revealed relationships between codes. As each code and verbatim evidence was transferred from the List-of-Verbatim Evidence, common supporting evidence was graphically regrouped around each code establishing sub-codes for each code. Sub-codes were then analyzed for similarities and relationships to other codes and sub-code groups. Where relationships existed, a line was drawn between codes, establishing a connection about participant thinking. After all codes and sub-codes were analyzed, a final Code Map for each participant was produced, showing a simple map of codes and relationships. This step used the mind map method to establish a network of relationships between codes. Appendix H shows a sample of Allison’s Code Map.

With a Code Map established for each participant, all maps were transferred to an Axial Code Map. The Axial Code Map was a map of all participant code maps allowing for easier cross-participant analysis and establishment of common themes. The map was a key step in the inductive process revealing common observations and axial themes across all participants. The map became the basis for the final ideological framework. Appendix I contains a copy of the Axial Code Map.

The graphical data and memos on the Axial Code Map were further reduced to a single Ideological Storyboard. The storyboard displayed each participant’s final Code Map in a simple network diagram. Nodes on the diagram represented participant codes and connecting lines the relationships. The codes were interpreted as participant values and commitments. Further analysis was conducted to look for common values and commitments between participants. Appendix J provides a copy of the Ideological Storyboard.

All of the collected and analyzed data became the basis for writing each participant’s story. Each story contained the same basic elements of participant commitments, values,
situation-of-dilemma, and analysis. The stories highlighted one or two values relevant to the situation-of-dilemma described by the participant. The analysis of each story communicated the essence of decision-making for the participant and his or her ideological position for the dilemma. Each story was sent to the participant for editing and confirmation.

To complete the inductive analysis, three summary matrices, or grids, were produced. The Matrix of Values (shown in Appendix K) highlighted each participant’s ideological narrative by his or her values. This grid revealed the tight coupling between values and ideological positions. The Matrix of Influences (shown in Appendix L) categorized the effect of others on participant thinking. The influence of others was connected to participant values and commitments. Finally, the Matrix of Situations (shown in Appendix M) summarized each participant’s ideological narrative by his or her situation-of-dilemma. This grid allowed deeper understanding of how participant situations changed the ordering of values and ideology.

In summary, during the analysis phase of the project, all forms of data were analyzed and synthesized working toward a final ideological framework. The procedure that worked inductively from specific participant data toward the final framework is shown in Table 2.
### Table 2

*The Inductive Methodology*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Detail</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; Participant Interview</td>
<td>Schedule and complete the 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; participant interview</td>
<td>Audio recording of the 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Listen to audio</td>
<td>Record interesting words and phrases in journal</td>
<td>Journal entries of emerging codes and memoed thoughts about the participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Read transcript</td>
<td>Highlight or circle interesting text, words, and phrases in the right margin identify new codes, or use codes from the most recent List of Codes. Journal unique entries.</td>
<td>A coded transcript with emerging codes, memos, and follow-up questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Create and maintain a List of Codes</td>
<td>As each transcript is read, add unique codes with supporting verbatim evidence to the List of Codes. Use the codes when reading transcripts to identify emerging codes.</td>
<td>A single list of emerging codes based on verbatim evidence from transcripts. See Appendix F.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Participant Confirmation of Transcript</td>
<td>Send the to the participant for confirmation</td>
<td>Member checking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Develop Follow-Up Guide</td>
<td>Create a list of questions based on the coded transcript. Include questions about family, church, and faith development. Include follow-up questions that allow the participant to confirm or deny emerging codes, or values.</td>
<td>A Follow-Up Interview Guide for the 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Participant Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Participant Interview</td>
<td>Schedule and complete the 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; participant interview</td>
<td>Audio recording of the 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Listen to audio</td>
<td>Record interesting words and phrases in journal</td>
<td>Journal entries of emerging codes and memoed thoughts about the participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Read transcript</td>
<td>Highlight or circle interesting text, words, or phrases. In the right margin identify new codes, or use codes from the most recent List of Codes. Journal unique entries.</td>
<td>A coded transcript with emerging codes and memos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Create and maintain a List of Codes</td>
<td>As each transcript is read, add unique codes with supporting verbatim evidence to the List of Codes. Use the codes when reading transcripts to identify emerging codes.</td>
<td>A single list of emerging codes based on verbatim evidence from transcripts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Create List-of-Verbatim Evidence for each participant</td>
<td>For each participant: transfer verbatim evidence from the coded and marked up transcripts to an 11x17 sheet of paper, grouping the evidence together by emerging codes. Use multiple sheets for each participant if necessary. Create memos on the sheets.</td>
<td>For each participant, a consolidated list of verbatim evidence from each of the two interviews. See Appendix G.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Create an Axial Code Map for all participants</td>
<td>Create a single map that shows all participant’s Code Maps; This map is a macro-overview of all participants. Identify common codes that exist throughout each participant’s Code Maps. This is an axial look across all participants. Identify and circle the codes around which all other codes seem to be connected.</td>
<td>A single Code Map consolidating all participants’ Code Maps. See Appendix I.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Create the Ideological Storyboard</td>
<td>Create a simple network map for each participant showing the common codes and relationships. Show unique codes for participants.</td>
<td>A simple network diagram that tells the story of each participant’s ideology. See Appendix K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Create participant stories</td>
<td>Create a grand-narrative (Creswell, 2005) for each participant from the transcripts, artifacts, and ideological storyboard</td>
<td>A single narrative for each participant that develops and analyzes ideological position from the situation-of-dilemma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Participant review of story</td>
<td>Send each participant his/her narrative for confirmation and corrections if necessary</td>
<td>Member checking the final story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Create Matrix-of-Situations</td>
<td>Create a grid showing the ideological positions for each participant based on his/her situation-of-dilemma.</td>
<td>A grid that categorizes situations-of-dilemma for all participants against his/her ideological position. See Appendix M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Create Matrix-of-Values</td>
<td>Create a grid showing the ideological positions for each participant based on his/her values.</td>
<td>A grid that categorizes values for all participants against his/her ideological position. See Appendix K.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Create Matrix-of-Influences</td>
<td>Create a grid that highlights life influences on values and commitments for each participant.</td>
<td>A grid that categories the influences for each participant against his/her values and commitments. See Appendix L.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Trustworthiness**

This research project used a number of strategies to establish the trustworthiness of the interview data. Creswell (2003), Spradley (1980), and Eisner (1991) recommended a number of strategies used in this research:

**Thick, rich descriptions.** Creswell (2003) suggests that thick, rich descriptions “transport readers to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experiences” (p. 196). Similarly, Spradley (1980) recommends using the language principles of identification, verbatim, and concrete to capture the field record in the native language of the participant. This approach helped bring a greater understanding to the meaning and context of transcripts. Participants’ language and words were not cleaned up or condensed during the transcription process. Where possible, long text blocks were extracted from the transcripts and used for analysis.

**Peer review debriefing.** Creswell (2003) recommends that researchers use a peer review process to improve the accuracy of the project’s conclusions. Likewise, Eisner (1991)
suggests a group of critics review the same set of data because “different critics might be attending to different dimensions of the same data” (p. 113). In Eisner’s view, critics assess the same data quite differently and, therefore, consensus is not as important as critical discourse. To meet this requirement, this research project used a peer review team composed of the doctoral committee.

**Member checking.** Creswell (2003) also recommends providing the individual participants an opportunity to comment on conclusions. Creswell (2005) specifically recommends that collaboration with participants is a required step when conducting narrative types of analysis. For this research, a number of strategies fulfilled this requirement. For example, near the end of the second interview, each participant was asked about emerging observations and values that seemed important to the participant. Participants either confirmed or denied those values. Participants were also asked to read and verify their own transcripts. Additionally, participants were sent their story compiled from the first two interviews, artifacts, and other documents. Participants were given an opportunity to provide changes or confirm the story’s content. With one participant, a popular military movie was used as a metaphor to confirm emerging themes from the interviews. Finally, interviews and stories were analyzed looking for saturation of emerging themes to validate new data as they were gathered. Common themes began to emerge after interviews with the fifth participant.

**Discrepant evidence.** Creswell (2003) advises reporting on “information that runs counter to the themes” (p. 196) because it builds credibility with the reader. The discovery of missing data provides another view or the participant’s ideology. Interview transcripts and other participant documents from the field were explored looking for discrepant data. In this project, a number of expected themes did not emerge as common amongst all K12 Christian
school superintendents. For example, love of children and religious values like grace and discipleship were not dominant themes amongst all superintendents as one might expect given that the schools are Christian in nature.

**Data triangulation.** Creswell (2003) suggested that data trustworthiness is established by examining evidence from “different data sources of information” (p. 196). Eisner (1991) further clarified that “structural corroboration in education…requires the mustering of evidence. The weight of the evidence becomes persuasive…” (p. 111). Eisner’s challenge was to gather evidence supporting the data’s credibility as if it were to be presented in a court of law. To meet the requirement, this study used three sources to triangulate a participant’s ideology. The two semi-structured interviews provided an opportunity to ask questions and triangulate answers around emerging themes looking for “corroboration” (p. 111) of evidence. The participant’s philosophy of education was also discussed in an attempt to confirm or deny values. Finally, documents from the field such as the school’s mission statement, the school’s core values, books, and office plaques were used as additional confirmation points regarding participant values.

**Referential adequacy.** Eisner (1991) suggests, “If criticism does not illuminate its subject matter, if it does not bring about more complex and sensitive human perception and understanding, it fails in its primary aim” (p. 113). Eisner believes that collected data are trustworthy if they bring a deeper and clearer understanding of the topic to the reader. For this study, discourse with one other doctoral student provided an opportunity to “illuminate” developing themes and stories. The doctoral student used a qualitative analysis method different from this project to analyze one of this project’s transcripts. The emerging themes identified by this research’s approach and the other doctoral student’s approach were similar.
Multiple meetings were held with the other doctoral student to discuss observations and findings from this dissertation.

**Researcher bias.** Creswell (2003) recommends that researchers reveal biases in order to create “an open honest narrative that will resonate well with readers” (p. 196). Exposing researcher bias was addressed using two methods. An earlier section of this document explicitly proclaims this researcher’s own values and experiences in the K12 Christian school environment. The second method involved journaling personal experiences and thoughts regarding ideology throughout the dissertation process. The journal is available for inspection as a research record from the study.

**Reflectiveness.** Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stress the importance of designing qualitative research so that it is reflective. They indicated that field texts such as journals “take on an intimately reflective puzzling quality, perhaps less a way to give account of experiences…and more a way to puzzle out experiences” (p. 103). Journals are reflective by nature and allow people to capture feelings and attitudes in the moment. In this research, journaling was used as a method to capture reflections about interviews, emerging themes, and findings. Three journals were filled covering proposal development through defense of the final dissertation. The reflections contained in the journals shaped the lessons learned and personal impact of the findings on the researcher documented in Chapter 6, the Conclusion.

**Ethical Considerations**

Creswell (2005) established the need for ethical considerations when conducting research. He indicates that “because [researchers] …will spend considerable time with participants and stay for long periods of time at a research site, ethical issues need to be anticipated in qualitative data collection” (p. 225). Anticipating ethical issues will avoid
conflicts with participants, build trust, and keep the research within legal boundaries, according to Creswell.

This dissertation addressed ethical considerations under Eastern Michigan’s Human Subjects Review requirements as found on the Research Compliance Website (http://ord.emich.edu/compliance). As such, a number of topics were addressed before interviews began as required by the University Human Subjects Review Committee. Participants in this research study did not experience any physical risk. Participants were interviewed in their office or on school property. Participants were not exposed to dangerous interviewing techniques such as coercion, tricking, or threats, and all data were kept confidential. The interview procedures followed the typical practices outlined by Creswell (2005, p. 217-219).

Additional concerns addressed benefits for participants. Participants did not materially benefit by participating in the research. However, participant contributions to stories gave a voice to K12 Christian school superintendents and their organizational decision-making.

To generate the participant pool, a list of potential superintendents was generated from the list of ACSI member schools database (www.acsi.org). Potential participants included superintendents from mid-Michigan, upper Illinois, upper Indiana, and northern Ohio. There were four criteria required for entrance into the participant pool: willingness to share personal and professional stories about experiences as educational leaders; current employment as a superintendent in a K12 Christian school; school membership in ACSI organization; and a willingness to discuss a personal philosophy of education.
All research materials, electronic or hardcopy, were securely stored. Written names of individuals were replaced with pseudonyms. Electronic materials were stored on the researcher’s laptop under a password-protected login and stored in a “cloud” storage account under a password controlled by the researcher. Hardcopy materials were stored in a locking file cabinet in the researcher’s home and analysis of data conducted in the researcher’s home office.
Chapter 4. Data

Introduction

During interviews, nine participants shared multiple stories and commentary on their life. These included “war stories” from school situations, dilemmas they faced, life as a child, previous careers, and life’s tragedies, to name just a few. Working inductively from these stories toward a possible general explanatory framework about ideology was challenging given the amount of data.

Given the vast amount of qualitative data collected, the researcher divided data analysis into two parts. Chapter 4 is a collection of the narrative stories developed for each participant and retold in a standard format. Chapter 5 includes analysis and development of themes and observations emerging from the individual stories, artifacts, and transcripts.

A narrative view of the data allowed for comparison of developing themes across all participants while also providing a consistent path for readers to follow. Figure 2 shows an overview of the method used to discover the four elements of ideology.

Figure 2. Developing participant narratives.
Participant Narratives

There were two one-hour interviews for each participant. During these times, each participant referenced multiple stories to demonstrate his or her points, answer questions, and carry on dialogue. The method of interviews did not always produce a chronological telling of stories. One of the early questions asked was a request to describe a situation in which the participant faced a difficult choice, a dilemma, regarding an issue at school. Participant stories often wandered off topic as they answered the dilemma question. While the wandering discussion yielded relevant qualitative data, a grand narrative (Creswell, 2005) to put a participant’s story back together provided a coherent flow to stories.

An introductory section for each participant’s story provided evidence of the participant’s personal commitment to a value that was foundational to his or her entire narrative. This personal commitment identified the participant’s mission, a major driver in his or her life, or simply the most important thought that tied all of the participant’s stories together. The next section of each participant’s narrative included the main two or three values that developed throughout the interviews. Throughout each participant interview, numerous values appear as good candidates for the narrative. However, only two or three values stood out as significant for the general theme of the stories the participant told.

The next section in the narrative described the situation-of-dilemma provided by the participant. The dilemma story was central to the discovery of participant ideology. The story made use of a simple plot complete with protagonist, antagonist, conflict, and resolution to help the reader understand all of the dynamics at work as participants made decisions. A section highlighting the resolution of the conflict followed each situation-of-dilemma.
In the last section of each participant’s narrative, an analysis combined the pieces
together. The analysis section used the participant’s commitments, values, and dilemma to
synthesize an understanding of the participant’s ideology. Ideology was not stated as a single
brief statement but a short narrative intended as the capstone of the participant’s grand
narrative (Creswell, 2005). The short ideological narrative captured the most important
values evident in the struggle. In four of the nine participants, the addition of a postscript
section explained important changes in the participant’s life after the interviews occurred.

With nine different participants, there were nine different narratives. The narratives
were not always unique in their emerging themes and observations; some commonality began
to emerge throughout the analysis. In an effort to call out that commonness as it occurred,
embedded references to previous participant stories were cited throughout. Thus, the order of
the narratives is not in the order in which they were collected during the interview process.
Ordering of narratives helped facilitate easy referencing back and forth between stories with
common denominators. Table 3 offers a quick reference guide to the study’s participants,
their age for context, their situation-of-dilemma, and a brief summary statement of their
ideological narrative.
Table 3

Participant Quick Reference Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Situation-of-dilemma</th>
<th>Summary of the ideological narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Released a teacher due to performance problems</td>
<td>Academic performance is necessary in a Christian school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Released a teacher because of certification problems</td>
<td>Quality academic instruction is necessary in a Christian school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Expelled a student for causing trouble with other students</td>
<td>A nurturing culture is necessary to do what is best for kids.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Expelled two students for breaking code-of-conduct</td>
<td>A protective culture is necessary to demonstrate love to a child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Expelled students for sexting</td>
<td>A stable culture is necessary to uphold Christian standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janet</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Disagreed with teachers over the necessity of having an overnight retreat</td>
<td>Change is necessary to achieve vision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allison</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Disagreed with the superintendent over cutting teacher salaries</td>
<td>Caring relationships with employees are necessary in a Christian school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Disagreed with board over teacher salaries and leadership structure</td>
<td>Executing duty and obeying authority are necessary in a Christian school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drew</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Had to deal with a rumor that alleged inappropriate behavior with a female teacher.</td>
<td>Gracious behavior is necessary after the truth of a matter is discovered.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dan—A story of personal mission, academics, and relationships

Dan’s primary commitment in life was simple: to fulfill his personal mission in the context of the Christian school where he worked. “I will purpose in every way possible and plausible to store up treasure in heaven by emulating my Lord Jesus Christ by being a leader, teacher, servant, and friend.” The mission states his goal as “[storing] up treasure in heaven,” a reference to the Christian principle established in the sixth chapter of the gospel of Matthew in the Bible to focus one’s resources to help others believe in Jesus Christ. Additionally, in Dan’s view, Jesus Christ is a model for the components of “leader, teacher, servant, and friend.”

Dan repeated his personal mission statement as naturally as he did his own name. His mission statement was a significant part of his life motivation and he used it as a lens to think about his daily responsibilities at school. “[It is] where my heart is…I live that all the time.” Dan worked on his personal mission statement while completing graduate school.

I got an opportunity to do that when I was doing my MBA. One of the classes I took had different projects that you could do, and that was one of the projects. I just started studying both scripture and mission, and it just jumped at me.

Dan’s personal mission was a hybrid of evangelical Christianity and various mission statement models found in his MBA program. The statement, once developed, resonated strongly with Dan.

His career has taken a circular route that began in education, then into the business world, then into non-profit Christian ministry, and eventually back to education as superintendent of a Christian school. After completing his undergraduate degree, Dan was a certified secondary teacher in Mathematics. Earlier in his career, he spent two years in a
public high school as a math teacher and varsity running coach. After completing his MBA, he changed careers and joined his father in the furniture business. Dan found great success in selling, planning, and managing large furniture installations for a national furniture company.

He shared a very personal story about the day his life changed—the day his college-aged son died in a car accident. On that day, his personal mission was put to the test, as was everything he held dear. His son, his son’s fiancé, and Dan’s younger daughter were driving back to their college campus after a family gathering. Dan and the rest of the family were driving the other direction heading back toward their home when Dan’s cell phone rang. The state police delivered the tragic news that Dan’s son had passed away. He had tried to pass another vehicle resulting in a head-on collision. His son’s fiancé and Dan’s daughter were the only survivors.

You got to make a decision, instantaneously, what are you going to do? I had to decide what to do. I pulled everybody out of the car along the side of the road after the phone call. We thanked God—it changed everything. I mean, everything you say you believe, you have to decide whether you believe it, or not. Do you really believe it when you get the call? What do you do? So, I pulled them out and I prayed over them; I prayed over my family. I said, “We’re going to choose to trust God and thank Him for this gift.” But I wept; I was mad. But I chose in that time to pray that no bitterness would take hold in me or our family.

The suddenness of his son being killed within hours of a family gathering forced Dan to make an immediate decision. His personal mission in life was something he claimed to live all the time, and in the midst of tragedy he decided to remain intentional about his actions. He turned to God, thanked Him for the tragedy, and asked “that no bitterness would take hold
in [him or his] family.” In keeping with his mission, Dan became both “leader” and “servant” for his family.

During the time after the accident, Dan intentionally built a stronger relationship with God, resulting in a greater trust of God. The whole experience gave Dan the courage to take a radical step in his life. Not long after his son’s death, a business associate challenged Dan to accept a ministry position outside of the business world. The new position paid very little and had no benefits. “[It] wasn’t long after my son had died, and so I was like, ‘God, if you ask me to do something, I’m going to do it.’” His son’s death caused Dan to take a reflective look at his own life and mission, resulting in an openness to depart from a well-structured, well-paying position in the business world.

Dan left the business world and went on to run a retreat center for pastors. He eventually became the superintendent at the school where he has worked for seven years. He is thoughtful and reflective about the connection between running the retreat center, the school, and his personal mission. “That’s exactly what I’m trying to do [live out my mission statement]. You know that resonates in me...Yeah, I am mission driven. I got to be that way.” Dan sees the school as the link between his personal mission and his work.

**Academic—“Educational outcomes.”** Part of Dan’s mission points to using his life being a “leader.” Dan does not view himself as a classroom teacher but rather a leader who helps teachers accomplish more in their classroom. He recounted a conversation that he recently had with a board member from another school.

“As a superintendent, how do you get involved in the classroom?” And I said, “I don’t.” The board member questioned further, “But, how do you get in there and model, help them understand?” I said, “I don’t.” The board member pressed, “Well,
but what do you do?” I said, “My job as superintendent is to create a process of
education that will create a great, quality educational product.”

Dan believed that his greatest impact on education at his school was through indirect
classroom contact. His role in academics was to create a system that will deliver a “quality
educational product” to the students. In his current school, Dan has created a process of
teacher accountability to improve the educational outcomes in his school.

Dan continually used words like “process” and “processes” when discussing
“academics.” He described the intentional and analytical method he used to make changes
with the goal of improving educational outcomes. “We worked through the process” was the
phrase he used to describe how he addressed poor performance with one of the teachers. He
mentioned, the “performance improvement plan” that he put in place to help a teacher
improve her classroom instruction. Dan knew that he was accountable to the board and the
school community for building a learning environment that will achieve high academic
outcomes.

**Trust**—“Trust is through relationship.” Dan also recognized the importance of
building an environment where relationship and trust exist between people. His personal
mission pushed him to work on trust and relationship issues in order to be a “leader” and
“friend.”

Cultivating and maintaining relationships among people was important to Dan. He
related a brief story about his journey in rebuilding trust through focusing on relationships
with his staff after releasing two teachers.

[I have] been a lot more in the hallways and the classrooms…just spending more time
with staff. Doing things and…really have built a trust back. And by removing those
two people who were really—we can see it now more clearly than ever—were very cancerous in both of those hallways. By removing them [we have] built great camaraderie.

Dan released two teachers who were divisive and destroying relationships between others in all areas throughout the school. He acknowledged the need to increase his own efforts to rebuild trust and relationships with his staff. With the “cancerous” teachers gone and his intentional efforts to “spend time with staff,” he has seen improvement in “camaraderie” among the staff.

Dan’s goal was to build trust within the school community. He was concerned that a lack of trust in the community would lead to broken relationships, which could lead to bitterness. Dan had great concern for those who have relationship issues. “I really hurt for people that have [unresolved relationships], because what can happen is a real root of bitterness can take hold. That bitterness can grow and fester, and I really worry about that.”

Dan confirmed the importance of building trust in order to maintain healthy relationships, especially in a school. He shared, “The only way to trust is through relationship. If I start with relationships, then academics and everything else follows.” From Dan’s perspective, trust was the outcome of any productive relationship. Once trust was established, then the work of building quality education programs was achievable.

The dilemma—“It got really, really ugly.” In February of 2012, Dan began working on teacher contracts for the upcoming school year. The contracts come up for review during the mid-point of the current school year. Dan and his administrative team had already identified a handful of teachers that needed to show immediate improvement. Without improvement, re-assignment of teaching positions would be necessary.
One of the teachers who needed improvement was currently teaching in a fifth-grade classroom. After a lengthy review process that utilized student test data from national standardized test, Dan realized that change was necessary. He put one of the teachers on a performance improvement plan and communicated his concerns to the board regarding the test results.

I said, “Here’s the results. We have two fifth-grade teachers. On average, here’s the difference between the two. It’s not good. We are going to put these scores in the public next year. What are we going to do? Of the 20 kids she had, 15 did not make grade level expectations. In fact, 10 of them went backwards! I am accountable for the kids to at least making grade level progress.” So, we were in a really, really tough spot.

Dan and his administrative team uncovered a significant gap in student performance between two fifth-grade teachers. Based on the data, they decided that one of the teachers needed to make immediate and significant improvements. The school was committed to posting standardized test scores on its website. Dan was concerned about backlash from the public about inconsistent test scores. Unfortunately, some board members were not convinced that differences in test scoring were the correct benchmark for assessing performance. Also, some board members noted that students enjoyed coming to school and being in the troubled fifth grade teacher’s classroom.

Dan’s dilemma began to take shape when he asked the fifth-grade teacher to move back down to the kindergarten classroom in the upcoming school year. She had been successful for a number of years at the kindergarten level before moving up to the fifth-grade level. The teacher was not happy about having to change assignments in order to keep her
teaching job. Eventually the teacher and Dan reached an agreement that she would not return to the next school year. However, she did not leave quietly.

With just a few weeks of school left, the teacher chose a Sunday afternoon to send a surprise, and unauthorized, mass email to the entire school community. In the email, she claimed that she was being unfairly dismissed and that whatever story would come from the school’s administration was a lie. Dan was devastated.

I was hurt and angry. I’m trying to discern as a Christian: how do you respond to something like this? It made me really, really disappointed and angry that she would knowingly and willingly violate…the commitment she signed in her teacher contract to peacefully resolve disputes.

While Dan admitted that he was angry about the unauthorized email that attempted to undermine his authority, he was more disappointed that the teacher violated her agreement to “peacefully resolve disputes.” She had violated a trust that Dan thought was solid and in doing so, broke off relationships with the school.

With the email out, the school’s community began to choose sides resulting in additional broken relationships. Dan noted that the teachers began to divide over the issue, some parents decided not to re-enroll their children, and at least one board member resigned. “It got really, really ugly. So after the email, there were lots of parent letters, lots of threats to pull kids, and lots of accusations. She really, really rallied the troops. She was very popular.”

As the strife continued, relationships between parents, teachers, and the administration deteriorated resulting in some “bitterness” that Dan worked to avoid. Making matters worse, because of privacy issues between employers and employees, Dan could not openly talk about the reasons behind the change in teaching assignments.
The chaos and bitterness continued through the end of the school year and continued to pull in more parents, students, and teachers. In one story, Dan related the impact on an end-of-year celebration in the elementary school in which the outgoing teacher was applauded by parents.

We have an end of the year elementary awards banquet. Every teacher gets up to give out [his or her] Bible awards. She gets up to give out her awards and a number of parents and students give her a standing ovation! So, both the elementary principal and I are just standing there with her—not applauding. A right-in-your-face moment! We just waited. No one did that for the third-grade teacher who was also leaving after 25 years!

The irony, in Dan’s mind, was that this lack of trust and broken relationships was being displayed in front of the school community while the “Bible awards” were being distributed to students. He was further disappointed that the third-grade teacher, who was retiring after 25 years of service, did not receive the same recognition from the audience.

The resolution—“It’s really, really sweet.” Dan shared his thoughts about his potential response to the email and possible ways to resolve the crisis. He was angry and disappointed, but also trying to “discern as a Christian” how to respond appropriately. “As I prayed through it, really what came to me was one phrase of scripture ‘Let your words be few…Let your words be few.’ So, I choose not to defend anything we did or to make anything public about her performance. That’s what I chose for all of us.” Dan felt that by saying less, the problem would be resolved quicker and not force a public debate about the teacher’s “performance.”
Dan contrasted his response to the response of his teacher. He said, “That’s not the way Christians should act. It’s like a Christian suing a Christian. You just don’t do that!” He attempted mediation, but said, “When she didn’t get the answer she wanted, she went out and told mistruths and half-truths.”

In the end, the teacher acquired space in a nearby church and started a new school. Some parents, and a board member, pulled their children out of Dan’s school and enrolled them in the new school. Dan noted that the teacher was still attempting to attract families to her school.

As the summer ended, Dan focused on the new school year. He took on a number of activities with a focus on rebuilding relationships.

I did a number of things through the fall…When we started the school year I got in front of the entire staff and had to ask for forgiveness for a number of stuff. I mean I brought the whole staff together, not just faculty. I spent some time just laying myself bare before them. In the midst of trying to get a lot of things done around here, I started losing my focus on people. I had to apologize and was glad to do it…to be freed of that.

Dan was transparent with others about his relationship challenges. Holding himself accountable in front his staff allowed Dan to have a fresh start for the new school year. He felt free of the guilt he carried from not focusing on the trust and relationship issues.

He reflected on the turmoil that had occurred throughout the previous school year. He talked about the positive changes in relationships and the resulting trust that he was noticing. [We have been] doing things and really have built trust back….we are starting to build great camaraderie. We are in the best spot we’ve ever been in terms of the team
working together; in terms of educational outcomes; in terms of things happening. It’s really, really sweet.

Analysis—“Being a leader… and friend.” Revisiting the components of Dan’s personal mission helps to analyze his values and ideology. “I will purpose in every way possible and plausible to store up treasure in heaven by emulating my Lord Jesus Christ by being a leader, teacher, servant, and friend.” Achieving the components of “leader, teacher, servant, and friend” were important commitments to the success of Christian education in Dan’s view.

In the stories he shared, Dan had difficulty at times balancing his commitment to concurrently being a “friend” and a “leader.” In the context of Christian education at his school, the balance manifested itself as a struggle between the values of academic performance and building trust. He knew that building trust through relationships was important in order to avoid “bitterness” in his life and the lives of those around him. He worked on a number of relationship building activities. “We’ve taken lots of surveys. I’ve had what we title ‘skip level meetings’; skip any layer of management to have open meetings with me.” These “skip level meetings” allowed Dan to establish relationships at lower levels of the organization to build trust, to be a “friend.”

Concurrently, Dan also acknowledged the importance of school leadership and its role in implementing academic changes. Some of those changes involved improving teacher performance.

We just said if we are actually going to move forward educationally we are going to have to make the hard call here. And so, while they are teaching we put them on a
performance improvement plan rather than give them a contract. We were not ready to offer a contract.

As the “leader,” Dan decided to give teachers opportunities to improve their classroom performance before making the “hard call” and final decisions regarding contracts.

In fact, academic performance and trusting relationships with employees at his Christian school had become a dichotomy for Dan. “In the midst of trying to get a lot of things done around here, I lost my focus on people.” In his push to build academics, he was not intentional about building trust with others.

Therefore, while Dan readily admitted that he lost his focus on building trust with others, his situation-of-dilemma revealed the relative importance of academic performance compared to trust. As he worked to achieve the components of his personal mission, he rationalized one value over another. Consequently, academic instruction emerged as more important than trust.

**Postscript.** I conducted two interviews with Dan, one in January 2013 and one in February 2013. Between the two interviews Dan was informed by the board chairman that his contract would not be renewed for the 2013/14 school year. The incident involving the fifth-grade teacher provided cause for two influential board members to pull their support from Dan. Those two board members convinced the remaining board members to not renew Dan’s contract.

**Ken—A narrative on Christian schools, academics, and student discipleship**

Ken was the superintendent of a small Christian school in a rural Midwestern town. He loved education. “I just always enjoyed the classroom, the teaching aspect.” Specifically, Christian education was one of Ken’s personal commitments. “The goal is to provide
continued discipleship as well as the academic instruction that will make it possible for the young person to bring God’s message of love and purpose to a watching world.” Christian education, according to Ken, was a fusion of “academics” and “discipleship.”

In addition to Christian education, Ken was equally committed to the growth of the local church in his community. Before coming into Christian education, Ken “worked as a senior pastor at a couple of different churches…” In his new community as a superintendent, he believed his background as a pastor uniquely positioned him to strengthen the bonds between the local churches.

It also helped a little bit with other pastors. I can meet with them on a colleague level. I understand some of what they’re going through. But, we can sit, talk, and I can encourage them a little bit...Looking back [there are] just a lot of components that fit well together.

Ken was able to identify with many of the problems that the pastors in his community experienced. He had built relationships with them so that he could “encourage them” and build “partnerships” between his school and local churches to help families.

Part of what we’re trying to do, in partnership with churches, is to become a common ground place where families can come; then we have church relationships that we can kind of plug them into.

Ken wanted his school to provide ministries to families in the community so those families could then connect to a local church. Therefore, maintaining good relationships with the local pastors was important to accomplishing the school’s purpose.

Ken believed that his school was an extension of the church and a place for different denominations to exist.
This is a place where the church can come together and we can raise our children together…This is where the church meets Monday through Friday. I really see us not just as a training ground, but also a place where kids from different backgrounds can learn to wrestle through differences. Hopefully, this generation that is coming up will have less of a competitive spirit amongst churches.

Ken wanted to pastor the families and students in partnership with local churches throughout the weekdays. He saw his school as a place where students could peacefully “wrestle” through their religious differences, resulting in a more unified local church.

**Academics—“They need to be ready.”** Ken focused on two priorities for his school: academic quality and discipleship.

What drives me is to create that academic environment that says the kingdom of God can pursue excellence but not at the expense of everyone else and our goal is not to be the number one prep school in the area but to prepare kids for whatever God has them to do; make sure they’re ready.

In his view, a successful Christian school should provide an environment where a solid academic program is in place and students are discipled. An excellent education should not have to be sacrificed if parents want to send their children to a Christian school in Ken’s view.

Before Ken became superintendent at his school, he was a teacher there for a number of years. As a teacher in the school, Ken noticed that the curriculum was “subpar.” He recalled a conversation with his wife, who was also teacher, as they considered the school’s academic environment and curriculum, for their own children.
In my opinion this was poor. My wife and I almost came to a point of saying we're going to have to pull our kids. This is subpar. I don’t expect my kids to go to Ivy League schools, but I believe if we want our children to grow up and make an impact in the world they need to be ready.

A quality curriculum delivered by certified teachers was important to Ken and his wife for their own children. They did not expect an elite private school education that prepared their children for Harvard, for instance. Ken described the school’s academic environment before he took over as superintendent.

It was a very loosely held environment, very casual. It was to a point where in this setting it was not appropriate. Within a church youth group setting it would have been fine. But, in my opinion within an academic setting the environment just was not well placed.

The previous superintendent instituted more of a “youth group feel” to the school with an emphasis on the value of student relationships over academics. There was little structure within the school, and there was not an appropriate degree of separation between students and teachers. “It was very much relational, especially at the high school level where the teaching staff was seen as a friend or a buddy kind of thing…It was very casual.” The school’s culture was not working academically because students did not respect their teachers as educators.

Immediately after becoming superintendent, Ken began working on changing the school’s culture. “What I've had to do is say, ‘Yes, we have a relationship with you, but it's because we care about you…I’m your teacher and you're my student.’” Ken implemented a culture that reminded students that there is a structural difference in the relationship between
teachers and students as compared to a youth leader. However, more importantly he addressed problems in the teaching staff. Each year has been a just a process of taking [the school] from a really messy place. We had teachers on staff that really weren't credentialed. Even though they had a heart for kids, they just didn't have the educational background. So, it's been a three year process of rebuilding...we can't carry everyone into the next year.

Ken focused on hiring “credentialed” teachers while releasing non-credentialed teachers. He admitted that the teachers he released were good people who loved children, but they simply did not meet the school’s academic standards.

Unlike Dan from the previous story, Ken’s problem with the teaching staff was more basic. Some of Ken’s teachers were not even certified to teach in the classroom when he took over as superintendent. Dan’s problem with teachers was not one of teacher certification but one of teacher performance. While both superintendents released teachers for academic reasons, each faced a different challenge.

For Ken, the process of academic improvement had taken a number of years. However, academic outcomes improved and the school’s legitimacy increased in the community. Even public schools were taking them seriously. This is probably the first year that we’re starting to see the fruit from that...We are seeing our academic levels increase, test scores are starting to head up. [They] are starting to see us as a real school.

Prior to Ken’s focus on academic instruction in the classroom, the school struggled to increase its national standardized test scores.
Because of those changes, enrollment has improved and the school’s future was brighter. “Over the past two years we’ve gotten just some really solid families coming. [They] are just speaking well of what we’re doing. I really see some good things in the next couple years.” The net effect of focusing on academics has significantly improved the school’s educational quality resulting in a positive outcome.

**Discipleship—“Discipleship doesn’t have to be a program.”** Separate from Ken’s focus on academics is his focus on discipleship. In his opinion, both are important in Christian education, and both are linked by the common element of having the right teacher in the classroom.

Discipleship for me comes back to who their [students] teachers are. I think more than anything they’re going to be learning integrity and Biblical foundations from their teachers. So, discipleship doesn’t have to be a program; it’s making sure I’ve got the right people in that classroom. Now, we do have Biblical curriculum for Bible classes and different things so we're getting that side. But, my concern has been to make sure the Bible just doesn't become a textbook for the kids…but really it’s been a process of getting the right teachers in front of the classroom.

According to Ken, teachers continually discipled students by how they lived their lives. Teaching about discipleship was not a “textbook” exercise for students.

Ken is more concerned about the practical skills that students learn as they observe their teachers.

I think, again, we're a school, so we're here to teach academics. But, if I’ve got the right person teaching academics then they’re not just going to learn math. They’re also going to learn how to deal with conflict, how to deal with stress.
Quality teachers, according to Ken, were vital to a Christian school’s approach to teaching discipleship. Teachers will teach more than just academics to their students. They will also teach through demonstration.

Ken had a number of students in his school with Individual Education Plans (IEP) because of various forms of autism. He encouraged teachers to train other students in how to interact socially with students who are on the autism spectrum. He encouraged teachers to disciple students to care for the IEP students and treat them as peers.

That social piece makes sense. We're trying to teach the students that you care for one another no matter who they are or what the need. If that means this student over here needs some time from you, then you need to give that to them. We're trying to help them become a supportive community member and to value each person.

Ken placed a high value on teachers demonstrating to students how to live the Christian life.

**The dilemma—“Some of them just couldn’t teach.”** Ken’s position on Christian education involved achieving both “academic instruction” and “discipleship.” When Ken took over the school’s superintendent position, he knew the school “was a mess academically.” Yet the administration continued to hire people who were not teachers.

The academic side had really hit a wall. The school had become very much ministry minded. It wasn’t bad, but it had taken on the feeling of a youth group…They still taught, but they were hiring people who loved kids but, some of them just couldn’t teach—it was just not their [teachers] gifting or their preparation.

The previous superintendent sacrificed quality academics for discipleship. The teachers in the school related well to students at a personal level. However, academically “they had teachers on staff that really weren't credentialed…they just didn't have the educational background.”
Because of the high value that Ken placed on academics, he believed that teachers needed to hold educational degrees and be state certified before working in his school.

With an overemphasis on discipleship and little academic expectations, Ken saw the school as unbalanced. His first action as superintendent was to release non-credential teachers from the school.

Probably the most difficult situation I have faced, and I’m still dealing with it this year, is that we had a gentlemen come on three years ago. He has a heart for kids and a desire to teach; it's what he wanted to do. He came in to, you know, kind of help with the junior/senior high English department. He was doing well, worked hard, but didn't have an educational degree. He did have a degree in Communications, so English was kind of his thing.

The teacher “worked hard” but was not educated as a teacher. Ken did not believe the teacher should be teaching at the school.

In addition to the credentialing problem with the English teacher, Ken faced budgetary challenges. He also needed to hire a part-time development staff person to raise funds for the school. Ken realized that he did not need the position of the English teacher to be a full-time position. As a solution to these problems, Ken planned to combine a part-time English teacher position with a new part-time development position. “By restructuring the position, it became half-time teaching and half-time development…Again, just with the size of our staff and our budget, I can’t keep him teaching full-time and then hire another person part-time…it just got really interesting.” Ken knew he could not afford to keep the uncertified English teacher and hire a part-time development person.
Ken was nervous as he prepared to inform the English teacher that his contract for the upcoming year would not be renewed. “His position was probably the hardest to explain… I’ve got to do this, I’ve got to get the nerve up to talk to him.” Outside of school, Ken was friends with the English teacher, and their wives had a friendly relationship as well. The conversation with the teacher went well but had a lasting negative effect on their relationship.

He was very gracious as we went through that process, but he’s been hurt because we brought someone else in. Now he feels like maybe he should have had a shot at that... His initial reaction was better than his current.

Ken admitted their relationship had suffered. While the original conversation with the teacher was positive, over time the teacher has come to believe that he should have been considered for the new combined position. “He won’t speak to me and I’ve tried to email him a few times.”

Resolution—“I wouldn’t want my kids anywhere else.” In part because of his background as a minister, Ken placed a high value on relationships. “Relationships are huge, whether it was with me personally or if I just saw a relationships growing with others. It was important to me that people were connected.” He worried about his broken relationship with the former English teacher, his wife, and others, because of his decision to improve the school academically. Ken’s relationship with the former English teacher remained unresolved.

Well, I guess I thought things were pretty good. It blew up again here about a month ago through one of our high school students who he’s still in touch with. The high school student finally voiced his hurt or lack of understanding to me, and so we had
an opportunity to talk through it. He [the student] said, “You know he’s still really upset.” Since then, I’ve had a couple people from the community tell me that he’s pretty hurt and he’s talking. So, I just kind of opened up conversation with him again. …I’ve done email, but he hasn’t responded to my phone messages. I’ve just tried to leave it open to him, let him know I’m here if he wants to talk about it... I doubt they’ll be much of a personal relationship again.

Ken also shared that the relationship between his wife and the former English teacher’s wife has not improved. “They’re actually not on the same team anymore [at school]. They’re still in the same system, so there’s been some space there; but, it’s been hard on my wife because she’s lost that connection.” In summary, the move to improve the school’s academics severed the personal relationship Ken and his wife had with the former English teacher and his wife.

Ken reflected on his decision to release the former teacher. He regretted not finding a “process” that could have salvaged the relationship while also improving the school’s academics.

Looking back, I wish I would have talked to him sooner, to let him in my head a little bit more than I did. I think maybe that would have helped with some of the hurt. I probably kept it too professional with him—probably for my own protection. Or, I don’t know… but looking back that’s one thing that… I could’ve done differently. Ken realized that he might have avoided a bad split in the relationship had he been more open about his own values and motives in making changes at the school. Ken thought that everyone at the school knew that changes were coming and that faculty was going to be let go because of budgetary problems and lack of credentialing. “You know, they spent probably
too much time with uncertainty. I wasn’t exactly sure how to deal with that in a way that would make them feel at ease.” In addition to not sharing his values and motives, Ken felt that he could have made a more timely decision to reduce the “uncertainty” that the faculty and staff felt.

However, on the other side of making these difficult changes Ken had a reason to hope. The school’s academics were climbing and enrollment was growing. Ken thought about his own children for a moment and said, “To watch them now for three years and to see them being discipled by some teachers that I feel are just phenomenal, I wouldn’t want my kids anywhere else.” Ken realized that the changes, though painful, produced the academic results that he intended.

**Analysis—“Your child will not suffer academically.”** The twin values of quality academics and discipleship of students were necessary in Ken’s view of Christian schools. Together these two values prepared students to “bring God’s message of love and purpose…to a watching world.” His past influences formed those two values in his life.

His family’s background created a significant influence on Ken’s thinking about education and academics. “My dad convinced me teaching is a good route to go…he was a school administrator and my mom stayed at home; she had taught prior to us kids coming along.” Ken’s parents were teachers in the public school system. Additionally, both Ken and his wife had teaching degrees and state certifications. Ken’s value for strong academics developed from his family.

However, Ken was also a former pastor and seminary graduate. He described his previous pastoral positions, which emphasized discipleship in the community.
Our church was involved in a lot of the community type of things, just so people felt like church was a place to explore and experience God’s love. I had a lot of mentoring opportunities; I loved those at our last location. It was in a college town and I spent a lot of time with the young guys in the coffee shops… just that mentoring relationship… developing people.

Ken “loved” the “mentoring opportunities” he had with students while working as a pastor. He wanted to recreate those same opportunities for discipleship in his school. Ken used the words “mentoring” and “discipleship” interchangeably emphasizing his interest in developing the people around him, whether students or parishioners.

Nonetheless, Ken had a strong desire to make sure academic quality was preeminent in his school.

If we're not going to have a certain level of academic excellence, then we should not sell ourselves as a school. We're basically telling parents that your child will not suffer academically if you send them to us; and I think that's an integrity statement for me. To say “give me your kids…but they'll be behind,” is not acceptable. I take that pretty seriously.

Ken is clear on this point. Instituting a quality academic program in the classroom was a matter of personal “integrity.” Allowing a school to have a great discipleship or mentoring program while allowing the academics to remain poor was “not acceptable.”

In the end, Ken struggled with these two values. He loved discipling, or training, students; it was part of his past training and experience as a pastor in a college town. He was conflicted though by the need to provide quality academics in the classroom, even if it meant setting discipleship aside. His parents and his wife demanded a quality environment in the
classroom. His situation-of-dilemma revealed his leaning toward a preference of quality academic instruction over other values. While Ken acknowledged the importance of discipleship, he personally connected to academics and held it as a higher value to accomplish his own commitment to Christian education.

Paul—A story about doing what’s best for kids through culture and academics

Paul was superintendent in a Christian school located in a Midwestern suburban neighborhood. He was committed to doing what is “best for the kids.”

As the administrator of this school, I’ve been commissioned by the school board to make sure that our kids get the best education possible. So, what do we do to help them carry on the Christian worldview? The Christian tradition? And so, what do I mean by doing best for the kids? Helping them develop their skills, their thinking to the best of their ability. So, developing their critical thinking skills, their spiritual life, their social skills, all of those things put together. Which teachers are gonna be the best at helping kids? Which will work together in small groups? Which are gonna be best at helping them write, learn, [be] right in life?

In understanding Paul’s mission of doing what is “best for the kids,” it was important to understand his thoughts on the scope of his role as superintendent. He believed he was “commissioned by the school board” to make sure that all the students in the school receive “the best education possible.” Paul divided the commission into two components. First, he considered the role of teachers in establishing the school’s culture, a culture which taught about life. Paul saw teachers’ roles as helping students to “develop…their critical thinking skills, their spiritual life, [and] their social skills” toward an outcome of understanding a “Christian worldview [and]…tradition.”
Paul also believed that his commission pushed him further than just making sure the right teachers are in the classroom. In the grander scheme, Paul believed that his job was to create educational processes that encouraged teachers to work collaboratively in “small groups” and process that identified the “best” teachers to help students “learn.” Therefore, the educational processes that Paul used to improve the academics of the school were as important as selecting the right teachers for the culture.

The belief that schools must develop teachers and processes that do what is “best for the kids” developed early in Paul’s life. Paul was raised Catholic and had an older sister with special needs. His parents considered sending her to the local Catholic school along with Paul and the other siblings. However, the nuns at the school convinced Paul’s parents to do something different for his sister.

The nuns said to my mom something to the effect…this child is your burden to carry, or something like that, and so they had to send her to public school to get some services the Catholic school could not provide.

Paul’s sister needed specially trained teachers and academic services the local Catholic school could not provide. His parents elected to send her to the “public school” because that was best for her given her needs.

Later in life, Paul and his wife faced similar challenges with one of their children. “Our youngest is still at home. He has Down syndrome…He is 20.” Paul has come to terms with his son’s disorder and has grown to understand more about God through the circumstances. “[By] understanding the sovereignty of God—he’s not broken. He was designed that way…” Paul does not see his son as “broken” but rather “designed” with Down syndrome. As such, Paul and his wife looked for an educational system to meet the
challenges of that design. A religious education was not a viable option. “We were not in a
Christian school where we could afford the extra help that he needed because he needed
pretty much one-on-one care.” Paul’s son required specially trained teachers in an
environment that could deliver the “one-on-one care” he needed. This type of care was over
and above the services paid for by tuition at a Christian school.

In his own school where he was superintendent, Paul still holds closely the mission of
having the right culture and the right academic services to do what is “best for the kids.” In
his current school, he was faced with the possibility of laying off teachers because enrollment
did not meet budgeted projections. Paul wanted input from the teachers before he made a
final decision on which course of action to take.

I remember having a meeting with all these teachers and I laid it out in front of them.
I said, “Here’s the deal, this is what it looks like. I am open to your ideas of how we
as a staff can make this work.” And, it was very interesting to watch that process.

From there, I concluded there was more talk about saving people’s jobs than about
doing what is best for the kids.

Meeting students’ educational needs with the right teachers in a financially sustainable
school environment was foremost in Paul’s decision-making. However, from Paul’s
observations, the teachers did not share his same mission given the potential for layoffs.

After Paul made his decision on which teachers to lay off, some people criticized him.

Some asked, “Why didn't you base your decisions on longevity or seniority?” Ok, I
don't believe that's in the best interest of the kids, and that's what they've hired me to
do—create what’s best for the kids.
Even in the face of criticism, Paul was determined to implement his mission of putting the needs of students before the needs of others. He believed the school board expected him to make decisions that were “best for the kids.”

**Culture—“A warm, loving environment.”** For Paul, one of the key components of doing what was “best” for students was retaining well-trained teachers who could communicate their love for students. “[Teachers] are important to me…because our families are looking for nurturing teachers. They want a warm, loving environment.” A positive academic setting in Paul’s view was dependent on “nurturing teachers” who let parents know that the school was a “warm, loving” place for their children.

Paul’s emphasis on teachers was different from other participant stories like Dan and Ken. Dan emphasized a teacher’s impact on the value of academic performance on standardized tests. Ken emphasized the need for credentialed teachers to improve academic instruction. Paul’s emphasis for teachers, though, was to establish a nurturing culture that would then result in academic performance and instruction.

Paul provided some examples of teachers who he felt helped achieved this type of culture at the school. This characteristic played an important role in his decision-making about which teachers to lay off. “The fifth-grade teacher…she is dynamite, very energetic. She’s got expertise in elementary and is a very positive person.” Paul viewed this teacher’s energy and excitement as indicators of success. He decided “to keep her” when making final decisions about layoffs. Another teacher Paul retained displayed similar characteristics of excitement and enthusiasm for students. “We had a para-pro that was a certified teacher, very positive upbeat. I hired her to…teach a second/third-grade combination…very positive, very excited about what was going on.” Again, a teacher’s “positive” upbeat attitude was
necessary in Paul’s view to meet the parents’ demand for a “warm, loving environment.”

Paul provided another example.

We've got this very vibrant first-year teacher teaching a K/1 combination. We have a very young 20-something teacher coming in doing this…There were parents with young kids, and she's done a great job at winning their hearts over. The kindergarten and first-grade teacher taught in a new combination class. Despite her youth and lack of experience, the teacher was able to endear herself to both parents and children.

By contrast, Paul released two teachers who did not provide a nurturing environment for students. “The kindergarten teacher had been here 17 years, a part-time worker, [she was] not nurturing and I decide to let her go, to not renew her contract… [She] was a great lady, but I wouldn't say she was nurturing.” In Paul’s view, the lack of a “nurturing” attitude indicated the teacher was not doing the “best” for students.

Paul provided another example of a teacher he let go. “The third-grade teacher, I’m going to say was ‘sullen’…So, I do not rehire him…been here 20-plus years.” Paul added that the teacher often seemed angry around both parents and students. Like the kindergarten teacher, he was also not “best” for students.

After these layoffs, the school began to develop a culture that aligned with parent expectations in the elementary division. “Even though we only have three teachers in elementary, our parents, and our grandparents, are saying they’re seeing a life that they haven't seen for quite some time.” By getting the best teachers in the school, Paul accomplished one of the two components necessary for doing what is “best for kids.”
Academics—“It’s a process.” The second component necessary to achieve Paul’s personal commitment was one of using processes that provided academic services necessary for doing what is “best” for students. Paul had a picture-puzzle of an Amish barn-raising in his office. The picture showed about a dozen men working in different locations raising the barn structure. Paul reflected on the picture and the process it takes to build a barn.

In the overall picture, a house is being built. There’s a whole lot of people doing that, doing different jobs. You know, when I think of a student, when I think of a person, a human being, there’s many people that impact that human…There’s many different influences. We have to work together,…it’s a process. It’s not an overnight thing, and sometimes you have to pull out the nails because you put them in wrong, but it is a journey together. It is a teamwork endeavor. Some of us have the talents and the desires to sit in the peak. Some of us like to stand on the ground. You know, I’ve never put my name on one of those people. It’s fun to be up at the top, but I like security around me.

Paul recognized that educating children takes different people working in different areas to build the “house.” Some people were working under the structure, some were working “at the top,” and others were directing the workforce from “the ground.” In Paul’s opinion, education was “a process” with many dissimilar pieces working together toward a shared purpose.

Paul changed the processes at all levels of his school to help get everyone working toward the common goal of doing what is “best for the kids.” For example, he made a number process changes related to personnel decisions that were not built on solid business practices.
We're trying to instill what I would call better business practices because things have been very loose, very. [They were] going to try to accommodate everybody. I don't believe they used the practice of using good business decisions across the board.

Paul noted that before his appointment as superintendent, teachers were rarely laid off, even in the face of declining enrollment. The business processes were “very loose,” and his objective was to implement new processes that resulted in “good business decisions” that were “best for the kids.”

In a related example, student re-enrollment processes were not working well compared to other Christian schools where Paul had worked. He described the situation he inherited.

Re-enrollment starts in March, and I’m thinking, “That's too late!” I want to be able to make decisions [about] teachers in March. Coming from the south…if you didn't have all your stuff ready by December 1st, you were late.

In Paul’s estimation, the school did not have a process that helped parents make timely decisions about re-enrolling children for the next year. Paul changed the re-enrollment process so that parents could make decisions earlier in the year. This change also helped the school to determine the appropriate number of teachers and staff necessary to support the enrolled students.

The dilemma—“I infuriated a lot of people.” Paul shared a story in which he worked to maintain a “warm, loving environment” in the face of a difficult student issue involving accusations of bullying and threats.
From his first year as superintendent, Paul recalled a female student and her mother who threatened the school’s environment. The female student’s bad behavior and her mother’s encouragement of that behavior caused the school culture to degrade.

There's a family, and this family goes to my church, and they have a daughter who is a high school student. And the first year that I came I had been cautioned about this daughter and the way she interacts with students; her behavior drags other people down.

The student’s “behavior” poorly influenced those around her. She and her mother were known throughout the school for causing trouble. The student had a “controlling and dominant” attitude toward others and “Mother [was] a very calm, quiet, and determined person that believed her daughter over anybody else.” The situation was complicated further because of a recent tragedy in the family. “Mother is a widow… dad had died a couple years ago.” Because Paul attended church with the family, he was often reminded of the empathy and compassion they deserved as a family navigating tragedy.

The combination of mother and daughter created a situation that eventually grew into crisis. In one instance, the daughter accused a male student of bullying her and saying threatening statements.

[He] comes from kind of a crass home. He and his parents cuss and swear and dad knows that's wrong and he's working on it. He is an angry person but he is in one sense glad to be here. [She] on the other hand is fearful for her safety because she thinks that [he] is going to do something violent…[He]would swear at her and call her nasty names and threaten her.
According to the mother, the daughter claimed that the male student was telling other students about his threatening statements. As Paul investigated the situation, he admitted that the male student displayed some anger issues. However, Paul and the Dean of Students interviewed other students and found no indication of the threats and name-calling that the female student alleged. Despite his best efforts, Paul could find no one to substantiate the female student’s claims about the male student.

Eventually, Paul confronted the mother about this lack of evidence. “[She] finally gets to the point of saying, ‘I don't want you talking to my daughter. What she tells me is true.’” Moreover, the mother became “fearful for [her daughter’s] safety because she thinks that the boy is going to do something violent.” Consequently, the “[daughter] and mother get on this campaign to get this kid expelled.”

At the same time, Paul learned some new information from several board members about the male student’s history. As a result, Paul decided to err on the side of safety. “I have to take a stand, and said to the boy and his parents, ‘Until we resolve this you cannot come back to school.’” Paul suspended the male student and also required a psychiatric evaluation before he would be allowed to return. He allowed the female student to stay in school while the investigation continued.

Paul’s actions were not well received by everyone in the school community. “We are putting [the boy] and his parents through hell…We've had some very intense meetings with them.” The male student’s parents were angry because they felt targeted and mistreated. Moreover, the boy’s parents were not the only ones angry with Paul for suspending the male student.
I infuriated a lot of people, some board members as well. But, having been down this path before. I don't want to go to jail because of a kid’s actions. I need to have shown that I’ve done everything that I could do with this, and that it's safe.

Paul, a veteran administrator, knew that he had to take extraordinary measures and do “everything” that he could to protect students, even if those measures were unpopular.

As the investigation continued, Paul kept the male student in suspension but did not expel him. The mother of the female student who made the claims finally took her concerns to the school board. The board “granted this lady permission to come and present her case to the board. We had that meeting and the board is really feeling, ‘Paul, why did you allow this to get out of hand?’” He summarized his dilemma: “Do I get rid of both? Do I keep both? What do I do?”

Paul and his Dean of Students wanted to maintain a “warm, loving environment” in the school, a culture that was “best for the kids.” However, some members of the school community were “infuriated” with his decisions. Concurrent with this issue, Paul prepared for the following school year hoping for a well-needed boost in enrollment. He needed positive press with parents in the school community.

The resolution—“It’s so different…” Paul met numerous times with his board about the situation involving the female student’s claims and the male student’s suspension. He recalled his commission to create a culture “that’s best for the kids.” He eventually reached a decision and shared it with his board.

In those meetings at some point I said, “As I look at this I don't believe [she] is a good influence for the school,” which floored some of these guys because she’s
fatherless. [They said], “How could you treat her this way?”…that decision infuriated some of the board members.

Paul believed the female student was not a “good influence for the school.” In his view, despite the fact that she was “fatherless,” she was not telling the truth about the male student. Paul also believed that her mother was a divisive influence. Once again, Paul found that his decisions caused anger with other people.

In the end, Paul allowed the female student to stay at the school for the rest of the school year as long as there were no further incidents. The male student returned to school after receiving approval from a psychologist. Another male student who left the school because of the female student’s behavior toward him re-enrolled and returned to the school the next year. “He came back, matter of fact he's excited to be here…” According to the Dean of Students, “It is so different with having this [female] student gone.” The school has returned to the “warm, loving environment” that everyone wanted. At church, Paul still sees the mother and daughter. He says, “I interact with them. I see them, they see me and we are cordial to one another.”

The analysis—“Do what is best…” Paul is a thirty-year veteran of Christian schools. He has held many administrative assignments and been involved with many difficult situations over his tenure. However, the story regarding these two students heavily weighed on him. The story involved accusations of bullying, a troubled teenage male student, and a widowed mother who circumvented Paul to get to the school board. He faced angry board members, parents who challenged him, decreasing enrollment, and teacher layoffs.

At the heart of the dilemma, Paul had to find a way to maintain the values of a nurturing culture and an academic process to do “what’s best for the kids.” The mantra of
doing “what’s best for the kids” begs the question “Which kids should Paul do his best for?”
The female student had no father in her life and her mother was a recent widow. Life was upside down for the family, and the school could have provided the consistency and stability the family needed. The male student, on the other hand, had a father who admitted that their home was sometimes tense. The male student needed the constant nurturing and positive environment the school had to offer. Paul had to decide which kids the school would serve and which kids would receive the “warm, loving environment.”

Paul considered the culture as he processed his options. “Do I get rid of both? Do I keep both? What do I do?” Paul mentioned numerous times the importance of maintaining a “nurturing” or “warm, loving environment.” In one story, Paul made his decision about which teachers to lay off based on his investigation of how “positive,” “vibrant,” or “excited” their attitudes were regarding students and parents. However, while in the midst of researching the facts about the female student’s claims, Paul found parents and board members who were feeling anything but “positive” or “excited.” Regarding the male student’s parents, Paul indicated, “We are putting… [them] through hell…we’ve had some very intense meetings with them.” Putting parents “through hell,” “very intense meetings,” and an “infuriated” school board are not phrases used to describe the “warm, loving environment” Paul was trying to create.

In the end, Paul made a decision that moved the school’s culture closer to that “warm, loving environment.” The Dean of Students said, “It is so different with having this [female] student gone.” Moreover, after Paul made a difficult decision about laying off teachers, the school moved closer to the desired environment. “Our parents, and our grandparents, are
saying they’re seeing a life…that they haven’t seen for quite some time.” Staying focused on the culture helped Paul decide which students to retain and which teachers to hire.

Paul used the word “process” numerous times to help clarify his understanding of academics. “There is a sense of security in process. I am like most of us—I want to be in control. When people are messing with my process, I don’t like that.” Paul views academics as a group of processes working together to educate the child. While discussing the Amish barn-raising, Paul stated, “It’s fun to be up at the top, but I like security around me.” Paul’s sense of security is based on having a process in place that he controls and if someone is “messing with [his] process” then he becomes concerned.

In fact, while Paul was dealing with the dilemma involving the female student and her mother, there were direct interferences with his process that threatened his control over the culture. Paul indicated that the school board “granted this lady permission to come and present her case to the board. We had that meeting and the board is really feeling, ‘Paul, why did you allow this to get out of hand?’” The mother had also said, “I don’t want you talking to my daughter—what she tells me is true.” The mother was attempting to take control of the culture away from Paul to achieve her ends by “messing with” his process.

Nonetheless, while both culture and academics were important to Paul, the stories he shared brought the value of culture to the forefront most often. In the story he shared regarding his dilemma, Paul decided that though girl had recently become fatherless and the mom a widow, the mom and the girl together were causing harm to a great number of students. Removal of the girl from the school allowed for a renewed focus on maintaining a “warm, loving environment.”
Jason—A Story of Loving Children, Culture, Discipleship, and Grace

Jason loved children. He was father to five adopted children and superintendent at a Christian school in the Midwest serving a couple hundred students. His personal mission in life mixed love for children and commitment to Christian education. “I believe with all my heart that children are created in the image of God. And as part of that created image, He designed them with this unique ability to learn.”

Jason’s love for children started at home and included a struggle that many couples experience: infertility. Jason and his wife struggled with trying to have their own children for years until they considered adoption; now they have five children, all adopted or fostered.

It's just part of what God wanted us to do. We were in the house and we had tried to have kids, biologically, [but it] was beyond the scope of what the doctors could even tell us…“We don't know what's wrong with you, you should be having kids. We don't know why you're not.” We thought, “Ok, we're selling this house.”…and with the profit we'll look into adopting.

Jason and his wife accepted the unfortunate reality of infertility in their marriage and moved on to adopting children. They felt that adoption was “just part of what God” wanted for them and were so committed to having children that they arranged to sell their home to raise the necessary funds.

Their experiences with adoption had not always been easy. Jason recalled the biological mother of their first adopted son: “She had a son who was already three with cystic fibrosis; and she was a mess. But [she] wanted a Christian family…for her child. She put him with us.” Jason and his wife opened their home and then filled it with children whose biological parents were a “mess.”
Regarding his own career choice as an educator and his professional work with children, Jason admitted that he was “not a big fan of Christian education.” Jason attended Christian schools as a student himself but the experience was not memorable and he pledged not to become involved with Christian schools as an educator. Over time, however, he changed his mind and developed a purpose in his calling to Christian education.

I struggled so much with Christian education. I said, “God, there’s no way I want to do this.” But He just kind of gently communicated…just kind of got a hold of my heart. And in a sense just whispered in my ear, “You're complaining about teaching and I made you a teacher. Why don't you do something about it?...This is where I've brought you so why don't you do something about it? Why don't you be the heart change in the culture now?”

Jason committed himself to teach in a Christian school and model a different way of educating compared to his own personal experience.

**Culture—Being “In the middle of the mess.”** Jason was determined to make his Christian school better than the Christian school he attended as teenager. He described his own Christian school experience as “terrible” and the culture “toxic.” He indicated discipline was like a “circus” and that the structure was too “laid back.”

I did not have a great Christian school experience. You know the kids were pretty rough…The kids ran the school. I mean the teachers, they were not disciplinarians. They weren’t really even organized. Only a couple teachers really taught anything. The school was in constant financial trouble and the kids just kind of ran wild…. lots of stuff. It was just weird for a school; it didn't make a lot of sense.
Confusion, lack of discipline, and purposelessness best described Jason’s Christian school experience.

Of his own school where he is now superintendent, he has focused on creating a culture that is the antithesis of his own experience. He used words and phrases like “grace and hope,” “protective” and “protect the other kids” to describe the environment he desires for students. He admitted that it is a struggle to create and maintain a culture that is both loving and forgiving while being protective and stable. He wants a culture that encourages spiritual growth among the students.

We're kind of bucking the culture here. We're not normal… We're a small school and we're supposed to be small. And part of that is so we can be in the middle of the mess and look for spiritual growth.

Jason believed that a smaller Christian school can be a more personal environment where students and teachers can work together academically while also dealing with life’s “messy” problems.

Jason accepted that the school’s openness to real problems in student’s problems would put him and his staff “in the middle of the mess.” Given that, he still wanted the culture to be stable so students could learn. Paul, the participant from a previous story, wanted a slightly different culture. He emphasized a “warm, nurturing” culture so students could learn. Paul was also not comfortable with being “in the middle of the mess.” He did not want people “messing with” his academic processes.

As part of establishing a stable culture, Jason worked directly with the seniors in his school, the leaders of the student community.
I'm a teacher at heart and administrator by trade, but a teacher at heart. There are two levels of kids that just are very close to my heart, one of them is seniors…It kind of goes against some methodology in small schools where you have to jump in with junior high and elementary to win them and to hang onto them. I really want to win the seniors. If I win the seniors and I have their confidence, they have mine, and we work with each other, [we can] influence the whole school. The whole tone will be more respectful, and that's worked very well for me. On Fridays I talk to seniors…we'll hang out… coaching them a little bit on their thought processes…I do spend a lot of time, invest a lot of time, with seniors.

Jason had chosen to invest his time in seniors as a method to stabilize the school’s culture. A partnership with the senior class was critical to positively influencing the “whole school.” He considered his time as superintendent an investment in the school’s culture.

Grace—“The beauty of it.” Jason provided his own definition of grace as he thought about his adopted children and the students in his school. “I've seen God change lives and seen the beauty of it; that would be the central core value [for me], if you’re looking for a marker. That whole concept of redemption and change means a lot to me.” He talked about the experience of adopting their second child and then having the birth mom come and take the child back.

Our second child was born [to an unwed mother]. It was an awful experience. She had a terrible time. We're not designed as humans to give our children away, so she beat us up badly for two months. Eventually she came and took him back. Then after three days, she called and said it was a mistake. “I shouldn't have done that. He
belongs with you; will you take him back?” Things really changed after that. God did a huge work in her heart and her life...he did a lot with us, too.

Jason and his wife saw God’s change in their own lives as well as that of their adopted son’s mother. Changes, forgiveness, and redemption were all a part of Jason’s definition of grace. These were “central…markers” for Jason, meaning that grace was important to Jason in his personal commitment to love children.

Jason also defined grace in the context of the school where he was superintendent. As he thought of students and their lives, phrases like “I hope that they change,” “second chances,” “reintroduce,” and “restoration” all described his view of grace. Jason was willing to give students second chances when they made mistakes. However, he struggled at times to balance grace and accountability for bad behavior.

It is a constant struggle between grace and truth [accountability] and how they fit together. I have a deep-seated desire of wanting to see a heart change so much that it's easy to blind myself of other realities. I want to see their heart change so much that it can rob me of doing exactly what I need to do.

The struggle to balance grace and accountability was often on Jason’s mind.

**Discipleship**—“**That made a lot more sense to me.**” Also constantly on Jason’s mind was the idea of discipleship, an idea he turned into a reality for both his children at home and the students at his school. He related a recent outing through his church with two of his sons to a rehabilitation home for adults.

My boys played Uno, and Jenga, and put puzzles together with people that won't remember them next week. There's something about that [which makes] my boys better, makes them more like Christ. …It's all part of discipleship.
Jason was committed to discipling his own children so they know that helping others was part of the Christian experience. In his view, discipleship involved training children to be “more like Christ.”

He was also committed to discipling students at his school. Discipling students in school was a different way of thinking about school, according to Jason. He described the change in his own thinking and his experiences as a teacher in a school in the Washington, D.C., area.

We can't just sit in Bible class day after day...We got to be doing ministry, we got to be in the community. Even though that can still …become a circus activity, at least it’s the next level, the next step….I played with some ideas and the whole discipleship mentality just really started to come out. I had started a small classical school in the DC area. …It was small, but the whole mindset was, “We’re after Christian kids trying to take them to the next level”; that made a lot more sense to me.

Jason’s views on Christian school changed dramatically compared to his own experiences in Christian schools. His experience involved the inclusion of a Bible class in a school where they were not “really even organized.” Understanding discipleship, in Jason’s view, required more than just academic lecture.

A Christian school needed to teach students how to put into practice meeting the needs of other people, according to Jason. Programs that trained students to be “involved in hands on ministry every single week” were important. “I really feel like [in a] Christian school there should be a programmatic piece that allows kids to work out what Christ showed us, and that is serving the poor or reaching [others].” He contrasted his position with other schools that focus on evangelism.
Undoubtedly some kids are unsaved in our school, you know so undoubtedly there is some piece of evangelism. And, [we] always bring the Gospel into everything. But, our hope is to take kids from where they are now and grow them deeper.

ACSI has accredited Jason’s school. ACSI’s view of evangelism is indirectly defined in their Statement of Faith.

We believe in the absolute necessity of regeneration by the Holy Spirit for salvation because of the exceeding sinfulness of human nature, and that men are justified on the single ground of faith in the shed blood of Christ, and that only by God’s grace and through faith alone are we saved. (ACSI Statement of Faith, 2012)

Evangelism, according to ACSI’s definition, allows a sin-filled person to be regenerated, or start over, by accepting the death of Jesus Christ. ACSI, and other evangelical churches, maintain the belief that acceptance of Jesus’ death “alone” is the pathway to be “justified” before God. Given this definition for evangelism, Jason acknowledged that some students were “unsaved,” needing regeneration. However, evangelism was not his focus. Jason wanted a school where students were growing “deeper” in their understanding of meeting the needs of those around them, which was his definition of discipleship.

Teaching students to understand discipleship was not an academic exercise in Jason’s opinion. He was honest with prospective and current parents about the school’s views on discipleship and the de-emphasis of lecturing on Christian principles and values.

We try to be very upfront with parents, we’re out to disciple their kid, to be their tool to disciple their child. I kind of took all the Christian worldview stuff and set it aside awhile ago. We’re not about Christian worldview…we’re about discipling kids. It’s
just messier and harder and much more difficult…that’s the mindset that God has laid in my heart and that allows me to function in this environment.

The challenge of loving children through the messy parts of life provided the motivation for Jason to disciple students and “function” in the Christian school setting.

**The dilemma—“I’ve got two knees.”** Jason described a significant dilemma he faced in his school, a dilemma that put three important values at odds with each other. The decision involved expelling two students who were sexually active with each other over the summer break and into the school year. According to Jason, the students were unrepentant, carefree about their behavior, and lacked the full understanding of the potential consequences. The students were seniors and longtime students in the school. The dilemma forced him to decide between showing grace for bad behavior so he could continue discipling the two students while also protecting the school’s culture.

We have a couple students who have absolutely trampled all over our student code of conduct, a guy and a girl. They got into a relationship that went too far. And in our school’s past that would have been a simple decision, we would have just kicked them out. I don't like that decision. I'd like to see redemption, I’d like to see change. The problem is I'm interacting with these students…and I'm not seeing it. So, I'm struggling with the depth to which I can access their ability to come back and not continue to trample all over that code of conduct, and the effect their going to have on the culture. Do I keep trying to help them and extend what we call grace, and hope that they change? Hope that they don't make the same mistakes? Hope that they don’t affect our culture badly? Or do I go protective, and protect the other kids from them?...I'm facing that right now. And it's hard.
Jason had a collision of three important values. On one hand, Jason could decide not to expel the two students and allow them to return to the school’s environment. This option would demonstrate grace and provide opportunity for continued discipleship with the two students. On the other hand, he could expel the students in order to protect the school’s culture but miss the opportunity for discipleship with the two expelled students.

You know I've got two knees. I've got the one knee that they should be gone because they are too much to manage and too much to handle. But, I've got the other side that says, “You know, look at what Christ did. Look at how He worked. Look at his conversations with individual people.” And, when I look at that, it's like I've got to find a way to help them and get them back. But, I can't just turn them loose. We represent part of the change process; that's a no brainer on one side. Looking on the other side…this thing is such a tangled mess.

Jason struggled over the Christian example to show grace and be a part of the “change process” and “turn them loose” in the student body and risk a negative impact to the school’s culture.

The struggle over deciding what course of action to take consumed Jason’s life. He shared the impact on him at a personal level.

Well I find myself, all of the time when I'm driving, when I'm thinking, when I'm laying in bed at night trying to develop a process by which we could bring them back, for it to make sense. I just can't find a way. You know no matter what I do there's elements…that are so beyond what anyone can control. You know, the hearts of these children…And how in the world to reintroduce them [to the culture]? I'm looking for
a process, my mind keeps going through a process. But…I can't seem to construct one that makes any sense.

Jason struggled over a method to show grace to the students and “reintroduce” them to the school without impacting the culture. The struggle occupied his mind continually.

**Resolution**—“**What I needed was a heart change.**” To resolve the dilemma, Jason took a closer look at the two students’ attitudes to understand their desire for grace and re-entry back to the school.

It's not that I want them gone. It’s, I don't know, how can I have them back?...How can I keep them safe in this community, keep the community safe from them, and work at this heart change. And I realized, it’s not possible! ...Their heart needed to change in ways other than what we can facilitate here. The more I twisted, and turned, and looked, the more I thought through all these things, the more I realized I'm not getting anywhere. I was looking for a process to reintroduce them…so that we could see a heart change. But, what I needed was a heart change…[to] reintroduce them to the community, and that wasn’t there.

Jason struggled with bringing the students back so the school could “work at this heart change” with them. However, he needed to see a “heart change” in the students before bringing them back in to the school’s culture. He recognized that the students did not want to change and did not want to follow the school’s code of conduct. In the end, Jason followed the school’s policy and asked them to withdraw from the school.

In his final reflection about his decision, Jason considered the school’s code of conduct and administrative policy. He struggled mightily with the long-term impact of expulsion in terms of college and career plans. He additionally discovered that the
administrative policy of the school allowed parents to withdraw their students voluntarily if irreconcilable disagreements exist. This option existed in the policy to avoid ruining a student’s transcript. In the end, the policy gave Jason the ability to show some level of grace to the two students while “protecting” the school’s culture.

Analysis—“Working out some things.” Jason struggled over the values of grace and culture while also maintaining a focus on discipleship. All three of these values developed from Jason’s experiences in his family, church, and Christian school. These experiences become the motivation for Jason to have a different vision for the school where he was superintendent than the one reflecting his childhood experiences.

Jason became a Christian at an early age. As a child, he was not well discipled or trained by the church his family attended. He also observed a lack of church commitment to disciple his parents who became Christians at the age of thirty. According to Jason, the church was great at evangelism, but lacked the ability to train and disciple people. Consequently, Jason’s family was on its own to figure out discipleship. He followed his mom’s example of pursuing discipleship on his own and even listened to Christian speakers on his radio at night while falling off to sleep.

My mom pursued it. She grabbed and read whatever she could. She bought all these books and read them and tried to do a self-study on her own. She learned a lot. I remember she mentioned Chuck Swindoll to me as a nine-year-old. I remember listening to Chuck Swindoll at night, that's how I was discipled.

The lack of programmed discipleship in his life, however, was not limited to Jason’s childhood church. He reiterated his experiences in a Christian school as a student and connected that to a change he made in the school where he worked as superintendent.
I went to a Christian school and did not have a good experience. I think what was missing there was that element of discipleship. It was a Christian worldview school…nothing wrong with that; and, that needs to be there. But, I think that falls short…of what Christ walked us through…He showed His disciples the practical, the everyday. These are the people we need to be reaching, these are the people we should be touching. As a school we should be training our kids to do that.

Jason learned from his childhood experiences in church and Christian schools that discipleship was less important than evangelism. He also learned that discipleship cannot happen through lectures on “a Christian worldview.” He felt drawn to help meet the needs of the “everyday” person on the street.

Jason took an opposite position to his learned experiences from childhood. “All kids can learn. They’re given by God this ability to learn. Christian schools should be places where kids develop and discover their gifts [and] where they also practice living like Jesus would have them live.” Jason saw Christian schools as a place that developed culture that focused on discipleship.

Jason spoke more about his childhood church. While he respected the pastors of his church, considered them friends, and admired their Biblical knowledge, he struggled with their lack of grace and forgiveness.

In my church growing up, you didn't get a second chance. The church discipline was to kick you out of church and that was clear. I saw them blow church discipline out of the water several times. [They] hurt people because their view of church discipline was not Biblical, and they didn't take the time to do that.
Jason’s experience in his childhood church taught him that some Christians were unforgiving and hurtful.

This lesson was reinforced in his Christian school. The educators in one of the Christian schools he attended placed a high value on enforcing the school’s code of conduct. Jason recalled a story, similar to the one he shared earlier, that put two students at odds with the school’s code of conduct.

There was some kids caught having sex … and the way that was handled—it was awful. They had the kids come up and ask the whole chapel for forgiveness. That was eighth grade, and I had no idea what they were talking about! Here I am sitting there in eighth grade listening to this little girl cry, this little boy cry… They were supposed to finish classes outside of school and then get married after they graduated; and that didn’t happen. It was just a big mess. It wasn’t handled well anywhere, by anybody, in any way at all.

Jason was angered by the way in which the school handled the situation. The culture was unforgiving and condemning, in his view.

The school’s culture was further diminished by the hypocrisy in the student body. Jason recalled an event that demonstrated the opposite of what he wanted in his school.

They were not intelligent sinners. One girl brought what she thought was pot to school, but someone sold her potpourri. And, the kids there were pretty rampant sexually, and lots of drinking. Kids just hid it really well. That kind of poisoned the well in my heart against Christian education. The kids were really good at giving the answers, but it didn’t affect them at all. So, I just really struggled with it.
Jason’s heart was “poisoned” against Christian education because the culture was hypocritical and unforgiving.

However, as an adult, Jason realized that he was being called to undo his own experiences and make improvements in Christian schools.

I came out of [college] and did not want to teach at a Christian school. But God did His work and changed my heart. I was a very arrogant person. God humbled me over time and I got to the place where I was just ready to teach no matter where that was. He also realized that by working in Christian schools and becoming involved in a church he had an opportunity to change culture, focus on discipleship, and display grace to others.

“There's things that I didn't have much of growing up. I really see what I do [now] as working out some things that were not in my community.”

From his stories, Jason’s personal experiences and the experiences of his parents influenced his values. Discipleship, for instance, emerged from his childhood experiences as an important value. This value resulted from the personal struggles he witnessed in his parents’ life due to a failure in his church.

The value of grace was also an important part of Jason’s thinking. Too often in Jason’s past, he saw both church and school leaders act unforgiving toward people. Jason determined that any school he led would value grace.

The value of a stable and protective school culture, however, was also an important value in Jason’s decision-making, especially in the story of dilemma he shared. From Jason’s Christian school experiences, he understood that schools need a stable culture that protects students and allows for discipleship. He refused to repeat his childhood school experience by allowing an environment where the students to run the school. In Jason’s mind, school
leaders need to be in charge of the culture. Consequently, even though grace and discipleship were important values, the value of a stable culture was more important in his situation-of-dilemma.

**Tom—Christian Standards, Evangelism of Students, and School Culture**

Tom was a veteran superintendent who would not compromise on his standards. He was convinced that even in the face of financial pressures at his Christian school he would not change his school’s admissions standards to admit more students. This adherence to standards was a foundational value for Tom, a personal commitment.

There’s two issues for me…I’ve got a monetary responsibility. But, far above that is the standards that Christianity has to uphold. If you fold because you lost all your students, so be it. You cannot subjugate your standards to the point of saying that it’s more important to keep a student because of money. You just got to let them go.

Whatever happens, that’s in God’s hands, not in my hands.

Tom viewed his responsibilities as superintendent from two opposing perspectives. First, he recognized his “monetary responsibility” to manage the school’s financial health. Second, and more importantly, Tom believed that he must “uphold” the standards of Christianity. At his school, these standards included prohibiting “drug problems,” “sexting” (sexually explicit texts), and other forms of “sexual junk,” like inappropriate discussions between students.

Tom was clear that he would not compromise standards for the sake of boosting enrollment. In his mind, the responsibility to “uphold” the standards of Christianity was far more important than his financial responsibilities. Tom believed that he and other Christian school superintendents are accountable to God for decisions.
I’ve been around this business too long to not be at the highest level of accountability in God’s sight. We spend our lives in churches, we spend our lives in Christian education, and we study Scripture as much as you could probably study them. We have no way to claim in front of God one day that we just made mistakes because we didn’t know. Therefore, that has to take precedent over anything else.

Tom felt that he would be unable “to claim in front of God” that he was unaware of his responsibility to uphold Christian standards. Those standards must “take precedent” over decisions of admissions and financial health.

Tom described some of the things he has learned about standards-based decision making during his long tenure in Christian education.

I’ve been in this for an awful long time. You get to the point where I think you just learn, at least in your relationship with God, that there’s absolutely nothing on earth for me. There’s nothing on earth that is really worth anything if you’re going to compromise your values based on Scripture. As a younger person, I was able to bend those pretty easily. I needed a paycheck, that was the number one thing. I could make some allowances for myself that were completely wrong. But, I think over the last twenty years…it’s been eminently clear that I put in perspective my short life on earth compared to eternity. If I know this is what God asked me to do, then it doesn’t make any difference what happens to the school.

Tom leaned heavily on his time in Christian education and his “relationship with God” to describe why he would not “compromise [his] values.” In his view, Tom has matured in his faith to the point that he will do “what God asked” him to do, even if closing the school is the
outcome. He admitted that his values have changed over the years and that he now has a different “perspective” on his responsibilities.

Tom explained why his thinking about upholding those standards has changed over the years. He attributed much of the change in his perspective to a Christian author that he has studied. He learned that he and his wife placed too much emphasis on money and having what they desired.

It’s maturity. I have studied John Macarthur. I have listened to him for probably 40 or 45 years. He’s been [my] Bible teacher. He really impacted my life a great deal…It didn’t make any difference whether we had the money to do what we wanted to do or not…we could not afford the lifestyle we had become accustomed to.

Tom and his wife learned that they were making decisions to boost their personal income levels at the cost of lowering their standards. Over the course of his life, Tom has learned not to “compromise” his standards for the sake of making more money. He translated this into a personal commitment. “I believe as a Christian administrator to never lower a standard.”

**Evangelism—“That to me is number one.”** Tom was also determined to extend the opportunity “to be exposed to Christianity” to as many children as possible through admission into his school. He often struggled to balance his commitment “to never lower” while satisfying his value to evangelize students.

I believe as a Christian administrator to never lower a standard to accommodate another kid unless I have seen that there’s truly hope for that kid to finally come to accept Christ….If I feel that’s there, then I’ve got to do that… I don’t want to give up a kid that I feel like I could still help…I have not turned away somebody, who after interviewing, I feel really needs to be exposed to Christianity.
Tom is often compelled “to do that,” or admit a student, if there is “hope” that the student will become a believer in Jesus Christ. He does not believe that he is lowering his standards by admitting a non-Christian student to his school. In his view, not admitting a student because they are not a believer in Jesus Christ is equivalent to giving up.

Tom tries to help students and parents understand the importance of becoming a believer in Jesus Christ. Over the years, he has impressed upon families the need to look beyond college and career choices when defining success for their children’s lives.

I don't care whether the kids becomes a “whatever,” if he becomes an engineer, or if he goes off and works with his dad…even if he goes to the best college. I don’t really care about that. The only thing that really matters is eternity. If you miss that opportunity with kids, then what good have you done? You’ve just produced another good engineer, or another “whatever” who may never have another opportunity to hear about Christ. That to me is number one; it really is.

Tom downplayed the importance of career and college choices in light of a student’s choices about faith. He strongly believed that providing an “opportunity” for a student to believe in Jesus Christ is the most important work that he does as superintendent.

The importance of evangelism took root in Tom’s life at an early age through his childhood church. The church he attended had a strong emphasis on evangelism.

It certainly was not on discipleship like it was evangelism. I still remember in the sanctuary, on the wall, they had a map of the world. They had every missionary we were supporting with a ribbon going to it. It was an enormous map…I still remember looking back at that and thinking where do I belong in that. I’ve never felt that I
should go off and be a missionary. But I felt the desire to want to always try to share Christ with somebody.

The church Tom attended as a child and as a young adult emphasized evangelizing people around the world more so than discipling, or training, Christians. Tom had “never felt” moved to evangelize other people around the world, but he understood the need to always “share Christ [with] somebody” wherever he went in life.

In the context of school, Tom sometimes accepted a student who was not a follower in Jesus Christ while not lowering his standards for admission. In one such case, he took a chance on a local high school girl who came to a school open house with her parents.

We’ve got a girl, she’s a senior this year. She came here last year… Her parents are not Christians, they’re not believers. To this day, I don’t think they go to any church. The first night I met her was at one of our open house nights. They came in to the school, and she just looked to me like somebody who didn’t like the environment she was in. She never had been [in trouble] but they were afraid she was going to get into some. That was why they had come here to begin with….

A family that did not follow Jesus Christ visited the school during an open house. They were interested in a different “environment” for their daughter, one where she was less likely to get into trouble.

Tom pursued the conversation with the family trying to assess their real interest in the school. They talked about the sports offered at the school and then moved on to deeper conversations. The daughter asked, “‘What is the Christian part of the school about?’ Which impressed me; it had nothing to do with a church. She was just trying to get a feel for what is
this school about.” Tom sensed intelligence and curiosity in the girl’s questions and decided to admit her to the school because there was an opportunity for her “to hear about Christ.”

Tom described the girl as searching for something “bigger” than just a school with education and sports. He sensed an opportunity to tell her “about Jesus Christ.”

She’s an average kid, an average student, nice girl looking for some belief and something a whole lot bigger than what she’s ever seen before; that was really what she was after…So she came by the office and said, “Hey, can I come and talk to you?” She comes in and says, “You were talking today about redeemed, what in the world do you mean?” She stayed for about an hour and a half. She had no clue about anything in Scripture, never opened a Bible. I led her through a lot of things and eventually we ended up with a saved kid. Now, if we hadn't accepted her [what were] the odds of her ever following Jesus Christ?

Tom recognized that the girl had questions about what it meant to be a Christian. He made himself available to answer questions and, in his words, “ended up with a saved kid.” The meaning of this statement is better understood in the context of the ACSI definition of Christianity. The girl was “redeemed” before God because of her belief in Jesus Christ. Tom felt that the risk he took to admit the girl into the school was acceptable given the outcome.

Some “highly conservative parents” challenged Tom on his decision to admit her into the school. He responded by referring to the importance of evangelism in his own life. “That's what I was put on earth to do—to help people like that.”

**Culture—sane and “stable.”** Tom used his commitment to Christian standards as a benchmark for his school. However, the school had families from many different Christian denominations. He often struggled to build a culture that allowed all of these denominations
to work together. “When you have a school like this, I really think bringing together people who have a lot of different beliefs [can be a challenge], they can’t all be right.” Tom wanted to build a school culture that was diverse in Christian beliefs but held together by a common belief in Jesus Christ.

With many denominational beliefs represented in the school, Tom explained that he struggles to maintain a culture that is both “stable” and has an acceptable level of “sanity” to it.

You don’t have to believe everything the same, but you have to have something that will hold it together…So that’s the sanity that I look to…there’s got to be something around that everybody, the board, me, the teachers, and the families say this cannot be touched. This has got to stay stable.

In Tom’s view, a common view of Jesus Christ is the unifying belief that “cannot be touched.” This commonality also included adherence to Christian standards. With a personal commitment to those standards, Tom looked for ways to keep the culture “sane,” or manageable, as well as “stable,” or predictable.

The desire for a “stable” culture was not unique to Tom. Jason also expressed the desire for a “stable” culture. Jason’s purpose for a stable culture was a reliable platform from which to have a school that was not like a “circus” and from which he could do discipleship, which was “messy.” Tom, on the other hand, wanted a culture that he could manage with minimal problems. Both superintendents wanted a stable culture but for different reasons.

In one story, a new student challenged Tom’s effort at creating a sane and stable culture. The new student, who had recently moved to the area from Texas, was staying with
his grandparents. The grandparents wanted a safe school environment for him. They
approached Tom and applied for admission to the school.

When this kid came in he was just this polite, pleasant guy. Kid was brilliant,
absolutely brilliant. He was probably the smartest kid in the school. He had Bible
down, he had everything down; it was just amazing to us. But then within two or
three days he started getting onto stuff in the computer lab...had some language in it.
Later on, he began to be overly friendly with some girls and it turned into some
sexual aggressiveness. Then within a week or two, he had become so bad that I had to
talk to him. Then it started getting reported to me that he was using profanity on
certain occasions...All this time I'm contacting the grandma and grandpa letting them
know what's going on and all that needs to be done. When we get to the end of the
year, I got to the point where it was just one thing after another and another. Finally, I
had had enough of it so I called the grandparents and said, “Look, this is what we’re
getting. We’ve got to get a stop to this one way or the other. He either has to leave the
school, or you got to get him to stop doing this.”

Tom accepted a student who he believed to be genuinely “polite,” “pleasant,” and “brilliant.”
However, shortly after his arrival, the student began pushing the boundaries of acceptable
behavior within the culture of the school. He used profanity, used the school’s computers to
visit questionable websites, and became sexually aggressive. The student’s behavior was in
direct conflict with the culture that Tom was attempting to establish, a culture in which he
could manage and “uphold” Christian standards.
To keep the culture sane and stable, Tom made the decision to expel the student with only one day of school left in the school year. Tom felt the student’s behavior could no longer be managed by the school.

I called the grandparents and said, “You know, I know there’s only one day left but we cannot have him back”... There’s no line there that I could get over to get him, to help him understand what life should really be like. He wasn’t ever going to do that. Tom recognized that the student’s behavior was so far from the school’s Christian standards of acceptable behavior that Tom could not ever “get over to get him.” Tom justified removing the student because his behavior compromised the stability and sanity of the school’s culture.

The dilemma—“I had a call from one of my parents.” Tom believed that evangelizing students was “what he was put on earth to do.” Additionally, he sought to create a culture that was sane and stable, but allowed for a diversity of Christian beliefs. Both of these values were formed on the basic principle of upholding the standards of Christianity. In one story, Tom experienced the tension of upholding these standards as the sanity and stability of the culture was threatened by a situation with some middle-school students. A middle-school girl had sent a middle-school boy a sexually explicit text. The father of the boy came in to talk with Tom.

I had a call from one of my parents, very conservative. [Dad said,] “I need to come in and let you see what was sent to my son.” He had an eighth-grade son... who was sent a text. He said, “I just got to come in and show you this because I am so mad and I have to make sure you understand how bad this is.” So, he came in and I met with him. He went through [the text messages]. It was highly sexual and a very explicit
type of text. “I'm not only mad at her, I'm mad at my own kid because I had to find this on his phone. He didn’t tell me. But I’m mostly mad at you. How can you have a kid in the school who’s doing this?” So I asked, “Do you know when it happened? When did it occur?” He said, “I don’t care when it occurred! It’s a kid from this school—I don’t want that! ...I want to meet with the parents of this girl.”

The parent was angry with Tom for allowing “a kid in the school” who was capable of that type of behavior. The dad indicated that he wanted Tom to facilitate a meeting with the parents of the middle-school girl.

Tom set up a meeting for the dad of the middle-school boy and the mom of the middle-school girl to discuss the text message. The dad of the boy and the mom of the girl attended the meeting.

So, I arrange for a day for the other parent to come in. We left the kids out of it.

When the mom came in she was absolutely flabbergasted, couldn’t believe it. She said, “I have the greatest young Christian girl that you could ever find in the world…” The dad was very cool; he was not in any way abusive. But, he showed her the text and it clearly came from the daughter’s phone, so it wasn’t like it was some question. We got the daughter to come in and she said, “Well I didn’t send that text…My friend sent that…when we were together on Saturday.” It was the previous weekend. She said, “Well, we were together and she took my phone and she sent this.”

Tom facilitated a meeting between the two middle-school parents in order to get to the truth. The middle-school girl who owned the phone insisted that a friend of hers sent the text to the middle-school boy.
Consequently, Tom set up a meeting between the dad of the middle-school boy and the two moms of the middle-school girls. The meeting occurred in his office a day later.

It was pretty clear that the girl was lying to me. I didn't know how I was going to get her to admit it... [Eventually,] the mother of the girl who owned the phone really put the pressure on her daughter. Finally, she admitted that she did send it. But, the other girl had also sent the same message to a different boy...They had both participated with different boys.

Tom and the parents were finally able to figure out which girl sent the inappropriate text to the dad’s son. In the end, both girls admitted to sending the same text to different boys from the same phone.

Tom recognized the seriousness of sexually explicit texts being sent between minors in his school. He felt it was his responsibility to work with the parents and take some form of disciplinary action, but struggled on the specifics. He had a responsibility to maintain a stable culture that would not allow sexting. However, he also wanted to retain the students at his school to continue the evangelism efforts in the middle-school girls’ lives.

The resolution—“It has been 180 degrees from last year.” Tom faced angry parents who were upset with the school for different reasons. The conservative parents were angry because they partially blamed the school for admitting students that had the potential to send inappropriate texts to their other students. “Well, we lost the [boy’s] family this year because of this...took both kids out.” The parent was disappointed in the school’s admission process and removed both of his children from the school.

Tom retained the middle-school girl who owned the phone and who initially lied about sending the text to the boy.
The daughter and her mother are still here, we have not had a single problem… There hasn’t been any issues with her at all. The mother was seeing it as honestly as you could see it. [She] was determined that if we would let her daughter stay, this wasn’t going to “be okay” with her. She cut off the friendship with the other girl, no contact at all. [She] took a very strong position on it and stuck to it and I thought, “This kid’s got some hope.”

The mother of the middle-school girl who owned the phone and initially lied about sending the text promised Tom that she was not “okay” with her daughter’s behavior. She took action and “stuck to it” giving Tom assurance that there was “hope” for this student in the school culture.

The parents of the second middle-school girl student, however, had a different view of the situation. They were angry with the school because they felt Tom was too harsh in his disciplinary response toward their daughter.

We dismissed the other girl at the end of the year because this was not the only incident. There were some other things, all sexual. The funny part is that mother never agreed that her daughter could ever do anything like this…I get a call from the father and he was just ticked off. “How could you blame this on my daughter? She would never do anything like that!”

Tom later learned that the second middle-school girl was also involved in other “sexual” types of behaviors. Her parents were upset and refused to believe that their daughter “could ever do anything like this.” Tom observed that the second girl was not receptive to change and that her parents were in denial of their daughter’s behavior. When he assessed the situation, he considered his options with this second girl. “If I don't feel like I can make a
change…then this is not the right place; [she is] just going to be destructive.” Therefore, in order to protect the culture of the school, the second middle-school girl was not allowed to return to the school the following year.

Tom made a number of similar enrollment decisions throughout the school year. He dismissed, or did not invite back, many students who had behavior issues. These students, in Tom’s view, had diminished the school’s culture and negatively affected other students.

Well, we lost some of the kids…But, it has been a 180 degrees from last year. I haven’t had a single discipline issue sent to me yet this year, it’s just amazing. [I] walk down the hall and there’s nothing happening. The kids are having a good time.

Tom’s decisions made a significant difference in the school’s culture during the current school year. The culture has returned to the sane and “stable” culture that Tom strived for in his school.

**The analysis—restoring “some sanity, again.”** Tom was thoughtful as he considered his admission decisions for the school year, a year in which he eventually “lost some of the kids.” However, Tom is committed to evangelizing students, and not having them in his school is a lost opportunity. He explained his approach on evangelizing students in the face of criticism from the “very conservative” parents in his school.

I understand their concern. You can’t just bring in every kid who’s got absolutely no interest in Christianity; that’s going to destroy you. But you’ve got to trust the administrator or …whoever that person is. You’ve got to trust their judgment to [admit] a kid who can make it here. We can make a difference for them by simply giving them a chance; to see something they would never see otherwise.
Tom had admitted a number of students who he was not sure would “make it” in the school, but was willing to give opportunities for success in the school’s Christian culture. In the end, some students were able to change and others were not. Tom, nonetheless, provided opportunities because he wanted to evangelize these students, which is what Tom believed he “was put on earth to do—to help people like that.”

However, Tom also wanted to maintain the value of managing the school’s culture and make sure it did not deteriorate from the Christian standards to which he was committed. He struggled with various issues in the previous school year.

There were three or four of these issues last year. I’d never run into that many. I mean, once in awhile, I’d get a problem this significant. But, I had three or four like that last year. I’m thinking, “If I’m going to just dump half a dozen families to get rid of whatever it is that’s going wrong this year…we’ve got a big problem. We’ve got to start getting rid of some kids to maintain some sanity again, or restore some sanity again. While it’s going to cost some money, it’s going to cost a whole lot more if we don’t clean the thing up and get back to where we need to get…I’ve got to get rid of some of these kids.”

In Tom’s view, the pathway back to restoring “some sanity again” in the culture was to dismiss students from the school who were causing the majority of these problems.

He struggled through two important values in his situation-of-dilemma. Maintaining a stable culture was important to his commitment to uphold Christian standards at his school. However, he also believed that evangelizing students so they could understand those Christian standards was also important. In his situation-of-dilemma the value of a stable culture was of primary importance over evangelism. Tom willing accepted the loss
opportunity to evangelize students in trade for a more stable culture to get “back to where we need to get.”

**Janet—A Narrative on Vision, Relationship, Trust, and Change**

Janet was a forward-thinking person, a strategic thinker who planned her next move with the future in mind. She had a commitment to being a visionary in whatever role she found herself. As a young adult she often did not do many of things her peers were doing.

I was basically born 35 years old…I was very mature, very focused, serious, and very intentional. I wasn’t frivolous, silly, and carefree like my peers. When my friends were going to rock concerts and school dances, I was antiquing, buying, and refinishing furniture for my first apartment, planning trips to see the world…I remember playing with dolls until I was six and then just longing to be a teenager. I looked ahead and acted much older.

Being visionary, however, created distance between Janet and her peers. While they were “frivolous, silly, and carefree…going to rock concerts and school dances,” she was on her own seeing the world and “longing” to be at the next level in life.

Janet was superintendent at a large Christian school in the Midwest. She had been the superintendent for six years and was hired to rescue the school from its financial struggles. “What I'm trying to do is save the school…We were dying. This school was dying. People had no idea; we were losing seventy-five students every year. When they hired me, I was kind of the last resort.” The school board hired Janet from outside the school’s community in an attempt to save the school’s reputation and repair its financial condition. The church community, the employees of the school, and the community at large did not know how desperate the situation had become at the school.
Janet made the necessary strategic changes to rescue the school, but at a cost. “I felt like I was all alone, and I really pretty much was.” As she learned from her young adult life, there is a consequence to being forward-thinking and making difficult strategic decisions. Distance between Janet and the staff grew as she “looked ahead” with intentionality and focused on the vision she had for the school. She discussed the loneliness and emotions of the position.

I can’t tell you how many times I’ve looked around and thought I’m so lonely. I still am lonely. It finally has sunk in—it’s not going to change. I’ve thought, “Well it’s just that I’m the newbie, it’s just whatever…” I’m very lonely, and nothing was lonelier than the day that I was crying. Leadership at the top is so lonely.

Janet made changes in an attempt to save and grow the school. However, not all of the changes were well received, and some of her administrative team “betrayed” her. The feeling of betrayal and abandonment by a group of her closest co-workers, with whom she believed she had a solid relationship, caused extreme grief and anxiety in her life.

**Relationships**—“We’re a very relational school.” Despite the loneliness created by her drive to be a visionary for the school, Janet acknowledged the importance of relationships. Demonstrations of solid personal relationships started at home for Janet when she was just a child. She loved her parents and the nurturing home they provided.

I had a very classic Christian upbringing, raised in a Christian home. My father was a first generation Christian, my mother a second. By the time they had children, they were committed really to having a Christian home in the typical 1950s version of that. [They] would take the kids to church every Sunday, and then on every Wednesday
night. I grew up in the church. My best friend across the street was also in the church…I am very, very grateful for my upbringing.

As an adult, Janet realized the sacrifices her parents made to provide for the family. She learned that relationships like those found in a “Christian home” require commitment and sacrifice, sacrifices like taking kids to church and making sure your children have good friends. However, Janet discovered family relationships could also be a great source of pain, especially in life and death scenarios.

When I was twenty-eight, my sister-in-law was kidnapped and murdered. Her body wasn't found for three-and-half weeks. We were very close; we were the same age; a lovely young woman. She had been at a Bible study, came back home that day and went for a walk…and never came home. So, we looked for her body... Janet was particularly close to her brother’s wife. Even though the event was nearly thirty years ago, the emotional pain of losing her sister-in-law was still fresh.

Janet talked about the change in her relationship with God as a result of her sister-in-law’s murder. Janet described the two-year journey she took to recover, after her sister-in-law’s body was discovered.

I mean my world was turned upside down. I had to go back and say “Who’s God? Who’s this good God?” I was so angry at God! It [the murder] didn’t fit my little American version of God. Yeah, I had to really go back and re-examine my faith. “Who am I? What do I believe?”

Janet’s relationship with God was tested. She was no longer sure she wanted to be in a relationship with a God who would allow such a horrific act to occur to a young wife and mother. After a two-year period, however, she reconciled her relationship with God and
established a stronger and more “solid” relationship with Him than before. “I mean that examination just bolted me further into understanding God. It took me probably a good two years to heal from that and it has impacted my life to this day.” Despite the pain of that moment and the challenge to her beliefs, Janet walked away with a greater relationship with God.

Employee and employer relationships are also important in Janet’s professional life. Janet has worked in a number of professional, non-profit, and pastoral positions throughout her career. She sees fellow employees as co-workers working toward a common mission. In her forties, she decided to go back to college and earn a teaching degree. Her first teaching job out of college, however, was not a good experience. Teaching jobs across the state were sparse and she was obligated to become a member of the school’s union.

I got into teaching just as teaching closed, so the only job I could get was in a public school as a union teacher, which was awful. I picketed my first week at school. It was just everything I’m opposed to…To say to an employer, “I am not going to show up for work” was really a problem for me. I don’t come from a union mentality. I believe that everybody should do an honest day’s worth of work and get paid. And, that you would have a “big daddy” taking care of you by being part of a union and paying dues…you know I’m just not a union person.

Janet’s first week of teaching included picketing the employer who had just hired her. Janet had a strong commitment to the employer-employee relationship, and picketing within the first week of school was “really a problem” for her. She did not support a third-party relationship, such as a union, to solve employee and employer problems. She did not accept the notion of having a “big daddy” in the relationship to watch over employees.
Janet, now in the employer role, wanted to have positive relationships with the teachers, but found it challenging to connect with them.

You know it’s interesting. Personally, the teachers would probably tell you that they like me. I make a real point to go during lunchtime and sit down in the faculty lounge, and go to classrooms occasionally. I’d say corporately they have not embraced me.

I’ve been the bad person.

From her perspective, Janet has made difficult but positive changes at her school but is often considered “the bad person” by employees in the school. Consequently, feelings of loneliness and distance have crept into her relationships with faculty and staff.

Janet also worked hard at maintaining positive relationships with the school board. However, while the relationships with board members began well at the beginning of her tenure as superintendent, it has changed over the last six years. “The board had always been with me, always my cheerleader. But that board has changed over several times. And now, I have a board that is not too thrilled about me…” She knows that having a good working relationship with the school board is important to make the necessary changes for the school to survive.

She expressed the importance of maintaining good relationships with the school’s community. She couples good community relationships with the school’s long-term sustainability.

I began to realize how important the community was; I had to get them on board. We had to be united. I do think that a school like this cannot survive without a united community. Otherwise, they’re just working against you and against one another.

What we had to do as a private school was move everybody forward. So, I don’t do
anything if it’s not relational. If it’s not gonna bring the community along…We’ve
done a lot of things to keep the community informed so that they feel like they’re part
of the school.

In Janet’s view, a “united community” will help the school move forward and absorb the
shock of the changes she was beginning to make.

She described one of the changes made to keep the relationship with the school’s
parents positive and engaging.

I said, “We’re gonna do family service hours.” Of course [I got] push-back, push-
back, push-back. Well, what happened within a few months was everybody bought
into it and you could feel the love in the building…Our people, when they come
together, they fall in love with one another. It has been a love fest ever since. For us,
racially, it has really helped too, because it’s no longer a “them” or “us,” it’s an “us.”

By requiring each family to perform a minimum number of service hours at the school,
families began working together, and in the process built fruitful relationships. She added,
“In addition to prayer, the number one thing we did to improve community [relationships]
was require family service hours…”

Janet also focused on maintaining good relationships with the student body. “We deal
with problems every day. Discipline, we do it very relationally so one discipline problem can
take ten hours…We’re a very relational school, we will never pull back.” In Janet’s view,
disciplinary issues required time to solve if maintaining good relationships with students was
important.

However, not every relationship Janet had at the school was positive. She recounted
an end-of-year lunch meeting with the faculty and staff at which she announced a significant
change. The purpose of the change was to reduce personnel expenses without having to lay off faculty or staff. She recalled a meeting a week after the lunch where an administrator on her team admitted that some of the teachers were not happy with the announcement.

A week later, we had an admin meeting and there were eleven administrators there. I said, “Oh, what a great luncheon!” [An administrator said,] “Well actually my teachers are really upset with you.” I said, “What do you mean they’re upset with me?” “Well, you really offended them because they felt like they were being scolded.” It turns out they all had a big meeting about it. I said, “Why didn’t anybody come to me? Why a week later?...I offended one of your teachers, why didn’t one of them come to me? Why didn’t you come to me? You wait until I’m in a big planning meeting for next year and you tell me that?”... I said, “First of all, I’m personally offended. This is gross spiritual immaturity.” And I said, “Quite frankly, my feelings are hurt.”

The situation revealed a crack in the relationship with her teachers and her administrative team, relationships she believed to be solid. She discovered that her teachers and some of the principals were not supportive of the changes she announced at the lunch meeting. The lack of timely communication from her principals made the situation even more frustrating for Janet.

I was just devastated. I just cried and I could not stop crying. We called a halt to the meeting so I could pull myself together, and then they just went on with their business like my feelings weren’t even hurt.

Janet made a change in the structural elements of the budget to reduce labor costs while avoiding teacher and staff layoffs. However, the change was not well received by the
teachers, and the principals did not publically support her. The revelation that Janet’s relationship with her administrative team was not as solid as she believed devastated her.

Trust—“No, it’s gotta be trust.” Closely related to Janet’s devastation was the realization that her administrative team, primarily the principals, did not trust her. She talked more about the broken relationship with her administrators after the end-of-year lunch meeting. “I’m really offended. As I was processing it…that was so hurtful.” She reflected on minor conversations and events with teachers and administrators. These small conversations were not noteworthy at the time they occurred, but when taken together in the greater context of reflection they revealed a disturbing trait in the organization.

It was like this light bulb moment. And then, I thought about all these conversations in the past. I think what probably happened was…little things would happen and I would dismiss [them]. I remember one time someone gave us instructions to grab the person next to you and pray, so I went to pray with this teacher and she was like, “Oh no!” and she ran away and I’m thinking, “What was that?!” But then, I started going back and thinking, “Oh my gosh, they don’t trust me, they’re not on board!”

Janet realized that some employees in the organization did not trust her as a leader and were therefore not loyal to her. Her own employees were uncomfortable talking with her about problems and even doing simple things that most people do in Christian schools: praying together. The bond of unity was broken between Janet and some of her administrators and teachers.

Janet challenged her principals on the distrusting environment at the school. She contended that the faculty and staff’s lack of trust in her was a result of the principals’ lack of trust in her.
If people are thinking that’s who I am, that’s because that’s what you’re communicating about me. I thought we were [trusting each other]...and I’m finding out somehow that’s not filtering down into your faculty meetings. “What are you communicating? I feel really betrayed by all of you.”

In a moment of clarity, Janet knew that some of the other educational leaders in the organization simply did not trust her judgment.

Janet confirmed the importance she placed on trust. “I’d say trust, definitely” is more important than loyalty. She added, “It’s gotta be trust.” The theme of trust resonated with Janet as she reflected back on her own dissertation work while pursuing a doctorate.

In my dissertation, I asked, “Give me a list of leadership skills that you would consider important for Christian administrators.” Do you know that across the board, all the people that I interviewed, “trust” came up as number one?

According to Janet, the principal’s lack of trust in her led some members of her team to betray her in front of the teachers and other staff members. This lack of trust led to problems as Janet sought to implement the changes she saw as necessary to rescue the school.

Dan, a participant whose story has already been told, also confirmed the importance of building trust to maintain relationships in the school. “The only way to trust is through relationship. If I start with relationships, then academics and everything else follows.” Like Dan, Janet felt that trusting relationships were necessary before for significant changes could occur in the school.

**Change**—“I came in and changed everything.” Janet shared some of the school’s history and explained what conditions were like at the school when she took over the top leadership position six years earlier.
In the early days, it was a place of educational excellence. But, it had gotten sloppy and we were running behind public schools academically. Spiritually, it was [only] a Bible class curriculum…

The school had become sloppy in its academics and in the way it taught spiritual development to the students. The school’s spiritual training had been reduced to having just a Bible class with little integration of spiritual concepts into other courses. “We realized that we were so off spiritually. We had to improve the spiritual development of the school.”

Janet described the finances and admission procedures at the school. The financial procedures were not sufficient and the admission files with potential students would stack up with little attention. “Financial practices were lagging. There was no admissions department; there were just the secretaries in the school and when they could get to the files they would get to them.” The school lacked a focus on implementing solid financial practices, resulting in a drain on the endowments. The school had no intentional method for managing and tracking admissions requests from prospective families. Following up with prospective parents was not a primary activity.

Unfortunately, the lack of focus and intentionality was not limited to just the financial and business office.

The principal who was in charge of athletics could [not] have cared less about athletics. It had no priority; it didn't mean anything to him. It was just a job, just something he had to check off…that was sloppy. Everything here was sloppy. There hadn’t been performance reviews done in ten years. Can you imagine in an educational environment, no observations, no write-ups!
Janet was amazed upon her arrival that the basic components of education were not managed. There was no focus on academics, spiritual development, business office practices, athletics, or teacher evaluations. These were the very educational processes important to Paul, another study participant whose story was told earlier. Like Janet, Paul also made changes to the school because of “sloppy” practices. According to Janet, the school was “sloppy” in every regard.

The mismanagement created a negative, downward spiral for the school. “[People] don’t know how close we came to closing or imploding.” Janet’s first task as a new superintendent was “to get into a different mindset.” She felt the pathway out of the “sloppy” condition of the school was to begin thinking differently. “You know I came in and changed everything.” She made changes that added value to the school in the eyes of the school’s community.

This was a philosophical shift for us, which is really important. How do I increase the value of what we’re doing? What are we doing that we think is extraordinary? That we think… separates us from the competition? So, I started looking at how are we different from every other Christian school out there. And then, how do we leverage that? How do we make it [work for us]? … How do we make Christian education so amazing that the family says, “I’ll give up vacations, a second home, food, clothing…this is priceless.” So, how do we enhance the experience?

Janet’s goal as a new superintendent was to make changes that would add value to current and prospective families to entice them toward giving up discretionary and core lifestyle items such as “vacations…clothing.” Her vision was for families to view the school as “priceless.”
One of Janet’s strategies to add value was pulled from the business industry. “Blue Ocean Strategy” (Kim & Mauborgne, 2005) outlined a strategic approach to create the type of value that Janet was looking for. Kim and Mauborgne (2005) described entrepreneurs who created their own “blue ocean” and compared the strategy to other business strategies.

The creators of “blue oceans,” surprisingly, didn’t use the competition as their benchmark. Instead, they followed a different strategic logic that we call *value innovation*. Value innovation is the cornerstone of blue ocean strategy. We call it value innovation because instead of focusing on beating the competition, you focus on making the competition irrelevant by creating a leap in value for buyers and your company, thereby opening up new and uncontested market space. (p. 12)

Janet is attracted to the model offered by “Blue Ocean Strategy” because it focuses on “leaps” in value, not small steps, as perceived by her “buyers.” Janet is trying to save the school and cannot afford the time required to make small incremental steps in perceived value. The value “leap” that Janet is looking for, however, required significant change in the organization.

In dealing with the change and making the “leap in value for buyers,” Janet decided to draw on her academic coursework in her doctorate program. Her hope was to get teachers and principals excited about the upcoming changes.

In one of my classes, we studied a change theory that. You share the truth with people. You bring them in and you move forward collectively. Well I shared the truth with them and told them we were “up a creek” financially and that we were cutting off Kleenex budgets and coffee budgets. Well, they couldn’t get beyond that. I mean, they were shocked; there was a huge disconnect. Insecurity ran rampant. I mean it
totally backfired on me because…they really looked to the superintendent to be “mommy” or “daddy” who will fix it because those are “mommy and daddy’s” problems.

Janet employed a change theory application that simply did not work in her organization. The approach caused more upheaval and chaos. In Janet’s view, the employees of the organization were not ready face the challenge of the hard work required to turn the school around. She felt that the organization looked to her position as the parent of the school to resolve problems without involving the children.

Janet, however, continued making difficult changes in the organization. For the first time in the school’s history, faculty and staff were released in order to control the school’s finances.

They had never let staff go, even though they were declining in numbers. We were overstaffed. I mean, people were having eleven kids in their classroom. We did that in the second year. We let a ton of people go to right-size the staff…We cut all sorts of services.

Janet did not give up on implementing the many difficult changes required to keep the school moving forward. She was not afraid to be forward-thinking while everyone else pretended that the school’s problems did not exist.

From the perspective of finances and credibility, the impact of those changes was positive for the school. “We’re in a healthy place now. We’ve got enough traction. Our reputation is stellar in this community. For the first time in years people will value what we’re offering…We’re seeing a huge transformation spiritually.” Janet was beginning to see the fruits of the difficult changes she has overseen. The school had continually made payroll,
re-established its endowment, had become more diverse culturally, and implemented a one-to-one technology program recognized for its excellence among schools in the district, both public and private.

However, creating that “leap in value” required Janet to spend tremendous emotional capital. The changes that increased the value of the organization to parents also created great tension between Janet and the rest of the organization.

I’ve poured out my heart and soul. I’m fighting the world. I’m fighting the church. I’m fighting culture…. [The] general attitude by others was, “We’re fine.” “What do you mean?! We’re not fine!” …Really, we had to do a whole introspection and the whole evaluation about why we were failing.

Janet spent a great deal of emotional energy convincing people that the school was close to “imploding” and that the state of the school was anything but “fine.” She struggled to get others in the school to participate in the “introspection” necessary for understanding why the school was failing.

The changes Janet implemented took a toll on her own reputation and credibility. The faculty and staff had mixed feelings on her approach to change.

I have a reputation for being a steamroller which I don’t think is accurate. I think what I am is aggressive…I’m not pushing because it’s something I want. I think initially people thought, “Wow, she’s just pushing” and now they go, “Wow, look she’s pushed the school forward.”

People have generally not liked the changes Janet made. However, many have come to accept the fact that the school was in trouble and that she made essential changes, difficult as they were.
The dilemma—“The whole building mutinied.” As an example of the difficult changes she implemented, Janet offered a story that became one of her defining moments as the educational leader of the school. She had arranged for an overnight retreat at a conference center two hours away from the school.

This probably was four years ago and I felt very strongly that this staff, a veteran staff and aging staff, needed to go away for a night. I just felt that…we needed some unity. We needed a spiritual retreat. We needed a different start to the school year because we were in a rut. Everything we did here was the same old, same old.

Janet planned to take her entire faculty to a one-day offsite overnight retreat. The intent of the retreat was to create unity among the faculty and to prepare them for needed changes. Janet sent an email communication at the end of the school year letting the faculty know of her plans for an off-site retreat at the beginning of the new school year. Her communication was met with a flood of complaints.

So, at the end of the school year I sent out a little memo and said, “Hey, so excited we’ve been given a donation and we’re going to launch the next year off with an overnight.” I was thinking it was a gift to them. I mean, this is a staff that really enjoys one another. But, as I came to find out, only between 8 [am] and 3 [pm]. So, I was inundated.

Janet was near the end of her first year as superintendent when she arranged for the off-site retreat. She believed the staff to be more relationally connected than they really were. She found out that they were really only interested in socializing with each other during the school day. The “gift” was actually perceived by the teachers as a burden. The “little memo” Janet sent out, generated a flurry of responses from the faculty and principals.
Janet was surprised at the negative response. However, she remained focused and intentional regarding her plan. The decision isolated her from some of her employees.

I felt like I was all alone. That was one of the times I just completely remember thinking, “Wow, what am I going to do?” I felt like I was all alone. I didn’t want to cave-in because, I knew where we needed to be. And the other thing was they just needed to get used to changing. They had to know, “Hang on! I got to get you out of your comfort zone because we’re dying.” It’s almost like the frog in the water…they didn't realize the temperature was [boiling]…

Janet had a vision of where the school needed to be and wanted to use the time away to convince the faculty and administrators that change was necessary to turn the school around. Janet’s reference to the “frog in the water” is a common metaphor about a frog in boiling water. The metaphor explains that while frogs will never jump into boiling water, they will jump into normal temperature water and then stay there even as the water begins to slowly heat and boil. Janet used the metaphor to help explain that her faculty and administrators had become used to the troubles and sloppiness of the school and were not willing to address the causes even while the school was “dying” around them.

Unfortunately, the faculty and principals felt that the “temperature” of the water was just fine and did not share Janet’s sense of urgency. They were not compelled to move beyond their comfort zone to address the school’s problems. “I was shocked to find out that the whole building mutinied.” She discovered that the principals knew that the teachers were less than excited about the retreat but they neglected to tell her. “They knew what I had planned and then they had heard that their staff was not happy. But at that point nobody came and gave me a heads-up.” Janet experienced a mutiny by many of the teachers and principals.
“The principals kind of left me out there hanging.” Janet realized early on that her principals were not supportive of the changes she was attempting to make.

In her previous years of ministry work in churches and non-profits, Janet had not experienced this level of resistance to change.

I was shell-shocked. It was the end of a very bad year, my first year here. I was flabbergasted because I came from a ministry background and I had no idea that the teachers here had a union mentality. I did not understand that.

Janet was “shocked” by the lack of support for an event that she thought was good and beneficial for the staff. The union mentality that Janet observed displayed itself in the faculty.

All the elementary teachers banded together and they wanted to have a meeting.

There was a rebel in the high school who said, “I’m going to get a whole group of people together.” Well, at the end of the day six people showed up for his meeting. I had to go deal with all these people.

Janet faced giving into the teachers’ complaints and cancelling the overnight retreat, or pressing on. Cancelling the retreat would have removed the setting that Janet believed she needed to prepare the faculty for some difficult changes. However, by pressing on with the retreat, Janet risked further alienating herself from the faculty and administration.

The resolution—“It was spectacular.” Janet decided to press the idea of an overnight retreat to help unify the staff and get them on-track for upcoming changes. She recounted the many reasons offered by the faculty about why they could not go.

I took each one of their issues and I dealt with them. I got the church to allow them to keep their bulletin boards up at the end of the school year so they didn't have to spend more time at getting their bulletin boards ready. I gave them gas cards if they would
drive with four people in a car because I knew that would create community, so I paid for their gas. I did exempt a few for extreme personal issues…

Janet found ways to eliminate the obstacles that the faculty tendered as reasons they could not be gone for an overnight retreat. Eliminating the obstacles and convincing her faculty of the retreat’s benefits was difficult personally.

Despite the rough beginning, the event was a success and people recognized the benefits. “It was spectacular. I had staff coming up and apologizing at the end. It was exhausting and it was crazy.” While the effort to get people to the event was monumental, the result in Janet’s view was worth the effort.

The analysis—“I was kind of the last resort.” Janet’s primary values of relationship, trust, and change interact with each other throughout her stories. The value of relationship appeared to be the starting point to establishing trust with others, just as it was with Dan.

Janet experienced the dynamic between trust and relationship both positively and negatively. When discussing the trust and relationship she had with her Bible teacher, also the chaplain, Janet experienced the positive side of this dynamic. “We’re a very relational school; we will never pull back.” She discussed the relationship the students have with their new chaplain, someone she hired. “He was a national youth speaker. He went all over. The kids go nuts [over him]…our kids love him. He’s transformed the spiritual life around here.” Janet’s relationship with this chaplain was positive because he had “transformed the spiritual life” of the school, something Janet saw as a needing improvement. Based on this relationship, Janet and her administrative team made a decision to trust the chaplain’s
discretion in dealing with significant discipline issues. They implemented a policy change because of their trust in him.

Our Chaplin unearths problems…even so much so that this year we changed our policy. We’ve always had a [policy that]…if you violate school rules and, in certain areas, administration is informed of it, you’re out. What we have now said is, “This isn’t helping us serve our community.” Now we have a policy that as a student…go to the chaplain and the school counselor. They will notify your parent and…work together on a student improvement plan. There’s accountability…and that’s totally acceptable to us.

The positive relationship Janet had with the chaplain was demonstrated by her trust in the chaplain to deal with student discipline issues without administrative oversight.

Unfortunately, Janet also experienced the relationship and trust dynamic negatively. That is, if a relationship does not exist then neither does trust. She shared the story about wanting to pray with a fellow teacher during a meeting. “I went to pray with this teacher and she was like, ‘Oh no!’ and she ran away.” In reflection Janet offered, “…they don’t trust me.” Her relationship with some of the faculty was not strong enough to establish the trust necessary to even pray with a faculty member.

In addition to the dynamic between relationship and trust, Janet also experienced a dynamic between relationship and change. As before, Janet experienced this dynamic both positively and negatively. The story of her sister-in-law being kidnapped and murdered provided a positive example of the relationship and trust connection. With the death of her sister-in-law, her brother was a widow and the children were motherless. Janet indicated she had a “very close” relationship with her sister-in-law and was concerned about her nieces.
It’s impacted my life to this day. They had a three-year-old and a five-year-old. When the three-year-old became sixteen, [she] was in jail and on the wrong track, she came to live with us. I whipped her into shape…Now, she is married to a pastor and thriving.

Janet maintained a solid relationship with her niece after her sister-in-law was killed. Their relationship was good enough to allow Janet to make significant and difficult changes in her niece’s behavior. Moreover, Janet and her brother had a good enough relationship to allow the teenage niece to come and live with Janet and her family. The result of those positive relationships resulted in a changed life.

However, Janet also made changes without having good relationships in place. She previously mentioned borrowing a change theory concept from one of her doctorate coursework. She admitted that this approach “totally backfired” because her relationship with the school’s faculty was not healthy. The faculty, though they did not have a good relationship with Janet, expected her to fix their problems. “They really looked to the superintendent to be ‘mommy’ or ‘daddy’ who will fix it, because those are ‘mommy’ and daddy’s’ problems.”

From Janet’s perspective, the school’s employees expected the superintendent to be the parent of the school and take care of problems without worrying or involving everyone else.

This notion of Janet being the parent of the school is further revealed in the words of one of the school’s principals. The principal said, “Well, you really offended them because they felt like they were being scolded.” According to this principal, teachers felt like they were being reprimanded, as children would be if they did not cooperate. The relationship between Janet and the employees was not one of a professional nature, but that of a parental
relationship. Consequently, as Janet tried to make changes, employees responded as children might when they do not agree with the parent’s direction.

Throughout Janet’s stories, there was constant struggle between the values of relationship, trust, and change. For example, she did not take the opportunity to establish relationships with employees before trying to establish trust. She did not always take the time to build relationships before making changes.

Janet often reordered the use of one value over the others in the moment. Janet decided which value was most important given the situation in which she found herself. For example, she often decided to make necessary changes to keep the school from “closing or imploding” before relationships with others were established. “We were dying. This school was dying. People had no idea…When they hired me I was kind of the last resort.” Based on the stories Janet shared, she had a vision to keep the school open even in the face of uncertain relationships and the lack of trust between her and the employees.

As when she was a young adult “born 35 years old,” she “looked ahead” and was not afraid of being isolated from her co-workers, though this was a lonely position for her. She was not afraid of the isolation because she was acting out of intentionality to keep the school open. In her situation-of-dilemma, she placed a higher premium on making changes to achieve the vision of the school surviving over improving her relationships with others.

Postscript—“I’m fighting the culture.” This story does not have a happy conclusion for Janet. Approximately, two weeks after the final interview with Janet, her board chair walked into her office and released her, effective immediately. The explanation was brief but was succinctly stated as, “The teachers are afraid of you.” Janet was, understandably, devastated. In her words from the interview, “I’ve poured out my heart and
soul. I’m fighting the world. I’m fighting the church. I’m fighting culture.” Unfortunately, her sacrifices of heart and soul were not enough to keep her board from releasing her.

**Allison—Christian Schools, Authority, and Relationships**

Allison was the superintendent of a suburban Christian school in the Midwest. She had been at the school nearly her entire career, first as a teacher, then as a principal, and now as the superintendent. The role and responsibility of Christian educators was clear in Allison’s description of her personal commitment.

I think our primary role and responsibility is to teach kids how to be as much like God as possible, and education is a…great vehicle to do that. It encompasses so many aspects. We hold high standards because God has high standards. We teach them to work hard. We prepare them academically to go out and serve…teaching them to be like God.

Allison believed that holding students to “high standards” was foundational because “God [had] high standards.” She viewed Christian education as a “great vehicle” by which to teach students these standards. As superintendent, her “responsibility” was to make sure that the school was positioned to teach students God’s standards.

Allison had an expansive view of her responsibilities as superintendent. She took seriously the responsibility to keep the school operating and supporting the teachers.

We’re taking care of details that make it possible for them to do their job. I’ve got a whole faculty and staff out there who need to make sure that they know that I care about them, [along with] parents and students. I can get really engrossed in what I’m doing.
Allison expressed the importance of focusing on certain “details” that allows others in the organization to do their jobs well. She expressed that her responsibilities include caring for her employees, parents, and students. She admitted that the balance of managing details and balancing the “care” of others was difficult at times.

Allison also recognized that she does not have free reign to execute her duties without oversight. She is bound by the policies and practices implemented by the board. In one story, she recalled an incident with the former superintendent while she was still the school’s principal. The superintendent wanted to violate a board-directed policy on student admissions and withhold this violation from the board. Allison did not agree with the superintendent’s suggestion.

Because that was the policy, and I know the school board…where they were on things. And I knew them well enough to know they expected us to hold the policy. It doesn’t mean they wouldn’t make an exception, but they wanted us to go to them and ask if it was “okay” to make an exception. There were times when that was done, and they either approved it or didn’t approve it. I think at some point in the conversation, I asked, “Are you going to take this to the school board?” and he wasn’t planning on it. To me, that felt like we were going behind their back, and they are the policy-making board. Our job is to enforce policy.

Allison knew that the board expected the school’s administration to implement policies as they are written. She was not comfortable “going behind” the backs of the school board. She believed that the duty of the administration was to “enforce policy,” not make it.

At the foundation of her philosophy, Allison took seriously the charge of implementing her responsibilities, which included a focus on “high standards,” “taking care
of the details,” and caring for others. However, those responsibilities were limited by board policies that were difficult to enforce at times.

**Relationships—“I am very close to the teachers.”** In the daily routine of living out her commitment to Christian education, Allison described the tension between balancing operational details while maintaining caring relationships with others. “I can get really engrossed in what I’m doing.” During her first years as principal, she took a personality assessment that confirmed this struggle and helped identify its root.

I’m very much a controller. And, it’s interesting how God works on you. I’d always been social, but the controller piece of me was often in conflict with that. I had to learn how to balance both of them. I had to learn to balance the controller part because I can be black and white, and yet, I still consider myself very flexible.

The personality assessment helped Allison understand the “conflict” she felt when attempting to “balance” operational details and her relationships with others in the school community. Allison also admitted to being “black and white” on issues, meaning that she holds strong views during decision-making conversations. However, according to Allison, God used situations at the school to help her maintain her relationships while remaining committed to fulfilling her responsibilities.

Allison shared one story where she learned how to become less “black and white.” Allison and her husband had been married 38 years when tragedy struck.

He had been sick for about a year and a half. His aorta had dissected and he had three major surgeries…they couldn’t control his blood pressure. They could never figure out what the problem was and no medicine was controlling it. So they had to go in and…put an artificial [aorta] in. He just didn't make it through surgery.
Allison’s husband passed away during the surgery to repair his aorta. She remembered questioning God’s intentions a few days after his funeral. “God, you can't be doing this….God, what are you doing?” Allison said that she “got a little angry at God, and I think I was scared.” Her confusion over the change in her life was deep and painful. She was honest and transparent through tears and choked words as she remembered the care of the school community.

I have come to realize how important people are. And, I have to tell you, it was one of the phenomenal aspects of when he was sick. The care of the people here floored me. It absolutely floored me. From parents, to students…I can’t tell you the things that students did. It was unbelievable. At the funeral, I will never forget...I was getting ready to go into the church, and I look up, and the entire senior class was lined up to come by and hug me. It just overwhelmed me. And then, on their own, they initiated a collection to help pay medical bills. I could not believe the amount they came up with. It wasn’t the amount, it was what that they cared. Yes, it was just unbelievable.

I mean people here were just unbelievable.

Relationships with others took on new importance in Allison’s life after her husband’s death. The students in the senior class provided her an example of what it means to care for others. Through tragedy, confusion, anger, and emotional pain Allison learned more about caring for others by the care others gave to her. “I have come to realize how important people are.”

Even before becoming superintendent, Allison cared deeply for the teachers at the school. However, her husband’s death and the care from others during her mourning reinforced her commitment to teachers in particular. “I am very close to the teachers and I think there’s a real high trust level there.”
Shortly after her husband’s death, Allison became the interim superintendent after the previous superintendent’s contract was not renewed by the board. She immediately began to address problems of trust and care left by the previous administrator. The board asked her to focus on taking care of the hurt relationships amongst the faculty.

They didn’t want to bring a new administrator in until some healing had occurred. I had enough longevity. I knew what the problems were, and I knew the people. So, my first year as interim our theme with…our teachers and staff focused on being a body, how we function, how we support each other, and how we care for each other.

According to Allison, the previous superintendent had treated the faculty and staff with very little care or support. Consequently, he was removed and Allison was left to fix the problems, especially the lack of unity and support throughout the school community. Allison took the responsibility of caring for the teachers and staff seriously, even though her husband had just passed away. It was an emotional time for her. “I cried, and then my love for these teachers became, ‘I need to help them.’ I did agree that they were hurting a lot, and there was a lot of anger and I wanted to help.” Allison was compelled to “help” the teachers overcome the bitterness that had taken root in the school community.

In a previous participant’s narrative, Dan was also concerned with the root of bitterness that might take hold in a school. His situation of bitterness also involved a teacher. However, unlike Allison, Dan was the superintendent against whom the teacher directed her bitterness. Dan had re-assigned the teacher to a kindergarten class because of performance issues as the fifth-grade teacher. The teacher was hurt, became angry, and left the school with very bitter feelings toward Dan. This action impacted all of the faculty and staff. Dan responded by apologizing to the employees for not dedicating enough time to care for them.
Unlike Dan, Allison quickly understood that if her faculty did not feel cared for and loved, then the school’s community would deteriorate and collapse. “Without good teachers, without the support of teachers, and without them knowing that you care about them, what have we got? You know they’re the backbone; they’re the ones in the trenches everyday with parents and students.” Allison recognized that the teachers were the first to address problems for parents and students. She viewed her support of the teachers as essential to the school’s success because they are “the backbone” of the school.

Allison viewed the people in her organization as people who needed care both “professionally” and “personally.” She hoped to translate her care for teachers and staff into action.

I value the people who work under me…I love them. I feel like my responsibility is to do everything I can to make their job as easy as possible so that they can impact the students; taking care of all of those other things…whether I help them professionally, or care about them personally. My job is to take care of them so that they can do their job effectively. Well, and just because they’re people too—not just so they do their job well.

Allison “values” the people in her organization and loves them. Her “responsibility” is to make their jobs easier so that they can “prepare [students] to go out and serve…[and teach] them to be like God.” Additionally, Allison feels that teachers and staff should be cared for, and not just so they can perform their jobs more effectively.

Authority—“I would never go the wrong way on the circle!” Alongside Allison’s commitment to establishing caring relationships with the school’s teachers and staff, was her
commitment to authority. Her commitment to authority included loyalty to the chain of command and to the school board’s policies.

As principal, Allison noticed a growing trend of complaints about the superintendent, the one she eventually replaced. She noticed a number of people questioning his leadership, but she defended him because he was the superintendent. “Teachers were coming to me more and more with frustrations and concerns with the leadership, and I was trying to be supportive of him.” In one story, the church’s pastor asked Allison if she would mentor the superintendent, her immediate supervisor at the time. Allison could not fulfill that request. “I just could not do that…I’m under his authority.” Allison remained committed to supporting the superintendent even though people below her and above her questioned his ability to lead. She recognized the authority of the superintendent even though she did not agree with him on many occasions.

Allison also displayed a high level of commitment to the school board and its policies. She did this even in opposition to the superintendent who wanted to undermine the board’s authority. Allison was asked by the superintendent to interview a family and grant them admission to the school, even though the family did not meet the requirements established by the board’s policies.

[He] knew I was going to be interviewing a family that did not meet our mission’s criteria, but they had a lot of money. He wanted me to accept them. I said, “I cannot, this is policy. This is a policy established by the board, and this has been policy since the inception of the school. Do not ask me to go against that because I can’t…. and I believe God honors when we do what is right and in my opinion that’s wrong.” So he
got angry at me. I said, “Well, you better do the interview because if you’re asking me to do it I am going to follow policy.”

Allison chose to follow the school board’s policy over the superintendent’s directive because, in her view, the school board’s authority superseded the superintendent’s authority. Enforcing the policies of the school board was foundational to her personal commitment of Christian education.

For Allison, obeying authority reaches beyond the organizational context. In one example, her unwillingness to violate the simple rules of the traffic circle in the school’s parking lot brought light-humored criticism from one of the teachers.

One of my teachers has laughed with me, because of our circle out there. There are signs about which way you’re to go. Well, I’ve seen a couple teachers, early in the morning before anyone’s here, go in the wrong way. I said, “Why do you do that?” and they said, “Why does it matter?” …I said, “I would never go the wrong way on the circle…I can’t do that!”

The dilemma—“I still felt I answered to him but that felt awkward.” Allison shared a story that put her value relationships with teachers in conflict with her value of obeying authority. Allison believed that the superintendent that preceded her was not treating the teachers fairly. She also believed that he did not appreciate their hard work. When he decided to reduce salaries and benefits for teachers, Allison, then the school’s principal, cautiously supported the decision. The economic recession seemed to demand extreme measures.
The way he treated the teachers… He cut salaries and benefits pretty significantly. I supported that to a point because I knew we were going through a rough time and we needed this ministry to survive, and so we all did our part.

Allison expressed support for the move to cut salaries and benefits for teachers because of the economic crisis that began in 2008. She supported the superintendent’s authority to make those decisions. However, she was concerned by “the way he treated” people.

Allison recalled other decisions by the superintendent that further supported her belief that he did not appreciate the sacrifices that others were making to keep the school intact. “During that time… I knew he was getting the highest salary of any administrator. He took a pretty significant raise and then implemented some benefit changes that only helped him.”

Allison was disappointed in the superintendent’s decisions to make changes that only benefited him. Making matters worse, the superintendent had previously negotiated a relatively high salary for himself compared to previous superintendents. This seemed unfair to Allison as she now watched the superintendent lower everyone else’s salaries.

As a result, of growing concerns about the superintendent from parents and teachers, the school board eventually decided to release him. The board announcement of his release included the announcement that Allison would be the interim superintendent and that the two superintendents would be working together during the last few months of the school year to transition the position. Consequently, Allison as interim was working alongside the outgoing superintendent for a few months.

As interim superintendent, one of Allison’s personal goals was to restore teacher and staff salaries before the beginning of the next school year. She finally decided to get counsel from the senior pastor of the church that operated the school about how to address the issue.
I did say something to the pastor… I didn’t have a close working relationship with the board at that time and I felt sort of stuck. I still worked for [the superintendent] regardless whether he was a “lame duck.” I still felt I answered to him but that felt awkward. But I did talk with the pastor about it.

Allison was “stuck” in a difficult situation because she needed to discuss the teacher and staff salaries with someone. Any discussion with the outgoing superintendent would have been “awkward,” and she was still developing her relationship with the school board. Finally, in desperation for some counsel, she turned to the church’s senior pastor.

Allison was committed to restoring the salaries of the teachers and staff, but she knew that the outgoing superintendent would not agree with this decision. “You take care of your people. We all know our teachers are willing to pull their belts in tight when they need to, but you don’t take advantage of that either.” Allison was torn between remaining committed to the “lame duck” superintendent who held final authority within the school and honoring her personal commitment to caring for the teachers and staff. She would have to go around the outgoing superintendent to address the issue with the school board if the salaries were to be restored before the start of the next school year.

**The resolution—“I accomplished what I wanted, but…”** The counsel from the senior pastor of the church was “to [immediately] be the active leader” on the issue of restoring teacher and staff salaries. Allison sat on a board subcommittee that established compensation for school employees. Eventually, when she became superintendent she would be the leader of this committee, but the senior pastor advised Allison to “be the active leader” immediately. Since the outgoing superintendent was still formally leading the school he was
also present at the next subcommittee meeting, which Allison chaired. The meeting was tense.

I was sort of in charge, and while the other superintendent was [present], they said to me, “You are the one we want to hear from.” So, I took to them a list of what every teacher was making, and they had never seen it before… [He] didn’t know I was going to show it.

Allison had decided that since this was the first meeting of the subcommittee that she was leading, she would present her case for restoring the reduced salaries. She presented “a list” of teacher salaries. She later regretted catching the outgoing superintendent “off guard that way” but was shocked to find out that the subcommittee was not aware of what each teacher made.

I looked at them and said, “You have no idea what teachers make!”…it made me angry. It made me angry at them for not finding it out. I said, “You’re making decisions on salaries not having a clue what they’re actually making!”

Allison was “angry” because the subcommittee had never challenged the outgoing superintendent’s decisions regarding teacher salary reductions. She was also “angry” with the superintendent for not informing the subcommittee of the specific reductions. She discussed the issue at length with the sub-committee.

I said, “Why didn’t you ever ask for [the list of salaries]… Let’s not put all of the blame in one place because it’s your responsibility. If you’re making decisions and you’re working on a budget you have to have that information.” They said, “You’re right, we should have.” They owned up to it. They said, “We just trusted the
leadership.” I said, “I’m not saying you don’t trust people, but you make decisions based on information…”

Allison suggested that the subcommittee and superintendent did not care enough about the teachers to make informed decisions about salary reductions. By this time in the meeting, the board realized that they should not have trusted the outgoing superintendent. The meeting grew increasingly tense as the sub-committee studied the list.

The Finance Sub-committee got angry. They were angry that they had no idea that’s what teachers were making. In fact, the school board chair looked at it, and named one of the teachers who had been here for 20 years. He said, “That’s what he’s making, and that’s what we were making decisions on?!” He took it wadded it up and threw it at [the superintendent].

The board chair realized that they were culpable in undercompensating the teachers by not making decisions based on information. This realization resulted in an emotional outburst by the board chair who threw the wadded up list at the outgoing superintendent. The meeting ended with no immediate resolution.

However, over the next few months, after the outgoing superintendent left, the board informed Allison that increases for teachers were forthcoming. “The very next year, they said, ‘We have got to give them a raise.’ So, I accomplished what I wanted, but I sure didn’t do it well… I don’t look back with pride that I handled that so well.” In the end, Allison “accomplished” her goal of getting salary increases for her teachers because she cared for them. On the other hand, she felt guilty that she had embarrassed her predecessor and the board subcommittee to achieve her objective.
Analysis—“I just didn’t think it through.” The subcommittee meeting brought to a climax the conflict of values that Allison dealt with. She fought for the teachers she loved and cared for but she had to momentarily reduce her value for respecting authority in order to accomplish her objective.

I just didn’t think it through. I wasn’t really trying to hurt [the superintendent] in that case. What I was trying to do was make them realize, “You keep making decisions, and you’re making decisions without enough knowledge to make good decisions.”

Upon reflection, Allison conceded that she “didn’t think…through” the consequences of bringing the salary list to the subcommittee meeting with the outgoing superintendent still on the job. She revealed that she “wasn’t really trying to hurt” the superintendent and “was shocked” when the board chair threw the wadded up piece up paper. She wanted the subcommittee to make decisions based on data that were verifiable. Her purpose was to get salaries restored for the teachers. Her decision to bring the list to the meeting was driven by the higher value of maintaining caring relationships with her teachers. There was little thought given to that decision’s impact on her value of respecting authority.

Allison also discussed the context of her decisions during that time period in her life. Allison was appointed the interim superintendent just five days after her husband’s funeral. The subcommittee meeting and other critical decisions happened a few weeks after her appointment.

I look back and think I wasn’t making great decisions. I was physically and mentally exhausted. I had cared for him [her husband] for 14 months. I did not realize how tired I was. That definitely impacts your decision-making…If it were a different time, different situation…probably would have been different.
Still in mourning over her husband’s death, Allison was not “making great decisions.” She was “exhausted” but continued making big decisions for the school. She recalled another major school decision she was working through at the time and the impact her husband’s death had on that decision, and said that it “definitely impacts your decision-making.” In her opinion, she “probably would have” made different decisions if she had not been going through such a difficult time in her personal life. Allison felt that she could have made a different decision about restoring the teachers’ salaries that would not have negatively changed her relationship with the superintendent.

Allison was extremely dedicated to her teachers. She knew that they could “impact the students” more than her. Concurrently, she was very respectful of authority figures. In her situation-of-dilemma she struggled with the decision to help her teachers while respecting the authority of the outgoing superintendent and her board. In the end, her value of having a caring relationship with her teachers was more important than respecting authority.

**Robert—The mission of Christian Schools, Duty, and Authority**

The foundation of Robert’s approach to decision-making is a personal commitment to the mission of Christian education. Robert is a retired Air Force officer who went back to school for a master’s degree, earned his doctorate in educational leadership, and then entered the field of Christian school education. He served as superintendent at a Christian school in the Midwest and was dedicated to the mission of Christian education.

I spent the bulk of my life in the military. I raised my hand and swore that I would die for what I believed in. I’m willing to die for my country. I’m willing to kill, to die, to be killed because I believe in the United States of America. I believe in fighting for what you stand for; that has been engrained in me for 23 years—just over and over
again. And I think a lot of that has spilled over as God was calling me out of a military career that I loved. I loved serving my country [but] I knew that God solidly had called me into Christian education. I’m willing to die for this, because this is eternal. I believe very strongly that kids in Christian homes belong in Christian schools.

Robert was committed to Christian education. He was even willing to make significant sacrifices to make sure it succeeded. Imprinted on his life was the belief of “fighting for what you stand for.” The passion that compelled him to fight for his country “spilled over” into his views about Christian education. He was adamant that Christian families should send their children to Christian schools.

He viewed his role as that of a vanguard, or protector, for Christian education. He understood the commitment parents make when they drop off their children at his school.

That little quote hanging up in my office says, “Right now counts forever.” These young people that moms and dads entrust us with, we want them to come to Christ….We spend more time with those kids than anybody else. More time than the church does and more time than mom and dad do during waking hours. We have the children through the school year more than [them].

The plaque on the wall in Robert’s office reads: “Right now counts forever.” He had an “eternal” view of his commitment to Christian education that drove him to help children “come to Christ,” not unlike Tom’s value of evangelism in a previous participant’s narrative.

Because of the amount of time that students spend at the school, Robert understands his unique responsibility to evangelize the students. The “eternal” perspective, however, pushed the understanding of his role well beyond just evangelistic opportunities.
We are being used by God to pass the faith on, so that what is said in the scriptures, that there’s a generation that arises without God, can’t be said of us. That a generation didn’t arise without God. Militarily speaking, “Not on my watch, Lord. Please not on my watch.”

Robert understood that he had the opportunity to avoid the warning in the Bible about not raising a “generation…without God.” He believed that he was on his “watch” and that he needed to remain active in accomplishing the mission of Christian education.

More specifically, Robert believed that the mission of Christian education is to achieve excellence in both academics and “Biblical truth.”

Well the mission is…We’re a Christian academic institution, so everything we do—reading, writing, and arithmetic—passes through the lens of Biblical truth. God is the center of it all. He’s our commander, if you will. He’s the one we serve and salute. The mission is to be that Pre-K through 12 Christian school that is, as John Piper would say, “God centered, Christ exalting, Spirit dependent, and Bible saturated”; that’s the mission.

The mission of Christian education, in Robert’s opinion, was to teach academics in a way that helped children learn that God is the “commander…the one we serve and salute.” Piper, a popular Christian author and speaker, influenced Robert’s view of Christian education as a God-centered endeavor.

Robert admitted that there were challenges to implementing his personal commitment to the mission of Christian education. Some of the challenges involved helping parents and students understand the scope, or reach, of the school’s mission. In one example, Robert changed the school’s dress code for students to be less restrictive. His intent was to put the
responsibility of enforcing an appropriate dress code back on the parents. From Robert’s perspective, the school lost its focus on the mission because of distractions related to dress code enforcement.

I’m trying to focus from a school’s perspective. We have a mission to perform day in and day out. And some things get in the way of that. Some of those things are parental responsibility that we have accepted that we never should have accepted.

In loosening up the dress code, Robert freed up his staff from managing dress code problems. Instead, he allowed them to focus on the school’s mission of being an “academic institution” with a focus on teaching students to “read, write, and [do] arithmetic…through the lens of Biblical truth.” The responsibility for dress code decisions was transferred back to parents.

**Duty**—“**God was preparing me to do hard things.**” Robert’s young adult and middle-aged years were consumed with his military career. As a result, he was indoctrinated with a strict code of disciplines. Those disciplines “spilled over” into his new career as a Christian school superintendent. Duty was one of those important disciplines in his life.

It’s the discipline of duty, honor, and country, I guess, as I’ve heard it put in military terms. Duty, honor, and…I love our country, don’t get me wrong. I wore a uniform for 23 years. But, I would say duty, honor, Christ…I love my country, but I love my God more. I’m here because it’s my duty.

Robert was clear in his understanding that his duty was to God more than his country. He expressed love for “our country” but loved God more. He left a successful military career and took on the role of a superintendent in a Christian school because “it’s my duty...”
Even with that level of commitment, Robert found it difficult at times to execute his duties as a superintendent. He often found that important decisions were easy to make but difficult to implement. The military prepared him well for this type of situation.

I had to step through that hard process, so I can look back as a Christian and [see] God was preparing me to do hard things. So that when I stepped into a Christian environment I could say, “Ok, this is a pretty easy decision to make, hard to execute.”

He believed that the military prepared him to make clear decisions related to his specific duties even if executing decisions was difficult.

In one example that occurred during his first year as superintendent, Robert had to make a decision about a teacher who was not treating students with the respect they deserved. This had been an ongoing problem but was not dealt with by the previous superintendent.

Well again it’s one of those things, there’s been a track record of performance issues that have been documented but no support at the superintendent level to take the right action. [She] was a second grade teacher, and you know those people are just squishy, soft, sweet, kind, and nice...but not this one. There was a history of just being mean, not physically, but just being mean, not kind. So, there had already been a documented history when I got here. I looked at my elementary principal and I said, “What are you thinking?” She said, “She needs to go.” And I said, “I agree…I’ll coordinate with our attorney”; a hard decision to execute, easy decision to make really.

Robert released a long-term teacher immediately because she was not willing to change her unkind attitude toward students in her class. Robert viewed his duty as supporting his principal’s decision about releasing the teacher for the same reasons.
In another story that occurred during Robert’s first year as superintendent, Robert had to release a coach in the middle of the soccer season. The coach acted inappropriately during a soccer game toward the water-boy on his team.

There's just certain things that you don’t do as a leader. If you're a coach, and in this incidence you get angry and you have a history of getting angry at your players… [you] should not be yelling at referees. Coaches should not be getting thrown out of soccer games, never…He yells for his water-boy because players don’t have a bottle of water in their hand, he kicks a water bottle. The water bottle takes flight and hits the water boy in the chest. That’s an easy one. But some players don’t get that and parents don’t get that. It may take a few years to work through. This [coach] was popular and, oh by the way, he was the youth pastor in the church. So when I fired him from the coaching position the church fired him from the youth pastor position. [I was] brand-spanking new…it was the right thing to do. It was an easy decision to make, but it was difficult in the execution. It was difficult for my athletic director, but he knew it was the right thing to do. We had this huge explosion with parents.

Robert holds his staff to high standards. One of his coaches had a history of angry behavior that had not been dealt with by the previous superintendent. After the incident with kicking the water bottle at the water boy, Robert did “the right thing” in his view by releasing the coach immediately. He indicated that making the decision was “easy…but it was difficult in the execution.” Again, despite the difficulty in implementing decisions, Robert had a clear sense of performing his duty, even if the result was an “explosion” of angry parents.

Developing his administrative team was also important to Robert.
Developing people, I see that as part of my duty. It begins with me developing my leadership team and I think that’s huge. It was huge in my previous school. Here, I have three principals and an athletic director; that’s my core group. Developing them as leaders has been huge. I mean that’s how all of that sprinkles down, filters down. The time I spend with them, not just within meetings, but in one-on-one conversation. When they have a crisis, they come to my office or I go to their office, and I help develop them. I see that as part of my duty.

Robert’s training in the military helped him appreciate the need to develop his “leadership team.” Development of his “core group” helps Robert “filter down” the responsibility of managing the school. He took the duty of developing his team seriously and spent whatever time necessary to make sure they understood their duties.

**Authority—“Respect for the chain-of-command.”** In addition to duty, Robert’s view of authority within organizations was developed and heavily influenced by his time in the military.

Well I tell my staff…it took God 23 years to get me to understand the concept of respect for authority, and submission to authority. In the military, obviously you have to get that pretty quick. I lived under that for 23 years…I get authority and I know how to submit to it. That doesn't mean I always do it well, but that's the human, sinful nature. But, I get it and I understand its importance. That’s one of those things I would say is in my DNA: the structure, the order, the respect for the chain of command, and then just submission to authority.
Robert’s time in the military taught him how to “respect” and “submit” to authority. He carried that understanding of authority into his superintendent position, but Robert also admitted that even after 23 years in the military, he did not “always do it well.”

Robert defined the concept of authority as having a structured chain of command. In his view, people are naturally resistant to submitting to an authority structure because of “sinful nature.” He described the “process” of helping people through that resistance.

I am instilling [the concept of authority] through an ongoing process. It starts with just doing it. Respect for authority in a chain of command is not just a top-down thing, but a lot of people get that feeling. There’s also a bottom-up piece. I expect my lower-level decision-makers to respect the decisions I make and to support me. If the team decided on something then I have to respect what they do as well. In the classroom if a teacher makes a decision…I’ve got their back. I may or may not have done something different, but it doesn’t matter. If what they decide fits with all of their stuff then I’ve got their back. When I walked into this environment that just wasn’t happening, up and down, it just wasn’t there. I just stepped in and started to do it.

Robert’s view of following the “chain of command” is not unidirectional; it is not just from the top-down. In his view, he has to also “respect” the decision-making of those below him to whom he has given authority. They have an expertise or an assignment in a specific section of the organization that he respects. “I’ve got their back,” Robert said as a way of describing his respect for his team’s decisions. The process he used to encourage respect for the “chain-of-command” was that he simply “started to do it” and expected others to follow. From his
first day at the school, he expected people to “support” his decisions and showed that he respected the decisions of those below him.

In one story, Robert demonstrated how the process of following the chain of command improved the performance of an elementary teacher and reinforced his principal’s authority.

I’m in my office during the first month or so and an elementary teacher just kind of wanders into my office. Just a young elementary teacher and she just started talking. And, I’m fine with that. I’m the new guy and “Ok, great to meet you, what’s going on?” But then I sense she is trying to get me to dislike the elementary principal that she works for. She starts to say a couple of things they don’t like. I let it go the first time. A week later she strolled into my office again and started that same conversation. I got a hold of my elementary principal. I told her, “I trust your leadership. You need to get a handle on this.” That teacher never walked into my office again like that. And this teacher is one of those success stories. She did a total 180 because the principal gets to her and talks to her about all sorts of stuff, put her on an action plan and meets with her once a week. By the end of the school year and into the summer this teacher did a 180. She is one of these people who is truly gifted and she has the education, knows how to apply it and she needed that authority piece to come on board.

Robert realized that the elementary teacher was circumventing the elementary principal in order to address grievances that the elementary staff held. Adhering to his respect for the authority structure, Robert demonstrated that he had the “back” of his elementary principal and asked her to talk with the teacher. The conversation between the principal and the teacher
reestablished the authority structure and consequently revealed some performance issues. The authority structure had been lacking in the school under the previous superintendent resulting in a breakdown in the “chain of command” structure that Robert valued. Eventually, the principal established a formal plan to improve the teacher’s performance, and the teacher improved. Without using the “authority piece,” Robert believed he may have lost a good teacher and possibly missed an opportunity to reinforce the chain-of-command value with his principal.

**The dilemma—“I needed to make some structural changes.”** Robert had been at his current school since the 2010-2011 school year. In his first year, he served in two capacities: first, as superintendent of the school system and second, as the high school principal. Upon his arrival, the school was in the midst of a ten-year slide in enrollment, which, when combined with the economic recession that began in 2008, meant that the school’s finances were in distress. As a result, the teachers had not received raises for “a long time,” and the leadership team was not structured to resolve some of the school’s struggles. Before the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year, Robert reached a decision on how to resolve these issues.

As a superintendent there’s always a budget piece and personnel piece, those are two huge components of the pie and budget, especially in this day in age when enrollment isn’t climbing to the ceiling—heads to the basement sometimes. You’re constantly dealing [with financial problems] and cutting things. During my first year, I had a budget that had a lot of red ink and I needed to do some initial cuts when I came onboard. In the new budget year, we didn’t quite get the number of students we thought we would.
Robert assessed that the financial situation was critical. He made some immediate changes to remove some of the “red ink” that he found in the budget. But after his first year at the school, enrollment projections for the next year were not promising.

Robert decided to take a risk and spend money on fixing the structural problems in the school in order to head in a “positive direction.”

I needed to make some structural changes to the school to move in a positive direction. Of the two of changes I needed to make, one was a structural change; the other was just giving the teachers a pay raise. Teachers hadn’t gotten a pay raise in a long time. They would set the money aside, but that would always be the first thing to get cut if we didn’t get enough students. The other thing…I was superintendent and secondary principal. I could not accomplish the mission that I was given without the appropriate level of leadership. I couldn’t do both jobs and both needed to be done.

Things below me and above me were suffering. There were things that I wasn’t able to get done as the superintendent that my board deserved, that the greater school community deserved, and that the faculty and staff deserved. I just couldn’t get to it. I didn’t have time to think or study. I was constantly dealing with parents, students, and faculty. Below me the teachers weren’t getting the attention they needed from their principal. The involvement, planning activities, and making sure things were purposeful were just not getting done. The mission was failing; we were not accomplishing the mission. In my line of thinking, we have mission failure; there’s not a leader in that role.

Robert was convinced that for the school to grow and head in a “positive direction,” two immediate changes were necessary. First, he believed that it was not right to always “cut”
teacher salaries in the face of declining enrollment. He believed his duty to develop people required him to secure the raises that they “deserved.” Second, he believed that the school was not accomplishing its mission because there was a lack of time and space allotted for leadership. In Robert’s opinion, “the mission was failing” because there was not a full-time superintendent who could “think,” “study,” be “purposeful,” and plan through the problems of the school.

Robert believed that part of the solution was to hire a high school principal to replace him so that he could devote himself to the duties of superintendent. In his view, adding additional leaders allowed more duties to be fulfilled while providing a clear line of authority within the school. Robert acknowledged the risk he took by adding additional staff. “There came a point this past summer where I was doing the dance of: do we give the raises, or do we save money by not doing that.” Robert wanted to increase teacher salaries because he knew it was part of his duty to pay a fair wage. He also needed to hire a high school principal so that he could spread out the authority structure and focus on long-term planning as the superintendent.

The resolution—“These two things are not negotiable.” Robert’s dilemma involved deciding which value was most important: his duty to pay teachers adequately or to provide an appropriate authority structure within in the school. In the end, he convinced his school board that both values were equally worthy of support.

I had to stand on a conviction that we have to show our teachers we’re going to pay them more and I have to have this high school principal…I had to be able to face my business manager but, more specifically, I had to be able to face my board. “For the school to move forward and succeed these two things are not negotiable.” That was
my language. “We’re going to give the teachers a raise and we’re going to have a high school principal. I need to be the superintendent so we can do the things we need to do. I don’t know how we’re going to do it financially. We’re going to have to cut some things, but these are things we have to do if we’re going to succeed as a school. Robert was convinced that the two actions needed to happen concurrently and that both were essential to the school’s success.

However, Robert knew that even if the decisions were clear, implementing them would be difficult. He knew that making the necessary cuts to fund his recommendations would not be easy. In addition to donors who stepped forward to help fund the budget gap, other reductions were necessary.

We had to cut some things, I mean some hard cuts…We had to free up some money in some programs. We had to cut some minor things, too. We had a couple people take voluntary pay cuts—I was one of them.

Robert’s leadership team made “some hard cuts” to programs and other “minor things.” Additionally, he and another person voluntarily took a reduction in pay to help fund the gap in the budget. This level of personal sacrifice supported Robert’s statements from earlier about his commitment to the mission of Christian education.

Robert was realistic about the risks and benefits of his plan. He was not bleak about the school’s future, nor was he blissfully ignorant. He understood that the school was taking a gamble on his approach. He called his leadership team together to challenge them to do the hard work of their duties to minimize the risk of failure.

I’ve got structural changes that need to be made next year. I sat with my leadership team today and said, “Ok, by Christmas time, assuming our enrollment stays flat, we
can’t keep doing what we’re doing. We’ve got to change. We’ve got to downsize as a school to be able to function into the future.

Robert communicated the facts about the school’s future to his leadership team. He indicated that the school must “downsize” to continue functioning if enrollment did not increase. Robert believed that his team understood their duties and that the appropriate chain of command was available to support them. He was determined to execute the “right things” in order to accomplish the mission of the school.

My thinking is that when we’re able to perform the mission the way we should and when we’re doing all the right things—some of those things are hard to accept like letting teachers and coaches go—that at some point this downward spiral in enrollment will turn around.

Robert was convinced that if his leadership team stayed focused on their duties and kept the mission in front of them, the benefits of his plan would help “turn around” enrollment and improve the school’s financial situation.

However, if the school’s enrollment did not stop its “downward spiral” Robert had another plan to reduce costs.

If in the next year or two enrollment continues to decline after the things that I’ve done, and the things that we’re doing, to make this the kind of school that people want to put their kids into, well then I know how I can cut a certain amount of money. I’ve got four leaders in place and they’re doing fine. I will just step out and they can appoint one of them to be the superintendent, and now you have one less…I will step out.
Robert developed a worst-case-scenario plan in the event that his plan did not help increase enrollment in the next couple of years. His plan was that he would leave the organization to free up the needed cash to retain his leadership team and teachers. He believed that his leadership was “doing fine” and could handle the superintendent position between the four of them.

Analysis—An “Act of Valor.” When faced with a crisis, Robert drew on his military experience to find a solution. A declining enrollment, economic recession, frozen wages, an undisciplined faculty, and a structural deficit in the leadership team are difficult challenges for any leader. Turning to his military training, Robert relied on the essential rule of focusing on the mission of Christian education. He reflected on the transfer of his military training into his new role in Christian education.

I took the leadership skills that the Air Force had honed, and that God had given me, into my first school principalship of about 250 kids in a Pre-K through 12 Christian school in New Mexico. I believe that leadership is leadership, but what changes is the mission.

Robert believed that leadership skills are transferrable between industries and careers. His “leadership skills” were “honored” in the Air Force but easily reapplied in the field of education. However, he also recognized that the mission of the military is quite different from the mission of Christian education.

Robert was no less passionate about Christian education than he was about serving his country in the military. That passion now drove him to execute his duty and pushed him to follow the “chain-of-command” structure in the face of crisis.
A military movie offered a metaphor to help clarify Robert’s views on mission, duty, and authority. The movie *Act of Valor* depicts Navy Seals on a mission to rescue an American citizen in a foreign country. At one point in the mission, an enemy combatant throws a live grenade into a group of Seals. The unit commander acts quickly and selflessly by using his helmet and body to shield the others from the blast. He perished because of his decision.

Do I see myself in that role? Absolutely. I know we’re not talking about a real helmet and a real grenade, so I know that’s the metaphor. I always need to be ready and willing to do that, to jump on that grenade. To protect my leadership, my faculty and staff, my parents and the children that God has put in this school. As the leader of the school, Robert saw his “role” as that of protecting those under him in the authority structure and having their “back.” He stressed that he always needed to “be ready and willing” to make the sacrifices necessary to protect the school. This level of sacrifice was evident in the story Robert shared about his conviction to increase teacher salaries and hire a high school principal. He voluntarily accepted a salary reduction to achieve the mission.

Continuing with the metaphor provided by the movie, Robert discussed the value of duty and the value of the authority structure when dealing with a crisis. In the scene described earlier, the unit commander acted immediately and without regard for himself by falling on the grenade.

Hollywood gets a lot of things wrong…that one they got right. From a military perspective it starts on day one. I don’t know at what point it finally clicks over, but that’s what you do. It just clicks, and they just build on it, and build on it. A lot of that got carried over into what God has given me to do now. I take it just as seriously as I
took my military piece. I’m willing to die for what I do. I’m willing to die for the people that God has given me to lead, whatever that looks like in Christian education. Robert was clear in his conviction that his duty included being ready to sacrifice his own well being, if necessary. Preparing to make personal sacrifices for the mission began on “day one” for Robert in the military and eventually became “one of those things I would say is in my DNA.” Robert transferred the drive to perform his duty from his previous mission in the military to his new mission in Christian education. In Robert’s view, the willingness “to die” in education translates into selecting to leave the organization in order to preserve the school. He made it clear to his leadership team that if necessary he will “step out” in order to free up money to save the school.

Continuing with the metaphor offered by the movie, Robert connected his willingness to make personal sacrifices with his values of duty and authority. He discussed how the school would achieve its mission if he were not there.

If I have done my job as a leader then I have trained someone. In that movie, there were other Seals…and when the commander jumped on that grenade and took it, the number one next person in charge knew who they were. They continued the mission. And that was because they had an intentional chain of command and there was training on the part of the commander. That person knew…now he’s in charge and he’s gotta do it. What would happen? The duties that I perform as superintendent would have to be absorbed in this instance by the four of them and one of them may emerge [as leader]…I will step down and I will make sure that the other four would be able to pick up the other duties. Would it be as effective and efficient? Absolutely
not. But, it doesn’t matter; this is the way it needs to be. And I’m willing to take that chance because I believe in the outcome.

Robert saw part of his duty at the school as preparing his leadership team for the possibility of a time when he would no longer with them. If he were to leave the organization, he believed that his team was prepared to carry on the mission without him. He has trained them and set up a “chain-of-command” structure to accomplish the mission of the school.

In a final analysis, Robert reflected on the personal sacrifice he may have to make to save the school money so that it can survive. “I had to make that decision already this past summer. I had to jump on the grenade this last summer, if you will. Is it really a grenade or is it a dud?” Robert made an interesting point. He had already made the commitment of personal sacrifice. Within the context of the movie’s metaphor, he had already decided to jump on the grenade. If his plan did not work, then he already committed to his leadership team that he was going to leave. Given his military training and commitment to the mission of Christian education, it is likely that he will “step out” if necessary.

In summary, Robert had a strong desire to fulfill his personal commitment to the mission of Christian education. He was driven, even to the point of self-sacrifice. Unlike other participants in this study, Robert did not struggle with making decisions because he valued executing his duty and accomplishing the mission. Concurrently, he emphasized the value of an authority structure that demanded following the “chain of command” to resolve problems.

Postscript. Since the time of these interviews, the crisis at Robert’s school worsened. The crisis grew beyond just financial issues. The school was owned and operated by a church, and the church’s theology changed in the years since Robert began as superintendent.
This change resulted in a subtle change to the mission of the school as well. Robert struggled to support these changes because the school’s subtly changing mission was something he did not support. Moreover, the enrollment projection for the 2013-2014 school year was not encouraging. Robert’s plan to achieve the school’s mission by increasing teacher wages and hiring a high school principal did not yield immediate results. Unfortunately, the grenade exploded and, as promised, Robert decided to “step out.”

**Drew—A Narrative on Discovering Truth, Trusting Others, and Grace**

One of Drew’s foundational values was uncovering the truth in any situation. This principle motivated Drew in all areas of life, including his work as a superintendent at Christian school in the Midwest. Drew put his personal commitment to discover truth in broader terms.

Everybody has to answer these five questions: How did [the world] begin? What went wrong? How do we fix it? What is my role? And, what’s the purpose of it all? It’s in that framework that I established my viewpoint of the world. I want to base it strongly upon what does Scripture say about each of these things.

Drew framed his understanding of truth around his “viewpoint” of the world and its “purpose.” In Drew’s opinion, answering those five questions that “everybody has to answer” was the starting point for discovering truth. Furthermore, Drew believed the Bible was the only “base,” or standard, for properly answering those questions.

Drew applied this framework for discovering truth at his school. He often found that distinguishing between truth and lies was difficult.
This framework boils life down to [understanding] truth versus lies. When we start dealing with issues in the school, whether it is discipline issues, relationship issues, or conflict… it really boils down to what kind of a lie am I hearing and believing. In his estimation, people often construct a mix of truth and lies in any given situation. The challenge when seeking the truth, according to Drew, was to identify the lies. Drew referenced the Bible as a guide to better understand people and find the truth as he was “dealing with issues” in his school.

For Drew, associating the Bible with truth developed at a young age. “The church that I grew up in was a non-denomination Bible church. It had a very, very strong Mennonite influence. The church also had a school.” He attended a non-denominational church that theologically acted liked a Mennonite church. In their Articles of Faith, Mennonites acknowledge that “Scripture [is] the authoritative source and standard for preaching and teaching about faith and life, for distinguishing truth from error, for discerning between good and evil” (Mennonite Confessions of the Faith, Article 4). One of the Mennonite church’s foundational principles is to use the Bible as the “standard” for separating truth from lies. In support of that “standard” the church emphasized memorizing portions of the Bible.

[It had a] very strong emphasis on Scripture memory. It was called Bible Memory Association. You had these books, and there was an old lady in the church that would listen to you. Every Sunday I would have to come to her before church and I would have my verses to say….I look back at that now and I still pull up verses that I remember from Bible Memory Association.

Drew was taught from a young age to memorize verses from the Bible in support of “distinguishing truth from error.” Those verses still influence his thinking today.
During his formative educational years, Drew attended a school operated by the church he attended and then later a different Christian school. These schools played an important role in developing his perspective on Christian education.

It was a K-8 school and right inside the church building. That’s where I grew up kindergarten through eighth grade…We had a weekly chapel service. I really liked it; it was a very small school…After 8th grade I went to another Christian school, once again a very strong Mennonite influence.

Drew’s educational experience from elementary school through high school had a “strong Mennonite influence” that reinforced his developing belief that the Bible was the “source…for distinguishing truth from error.”

Drew’s concept of discovering truth developed further as an adult. He attended a Christian university and went on to study a number of programs and books after college.

Well, two things that have had probably the largest impact on me outside of the philosophy class I took at [the Christian university] is The Truth Project…It is just a fantastic worldview session. I went through it and fell in love with the material because it asks those questions.

Drew continued to establish his “viewpoint” of the world by taking a Christian-based philosophy course in college and then later studied The Truth Project (Tackett, 2006). Both courses outlined the necessity of developing a worldview that answered those five critical questions that Drew shared earlier. A second major influence on Drew’s concept of truth were Christian authors like Nancy Pearson, Chuck Colson, Gene Edwards, and Frank Gaebelein. Like his church, K-12 schooling, and college experiences, these authors supported
an understanding of truth through a worldview that answered questions similar to the five questions important to Drew.

**Trust—“I expect a high level of trust.”** Closely connected to his personal commitment to discover truth was Drew’s value of trusting other people. In one recent incident, Drew discovered that a staff member was gossiping about other people. Statements that were not true spread around the school’s community because of this person.

She was influential because of her years of being here and because…she knows people from the community. She knows people from the school. She knows alumni. I used to worry about people like that who would talk a lot, but I've learned not to worry. Most people don't trust a person like that anyway; their personality shows up no matter where they go.

The staff member used her “influential” position to “talk” about other people and destroy reputations. She was known for gossiping and spreading lies about fellow staff and faculty members. In Drew’s opinion, “most people don’t trust” someone who does not tell the truth about others.

Moreover, people who do not tell the truth also create “disunity” among staff and faculty in Drew’s experience. “It frustrates me because there’s a lack of trust. I’ve tried to do things that unify secondary staff, the lower elementary, the upper elementary…and, with our daycare staff… [I] try to get people together.” Drew has acted intentionally to build unity among people who work in the different divisions of the school. However, the “lack of trust” among people interfered with his efforts.
Trust and unity among the school’s community was important in Drew’s view of leadership. He believed that others would confide in him, and each other, if a trusting relationship existed.

If my faculty and staff can’t trust me, then they’re left alone. If you can’t trust your leader who are you going to go to when the chips are down? Or, when you need to be boosted up? I’ve actually had some people come in here and say, “I know you may not have the answer to it, but I just needed to talk about it.” They know that I’m not going to talk to anyone else about it. I feel like that’s important. They know that I value them enough to be trusted.

Without trusting relationships, Drew believed that his faculty and staff would be “left alone” to struggle through their work. He recognized that people need someone to go to “when the chips are down” or when they need encouragement.

Drew also admitted that trusting relationships are rare in his work life. He was especially careful about what information he shared with others.

Unfortunately, there are probably more people that I don’t trust than I do trust. I mean with those things, you expect a high level of trust. There are very few people with whom I have a very high level of trust.

Drew was cautious about establishing trusting relationships with others at the school because of bad experiences in the past when he was a victim of gossip. He has “very few” relationships at school in which he enjoyed a “high level of trust” and with whom he can share information.

**Gracious**—“I want to be a gracious person.” While Drew was careful about establishing close relationships with others at school, he was charitable in situations that
called for understanding and forgiveness. Drew’s definition of being “gracious” included understanding the truth of a person’s situation in life and then forgiving him or her.

I want to be a gracious person; I’ve not always been a gracious person. I’ve had to deal with anger and forgiveness in my own family. My parents are divorced and there’s a lot of ugliness that was there. I prayed for years to be able to forgive those who did wrong to me because I just couldn’t. I was angry, and I still get angry. I have a hard time forgiving sometimes.

The divorce of Drew’s parents set in motion a pattern of anger and hurtfulness that has taken years to resolve in his life. He admitted that his parent’s divorce still influences his relationships. Even though he struggled with extending forgiveness, he valued forgiveness and wanted “to be a gracious person.”

Drew’s definition of being a “gracious person” who can forgive others was supported by his ability to sympathize with the person who spread gossip about him. He tried to understand that person’s background and current situation. In Drew’s view, being gracious required forgiving other people. Moreover, forgiving someone was only possible for him if he could discover the truth about the person’s background, something to explain his or her behavior.

**The dilemma—“I had to deal with gossip.”** Drew shared a story that challenged his values of trust and being a gracious person. The story involved gossip about Drew while he worked with a female teacher in his office.

I was sitting in my office while my daughter was practicing basketball. I was working with one of the teachers and we were planning a Christmas caroling event…It was after school hours, so obviously it was dark early because of the wintertime. So, this
lady teacher was sitting in the office, the door was open, and we were discussing these things and making plans.

In an unrelated event a few days later, Drew and this same teacher worked together during regular school hours developing strategies to address a student discipline issue.

She had also been here during her prep time…This teacher and I had been working with a complicated student in her class…So she spent a lot of time in my office with the door open right across from the main office, and the office ladies can see me sitting at my desk.

Drew continued to work with the teacher on a discipline issue involving a student in her class. He was always careful to keep the door open and keep himself in full view of the front-office staff across the hallway from his office. For example, when students visited his office he was always careful. “I try, especially if I’m with a female student, to make sure the front office can see me.”

Despite these efforts to avoid any appearance of a questionable situation, someone on his staff assumed the worst. “I had this letter that ended up in my mailbox. It was a letter addressed to the board. It was sealed….” Drew often received board mail in his mailbox and had the board’s permission to open mail addressed to the board. Upon opening the letter, he found an anonymous note addressed directly to the board. The author wrote that “[Drew’s] actions were inappropriate…they were very concerned about [Drew’s] marriage and about what it looked like to have another teacher in the office.” The letter strongly suggested there was “inappropriate” behavior on Drew’s part with the female teacher. The letter appeared to have been put into his mailbox by another staff member. “I had pretty much narrowed it
Drew went through a wide range of emotions as he contemplated the potential consequences of the accusation.

It was anonymous, not signed, a totally anonymous letter which frustrated me… I remember thinking, if this is the way it’s going to be, I don’t even want to be here… I don’t even know if I want to deal with anything like this. If people are going to be that judgmental without having any details at all…

One of Drew’s first thoughts was feeling “frustrated” because an anonymous author, who did not know the truth, judged him. This frustration led him to feel like he did not “even want to be” employed by the school. He felt that his ability to lead others was called into question.

I felt stabbed. I don’t know if I really felt betrayed because I don’t know if I ever felt a particular loyalty from the person who wrote the letter to begin with. There wasn’t a loyalty that was taken away. It was more like here’s a person who’s on staff…under my leadership…undermined I would say.

Drew admitted that he had never felt a sense of loyalty from the staff member whom he suspected to be the author. Drew concluded that the staff person was attempting to undermine his leadership. This person “stabbed” at his character and called into question his ability to lead. “I was very offended… I was angry… who in the world would even conjure up this kind of thing?”

Drew contacted his school board leadership and advised them of the contents of the anonymous letter.
I called up the guy who was our vice-chair of the board at the time—we had developed a friendship. I told him and he was quite upset, too. I called the president of the board and told her about the letter. They both read the letter prior to a board meeting and decided they would not take it to the board. They had decided if the person who wrote the letter did not want to sign it then they did not have anybody they could go to and ask questions. So they didn’t feel like they had enough information to be able to deal with it. They did trust my character believing that there wasn’t any truth to anything that was alleged in the letter.

The school board’s leadership chose not to take action. From their perspective, since the letter was anonymous, the author was not available for inquiry about the accusations. More importantly, Drew knew that the board “did trust [his] character” and believed there was no truth to the allegation. Therefore, even in the midst of Drew feeling “offended,” “angry,” and “stabbed,” he maintained a high level of trust with his school board leadership.

However, Drew was concerned about his reputation with his staff and faculty. He was concerned about how fast and far the gossip had reached.

I did not know how far it had spread. Past experience tells me that things spread really fast in an environment like this. I had no clue how far a story would have gone. With gossip you don’t know how far from the truth it got with each retelling of the story.

Drew assumed that the content of the anonymous letter was beginning to work its way around the school in the form of gossip. With his experience in small schools, Drew knew that the story was distorted “with each retelling.” “Come to find out it had actually traveled to some other pockets of people, to staff members, at the school. That was a very personal
point in which I had to deal with gossip in the school head on.” Drew was determined to find out who was spreading gossip about him.

**The resolution—**“We're still good friends.” Stopping the gossip about him from going around the school was important to Drew because of personal commitment to distinguishing truth from lies. Drew hoped that revealing the truth about the situation would allow him to build trust with his staff and extend forgiveness to those involved. As time went on, Drew and the vice-chair from his board figured out who wrote the anonymous letter.

I was trying to figure out who this person was. I thought, “I gotta figure this out and who it is so I can talk to them; to figure out why they wrote the letter…I don’t get it.”

Our vice-chair of the board at that time was a very vocal person. He really was involved; he knew the people well. One day, I just said, “I can’t figure out who it is” and we were talking about it again. I said, “You don’t think it could be [one of the secretaries]?” He said, “No, but I’m going to go talk to her.” So he went to her, and she said, “Yeah, I wrote that letter.”

Drew and his vice-chair discovered that the author of the letter was one of the front office secretaries who readily admitted writing the letter when asked.

However, there was an additional person, an office receptionist, who helped spread the gossip.

This office receptionist had noticed that this teacher was in my office frequently and sometimes for an entire prep period. But what she didn't know was [that] we were trying to come up with a solution for this troubled kid and it was just the time of the year in which she needed a lot of attention. That had caught the attention of [the receptionist]. So, I think there was a little bit of, “Oh yeah. She's spending a lot of
time in his office…Well I saw her in there the other night while the kids were at basketball practice”…then it comes up into a bunch of conjecture.

The receptionist and the secretary convinced each other that there was something “inappropriate” happening between Drew and the female teacher. The office secretary then wrote the letter to the board, believing the gossip to be true.

With the truth discovered about what role each of the two staff people played, Drew addressed them separately. First, he addressed the front office secretary who wrote the anonymous letter to the board.

I called the person into the office and told her what my concerns were and what damage could have been done to me… She was defensive at first. But when I told her the way it had really hurt me personally and the way it could have damaged the school, she understood. She loves the school and she wants the school to carry on. I don’t think she understood the repercussion of those types of accusations, especially in a small school setting like ours. That type of scandal could tear a place apart...I don’t think she was intending it to be as harmful as it turned out to be. But the wording that she had chosen was harmful.

Drew talked with the front office secretary and explained the potential consequences for him personally. He also explained that this sort of “scandal could tear” the school apart. In Drew’s opinion, she did not understand the far-reaching consequences of her letter to the board. The secretary apologized for her actions and Drew graciously forgave her.

I think I could walk away from the conversation feeling like we came to an understanding. Because part of my understanding was knowing her story, which had a big impact on where her mind would go…The person is still employed here today.
We’re still good friends. There was a corrective conversation and no discipline, but an understanding.

Drew viewed the secretary’s actions through an understanding of “her story.” He realized her background caused her to make “inappropriate conclusions.” He forgave her and the two have even become “good friends.”

The second person involved, the office receptionist, continued to spread gossip about Drew. Drew came to the decision that he would either not renew her contract or release her. Fortunately, before he could do either, the receptionist tendered her resignation.

I actually ended up not having to let her go. She started looking for a job on her own, not long after the incident took place…She’d been with the school for 16 years, a long time; several kids graduated from here. One day she actually had written on her Facebook [page] that she had found another job; she hadn’t even told us yet. The next day she came in and told our office manager that she had found another job. We jumped on it right away…and we ended up hiring two part-time people; we readjusted.

Drew avoided having to choose between releasing the receptionist or not renewing her contract because she found a different job “shortly after” the gossip had started. Drew quickly replaced the receptionists with two part-time receptionists. However, just before the part-time replacement receptionists were to start work, the receptionist who had been the gossip and subsequently resigned, visited Drew and asked for her old job back.

I really tried to be gracious. I try not to be a hard person. But we sat down and I said, “Here's the timeline you gave us [for leaving]. We went to work on it and I think it's really important for you to understand that because of what you told us we had to
make a commitment to other people. We’re going to follow through on that. I really do thank you for your years of service. You've done a lot of great things for the school, but we need to move on now.”

Drew was firm in sticking to his decision while also being “gracious” by complimenting his former receptionist on her work and years of service. He did not want “to be a hard person” by scolding her or using the opportunity to retaliate. Because of his approach, the former receptionist remains engaged and supportive of the school. “She was at our auction. She comes here and helps promote our school. She has one our signs in her front yard, yeah so she’s still supportive of the school.”

However, Drew realized that his reputation had been damaged as a result of the gossip. “I did have to go around and make sure other fires were put out.” He sensed that there was still work to be done in quelling the rumors.

Among faculty and staff I was pretty aware of little pockets. You learn pretty quickly who the talkers are. You learn pretty quickly how much you can share with each faculty and staff, and who not to share anything with.

Drew knew his organization well enough to realize where to begin putting out the “fires” created by the gossip. Gossip is an ongoing concern in his school even though the school employees are like a family.

We really have a good family feel; it is not without it skirmishes. There is conflict that happens from time to time. My biggest concern, still to this day, is this whole gossip issue. There really are certain individuals and certain groups of people that will talk a little more than they should...It bothers me because it creates disunity among staff...I think that is probably the weak link in our school.
While the gossip that resulted from the anonymous letter eventually subsided, Drew’s “biggest concern” remains the culture of gossip existing among his staff and faculty. He is concerned because gossip, in his view, “creates disunity” among the employees of the school.

**The analysis—“God's been so…gracious.”** This situation-of-dilemma for Drew was about the consequences of distorting the truth and his gracious response of seeking to repair relationships and then extend forgiveness. The truth was distorted when two front office staff made assumptions based on the presence of a female teacher in his office. The two staff began gossiping and one wrote an anonymous letter to the school board. The truth was eventually revealed and Drew had a chance to explain to the staff involved the reality of the situation, which did not match their assumptions. With each person, Drew displayed “graciousness,” but with different outcomes.

Drew insisted that he always “want[s] to be a gracious person” toward other people. In all areas of his life, he wanted to demonstrate forgiveness and understanding toward other people, even though he still struggled with anger issues of his own. The application of this value was very clear in his involvement with the front office secretary.

Well, I was upset with her. But, knowing who she is, knowing a little bit of her story, the story of her family, and her siblings who have had bad things happen in their family, I can kind of understand why she would go a little bit overboard or overreact to something…It actually gave me a little bit of understanding.

Drew chose to view the secretary’s actions contextually, not just as an isolated set of circumstances. He decided that her “overboard” reaction probably resulted, in part, as a result of her family’s situation. That perspective allowed Drew to “understand” the truth behind her actions and provided a pathway to forgiveness. Since Drew lived by the commitment to
discover the truth, he was willing to look past the immediate circumstances in order to find the deep truth behind her harmful words. As a result, the secretary is still employed at the school.

In his narrative, Jason also valued gracious behavior toward people. His value of grace toward others involved forgiveness as well, but toward students. In Jason’s view, a changed heart in a student was the pathway to forgiveness. Both Drew and Jason required rational to extend grace toward others. Drew needed truth and Jason a changed heart.

In Drew’s story, the outcome for the office receptionist was different. However, he was consistent in his application of the value of graciousness by trying to understand the truth behind the employee’s situation and then forgiving her. As he worked his way through understanding the receptionist’s actions, he reflected on her past and current situation in life.

She’d been with the school for sixteen years, a long time; several kids graduated from here…Her youngest daughter had just graduated, like a year and a half before, she was into her second full year of working here without any children [at the school]. I would guess it was more subconscious than anything, but I’m kind of wondering if there was starting to be a disconnect from the school already just because the kids weren’t here. I don’t know, that’s speculation.

Drew acknowledged that the receptionist had a long tenure at the school with a deep connection to the school family. He also understood that with her children no longer in the school, the receptionist likely started to “disconnect” from the school’s environment. That understanding allowed him to be more gracious when she approached him about getting her previous job back. While he did not rehire her, he did compliment her accomplishments and
acknowledged her service to the school. This level of understanding resulted in her staying connected to her school family of sixteen years.

Drew’s personal story included difficulty with forgiveness. Drew was honest about his struggle to forgive other people. He leaned heavily on God as he worked through his desire to be gracious to others.

But that’s something that really in the past five years the Holy Spirit [God] has worked in me. You know we live in an ugly, fallen, broken world and God’s been so good and so gracious to me. Who am I to rob that from somebody? I’m right, you’re wrong, and you don’t deserve to be forgiven? Who am I? I do have to work at it, and it’s really only by the Holy Spirit because you know I’m just as unforgiving as the next person.

Drew recognized that since God was gracious toward him, he must value being gracious toward other people.

Drew found it difficult to trust the people he worked with but also found it necessary to be gracious or forgiving. He admitted to not trusting many people in his work place, providing him pause when extending forgiveness to other people. “Who am I to rob that from somebody?” In his situation-of-dilemma, he chose the value of being gracious toward others even if it meant trusting those who might hurt him.

**Postscript.** In April of the year that these interviews were completed, Drew received a call from a missionary organization that needed a new president and CEO. He decided to take the position because it matched a number of his skills and passions. He officially resigned from his school at the end of the fiscal year, but not before helping the school find
his replacement. Drew is leaving his school on good terms. In fact, he was elected by the school board to be the next school board Chairperson.
Chapter 5. Analysis

Introduction

This chapter covers the coaxial analysis of all participants. The analysis across all narratives revealed ideology as a major theme. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that ideology is composed of four themes: values, situations, commitments, and influences. The following section provides evidence for the existence of ideology and the four themes while providing some basic definitions.

The next sections provide detailed treatment of the values themes across all of the participants and evidence of the situations theme for all nine participants, while the following section reveals the results of exploring the theme of commitments. Next I provide the results of coaxial coding across all participants against the theme of influences. And finally, the last section constructs a framework that explains the relationships between the four ideological components. Figure 3 provides an overview of this chapter.
Figure 3. Developing the themes of values, situations, commitments, and influences.
Dissertation – Examination of Ideology

Ideology and the Four Themes

Axial coding across all participant grand narratives (Creswell, 2005) revealed a number of major themes emerging from the data. These themes worked together to turn thought into action for each participant. The next five sections present each of the themes with evidence from participant data supported by research literature.

Ideology. Each participant revealed insight about how he or she made decisions while in the moment of his or her situation-of-dilemma. Participants described the struggle with balancing multiple values, ideas, and options as they made decisions. In this section an ideological narrative provides a summary perspective of participant thinking for the situation-of-dilemma.

Dan admitted to the difficulty in balancing academic performance and building trust. In his dilemma, he decided that academic performance was more important than trust. However, upon reflection he acknowledged that his ordering of what was important could have been different. “In the midst of trying to get a lot of things done around here, I lost my focus on people.”

Ken attempted to optimize both quality academics and discipleship of students. His past influences anchored him in both the importance of academics and discipleship. However, in his situation-of-dilemma, he emphasized quality academics over all others. “If we’re not going to have a certain level of academic excellence, then we should not sell ourselves as a school.”

Paul struggled with the balance of maintaining a “warm, loving culture” and the academic process. In his situation-of-dilemma, he expelled a student in order to maintain a
warm environment over other options. He often made choices based on “what’s best for the kids.”

For his part, Jason also struggled with culture. Important to his thinking was the idea of grace and discipleship. However, in his dilemma he released two students because they did not want to change their attitudes and rejoin the school community. He chose to maintain a stable culture over the opportunity to disciple students.

Tom also expelled students for threatening the school’s culture. He valued evangelism of students along with maintaining a stable culture. However, when his culture was overrun with problems, he chose to protect the culture over the chance to evangelize students. “We’ve got to start getting rid of some kids to maintain some sanity again, or restore some sanity again.”

Janet had a disagreement with her teachers over the necessity of having an overnight retreat. “The whole building mutinied.” She struggled between making quick changes necessary to save the school and taking the time to establish relationships with others. In the end, she made the decision to make necessary changes even at the cost of damaged relationships with teachers and administrators.

Allison attempted to balance her relationships with teachers and her respect for authority. She disagreed with the outgoing superintendent and the board over cutting teacher salaries but desired to respect their authority at the same time. In the end, she chose to stand up to the board and complain about the teacher’s salaries being cut. “Without good teachers, without the support of teachers, and without them knowing that you care about them, what have we got?”
Robert not only disagreed with his board over teacher salaries but also disagreed with them on the leadership structure in the school. He struggled to find an affordable solution that allowed him to optimize two values. He wanted to fulfill his duty to his teachers by securing raises, and then he wanted to build the authority structure in his school. In the end, he found a way to achieve both, but at great cost to him personally.

Finally, Drew struggled with trusting people and being gracious, or forgiving, with people. In his dilemma, he dealt with staff that gossiped about him. After discovering the truth about who was gossiping and why, he chose to be gracious. “Who am I to rob that from somebody?”

The nine narratives described a pattern used by participants to work through their dilemma to reach a decision. The narratives revealed a common theme of ideology as the construct containing the patterns used to reach decisions. The research literature also supported the view that ideology is a pattern, or a system, helping in the decision-making process. O’Neill (1981) proposed that ideology is a “dynamic pattern of general ideas which serves to direct social action” (p. 19). All of the participants displayed struggle and balance as they navigated the “dynamic pattern” of ideas to reach a decision. Janet, for example, struggled with the ideas of building relationships and implementing quick changes to save the school. Tom balanced the ideas of maintaining a stable culture against opportunities to evangelize.

Kirst and Wirt (2009) indicated that ideology forms “overall judgments about various proposed courses of action” (p. 88). All of the participants considered multiple options as they worked their way through dilemmas. Jason stayed awake at night trying to use his best
judgment to find a solution to his dilemma. Dan asked the question of his board about the right course of action if academic performance did not increase.

Kohlberg and Mayer (1972) believed ideology was based on a system of “value principles” (p. 464) and that an educational ideology includes “value assumptions about what is educationally good or worthwhile” (p. 463). Paul was committed to the action of “doing what is best for the kids,” a foundational principle in his life. Robert was committed to the mission and purpose of his school.

Gilligan (1981) connected the development of ideology to cognitive development. When talking about the development of morality in students in higher education, she said, “The ideological moral constructions are realized in the moral systems and abstract principles of [cognitive development]” (p. 155). Drew, for example, developed much of his commitment to truth from his church programs, his Christian education, his university courses, and private study. All of these cognitive development sources worked together in Drew’s life and eventually formed the basis of his commitment to truth.

Ideology was a major theme emerging from the data. Additional axial coding across all nine participants’ stories revealed other major themes. These themes helped bring understanding and clarity to the theme of ideology. The balance of this section discusses these additional themes and the supported research. Table 4 provides a summary.
Table 4

*The themes of ideology.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>Groupings of sub-text or verbatim evidence identifying what was important to the participants.</td>
<td>academics, culture, relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situations</td>
<td>Developed from the stories told by participants describing specific circumstances of conflict and resolution.</td>
<td>situations with teachers, students, school boards, parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitments</td>
<td>Developed from participant values; Foundational values used frequently by participants to make decisions.</td>
<td>loving children, Christian education, truth, upholding Christian standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influences</td>
<td>Persuasive people, places or events in a participant’s life that impact how participants think about values and commitments.</td>
<td>personal tragedies, geographical influences, authors, Bible, God, family, career</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Values.** Of first interest is the emerging theme of participant values. A definition of “values” developed from the data shows that groupings of common verbatim evidence identified what was important to the participants. For example, the value of “academics” emerged from Ken’s interviews as important to him. He used phrases such as “on the academic side,” things “were a mess academically,” “the school’s academic setting,” and “if there is no academic excellence” to emphasize the importance of “academics” in his thinking.

Groupings of verbatim evidence for Tom included the concept of “culture” as a value. He used phrases like “I need to clean the thing up,” “can’t have that here,” “stable,” and “maintain sanity” to identify the importance of “culture” at his decision-making. Tom used phrases like these to express his value of a stable or sane culture.

Values, then, became a major theme for each participant. The values theme also contained the notion that participants considered certain ideas more important than other
ideas when making decisions. Current research also supported the concept of values. Kirst and Wirt (2009) pointed out that schools intentionally allocate the community’s values and ethics to students (p. 62). Ken, for example, embraced the community’s expectation for his Christian school and made a number of curriculum and teacher changes.

We’re starting to see the fruit from that. Some relationships that we have with public school teachers, we’re starting to see our academic levels increased, test scores are starting to head up so their starting to see us as a real school.

By hiring credentialed teachers, an expectation of the education community, Ken was beginning to establish legitimacy with the “public school teachers.”

**Situations.** The next emerging theme from the data was around the topic of stories, specifically the situations described in the story by the participant. By definition from the data, “situations” are the stories told by participants describing specific circumstances of conflict and resolution. These situations often formed the backdrop for revealing values.

Thompson (2008) supported the belief that people’s actions result from “opportunities and constraint” in the form of situations (p. 102). He contends that an individual will “exploit his opportunities…within the limits of the constraints he believes to be operating” (p. 102). Situations play out this tension and reveal values.

Paul, for instance, told stories about his family as a child. One story included him understanding of the educational constraints at the school his sister attended.

My sister, who’s about a year older than me, was born with some special needs, and the nuns said to my mom something to the effect—God has given you this child, and it’s your burden to carry or something like that, and so they had to send her to public school to get some services the catholic school could not. So the three older kids were
Catholic school, the three younger kids were public school. And I was right in the middle of that. This was a story that began to shape how Paul started to think about educational constraints. In another situation, he was approached by a mom who wanted her Down syndrome child to attend Paul’s school. Given the chance to be opportunistic, he declined. He gently turned the mom away and encouraged her to find the appropriate services in a school that could serve her child.

Situations helped to bring understanding to which values were most important to the participant in the moment of decision-making. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) offered that “stories can help to determine who we are today both personally and professionally” (p. 140). Dan, for example, told two stories that revealed his values. In one story, he described the situation of wanting to build trust between himself and his teachers.

[I have] been a lot more in the hallways and the classrooms…just spending more time with staff. Doing things and…really have built a trust back. And by removing those two people who were really—we can see it now more clearly than ever—were very cancerous in both of those hallways. By removing them [we have] built great camaraderie.

He described the situation of having to release two teachers who were “very cancerous” to building moral. In this situation, he emphasized his personal activities of trying to build trust through relationships.

In another situation, however, he focused on a different important value. Academic performance in the professional setting of Christian schools was important to Dan. In the story, his school was getting ready to publish the school’s standardized scores on their
website and he believed that he was “accountable” for the academics of the school. He expressed this value to his board.

   I said, “Here’s the results. We have two fifth-grade teachers. On average, here’s the difference between the two. It’s not good. We are going to put these scores in the public next year. What are we going to do? Of the 20 kids she had, 15 did not make grade level expectations. In fact, 10 of them went backwards! I am accountable for the kids to at least making grade level progress.”

Dan was concerned with teacher performance and the resulting impact on academic performance.

These two situations in Dan’s narrative revealed an interesting attribute of situations. In some situations, participants would utilize one value and then put that value aside and replace it with a different value in another situation. This substitution-like attribute of values given the situation helped bring understanding to how ideology operates. This attribute receives additional treatment later in this chapter and is discussed in Chapter 6 regarding organizational decision-making.

Commitments. Another theme that emerged from the narrative data was that of commitments. A pattern developed throughout the open coding of each participant revealing that the theme of values also included a subcategory of values that were more central to decision-making than other values. These values, identified as “commitments,” were foundational to each participant’s decision-making and were the underpinning throughout the interviews. These are the “value principles” that Kohlberg and Mayer (1972, p. 464) discussed in their research.
Jason demonstrated a strong commitment to loving children. His commitment was based on the Biblical understanding that God created children. “I believe with all my heart that children are created in the image of God.” The use of the word “heart” expressed his deep commitment to understanding that children are made in God’s image and, therefore, worthy of Jason’s concern and love.

Further evidence of Jason’s love children involved his family’s financial sacrifice to adopt children.

It’s just part of what God wanted us to do. We were in the house and we had tried to have kids, biologically, [but it] was beyond the scope of what the doctors could even tell us… We thought, “Ok, we’re selling this house.”… and with the profit we’ll look into adopting.

Jason and his wife opened their home to minority children, children with special needs, and displaced teenagers. Loving children in a very practical way by providing a stable home environment was a calling, “part of what God wanted” them to do.

The theme of loving children underpinned Jason’s thinking throughout the interviews. In his situation-of-dilemma, he wanted to find a way to retain two students who broke the school’s code-of-conduct. His commitment to children caused him great anxiety.

Well I find myself, all of the time when I’m driving, when I’m thinking, when I’m laying in bed at night trying to develop a process by which we could bring them back, for it to make sense. I just can’t find a way. You know, the hearts of these of children. Jason was deeply concerned about the impact of his decision on the lives of these two children. Demonstrating love and concern for children, adopted or students, was a major theme of importance for Jason.
The other participants also expressed commitments to a value foundational to their thinking. For example, Dan was committed to his personal mission statement in the context of Christian schools. Paul was committed to the value of always “doing what is best for the kids.” Tom was committed to upholding Christian standards. In his words, “You cannot subjugate your standards to the point of saying that it’s more important to keep a student because of money.”

**Influences.** Finally, one additional major theme emerged from participant narratives. Participants made multiple references over the course of the interviews to influences in their lives. These influences existed on a wide spectrum ranging from childhood memories of church, school, and home through tragedies as adults. Based on the data, “influences” are best defined as those people, places, or events that impact how participants think about values and commitments. These influences helped to shape the values and commitments of the participants for particular situations.

This concept of influences impacting values and commitments was evident in the research literature. Fowler (2004), for instance, referenced the influences of the “school system” (p. 124) on values and commitments. Stanford-Blair and Dickman (2005) found that “the phenomenon of family and community” (p. 14) significantly influenced the formation of leadership values and commitments.

For example, Allison described the impact of her husband’s death on her values. She connected the impact of his death to helping shape her value of relationships.

I have come to realize how important people are. And, I have to tell you, it was one of the phenomenal aspects of when he was sick. The care of the people here floored me.
It absolutely floored me. From parents, to students… I can’t tell you the things that students did. It was unbelievable.

This situation of tragedy in Allison’s life helped mold her into a more caring leader, someone who became intentional about relationships. This intentionality toward relationships emerged in her situation-of-dilemma when she faced the board requesting raises for teachers.

The theme of influences also demonstrated itself in Paul’s life. Paul had moved around in different parts of the country. “Born in Chicago… at twelve I moved to California… Got married after college, lived in San Diego for about fifteen years… moved to Maryland right outside of Washington DC… then four years in Birmingham, four years in Atlanta, four years in Nashville.” This movement gave him a perspective in Christian education unique to other participants. He discussed the impact of coming from the south to the north on his value of academic process.

Yeah, re-enrollment starts in March and I’m thinking that’s too late. I want to be able to make decisions for our teachers in March and things like that. Coming from the south it was… if you didn’t have all your stuff ready almost by December 1st you were late.

Paul’s experience in a different part of the country influenced him to make a change in the process at his school.

**Analysis of Participant Values**

The following section details the observations and themes observed throughout the participants’ stories regarding the major theme of values. As the analysis will show, observations and themes emerge around individual values. While not all participant values
from each story were included in the study, values uncovered from each participant’s situation-of-dilemma revealed notable values worthy of analysis and discussion.

Before beginning any thematic analysis, however, definitions of each value need development. Spradley (1980) suggested using the concrete language principle to “expand, fill-out, enlarge, and give as much detail as possible” (p. 21) when describing intended meaning to phrases and words. Given Spradley’s requirement, this section on values provides verbatim details from this study’s participants as evidence of the values developed axially across the group. In the following evidence, “nouns and verbs” (p. 21) are underlined to emphasize the intended meaning for each value. At the end of each value’s definition, a summary extracts the underlined nouns and verbs to provide a quick reference for the reader.

**Relationship.** *Ken* discussed the impact of his decision on a co-worker, a friend.

We’ve done email; he hasn’t responded to my phone messages. I’ve just tried to leave it open to “I’m here if you want to talk about it please do.” He’s a solid guy and so I think if we can get through that. I doubt there’ll be much of a personal relationship.

*Janet* discussed the impact of making difficult decisions regarding her staff.

I can’t tell you how many times I’ve looked around and thought I’m so lonely I just...I still am lonely. It finally has sunk in it’s not going to change; I’ve thought well it’s just that I'm the newbie, it’s just whatever. I’m very lonely and nothing was lonelier than the day that I was crying, but I will say that there were two women in this office that took care of me.

*Allison* discussed the relationship with the church that owns the school.

We’re separately incorporated. It’s very interesting we are in separate corporations, but still very strongly linked, and it has been a phenomenal relationship. They support
us heavily. They support us financially, and in every way it is a good working relationship.

Relationship from these excerpts carries the meaning of “getting through,” perseverance, filling the void left from being “lonely,” “care,” “support,” having a “good” enough relationship to deal with everyday problems.

Trust. Dan shared that he was on a one-year personal improvement plan to improve the morale of the school.

Well, so the board came back to me and we are going to give you a year…we are going to go through and evaluation process of you. And so, I’m in that year…it’s not public information. I’ve lost trust in my board.

From Dan as he worked to repair the damage caused by two he released, Been a lot more in the hallways and the classrooms…just spending more time with staff. Doing things and anyway, really have built a trust back. And by removing those two people who were really…we can see it now more clearly than ever…were very cancerous in both of those hallways. By removing them built great camaraderie. We are in the best spot we’ve ever been in terms the team working together, in terms of educational outcomes, in terms of things happening.

Drew received an anonymous letter alleging inappropriate behavior between himself and a female teacher.

I called up the guy who was our vice chair of the board at the time, we had developed a friendship. I told him and he was quite upset, too. I called the president of the board and told her about the letter. They both read the letter prior to a board meeting and they decided they would not take it to the board. They had decided if the person who
wrote the letter did not want to sign the letter, then they did not have anybody they could go to and ask questions, or answer questions. So, they didn’t feel like they had enough information to be able to deal with it. They didn't know how to do any kind of you know investigation on the whole thing. They did trust my character, believing that there wasn’t any truth to anything that was alleged in the letter.

Trust from these excerpts carries the meaning of “friendship,” “spending more time”; it can be “lost” and “built.” Without trust there are “cancerous” attitudes; with trust there is “great camaraderie” and “working together” as a team.

**Change.** Janet described the benefits of the changes she made at the school to help it survive.

Parents are going that’s something I would pay for. Then we have really upped our game academically, technology we’re probably leading the state. We’re an iPad school, you know. We hired this top [guy]. I mean we've got a tech guy who is so far ahead of everybody. We actually have three tech geniuses in the building, and they’re just pushing us forward technologically. It’s funny the public school districts around here come here to look at what we’re doing.

Dan revealed that he was not going to be returning the following year as superintendent. The board was in the process of finding his replacement.

There doing a search now, so I will finish—he reports to me now, ‘til the end of the school year. I’m here as president of the ministry and head-of-school through the end of July. Then, they’ll restructure the June board meeting, at the June board meeting, he’ll take over as President of the ministry.
Dan discussed enrollment declines and the changes made to stay within budget. “Even though we lost those students, we were able to stay within the budget given to us. There were ways to make adjustments, and are going to continue to make adjustments.”

Change from these excerpts carries the meaning of an “upped game” or increasing the intensity of changes, hiring people, creating a gap to be “far ahead” of others, pushing “forward,” “restructure,” taking something over, making “adjustments,” and continuous.

Academics. Ken made changes to improve the classroom environment.

Each year has been a just a process of taking them from a really messy place. They had teachers on staff that really weren’t credentialed, but they had a heart for kids. They just didn’t have the educational background carried out. So it’s been a three year process of rebuilding.

Drew described the changes he made to improve the learning environment.

So you know, a couple weeks ago our new science teacher she was teaching in physics and they were talking about trajectory and things like that. She’s like, “Hey, the kids want to do a potato gun. Can I bring a potato gun and shoot potatoes out of it?” Well sure, I love that kind of stuff because the kids get into it. They enjoy it. I want the students to enjoy it because school is a drag, it can be you know. But it’s up to the teachers to make learning fun, and if learning is fun the kids like being here. They actually do learn and it sticks with them. That’s just kind of the atmosphere that I generated and I want to facilitate that.

Academics from these excerpts carries the meaning of “credentialed” teachers, an “educational background,” “process,” it can be enjoyed, it can be “a drag,” teachers can make
it “fun,” kids can like school, learning can stick with them, it is an “atmosphere,” and it can be facilitated, or helped.

**Culture.** *Paul* talked about why he released some of teachers but kept others when parents complained about the elementary environment.

I looked at these teachers. The kindergarten teacher, great lady, but I wouldn’t say she was nurturing…That is important to me, especially at the kindergarden level because our families are looking for nurturing teachers. They want a warm, loving environment. You hear all these stories people leaving because of x, y, and z, and you try to figure out what is truth. I’ve been in this long enough that if people leave and they say it’s finances there’s some other issues…[But], for several people just to be forthcoming and saying *this* [culture] is it. Now, I’m faced with who are the teachers that are going to help build and instill a life back into the school. The third grade teacher man I’m going to say sullen.

*Tom* reflected on the changes he made to regain control of his culture.

I’m looking at this and saying “If we’ve got that big of a problem, we’ve got to start getting rid of some kids to maintain some sanity again or restore some sanity again.” While it’s going to cost some money, it’s going to cost a whole lot more if we don’t clean the thing up and get back to where we need to get.

*Jason* struggled to determine the right course of action regarding two students who were suspended for violating the student-code-of-conduct.

I’d like to see change. Problem is I’m interacting with these students as their own suspension right now and I’m not seeing it. So I’m struggling with the depth to which I can access their ability to come back, and not continue to trample all over that code
of conduct. And the effect their going to have on the culture, do I keep trying to help them and extend what we call grace? Hope that they change and hope that they don’t make the same mistakes? Hope that they don’t affect our culture badly? Or do I go protective and protect the other kids from them and say ”I’m sorry you can’t come back.” I’m facing that right now. And it’s hard.

Culture from these excerpts carries the meaning of “nurturing,” “nurturing teachers,” a “warm, loving environment,” can be built and “instilled,” should not be “sullen,” should be sane, can be affected by students, can be affected “badly,” can be “protective” for “kids.”

Grace. Jason reviewed his own words on the transcript from the first interview. He provided reflection about his situation-of-dilemma.

It shows the constant struggle between grace and truth, how they fit together. And how they work. The deep-seated desire of wanting to see a heart change so much that it’s easy to blind yourself of other realities. You selfishly want to see that heart change so much that it could rob you of doing exactly what you need to do, which could bring out the heart change, the one you want to see.

Drew struggled to forgive others who hurt him with their gossip.

I want to be merciful. Micah 6:8 is my verse: “To do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God,” that’s what I want my motive to be as a school administrator. But, I think that balance of justice and mercy is a very, very key thing, it’s a very difficult thing and actually it’s humanely impossible.

Again from Drew, he dealt with the emotions of having a staff person create gossip about him.
Well, I was upset with her. But, knowing now who she is, knowing a little bit of her story, the story of her family, her siblings, and the bad things happen in their family I can kind of understand why she would go a little bit overboard or overreact to something. Thinking she’s doing something right, but not going about it the right way. So, it actually gave me a little bit of understanding once I figured out who it was. My wife was probably not as quick to be gracious about that and still has a hard time talking to that person.

Grace from these excerpts carries the meaning of “struggle” once “truth” is known, a “change of heart” is needed before “grace” is given. Grace can be blindly given, can “rob” someone of a better option, it is “merciful,” and needs to be balanced. It is “very difficult” to understand and requires “knowing” someone’s story.

**Discipleship.** *Ken* considered the purpose of his school.

It’s more about discipleship, and that’s how the school originally was set up…It had gone through a shift. It was becoming more evangelistic, which is not bad but their directional decision was we want to become more of a discipleship model again.

Once again from *Ken*, he considered the work he is doing at the school and the impact on his own children.

I love the challenge. It’s probably been good for me that it’s been hard. I enjoy that I still. Some days I get out of here and I wander. I love the classroom environment, it’s that interaction with the kids; to see that growth in them at such an early age. That’s the pastoral side of me, to watch them now for three years. To see them being discipled by some teachers that I feel are just phenomenal. I wouldn’t want my kids anywhere else.
Jason described his journey to develop a different school that focused on discipling students.

The whole discipleship mentality just really started to come out at this school in [another city]. I had started a small classical school in the DC area. Where it’s totally based on that mindset. It was small but the whole mindset was: we’re after the Christian kids to take them to the next level. And that made a lot more sense to me. And then that’s what we played out. And we started doing things a lot differently. Getting the kids involved in hands on ministry, every single week. That whole concept of we can’t just sit in Bible class day after day. We got to be doing ministry, we got to be in the community. Even though that can still become a fun treat, and can still become a circus activity, at least it’s the next level, or at least the next step. It gives adults avenues into their lives to make discipleship moves and efforts.

Discipleship from these excerpts carries the meaning of being a “model,” it is not the same as evangelism. “Interaction with kids,” “growth,” “teachers” and “adults” are involved. It is a “mentality,” a “mindset.” Discipleship is for “kids” who are already “Christian,” and involves growth to the “next level.” It is a “ministry” in the community, and can be “fun” but also a “circus.”

Authority. Allison’s pastor asked her to mentor the current superintendent, also her boss.

He asked me and I just looked at him, “Like are you kidding me!” He said, “Could you help him? I don’t think he’s aware of all these issues.” I said, “Pastor, I have tried. I have not avoided speaking truth, when it was appropriate, and I will continue
to do that. But, if you are asking me to be a mentor to him, I cannot do that… I'm under his authority.”

Again from Allison as she was confronted by her then superintendent to violate an admissions policy. The superintendent had asked her to interview a family and then accept them because they were wealthy.

He knew I was going to be interviewing a family that did not meet our missions criteria, but they had a lot of money. He wanted me to accept them. I said, “I cannot, this is policy. This is policy established by the board, and this has been policy since the inception of the school. Do not ask me to go against that because I can’t.” …He got angry at me. I said, “Well, you better do the interview because if you’re asking me to do it I am going to follow policy.”

Robert’s experience in the military shaped his definition of authority.

Well, I’ll tell my staff and I share it even with the church staff, it took God 23 years to get me to understand the concept of respect for authority, submission to authority. In the military obviously you have to get that pretty quick and I lived under that for 23 years… So, I get authority and I know how to submit to it. It doesn’t mean I always do it well, but that’s the human sinful nature; but I get it. I understand it’s importance… the structure, the order, the respect for the chain of command, and then just submission to authority.

Authority from these excerpts carries the meaning of not avoiding “speaking truth” to those higher in the organization; it does not mean coaching or mentoring those higher in the organization. Authority can come in the form of “policy,” or from the “board.” It means
following “policy,” “respect,” “submission,” “structure,” “order,” “chain of command,” and is not always done well.

**Duty.** Robert struggled to find a solution to balance his values of duty and authority. He described the need to carry out policy and directives from the school board even if did not agree with them.

I saw that kind of stuff in the military, too. It comes to this: this is my duty and it’s just the way that I’ve been trained. You work for a board, it’s very different from anything I’ve ever done before. But coming out of the military…with my boss in the military I was trained to go into my boss and say, “Ok, boss this is what you’re telling me to do. I don’t agree, can we talk about it?” So, we talk about it. [He says,] “I’m not convinced. So, I still want you to go do this in your unit. I’ve heard you I don’t agree with you I just need you to carry out my order.” “Yes sir.” I salute, I do it and I carry out that order. Everybody in my unit thinks it’s my idea. That’s the way I’m trained and that’s what I try to do.

Again from Robert as he described the requirements of teachers and their duty.

[They must be] willing to hold students accountable knowing that the mind belongs to God and that he or she as a teacher has a duty and responsibility before God to know their students, because every student is different. Every student has different intellectual capacity. Some students are struggling with learning disabilities that will never be diagnosed, and they’ll have to learn to overcome that. The teacher can help with that. And other kids, need to speed ahead super-fast with no disability, they’re cheating the child that needs the extra help if they can give them that extra help. They’re cheating the child that needs to speed ahead a little bit by not finding ways
for that child to speed ahead. So from a practice perspective the teacher needs to be thinking in that regard to her students.

Duty from these excerpts carries the meaning of being personal, trainable or learned, and includes the notion of submission to authority. Duty is action oriented: “do it,” “carry out that order.” It includes the understanding of respect: “salute.” Duty includes being held accountable: teachers are required to “hold students accountable,” “responsibility before God.” Teachers have a duty to “help,” give “extra help,” find “ways,” and think about “students.”

**Evangelism.** Tom struggled with admitting students who had the potential to cause trouble for the culture but were opportunities for evangelism.

Now I’m not going to take a ton of them. They’re not going to be the dominant number in our school but I have no problem getting 10%, 15% in. And people who are uncomfortable are not going to have discipline or drug problems. And I don’t want any of that. But if it’s just a matter of somebody who’s seeking some logic to their lives, some truth to their lives. Who’s actually seeking out a place where their kid could be safe because they believe religion will improve them, and the kid is open to be in that environment, then yeah I’d probably take them.

Again, from Tom, he considered the purpose of his school.

For me the whole thing revolves around…God is going to give you a certain number of kids, and they’re brought to you by Him. He gives you a chance to have an impact on them for a brief time; could be a year, could be 12 years could be 13 years. But, not much more than that. You might have some more contact beyond that. What is the most important thing that you can do to help the kids? Is it academic, is it sports is
it social areas? I see so many people come in and they talk about the stuff that kids enjoy...But, they don’t get down to truly getting to the point of who Christ really is, and what He did for you. And, that to me is the epitome of what we’re here for. If you don’t do that in your school than you’re no different another public school. You’re just talking around the issues, avoiding what I believe God has given you an opportunity to do... The whole idea of evangelism really is where my heart really is. We did it for a year when they came in for the training with us and it was, I don’t want to sound negative, but the materials they used is not something that were going to appeal to kids today. It was just so old fashioned stuff. The message was fine but the methodology was antiquated and just was not going to appeal. I mean our kids, I had to beat them on the head to even enjoy it, and they never enjoyed it. So do I think that evangelism is important, yeah, but I still believe that you have to take in kids.

Evangelism from Tom’s excerpts carries the meaning of students seeking some “logic,” or “truth to their lives.” It is a religious term. The term implies students are “brought” to the school by God so the school can have an “impact” on them. It is the “epitome” or essence for the school’s existence. Evangelism is an “opportunity.” It carries the understanding that there is curriculum and “materials” and methods. The school must accept kids who need to be evangelized.

With the definitions complete, the balance of Chapter 5 presents the many observations and themes related to values that emerged from the coaxial analysis. Table 5 provides a quick summary of the observations and themes uncovered during the analysis.
Table 5

Observations and Themes about Values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation of Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Values Observation 1</td>
<td>Values have order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values Observation 2</td>
<td>Values are interconnected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values Observation 3</td>
<td>Different situations use different values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values Observation 4</td>
<td>Classification of values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values Observation 5</td>
<td>Values and religious denomination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values Theme 4</td>
<td>Relationships and female participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values Theme 5</td>
<td>The middle class and performance values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values Observation 6</td>
<td>Value and academics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values Theme 1</td>
<td>The value of culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values Theme 2</td>
<td>Religious values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values Theme 3</td>
<td>Religious values and participant age</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Values Observation 1: Values have order. Stanford-Blair and Dickman (2005) expressed the notion that ideology is more than just a list of values; it is composed of a set of values that have ordering. Fowler (2004) provided understanding to the ordering process. Americans differ not in whether they believe in these values, but in how they prioritize them. The way people prioritize the major values is crucially important; in the real world of limited choices and resource constraints, one cannot pursue all the values at the same time. (p. 120)

People, according to Fowler, make choices about which values are the most important given the circumstances and then “prioritize” them. This was certainly observed in the nine participants.

One of the first observations that emerged from the axial coding of values was the notion that values have hierarchy or order. In any given story, each participant’s decision seemed to pivot on a single value of primary importance. The primary value was that value selected by the participant because of “real world” constraints (p. 120). While this primary value trumped the importance of other values, it did not silence them. The less important values were in a secondary position of hierarchy but still in the mix of participant thinking as they rationalized choices based on constraints. Table 6 lists the values for each participant.

Jason, for example, struggled in his dilemma with three values: culture, grace, and discipleship. His ideological narrative for the dilemma resulted in an emphasis on the primary value of culture. His choice resulted in the expulsion of two senior students because he was concerned about the impact on other students. However, the value of grace, while not primary, was still present in his thinking. He was able to demonstrate grace toward the two senior students he dismissed by finding a way to ask them to leave the school without ruining
their transcripts for college. In this example, Jason’s primary value was culture, and his secondary value was grace.

Such was the case with Tom, as well. In his dilemma, Tom’s ideological narrative emphasized a sane culture. Tom chose to maintain a sane culture for the school and dismissed one student, and could have dismissed a second student. Instead, he allowed the second student to stay. The choice to keep the second student was the effect of the secondary value of evangelism. Tom felt the student had “hope” because of her mother. Maintaining a stable culture was primary and resulted in the expulsion of one student. Evangelism was secondary and resulted in retention of student.

In summary, primary values surfaced as the dominant value by which participants established ideological positions for their situations-of-dilemma. Secondary values fell to a lesser role in the decision but added caution to the participant’s decision-making.
Table 6

*Primary and Secondary Values of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Primary and Secondary Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>*Academics, Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>*Academics, Discipleship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>*Culture, Academics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>*Culture, Grace, Discipleship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>*Culture, Evangelism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janet</td>
<td>*Change, Relationship, Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allison</td>
<td>*Relationship, Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>*Duty, *Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drew</td>
<td>*Grace, Trust</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Indicates the primary value for the participant’s ideology

**Values Observation 2: Values are interconnected.** As open coding occurred for each of the participants’ stories, ordered values not only emerged for each participant, but so did associations between those values. It was very common, for instance, for participants to have their primary and secondary values congregate around a commitment value. Commitment values were central to a participant’s thinking and more consistent throughout multiple situations.

O’Neill (1981) also suggested the notion of values being interconnected and associated with each other. While discussing the characteristics of ideology, he noted that they “are more specific systems of general ideas” (p. 20). The concept of “system” suggests inputs, outputs, and connectedness of these “general ideas” which we know as values.
By observing similar words or phrases from the inspection of verbatim evidence, connections between values emerged. For example, from Ken’s verbatim evidence, words and phrases formed values around important topics like Christian schools, discipleship, academics, change, and relationships. Many of the words and phrases added meaning to words or phrases in other groups, so networks began to develop. For example, Ken indicated that from an academic perspective, the “school was a mess academically.” As a result, he began a “restructuring process” to change the school’s academics. In another example, when speaking about the importance of a Christian school, he said, “It’s not just a training ground” for academics, but discipleship was important as well: “Discipleship [includes] learning from the teachers.” Figure 4 depicts a sample of Ken’s verbatim evidence showing the formation of values and connections. An actual sample of the List-of-Verbatim evidence is shown in Appendix G.

In a condensed version of Ken’s network of values, it is easier to visualize the relationship between his commitment to Christian schools and the other values in his network. The value of Christian schools added more understanding to Ken’s comments and phrases regarding the value of discipleship and academics. For example, regarding his commitment to Christian schools, he discussed “the role of Christian education.” About his value of academics he stated, “School is an academic setting” and that some teachers “couldn’t teach” which helped him decide to restructure the teaching assignments to improve the school. Figure 5 shows a simplified version of Ken’s network of values, also called a Code Map. An actual sample of a Code Map is shown in Appendix H.
Figure 4. Ken’s network of values based on verbatim evidence.
Figure 5. Ken’s simplified network of values (Ken’s Code Map).

Additional observations emerged when overlaying Ken’s primary and secondary values for his situation-of-dilemma onto his network of values. From Observation 1 we know that values have ordering. We also know that commitments are important assumptions to participants and are central to decision making across any situation, not just the situation-of-dilemma. Combining these two observations together provided a synthesized view of Ken’s network given his situation of dilemma.

In his situation-of-dilemma, Ken struggled with the decision to release one of his non-credentialed teachers. Central to his thinking throughout all of his stories was his commitment to Christian schools. His struggle included balancing his decision to improve academics with the importance of discipleship, all for the purpose of improving his school. He acknowledged that having the right teacher in front of the students was paramount to discipleship. “Discipleship doesn’t have to be a program; it’s making sure I’ve got the right
people in that classroom.” He also conceded that the teacher he was releasing was good at discipleship. “He has a heart for kids and a desire to teach.” However, Ken chose to release the teacher because he was not credentialed. Quality academic instruction was primary over the secondary value of discipleship and other values. Ken’s situation-of-dilemma is graphically depicted in Figure 6.

\[ 
\text{Christian Education} \rightarrow \text{Academics} \rightarrow \text{Discipleship} \rightarrow \text{Change} \rightarrow \text{Relationships} 
\]

**Figure 6.** Ken’s network of values for his situation-of-dilemma.

**Values Observation 3: Different situations use different values.** Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) believed that people typically operate between one of four ethical considerations causing variation of their core values. Throughout life, people have a natural tension between values and constantly “rethink and reframe concepts such as privilege,
power, culture, language, and even justice” (p. 14). The rethinking process can result in modifying the relative importance of values.

One of the most interesting themes of the entire research project revealed itself in eight of the nine participants. During the course of the interviews, superintendents shared multiple stories, not just their situation-of-dilemma, about how they dealt with difficult circumstances. With the exception of Robert, all superintendents recounted stories that did not align with the ideology developed from their situation-of-dilemma story.

Upon further analysis, these alternate stories did not support the primary value found in the ideology derived from their dilemma. There was a rethinking by the participants of the relative order of values based on the situation. For example, Allison’s ideology from her story of dilemma was, “Caring relationships are necessary for a Christian school.” The value of relationship was primary, or dominant, over the secondary value of authority because in her dilemma, she was fighting for salary increases for teachers. She had to stand up to the authority of her board and tell them, “It’s your responsibility…to make decisions based on information,” which they were not. However, in a different story, Allison questioned her superintendent about a decision he was making without the board’s knowledge. “To me, that felt like we were going behind their back, and they are the policy making board. Our job is to enforce policy.” With the threat of violating board policy, Allison felt more aligned to the value of the board’s authority than she did to the relationship with her superintendent. In those two situations, Allison rethought her values and rotated the importance of relationship and authority.

Ken also exhibited the emerging theme that values change in different situations. From his story of dilemma, Ken’s ideological narrative emphasized quality academic
instruction. In his story, he released a teacher because the teacher was not certified, and certification was necessary for quality classroom instruction. The teacher had a “heart for kids” and “worked hard” at discipling students. However, Ken’s primary value in the situation required the teacher to be credentialed for classroom instruction. In a different story, however, Ken admitted autistic students into the school. The current students were learning to disciple other students even at the cost of academic time in the classroom.

We’re trying to teach the students that you care for one another no matter who they are or what the need. If that means this student over here needs some time from you, then you need to give that to them.

Ken elevated his value of discipleship to a primary position over academic instruction, now a secondary value.

There is an important note regarding these values. The participants were not discarding their primary values, but rearranging them to accommodate the situation. Their pool of values remained constant throughout their stories, but their primary values changed as the situations changed.

Robert was the exception, however. Robert did not reveal any stories that rearranged his primary values. In fact, in each of the situations he shared he used the same ideological position. Robert’s ideological position was, “Executing duty and obeying authority are necessary in a Christian school.” His dilemma story involved finding a solution to accomplish his duty to pay for teacher salary increases while concurrently improving the authority structure of his leadership team. Achieving both values cost money, but Robert found a way to satisfy both primary values in his ideology. In another story, a divisive elementary teacher tried to persuade Robert “to dislike the elementary principal.” Robert,
again, performed his duty of listening to her “just talk” to him, but then later supported the chain-of-command authority structure in the school and contacted his elementary principal. Robert was consistent in his ability to achieve both primary values of duty and authority.

**Values Observation 4: Classification of values.** In total, there were ten major values evolving from participant stories. The ten major values, shown by participant in Table 6 and defined in the first half of this section, share some similarities if grouped together. For example, discipleship, grace, and evangelism are religious in nature and can be important when resolving dilemmas in Christian schools. Values like relationship and trust are also important when working with people in an organizational setting. Likewise, culture provides acceptable norms for how people relate to each other in organizational settings.

However, there are other values unlike those just mentioned. Academics were a performance value of Dan, Ken’s, and Paul’s. Duty and authority both addressed completing tasks and following the “chain-of-command” as Robert emphasized. Change, for Janet, was important to achieve the vision of the school.

Consequently, a system of classification emerged from the data for the ten major values found during the project. The values of relationship, trust, grace, discipleship, evangelism, and culture can be widely classified as “relational” values. This group of values guided interactions between people on a daily basis to resolve conflict, encourage people, and live together in community.

The other group of values shaped interactions between people, but differently. Values like change, authority, duty, and academics were “performance”-based values. They emphasized the importance of achieving organizational goals. Table 7 shows the two categories of values that emerged from the analysis.
Table 7

*Values Classifications*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Participant Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>relationship, culture, trust, grace, discipleship, evangelism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>change, authority, duty, academics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Values Observation 5: Values and religious denomination.** Not present in the participant data were any developing themes between religious denomination and values. The range of religious denomination that participants belonged to at the time of the study included Baptist, Evangelical Free, Fellowship of Evangelical, Bible Church, and Non-Denominational. As children, two of the participants were involved in Mennonite churches. More data are needed to understand the effect of denomination on value selection for participant stories.

**Values Observation 6: Values and academics.** An ideological position expected to be a major theme, but was not, involved the importance of academics in the ideology of Christian school superintendents. Only two of the nine participants’ ideology included academics as the primary value in their ideology from the situation-of-dilemma. Only Dan and Ken told stories about dilemmas that involved academics as the most important value in their decision-making. From Dan’s story, he released teachers or re-assigned teachers because they were not producing results on academic tests. Ken released teachers because they were not certified by the state, a requirement to improve academic instruction in the classroom in his view. Only Dan and Ken believed that academics were necessary to achieve their personal mission.
Values Theme 1: The value of culture. Ideological positions that used culture as the primary value prevailed over those ideological positions involving other values. Three of nine participants’ ideologies included culture as the primary value for making decisions in their story of dilemma. Jason wanted a “protective” culture from which he could demonstrate love for children. Paul wanted a “warm, loving” culture created by the teachers in the school because that would be best for kids. Tom wanted “sanity” and stability in his school’s culture so he could uphold Christian standards. Culture was so important to each of these superintendents that they expelled students who, in their view, put the school’s culture at risk.

Values Theme 2: Religious values. Religious values were either primary or secondary values for four out of the nine participants. The religious values of grace, discipleship, and evangelism were secondary values for Tom, Ken, and Jason. Tom, for example, chose a stable culture as a primary value and evangelism as a secondary value. Ken chose value of academic instruction as primary and discipleship as secondary. Jason decided to have a protective culture but still identified the values of grace and discipleship as important secondary values. It should not be assumed, however, that participants always view these religious values as secondary values; they were only deemphasized for the participant’s story of dilemma.

Unlike the other three participants, Drew held a religious value as primary in the ideology used in his story of dilemma. Drew’s primary value was grace, and he used words like “forgiven,” “understanding,” and “graciousness” to describe his decision on how to address a staff member who gossiped about him. Part of the explanation for this exception was Drew’s personal commitment. His personal commitment centered on understanding truth and exposing lies.
If I can expose the lie that has caused [someone] to act or behave in whatever way they did and counteract that with truth, then I can hold them accountable for truth and lies…a lot of times there’s natural consequences and I don’t even have to do anything…

Drew believed that once a truth revealed a lie, then there are natural consequences the person. Therefore, his response was to be understanding and gracious.

**Values Theme 3: Religious values and generational age.** As mentioned, only four of the nine participants embraced the religious values at any level. Of those four participants, three participants were between the ages of 47 and 32, making them members of Generation X. These three participants were the only participants who embraced grace and discipleship as either primary or secondary values. Jason, Ken, and Drew all held grace and discipleship in high regard throughout their stories. Jason, for example, struggled with establishing which values were more important in his story of dilemma: culture, grace, or discipleship.

I’d like to see redemption, I’d like to see change…I’m struggling with their ability to come back and not continue to trample all over that code of conduct. And the effect they’re going to have on the culture? Do I keep trying to help them and extend what we call grace, and hope that they change?

Jason, who is under 50 years old, eventually decided that culture was more important than grace and discipleship in his story of dilemma. However, he did consider these religious values important enough to include in his struggle as secondary values.

Ken, also under 50 years of age, struggled to find a balance between values like academics and discipleship. “Credentialed” teachers were important to Ken to improve
academic instruction in the classroom. However, he also struggled to find teachers who would disciple students.

Discipleship for me comes back to who their teachers are. I think more than anything they’re going to be learning integrity and Biblical foundations from their teachers…It’s making sure I’ve got the right people in that classroom…it has been a process of getting the right teachers in front of the classroom.

In his story of dilemma, Ken released a teacher who was not certified by the state but was good at discipleship with the students. Like Jason, Ken eventually chose a different primary value over a religious one. He struggled with the decision, indicating the importance of the religious values, even if secondary.

Tom was the fourth participant who included a religious value in his decision-making. Tom, unlike the other three participants, was over the age of 65, making him a member of the Silent generation. He struggled with maintaining a culture that was sane and stable because he had a desire to include students who needed to be “evangelized” in his school. He summarized his struggle as he considered the risk of lowering his admission standard to accept a student who he might not normally accept.

I believe as a Christian administrator to never lower a standard to accommodate another kid unless I have seen that there’s truly hope for that kid to finally come to accept Christ…If I feel that’s there, then I’ve got to [admit the kid]… I don’t want to give up on a kid that I feel like I could still help.

Tom struggled with not giving up on a student that he felt needed to be evangelized. However, in one of his other stories, he also expelled a student who was creating instability in the school’s culture. “When we got to the end of the year, I got to the point where it was
just one thing after another and another.” While Tom did eventually expel the student, it was not without a serious consideration of what would happen to the student’s life. As with the younger superintendents, it was not clear why the age demographic caused the oldest member in the study to embrace evangelism.

Research from the Pew organization (Millenials, 2010) indicated the importance of religion for the different generations. Their research indicated that religion was important to 67% of the Silent generation, 60% of the Boomers, and 52% of Generation X (p. 95). The research also indicated that 50% of the Silent generation, 43% of the Boomers, and 38% of Generation Xers have a strong affiliation with religion (p. 89).

However, even with the importance of religion and the strong affiliation with religion, there was no clear explanation from the research literature that explained the association between the religious values of grace, discipleship, and Generation X thinking. The same gap in the literature exists to help explain Tom’s value of evangelism from the Silent generation.

In summary, the category of religious values was a theme amongst four of the nine participants. The five participants from the Baby Boomer generation displayed little attention to the religious values of grace, discipleship, or evangelism. Grace and discipleship were popular with the Generation X participants and evangelism with the one participant in the Silent generation.

Values Theme 4: Relationships and female participants. When analyzing values across social factors such as gender, data indicated that one value was shared by both female participants, but not with males. Relationships with the administrative team, teachers, and community were primary or secondary values for Allison and Janet, respectively.
As an interim superintendent, Janet intentionally focused on building relationships with her staff because she understood the importance of positive relationships with people. “Our theme with…our teachers and staff focused on being a body…how we support each other, and how we care for each other.” She knew that the staff needed time to heal from the broken relationship they experienced with the previous superintendent. “I value the people who work under me…I love them. I feel like my responsibility is to do everything I can to make their job as easy as possible…whether I help them professionally, or care about them personally.” Allison values the relationships with others in her school, which caused her to take responsibility for their professional and personal well-being.

From a different view on the value of relationships, Janet was hurt by her employees. Janet expressed how hurt she was after finding out that she offended some teachers and the principals did not discuss it with her sooner. “Why didn’t anybody come to me? Why a week later? ...I offended one of your teachers…Why didn’t you come to me? ... I’m personally offended… my feelings are hurt.” Janet thought the relationship between her and the principals was solid; it was not. “I was just devastated. I just cried and I could not stop crying.” The realization that her relationship with her administrative team was not positive caused an emotional response.

In her work on gender differences, Gilligan (1977) identified two major differences between men and women necessary to understanding gender values. In her interviews, she found woman have “an injunction to care, a responsibility to discern and alleviate the ‘real and recognizable trouble’ of this world” (p. 511). Allison displayed a desire to have a relationship with others where she could personally care for her teachers and staff. Janet was
offended when her principals did not identify “real and recognizable trouble” that would have prevented hurt feelings.

Both Janet and Allison understood the value of relationships with community. Janet realized the value of positive community relationships as she focused on helping the school survive. “I began to realize how important the community was…We had to be united. I do think that a school like this cannot survive without a united community…So, I don’t do anything if it’s not relational. If it’s not gonna bring the community along…” Janet emphasized the need for positive relationships with the community so the community could unite and help save the school.

Allison also realized the importance of a strong relationship with the school community. When her husband passed away from an extended battle with a heart condition, the people of the school responded with help and encouragement.

I have come to realize how important people are. And, I have to tell you, it was one of the phenomenal aspects of when [her husband] was sick. The care of the people here [at the school] floored me. It absolutely floored me. From parents, to students…

Allison felt the positive support from her school family as she dealt with the aftermath of her husband’s death.

**Values Theme 5: The middle class and performance values.** With the classification system for values in place, additional analysis revealed an interesting perspective on the social factor of class. From the demographics of the participants, only the social classes of middle and working were represented in the study. Participants raised in the middle class embraced only performance values as their primary values from their situation-
of-dilemmas. Ken, Dan, and Janet all used the performance values of change or academics as the primary value in their ideology.

Janet for example, was raised in a middle-class family and embraced the value of change as necessary to improve the school. “Financial practices were lagging… The principal who was in charge of athletics could [not] have cared less about athletics… There hadn’t been performance reviews done in ten years” are all indicators of the performance values important to Janet. In her story of dilemma, she forced teachers and administrators to attend an off-site retreat because, “We needed a different start to the school year, because we were in a rut. Everything we did here was the same old, same old.” Again, Janet was focused on change to improve performance and save the school.

In complimentary fashion, with the exception of Robert, five of the participants raised with working-class parents embraced relational values as primary in their ideologies. Paul, for example, was raised in a working-class home and embraced culture as the primary value in his ideology. “Families are looking for nurturing teachers. They want a warm, loving environment… [Of an elementary teacher] she’s done a great job at winning their hearts over.” Paul believes in the value of culture like his other working-class participants.

Robert was the exception to using relational values like his working-class peers from the study. Robert embraced performance values like authority and duty during his story of dilemma to make decisions. One possible explanation for Robert jumping from the relational values to the performance based values is the influence and training of the military. Regarding the value of duty for example, Robert was very clear that the military was responsible for making that important to him, aside from the social class of his parents.
I’m willing to kill, to die, to be killed because I believe in the United States of America. I believe in fighting for what you stand for; that has been engrained in me for 23 years, just over and over again.

It is not clear, however, if Robert held relational values in high regard before his military training. It is not possible without further investigation to determine if Robert’s affinity for performance values can be entirely attributed to the military, or if some other influence was at work in his home life or childhood.

**Analysis of Participant Situations**

Throughout the interview process, participants shared stories of dilemmas in which they had to make an important decision, often under stressful conditions in a dynamic environment. These stories gave insight to the situations in which superintendents found themselves throughout the course of their daily work. This section analyzes those situations of dilemmas looking for emerging themes and connections to current research. For easy reference, Table 8 presents the situation-of-dilemmas for each participant, Table 9 a list of the observations and themes developed from the analysis, and Table 10 a listing of the situational categories emerging from the stories participants shared.
Table 8

*Participant's situation-of-dilemma.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Situation-of-dilemma</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>Released a teacher due to performance problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>Released a teacher because of certification problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Expelled a student for causing trouble with other students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>Expelled two students for breaking code-of-conduct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Expelled students for sexting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janet</td>
<td>Disagreed with teachers over the necessity of having an overnight retreat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allison</td>
<td>Disagreed with the superintendent over cutting teacher salaries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>Disagreed with board over teacher salaries and leadership structure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drew</td>
<td>Had to deal with a rumor that alleged his inappropriate behavior with a female teacher.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9

*Observations and themes about situations.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation or Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Situations Observation 1</td>
<td>Situations create emotional responses in others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situations Observation 2</td>
<td>Classification of situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situations Observation 3</td>
<td>Situations and social factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situations Theme 1</td>
<td>Situations and employee discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situations Theme 2</td>
<td>Situations and student discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situations Theme 3</td>
<td>Situations and boards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Situations Observation 1: Situations create emotional responses in others.** An obvious but not to be overlooked observation throughout all of the situations of dilemma shared during the interviews were the emotional responses of others toward the participants. Jason expelled two students for inappropriate sexual behavior, and he had “a couple of really angry parents.” Ken released a teacher who was also a friend of his. “He’s still really upset…I doubt there will be much of a personal relationship again.” Additionally, Drew, who forgave the person who gossiped about him, had to deal with that person being “defensive.”
Superintendents during the situations of dilemma confronted a wide range of emotional behaviors from others, often resulting in broken relationships.

**Situations Observation 2: Classification of situations.** Similar to values, it was possible to classify situations. Since one of the study questions was related to understanding how superintendents use ideology to make organizational decisions, a grouping of situations in the organizational context made sense. Amongst the many organizational theory models available—Thompson (2008), Pfeffer and Salancik (2003), and Scott (2008)—Thompson offered the best fit for classifying situations for this study. The model is relatively easy to explain because of its simple design, and it efficiently handled all of the various situations offered by the participants. The model also offered the benefit of being able to study each superintendent’s maneuvering in situations to keep his or her organization either opened or closed to the outside environment, a key characteristic of the Thompson model.

In the Thompson model, there are four concentric layers describing the four groups of people typically found in an organization. The inner-layer is the *technical core*, the layer where the work of the organization is done by experts. In education, this layer includes teachers and counselors, for example—those who work directly with the students. Teachers work with students to increase their academic knowledge and, in the case of a Christian school, an understanding of God and the Bible.

The next outer layer is where *management* resides. This layer directs members in the technical core, enforces policies, and often shields the core from distractions coming from the outside environment. In education, principals, vice-principals, and deans of students, for example, often occupy this layer. *Institutional* leaders reside in the next outer layer acting as the vanguards to the organization. This layer often creates policies allowing the organization
to remain closed or opened to changes in the external environment. Superintendents and boards reside in this layer of the organization. In the final outermost layer, the *task environment* contains all of the external influences tempting the organization to remain the same or adapt. In education, groups at this level include parents, the school community, and the government, to name a few. Table 10 identifies the four classifications of this study’s situations based on the Thompson model.

Table 10

*Classification of Situations Based on Thompson’s (2008) Organizational Model*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Situations from participant stories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thompson(2008)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Core</td>
<td>Teaching students, developing curriculum, standardized testing, discipling students, counseling students, evangelizing students, mentoring students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Releasing teachers, putting teachers on improvement plans, enforcing policy, establishing processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional</td>
<td>Creating policies, working with boards, governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Environment</td>
<td>Parents, school community, pastors, local agencies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using the classification scheme based on Thompson’s organizational model provided easy stratification of participant situations told through their stories. In the technical core, for instance, Ken mentored college-aged students while a pastor. In the Air Force, Robert helped one of his soldiers with a marital problem, and Jason discipled two of his students.
Participants found themselves in situations involving them in the technical core of their organizations even though they were not formally working with students.

Participants also found themselves in situations that involved management tasks and activities. For example, Drew disciplined a staff member for gossiping. Paul changed an administrative process that published tuitions and fees earlier in the year to encourage parent enrollment, and Janet disciplined teachers who had a “union mentality.” These examples point out the wide range of management situations that superintendents engage in on a regular basis.

At the institutional layer, superintendents interacted with authority figures and policies that navigated through the task environment. For example, Ken released a teacher because of a board policy that he helped to create. The policy was created for the purpose of improving classroom instruction and increasing school legitimacy. Allison chastised her board for not making data-based decisions. Dan had a sharp disagreement with his board as he dealt with a teacher discipline problem. As a commander in the Air Force, Robert told of a situation in which he faced a potential court martial because of performance problems in his unit. Participants often told stories of working at the institutional layer to seal off the organization to the influences of the environment or open it to outside influences.

Participants interacted with the task environment in a wide spectrum of situations. Dan, for instance, told a story of him “being a pastor’s pastor” to local clergy as he encouraged and worked with local pastors in his school’s community. Jason interacted with a local shelter in community and took his children there to work. At the other end of the spectrum, Paul interacted with a mother in a situation whose daughter made allegations of
another student. Superintendents found themselves often times interacting with people outside of their school as part of their regular duties.

As the conclusion chapter will reveal, one of the findings of this research was that superintendents roam around the different levels of the organization. This roaming, however, is not random. Superintendents involve themselves in different layers of the organization to satisfy their personal commitments. The upcoming analysis on the ideological element of “commitments” will reveal that the superintendents hold one value above all others and maintain a personal commitment to that value throughout any dilemma.

**Situations Observation 3: Situations and social factors.** With groups established around the Thompson (2008) organizational model, an analysis revealed no association between the social factors of race, age, gender, social class, or religious denomination. This is possibly explained by the few number of participants or the few number of social factors tracked for the study. Future studies could address this gap and investigate potential correlations.

*Situations Theme 1: Situations and employee discipline*

As participants retold their stories throughout the interviews, an emerging theme included situations that involved taking disciplinary actions with employees. While this theme was present in only two of the nine participant dilemmas, six of the nine participants included other stories involving employee discipline.

In Janet’s situation-of-dilemma, for example, she dealt with a mutinous group of teachers who refused to go on an overnight retreat at the beginning of the school year.

I was shocked to find out that the whole building mutinied…all the elementary teachers banded together and they wanted to have a meeting; there was a rebel in the
high school who said, "I'm going to get a whole group of people.” I had to go deal with all these people.

Janet found herself having to confront a group of teachers who did not want to go on an overnight retreat. Instead of caving into to their demands, Janet addressed each of their concerns. She did not allow her teachers to opt out of the retreat simply because they did not want to go. In the end, the employees relented, went on the retreat, and had a good time. “[I had staff coming up and apologizing” for their behavior.

In Dan’s situation-of-dilemma, however, the ending was not so pleasant. Dan released a teacher because she would not accept a new teaching assignment, one for which she was better suited in Dan’s opinion. In the process, Dan and the teacher reached an agreement that she would leave the school, but she created a stir as she went.

On Sunday, she sent out a letter to everybody… “I’ve been dismissed unfairly, I want to tell you my side of the story.” And… it was horrible. [She said], “I want to tell you my side of the story; anything else they tell you is a lie.”… I was hurt and angry… trying to discern as a Christian, how do you respond to something like this?

Dan’s situation involved letting a teacher go because of performance issues but then having to deal with the aftermath of a surprise email blast from the teacher to the entire school community. In the end, the teacher started her own school, a board member resigned, and a number of students left the school. His board even suggested that he hire her back in an effort to settle the situation. Dan refused to back down on disciplining the employee.

Situations, other than those of dilemma, from participants revealed similar themes of having to confront employees about performance issues. Allison had to release a maintenance person because he refused to trim trees in the front of the school. Paul let
teachers go because they were “sullen” and “not nurturing.” Ken released a teacher who lacked certification by the state. Robert had to release a coach because of an inappropriate display of anger in front of students and fans. After disciplining a staff member who gossiped about him, Drew chose to forgive and reconcile with the person. These stories reveal a theme of situations that involve the necessity of disciplining teachers, staff, coaches, and other employees as a normal part of the superintendent’s duties.

**Situations Theme 2: Situations and student discipline.** Three of the nine participants dealt with student discipline issues, another emerging theme in the situations superintendents face. Jason found students who were “trampling all over the student code of conduct” by having an inappropriate relationship. Eventually, Jason dismissed the students. Similarly, Ted needed to resolve a sexting issue and other “sexual junk” between the students in his school, releasing a number of students in the process. Paul faced a situation involving a female student who claimed a male student “would swear at her and call her nasty names and threaten her.” The claims were never proven and the female student was dismissed.

There was no demographical data indicating a relationship between these three superintendents and their action of expelling or releasing students. However, all three of these superintendents placed a high value on the school’s culture. Culture was the primary value in Jason’s, Ted’s, and Paul’s ideologies. These superintendents, when faced with a situation that threatened the school’s culture due to student behavior, chose to preserve the culture over retaining students.

**Situations Theme 3: Situations and boards.** Another group of themes amongst the participants developed from situations involving board interactions. Three of the nine schools were church-owned, allowing church boards and leaders to exercise significant control over
the school. The remaining six schools operated as independent schools with school boards. Amongst participants who shared situations involving churches and board interactions, two primary themes emerged.

A theme of support was evident in four of nine participants. For example, Allison is superintendent in a church-owned school and received support from her church-elected school board when requesting increases for teacher salaries. “Going into this year they gave me $40,000 for raises…to smooth out the differences [between salaries].” The salary structure was low and not equitable, and the board decided to support Allison’s request.

In another show of board support, Paul received backing from his school board regarding the expulsion of a student who was making false accusations about another student. Paul’s school is not associated with a church and operates with an independent school board. Though the board did not necessarily agree with Paul’s decision, they allowed him to make the decision. “That decision infuriated some of the board members… [but] they agreed that I run the school.” The board provided support for Paul’s decision by allowing him to make the final decision on the student’s disposition even if some members were “infuriated.” Support for superintendent decisions by the school board was also evident in Ken’s and Tom’s situations.

However, a second theme emerged regarding school boards. Board disagreement with the superintendent was evident in three of nine superintendents. Janet, who is superintendent at a church-owned school, lacked the support needed to make many of the changes she felt were necessary to save the school.
The board was always with me, always my cheerleader. But that board has changed over several times and now I have a board that is not to thrilled about me… [They] don’t even know anything about my job.

Janet felt the distance grow between herself and the school board as the years passed after being hired. That distance resulted in less support for some of the financial restructuring she was attempting to accomplish. Eventually, the gap in the relationship between Janet and her board resulted in her release during the middle of the school year.

Similarly, Dan reached a point of disagreement with his school board. Dan was superintendent at an independent school. His school board was composed of a board of Christian leaders and donors supportive of Christian schooling. During his situation-of-dilemma, he released a teacher. The teacher went directly to the school board to get her job back.

[She is] still trying to get us to reverse our decision…and put her back in 5th grade…I’m willing to take a stand…I’m taking a stand on this. Someone who demonstrates those type of character issues [the teacher], I don’t want teaching my kids.

Dan decided not to reverse his decision about hiring back the teacher. She rallied support from the school board who responded by putting Dan on a formal improvement plan.

Well, so the board came back to me and said, “We are going to give you a year…we are going to go through an evaluation process of you.” And so, I’m in that year…I’ve lost trust in my board.

Dan had until the end of his contract year to resolve the teacher situation and other employee issues in the school. The board did not support Dan in his removal of the teacher.
Additionally, the board did not give Dan the year to fix the problem as they indicated. The board decided not to renew his contract months before his contract expired.

A similar situation involving loss of board support occurred with Robert as well. None of the three superintendents—Janet, Dan, and Robert—returned to their schools due to lack of support by the school boards.

**Analysis of Participant Commitments**

Analysis of data revealed themes developing from the personal commitment to a value by participants. Commitment is best understood as the value that is foundational to all other values. As such, the collective stories for each participant uncovered a commitment to a personal value that was not specific to each story but a common thread throughout most stories. This value commitment rarely changed throughout each of the participant’s stories.

An analysis of each of the participant commitment data did not reveal any coaxial themes across participants. A handful of observations were made, however. Table 11 highlights the commitment value for each of the nine participants, and Table 12 identifies the three observations that developed.
Table 11

*Participant Commitments*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Commitment values (values underlined)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>Committed to accomplishing his <em>personal mission</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>Committed to working in a <em>Christian school</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Committed to doing what is best for <em>kids</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>Committed to loving <em>children</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Committed to upholding <em>Christian standards</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janet</td>
<td>Committed to being a <em>visionary leader</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allison</td>
<td>Committed to working in a <em>Christian school</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>Committed to accomplishing the <em>school’s mission</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drew</td>
<td>Committed to finding the <em>truth</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12

*Observations about Commitments*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commitment Observation 1</td>
<td>Commitment to Christian education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment Observation 2</td>
<td>Commitment to children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment Observation 3</td>
<td>Commitment to personal mission</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Commitment Observation 1: Commitment to Christian education. Of the nine participants, only two identified a personal commitment to work in a Christian school; it was not a major theme as a commitment value. This observation should not be interpreted as the other seven superintendents not caring about Christian education as much as those two. One interpretation is that the two superintendents will likely stay employed in Christian schools as other job offers come their way. Allison, for example, has worked in Christian schools for her entire career and has been at her current school for 26 years. She has served as teacher, elementary principal, high school principal, and now superintendent. She has a personal commitment to work in Christian schools that will not likely change.

Ken also has a personal commitment to work in Christian schools. However, this commitment was not always in place. In fact, he was a senior pastor before becoming involved in Christian schools. His personal commitment to Christian schools is directly connected to his children. “To watch them [his children]…being discipled by some teachers that I feel are just phenomenal, I wouldn’t want my kids anywhere else.”

Robert was not counted as one who is committed to Christian schools. He is, however, committed to the mission of Christian schools. Robert made the following statement multiple times during the interviews: “I believe that leadership is leadership, but what changes is the mission.” In other words, leadership skills are transferable between any industry and career. The mission, however, changes. Robert recognized that his commitment to the mission of the Air Force ended when he switched careers but that he would be just as committed to his school’s mission. If Robert worked in another field, he would like still say “…but what changes is the mission.”
An interesting postscript occurred to help demonstrate the point that not all Christian school superintendents are committed to working in Christian schools. Four of the nine superintendents left their positions either voluntarily or involuntarily throughout the research effort. Not all of them returned to Christian education. Janet was released by her board and found employment at another Christian school near her home. Dan was released from his job and found employment at a Christian school in another state. Drew left his position for different Christian ministry program that is not a Christian school. Robert left his position and is considering options other than Christian schools. Tom, while not released, made it obvious that he was going to uphold Christian standards even if it cost him his job.

It doesn’t make any difference what happens to the school. It doesn’t make any difference if they [the board] want to replace me with somebody who can do a better job. Have at it; I’m ready to go anytime. I don’t care; I’ll find someplace else to work if that’s what God wants.

Tom was clear that his commitment was not to Christian schools but to upholding Christian standards.

**Commitment Observation 2: Commitment to children.** Absent from the data was a major theme about children in participant commitments. Although a case could be argued that any personal commitment tied to working in Christian schools would include a personal commitment to children, it would be an indirect commitment. Only Jason and Paul had a commitment to children outside of the Christian school environment, based on the stories shared. Jason and his wife adopted children when they could not have children of their own, and loving children was “part of what God wanted us to do.”
For different reasons, Paul also had a personal commitment to children. Paul had a sister with special needs and a son who had Down syndrome. His personal commitment to children involved doing what is best for them. His baseline question throughout the interviews was always asking the question of “What is best for the kids?”

Commitment Observation 3: Commitment to personal mission. Also absent from the data was major themes about participants’ mission statements. Only one participant had a well defined personal mission statement. Dan stated that his personal mission throughout life was to “…purpose in every way possible and plausible to store up treasure in heaven by emulating my Lord Jesus Christ by being a leader, teacher, servant, and friend.” Dan developed this mission statement while completing his MBA. He applied it to the school context with a commitment toward leadership. “We should be leaders academically.” While Dan was personally committed to leadership because it was part of his personal mission, other participants did not explicitly state their mission. Explanations for this missing theme in the other eight participants include the possibility that they had never spent the time to develop their personal mission statement like Dan. Additionally, sharing of personal mission was not important to the other participants as it was with Dan, so they simply did not share it during the interviews.

Analysis of Participant Influences

The influences of different elements in a participant’s life were many. Influences for the study were those activities, experiences, and people that impacted participant thinking. From the specific stories, these influences had a greater impact on the values and personal commitment making their impact on ideology indirect but no less important. Table 13
presents the various influences and definitions based on usage by participants. Table 14 identifies the observations and themes evolving from an axial analysis across all participants.

Table 13

*Categories of Influence*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influences</th>
<th>Definition and Usage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>The impact of family, personal tragedies related to family members, relationships with family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>The impact of God, Bible, Church, and Denomination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>The impact of people who challenge participant thinking, develop new thoughts, or provide spiritual counsel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Places lived</td>
<td>The impact of geographical locations where the participant has lived or is living: city, state, neighborhoods, regions of the country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and Career</td>
<td>The impact of college, careers as an educator, or careers outside of education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian School</td>
<td>The impact of experiences in Christian schools as a child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 14

*Observations and Themes about Influence*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influences</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Influences Observation 1</td>
<td>Influences and social factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influences Theme 1</td>
<td>Religious Influences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influences Theme 2</td>
<td>Influences and family tragedies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influences Theme 3</td>
<td>Influences and Christian school experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influences Theme 4</td>
<td>Influences and authors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influences Theme 5</td>
<td>Influences and past careers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Influences Observation 1: Influences and social factors.** When comparing the categories of influence on values the study’s social factors of race, age, gender, social class, or religious denomination, no major themes emerged. As with the ideological elements of situation and commitments, this gap in theme association may be explainable due to the few number of participants or the need for more social factor variables. Future research could address this topic.

**Influences Theme 1: Religious Influences.** A consistent theme among all participants was a reference to religious or spiritual influences present throughout their life.
These types of influences affected beliefs, personal commitments, or values. All of the participants made multiple references to “God,” “Jesus,” “Lord,” “Scripture,” or the “Bible” throughout the interviews. Most participants referenced verses from the Bible to support many of their views. Tom, for example, referenced the Book of Genesis to support his view of man’s origin. Ken, when talking about his philosophical views of Christian education, referred to the Bible supporting his view that parents have the responsibility to educate their children in a Christian environment. Drew made a personal commitment to truth founded on the “truths” found in the Bible.

The religious and spiritual influences affected more than just beliefs and commitments of the participants; they also directly influenced values. When discussing the value of academics, Paul referenced a specific Bible verse encouraging Christians to educate their children. “Colossians 1:28…We are doing everything to prepare our students to be servants of Jesus Christ…The act of learning, how to use our brains, how to think and reason, [and] how to communicate.” In Paul’s view, the Bible provided an academic mandate to “prepare” student to “think,” “reason,” and “communicate.”

The church also played a role in influencing the values of participants. Jason, for example, made grace, or forgiveness, one his values as an adult. This is in apparent contrast to his childhood church that did not give “second chances” when people made mistakes. He also referenced the bad example his childhood church had regarding the discipleship of his parents, a value he now holds in high regard. These influences from Jason’s childhood church created examples of how not to behave as an adult.

**Influences Theme 2: Influences and family tragedies.** A theme of personal tragedy developed in a number of participant stories. The impact of these tragedies played a role in
the lives of five superintendents. As a 28-year-old woman, Janet was close to a sister-in-law who was kidnapped and murdered. The experience strengthened her belief in God.

Dan had a young adult son who was killed in a car accident. The experience left Dan with a strategy for dealing with bitterness and anger toward God. He was able to reinforce his personal commitment of being a Christian leader in all circumstances. “What will you do when you get the call?” was his phrase about being ready when tragedy strikes.

Allison’s husband of 38 years passed away after an extended health issue involving his heart. The loss of her husband was the cause behind a powerful life lesson. “I have come to realize how important people are.” She recalled with tears the love the school extended to her after her husband’s death. A relationship with people, like her teachers, was the primary value expressed in her dilemma.

Drew and Robert, however, experienced tragedy quite differently than Janet, Dan, and Allison, but no less impactful. Drew experienced the pain of divorce. “My parents are divorced and there’s a lot of ugliness that was there…. [I learned] to forgive those who did wrong to me… I have a hard time forgiving sometimes.” Being “gracious” about forgiving others was the primary value in Drew’s situation-of-dilemma.

Robert, like Drew, was also affected by tragedy as a child. “My father was an alcoholic, and a workaholic. My mother was just a great lady that put up with a lot…My home life was miserable—just because he was a drinker.” As he reflected on his childhood, he thought about his future. “I probably would have at some point followed in my father’s footsteps more than I would have cared to have done.” The impact on his life was profound. “[I] don’t want to be addicted to anything. I don’t want a crutch. I want to love my wife and treat [her] with dignity and respect…[I] didn’t see that played out with my
mother. I want my children to want to be around me. I didn’t want to be around my father.

Robert’s sense of duty to “treat” his wife correctly and “treat” his children well so they will want “to be around” him developed from the impact of his father’s alcoholism.

The tragedy of divorce and alcoholism impacted Drew and Robert to the point that they had to intentionally fight against the temptation to walk down the same path. Starratt (1994) contended that parents are essential to the development of values and ethics in their children (p. 85). He presented the case that parents teach values through demonstration or example (p. 4), resulting in either good or bad behavior. In the stories of Drew and Robert, they used the example of their parents as a model of what to avoid.

Influences Theme 3: Influences and Christian school experiences. A theme developed amongst those participants who attended Christian schools during their childhood. Only two of the nine participants attended Christian schools during their K-12 years. Jason, who had bad experiences in his church, also had bad experiences in his Christian school.

“Very, very small, it was terrible… [I] did not have a great Christian school experience.” The students in his school created a culture of hypocrisy, and “the kids were really good at giving the [right] answers, but it didn’t affect them at all.” That hypocrisy and the lack of impact on student’s lives was “exactly the opposite of what” of what he wanted in his culture, the primary value in his situation-of-dilemma.

Drew also attended Christian schools as a student, but his experience was different from Jason. “I really liked it, it was a very small school…I had a high respect for my teachers.” Drew’s experience in Christian schools was positive despite the smallness of the school. His teachers “were strict, but they were not harsh; they maintained classroom
Dissertation – Examination of Ideology 262

control.” His physics teacher “just loved being at the school, he loved all of his students.” Drew’s experience with his teachers supported the development of the value of trust. The strict but not harsh environment combined with love for students developed a trusting relationship between him and authority figures like his teachers.

The Theory of Mind, Wellman and Miller (2008) offered insight as to how Jason and Drew used Christian school experiences to shape their current thinking. The theory provides a basis for understanding how people judge themselves in view of authority figures. Consequently, even at an early age people begin to form and test a belief system. Their experiences and interactions with teachers and school authorities shape how they view and test the world. Jason and Drew each formed beliefs and judgments about their school’s “world” and then made decisions about their futures. In Jason’s story, he decided never to have a school like the one he “tested” as a child. Drew, however, had a better experience and saw himself in a positive light in the authority structure in his childhood school and has tried to repeat that same structure in his school.

Influences Theme 4: Influences and authors. Marshall, Mitchell, and Wirt (1989) emphasized, “Values are carried from the past in the accepted history, the traditions, rules, and structures of institutions (e.g. churches, schools…” (p. 6). The engineering of values and ideology likewise transferred through the artifacts of those organizations, including books.

An emerging theme expressed by many participants was the influence of authors. Authors reinforced a participant’s belief in God, supported their commitments, or strengthened primary and secondary values. Both Dan and Robert referenced Christian author John Piper. After his son’s death, Dan turned to Piper’s commentary on the Biblical book of Job. “I spent a lot of time in Job after [my son] died. I found a lot of help in Job and
there’s actually a commentary on Job…a book that John Piper wrote.” Piper’s book, *The Misery of Job and the Mercy of God* (2002), addressed the challenge of suffering through life’s hardest moments. Dan had to decide what he believed about God. “Everything you say you believe, you have to decide whether you believe. Do you really believe it when you get the call? What do you do?” The author’s book helped Dan reinforce his beliefs about God while living through the reality of his son’s death.

Janet was influenced by an industry favorite book titled *Blue Ocean Strategies* (Kim & Mauborgne, 2005). The book focuses on implementing strategies that develop products and services not addressed by others in the same industry. The concept of “making the competition irrelevant by creating a leap in value” (p. 12) caused Janet to think about her vision for the school. “How do I increase the value of what we’re doing?… [Making us] priceless. How do we make Christian education so amazing that the family says, ‘I’ll give up vacations, a second home, food, clothing, but this is priceless!’” The book’s strategy supported Janet’s commitment to achieve her vision, a vision for the school to survive and then become “priceless.”

Participants Drew and Tom referenced a seminar series by Christian author Del Tackett. Tackett’s series, *The Truth Project* (2006), was built on a philosophy that established God as the foundation for understanding truth. Drew had a personal commitment to finding the truth in the situations he faced. The series supported the “framework” he used to establish his “viewpoint of the world.”

Tackett’s *Truth Project* also influenced Tom. The series directly increased the strength of his value regarding evangelism. “I think the Truth Project…probably affected me more than anything else. In it, I saw the need to get across the fact that in life…the only thing
that really matters is eternity.” Tom credits Tackett’s work as one of the major contributors to his thinking that it does not matter “whether the kid becomes a whatever…engineer… [or] works with his dad.”

**Influences Theme 5: Influences and careers.** Two themes developed from the data around the topic of careers outside of education and previous educational experience. One theme involved teaching in public schools. Four of the nine participants taught in public schools before teaching or working as superintendents in a Christian school. Ken, Tom, Janet, and Dan all taught high in public schools. Ken and Tom had positive experiences, and there was no obvious association to their beliefs about God, personal commitment, or values.

However, Janet and Dan’s experience were less than favorable in the public schools and affected their values of relationships and trust, respectively. Both of their stories involved negative interactions with teacher unions. Janet was involved in a union strike her first week at school as a newly graduated teacher. “I don’t come from a union mentality. And that you would have a ‘big daddy’ taking care of you by being part of a union and paying dues, you know I’m just not a union person.” In Janet’s experience, the union was expected to take care of the teachers, not the schools administration or board. The experience influenced her value of having positive relationships with teachers and staff, even though she struggled in this area.

Similarly, Dan also had a negative experience with the public school teacher’s union. Dan opted out of joining the union and was ostracized as a result. He felt the union was out to eliminate him from the beginning of his teaching career. “I don’t want to be a part of the union. I didn’t want to have anything to do [it]. I thought, ‘Why should I pay dues to
someone who’s trying to eliminate my job?’ It was all based on seniority. I was the new
guy.” Trust of others was an important value for Dan, and he did not trust the union.

A second theme developed from the participant data in the area of non-educational
careers. Robert, Drew, Janet, Ken, and Dan all had careers outside of education before
entering the Christian education field. Robert, as previously discussed, had a 23-year career
in the Air Force. The influence on his values was noticeable, especially in the area of duty
and authority. “That has been engrained in me for 23 years, just over and over again. And I
think a lot of that has spilled over…into Christian education.”

Drew and Janet both had careers in other fields, but the connection to personal
commitment and values was not apparent. Drew had a pilot’s license and was a licensed
aerial mechanic. Janet was the development director at a non-profit women’s crisis
pregnancy center where she raised donations.

Before entering education as a public school teacher and then as teacher in a Christian
school, Ken was senior pastor in church. The experience shaped his discipleship and
mentoring skills to help people work through life’s problems. “I mean just being able to help
people work through change, work through conflict and just taking that time to be able to
listen and counsel.” The experience helped Ken strengthen his value of discipleship.

After his public school teaching experience, Dan left education for a few years and
became a consultant in the office furniture business. He was responsible for designing,
selling, and installing office equipment for large companies. His dad started the company,
and Dan later joined his dad in the business. “We built [the company] from a little under a
three million …to about nine million dollars and five locations.” Performance in business
was important to Dan, a value that he carried over to his view academics. “I am accountable
for the kids to at least making grade level progress.” From his business experience, Dan realized the importance of accountability and reaching goals.

**Ideology and the Relationship of the Four Themes**

According to Forsyth (1980), ideology is a blend, or mix, of values and principles. In this section, an inductive analysis worked from specific participant narrative toward a general framework attempting to describe how ideology operates. The analysis revealed a “blend” that was more systematic and discrete than just “values and principles.”

The emerging themes and observations of ideology revealed that if the themes of values, situations, commitments, and influences are treated as elements, then a framework also emerges. The framework consists of a system showing the interaction between the elements consistent with others research (Gilligan, 1977; O’Neill, 1981). Values and commitments, for instance, had a direct effect on a participant’s ideology, and the situation directly ordered the hierarchy of values. Influences shaped both values and commitments. Chapter 6 provides additional treatment of this framework, but is shown in a graphical depiction in Figure 7 in this chapter for convenience.
Figure 7. The ideological framework.
Chapter 6. Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter synthesizes findings from the analysis phases into useable conclusions and suggestions. First I will present summary conclusions about ideology and the developed framework from the qualitative data, and then use the framework to develop a working definition of ideology and revisit theory uncovered in the literature review. The next section overlays the ideological framework on the organizational theories of Thompson (2008) as evidence of the importance of ideology when studying organizations. The next section reflects on the study’s unintentional limitations and suggests further research around the developed ideological framework. Next we look at considerations for educators based on this study’s conclusions, and the researcher reflects on personal insight and growth. Finally, the last section suggests a simple metaphor to help clarify how ideology worked in the situations presented by the superintendents in this study.

Statements of Conclusion

The study used an inductive methodology to move from specific ideological findings to a general framework. The framework provided a simple graphical representation of ideology, its elements, and their relationship. From the framework shown in Figure 8, four conclusions emerge regarding the ideology of the superintendents studied.
Figure 8. The ideological framework.

Conclusion #1: The ideological framework contained four elements: values, situation, commitments, and influences. The axial thematic analysis across individual superintendent stories revealed a consistent pattern. The data revealed that the elements of values, situations, personal commitments, and influences related to each other in a system forming an ideological statement for the superintendents.

The existence of a framework establishing the relationship between the four components is an important finding from the project. While current research suggests the existence of such a system, no research has established a framework showing how the ideological components work together. O’Neill (1981) suggested that ideologies “are more specific systems of general ideas” (p. 20) that causes action. In the ideological framework from this project, ideologies result from the interaction of values and commitments but are made “more specific” by situations and influences. The framework also supports the notion offered by Forsyth (1980), who suggested that ideology is a cross product, or mixing, of values. The analysis demonstrated that superintendent values and commitments worked
together to form a decision. Stanford-Blair and Dickman (2005) expressed the connection between ideology and important commitments in our lives, commitments that people are “ready to die for” (p. 174). Thompson (2008) suggested that the “opportunities and constraint[s]” (p. 102) offered in specific situations modify values which drive action. Finally, Stanford-Blair and Dickman (2005) also offered the theory that “the development of a richly textured core of values” (p. 14) occurs through family, extended family, and the community. They contend that values and commitments are influenced “by family and community, cultural context, and mentor influences” (p. 35). Superintendents use the four components in an organized schema to arrive at organizational decisions.

Allison, for example, put this system to work as she retold her situation-of-dilemma. She struggled with the proper blending of two values: relationships with teachers and respecting the authority of the outgoing superintendent. At the foundation of her thinking as she struggled to blend these two values together into a decision was the necessity of Christian education.

“I think our primary role and responsibility is to teach kids how to be as much like God as possible, and education is a…great vehicle to do that.” In her situation-of-dilemma, she had the opportunity to satisfy her value of improving relationships with her teachers by fighting for a salary increase. However, she was also constrained by her value of respecting the authority of the outgoing superintendent. A number of influences shaped her values and commitments. For example, she attended a Christian university that required strict adherence to rules and policies. She met her husband while a student, and after 38 years of marriage, he passed away. The influence of his death marked her life. “I have come to realize how important people are.” The importance of people reinforced her value of teachers.
From Allison’s story, we can see the ideological framework at work. She struggled to balance her values of relationships and authority. In her situation-of-dilemma, she emphasized relationships over authority in large part because of her love for people, a value that was reinforced during her husband’s death. In summary, the four elements in the framework worked together to create an ideological position for Allison in that situation. Her resulting action was to rebuke the outgoing superintendent and board for not taking care of the teachers.

**Conclusion #2: Ideology was a blend of values to satisfy personal commitments.**

Data revealed that superintendent decision-making often included consideration of many values. The blending of values was largely dependent on the relative order of importance for the participant based on the situation. Ordering of values developed into two tiers throughout the study: primary or secondary. Fowler (2004) supported the concept of ordered values. “The way people prioritize the major values is crucially important; in the real world of limited choices and resource constraints, one cannot pursue all the values at the same time” (p. 120). Fowler suggested that people make choices about which values are the most important.

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) likewise suggested that as those values are considered, a “tension” (p. 14), or struggle, emerges as the person attempts to blend values together for a decision. When discussing ethical dilemmas and the law, Shapiro and Stefkovich indicated people “raise difficult questions by critiquing both the laws themselves and the process used to determine if the laws are just.” The self-critiquing is the step at which people rationalize which values are most important to them in the situation. A primary value emerges as the most important and all other values become secondary values of lesser importance.
The notion that some values are foundational to all other values received separate treatment in the analysis and was a significant finding in the study. Commitment values, referred to only as commitments, were foundational across multiple stories for any one superintendent. Commitments were central to the decision-making process in many different situations. In their discussion of educational ideologies, Kohlberg and Mayer (1972) offered, “Ideologies include value assumptions about what is educationally good or worthwhile” (p. 463). The “value assumptions” are those underlying or foundational values, upon which all other values sit.

Superintendents in the study demonstrated using their primary and secondary values to support their commitments. Ken, for example, embraced the primary value of quality academic instruction to satisfy his commitment to Christian schooling. He wanted teachers who were “credentialed.” However, he also considered the teacher’s ability to disciple students a secondary value in his situation-of-dilemma. “Discipleship doesn't have to be a program; it’s making sure I’ve got the right people in that classroom.” Ken blended his primary and secondary values in such a way to make a decision that was consistent with his commitment to Christian education. While he released one teacher because he was not credentialed, he retained other teachers who were good at discipleship.

Drew also demonstrated the ability to blend primary and secondary values. With a primary value of graciousness in his situation-of-dilemma, he decided to forgive a staff member who had spread gossip about him. However, in the background, his secondary value of trust caused him to pause as he struggled with offering forgiveness. In the end, he forgave the staff member but released her because she was not trustworthy.
Conclusion #3: Situations guided the selection of values. Data from superintendent interviews revealed that ideology can change with different situations. This occurs because of the relationship between ideology, values, and situations. Ideology is situational because selection of values is situational. Thompson (2008) suggested that a person’s actions result from “opportunities and constraint” (p. 102) revealed during situations. People will “exploit…opportunities…within the limits of the constraints” (p. 102). Superintendents did not discard values with each situation but instead re-ordered them as scenarios changed.

Dan, for instance, made use of two different values in two different situations. While at school, Dan focused on academic performance. “My job as superintendent is to create a process of education that will create a great, quality educational product.” Dan focused on academic performance to increase the “quality” of the school’s outcome. In fact, Dan set a minimum standard for academic performance and reminded his board of this minimum during his dilemma. “I am accountable for the kids to at least making grade level progress”

As important as academic performance was to Dan, while in his situation of dilemma at school, he switched values in a different situation. “Trust through relationships” was important to Dan. He stressed building relationships so that he could establish trust with others. Outside of school, Dan was active in building relationships with pastors in local churches. In his first years at the school he was new to the community and reached out to local pastors. “I really wanted to gather with pastors. [In the beginning] there were three pastors that were meeting once a month just to pray together…and that’s grown now to about 25 or 30 that are pretty regular.” Dan was able to generate relationships with many local pastors. They prayed and supported each other. In this situation with pastors, Dan was clear on his primary role: “They kinda regard me as their pastor, and so I pastor the pastor in our
community.” When meeting with local pastors and working through their problems, Dan selected relationship and trust over the value of performance.

**Conclusion #4: Influences in life affected values and commitments.** During the interviews, superintendents revealed a number of influences that helped form values. Those influences included God, the Bible, church, family, tragedies, Christian school experiences, authors, and past careers. These influences impacted commitments and values. Multiple sources of research support this notion. Both Lewis (1952) and Noddings (2006) discussed the importance of “religion” in the shaping of a person’s values and commitments. Marshall, Mitchell, and Wirt (1989) emphasized, “Values are carried from the past in the accepted history, the traditions, rules, and structures of institutions (e.g. churches, schools...)” (p. 6). Stanford-Blair and Dickman (2005) discussed influence of family, community, and mentors. Fowler (2004) referenced the influences of the “school” (p. 124) on values and commitments. Starratt (1994) contended that parents were essential to the development of values in their children (p. 85).

Robert demonstrated this conclusion at work in his life. He spent 23 years in the military. His experiences and training in the military formed his commitment to complete the mission of the organization, no matter the cost. That military influence shaped his values of duty and authority.

Similarly, Drew placed a high value on learning about truth from the Bible. His denomination emphasized learning the Bible and its standards. As a child, his family attended a church that emphasized Bible memorization. These influences developed into a question that Drew often asked: “What does God say the truth is?”
Comparison to Theory and a Working Definition

The review of current research revealed multiple topics to help gain a comprehensive understanding of ideology. The investigation included inspection of ideology across multiple domains, over multiple social factors, and by various characteristics. The review also included understanding ideology and the contribution of values, ethics, and the mind. Data collected from superintendents supported much of the current research uncovered during the literature.

In Edleman’s (1985) and McGee’s (1980) definition, there was an emphasis on using values to drive action toward the end of changing people’s behaviors. This view of ideology existed in the nine superintendents. Robert, for example was overt in his value of authority. He was clear that teachers needed to perceive their principal as next in the chain of command. He used his values of duty and authority to undo past practices that encouraged shortcutting the chain of command. Likewise, Tom used his values to drive action toward reclaiming the schools culture. He took action to “clean the thing up and get back to where we need to get” when discussing the school’s culture. He used the values in his ideology as rationale to expel students and convince parents the school’s culture was stable.

McGee (1980) and Fowler (2004) both emphasized the power of ideology to convey meaning. McGee contended that in any society people are “conditioned to believe that words… have an obvious meaning” (p. 6). In his view, ideological positions have “obvious meaning” to those in the culture and, therefore, have similar interpretations. Fowler (2004) expanded this thought: “Although all ideologies are based on several core assumptions about human nature and the nature of the universe, these ideas remain implicit. Adherents of the ideology take them for granted…” (p. 124). In Fowler’s view, ideologies are “implicit,” or
generally understood, because they are based on “core assumptions” known by everyone. Taken together, McGee and Fowler agreed that ideologies are inherent and obvious, requiring no further explanation.

The notion that there is an “obvious” or “implicit” meaning to ideology did not hold up as a consistent assumption throughout the superintendents studied in this project. With the understanding that values are a key element of ideology, there was often disagreement between superintendents and their boards regarding common meanings of “obvious” values. In one example, Dan held the ideology that “academic performance is necessary in a Christian school.” In his view, the obvious meaning of “academic performance” came from performance on standardized testing. Many members of his school board disagreed. Students who enjoyed the experience of school will perform better. In their opinion, a student who liked his or her teacher would have a good experience and come to school ready to learn. The board claimed that the teacher Dan was releasing was loved by students. “[The students] loved her… [she was] very, very personable…they love coming to school.” The meaning of “academic performance” was not the same across all leaders in the school.

Iannaccone and Lutz (1970) argued that creation and distribution of ideologies are intentional by community leaders, such as school boards. They further argued that communities divide themselves across two categories as they create and distribute ideologies. “Sacred” (p. 32) communities hold fast to traditional ideologies, making sure their school does not deviate from historical thinking. These communities enact polices and hire leaders that close the school to influences that may change long-standing values and commitments appreciated by constituents. Conversely, “secular” (p. 45) communities willingly embrace
new values and commitments to keep the school aligned with broader, more comprehensive thinking. These schools take action to open themselves to new ideologies.

Christian schools act both ways according to the data in this study. Some superintendents and their boards led the school to follow longstanding traditions and rebuffed outside influences. Ken used his ideology to remove a teacher that was not certified. The school had wandered from its original purpose, in Ken’s view, with the result of sacrificing academic instruction. Ken valued certified teachers and closed the school to those who could not teach. “It had taken on the feeling of a youth group…They still taught, but they were hiring people who loved kids, but some of them just couldn’t teach.” The community rewarded this “sacred” line of thinking as evidenced by improved credibility with local public schools and increased enrollment.

Janet, however, used her ideology to open the school to new ideas and realign the school to the broader values of the surrounding community. Her objective was to “enhance the experience” of her Christian school to make it more appealing to parents in the community, ultimately increasing enrollment and surviving. She embraced a new way of thinking promoted in *Blue Ocean Strategy* (Kim & Mauborgne, 2005). “Value innovation…We call it value innovation because instead of focusing on beating the competition, you focus on making the competition irrelevant by creating a leap in value for buyers and your company…” (p. 12). Janet acknowledged that the “value innovation” strategy promoted in the book was a “philosophical shift” for the school. She made a number of changes that created value she believed parents in the community would appreciate, resulting in releasing teachers and staff that were not adding value to her organization. The
broader community responded with increased enrollment, but teachers and staff “mutinied,” eventually leading to Janet losing her job.

While their outcomes were different, Ken and Janet demonstrated that superintendents use ideology to direct the school to act “sacred” or “secular” (p. 45), using Iannaccone and Lutz’s (1970) terminology. Their theory suggested that school leaders use their power and ideology to close or open the school to “alien” (p. vii), or new, ideologies. Ken kept his school closed to the “alien” ideology that a Christian school should have a “youth group” feel, and Janet opened her school to the “value innovation” ideology.

The research literature revealed a consistent theme, suggesting that ideology is not static. One group of researchers suggested that significant events must occur in order for ideology to shift. Stanford-Blair and Dickman (2005) noted that ideology changes during a person’s life because of “adversity” (p. 25). Therefore, ideology tends to modulate as significant events happen to people. A number of participants demonstrated this theory to be true.

In one story, the murder of Janet’s sister-in-law caused significant “adversity” in Janet’s life. Prior to the murder, her values in life were largely founded on a safe and loving home with Christian parents.

They were committed to having a Christian home in the typical 1950s version of that.

[They] would take the kids to church every Sunday and then on every Wednesday night. I grew up in the church. My best friend across the street was also in the church…

The murder of her sister-in-law shattered Janet’s safe and loving environment and caused her to rethink her beliefs in God. “I was so angry at God! It didn’t fit my little American
version of God. Yeah, I had to really go back and reexamine my faith. ‘Who am I? What do I believe?’” The “adversity” (Stanford-Blair & Dickman, 2005, p. 25) created a pause in Janet’s life to reconsider who she was and what she believed. Because of her sister-in-law’s murder, Janet reexamined her relationship with God. “I mean that examination just bolted me further into understanding God. It took me probably a good two years to heal from that.”

Despite the pain of that moment and the challenge to her beliefs, Janet walked away with a greater relationship with God and a new purpose.

It’s impacted my life to this day. They had a three- and a five-year-old [child]. So, when the three-year-old became 16 she was in jail and on the wrong track. She came to live with us and I whipped her into shape. She was on a downward spiral and out of control so my husband and I took her in… [Today] she is married to a pastor and thriving.

The “adversity” (Stanford-Blair & Dickman, 2005, p. 25) caused Janet to see life not as always safe and loving, but more harsh. The event of her sister-in-law’s murder changed more than her view of her home life, however. Janet also became purposeful in valuing the life of her niece who today is “thriving.”

Another group of researchers suggest that a change in values, and thus ideology, is a natural event in each person’s life and does not necessarily require a significant event. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) postulate that people change their core values throughout life as they “rethink and reframe concepts such as privilege, power, culture, language, and even justice” (p. 14). Rethinking and reframing long-held concepts causes’ tension and rationalization, often resulting in modified values and ideologies. Thompson (2008) suggests that “Human action emerges from the interaction of (1) [our]…aspirations, standards…and
(2) the situation which presents opportunities” (pp. 101-102). Using this definition, a person’s ideology is determined by the standards, or values, by which he or she lives and the “situation” in which they find themselves.

A number of the superintendents displayed the ability to change their ideology as the situation changed. For example, Jason expelled two students for breaking the code of conduct, resulting in risk to the school’s culture. In his situation-of-dilemma, Jason’s ideology emerged as a stable culture necessary to demonstrate his love for children. However, in a different situation he accepted a student who had been expelled from another school because Jason saw a hope in discipling him. Jason said, “He was the greatest chance I ever took.” This change in ideology was a result of Jason “rethinking” his values based on the situation. He saw an opportunity to disciple a student that needed help, even as he took a “chance” on putting the culture at risk.

Commitment, while itself a value, was seen as a stage upon which the other values rested. Unlike primary and secondary values, commitments were seen as central to cross-situational decision-making and did not fluctuate in and out of importance. The notion of satisfying commitments was included in the theory offered by Stanford-Blair and Dickman (2005). According to their research, ideology naturally guides people through tough times in life providing a “primal thread of inner…coherence” (p. 175), or clarity of purpose. Commitments in superintendents provided the “primal thread” needed to understand the basis for decision-making. Jason, for instance, was committed to loving children. In all the stories he shared during the interviews, he was committed to helping and loving children. His commitment to children caused him grief as he wrestled with the consequences for two students who broke the code of conduct. “I find myself, all of my time when I'm driving,
when I'm thinking, when I'm laying in bed at night trying to develop a process...for it to make sense.” Jason was clear in his commitment to help children but struggled in the situation to determine which primary value to embrace.

Another ideological characteristic uncovered during the review of current research suggested that organizations intentionally engineer and transmit ideology. Marshall, Mitchell, and Wirt (1989) emphasized that organizational procedures, rules, and structures intentionally promote organizational values and commitments. Drew, for example, attended a Mennonite church as a child that promoted the Bible as the “standard” for separating truth from lies. To transmit that value to its children, the church set up a Bible memorization program. “You had these books, and there was an old lady in the church that would listen to you. Every Sunday I would have to come to her before church and I would have my verses to say…” The church designed, implemented, and assessed the formation of his values and commitments, and thus, his ideology.

In summary, when comparing the current research to data from this study a number of simple conclusions emerge regarding ideology. First, ideology caused superintendents to take action as shown from Robert’s, Tom’s, Dan’s, and Janet’s narratives (Edleman, 1985; McGee, 1980; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970). Second, ideology did not always carry “obvious meaning” (McGee, 1980, p. 6), nor did it always catch the essences of assumed meaning as Fowler (2004) suggested and highlighted with Dan. Third, ideology did change throughout life as suggested by Stanford-Blair and Dickman (2005) and Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005). Personal tragedies, for instance, all influenced the values of Janet, Allison, Dan, Drew, and Robert. Fourth, ideologies worked to satisfy commitments, a notion offered by Stanford-Blair and Dickman (2005) and demonstrated by Jason, for example. Fifth, and finally,
Marshall, Mitchell, and Wirt (1989) discussed the intentionality, or engineering, of values by institutions that shape a person’s ideology as demonstrated by Drew and Robert.

Using these four conclusions from the review of research literature supported by participant data, a working definition emerges for ideology that helps bring understanding to its use in everyday life. *Ideology is a statement of how values cause actions to satisfy commitments. Ideology can change with each situation and is shaped by life’s influences.* While not intended to be exhaustive, this definition is based solely on this study’s data when compared to current research. Until verified through qualitative techniques, its use should be limited to the K12 Christian school superintendents of this study.

**The Ideological Framework and Organizational Theory**

One of the fundamental research questions established for this project was to explain the connection between ideology and organizational decision-making. Inductive development of the ideological framework from specific superintendent qualitative data provided an understanding of how ideology developed and operated in participant’s lives. However, the question of understanding how ideology connects to decision-making in an organizational setting requires further treatment. An overlay of the framework with an established organizational theory model helps to develop and clarify this connection.

Thompson’s (2008) theory on organizations was one of many models helping to understand how organizations operate. A previous discussion about Thompson’s model in Chapter 5 (Section 5.4) used the model to classify the various situations superintendents encounter. From that discussion, Thompson’s model offered benefits over other organizational theory models (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003; Scott, 2008) for classification of situations. For example, Thompson’s model was easy to explain with its simple but powerful
paradigm. The model lined up well with the different situations superintendents revealed throughout the interviews. Finally, the model provided easy inspection of superintendent activities and his or her propensity to open or close the school to “alien” ideologies (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970, p. vii).

Thompson’s (2008) model, founded on Parson’s (1960) theories, developed around three concentric layers of organizational structure and an outside environment (Thompson, 2008, p. 10) as shown in Figure 9. Overlaying superintendent situations on the model was helpful to understand the organizational layer in which each superintendent exercised his or her values to satisfy personal commitments as shown in Figures 10, 11, and 12.

Thompson (2008) also made a number of propositions based on the model, making his theories about how the model operated testable and applicable in organizations. Overlaying the ideological framework on to these propositions was helpful in explaining the impact of ideology on organizations. Specific examples of superintendent values, commitments, situations, and influences helped illuminate these propositions.
**Figure 9.** Thompson’s (2008) organizational model based on Parson’s (1960) model.

**Thompson’s model and superintendent ideology.** Using the model to stratify the group of superintendent ideologies provided a look at the range of how the group took action to satisfy personal commitments. In Figure 10, superintendents were placed within the layer based on the classification of their situation-of-dilemma. Using Tables 8 and 10 as a guide, Jason exercised his values in his situation-of-dilemma at the technical core. He worked with two students in the technical core trying to find a way to retain them. In the end, he expelled the two students because they did not want to follow the code of conduct for students in the technical core. From the management layer, Drew disciplined a teacher who gossiped about him. Dan released a teacher who was not performing in the classroom, and Janet enforced a directive with her teachers to attend an overnight retreat. Robert, Allison, and Ken worked in the institutional layer because they exercised their values with their boards or used their values to make policy. Finally, Tom and Paul expelled students for behavioral problems, which put the culture at risk. However, lack of understanding and support by the parents was
the underlying reason expulsions occurred. This put the use of their values, and consequently the use of their ideologies, in the task environment.

Figure 10 also shows how, as a group, superintendents exercised values in their dilemmas at all levels in the organization. There was equal distribution between the management and institutional layers, three in each. This is not surprising given that the role of superintendents is to manage others, help create processes, and enforce policies. Jason exercised his values to protect the school’s culture by directing the activity with students from within the technical core taking on the role of counselor and disciplinarian. Tom and Paul exercised their values by removing students whose parents in the task environment were negatively affecting the school’s culture.
Thompson’s model and superintendent values for multiple situations. From Figure 10, Thompson’s (2008) model provided insight to where individual superintendents exercised their values during their situation-of-dilemmas. However, each superintendent provided multiple situations in which they needed to address conflict or make major decisions; these were in addition to the situations-of-dilemma. Figure 11, for example, depicts the Thompson model with all of Janet’s situations overlaid.

From the model, Janet used her values in the task environment to engage parents for their support. Thompson (2008) identified the function of “boundary-spanning” (p. 81) by leaders in the organization as the job of making “adjustment to constraints and contingencies not controlled by the organization” (p. 81). Since parents existed in the task environment, outside of the school’s organizational boundaries, Janet was not able to exercise direct control over them. However, parents offered Janet an opportunity to gain support for changes that would be difficult. These changes included implementing ideas like reducing teachers, combining classes, or ideas from the “value innovation” (Kim & Mauborgne, 2005, p. 12).
initiative. Consequently, Janet used her values and influence in boundary-spanning activities like parent meetings and start-of-school chapels to gain support from parents. Additionally, from the data gathered in the interviews, Janet rarely took on activities from the technical core. With the understanding that students exist in the organization’s technical core, Janet often delegated responsibility for some student discipline problems to the school’s chaplain.

Janet’s commitment was to be a visionary leader focused on saving the school. To satisfy that commitment she needed financial support and agreement. Therefore, she spent her resources in the outside layers of the organization where that support resided.

Jason, however, used his values quite differently. Figure 12 depicts some of Jason’s situations shared during the interviews. While Jason also used his values in the task environment to conduct “boundary-spanning” (Thompson, 2008, p. 81), his purpose was different from Janet’s. Jason wanted to expand the boundaries of his organization by adjusting to the constraints of the task environment.

Jason was looking for areas in the community that aligned with his school’s mission. He believed the value of discipleship in a Christian school depended largely on doing work in the community instead of simply studying in “Bible class.” To achieve this value, Jason sought out organizations in the task environment, like churches, that allowed his students to get out of the classroom and into the community.

Jason also exercised his values personally discipling or disciplining students. He spent time with the two students that he eventually expelled, trying to assess “their hearts.” He spent time and energy with the seniors in the school. His commitment was to love children and, therefore, he spent a great deal of his power and influence in the technical core where students are located.
Figure 11. Thompson’s (2008) organizational model and Janet’s ideology.
**Thompson’s propositions and superintendent ideologies.** In his theory about organizations, Thompson (2008) developed 61 testable hypotheses about the operation and behaviors of organizations. The hypotheses range from organizational design to power structures and control of resources, to name a few. The ideological framework developed in this research provided evidence supporting a number of Thompson’s propositions. Conclusions about four propositions demonstrate how the ideological framework supported Thompson’s theories.

*“Proposition 2.1: Under norms of rationality, organizations seek to seal their core technologies from environmental influences”* (p. 19). This proposition suggests that
organizations, like schools, protect their students and teachers from changes occurring in the external environment. This was evident in the situations of Tom, Paul, and Jason; all three superintendents had ideologies that valued stable cultures. They used their ideologies to “seal” off their cultures from societal problems like sexting and bullying. Tom and Paul sealed off their culture by using their power in the task environment to repel parents who would likely modify the school’s culture. Jason, however, sealed off his school’s culture by working with students in the technical core to change their thinking. All three superintendents used their ideologies to close the school’s culture to the questionable influences occurring in the external environment.

“Proposition 2.5: When buffering, leveling, and forecasting do not protect their technical cores from environmental fluctuations, organizations under norms of rationality resort to rationing” (p. 23). “Rationing is an unhappy solution, for it signifies that the [organization] is not operating at its maximum” (p. 23). In the context of school, “rationing” is understood to take on different forms: foregoing purchases of new curriculum in favor of using current; reducing the number of teachers or aides; pay reductions; or consolidation of buildings, to name a few. Ken’s situation-of-dilemma provided evidence of this proposition. Ken faced sinking enrollment, the need for credentialed teachers, and the desire for legitimacy in the community. His ideology emphasized the value of academic instruction in a Christian school and guided him to a solution that rationalized his dwindling resources. He decided to combine two positions and release a non-credentialed teacher. He resorted to “rationing” because he did not have enough funding to support the positions he needed.

“Proposition 6.2b: When the range of variation presented by the task-environment segment is known, the organization component will treat this as a constraint and adapt by
standardizing sets of rules” (p. 71). An organization that faces a known “range” of outside pressures will comply and “adapt” by modifying its approach. In the Christian school environment there is no more real application of this proposition than when competing in the marketplace for students. Tuition and quality of academics are two variables faced by superintendents attempting to draw students toward the school. By way of example, Janet’s ideology in her situation-of-dilemma emphasized the value of change in order to achieve her vision of saving the school, a vision that also included growth. She viewed public schools, schools of choice, charter schools, and other local Christian schools as “constraints” that were not going to disappear. As a result, she adapted and changed the rules that her school would use to compete by in the marketplace. She utilized the business model offered in Blue Ocean Strategies (Kim & Mauborgne, 2005) to “adapt” to her new reality.

“Proposition 7.4: Under norms of rationality, complex organizations are most alert to and emphasize scoring well on those criteria which are most visible to important task-environment elements” (p. 91). Achieving criteria that is “visible” in the task-environment builds legitimacy and demonstrates the organization is improving. For schools, one important visible “criteria” is the score from standardized achievement tests. Dan demonstrated the importance of these tests in his situation-of-dilemma. His ideology valued academic performance by the Christian school educators. He used that ideology to exercise his power and release a teacher who was not achieving results on standardized tests for the students in her class. The school board and Dan had agreed the results would be published on the school’s website. Dan demonstrated Thompson’s proposition by expressing concern that the community in the task environment would respond negatively to the published results. He
took actions such as disciplining teachers to avoid a negative response to criteria important in the task environment.

**Limitations**

As indicated in Chapter 1, no research study is complete without the transparent admission of deficiencies, both intentional and unintentional. An understanding of these limitations will help with the appropriate application of the study’s findings. This section reviews the limitations uncovered during the course of the research.

There were a number of unintentional limitations with this study. For example, the integrity of the data was only as good as the honesty of the participants. Participants were not intentionally dishonest, but when issues of ideology are discussed within a Christian school context, researchers and readers alike have an expectation of consistency with the Bible. Interviewed participants did not want to appear un-Christian in their responses. To overcome this specific limitation, data triangulation (Creswell, 2003) and structural corroboration (Eisner, 1991) established multiple pieces of evidence supporting participant statements.

An additional study limit stemmed from the researcher’s own bias. Given the qualitative nature of the research methodology, unaccounted researcher bias can mislead the reader by confusing facts and opinions. The use of peer review (Creswell, 2003) moderated the influence of the researcher’s own ideology.

The interview guide was another limitation of data collection process. The interview guide was untried; it was designed as the best guess on what questions to ask and how to follow up. Leading questions, or questions that do not expose true values, limited the quality of participant responses. To avoid this limitation, the doctoral committee reviewed questions, sampled transcripts, and offered adjustments to the interview process.
Usefulness of the study is limited by the number of themes emerging from the study. Nine superintendents participated in this study and provided enough qualitative data to reveal common themes and observations about ideology. However, the results should not be extended to the general population until further research confirms the framework and conclusions.

**The Ideological Framework and Future Research**

This section offers suggestions for additional research. Suggestions focus on further development of the ideological framework and closing the gaps found in this research.

**Future Research Suggestion #1: Expand the list of primary and secondary values.** One of the elements in the ideological framework is values. Values were divided into two groups based on the situation. Primary values had a direct and significant bearing on the outcome, while secondary values fell to the background, but still were part of participant thinking. As a group, only ten values were used by superintendents in their situations-of-dilemmas. Further research could work to expand the list of superintendent values by conducting quantitative studies with a larger pool of superintendents.

**Future Research Suggestion #2: Investigate the scope of ideologies.** Another observation that developed out of the participant data was one of ideological scope. Participants were not agreed upon how far reaching their role as superintendent extended when dealing with students and families. Tom, for instance, wanted to know when the sexting occurred between the two middle-school students, “When did it occur?” He indicated that he believed there was a clear boundary between his responsibility and the parents’, that his ideological position had limits, or scope. Tom felt his ability to take action was beyond
his scope because the sexting occurred outside of school hours. His ability to create a stable environment to uphold Christian standards was limited to the context of school.

Jason had the opposite view. He believed his role as superintendent extended his ideology beyond the boundaries of the school. The two students that he eventually expelled, “absolutely trampled all over our student code of conduct...They got into a relationship that went too far.” The trampling of the student code of conduct by the two students happened during the summer before their senior year and then during the school year, but off-campus. Jason viewed the extension of his ideology and decision-making well beyond the boundaries of the school’s context. Jason did not see a “hard line” that ended his scope as superintendent. He viewed the scope of his ideology as extending somewhat into family boundaries because the family had elected to enroll their children in his school. Future research on ideology could focus on the scope, or reach, of a person’s ideology. A scope acceptable to one superintendent may not be acceptable to another.

**Future Research Suggestion #3: Investigate the impact of the military training on ideology.** Robert spent 23 years in the military. His ideology was different from the other nine superintendents. He had two primary values, and his commitment was to the mission of the organization. He constantly worked to achieve his two primary values of duty and authority in all the situations discussed in the interviews. Future research could study military training and its effect on ideology.

**Future Research Suggestion #4: Investigate the potential to hire employees based on their ideologies.** The ideological framework developed in this research suggests that values are ordered, commitments are consistent across multiple situations, situations guide value selections, and influences impact commitments and values. Given the variation that
emerges in ideological positions, employers must be careful about the person they hire. Hiring superintendents is no exception. In this research, three out of nine participants had disagreements with their boards over values and commitments, resulting in those superintendents leaving their posts, either voluntarily or involuntarily. A potential new variable that requires attention during the hiring process is the applicant’s ideology. Future research could use quantitative and qualitative methods to assess applicant ideology.

Future Research Suggestion #5: Build on the developed framework to establish organizational ideology. The notion of community ideology is not original. Iannaccone and & Lutz (1970), for example, indicated that community leaders need to be careful of “alien ideology” (p. vii), a term expressing concern about individual ideologies that are different from the community’s. Applying the term “alien ideology” to a community of people who belong to an organization expresses the notion that organizations likewise need to be concerned about ideologies that are different from their own. Given this concern, organizations must understand ideologies in order to recognize “alien” ones.

Establishing an ideology for an organization will have challenges. Challenges include understanding a list of values that people will agree with, or commitments in which everyone believes. Beyond the list of values and commitments is the selection of primary and secondary values by a group of people who may not have the same influences or beliefs.

Organizations that understand their ideologies will protect themselves from ideologies that could otherwise leave the organization open to “secular” (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970, p. 45) thinking when they want to remain “sacred” (p. 45). Without this protection, “alien” (p. vii) ideologies could open the organization to the task environment. Future
research could develop methodologies for organizations to understand their corporate ideology.

**Future Research Suggestion #6: Investigate the correlation between social factors and ideological statements.** Social factors played a minor role in this study. With only a few exceptions, race, age, gender, social status as a child, and religious denomination as an adult did not provide further insight into the ideologies of superintendents. This likely occurred for three reasons. First, because this was a qualitative study, the participant pool was limited to a small number, and large demographic variations were not present. The second problem could be one of methods. Questions directed at the superintendents were open and allowed opportunity for them to talk freely about what was on their mind. While this served the purpose of collecting data about their situations-of-dilemma, the open question methodology did not always lead to discussions around social factors. Third, and finally, it is possible that the social factors selected for this project were not discrete enough. During the study, a number of other factors emerged as potential social or demographic factors eligible for future studies. The enrollment size of the school is one possible factor to consider. Perhaps superintendents in large schools think differently than those in smaller ones. The factor of school location in urban, suburban, or rural was not considered in this study. This study only considered K12 Christian schools within a two-hour driving range from the researcher’s hometown. Maybe superintendents in the south, for example, have different values and commitments compared to those in the north. Future studies should include a larger geographical radius.

**Future Research Suggestion #7: Conduct a quantitative study on the ideological framework.** With the development of the ideological framework from this inductive study,
the framework needs the improvement offered by a study with more participants. The current framework suggested that a superintendent’s ideology receives direct input from commitments and values, and indirectly from situations and influences. While this model was true for nine K12 Christian school superintendents, the study was not rigorous enough to claim that it is generally true of all superintendents or other major groups of people. Quantitative studies with a large participant pool using deductive methods will help verify or debunk the ideological framework developed in this research.

Future Research Suggestion #8: Overlay the ideological framework on other organizational models. Understanding the effect of ideology on organizations is an area of research requiring more study. Future research could focus on studying established organizational theories like Pfeffer and Salancik (2003), Scott (2008), and others through the lens of the ideological framework developed in this study. This study conducted a review of Thompson’s (2008) organizational theory using the ideological framework. Results of the study yielded an increased understanding about superintendent behavior within their organizations. Studying organizational theory from an ideological perspective could provide greater insight to why organizations behave as they do.

The Ideological Framework and the Educator

This section covers a number of practical suggestions that emerged from the research. This section includes simple lessons learned from the nine superintendents and their stories. The section closes with a single question that helps educators identify their own ideology.

Lessons Learned #1: Be willing to make a different decision if the situation is different. The first lesson learned from participants suggests the idea of being flexible in decision-making. Participants selected their primary values based on the situation they faced.
Participants displayed an adaptation of values to various situations. These superintendents were not being hypocritical in rotating values; they were not casting their values aside and establishing new ones in each situation. Instead, they were selecting the right primary value by which to make a decision in light of their dilemma. Educators, and people in general, should be willing to reorder their values as needed to address the situation.

**Lessons Learned #2: Pre-think decisions and actions based on scenarios.** Situations-of-dilemma often caught participants by surprise. Dan was surprised when the teacher he was releasing sent a mass email out to the school’s community criticizing his decision. Allison, upon reflection, admitted that she could have made a different decision as an interim superintendent working with the outgoing superintendent. Educators should consider reviewing different potential situations-of-dilemma, or scenarios, and then work through responses based on ideology. One practical approach to pre-thinking through ideology is to discuss hypothetical violations of the student code-of-conduct. Educational leaders can use their formal handbooks to create meaningful discussions about ideology.

**Lessons Learned #3: Assess ideology before hiring someone.** A number of problems surfaced for superintendents as they worked through the normal course of their day. Many of the problems they handled were due to misaligned values with others and, therefore, misaligned ideologies. Allison had to release a maintenance person because he would not respect the authority structure of the school, putting him in direct conflict with one of Allison’s values. Drew had to discipline an office person because he did not trust her, a value that was important to him.

Some of these problems can be avoided if ideology is understood before hiring people into the organization. Educators who have the responsibility to hire others need to assess the
ideology of those being brought into the organization. Vetting potential candidates based on their ideology before hiring will likely prevent future problems.

**Lessons Learned #4: Religious values are important.** All nine participants referenced God and the Bible as influences in their lives. They also mentioned praying and reflective reading as sources of influence. From the data, Christian educators should spend time on shaping their values and commitments under the influence of the Bible.

**Lessons Learned #5: Assess gaps with the school board.** Educators, especially superintendents, need to inquire about the values and commitments of school board members when interviewing with boards for open positions. Additionally, educational leaders should continually assess board member ideology. Robert, for example, noticed a change in the basic theology of the school as new board members replaced outgoing ones. Those new board members brought a new set of values and commitments that Robert did not agree with, causing him to make the decision to leave the school. Educators should always be looking for gaps between their own values and commitments and those of their board members.

**Lessons Learned #6: Understand childhood school experiences.** Two of the participants in the study openly expressed their values and commitments relative to their childhood school experiences. Jason had a bad experience in his school and worked to make the school where he is superintendent different. Drew had a good experience in his school and repeated a number of successful strategies from his childhood school. Educators should reflect on their own childhood school experiences and intentionally decide if they will make their school different or the same.

**Lessons Learned #7: Assess the impact of decisions on school’s culture.** The superintendents’ impact on culture was significant. Educators from the superintendent to the
custodian need to be aware of their ability to affect culture. Dan, while not strictly focused on the culture in his situation-of-dilemma, experienced the negative effect of teachers creating problems in his school. The level of trust and relationships diminished amongst the teachers as one teacher created problems. Based on this study, educators should always consider the impact of decision-making on the school’s culture.

**Lessons Learned #8: Critically assess influences on ideology.** Authors and speakers with books, webinars, and journals influenced many of the participants. Drew and Tom spent much time studying the work of Tackett (2006). Others studied the writings of Piper (2002). This study connected the influences of authoritative others to the values and commitments of the nine participants. Because of that connection, educators at any level in schools should critically assess what they are learning from authors, researchers, professors, and other experts. Those influences can create an indirect impact on values and commitments.

**Lessons Learned #9: Others will be angry.** All of the situations-of-dilemma resulted in displays of anger by those affected by the decisions made from superintendent ideologies. Janet had mutinous teachers rise up. Tom was cursed at and yelled at by angry parents. Allison watched a board member throw a wadded up piece of paper at someone during a board meeting, and Dan felt the wrath of a vengeful teacher. Ideology involves decision-making based on values, commitments, situations, and influences, all of which involve emotions at some level. Educators should be prepared for angry responses from the individuals affected by decision-making.

**The ideological question.** Ideology tends to work in the background, in the unconscious mind (Stanford-Blair & Dickman, 2005; King, 1991). For example, the
superintendents in the study could not specifically express their ideologies, let alone repeat them to others and make use of them consciously. Although ideology works unconsciously, it need not remain unknown.

The challenge for educators and anyone in general is intentionally thinking about ideology at the time of decision-making. One suggestion for making ideology more real in the moment is to consider answering a reflective question before making a decision or taking action. The definition of ideology is helpful to guide the development of such a question:

*Ideology is a statement of how values cause actions to satisfy personal commitments.*

*Ideology can change with each situation and is shaped by the life’s influences.*

With that definition in mind, it is possible to deconstruct the definition back into the elements of ideology. The elements allow for easy reconstruction into a reflective question for educators to consider as they face difficult situations. The following reflective question offers educators the opportunity to pause before taking action: “Given the situation you are in, what is the most important value you will use to satisfy your personal commitments?”

This reflective question demands the answer to more questions. For example, educators must be able to define the situation in which they find themselves. From the participant data, this required superintendents identifying the story of the conflict they faced. Educators must also understand their most important personal commitments at school. While establishing and upholding these commitments may seem easy, it is not. Jason spent a great deal of emotional and financial resources demonstrating his commitment to love children. Educators must also be able to identify the most important value to achieve that personal commitment. It is as this point that the work of ideology truly begins. Again, Jason struggled endlessly to decide the right action to take in his situation. Janet wrestled in her situation
about what to do with teachers who did not want to follow her directive. All nine of the superintendents struggled through making a decision about the most important, or primary, value they would use to accomplish their commitments. Educators must be willing to wrestle, struggle, and spend time on knowing their values and personal commitments.

**Personal Reflections**

This research effort has generated multiple reflections, both personal and professional, in my life. Below is a list of reflections that have created change in, or acceleration of, some behaviors, skills, and knowledge. These reflections are all important and, thus, not ordered by importance.

**Personal Reflection #1: Became a better communicator.** Writing a project such as this has forced me to become a better communicator with the written word. In a previous career, the extent of my writing was in the form of PowerPoint presentations, running meetings with an agenda, emails with bullets, and spreadsheets. This research project has stretched my writing skills into a new domain with a new audience. This new domain does not accept short bulleted sentence fragments and financial spreadsheets as proof that I know my subject. The new audience no longer accepts fragmented sentences, paragraphs with vague meaning, and technical references with no citations. This new domain of writing is interesting and exciting because it is extremely challenging and seems a worthy cause.

**Personal Reflection #2: Enjoyed the distraction.** My role as superintendent has many demands. Demands of the job include wrestling with financial crisis, struggling through personnel problems, working with students, and managing customers (our parents). This research has provided a wonderful distraction, a distraction that has helped me understand the field of education without the stress of everyday operations. The time spent
on this project has allowed me to take a step back from the daily fray and view education, especially K12 Christian education, from a macro-perspective. This perspective allowed me to reconsider my own actions and behaviors from a distance.

**Personal Reflection #3: Became a better listener.** I have never considered myself a great listener. I am usually quick to identify problems and implement solutions. However, this project necessitated that I listen and engage in reflective dialogue, instead of conversing with participants about problems and discussing solutions. After the first two interviews, I reread the transcripts and re-listened to the audio recordings. I noticed that I interrupted with too many questions trying to scope out the problem instead of just listening to the participant. As a result, I often asked leading questions. This had the negative effect of redirecting the participant’s thoughts, thoughts that may have led to more interesting data. I quickly adjusted and retrained myself to not talk or comment when the participant was talking. I also found that participants do not like silence and will talk to fill the void, often providing good data. My interviews grew deeper in content as I ceased talking and started listening.

Professionally, I have become better at toggling between reflective dialogue and problem-solving dialogue. Both are needed and serve a purpose. However, working with my employees in a reflective dialogue mode allows them to just talk and express concern or ideas without interference of my thoughts. This provides for deeper and more personal conversations.

**Personal Reflection #4: Understood commitments and values.** One of the outcomes of this research was the importance of commitments and values. In short, I need to know myself better and am in the middle of thinking and writing out my values and commitments at school. This seems like an extremely obvious step that most people ought to
take. However, I am finding this task very difficult because it requires intentionality before decisions are made. The ideological question formed earlier in this chapter is proving useful as I begin to understand my own ideology better.

**Personal Reflection #5: Challenged research and analysis.** By nature, I enjoy the challenge of identifying and solving problems. As I have learned, the work of research is difficult, tedious, and endless at times. My family has had to organize their life differently to allow me the opportunity to accomplish the effort. However, this project has filled the void of finding a challenge that seemed worthy of understanding and explaining. The challenge of uncovering a hidden framework was both fascinating and rewarding.

**Personal Reflection #6: Connected values to a Biblical standard.** One of the influences confirmed by the other superintendents was the need to remain committed to studying the Bible. In my opinion, the Bible represents the benchmark to which I compare the actions coming out of my ideology. Studying the Bible becomes the basis to form my values and commitments in order to move my actions closer to its benchmark.

**Personal Reflection #7: Considered peers and decisions.** This is my sixth year as superintendent. Within my first two years, I began to notice that the decisions of other superintendents seemed at odds with my own decisions even though we shared similar values. This puzzled me and was the genesis for this project. This project revealed that I was too quick to judge the actions of my peers. While our values may be similar, our commitments and our situations may be different. This project has allowed me to understand that superintendents of Christian schools will likely make different decisions from each other even in similar situations.
Personal Reflection #8: Realized the humanness of peers. Many of the interviews revealed more than just recordable verbatim evidence. I learned that my peers are fragile and struggle through many of the same problems that I do. I left each interview with a better understanding of his or her humanness. They laugh, cry, make mistakes, and ask forgiveness like me. One more than one occasion I re-listened to audio during the analysis phase of the project and cried or laughed as I heard their stories. Stories recorded in their voice and their words left their imprint.

Personal Reflection #9: Transferred skills and abilities. In 2008, I entered the world of education. Before then, I held engineering, manufacturing, and management roles for companies in the automotive industry. Those are two very different worlds with different rules. I completed a Master’s Degree in Educational Leadership before becoming a superintendent. In the master’s program I began the process of transferring my skills from automotive to education. This research project has helped continue the transition.

A self-elected challenge for the doctoral program was to conduct a qualitative research study instead of a quantitative one. Given my engineering and manufacturing thinking, a quantitative project certainly would have been a challenge, but a little easier. However, a qualitative study in an area that I knew absolutely nothing about presented a challenge worthy of my energy.

I had to learn to be selective about which skills and abilities to use in this project. As mentioned, I learned quickly to remain quiet in the interviews and not lead participants to a problem that was not important to them. I learned that math, while necessary to communicate some types of information, is terrible in communicating problems related to human behavior. Similarly, I found that participants’ stories were not formulaic; that is, I could not predict
participant actions based on their previous actions. Different situations caused the same participant to respond differently. Human behavior is too complex for prescriptive rules, as I learned.

**Personal Reflection #10: Learned to value low tech tools.** Finally, I learned the value of using low technology tools to help me think reflectively about data. I have a leaning toward all things electronic and automated. As I made the decision to conduct a qualitative study, I began to investigate automated tools that would help catalog data, find themes, and do some of the analysis. However, I found that I did not know enough about the thematic analysis process to correctly assess the automated tools I was considering. I abandoned the automatic tools in favor of large 11x17 sheets of paper, my research journal, and a pen. In my case, I learned about the process of doing thematic analysis using pen and paper. This approach immersed me in the data and allowed me to think reflectively about what I was finding. I was less focused on the technology and more committed to the data.

I have learned that I am more creative with a pen and blank sheet of paper than I am with a laptop and blank screen. This was a powerful lesson for me that I did not know until I started on my doctoral work. I think more creatively and more reflectively when I have a pen in my hand and a physical space to exercise thinking.

**A Metaphor**

Morgan (2006) asserted that a metaphor implies “a way of thinking and a way of seeing…it can create powerful insights that also become distortions” (pp. 4-5). It is with this exhortation and warning that a metaphor is presented in this final section. Ideology is not a physical construct; it cannot be touched or physically manipulated. Ideology is abstract by its nature because its elements of values, situations, commitments, and influences are abstract. A
metaphor connecting ideology to a physical construct may provide a new way of “thinking [about] and …seeing” ideology.

An ensemble is “a group producing a single effect” (Merriam-Webster, 2013). It is with the understanding that an ensemble is “a group” of separate units creating a “single effect,” which makes an ensemble an interesting metaphor for ideology.

In the realm of music, a jazz ensemble consists of five basic components. In the ensemble, each musician plays a unique instrument with certain expertise: one on the trumpet, one on the saxophone, one on the drums, and so on. Their expertise and skill develops over the course of time from much practice and experience. All musicians sit on a platform that provides a consistent place to play their instruments through all variations of music. Sheet music guides the musicians as they work their way through specific pieces of music.

From the definition of ideology presented in this chapter, an alignment emerges between the ideological framework and the ensemble metaphor. A single musician, for example, represents a single value. The development of that value happens over the course of time with many influences, just as the musical expertise of the musician happens with practice. The platform, like commitments, offers stability and consistency for the musicians, independent of the sheet music handed to them. Sheet music, like the situation, guides musicians through the musical course. Depending upon the sheet music, some musicians will play their instruments louder and longer than the other instruments, the notion of primary and secondary values. In some music, the trumpet is louder while the saxophone is playing quietly in the background. In other scores, the saxophone is louder than the rest of the instruments. However, as already suggested, the entire ensemble is “producing a single
effect” (Mirriam-Webster, 2013) or sound. The overall “effect,” action, or decision is a blend of all the instruments working together.

Within the metaphor, primary values are always heard more loudly than the secondary values in certain situations. Those secondary values in one situation could be primary in another. The sheet music tends to guide the selection of which instruments get which parts. The metaphor, while not perfect, offers a view of ideology that helps bring understanding to the dynamic nature of how ideology operates and works in decision-making.
References


Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.


http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.emich.edu/docview
/218796382?accountid=10650


APPENDICES
Appendix A - Email Letter of Invitation to Participate in the Study

To:  <Potential Participant>  <date>
     <email>
     <cell>

Re: Letter of Invitation to Participate in a Qualitative Research Project

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project conducted as part of my dissertation research project. I am completing the research as part of my doctoral studies at Eastern Michigan University in the Educational Leadership program. The study is about the ideologies of K12 Christian superintendents. Specifically, the study involves discussions with acting K12 Christian school superintendents. Your participation gives a voice to a group of educational leaders who are not always heard in educational circles.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary and you will be assured of complete confidentiality if you choose to participate. If you decide to participate there will be two 1 hour (maximum) interviews and requests for documents such as your philosophy of Christian education paper, the school’s mission statement, the school’s core values, recent board decisions, and other office documents (memos, emails, etc). These documents will be collected as needed before and during the interviewing process and only with your permission. While there are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study, your participation will help broaden understanding of the values and ideologies which characterize K12 Christian school superintendents.

If you would like to participate, please read the attached Consent Form and respond by email regarding your interest. I will then follow-up with a confirmation letter and short demographic survey. The Consent Form will be signed at the time of our first interview should you decide to participate.

I appreciate your consideration to participate in this research.

Thank-You,

Jim Dolson
Doctoral Candidate
Eastern Michigan University
Appendix B- Participant Consent Form

Participant Informed Consent Agreement

Project Title: The Ideology of K12 Christian School Superintendents

Investigator: Jimmy L. Dolson, Eastern Michigan University

Co-Investigator: Dr. David Anderson, Doctoral Committee Chair

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research study is to gain a better understanding of the ideology of K12 Christian School superintendents and its affect on organizational decision-making. Organizational action and decision-making are often ideologically driven and based on values.

Procedure: The researcher, Jim Dolson, will explain the study to you, answer any questions you may have, and witness your signature to copies of this consent form. The researcher will keep one copy of the consent form and the other copy is for you. To participate in this study you must be an acting superintendent, or head administrator, employed at an ACSI (Association of Christian Schools International) member school. You must also be willing to share your philosophy of education with the researcher, preferably in written form, as well as other documents. These additional documents include the school’s mission statement, the school’s core values, recent board decisions, and other office documents (memos, emails, etc) that may support your values and ideology. While some of these documents might be available on public websites and gathered before the interviews, other documents may require your assistance in gathering. The researcher will only use those documents for which he has permission to use.

If you participate in this project, there will be two interviews. The first interview will be approximately 1 hour long and conducted at the school where you serve. The second interview will also be about 1 hour in length and conducted at your school. During the interviews, you will be asked to share stories from your professional career as an educational leader and may be asked to share any available documents related to your stories. The most valuable stories are those that required you to make difficult decisions in your role as the school’s top leader.

Confidentiality: A pseudonym for your real name will be used to store, analyze, and describe all data collected from you during the project. Examples of collected data include: transcripts from interviews, demographic surveys, written documentation, electronic notes, etc. At no time will your real name be associated with your data. The interview will be audio recorded on a digital recorder to enhance accuracy. The recorder will be in a locked cabinet at the researcher’s home office when not in use. This informed consent form showing your real name and all physical field records will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s home office. At the completion of the project, all physical data collected will either be destroyed or retained in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s home office. Likewise, at the completion of the project, all electronic data will be either stored on a password-protected
Appendix B- Participant Consent Form (continued)
laptop in control of the researcher or on the researcher’s password protected “cloud” based storage account.

**Expected Risks:** While there should not be risk to you in participating in this study, there is the possibility that as you respond to the interview questions you may feel some distress. This distress is natural as you discuss experiences and stories from your own past. If you feel any such discomfort, you have the right to stop at any time. You have the right to take a break or voluntarily drop out of the interview. Additionally, you are free to ask questions at any time during the research about the techniques to be used or procedures to be undertaken.

**Expected Benefits:** There are no direct personal benefits to you by participating in this study. However, your participation will contribute to our understanding of the ideology of K12 Christian school superintendents. Your participation will give voice to a group of educational leaders not often heard from in educational research.

**Voluntary Participation:** Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you do decide to participate, you can change your mind at any time and withdraw from the study without negative consequences. If you choose not to participate, this will in no way affect your relationship with ACSI or Eastern Michigan University.

**Use of Research Results:** Data collected from this interview will be analyzed along with data from other research participants. Your individual data may be combined with other data for inclusion in the final research dissertation. Again, your real name will never be used, only your pseudonym. The dissertation will be available on public web sites; may be published, in whole or part, in both written and electronic format; may be used in public conferences or seminars; and, may be made available to other research institutes other than Eastern Michigan University.

**Future Questions:** If you have any questions concerning your participation in this study now or in the future, you can contact the research, Jim Dolson at (517)936-7083 or at jdolson@jacksonchristianschool.org.

This research protocol and informed consent document has been reviewed and approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee for use from September 1, 2012 to December 1, 2013. If you have questions about the approval process, please contact the Human Subjects Review Committee at 734.487.0042 or email the committee at human.subjects@emich.edu.
Appendix B- Participant Consent Form (continued)

Consent to Participate: I have read or had read to me all of the above information about this research study, including the research procedures, possible risks, side effects, and the likelihood of any benefit to me. The content and meaning of this information has been explained and I understand. All my questions, at this time, have been answered. I hereby consent and do voluntarily offer to follow the study requirements and take part in the study.

Participant’s Printed Name: ___________________________________________

Participant’s Signature and Date: _______________________________________

Researcher’s Signature and Date: _______________________________________
Appendix C- Email Confirmation

To: <Affirmative Responding Participant> <date>
   <email>
   <cell>

Re: Confirmation to Participate in Jim Dolson’s Qualitative Research Project

Dear <Participant’s Name>,

Thank-you very much for expressing a desire to participate in this research project. I am excited about your participation because you are working everyday on the frontlines of K12 Christian education. Your experiences will help tremendously in bringing further understanding to the topic of ideology of those leading our Christian schools.

The next step in the process is the establishment of a pool of participants from which I can draw on to conduct interviews. To aid in this step I need to collect some demographic data from all potential participants. Attached is a link to a short survey that I need you to complete. The survey will take less than 10 minutes to complete and is necessary for me to properly understand how I can use any data collected from you during the project.

Again, Thank-you very much for your willingness to participate in this project. I will contact you after I receive your demographic and interest survey.

Click here to access the survey -----> demographic and interest survey

Sincerely,

Jim Dolson
Doctoral Candidate
Eastern Michigan University
Appendix D- On-Line Demographic Survey

Dear Potential Participant,
Thank-You for taking this on-line demographical survey. You will be asked questions regarding your age, race, gender, childhood social-class, and current religious denomination. Additional questions include qualifying questions for the project such as your school’s ACSI membership status and questions of availability to access your philosophy of Christian education.

This survey will take no longer than 10 minutes to complete. You may terminate the session at any time during if you do not wish to complete the survey. Your final results will only go to me via access to a password protected electronic database. I will assign your results a pseudonym so that no one will know your real name.

1) Please enter your first and last name:
2) What position do you hold at your school?
3) Is your school a member of ACSI?
4) Are you willing to share your Philosophy of Christian education paper as part of this research?
5) Your gender?
   a. Male
   b. Female
6) Your race?
   a. White
   b. Black or African-American
   c. Asian
   d. American Native
   e. Other
7) Your age?
8) Your social class as a child?
   a. “Poor”-Your parents were on public assistance and were not regularly employed.
   b. “Working”- Neither of your parents held jobs that had managerial authority over others and their jobs did not require highly complex or educational skill.
   c. “Middle”- One or both of your parents held managerial jobs and their jobs required highly complex or educational skill.
   d. “Wealth”- One or both of your parents owned major businesses or were well-compensated top-level executives.
9) Your religious denomination?

Thank-You for taking this demographic survey.
I will contact you in the near future if an interview needs to be scheduled!

Jim Dolson
Doctoral Student
Eastern Michigan University
Appendix E- Dissertation Interview Guide

Participant: ______________________________________

Date of Interview: ________________

Description of Setting: ___________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

1) Check Recorder and verify it is working.

2) Opening Statement: I would to thank-you for taking the time to discuss your experiences as Christian school superintendent. You are uniquely qualified for this interview because you are a superintendent working in the “trenches” everyday. As such, I am interested in your experiences as a superintendent.

3) Transition to first round of questions (focus on current school year): As we begin, I would like you to think about a major decision you made in the past school year. This might have been a decision where you were caught in a dilemma having to choose amongst many options; or, maybe it was decision requiring you to stand on a conviction. Please bring me into the situation and describe it for me.

4) What other experiences in your past did you draw on to help you make this decision?

5) What were you feeling as you made this decision? (Explore verification of story)

6) If I were faced with this same situation, what advice would you give me?

   Record advice here: ______________________________________________

   _______________________________________________________________

   _______________________________________________________________

   _______________________________________________________________

7) Check recorder to make sure it is still recording.

8) Transition to second round of questions (from a past school year): Ok, now that we’ve discussed a fairly recent situation, I’d like to explore a major decision about school that you needed to make in past, something earlier than this past school year. Again, this could have been a situation where you needed to make decision amongst
Appendix E- Dissertation Interview Guide (continued)

9) many choices, or you made a decision based on a conviction. Please describe the situation and the decision you faced.

10) As you think back on this past situation and your decision, what was the impact on your school?

11) If you had the opportunity to re-live the situation, what would you do differently?

Record response to “re-live” here: __________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

12) **Transition to final round of questions (verification of values):** Now that we’ve looked at a situation from the current school year and a situation from a past school year, I’d like to just briefly discuss review those situations (this will help in verifying information and reveal deeper meanings).

13) As we were discussing the situation from this school year, you gave me some advice should I find myself in a similar situation....(read from above). From that advice, what would you say are your values?

14) In the situation from a past school year, you indicated that if you had the opportunity to re-live that experience you would ...(see above). From that, describe your values to me?

15) **Closing Transition:** Thank-you very much for allowing me the last couple of hours to talk with you about your experiences as a superintendent. I appreciate your honesty and transparency. I have really enjoyed getting to know you better. The work you are doing is important and it takes perseverance to do this day-in and day-out.

16) I will be reviewing this transcript, writing up a summary of our discussion, and begin doing some analysis. I will send you the summary of our discussion within the week and give you a chance to review it. Is it ok if I follow-up with you in the next two weeks with some questions to fill-in any gaps I might find and to review the summary with you?

17) Shut Off recorder

18) After leaving site:
   a) Record observations of office, school, grounds, etc. on recorder
   b) Journal reflective thoughts in the dissertation journal
### Appendix F - Code List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Descriptors from Transcripts - Synonyms</th>
<th>Descriptors from Transcripts - Antonyms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>“protect culture”, “restore sanity”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>“school community”, “family”, “create community”, church relations</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>“process to protect culture”, “analytical [thinker]”, “rebuilding [culture]”</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>“parents”, “family”, importance of family, “loving my children, my wife”</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipleship</td>
<td>“discipleship”, influence others, “coaching”, “mentoring”, “learn something from it”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian School Experience</td>
<td>“Christian school experience”, “[school was] very small”, “enjoyed”, “fun”, “had high respect for [teachers]”, “safe”</td>
<td>“administrator was very gracious…wouldn’t deal with mess”, “[school was a ]circus”, “terrible [experience]”, “kids ran the school”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence</td>
<td>“[my] mentors”, “author [I read]”, speakers, “Bible”, “born in”, “[she was like] an older sister”, “very influential”</td>
<td>“alcoholic father”,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>“efficiency”, school purpose, “investment”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix F- Code List (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Descriptors from Transcripts-Synonyms</th>
<th>Descriptors from Transcripts-Antonyms</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evangelize</td>
<td>“evangelism”, missionary</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>“[my] age”, maturity, “experience”, “I’ve been in this business awhile now…”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>“together”, “openness”, “resolving conflicts”, “staff relations”, “reconciliation”, “community relations”, “friendly”</td>
<td>“I am so alone”, “I’m lonely”, “doubt there will ever be…a personal relationship”, “[I was] too professional”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td>“recognition”, “understanding”, “I did that”, “As a women…”, “legitimacy”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td>“[I]changed everything”, “pushing it”, “finances were sloppy”, take action, “restructured”, “restructuring”</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>“authority”, “chain-of-command”, “submission to authority”, “union mentality”, “entitlement mentality”</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>“instill discipline”, “develop”, “pay”, “promotion”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>leadership ability, “leadership-is-leadership”, “send signal to staff”</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix F - Code List (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Descriptors from Transcripts - Synonyms</th>
<th>Descriptors from Transcripts - Antonyms</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mission</td>
<td>“accomplish mission”, “mission is what’s different”, mission issues</td>
<td>“hypocrisy”, “[school] didn’t affect them”, “[we were] becoming opposite”</td>
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<td>Genuine</td>
<td>“genuine”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unity</td>
<td>“Unity”, “unify”</td>
<td>“disunity”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comm.</td>
<td>“honesty in communication”, “communication”, “[communicating to] board”, “networking [with others]”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acad.</td>
<td>“[did not want students to see] school as a drag”, “good learning”, “freedom”, “make learning fun”</td>
<td>“weren’t credentialed”, “[teachers] didn’t have educational background”, “degreed”, “a mess academically”,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Truth</td>
<td>“teaching truth”, “I do know what truth is [related to gossiping and slander]”, “speak truth”, “lies die away”, “identify a lie”, “expose a lie”, {there are two modes of this code: truth in speech (i.e. “gossip”), and truth in interpreting facts (i.e. “teaching truth”)</td>
<td>“not teaching [truth]”, “[gossip] is absolutely not true”, “what lie do I believe [about myself]”, “frustrating thing”, “gossip”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe</td>
<td>“we were scared of the schools [in Detroit]”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>“make them [students] wait”, “timeout”, “[students need to] own it”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>“Justice”, “accountable”, “place responsibility”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G- Sample Verbatim Evidence for Allison
Appendix H- Sample Code Map for Allison
Appendix H- Sample Code Map for Allison (continued)
Appendix I- Axial Code Map
Appendix I- Axial Code Map (continued)
Appendix I- Axial Code Map (continued)
Appendix I- Axial Code Map (continued)
Appendix J- Ideological Storyboard
Appendix J-Ideological Storyboard (continued)
Appendix J: Ideological Storyboard (continued)
### Appendix K - Matrix of Values: Ideological Statement by Participant Values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evangelism</th>
<th>Duty</th>
<th>Authority</th>
<th>Discipleship</th>
<th>Grace</th>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Ideology</th>
<th>Arts/Artsis</th>
<th>Change</th>
<th>Trust</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Cause &amp; effect: necessary in a Christian school.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Covenanted with us</em></td>
<td><em>Serving others</em></td>
<td><em>Learning from teachers</em></td>
<td><em>Forgiveness</em></td>
<td><em>Stable culture</em></td>
<td><em>Educational process</em></td>
<td><em>Warms environment</em></td>
<td><em>Understanding</em></td>
<td><em>Stable culture</em></td>
<td><em>Same culture</em></td>
<td><em>Same people</em></td>
<td><em>Teacher</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fellowship</em></td>
<td><em>Serving others</em></td>
<td><em>Learning from teachers</em></td>
<td><em>Forgiveness</em></td>
<td><em>Stable culture</em></td>
<td><em>Educational process</em></td>
<td><em>Warms environment</em></td>
<td><em>Understanding</em></td>
<td><em>Stable culture</em></td>
<td><em>Same culture</em></td>
<td><em>Same people</em></td>
<td><em>Teacher</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Commitment to the mission of the school</em></td>
<td><em>Serving others</em></td>
<td><em>Learning from teachers</em></td>
<td><em>Forgiveness</em></td>
<td><em>Stable culture</em></td>
<td><em>Educational process</em></td>
<td><em>Warms environment</em></td>
<td><em>Understanding</em></td>
<td><em>Stable culture</em></td>
<td><em>Same culture</em></td>
<td><em>Same people</em></td>
<td><em>Teacher</em></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Helping other</em></td>
<td><em>Serving others</em></td>
<td><em>Learning from teachers</em></td>
<td><em>Forgiveness</em></td>
<td><em>Stable culture</em></td>
<td><em>Educational process</em></td>
<td><em>Warms environment</em></td>
<td><em>Understanding</em></td>
<td><em>Stable culture</em></td>
<td><em>Same culture</em></td>
<td><em>Same people</em></td>
<td><em>Teacher</em></td>
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</table>
## Matrix of Influences: Commitment and Values by Participant Influences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commitment</th>
<th>Matrix of Influences</th>
<th>Values</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Participant Influences</strong></td>
<td><strong>Commitment</strong></td>
<td><strong>Values</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Family</strong></td>
<td><strong>Influences</strong></td>
<td><strong>Commitment</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parental Values</strong></td>
<td><strong>Commitment to Family</strong></td>
<td><strong>Family Commitment</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Dynamics</strong></td>
<td><strong>Commitment to Parental Values</strong></td>
<td><strong>Parental Values Commitment</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial Security</strong></td>
<td><strong>Commitment to Family Dynamics</strong></td>
<td><strong>Family Dynamics Commitment</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religious Commitment</strong></td>
<td><strong>Commitment to Financial Security</strong></td>
<td><strong>Financial Security Commitment</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural Heritage</strong></td>
<td><strong>Commitment to Religious Commitment</strong></td>
<td><strong>Religious Commitment Commitment</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Notes
- Commitment and Values are interrelated in influencing participant decision-making processes.
- Family, Parental Values, Financial Security, Religious Commitment, and Cultural Heritage are key influencers in shaping commitment to various values.

---

**Appendix L**

Matrix of Influences:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commitment</th>
<th>Matrix of Influences</th>
<th>Values</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Participant Influences</strong></td>
<td><strong>Commitment</strong></td>
<td><strong>Values</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Influences</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Commitment to Family</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Family Dynamics Commitment</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Commitment to Financial Security</strong></td>
<td><strong>Financial Security Commitment</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural Heritage</strong></td>
<td><strong>Commitment to Religious Commitment</strong></td>
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# Appendix L: Matrix of Influences: Commitment and Values by Participant Influences

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Commitment and Values</th>
<th>ThG</th>
<th>Fired by Board</th>
<th>Fired by Parent</th>
<th>Fired by Commitment</th>
<th>Fired by Teacher</th>
<th>Fired by Committee</th>
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<td>Commitment to Respect for Community</td>
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<td>Commitment to Respect for Fellow Workers</td>
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<table>
<thead>
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<th>Influences</th>
<th>ThG</th>
<th>Fired by Board</th>
<th>Fired by Parent</th>
<th>Fired by Commitment</th>
<th>Fired by Teacher</th>
<th>Fired by Committee</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Teacher's Religion</td>
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(continued)
### Appendix M: Matrix of Situations: Ideological Statements by Participant Situations

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Ideological Statement</th>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note: This matrix is a simplified representation and does not capture all possible situations and statements.*
Appendix N- Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) Statement of Faith

1. We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative, inerrant Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:21).
2. We believe there is one God, eternally existent in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Genesis 1:1, Matthew 28:19, John 10:30).
3. We believe in the deity of Christ (John 10:33), His virgin birth (Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23, Luke 1:35), His sinless life (Hebrews 4:15, 7:26), His miracles (John 2:11), His vicarious and atoning death (1 Corinthians 15:3, Ephesians 1:7, Hebrews 2:9), His Resurrection (John 11:25, 1 Corinthians 15:4), His Ascension to the right hand of God (Mark 16:19), His personal return in power and glory (Acts 1:11, Revelation 19:11).
4. We believe in the absolute necessity of regeneration by the Holy Spirit for salvation because of the exceeding sinfulness of human nature, and that men are justified on the single ground of faith in the shed blood of Christ, and that only by God’s grace and through faith alone are we saved (John 3:16–19, 5:24; Romans 3:23, 5:8–9; Ephesians 2:8–10; Titus 3:5).
5. We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; that they are saved unto the resurrection of life, and that they are lost unto the resurrection of condemnation (John 5:28–29).
6. We believe in the spiritual unity of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 8:9, 1 Corinthians 2:12–13, Galatians 3:26–28).
7. We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life (Romans 8:13–14; 1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19–20; Ephesians 4:30, 5:18).

(“ACSI Statement of Faith”, 2012)