

Principals and Blogs:
*In what ways does blogging
support the practices of school principals?*

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the people who inspired and motivated me to the finish line. Their support kept me moving forward and without them, this would not be a finished product.

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Abstract

This study paper explores the factors that motivate school principals to blog and the effectiveness of those blogs in terms of instructional and technology leadership. Participants were school principals who blog and were sent a web-based survey. Fifty responded. Results indicate that principals blog to communicate to others, including parents, staff, other principals and the school community. Respondents felt that blogs do support their role as instructional and technology leaders of their school. Advice for other principals thinking about blogging, was to “Just do it!”

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Chapter 1

Introduction

History teaches us that the dominant form of communication changes as rapidly as innovators develop new technologies. The printing press was the big innovation for communication, until the telegraph came along. This mode of communication faded as radio became easy to use and popular. Once television was perfected and the content for it was well-developed, it became the dominant form of mass-communication technology. Then came the Internet as a far-reaching information medium (Elon University/Pew Internet Project, 2010).

One of the tools used on the Internet to communicate is a blog. Technorati is an Internet search engine (think: “Google”) for finding blogs. Since 2004, Technorati has reported yearly on the “State of the Blogosphere” in an online report. In 2009, Technorati surveyed almost 2900 bloggers and found that 72% of them blog because they enjoy it. The primary motivators for these people are self-expression and sharing expertise. Blogging has become a way to communicate with others via the Internet.

Weblogs, or blogs as they are more commonly called, have increased in number each year of their existence. Technorati (2008) reports that when their website started in 2004, designed to help bloggers succeed, most people did not know what a blog was or its purpose. Since their inception, that has changed dramatically. There are now millions of people who post and/or read blogs on a daily basis (Technorati, 2008).

Forty-three percent of the bloggers (n=7,205) surveyed by Technorati in 2010 have a graduate degree and one-third have an income of \$75,000 or higher. Two-thirds are male and 65% are between the ages of 18-44. Eighty-one percent have been blogging

more than two years (Technorati, 2010). Bloggers are highly educated people communicating about the things they care about, including their professions.

School principals could easily be a part of this group, since they are highly educated and communicate about the things they care about: students, instruction, and learning. Blogs are one form of technology that has the potential to assist principals in their roles as effective instructional and technology leaders. Smith and Andrews (1989) identified four roles of an instructional leader: resource provider, instructional resource, communicator, and visible presence. As a resource provider, the principal secures whatever is needed to achieve the vision and goals of the school. This can be materials, personnel, facilities, staff training, information, budget, data and community resources. As an instructional resource, the principal facilitates good teaching by being actively engaged in the improvement of classroom instruction. This is done by modeling desired behaviors, having continuous dialogue with staff and being aware of new instructional strategies and materials through a personal professional development plan that includes keeping up on the best practices of instruction and curriculum. As a communicator, the principal has clear goals for the school and articulates these to the staff, parents and to the larger school community. Frequent reference is made to these goals, so that the focus stays on the priorities. As a visible presence, the principal is engaged with students and staff, is highly accessible and knows first-hand what is going on in the school.

The centrality of instructional leadership is increasingly emphasized within educational leadership. This emphasis, however, is a concept that is not uniform or well-defined (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Despite different views about what defines instructional leadership, research is clear that the role of the principal in creating

the conditions, both pressure and support, to advance teaching and learning is pivotal (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982; Hallinger, 2005; Jenkins, 2009; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Smith & Andrews, 1989). Further, the importance of principal leadership is second only to teacher practice as the greatest influence on student achievement (Wahlstrom, Seashore, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010). Such studies show that the instructional role of the principal is complex and additional research is needed to understand more fully the essential dimensions and means of enactment in serving as an effective instructional leader.

A review of the literature shows that there are leadership behaviors or factors that can assist a school leader in creating an effective school that will impact student learning. Blogs may have the potential to assist principals in their roles as instructional leaders. For example, blogs could support communicating their vision and goals of the school to a broad audience of stakeholders in a timely manner. Blogs could also create a space for ongoing dialogue about enacting established priorities. Blogs might even serve to advance professional development for principals and staff in a variety of ways, including just-in-time sharing of ideas, strategies, and support. Ongoing reflection among others who are experiencing the same situations or challenges could help sustain momentum during both early and later stages of implementing various instructional initiatives.

In the 21st century, principals also are expected to be technology leaders (Anderson & Dexter, 2005; Garrett Dikkers, Hughes, & McLeod, 2005; Kozloski, 2006; McLeod, 2007). Without administrative support and encouragement, the integration of technology into the classroom will be negatively impacted (McLeod, 2007; Riedl, Smith, Ware, Wark, & Yount, 1998; Ritchie, 1996). It is not enough for principals to be aware that

there are technology needs in their building. Principals need technology training (McLeod, 2007; Yee, 2000) so that along with their leadership skills, the long-term benefits from technology can be realized and implemented. Modeling the use of technology and supporting the training needs could increase the likelihood of technology adoption by teachers in this digital age in which we live. When principals use technology to communicate, they demonstrate a willingness to innovate (ISTE, 2009). Use of blogs by principals is one way to model and reinforce use of technology for educational purposes.

The National Educational Technology Standards for Administrators, or NETS-A, help define what principals need to know and do in order to be the technology leaders in their schools (ISTE, 2009). The 2009 NETS-A has five standards: Visionary Leadership, Digital Age Learning Culture, Excellence in Professional Practice, Systemic Improvement and Digital Citizenship. Within each standard, specific indicators of effective principal practice are articulated. Arguably, blogs can assist principals in achieving many of these indicators, especially the ones involving communication, collaboration and technology modeling.

While the number of blogs by principals is not known, a search on Google using the term “principal blog” results in 49,900,000 hits in October 2010 up from 44,500,000 hits in February 2010, and one can quickly connect to a number of blogs written by principals. A Google Scholar search of “principals and blog” results in 19,900 hits for the same month, up from 18,400 hits in February 2010. There has been limited research on principals who blog. A search of “principals and blog” through Digital Dissertations at the University of Minnesota’s library, brings up “No documents found.” The result is the

same using the search term “school administrators and blog.” In November 2010, thirteen results are found for “schools and blogs,” up one from February 2010. Of these thirteen, only three had the use of blogs as part of their study. One study was of the use of blogs as a learning tool in a high school science class; one study used blogs for a seventh-grade math classes; and the third study was about the use of blogs and writing instruction in a high school classroom. The others stated in their abstract that they had read blogs as one source of gathering information. The number is different when the search term of the single word “blog” is used. In November 2008, when the search began for this study, the number of documents found using the search term “blogs” in Digital Dissertations was 104. A year later, in November 2009, the number was 192. Another year later, November 2010, the number is 289. An advanced JSTOR search using “schools,” “principals” and “blogs” produces seventeen results, none of which have to do with school principals who blog. Searching with the same terms in Web of Science produced zero results. It is evident that research is being done about blogs, but not necessarily in the area of principals and blogs. Clearly, more research is warranted.

Purpose of the Study

The purposes of this study were to examine why school principals blog, to identify the focus of their blogs, and to determine the extent to which blogs are useful as a technology tool to assist in their roles as instructional and technology leaders. Findings have the potential to inform the field about existing and potentially advantageous use of blogs to support principal practice.

Research Questions

Research on principals who blog is, at best, limited. What is clear, however, is that principals have a pivotal role in whether or not various initiatives and improvement efforts take hold in their schools (Andrews & Soder, 1987; Wahlstrom, Seashore, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). This study examined what motivates principals to blog and whether blogs might assist them as effective instructional and technology leaders in their school. The overarching question that guided this study was: In what ways does blogging support the practices of school principals? Sub-questions are:

- What motivates a principal to begin blogging and then to continue blogging?
- What are the benefits and challenges of blogging for a principal?
- In what ways does blogging assist a principal as an instructional leader?
- In what ways does blogging assist a principal as a technology leader?
- What advice is there for principals who want to start their own blog?

This study invited principals who blog to respond to an online survey. It is a descriptive study in that the responses from the principals described what they consider to be their blogging practice and the associated value of these practices (Bryant, 2004).

Research Design

The online survey method was used to gather information from a sample of principals about their use of blogs. Surveys are the most popular type of study for describing what currently exists (Orcher, 2005). Online surveys support easy access to a wide audience of potential participants who otherwise would be difficult to access.

Online survey methods also seem especially well suited for the sample being surveyed: principals who blog. Such principals are likely to be reasonably familiar and comfortable with online technology means of communication. Data were organized, analyzed and reported to address each of the research questions.

Delimitations and Limitations

A delimitation to this study was that the data were gathered from just one group of people who blog, principals or other designated formal leaders of a school building, and cannot be generalized to other groups who blog, such as superintendents or other district administrators. Another delimitation was the lack of a known or formalized way to access the desired sample, i.e. – principals who blog. There were some sources known by Professor Scott McLeod, Director of University Council of Educational Administration (UCEA) Center for the Advanced Study of Technology Leadership in Education (CASTLE), at Iowa State University. Dr. McLeod is a nationally known expert and leader in the area of technology use for and by school administrators. He was asked, and graciously agreed, to serve as a committee member for this dissertation research. As such, he was able to assist substantially in the process of securing access to principals who blog.

A limitation to this study is that the population size of principals who blog is unknown. Determining a sample size from the unknown population is a limitation to the study, particularly in regard to the inability to assess the representative nature of the responding participants. Another limitation is that the data collected were from only those respondents who chose to respond. Non-respondents were not able to be identified. This means that reasons for non-responses could not be ascertained. The representative nature

of responses, again, cannot be discerned. Caution is warranted, therefore, when considering broader application of findings beyond this particular set of respondents. For these reasons, this study is well conceived as exploratory in nature – an initial attempt to chart some territory about why principals blog, the benefits and challenges realized through blogging, and the potential impact of blogging on instructional and technology leadership.

Significance of the Study

The expectation that schools have strong leaders who effectively enhance and are accountable for student achievement has never been higher than it is today (Leithwood et al., 2004). Communicating with many stakeholders and serving as a knowledgeable resource for students, staff members and communities is an increasingly significant dimension of principal practice (Kinney, 2009).

Research is clear that principals are expected to be instructional leaders in this new age of accountability (Andrews & Soder, 1987; Hallinger, 2005; Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano et al., 2005). Research is also clear that in order for technology to be integrated into the school, the principal must be the technology leader (Anderson & Dexter, 2005; Kozloski, 2006; McLeod, 2008). Although school leaders may be aware of such expectations, research is lacking about which tools could be used in the 21st century to assist a principal in being an effective instructional and technology leader. This study was intended to contribute to the field in the following ways:

- Adding to the literature a study on principals who blog;

- Informing principal practice about possible connections between the use of a particular technology tool, blogs, and the usefulness in the arenas of both instructional and technology leadership;
- Adding to the literature a study that not only builds on the current research of the importance of principals being technology leaders, but delves deeper into the use of a particular technology tool that is currently used by many school principals; and
- Informing principal practice about the benefits that blogs can have to the school community in terms of professional development for teachers and other means of advancing instructional practice in the classroom.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

It's hard to view school leaders as bureaucratic, out of touch, and aloof when they show their humanity week after week online by sharing their fears, dreams, hopes, frustrations and plans.

Nora Carr, American School Board Journal, 2006, pg. 46

Effective school leaders are effective communicators (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005) with a variety of methods and styles available to convey their messages. Most principals spend 75 percent or more of their day communicating with students, teachers, parents, and the many other people with whom they work (Nicholson, 1972; Valentine, 1981).

Nicholson in 1972 reported that the constant improvement in communications continues to be of vital concern to principals. He writes, "The 'right to know' complex is at an all time high. Teachers, students and the public expect to have access to information that a principal uses in his deliberations about policies and procedures affecting them. Thus, it becomes an enormous task to communicate such information both accurately and adequately" (Nicholson, 1972, p. 133).

Those statements could have easily been written today, some thirty-eight years later. Effective communication continues to be a concern of school principals. The Internet has created new means for communication with staff, students, and the community, and principals need to be aware of the multiple uses of technology. Computer-savvy parents have rising expectations for schools to provide information relevant to their child's school life (Holland, 2000).

Email is a popular choice as a communication tool for principals. Glendinning (2007) reports that he spent approximately 2 ½ hours a day at his computer doing emails during his first year of being a principal. Emails became more common in schools in the late 1990s and helped to decrease intercom messages and paper memos (Logan, 1999). Email list serve groups allow for a number of people with common interests to share ideas and communicate simultaneously with all persons who have subscribed (Logan, 1999). The negative side to this form of communication is the lag time between the time a message is sent and answered. Also, email list serves tend to force users into a distinctly staccato mode of thinking and communicating (Glendinning, 2007), which does not allow for thoroughly addressing issues.

Email requires administrators to become comfortable with a fragmented and discontinuous thought process and with a state of “suspended animation” in regard to a number of ongoing conversations. Not knowing where one stands in any given email thread can be a cause for anxiety (Glendinning, 2007). Another form of communication, besides email, is the blog. “Blog” comes from the term “Web log” which was coined by Jorn Barger in 1997 (Descy, 2004) to refer to an online journal, or diary, of thoughts and ideas which appear in reverse chronological order.

Among principals, email is a more common and known form of communication than blogs, but its effectiveness in reaching a larger audience such as blogs do is not as strong. With blogs, there is a link for “Comments” at the end of the post. Clicking on this link allows one to read the comments of others and post one’s own comment. The author of the blog can limit the comments or delete those that might be in poor taste (Buck,

2005). The comment section can make it easier to follow a discussion thread rather than a series of several emails.

The purposes of this study were to examine why principals choose to blog, the focus of the blog and the benefits realized from blogging. The study gathered details regarding the principals' decisions to create and sustain a blog and the ways in which these decisions have made an impact on their leadership practices as both instructional and technology leaders in their respective school buildings.

This review of literature begins broadly with a description of blogs and their use in today's society. The focus narrows to the educational use of blogs by principals, teachers and within the classroom. Studies are then reviewed regarding the principal as an instructional leader and then as a technology leader. Finally, this chapter concludes with a summary of key findings from the literature.

BLOGS AS A MEDIUM OF COMMUNICATION

Blog Utilization

According to eMarketer (2010) by the year 2014, there will be 33.4 million people creating blogs, or 13.3 percent of the Internet population. There are already 11.9% of Internet users keeping blogs in 2010 and 113 million people, or 51% of users, reading blogs on a monthly basis. By 2014, the blog audience is expected to increase to 150 million people, or 60% of Internet users.

Although the numbers vary slightly, Universal McCann (2009) reports that there are 31.9 million people who have started a blog and 63.7 million Internet users who read blogs. Technorati (2008) reports that there have been 133 million blog records indexed by them since 2002, indicating that blogs are a global phenomenon that are here to stay.

The Millennial generation, those born between 1980 and 2000 and just coming into the teaching and administrative professions, does not know a world without numerous forms of available technology according to Walker (2009). She writes, “They process information in nonlinear and visual ways and are excellent multitaskers. Communication is done extensively through texting, instant messaging, and e-mailing” (Walker, 2009, p. 74). Millennials spend 16 hours a week on the Internet -- and that's not including emailing. Recent research from the Pew Internet and American life project shows nearly 80 percent of the 28 and younger set regularly read blogs, compared with just 30 percent of adults 29 to 40. And roughly 40 percent of teenage and 20-something Internet users have created their own blog, as compared to just a sliver of 30-somethings -- a mere 9 percent (Tresser, 2007, August 2).

Who Blogs?

All types of people including students, teachers, writers, politicians and service people keep blogs (Descy, 2004). Professors (McLeod, 2007), business people (Baker & Green, 2005; Baker & Green, 2008), and school board members blog (Abbott, 2008). Retired people and self-employed people (Technorati, 2008) also blog.

Purpose of Blogs

The purpose or the content of the blog varies according to the purpose or interest of the blogger. Conversational in tone, blogs represent a new, and powerful, form of communication (Carr, 2006). Blogs may take the form of a diary or journal, mini-essay, photo-essay, project updates, fiction or non-fiction work (Descy, 2004). The key to their popularity is how simple it is to construct and maintain them. The blogger simply types his or her thoughts and clicks “post.” The blog handles the rest automatically, with the

new post appearing at the top of the blog Web page, followed by previous postings in reverse chronological order (Buck, 2005).

In a survey about what motivates people to blog, Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, & Swartz (2004) found that reasons vary among five categories. These categories are: documenting one's life; providing commentary and opinions; expressing deeply felt emotions; articulating ideas through writing; and forming and maintaining community forums. These motivations are not mutually exclusive and might come into play simultaneously.

Blogs provide a simple medium for communication that can replace a traditional Web site. They require no special software, no knowledge of html, and virtually no time (Buck, 2005). Blogs foster regular and timely personal communication and dialogue for a defined team, community or interest group (Ward, 2006). Blogging has become a powerful tool for establishing and maintaining online communities (Cayzer, 2004; Rosenbloom, 2004). Bloggers in a community often link to and cross-reference one another's postings while discussing common topics (Kumar, Novak, Raghaven, & Tomkins, 2004). The websites that publish blogs are called "blog sites." Blog sites often provide opinions, commentaries or news about a particular subject or can function more like an online diary. The universe of all blog sites is often called "blogosphere" (Agarwal & Liu, 2008).

PRINCIPALS AND BLOGS

Principals blog to connect with other administrators facing similar challenges, to communicate with their local constituencies, or for professional development (Archer, 2007b). Each of these reasons for blogging is discussed further below.

Connecting with Others

A growing number of school principals are blogging and writing about their successes, failures, hopes and frustrations for readers far beyond their districts (Richardson, 2007). Creating and using a blog for this purpose allows principals to make professional connections to others who are doing the same type of work which is often beneficial (Nardi et al., 2004).

One blog, titled LeaderTalk (<http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/LeaderTalk/>), claims to be the first group blog by school leaders for school leaders. The blog's home page states that it allows school leaders a place to go for "insightful, thoughtful, reflective commentary about what it means to be a P-12 administrator today." The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) has their own blog (<http://naesp.typepad.com>) which they self-describe as a "blog that connects principals with their colleagues and other K-12 educators. Come in and join our community of principals—where the door is always open."

Communicating with Local Constituencies

Building your school community through the use of a blog as a way to have more interactive communication with multiple school stakeholders is a benefit for principals (McLeod, 2008). Readers of the school blog can post a question or comment, which everyone can see, allowing for more ongoing dialogue about a particular topic. This also creates transparency and openness, which builds positive public relations when community members have a chance to voice their thoughts and opinions.

Blogs are a quick way for principals to keep a school community updated on what is happening in the school, whether it is extra-curricular activities, upcoming special

events, classroom highlights or the lunch menu (Franklin, 2005; McLeod, 2008). Items that used to be considered for paper newsletters can be put into a blog that is more timely and cost-effective. It also allows for more community members to be aware of what is happening in the school, rather than just parents of the students. This type of format allows parents who are considering moving into the district an opportunity to get a sense of what the school is about. Parents now have choices about which type of school to send their child, such as charter schools, specialty schools and home schools (Anderson, 1999). A school blog that promotes the positive things happening within the building can be a marketing tool for real estate agents who need to answer the question, “Where are the good schools?” from parents who need to relocate (McLeod, 2008).

Engaging in Professional Development

Being able to connect with other principals from around the country by reading comments posted by others fosters ongoing professional learning that is more timely, efficient and supportive (Poling & Borelli, 2009). Former principal, now superintendent, Kimberly Moritz states that blogging has transformed how she looks at her own professional development. It is now on demand and almost completely relevant to her needs. She states, “It’s thinking about my audience and what I want to say that can potentially influence or serve a purpose for another educator, student, or parent. My time spent blogging – writing and reading comments and reviewing resources – is all about my own learning. It’s free, it’s accessible 24/7, and it’s what I choose” (Richardson, 2007, p. 89). While it may appear at first glance that blogging takes up precious time that a principal does not have, making the time to blog could save a few phone calls a month, or

make your staff aware of important issues and eliminate a meeting or two, which is worth the time it takes to blog (Forde, 2007).

Creating an educational blog, which is an online journal of your professional thoughts, questions, or experiences, allows principals such as Dr. Jan Borelli and Dr. Steve Poling to connect with each other, although they have never met and their elementary schools are 1,000 miles apart (Poling & Borelli, 2009). Blogging has allowed them to share their issues, insights, and ideas in a forum in which other principals can also respond and react. They also state that blogging has allowed them to reflect on their practice so that on a more day-to-day basis they are intentional about what they are doing. Additionally, blogging gives them an opportunity to support each other when they are facing tough issues (Poling & Borelli, 2009).

Newer principals can learn from more experienced principals who have “been there and done that” writes Dr. Poling (2006) in one of his posts where he is encouraging more principals to start blogs. He also states in his post, “If a principal is not intentional about seeking out fellow administrators, and building relationships with colleagues, then the principalship can be an isolating and myopic job.” To help motivate principals to start blogs, university professor Dr. Scott McLeod, offered to set up free blogs (Archer, 2007a).

Serving as an Instructional Role Model

Not only are principals becoming active and reflective learners in professional practice through networking with educators around the world, but they are also modeling important online reading, writing and publishing literacies for the staff, students and parents (Richardson, 2007). Kimberly Moritz discovered a sizeable audience to her frank

and honest posts on her blog, including students who responded to a post she wrote on cheating (Richardson, 2007). Principals are not limited to having parents as their only audience. Students in the upper grades, for example, in addition to staff, can be invited to read the blog and post comments (Buck, 2005).

TEACHERS AND BLOGS

Blogs are especially popular among new teachers who want to share their first-year teaching experience, which can be quite harrowing (Franklin, 2005). Through blogs, teachers also seek support and advice on how to manage their classroom more effectively and discuss topics such as perspectives on education policy, curriculum issues and personal survival strategies (Franklin, 2005).

In Ray and Hocutt's (2006) study of K-12 teachers who had created their own blogs, the research showed that blogs were effective reflective devices. Teachers used the blogs to not only think about their own teaching, but also to look at what was going on in the classroom in terms of student achievement. Teachers need to be cautious about any disclosure of confidential student information in a blog as this violates the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and state student records laws (Todd, DiJohn, & Aldridge, 2008).

The effective use of blogs creates a shared electronic space that allows for professionals who are typically isolated from one another for the majority of the day to come together to share ideas, ask questions, dialogue and discuss a topic that has been presented by a facilitator of the blog (Poling, 2005; Ray & Hocutt, 2006). One example is teachers from rural areas who are participants in a training program to become school-wide literacy coaches. These teachers communicate with each other through blogs as they

learn and experience the role of literacy coach in their respective schools (Aguilar & Rivero, 2006). Blogs are both a social and collaborative tool that allows teachers to build a community of support between themselves and their peers (Ray & Hocutt, 2006).

The one-shot professional development to which most teachers and administrators are accustomed often does not meet the needs of most teachers (Poling, 2005). The typical workshop model does not provide the sustained support that is required for long-term changes in instruction, whereas blogs allow for continued discussion on topics of professional development. The professional communities that teachers often form with colleagues both within and outside their own schools can be a strong factor in their effectiveness in the classroom (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004).

Teachers can also use blogs to share information with parents about classroom activities (Ribble & Bailey, 2007). Teachers can post homework assignments, create links, pose questions, and generate discussions using blogs (Richardson, 2005). Discussed next are ways blogs can be used in the classroom as part of a principal's instructional and technology building plan.

CLASSROOM USE OF BLOGS

While blogs have typically been considered an online journal where others can comment on an individual's post, the classroom application of blogs can support the creation of a collaborative learning community (Poling, 2005). Such learning communities can be within one classroom, between classrooms in a school or between classrooms in different cities or countries. Using blogs for communication from teacher-student, teacher-teacher and student-student builds an awareness of blogs and an

understanding of how they can benefit the instructional program of a school (Poling, 2005).

Weblogs are being used in the classroom to promote literacy through the use of storytelling (Huffaker, 2005). The blog allows both personal space and an opportunity for online connections to others (Utecht, 2007). Blogs are an excellent way to fuse educational technology and storytelling inside the classroom and beyond the school walls (Huffaker, 2005). Boling's (2006) study of integrating technology into literacy instruction shows that reading, writing, comparing and critiquing various online blogs hold the possibility to support both reading and writing development. Blogs can motivate students to become more engaged in reading, think more deeply about the meaning of their writing and submit higher quality work (Richardson, 2005).

Another use of blogs in the classroom is through learning logs, where students document their learning experience and comprehension of a subject or topic alongside their studies in a diary form (Du & Wagner, 2007). Learning logs allow the student to take a more active role in the learning process and provide instructors with better awareness of the student's learning progress. Learning logs were typically paper based and only shared from student to teacher. As an online alternative, the blog offers considerable advantages over the traditional learning log. Other students can frequently view and post comments about the subject or topic and hyperlinks can be added to expand the ideas. This allows for the potential of increasing the effectiveness of traditional learning logs (Du & Wagner, 2007).

Blogs can be multidisciplinary. Because reading and writing can be used in a variety of academic contexts, blogs are exchangeable across disciplines (Huffaker, 2005).

Students can express their perceptions in any number of subjects, such as exchanging lessons learned after a science experiment, discussing fundamental concepts in math to understand the logic behind formulas, or learning about international culture or politics through a global blog. Social Studies field trips can be planned, organized and documented in a blog allowing the project-oriented approach to using Web resources to become highly interactive and meaningful for students (Britt, 2006). In short, any discipline can use blogs to approach a style of meta-learning, where concepts or contexts are discussed and articulated in both a personalized and group exchange, and ideas are built on previous educational content (Huffaker, 2005). Blogs allow the learning within the classroom walls to expand beyond, by inviting outside experts, mentors, and observers to participate and collaborate with students (Richardson, 2005). Several blog sites currently exist for educators to begin their own classroom blog. A few of the common ones are www.educblogs.com and www.classblogmeister.com and www.Weblogg-ed.com.

Given that students use technology to communicate outside the classroom walls in society, it is imperative that school technology leadership teams, which include the principal, determine the educational values of digital communication. These values are the rules and laws that guide how a person is expected to act in a digital society. Once those are established, it will be necessary to teach students how to be good digital citizens using the proper rules, options and etiquette for this type of communication technology (Ribble & Bailey, 2007). The coordination of what needs to be taught to students in school, is part of a principal's leadership responsibilities.

PRINCIPAL AS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER

The special nature of school administration, as compared with the executive function in other organizations, is its primary emphasis on teaching and learning (Michael, 1968). The concept of the principal as an instructional leader emerged in the early 1980s (Jenkins, 2009). School-based management and facilitative leadership seemed to replace that concept during the first half of the 1990s. Now, it appears that instructional leadership has made a comeback as schools are increasingly being asked to be accountable, and more importance is being placed on academic standards (Jenkins, 2009). Clearly, there is an increasing and explicit expectation that principals will function as “instructional leaders” (Hallinger, 2005; Valdez, 2004).

Instructional leadership is one of the key factors for establishing a successful school in which student learning improves, especially when the role of the principal is someone who coordinates and controls the instructional program (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982; P. Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2004). This is done by knowing the learning problems in the classroom and allocating the resources accordingly (Bossert et al., 1982).

Bossert et al. (1982) reported on four areas of leadership that summarized the studies of effective principals and schools. These areas are goals and production emphases, power and decision-making, organization and coordination, and human relations (see Table 1). They found that the managerial behavior of principals is important to schools being effective. Yet, the authors also make the point that the research in leadership studies does not support one single style of management that appears to be appropriate for all schools.

Table 1

Four Areas of Principal Leadership (Bossert et al., 1982)

Goals And Production Emphasis
Set instructional goals
Develop performance standards for students
Expect all students to achieve
Power And Decision Making
Be more active and make decisions in the areas of curriculum and instruction
Be effective within the community
Organization/Coordination
Devote more time to the coordination and control of instruction
Observe teachers
Discuss work problems with teachers
Support staff development
Set up teacher and program evaluations
Have structured learning environments with few disciplinary problems; students are engaged
Human Relations
Recognize the unique style and needs of teachers and help them to achieve their own performance goals
Encourage and acknowledge good teacher work

Hallinger and Heck's (1996) review of the literature 14 years later continued to show that principal leadership can make a difference in student learning. They also noted that when the function of the principal is to "sustain a schoolwide purpose focusing on student learning" (p. 38), there is empirical support to show it makes a difference.

Eight years after Hallinger and Heck (1996) and 22 years after Bossert et al. (1982), Leithwood and colleagues (2004) reviewed research on the role of leadership in improving learning. Their findings corroborate the earlier reviews that support the significance of effective school leadership on student learning. They reported that leadership not only matters but "it is second only to teaching in school-related factors in its impact on student learning" (p. 3). Leithwood et al., (2004) identified many of the same leadership factors that support school success as did Bossert et al. (1982) and

Hallinger and Heck (1996). Specifically, they pointed out the central importance of the following: setting a clear course of expectations that everyone can understand, establishing high expectations, and providing teachers with the necessary supports and training.

It is clear from the three previous studies that there are two common leadership factors that can create an effective school which will impact student learning: setting a clear vision or direction and providing support for teacher development and practice. These leadership factors also have been suggested by many others as well (Andrews & Soder, 1987; Cawelti, 1987; Hoerr, 2008; Jenkins, 2009; Michael, 1968; Quinn, 2002; Smith & Andrews, 1989; Valdez, 2004).

Marzano's et al. (2005) meta-analysis of 35 years of research confirms that school leadership has a substantial effect on student achievement. His study also identified 21 behaviors or "responsibilities" related to principal leadership. One of the responsibilities is having a focus by setting a clear vision. Another responsibility is providing the necessary resources for teachers, both in terms of materials and professional development. These responsibilities correlate to the research of others previously mentioned. There are numerous ways that blogs can help support the responsibilities of principals.

Blogs can be used by the principal to communicate the clear goals that have been set for instruction and to state the expectations to all the stakeholders. Both teachers and community members can post comments about the vision or goals that have been established in order to increase their understanding. Ongoing communication that is

easily facilitated by means of blogging can keep the goals in the forefront of ongoing practice, rather than just something that is discussed at a workshop or faculty meeting.

Blogs can be used as a medium for more personalized teacher professional learning and development. For example, individual teachers may be focusing their learning in areas that are not applicable to others in the building, such as learning to be a literacy coach (Aguilar & Rivero, 2006). New teachers to a building may be learning to embed instructional strategies that are new to them but are well engrained by more experienced teachers. Blogs can allow instructional leaders to create learning communities which would ensure that adults have many opportunities to work and learn together, to share ideas and knowledge, and to develop and test new approaches (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2008).

The Robinson et al. (2008) study on the impact of leadership in student learning provides some empirical support for school leaders to be the “leading learners” in their schools. The principal needs to be actively involved with teachers either as the leader, learner or both. The context for this learning can be formal (such as staff meetings and professional development) or informal (discussions about specific teaching problems). The findings show that a school leader is likely to have a more positive impact on student achievement and well-being when they are able to focus on the quality of learning, teaching, and teacher learning. Technology leadership as part of a principal’s duties is discussed next.

PRINCIPAL AS TECHNOLOGY LEADER

Using technology to communicate is one of the ways that principals lead by example in order to demonstrate the importance of such technology to teachers and

students (Demsey, 1999; Hall, 1999). As technology leaders in their buildings, principals have an opportunity to leverage their technological prowess of new tools to educate the public on what their schools are doing, how rich the achievement by students actually is, and the multitude of values that come from a technology-enhanced instructional environment (Anderson, 1999). Examples of this are using a blog to educate parents, who have choices about which school to send their child, about the benefits of a particular school; to inform the public about the learning concepts that are working to increase student achievement rather than just reporting standardized test scores; and to gain a higher-level of understanding about technologies and use them to move forward to more progressive learning opportunities (Anderson, 1999).

Principals are expected to have some degree of skill with technology in order to have an understanding of what is possible and a vision for how technology can add value to the teaching and learning (Yee, 2000). The de facto technology leaders in most districts are technology coordinators, media specialists, technology integrationists, and/or teachers who have little or no leadership preparation but who are tech-savvy (McLeod, 2007). Principals, with their leadership skills and ability to redesign school organizations, are the ones who are positioned to be the technology leaders in their schools in order for technology to be integrated into the classroom (Felix, 2007; McLeod, 2007; Riedl, Smith, Ware, Wark, & Yount, 1998; Yee, 2000).

As technology becomes a more integral part of our schools, more attention is given to the teachers and their ability to integrate technology into the classroom. The role of the principal with leadership responsibilities of technology, however, is often overlooked. No matter how dedicated teachers may be and how convinced they may be of the benefits of

technology in the classroom, they will not be able to accomplish much if they do not have the support from their principal (Sharp, 1998). Even when teachers have technology skills, it is argued that effective technology integration will not occur without strong leadership. McLeod (2007) states that administrators are the key individuals with the ability to redesign school organizations. He clarifies, “They set the vision, control the budget, reassign personnel, empower others, alter school culture, establish priorities, facilitate buy-in, reallocate resources, and ensure organizational alignment” (p.17). Anderson and Dexter’s (2005) empirical investigation states that “all of the literature on leadership and technology acknowledges either explicitly or implicitly that school leaders should provide administrative oversight for educational technology” (p. 51).

Administrators are expected to lead by example. Principals who blog are increasing their leadership and technology skills on a regular basis. They are modeling for others how to use a form of technology in order to communicate effectively. Blogs offer a way of communicating more often and more effectively with people (Buck, 2005). When technology is incorporated into a daily practice, it not only provides a model by which teachers measure themselves, but also helps establish an unstated policy that technology use is not simply a luxury, but a desirable strategy (Ritchie, 1996). Principals can also model appropriate use of technology and in turn influence teachers (Anderson, 1998).

Most principals know that technology means more than wires and hardware but may not have the knowledge needed to make wise decisions about technology. Many administrators, most likely, did not grow up in a technology rich environment and have had little or limited technology training provided in administrative courses (Garrett Dikkers, Hughes, & McLeod, 2005). They received their education at a time when

computers were not yet incorporated into the educational arena, and they may have had limited experience with educational technologies (Riedl et al., 1998). Their own technology experience is likely limited to email, Internet searches, and word processing (Anderson, 1998).

Most administrators have gained their technology experience through self-instruction, vendors, school personnel, consultants or external courses. Of these, the most cost-effective, unbiased and comprehensive may be structured courses designed for school administrators (Ritchie, 1996). Specifically, institutions of higher education may offer the greatest resource for administrative technology training. Providing a pool of competent school leaders in this technology-rich environment must become a priority for higher education institutions (Holland, 2000). To be effective, coursework should include how to become proficient in the use of technology. Coursework should also focus on the conceptual knowledge of how technologies can be used to enhance student learning. As administrators improve their technology skills and their conceptual knowledge of how to restructure education using technology, they must articulate a vision that is accepted by the educational community. By using technology themselves, and leading by example, principals will establish the policy that technology is not a luxury, but a strategy to help serve students in a society that depends on creative, technology-using citizens (Ritchie, 1996). Surprisingly, there is little attention on the technology-related needs of school principals as part of administrative programs (Garrett Dikkers et al., 2005; Riedl et al., 1998).

One of the resources that principals can access to help educate themselves about technology is the website for The International Society for Technology in Education

(ISTE). ISTE is a non-profit membership organization that is the “trusted source for professional development, knowledge generation, advocacy, and leadership for innovation” according to its website (ISTE, 2009). ISTE is also the home of the National Educational Technology Standards (NETS) for students, teachers and administrators. These standards “have served as a roadmap since 1998 for improved teaching and learning by educators” and have been broadly adopted throughout the U.S. and several countries (ISTE, 2009).

The National Educational Technology Standards for Administrators (NETS-A) were first released in 2002. These standards are indicators of effective technology leadership in schools and part of a national consensus of what best indicates effective school leadership for comprehensive and appropriate use of technology in schools (ISTE, 2009). The NETS-A standards were developed through input from experts and partner organizations, review and comment from the field, and oversight by an advisory board. They were initially called the Technology Standards for School Administrators (TSSA) and were released in 2001. In 2002, they were integrated into the ISTE NETS standards and widely promoted (Anderson & Dexter, 2005). McLeod (2007) states that the NETS-A is a good place to start to support administrators in becoming technology leaders by taking each standard or indicator and asking, “What do leaders really need to know about this? What do they really need to be doing in this area?”

Anderson and Dexter (2005) did an investigation into literature regarding school technology leadership and integrated those findings with the NETS-A standards. They state that the scope of suggestions for what school leaders should know and be able to do with technology has broadened in the last 10 to 15 years. The NETS-A standards

encompasses nearly all of what the research has shown and may represent the common wisdom about what technology leadership means to the practitioners in the field.

Anderson and Dexter also state that the NETS-A standards and indicators will be refined over time and additional data will become available to add to the literature on school technology leadership.

The new 2009 NETS-A standards were released in July 2009. While the NETS-A of 2002 had six standards, the 2009 version has five. As with the 2002 standards, these new standards list specific indicators of effective technology leadership. Each standard lists four to five indicators of effective practice that administrators can achieve to increase their technology leadership skills. Principals who blog are meeting many of these administrative standards. Located in Table 2 are selected NETS-A standards and indicators that are achieved by using blogs as both a communication and learning tool. The complete NETS-A (see Appendix A) can be found at:

<http://www.iste.org/welcome.aspx>

Table 2

Specific NETS-A Standards and Indicators that Can be Met Through the Use of Blogs

<p>Visionary Leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspire and facilitate among all stakeholders a shared vision of purposeful change that maximizes use of digital-age resources to meet and exceed learning goals, support effective instructional practice, and maximize performance of district and school leaders • Engage in an ongoing process to develop, implement, and communicate technology infused strategic plans aligned with a shared vision
<p>Digital-Age Learning Center</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model and promote the frequent and effective use of technology for learning • Ensure effective practice in the study of technology and its infusion across the curriculum • Promote and participate in local, national, and global learning communities that stimulate innovation, creativity, and digital-age collaboration
<p>Excellence In Professional Practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocate time, resources, and access to ensure ongoing professional growth in technology fluency and integration • Facilitate and participate in learning communities that stimulate, nurture, and support administrators, faculty, and staff in the study and use of technology • Promote and model effective communication and collaboration among stakeholders using digital-age tools • Stay abreast of educational research and emerging trends regarding effective use of technology and encourage evaluation of new technologies for their potential to improve student learning
<p>Systematic Improvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead purposeful change to maximize the achievement of learning goals through the appropriate use of technology and media-rich resources
<p>Digital Citizenship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote, model, and establish policies for safe, legal, and ethical use of digital information and technology • Promote and model responsible social interactions related to the use of technology and information • Model and facilitate the development of a shared cultural understanding and involvement in global issues through the use of contemporary communication and collaboration tools

SUMMARY

In the literature reviewed for this study, it is clear that principals are expected to be instructional leaders who are able to show their school community that students are making educational progress. While this expectation was originally set decades ago, the

difference now is that schools are required to be more accountable in showing how students are making progress using state standards. Currently, it is expected that ALL students will learn and meet levels of proficiency in academic subjects. This requires that both principals and teachers advance their instructional and instructionally focused practices.

New methods of professional development that are more than the “sit-and-get” workshops of the past need to be created and supported. Principals who are open to new ways for teachers to connect with each other and learn in ways that will sustain the skills and strategies they need to meet the needs of learners in the 21st century are also likely to be instructional leaders who welcome the technology age we live in.

Communication technologies are more prevalent than ever in our schools and principals are expected to be the technology leaders. Research is emerging that suggests principals must be the technology leaders of their school for any sustainable success with technology integration to occur. The task of being a technology leader can be daunting and overwhelming, especially given that many school administrators did not grow up in a technology-rich environment and have had to probably learn what they know through self-instruction. Many administrative preparation programs have not addressed technology leadership, yet our students are being raised in a technology-rich society that does not stop at the school house door.

Technology integration takes time and principals must learn to be comfortable with the tools of technology and to incorporate its use on a regular basis, which is a change in behavior for those who have not grown up in the digital age. Modeling uses of technology sends a message to staff, students and members of the community and helps

to send the message that technology is a welcome and needed part of the educational system.

Blogging has become an easy way for principals to communicate to various stakeholders with whom they interact and the community at large. The numbers of bloggers has increased substantially in recent years with showing no signs of slowing down. Principals can use this form of technology to communicate more effectively than using email and to get their messages on educational issues out to a broader range of people. Blogs also allow principals to learn from others in the educational field from places all around the world.

Principals who blog are role models for their teachers and students by integrating technology into the school setting for a multitude of purposes. As shown in the literature, blogs can be used in a variety of ways from communicating with parents and the community about what is happening in a school, to increasing professional development by discussing educational topics and strategies to increasing literacy in the classroom by using blogs for instructional purposes.

In the next chapter, Chapter 3, the research design and survey method used to explore ways in which blogging supports or might support principal leadership will be described. Results are reported in Chapter 4. A summary of key findings, along with implications for practice are discussed in the final chapter, Chapter 5.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter describes the methodological underpinnings and strategies for this descriptive study. A survey method was chosen to investigate the practices and motivational factors of principals who blog. Principals from across the country were surveyed. Also explored was the extent to which blogging is viewed as useful or potentially useful for advancing instructional and technological leadership. Research methods are described in full detail, including sampling, instrumentation, data collection, data management, and data analysis plans. The overarching question that guided this study was: In what ways does blogging support the practices of school principals? Sub questions were:

- What motivates a principal to begin blogging and then to continue blogging?
- What are the benefits and challenges of blogging for principals?
- In what ways does blogging assist a principal in being an instructional leader?
- In what ways does blogging assist a principal in being a technology leader?
- What advice is there for principals who want to start their own blog?

Research Design

The research design of this study is descriptive and employs the survey method. It is a descriptive study (Bryant, 2004) because it describes the blogging practices of principals, as well as the value of blogging practices specifically related to instructional

leadership, including technology leadership. A descriptive study determines and describes the way things are and is useful for investigating a variety of educational issues (Gay & Airasian, 2000). A survey allows the researcher to collect data from selected individuals in a single time period. The survey used was web-based.

Sample

Participants were a non-random sample of principals who blog. The sample was obtained from a list of principals who blog from the websites www.movingforward.wikispaces.com, www.supportblogging.com and <http://www.schooltechleadership.org/administratorblogs>. Two of these sites are maintained by Dr. Scott McLeod, Director of University Council of Educational Administration (UCEA) Center for the Advanced Study of Technology Leadership in Education (CASTLE), at Iowa State University. Additional participants were selected from the researcher's knowledge of principals who currently maintain their own blog. The population was K-12 school principals, primarily in the United States, who currently have a blog site of their own.

This was a nonrandom sample. The approach to this nonrandom sample was purposive sampling. The sample was selected based on the researcher's knowledge of the targeted participant group (Gay & Airasian, 2000), which is principals who blog. Purposive sampling was appropriate for this study because the researcher chose participants viewed as likely to have information, perspectives, and experiences related to the study questions. Within the domain of purposive sampling is the specific approach of criterion sampling since the participants must also meet the criteria of maintaining their own educational blog (Gay & Airasian, 2000). Because there is no centralized or

comprehensive national data base of principals who blog, participants were necessarily identified through non-random and therefore, potentially, non-representative, ways. In short, given the preliminary and exploratory nature of this study and the lack of a known data base of potential respondents, all accessible and reasonable means by which principals who blog could be contacted were employed.

The population size of principals who have their own blog was unknown. The size of the sample was estimated to be about 75 participants. In 2007, Dr. Scott McLeod offered to create blogs for 100 principals in 100 days (Archer, 2007). Eighty principals responded to his offer by the 100th day and since then, more have started. Given that this is a purposive study, requiring survey participants to have a current blog of their own, the sample size included everyone who met the criteria of a K-12 principal and could be identified or found through a search on the Internet using the information from the three websites previously listed or from the researcher's knowledge of known bloggers. The number of people who received an invitation to participate was 64. Total number of respondents was 50.

Survey Development

An online survey was used to collect data to assist the researcher in answering the research questions. The survey was developed based on an analysis of the related research literature and the researcher's professional experience and consultation with school technology experts. The survey was divided into four sections. Part I included questions about respondent experiences with blogging. This included questions about what motivates them to blog and about their blogging topics. Part II posed questions about the extent to which blogging might be effective for advancing or informing the 21

significant areas of principal leadership practice as identified through meta-analyses conducted by Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) and published in the book *School Leadership that Works* (Marzano et al., 2005) by Robert Marzano and colleagues available from www.ascd.org. Part III of the survey provided an opportunity for respondents to write about how blogging intersects with their roles as instructional and technology leaders. Part IV included demographic questions that would serve to describe characteristics of the respondents. Selected demographic items were used in correlational analyses.

Most of the items in this survey were constructed as forced-choice response items, allowing participants to move relatively quickly through the survey. In addition, eight open-response questions were posed. These open questions were limited in number to minimize the likelihood that participants would choose not to respond because too much effort was required. In addition to being time consuming, open-ended questions can be viewed as test-like or threatening (Patten, 2001). Open questions were used to gather additional information about the blogging practices of the principals, as well as about the advice respondents would offer to principals interested in starting their own blog.

In an effort to include as many principals who could inform responses to the research questions, two parallel versions of the survey were created. One version used language construction that aligned with principals who currently maintained their own blogs. A second version used language construction that aligned with principals who did not currently maintain a blog, but did in the recent past. For those who no longer maintained a blog, most questions were formed in the past tense. For example, instead of asking, “How long have you maintained your blog?” the question was, “How long did

you maintain your blog?” For the most part, it was only Part I of the survey that these minor changes in language were necessary. Questions in Parts II, III and IV were more prospective in nature.

A pilot survey was conducted in January 2010 to assist with clarifying survey items and to estimate the potential time commitment for respondents. The survey was piloted using both paper-form and web-based samples. The pilot conducted using a paper-form of the survey involved two school based educators who are familiar with blogs, although they were not principals. (Recall that the sampling strategy sought to identify and include any and all accessible principals who blog. Given concerns about securing an adequate sample size, such principals were intentionally not used to pilot the survey.) The paper-based pilot took the form of think-alouds (Patten, 2001). A think-aloud involves asking people not involved in the study to answer the items in the survey while thinking aloud. The respondent is to say aloud what they are thinking while they consider the items. The main function is to identify items that are ambiguous. Two think-alouds were conducted by the researcher to determine whether the questions made sense and the wording flowed well for understanding.

The web-based survey was piloted with six educators to determine the ease of engaging with the survey tool and to determine the estimated time that would be required to complete the survey. Pilot participants included two principals who do not blog, two special education coordinators familiar with blogs and who work regularly with principals, one executive director of special services who works regularly with principals, and one college education professor knowledgeable in technology. These individuals were chosen because of their clarity of thought and ability to articulate potential problem

areas in the survey. They were also chosen because of their general knowledge of the subject area (i.e. uses of recent technology to support educational leadership) and the role of the principal in schools. Four of the pilot participants had completed their own research studies in doctoral programs and therefore were knowledgeable about the types of feedback that was important for the researcher of this study. The pilot survey resulted in only minor modifications, such as correcting typographical errors and one wording change. The survey was viewed as easy to understand and relatively straightforward in terms of responses required. The amount of time required to complete the survey was approximately 15 minutes for each pilot participant and was viewed as reasonable. Expert review of the survey was also conducted by the dissertation committee members of this researcher. Recommendations, again, were minor consisting of minor language and format changes viewed as easing engagement.

A copy of the final version of the survey is located in Appendix B. This version includes 20 forced-choice questions and eight open-ended questions. The survey was produced and administered through an online resource, SurveyMonkey.com. Given that the participants already were adept at use of online resources, the on-line format was considered to be a familiar medium for data collection.

Data Collection

The purpose of this survey was to collect perspectives from principals who blog. As indicated above, SurveyMonkey was used as the means by which to collect the data. An initial email with the survey link was sent out to all potential respondents. This initial email (see Appendix C) was sent by Professor Scott McLeod. He was known to most of the potential respondents. The email emphasized the significance of this exploratory

study and strongly encouraged participation. This initial email also included the participant consent form (see Appendix D).

One week after the initial email was sent, a second email was sent from the researcher stating appreciation for those who had already responded and asking that those who had not yet responded to please do so. In this follow-up email (see Appendix C), potential respondents were invited to send a separate email to the researcher if they would like to receive a copy of the executive summary of the study. A third email was sent two weeks after the initial email was sent, similar to the second email, as a final reminder. At the end of the three week survey window, 50 responses had been received. The survey was then closed.

Data Management and Analysis

The data collected and presented in SurveyMonkey included the response percent and the response count. To allow for easier analysis, spreadsheets or tables were created to organize the data from each question in each section of the survey. In the initial organizational sort, data from current and former bloggers were kept separate, each in its own column. Response means, modes and percentages were calculated and recorded for all forced-choice questions. Open-ended responses were coded thematically (as described below) and then categorized and counted.

Specific survey items were used to conduct correlational analyses. The age of participants was used as an independent variable related to two dependent variables: length of time blogging and the number of blogs the participant maintains. No correlation was found. Analyses to determine correlations using the size of the school population and urbanicity variables and the frequency of principal blogging were conducted. Again, no

correlations were found. Finally, gender was a variable used to determine correlation with the topics respondents blogged about. As with the other correlations, no correlations emerged.

To analyze responses to the open-ended questions, an a priori set of codes was used that pertained to each open-ended question. For the open-ended question about reasons respondents first started to blog, responses were coded by a key word or words that expressed the main meaning of the response. Once coded and counted, a summary of themes, along with exemplary verbatim quotes were organized related to each open-ended question. This was done for five open-ended questions which were:

- Why did you begin to blog?
- What are your top three reasons for blogging?
- What are some ways blogging has supported your role as an instructional leader?;
- What are some ways blogging has supported your role as a technology leader?
- What advice would you give to principals who want to start their own blog?

The other three open-ended questions had no or very few responses. These were:

- Are there other topics you blog about that were not listed?
- Please provide any additional information to the benefits of blogging.
- Please provide any additional information to the challenges of blogging.

Open-ended responses were directly reported related to each respective question but were also, sometimes inserted to illustrate or extend findings from forced-choice questions specifically and overall research questions more generally.

After conducting descriptive and correlational analyses of forced-choice item responses and descriptive accounting for open-ended items, data “chunks” were

organized related to each of the study's sub-questions. Table 3 shows specific items from the survey that served as data sources for each respective research question.

Table 3

Survey items that are data sources for research questions

Research Question	Survey Items
• What motivates a principal to begin blogging and then to continue blogging?	4, 14
• What are the benefits and challenges of blogging for a principal?	17, 18
• In what ways does blogging assist a principal in being an instructional leader?	15a, From Part II: 11 items
• In what ways does blogging assist a principal in being a technology leader?	15b, From Part II: 15 items
• What advice would you give principals who want to start their own blog?	16

Chapter 4 reports the results from the analysis of the day. The final chapter, chapter 5, will provide a summary of key findings, along with a discussion of the implications for leadership development, practice and research.

Chapter 4

Results

A primary purpose of this study was to determine whether the blogging practices of principals contributed to their role as instructional and technology leaders. Using the 21 principal responsibilities as described in the book, *School Leadership that Works* (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005), principals were asked whether blogging might be a useful tool for each of the responsibilities. Principals also were asked about reasons that they blog, benefits and challenges to blogging, and advice for future principal bloggers. The overarching research question was: In what ways does blogging support the practices of school principals? Sub-questions were:

- What motivates a principal to begin blogging and then to continue blogging?
- What are the benefits and challenges of blogging for a principal?
- In what ways does blogging assist a principal as an instructional leader?
- In what ways does blogging assist a principal as a technology leader?
- What advice is there for principals who want to start their own blog?

Principals who have their own blog site were the respondents for this because they could inform each of these questions. Presented first is descriptive information about the respondents and the specific contexts in which they work. Following presentation of this demographic data, responses to the four major areas of study are described. These areas are: the blogging profile of the respondents, their reasons for initiating and continuing to blog, topics about which they blogged, and ways blogging intersected with overall leadership practices. As mentioned previously, responses to the open-ended questions

stood on their own as appropriate and also were used to enrich the descriptive responses to the major research questions. A succinct summary of results concludes the chapter.

Description of Respondents

The invitation to participate in the study was sent to 64 principals who were known to have their own blog. Their website information was obtained through a list of the names that Dr. Scott McLeod, Associate Professor of the University of Iowa, had created of administrators who blogged. A Google search using the term “principal blogs” turned up a few additional websites of principal bloggers, as did the website www.supportblogging.com under their list titled “Principal Blogs.” A search of each site helped to determine whether the blog was current. If it appeared that the blog was not current, the principal was still contacted to participate in the survey. The survey was structured to allow both current and former, but recent, principal bloggers to participate by posting a parallel track of questions for each group.

Sixty-four principals were invited to participate, and fifty completed the survey for a 78 percent response rate. Of the fifty that completed the survey, seven were former, but recent, bloggers. An analysis of responses between current and former bloggers revealed a similar descriptive profile. Further, the length of time since the former bloggers had their own blog was less than a year. Finally, there were no substantial differences in location, gender or age groups between the former bloggers and current bloggers. Given these response-informed similarities, data from former and current bloggers were combined for all of the analyses. This decision allowed the perspectives of former bloggers to be included in the study and respects their time and desire to contribute to this study. Descriptive information about the respondents is presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Description of Respondents

Demographics	N	n	%
Position	50		
Principal		45	90
Assistant Principal		4	8
Head of School		1	2
Gender	48		
Male		37	77
Female		11	23
Age	48		
20-30		0	0
31-40		21	44
41-50		18	37
51-60		8	17
61+		1	2
School Level	49		
Preschool		4	8
Elementary		24	49
Middle/Jr. High		11	22
Secondary		17	35
School Population	49		
Less than 250		4	8
251-500		15	31
501-1000		21	43
Greater than 1000		9	18
School Location	48		
Rural		7	15
Suburban		27	56
Urban		12	25
Other		2	4
Region	49		
Northeast		10	20
Southeast		11	22
Midwest		17	35
Southwest		3	6
Northwest		7	14
Canada Eastern		0	0
Canada Mid Prov		1	2
Canada Western		0	0

The vast majority of respondents, 90%, were principals. A majority were men (77%) and nearly half (49%) were leaders of elementary schools, although respondents included principals from all levels of schooling. Over three quarters (81%) were located

in suburban or urban areas, which may indicate greater Internet access than in rural areas. About three quarters (74%) were leading schools with 250 to 1000 students. About half (57%) led primary schools (including preschool and elementary schools) and about half (57%) led secondary schools (including middle and high schools). Some principals probably oversee more than one school level, (middle/jr. high school and secondary, for example), since the percentage combined is greater than 100%.

Descriptive information about the blogging profile of the respondents is presented in Table 5. Only four principals have been blogging for less than a year. More principals (n=23) have been blogging for 3-4 years, than have been blogging for 1-2 years (n=17). Six have been blogging for more than five years. That 29 of the 50 respondents (58%) report that they have been blogging for at least three years, suggests that blogging has served an important function for these school leaders. Slightly more than half of the respondents (56%) have one blog to which they post at least weekly. Twenty-eight percent of the respondents said that parents are the primary audience for whom they write and twenty-six percent said it was the public/community. Seventy-four percent of the respondents allow comments from readers on their blog. Most bloggers (74%) use free web sites to create their blogs.

Analyses were calculated to determine whether the type or size of the school correlated to the number of times that a principal posted to their blog or when they posted to their blog. No correlations were found. Nor was there a correlation between the gender or age of the blogger and how often or when they blogged. Among all groups, respondents varied in terms of the number of times they posted to their blog and the time of day when they posted to their blog.

Table 5

Blogging Profile of Respondents

Questions	N	n	%
How long have you been blogging related to your work as a school principal?	50		
Less than 1 year		4	8
1-2 years		17	34
3-4 years		23	46
5 or more years		6	12
How many blogs do you maintain?	50		
1		28	56
2 or 3		20	40
More than 3		2	4
On average, how often do you contribute to your blog?	49		
Daily		3	6
Several times a week		11	22
Weekly		12	24
Several times a month		9	18
Monthly		9	18
Less than once a month		5	10
During which times do you typically blog?	50		
Before the school day starts		4	8
During the school work day		9	18
After the school day ends		24	48
Weekends		13	26
Do you allow your audience to post comments on your blog?	50		
Yes		37	74
No		7	14
Sometimes		6	12
Who is the primary audience for whom you write?	50		
Staff		7	14
Students		1	2
Parents		14	28
Public/Community		13	26
Colleagues		8	16
Myself		1	2
The World at Large		6	12
How is your educational blog paid for?	50		
I pay for it myself		10	20
My school district pays for it		5	10
I use free blog sites		37	74

Twenty-two of the principals (44%) reported having more than one blog. This might indicate ease of maintaining a blog and of differentiating blogs for particular audiences. Further, this might indicate that as principals grow in their technology skills they become more sophisticated in their use of blogs. One participant shared that after creating a blog for staff and parents, he created another blog to connect with other principals of catholic schools. Another example of multiple blog use, stated by a few respondents, is to create a blog for use internally with staff and also a blog for external use for the school community. One principal respondent shared that he “live-blogged” the superintendent meetings to his staff so that when he returned to his building, there was no need to meet with his staff because they had already been informed about key agenda items. Another respondent shared that he had one blog for both external and internal audiences that focused on the school vision and another blog for staff only that was used to provide information and to support advancing their professional knowledge and development. Similarly, another respondent wrote that he created a blog just for his teachers and communicated information specifically relevant for them. Another reported blogging on a weekly basis to keep priorities on the forefront for his teachers, such as posts about their anti-bullying program or subject area curriculum pacing. “Teachers easily revert to routines and current practices,” said one principal. She reported using the blog to keep staff focused on the big ideas of where they are headed. She adds, “It also keeps the leadership transparent, reinforces ideas and keeps ‘my word’ in their head, when the message can otherwise become so distorted in the faculty lounge and parking lot.”

The majority of principals (74%) allowed comments to be posted from readers. One respondent said, “I want people to be able to share their view, give me feedback, express enthusiasm or endorsement for my views, or to respectfully criticize them.” Another said, “I love to see what people think about what I’ve written. I love to learn from comments people share with me based on what I’ve posted.” A few principals were in districts where comments from readers were not allowed or were moderated. One principal wrote, “I wish we did [allow readers to respond], but the school has decided to limit comments for now. They are worried about negative feedback and lack of control.” Another principal wrote that comments were allowed but they must be approved.

Most of the respondents (74%) reported that they post to their blog after the school day or on the weekends. About half (46%) indicated that they post to their blog either several times a week or at least weekly.

Reasons for Blogging

Principals were asked to indicate reasons they started blogging, as well as their reasons for continuing to blog. These were two separate, open-ended questions. Forty-eight respondents (96%) wrote responses for starting a blog and a total of 80 responses were provided. Thirty-six respondents (72%) wrote responses for continuing to blog and a total of 114 responses were provided. Responses were coded and then counted within the categories that emerged. Some responses were counted in multiple categories. For example, if a reason for blogging was written as, “To communicate with parents and the community” then it was counted twice, once in the “communicate with parents” category and once in the “communicate with school community” category. Essentially, if there were two “meanings” in the one response, each meaning was coded. If a more general

response was offered that did not indicate a particular audience, it was counted in the “communication- non-specific.” Examples of these types of responses are, “share ideas” or “communication.” Table 6 presents a summary of the reasons.

Table 6

Reasons for Initiating and Continuing a Blog (categorical summary of responses from open-ended questions)

	Reasons for initiating a blog (48 respondents) ¹		Reasons for continuing to blog (36 respondents) ²	
	n	%	n	%
Who? Communication to specific groups of people				
Parents	12	25	4	11
School community	10	21	6	17
Other principals	6	13	NR	NR
My staff	4	8	4	11
Students	4	8	1	3
Audience not specified	2	4	10	28
Other educators	1	2	NR	NR
Larger audience	NR	NR	6	17
What? Communication for specific purposes				
Reflection	7	15	12	33
Share ideas	6	13	10	28
Professional development	6	13	6	17
Public relations	5	10	12	33
Connect with others, network	4	8	3	8
Model technology use	3	6	NR	NR
For fun	1	2	3	8
Be visible	NR	NR	6	17
Influence others	NR	NR	6	17
Archive the school year	NR	NR	3	8
Better understanding of administration	NR	NR	3	8
It is free	NR	NR	1	3
Other responses				
Someone got me started blogging	6	13	NR	NR
Efficiency of communication	3	6	18	50

Note. ¹There was a total of 80 responses from the 48 respondents. ²There was a total of 114 responses from the 36 respondents. NR indicates there were no responses offered in this particular category.

Communicating with others was a strong motivator for initiating a blog. The top three specific audiences to whom respondents indicated they communicated to were parents (25%), the school community (21%), and other principals (13%). Reflection, sharing ideas and professional development were the top written responses about purposes for blogging, indicated by 15%, 13% and 13% of the respondents. Illustrative responses were: “I wanted to share ideas with other principals. Our job can be very isolated and it can be a way to have a ‘conversation;” “Loneliness;” and “Connecting with others is the main reason I started.” As Playko (1991) states, “Being an instructional leader sometimes means going against existing norms in a school system. Yet, taking a stance that goes beyond the safe harbor of maintaining existing practices can be a lonely business” (p. 124). Blogs provide a means by which principals can connect with each other for support, advice and ideas. One principal said in his response, “I started to blog when a trusted online mentor/advisor suggested I try it as a tool for reflection and networking with other school leaders.”

Besides communicating to specific audiences, blogs allow principals to internally think and reflect about their practice. Fifteen percent of respondents said reflection was a reason for starting a blog. Blogs have been described as “online diaries” (Descy, 2004). One principal said he started his blog “as a means to do reflective thinking.” Another said to “clarify my thinking” and another said for “personal reflections on leadership and education.” Sharing thoughts and ideas online through a blog allows for communication in a number of ways with a number of audiences.

There were some differences noted between reasons (both audiences and purposes) for initiating a blog and reasons for continuing a blog. In their responses to the open-

ended question asking respondents to indicate reasons for continuing to blog, communicating with the school community and communicating to a larger audience were the two most frequently offered responses, both of which were provided by 17% of the respondents. Communicating with parents and staff were indicated by 11% of the respondents. A much greater percentage of respondents (33% compared to 15%) wrote that reflection was a purpose for continuing to blog. Public relations also was identified by more respondents (33% compared to 10%) as a reason for continuing to blog. Sharing ideas was, again, identified as a purpose for continuing to blog but also by more respondents (28% compared to 13%), as was professional development (17% compared to 13%). There were two purposes for continuing to blog that were never mentioned in response to the query about reasons for initiating blogging. There were being visible and influencing others, each indicated by 17% of the respondents. Subtle variation in the responses for initiating and continuing to blog may indicate a more refined, focused or strategic use of blogs.

Many respondents (50%) indicated that blogs were an efficient way to communicate. Specific reasons in this category indicated that blogging was timely, efficient, easy, paperless, quick, immediate, and readily accessible.

More principals stated reflection as a reason to continue blogging (33%) than did as a reason to start blogging (15%). As one principal said, "It is my public reflective space." It appears that as principals began to blog, they realized the potential for how far their messages could carry. Some principals stated how they can now reach a larger audience and do so much more quickly. One stated, "Sharing my opinions with the world", as a reason for blogging. Other principals thought the ability to influence others

was a top reason for blogging. One principal wrote, “[I blog] to influence the broader conversation nationally about best practices and important steps in 21st century teaching and learning.”

While it is understandable that communicating with others allows them to get to know you better, three principals were more specific about how blogging helps the audience to better understand administrators. Their comments were: “Blogging gives a human face to my thoughts;” “[Blogging] increases transparency of administration;” and “[My blog] opens access to our school administration.” These comments could imply that blogging has allowed members of the school community to get to know their administrative leader better. This type of effective communication can help make a principal an effective leader. Marzano et al., (2005) state that effective school leaders are effective communicators. These comments could also imply that these principals are practicing “information leadership.” Information leadership is an approach to leadership that keeps the focus on the mission, vision and values of the school by communicating constantly to all stakeholders (Sommers, 2009). Blogs are a tool that can help principals communicate.

Blogging Topics

In order to more fully understand ways in which blogging supports principal practices, it is important to know the topics about which they blog. A number of topics were generated by the researcher and principals were asked to rate the extent to which they blogged about the topics on their blog. A summary of their responses is located in Table 7. Items are ordered from topics about which principals blog most frequently to those which were addressed least frequently. School accomplishments, technology, and

curriculum and instruction were the most frequent topics to blog about. Religious issues was the least frequent topic addressed in blogs.

Principals also were asked to provide additional topics that were not included in the list provided by the researcher. There were nine additional topics about which six respondents indicated were addressed in their blogs. These were: Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), volunteers, history of the school, appreciation of the faculty and staff, pedagogy, classrooms design, leadership, grading, and philosophy of education. Note that for open-ended questions, six respondents, which is about 12% of this sample, is noteworthy.

Table 7

Blogging Topics

	N	Range	Mode	Mean
School Accomplishments	49	1-4	3 (47%)	3.32
Technology	49	1-4	4 (45%)	3.29
Curriculum and Instruction	50	2-4	3 (58%)	3.22
Staff Professional Learning/Development	49	1-4	3 (51%)	3.08
School Activities and Events	50	1-4	4 (44%)	2.96
Assessment	50	2-4	3 (68%)	2.92
Issues Related to Students	50	1-4	3 (40%)	2.92
Teacher Engagement	49	1-4	3 (43%)	2.88
Issues Related to Parents	50	1-4	3 (34%)	2.86
School Announcements/General Communication	50	1-4	4 (40%)	2.80
Issues Related to Staff	49	1-4	3 (35%)	2.61
Issues Related to the Community	49	1-4	3 (45%)	2.51
Policy Issues	49	1-4	2 (41%)	2.30
Legal Issues	49	1-3	2 (41%)	1.89
Personal Issues	48	1-4	1 (46%)	1.85
Political Issues	48	1-4	1 (50%)	1.73
Religious Issues	49	1-3	1 (84%)	1.00

Note. ¹Response options: 1-Never; 2-Rarely; 3-Sometimes; 4-Frequently

Forty-five respondents (90%) said that they blogged about school accomplishments sometimes or frequently. Forty-five respondents also indicated that they blogged about

curriculum and instruction sometimes or frequently. Forty-three respondents (86%) rated technology as a topic about which they blogged sometimes or frequently. Forty respondents (80%) identified assessment and staff development as topics about which they blogged sometimes or frequently. The literature review in Chapter 2 revealed that there are two common leadership factors that can influence student learning. These two factors are setting a clear vision or direction and providing support for teacher development and practice. Principals who communicate about their school accomplishments, curriculum/ instruction/assessment, technology and staff development are principals who are demonstrating the practices of instructional leaders (Bossert, et al., 1982; Hallinger & Heck 1996; Leithwood et al., 2004). This study shows that principals are blogging about these topics to audiences of parents, the public/community, colleagues and staff. It would appear that blogs are a tool to assist principals in their role as instructional leaders.

Other Mediums of Principal Communication

Blogs are not the only form of communication that principals use. To gain a broader perspective on the multiple means by which principals communicate and the frequency of using such communication tools, principals were provided with a list of various means of communication and asked to indicate the extent to which they use each for work purposes. Table 8 shows a summary of their responses, listed in order from the most frequent to the least frequent means of communication. Staff emails were at the top of the list, with almost all of the respondents (98%) indicating they use this form of communication sometimes or frequently. Also rated highly were use of the phone and use of letters, rated as used sometimes or frequently by 94 and 86 percent respectively.

Table 8

Frequency of Use for Other Communication Tools

Communication Tools	N	Range	Mode	Mean
Staff e-mails	50	2-4	4 (92%)	3.90
Phone	50	2-4	4 (54%)	3.48
Letters	50	1-4	3 (58%)	3.10
Newsletters	50	1-4	4 (42%)	2.96
News releases	50	1-4	3 (40%)	2.64
Twitter	50	1-4	1 (36%)	2.54
Online videos	49	1-4	3 (37%)	2.30
Wikis	50	1-4	3 (36%)	2.24
Newspaper articles or editorials	50	1-4	1 (30%) 2 (30%) 3 (30%)	2.20
School bulletin boards	49	1-4	1 (33%) 2 (33%)	2.16
Staff memos (hard copy)	49	1-4	1 (41%)	2.00
Podcasts	50	1-4	1 (48%)	1.80
Community bulletin boards	48	1-3	1 (63%)	1.50

Note. ¹Response Options: 1-Never; 2-Rarely; 3-Sometimes; 4-Frequently

It should be noted that Twitter as a form of communication would have ranked higher had the data from the seven former bloggers not been included in the study. Twenty-six current bloggers reported using Twitter sometimes or frequently, whereas only two former bloggers had used Twitter, which lowered the overall mean. This is noteworthy because Twitter is a newer tool for online communications, created in 2006 (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twitter>). Current bloggers, therefore, might be more familiar with and exposed to Twitter as a useful means of communication.

Besides Twitter, there are other online communication tools available that some of the respondents reported using. About half (44%) reported that they sometimes or frequently used a wiki. Similarly, about half (46%) reported that they sometimes or frequently used online videos as a means of communication. Podcasts were reported as used sometimes or frequently by only 22 percent and used rarely or never by 78 percent.

As we continue to move in the digital age, people are more likely to use various forms of online communication tools. The results reported here suggest a current communication profile for principals who blog but, a profile that could rapidly change as e-communication tools become more widely adopted.

Blogging to Support Research-Based Principal Leadership Responsibilities

A primary objective of the present study was to determine whether blogging, a specific technology tool, might be useful for supporting principal leadership. In the book, *School Leadership That Works: From research to results*, Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005) identify 21 responsibilities related to principal leadership. Using their research-derived principal responsibilities grounds the question about whether blogging might support principals in a credible source. The survey used in this study presented the Marzano et al. (2005) 21 responsibilities as described in their book. Principal respondents were asked to rate the extent to which blogging might be useful to enact each of the 21 responsibilities, on a 1/low to 4/high scale. Results are presented in two tables. First, shown in Table 9, are items and ratings categorized by the present researcher as well-aligned to enacting principal practices in the domains of instructional and technology leadership. A few items in Table 9 might be viewed as most specifically aligned with instructional leadership rather than technology leadership (e.g. “knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment”). Arguably, however, all listed could be viewed as potentially useful in both technology and instructional leadership roles. Next, shown in Table 10, are items and ratings that were considered more generalized types of responsibilities enacted by principals in many areas of their practice (i.e., less specifically related to instructional and technology leadership and more global in nature).

Table 9

Potential Usefulness of Blogging for Instructional and Technology Leadership by Principals

Responsibilities of the school leader	N	Range	Mode	Mean
COMMUNICATION: Establishing strong lines of communication with and among teachers and staff	49	1-4	4 (59%)	3.45
OPTIMIZER: Inspiring and leading new challenging innovations	49	2-4	4 (57%)	3.45
FOCUS: Establishing clear goals and keeping those goals in the forefront of the school's attention	49	1-4	4 (53%)	3.43
INTELLECTUAL STIMULATION: Ensuring staff know about current theories and practices and discussing as regular part of school culture	48	1-4	4 (54%)	3.40
KNOWLEDGE OF CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT: Being knowledgeable about current curriculum/instruction/assessment practices	49	2-4	4 (47%)	3.35
RESOURCES: Providing teachers with materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their jobs	49	1-4	4 (49%)	3.35
CURRICULUM/INSTRUCTION/ASSESSMENT: Being directly involved in designing and implementing curriculum/instruction/assessment	48	1-4	3 (50%)	2.83
MONITORING/EVALUATING: Monitoring the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning	48	1-4	3 (40%)	2.50

Note. ¹Response Options: 1-Would Not Be Useful; 2-Might Be Useful; 3-Would Be Useful; 4-Would Be Very Useful

The mean score for these eight responsibilities fell between 2.50 and 3.45 on a scale of 1/low and 4/high. This would indicate that respondents felt that blogging was viewed as being potentially useful for all eight of the responsibilities identified as closely aligned to principal roles of instructional and technology leader. The most highly rated responsibilities (3.45 average rating) were establishing strong lines of communication

and inspiring and leading new innovations. Forty-three respondents thought blogging would be useful or would be very useful for these responsibilities. Both of these responsibilities are closely aligned with both instructional and technology leadership. In open-ended questions at the end of the survey, one principal stated, “Through blogging I am easily able to share with my staff and students best practices and resources that can contribute to teaching and learning.” The responsibility of establishing clear goals and keeping a focus on them was a close third in terms of average rating (3.43). A few principals shared ways that blogging has supported them in sharing their vision for the school with the community. One wrote, “I started blogging to promote my educational vision and our school’s progress toward it, to both internal constituents and to prospective future parents (consumers).” For the next three responsibilities: intellectual stimulation, knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment and resources, about 88% (43 or 44) of the respondents indicated that blogs would be a useful or would be a very useful means of support for enacting the responsibility. These results suggest that for principals who currently blog, blogs are viewed as being potentially supportive of instructional and technology leadership roles. As one principal stated, “I have not only sharpened my skills, but also, due to some of the other blogs I read on a regular basis, expanded my understanding of how technology can be used to facilitate learning.”

Shown in Table 10 are results related to the remaining 13 principal leadership responsibilities identified by Marzano et al., (2005). Recall that these responsibilities were categorized by the researcher as more broadly applicable to principal leadership and less specifically aligned to just instructional and technology leadership roles.

Results show that four of the more general leadership responsibilities, outreach, affirmation, ideals/beliefs, and culture, were viewed by 92 to 98 percent (45 to 48 respondents) as being either useful or very useful. This large percent makes sense when you recall a number of the reasons respondents gave for starting or continuing to blog. Public relations or promoting the school; reflecting on their practice as a principal; sharing their educational viewpoints and vision; communicating with parents, staff, students and the school community in general are just a few of the reasons given that would align to these principal responsibilities.

Of the 21 responsibilities, only six of them fell below an average rating of 3.0. This indicates that many of the principals in the survey felt that blogs “would be useful” or “would be very useful” in helping them demonstrate 15 of the responsibilities for school leaders. None of the 21 responsibilities had a mean below 2.0, which was “might be useful” in the response options. This shows that many of the principals in the survey felt that blogs have the potential to be useful, if not very useful, in assisting them in meeting these responsibilities.

Table 10

Potential Usefulness of Blogging for General Principal Leadership

Responsibilities of the school leader ¹	N	Range	Mode	Mean
OUTREACH: Advocating and serving as a spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders	49	2-4	4 (71%)	3.67
AFFIRMATION: Recognizing and celebrating accomplishments and acknowledging failures	49	2-4	4 (67%)	3.61
IDEALS/BELIEFS: Communicating and operating from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling	49	2-4	4 (59%)	3.57
CULTURE: Fostering shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation	49	2-4	4 (61%)	3.53
CONTINGENT REWARDS: Recognizing and rewarding individual accomplishments	49	2-4	4 (47%)	3.26
CHANGE AGENT: Being willing to challenge and actively challenges the status quo	49	1-4	4 (43%)	3.18
INPUT: Involving teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies	49	1-4	4 (39%)	3.04
FLEXIBILITY: Adapting leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and being comfortable with dissent	49	1-4	3 (43%)	3.02
SITUATIONAL AWARENESS: Being aware of and addressing, as needed, details and undercurrents in the running of the school	49	2-4	3 (43%)	3.00
RELATIONSHIPS: Demonstrating an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and staff	48	1-4	3 (35%)	2.81
ORDER: Establishing a set of standard operating procedures and routines	49	1-4	3 (43%)	2.61
VISIBILITY: Having quality contact and interactions with teachers and students	47	1-4	4 (47%)	2.56
DISCIPLINE: Protecting teachers from issues and influences that would detract from their teaching time or focus	49	1-4	2 (45%)	2.18

Note. ¹Response Options: 1-Would Not Be Useful; 2-Might Be Useful; 3-Would Be Useful; 4-Would Be Very Useful

Overall Reflections about Blogging as a Support for Principals

At the end of the survey, respondents were asked whether blogging had supported their practice as a principal, using a simple response set of: yes, not sure, and no. Forty-eight of 50 (96%) responded yes, with the remaining answering not sure. Using an open-ended response format, principals were then asked to write ways in which blogging supported their role as an instructional leader and, in a separate text box, ways blogging supported their role as a technology leader. If respondents answered no or not sure, they were then directed to a text box to state why. Eighty-six percent (n=43) wrote responses related to instructional leadership; 78% (n=39) wrote responses related to technology leadership; and 4% (n=2) wrote responses related to their answer of not sure. Analysis of the open-ended responses regarding instructional and technology leadership results in response categories and frequencies as shown in Table 11.

Table 11

How Blogging Supports Instructional and Technology Principal Leadership Roles

Open-ended responses	N	n	%
Ways blogging supports instructional leadership	43		
Share information with others		9	21
Allow for continuing professional development		8	19
Express my views to further instruction in classroom		7	16
A connection with colleagues		5	12
Share goals and achievements		4	9
Give a personal voice on education issues		4	9
Modeling communication		4	9
Communication (non-specific)		3	7
Personal reflection		3	7
Ways blogging supports technology leadership	39		
I am modeling technology		22	56
Communicates to staff that technology is important		11	28
I have learned new ideas regarding technology		8	21
I have shared ideas regarding technology		7	18
I have connected with colleagues about technology		2	5
It saves paper		1	3

Principals shared that blogging allows them to communicate with others about instructional issues and increase both their professional development and that of their teachers. One principal replied, “Blogging has given me a space to write about the theory of education, getting away from the day-to-day stuff. It also is a great place to ask for advice from a community, both local and global.” Another responded with, “I have ‘met’ many other educators and school administrators through blogging and have learned a lot through their blogs.” One other principal said, “Blogging has given me a forum or stage through which to articulate my beliefs about what the best instruction looks like. Because of Web 2.0, I have been able to transparently share and reflect on current research, articles, and thoughts regarding instruction - something we rarely have time to do during the school day. All staff who follow my blog have a clear understanding of what I believe they should be doing in the classroom.”

Principals wrote that using a blog allowed them to model technology and also communicate to their staff that technology is important. This aligns with the research stating that principals need to model technology and be leaders of technology in order for technology to be incorporated into the classroom (Felix, 2007; McLeod, 2007; Riedl, Smith, Ware, Wark, & Yount, 1998; Yee, 2000). As one principal wrote, “I would bet that any teacher in my school clearly knows that the use of technology is important for the use of our students because they read about it on the blog. I provide them with links and I model it. I am not continuing the same old ways, so how can they?” Another principal said, “It has allowed me to be a role model for staff and it has encouraged them to create class and student blogs.” One principal simply put it this way, “It has given me ‘street cred’ as a technology leader.”

It should be noted that while 48 of the 50 principals said that blogging has supported their practice as a principal, not all 48 responded to the open-ended questions asking for specific reasons. Forty-three responded to the open-ended question on instructional leadership and thirty-nine responded to the open-ended question on technology leadership. It is unknown why this occurred. It could be because some principals do not associate blogging with their role as a technology or instructional leader or it could be because these open-ended questions were towards the end of the survey and respondents did not want to take the time to respond. There were two respondents, one former and one current blogger, who said they were not sure if blogging has supported their practice as a principal. In the open-ended response, one said, "I blogged more about technology leadership and instructional practices involving technology than school leadership." The other respondent said, "I have been blogging for just over a year and sometimes feel there is an impact, however, it is not significant. I am not a confident blogger and I feel that I do not really write to reach the readers."

Advice for Other Principals

Finally, survey respondents were asked to share advice or encouragement they would offer a colleague who was interested in starting their own blog. Eighty-eight percent (n=44) of the principals wrote responses in the open-ended space provided. Analysis of the responses resulted in 10 discernable categories, as shown in Table 12.

Table 12

Advice for Principals

Open-ended responses	N	n	%
What advice would you give principals who want to start their own blog?	44		
Just do it!/Have fun!		19	43
Read and comment on other blogs/Talk to bloggers		9	20
Make it a priority/Schedule a time		7	16
Decide on your purpose/audience/title		5	11
Be yourself/Be honest/Say what you think		4	9
Stick to the issues, not people/Be aware of political climate/Check with superintendent		4	9
Share success stories/Use pictures, videos		3	7
Work with a team or others to help you		3	7
Learn to write well first or get an editor		2	5
Find free sites to start		2	5

For many of the survey respondents, blogging is viewed as fun and they want aspiring bloggers to know this. Forty-three percent of the respondents and 33% of the total number of responses took some form of, “Just do it!” Other more practical tips or advice included check out other blogs to see what they are about and talk to and ask questions of current bloggers. One principal said, “You need to be sure this is something you want to do and make it a priority so that you post on a regular basis.”

Summary

Sixty-four people were sent the survey and fifty people completed it for a response rate of 78%. Most of the respondents (77%) were male and the majority of respondents (92%) were head principals or heads of a school. The survey results showed that blogging was something many of the principals considered to be fun and that it provided them with a useful means of communicating to a number of audiences. While the reasons for starting a blog may have been to make a connection to parents and the school community,

reasons for continuing to blog expanded and deepened to include an opportunity to reflect on their practice as a principal and to make connections with colleagues.

The results of the survey show that blogging was viewed as potentially useful for enacting all of the 21 responsibilities identified by Marzano et al., (2005). Respondents shared many ways in which blogging has supported their role as both a technology and instructional leader, with the greatest responses indicating that blogging provided a means by which principals modeled use of technology in their building. Respondents also offered thoughtful advice for colleagues who might be interested in starting their own blog, including to read and make comments on other blogs, to ask questions of principals who blog, and to make sure of one's willingness to commit the time for posting on a regular basis. Resoundingly, principal respondents wanted others to know that blogging is fun, is free and is a great way to get one's "voice" out there to valued audiences – a tool worth consideration by current and aspiring principals. As shared by one principal, "Go for it! It will take your principalship to a whole new level!"

In Chapter 5, each of the research questions that guided this study will be presented with related results succinctly summarized. Implications for current and aspiring principal administrators, as well as for leadership preparation also will be described. Finally, future directions for research will be offered.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

This study was framed around the following over-arching research question: *In what ways does blogging support the practices of school principals?* Sub-questions were:

- What motivates a principal to begin blogging and then to continue blogging?
- What are the benefits and challenges of blogging for a principal?
- In what ways does blogging assist a principal as an instructional leader?
- In what ways does blogging assist a principal as a technology leader?
- What advice is there for principals who want to start their own blog?

The research was accomplished by creating an online survey for principals who maintain their own blog. The survey had four parts. Respondents completed questions related to their individual experiences with blogging, which created a blogging profile. They responded to questions about specific ways blogging did or might advance their principal leadership practice. They offered overall reflections about blogging and its value. Finally, they provided demographic information that created a general understanding of who responded, including descriptive information about themselves and their work context. The respondents were located throughout the United States, represented all levels of PK-12 education and worked in a variety of settings – urban, suburban and rural.

This chapter begins with a review of study purpose and significance. Limitations are presented next, followed by findings related to each of the research questions. Finally, recommendations for further research are offered.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine ways in which blogging supported principals in their roles as school leaders and specifically, in their roles as instructional and technology leaders. The term “blog” was coined in 1997 (Descy, 2004) indicating the relatively short period of time blogs have been in existence. Although there are many articles about blogs and some research that involves the use of blogs, there is limited research about principals who blog. Notably, no research was located that addressed the question about ways blogs might support the work of principals in their roles as instructional and technology leaders.

This study broke new ground by exploring the potential of a relatively new technology tool, the blog, for enacting the 21 research-based principal leadership responsibilities identified by Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005) and described as “important to the effective execution of leadership in schools” (p. 64). This study is also significant in that it offered some insight into the profiles of principal blogging, including reasons for blogging, topics about which they blog, when they blog, and the audiences with whom they communicate. The study participants were principals who blog. Overwhelmingly, they viewed blogging as supportive of their school leadership practice. Findings report specific ways in which blogging has supported their practice and are worthy of attention in both the initial preparation and ongoing professional development of principals.

Limitations of the Study

Before summarizing the findings, limitations of the study are presented so that readers consider the findings cognizant of the presenting limitations. The first limitation

was the lack of a recognized data base of principals who blog. It was not possible, therefore, to know the extent to which the sample tapped was representative of the population of principals who blog. It was not difficult to locate principals who blog but generalization beyond this particular respondent group is speculative.

Another limitation to the study was the size of the sample. Sixty-four principals who were known to currently blog or to have started a blog in the recent past were located by means described in Chapter 3. The email addresses of these 64 principals were known and used as the means of communicating about the study and sending the survey. Fifty principals responded to the survey. This is a response rate of 78%, which is strong. Because the sample size is small, however, caution is warranted in terms of extensions to broader principal populations. A substantially larger sample size might have altered the results considerably. A limitation related to the use of email addresses is the inability to know whether the email addresses were no longer in use, were sent to a spam folder and not retrieved, or were just ignored by the recipient. It is possible that some of the 14 individuals (of the original 64) who did not respond to the survey had never actually received the survey.

Summary of the Findings

In this section, findings related to each of the study questions are presented. Embedded in these question-specific discussions are relevant connections to related research.

The first question was: “*What motivates a principal to begin blogging and then continue blogging?*” Findings from the present study indicate that principals start a blog to communicate with others and to share their ideas. Initially, this might be to a particular

audience, such as parents, staff, school community or colleagues. As one continues to blog, the findings showed that blogging to a particular audience was not as important as being able to have a platform to communicate to a larger audience and to be able to influence others. Being able to reflect was another motivation for principals both to start a blog and to continue blogging. Since blogs are similar to a diary, but kept online (Descy, 2004) it would be reasonable for principals to want to share their thoughts of the job and reach out to connect with others who are also practicing principals. These findings are similar to those reported by Nardi et al., (2004) who identified the following reasons for blogging: documenting one's life, providing commentary and opinions, expressing deeply felt emotions, articulating ideas through writing and, forming and maintaining community forums. Hart (1990) states, "Reflective practice can be a key to effective administration" (p. 167). She also writes that when administrators develop the habits of reflective practice they can improve the quality of their choices and their knowledge to improvement of schools.

Another finding from the present study was that once principals started blogging, they realized the efficiency of using this tool to communicate. This was a strong motivating factor for continuing to blog. Prior research has shown that principals spend about 75 percent or more of their day communicating with others (Nicholson, 1972; Valentine, 1981). Parents, staff and the community want to know what is happening in their school and the Internet has become one of the ways for them to get this information (Holland, 2000). The desire to communicate with others is a strong reason to motivate principals to begin a blog. Principals want to communicate with parents, staff, students, the school community, their colleagues, and with the world in general. Marzano et al.,

(2005) state that effective school leaders are effective communicators. Using a blog to communicate allows for quick, easy communication, replacing the paper school newsletter sent home in backpacks which could be already outdated by the time it reaches the intended audience. Blogging also allows principals to write down their thoughts and reflect on their practice or their beliefs about education. This was another reason stated for starting a blog. Many of the reasons for starting a blog turned out to be the same reasons for continuing to blog, yet there were also more specific reasons listed for continuing to blog as principals discovered once they began to blog. Examples of this were responses such as, "It's fun!;" you can "archive the school year;" and blogs help you "be visible [and] reach a larger audience."

These findings are significant because it shows that blogs are a tool to reach a large number of people in a quick and easy manner. Principals want to communicate and need a format to reach their intended audience(s) without it taking a lot of time from their already busy day. Blogs also allow principals to grow in their self-reflection skills and to connect with other principals. This can enhance their ability to be a better leader and to grow professionally. One respondent stated, "Networking with other administrators, and having a core group to bounce ideas off of, has been tremendously helpful." Another said, "I have 'met' many other educators and school administrators through blogging and I have learned a lot through their blogs." Communicating and collaborating clear, common goals with teachers, other principals and district staff can allow principals to be most effective and experience greater efficacy (Wahlstrom, et al. 2010) and blogs are one communication tool that allows this to happen.

The second major question of the study was, “*What are the benefits and challenges of blogging for a principal?*” This was posed as two separate open-ended questions in the survey. The response rate for these questions was very low so the findings are inconclusive. None of the current bloggers (n=43) answered either question. Two of the seven former bloggers responded to both questions about the benefits and challenges of blogging and three of the seven former bloggers responded only to the question about the challenges of blogging. The reasons for the current bloggers not responding are unknown, but some possibilities for the low response rate can be formulated. Earlier in the survey there were a number of questions that, essentially, addressed benefits. These questions queried respondents about reasons for blogging and also about the potential for blogging to advance Marzano’s 21 leadership practices. The open-ended question about benefits, therefore, may have seemed redundant. Or, perhaps respondents had nothing more to add regarding benefits. Another reason for low response rate could have been the location of these two questions which were near the end of the survey and immediately following two other open-ended response questions.

The five former bloggers who did write in responses to the benefits and challenges queries offered the following information. Responses about the benefits of blogging were: “It’s huge for internal communication and sharing resources with staff” and “It is interactive and fosters closer relationships.” As for challenges, the responses were: “Making the time to blog” (reported by four of the five), “Getting your point across without offending your constituents, be it staff, parents or the community” and “The stress and demands of the job make it difficult to collect your thoughts.” While only four people, who are former bloggers, responded that making the time to blog was a

challenge, it is a significant finding in that it could be one of the reasons that more principals do not blog. Forty-eight percent of the survey respondents replied that they blog after the school day ends and twenty-six percent said they blog on the weekends. This is time outside of the school day and is something that potential bloggers must take into consideration.

The third major question was, “*In what ways does blogging assist a principal as an instructional leader?*” The research on instructional leadership goes back to the early 1980s (Jenkins, 2009). There is an increasing expectation that principals will function as instructional leaders (P. Hallinger, 2005; Valdez, 2004). Eight of the 21 responsibilities described by Marzano et al. (2005) are well aligned to the instructional leadership dimension of principal practice. These include: communication, optimizer, focus, intellectual stimulation, knowledge of curriculum/instruction/and assessment, resources, curriculum/instruction/assessment, and monitoring/evaluating. The vast majority of respondents (88% -92%) indicated that blogs would be useful or very useful in assisting them achieve the behavior described in the first six responsibilities in this list. Fewer respondents (71%) identified curriculum/instruction/assessment as an area in which blogs would be useful and fewer still (52%) identified monitoring/evaluating. Overall, however, principals viewed blogging as potentially useful for enacting responsibilities related to instructional leadership. Corroborating this assertion were responses offered to an open-ended question that invited principals to write in ways that blogging had supported their role as an instructional leader. Although only 86% responded to this question, the highest frequency responses pertained to sharing information with others, ranging from sharing best instructional practices to supporting professional development

for themselves and/or staff, to expressing their views on what is important for learning and keeping those viewpoints alive with continued discussions via the blog. One respondent said, “It has made very clear, and I am brand new here this year, to my many teachers that I am truly an educational thinker and leader, not just an office administrator. It has helped me set the agenda for educational reform, and helped people understand what is most important to me.”

In the past twenty years, instructional leadership has been one of the most dominant themes in educational leadership (Bossert et al., 1982, Hallinger, 2005, Leithwood et al. 2004, Marzano et al., 2005, Valdez, 2004). Lacking operational definition, however, the term “instructional leadership” does not tell us much about specific means or practices for serving as an instructional leader. As discussed previously, Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005) have defined 21 responsibilities or behaviors that can provide new insight into the nature of school leadership. This study presented those 21 responsibilities to principal respondents and asked whether blogging might be a useful tool for enacting these responsibilities. This is significant because it is not only important for aspiring and practicing principals to know research-based findings about effective leadership practices, but it is also important from a practical standpoint to be knowledgeable about tools that can support such effective practices. This study is able to narrow the focus from the general knowledge of the research about instructional leadership to the use of a specific tool that will help school leaders enact the responsibilities that are expected from them in order to be effective leaders in their schools. Educational leadership programs should follow this same narrowing of the focus

from general knowledge of the research to specific tools that can be used by aspiring administrators to assist them in increasing their efficacy as school leaders.

The fourth major question was, “*In what ways does blogging assist a principal as a technology leader?*” Research clearly indicates that it is the principal who is positioned to be the technology leader in the school (Felix, 2007; McLeod, 2007; Riedl, Smith, Ware, Wark, & Yount, 1998; Yee, 2000). Six of the 21 responsibilities (Marzano et al., 2005) were identified by the present researcher as directly supportive of principals in their role as a technology leader. These are: communication, optimizer, focus, intellectual stimulation, resources and monitoring/evaluating. At least 88% responded that blogs would be useful or very useful for five of the six responsibilities. The exception was monitoring/evaluating for which 52% indicated a blog would be useful or very useful. These responses suggest that blogs could possibly assist principals serving as technology leaders in their schools. When asked in an open-ended format for ways in which blogging has supported their role as a technology leader, modeling technology was the most frequent written response. As one respondent said, “As I embrace and use technology, my teachers become more likely to do the same.” Another said, “It is one way I model the use of technology in my daily practices.” By modeling use of a relatively easy to use technology tool principals introduce or reinforce for staff, parents, and community members the integration of a technology strategy into the learning environment. This is significant because modeling a technology tool is one way that principals can show the importance of technology use to their staff. Principals are the ones who are in the leadership position to implement, build upon and sustain technology-related initiatives (McLeod, 2007).

The fifth major question was, “*What advice would you give principals who want to start their own blog?*” Principal respondents offered a considerable amount of advice of potential use for any principal new to blogging. The overwhelming response was, “Just do it!” Clearly emerging from this study was the sense that blogging principals enjoy it and make time in their lives to maintain their blogs. Additional advice included to read other people’s blogs and ask questions, make comments on other blogs, decide on your audience/purpose/title, and be yourself. The advice offered may encourage principals who are not comfortable with technology or who are not sure how blogs work to become more familiar with blogs, even if just to become a reader of others’ blogs. Blogging offers an easy way to learn about what colleagues are thinking, saying and doing in their roles as educational leaders. Reading blogs can be very informative and supportive of one’s own practice (Poling, 2006). When principals blog about their successes, failures, hopes and frustrations, they are becoming “active learners on professional practice through networking and interacting with educators around the world,” writes Richardson (2007, p. 89). Richardson also states that when principals blog, “they can transform Web users from being passive consumers of information to active participants in sharing expertise” (p. 89).

The over-arching question of this study was, “*In what ways does blogging support the practices of school principals?*” This question was addressed, in part, by the responses to the four specific sub-questions presented above. In addition, when looking at the 21 responsibilities that Marzano et al. (2005) describe in “School Leadership that Works,” this study shows that blogging might be useful for 15 of those responsibilities. This means that making the decision to maintain a blog, which was viewed by many

respondents as easy to use and fun to do, can assist principals with enacting these responsibilities.

When reviewing the reasons principals stated for starting a blog and continuing to blog, it is not surprising that communication was the strongest overarching purpose. Principals spend three-quarters or more of their day in communication with others (Nicholson, 1972; Valentine, 1981). Email is a common form of communication but can produce a fragmented and discontinuous thought process when there are a number of conversations happening (Glendinning, 2007). Blogs allow all thoughts and comments on a particular subject or topic to remain in one place, appearing in reverse chronological order, making it easier to read and follow (Descy, 2004). Blogs have the ability to reach a larger audience than emails because anyone with Internet access is able to find a blog and post comments. Using email requires that a message be sent before a response is rendered. Forty percent of the respondents in the present study maintain more than one blog which allows for differentiating audiences and purposes among blogs. For example, one blog could communicate to both internal and external audiences (e.g. staff, parents and the school community at large); and another blog could be used for communicating specifically to staff about topics such as professional development or instructional strategies. Another option is to have one blog that is for the school community and another blog that is for principal colleagues to share successes and challenges and to network with others in similar positions. The findings showed that principals use blogs to support their practice as school leaders who are expected to communicate to a variety of audiences. This is important because research done by Halawah (2005) shows that effective communication between the principal and teachers can create a positive school

climate which in turn can be a factor for successful school improvement. Ethridge (1989) writes, “The best decisions made by principals are those reached through open and frequent communications with central office administrators, teachers, parents and citizens” (p. 39).

Implications for Leadership Development, Practice and Research

Many administrators have received little or no technology training through their administrative courses (Garrett Dikkers, Hughes, & McLeod, 2005). This study suggests that blogging is a technology tool that can assist principals in demonstrating the leadership responsibilities identified by Marzano et al., (2005) that ultimately contribute to increases in student achievement. It is reasonable to assert that administrator preparation programs should offer coursework and require fieldwork that increases technology proficiency of aspiring administrators. Many principals have to learn about technology on their own. As one principal stated, “Blogging has forced me to learn about Web 2.0 and how to use it effectively for leadership. Staff know that I model the use of technology and that I am pushing them to get up to speed on how to use it more effectively for instruction.” Ritchie (1996) wrote almost 25 years ago that university-created administrative technology courses should update the skills and knowledge of administrators. He emphasizes that courses should do more than update the technology skills of administrators but also “focus on the conceptual knowledge of how technologies can be used to augment student learning, and the leadership and strategic skills needed to promote, achieve, and sustain a vision of how our schools can and should evolve in a society that will increasingly depend on creative, technology-using citizens” (p. 45). Administrators continue to have a need in learning technology skills and knowledge, as

this study indicates, and administrator preparation programs should be including coursework to fill the void.

This study shows how taking one tool, specifically a technology tool, can assist school leaders in exhibiting behaviors that are aligned with instructional (Andrews & Soder, 1987; Cawelti, 1987; Hoerr, 2008; Jenkins, 2009; Michael, 1968; Quinn, 2002; Smith & Andrews, 1989; Valdez, 2004) and technology leadership (Felix, 2007; McLeod, 2007; Riedl, Smith, Ware, Wark, & Yount, 1998; Yee, 2000). This study has attempted to offer grounded and specific means by which general theories of school leadership can be enacted by an easy to use technology tool: a blog. Given the complex and time-consuming nature of being a school leader, the results of this study show that there is a simple, easy to use tool that can benefit a principal's practice of leadership. As stated by one principal, "Blogging allows for communication to happen instantly. There is no need to wait until you have enough information for a newsletter which must be formatted, copied, distributed to teachers, and then carried home by students."

Although this study focused on the potential application of blogs to support principal leadership, blogs are just one of an expanding array of potentially useful digital tools. As noted in the survey results, some principals are also using Twitter to communicate to their audiences which is a newer technology tool than blogs. One principal said, "Right now Twitter more than blogging has connected me with new technology and ideas but it was blogging that lead me to Twitter." Blogs might become a tool of the past, just as the familiar school newsletter printed on paper and copied off to be sent home in backpacks is possibly being replaced by school websites on the Internet.

Therefore, future studies that address how technological tools impact school leadership may need a broader focus than blogs.

Summary

The dominant forms of communication used by school leaders in their practice have changed rapidly in the last ten years. Options have greatly expanded beyond the former basics of a desk phone, computer and email. In the past five years alone, numerous means of e-communication, such as blogs, Twitter, podcasts and wikis have moved from being novelties to becoming widely adopted in society. The purpose of this descriptive study was to learn from practicing principals who use a specific technology tool, a blog, some ways in which blogging might be used to support their role as school leaders. Although this was a preliminary study and the representative nature of the sample is unknown, it contributes by making an initial attempt to map some of the territory negotiated by principals who blog. The vast majority of principal respondents indicated that blogging was supportive of their leadership practice in a variety of specific ways, including ongoing and differentiated communication with staff, parents and community members.

Blogging was used to communicate the school's vision, goals, accomplishments, instructional practices and staff development. It was also used to model innovative technology use for staff. Principals could have an internal blog just for their teachers or staff and an external blog for the school community and the "world at large." The ability to communicate to a large audience was also viewed as a benefit of blogging.

Another area reported as supportive for principals was the use of blogs to communicate with principal colleagues, thereby learning from and feeling supported by the practice of other principals. Further, because blogging can result in a diary of

thoughts presented online, some principals realized the benefit of blogs as a prompt for reflecting on their practice.

Principals overwhelmingly viewed blogging as potentially useful for enacting 15 of the 21 Marzano et al., (2005) research-based leadership responsibilities. This result suggests that principal leadership development programs intentionally address ways to advance and support leadership practice by means of technology tools. Many respondents indicated that blogging was fun and encouraged other non-blogging principal colleagues to “just do it!”

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Appendix 1

The ISTE National Educational Technology Standards for Administrators (NETS•A)

1. Visionary Leadership

Educational Administrators inspire and lead development and implementation of a shared vision for comprehensive integration of technology to promote excellence and support transformation throughout the organization. Educational Administrators:

- a. inspire and facilitate among all stakeholders a shared vision of purposeful change that maximizes use of digital-age resources to meet and exceed learning goals, support effective instructional practice, and maximize performance of district and school leaders.
- b. engage in an ongoing process to develop, implement, and communicate technology-infused strategic plans aligned with a shared vision.
- c. advocate on local, state and national levels for policies, programs, and funding to support implementation of a technology-infused vision and strategic plan.

2. Digital Age Learning Culture

Educational Administrators create, promote, and sustain a dynamic, digital-age learning culture that provides a rigorous, relevant, and engaging education for all students. Educational Administrators:

- a. ensure instructional innovation focused on continuous improvement of digital-age learning.
- b. model and promote the frequent and effective use of technology for learning.
- c. provide learner-centered environments equipped with technology and learning resources to meet the individual, diverse needs of all learners.
- d. ensure effective practice in the study of technology and its infusion across the curriculum.
- e. promote and participate in local, national, and global learning communities that stimulate innovation, creativity, and digital-age collaboration.

3. Excellence in Professional Practice

Educational Administrators promote an environment of professional learning and innovation that empowers educators to enhance student learning through the infusion of contemporary technologies and digital resources. Educational Administrators:

- a. allocate time, resources, and access to ensure ongoing professional growth in technology fluency and integration.
- b. facilitate and participate in learning communities that stimulate, nurture and support administrators, faculty, and staff in the study and use of technology.
- c. promote and model effective communication and collaboration among stakeholders using digital-age tools.
- d. stay abreast of educational research and emerging trends regarding effective use of technology and encourage evaluation of new technologies for their potential to improve student learning.

4. Systemic Improvement

Educational Administrators provide digital-age leadership and management to continuously improve the organization through the effective use of information and technology resources. Educational Administrators:

- a. lead purposeful change to maximize the achievement of learning goals through the appropriate use of technology and media-rich resources.
- b. collaborate to establish metrics, collect and analyze data, interpret results, and share findings to improve staff performance and student learning.
- c. recruit and retain highly competent personnel who use technology creatively and proficiently to advance academic and operational goals.
- d. establish and leverage strategic partnerships to support systemic improvement.
- e. establish and maintain a robust infrastructure for technology including integrated, interoperable technology systems to support management, operations, teaching, and learning.

5. Digital Citizenship

Educational Administrators model and facilitate understanding of social, ethical and legal issues and responsibilities related to an evolving digital culture. Educational Administrators:

- a. ensure equitable access to appropriate digital tools and resources to meet the needs of all learners.
- b. promote, model and establish policies for safe, legal, and ethical use of digital information and technology.
- c. promote and model responsible social interactions related to the use of technology and information.
model and facilitate the development of a shared cultural understanding and
- d. involvement in global issues through the use of contemporary communication and collaboration tools.

NETS for Administrators:

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Appendix B: Survey

PRINCIPALS WHO BLOG

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, blogging has become more common among educational leaders but very little is known regarding why, when, and about what principals blog. This national study seeks to identify ways that blogging is viewed as supporting principal leadership.

Thank you for choosing to be part of this study! A high response rate lends more credibility to the findings that will emerge. At the end of the survey you will be instructed as to how you can receive a copy of this study's findings.

Note that throughout the survey the term "PRINCIPAL" is used but that it is intended to include assistant principals, as well as those referred to as head, director, or administrator of a school.

PART I: Your Experiences with Blogging

1. What is your current title or position?
 - Principal
 - Assistant Principal
 - Head, Director or Administrator (of a school)
 - Other: (please specify)

2. Do you currently maintain one or more blogs that relate to your work as a school principal?
 - Yes (*if yes, respondent proceeds to question 3*)
 - No (*if no, respondent proceeds to question 2a, 2b, 3a, etc.*)
 - 2a. If your blog that relates to your work as a school principal is no longer active, what are the primary reasons for it being inactive?
 - 2b. How long has it been since you last maintained an active blog related to your work as a school principal?
 - Less than 6 months
 - 6 months-12 months
 - More than 1 year

3. How many years have you been blogging for purposes related to your work as a school principal?

- Less than one year
1-2 years
3-4 years
5 or more years
- 3a. How many years did you blog for purposes related to your work as a principal?
Less than one year
1-2 years
3-4 years
5 or more years
4. For what reasons did you begin to blog? Or, stated another way, how is it that you first started to blog? Please specify here:
5. At the present time, how many educational blogs do you maintain?
1
2 or 3
More than 3
- 5a. How many educational blogs did you maintain as a school principal?
1
2 or 3
More than 3

For the next set of questions, please answer pertaining to the educational blog that you maintain(ed) most frequently for your professional practice as a school principal.

6. How is (was) your educational blog paid for? (Choose one or two)
I pay for it myself
My school district pays for it
I use free blog sites
Other: (Please specify)
7. On average, how often do (did) you contribute to your educational blog? (Check one)
Daily
Several times a week
Weekly
Several times a month
Monthly
Less than once a month
8. During which time blocks do (did) you most typically blog? (Choose one)
Before the school day starts
During the school work day
After the school day ends
Weekends

9. Do (did) you allow your audience to post comments on your blog? (Choose one response)
 Yes
 No
 Sometimes (Please explain)
10. Who is (was) the primary audience for whom you write? (Choose one)
 Staff
 Students
 Parents
 Public/Community
 Colleagues
 Myself
 The World At Large
11. As a school principal, please indicate the extent to which you blog(ged) about each of the following topics:

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently
School Goals				
School Accomplishments				
School Announcements/General Communications				
School Activities and Events				
Curriculum and Instruction				
Assessment				
Staff Professional Learning / Development				
Teacher Engagement				
Issues Related to Staff				
Issues Related to Students				
Issues Related to Parents				
Issues Related to the Community				
Legal Issues				
Policy Issues				
Political Issues				
Religious Issues				
Personal issues				

12. Are there other topics you blog(ged) about that were not listed?

13. In addition to blogging, please indicate the extent to which you use(d) other forms of communication in your role as a school principal.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently
Newsletters				
Newspaper articles or editorials				
News releases				
Letters				
Staff e-mails				
Staff memos (hard copy)				
Phone				
Twitter				
Podcasts				
Wikis				
Online videos				
School bulletin boards				
Community bulletin boards				

14. Overall, what are (were) your three top reasons for blogging?

PART II: Considering Ways Blogging Might Advance Principal Practice.

Meta-analyses conducted by Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) and presented in the book, *School Leadership that Works* (Marzano et al., 2005) available from www.ascd.org, identifies 21 significant areas of practice for principal leadership.

Adapted with permission from McREL. All rights reserved.

15. In this section of the survey I ask you to indicate the degree to which **blogging might be useful** for advancing or informing each of these 21 areas of principal practice.

VISIBILITY: Having quality contact and interactions with teachers and students	Would not be useful	Might be useful	Would be useful	Would be very useful
AFFIRMATION: Recognizing and celebrating accomplishments and acknowledging failures	Would not be useful	Might be useful	Would be useful	Would be very useful
IDEALS/BELIEFS: Communicating and operating from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling	Would not be useful	Might be useful	Would be useful	Would be very useful
OUTREACH: Advocating and serving as a spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders	Would not be useful	Might be useful	Would be useful	Would be very useful
CULTURE: Fostering shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation	Would not be useful	Might be useful	Would be useful	Would be very useful

SITUATIONAL AWARENESS: Being aware of and addressing, as needed, details and undercurrents in the running of the school	Would not be useful	Might be useful	Would be useful	Would be very useful
FLEXIBILITY: Adapting leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and being comfortable with dissent	Would not be useful	Might be useful	Would be useful	Would be very useful
CHANGE AGENT: Being willing to challenge and actively challenge the status quo	Would not be useful	Might be useful	Would be useful	Would be very useful
KNOWLEDGE OF CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT: Being knowledgeable about current C/I/A practices	Would not be useful	Might be useful	Would be useful	Would be very useful
INTELLECTUAL STIMULATION: Ensuring staff know about current theories and practices and discussing as regular part of school culture	Would not be useful	Might be useful	Would be useful	Would be very useful
RESOURCES: Providing teachers with materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their jobs	Would not be useful	Might be useful	Would be useful	Would be very useful
ORDER: Establishing a set of standard operating procedures and routines	Would not be useful	Might be useful	Would be useful	Would be very useful
OPTIMIZER: Inspiring and leading new challenging innovations	Would not be useful	Might be useful	Would be useful	Would be very useful
FOCUS: Establishing clear goals and keeping those goals in the forefront of the school's attention	Would not be useful	Might be useful	Would be useful	Would be very useful
MONITORING/EVALUATING: Monitoring the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning	Would not be useful	Might be useful	Would be useful	Would be very useful
COMMUNICATION: Establishing strong lines of communication with and among teachers and staff	Would not be useful	Might be useful	Would be useful	Would be very useful
RELATIONSHIPS: Demonstrating an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and staff	Would not be useful	Might be useful	Would be useful	Would be very useful
CURRICULUM/INSTRUCTION/ASSESSMENT: Being directly involved in designing and implementing curriculum/instruction/assessment	Would not be useful	Might be useful	Would be useful	Would be very useful
INPUT: Involving teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies	Would not be useful	Might be useful	Would be useful	Would be very useful
DISCIPLINE: Protecting teachers from issues and	Would	Might	Would	Would

influences that would detract from their teaching time or focus	not be useful	be useful	be useful	be very useful
CONTINGENT REWARDS: Recognizing and rewarding individual accomplishments	Would not be useful	Might be useful	Would be useful	Would be very useful

PART III. Reflections about Blogging as a Support for Principals

16. Do you think blogging has supported your practice as a principal?
 Yes
 Not sure
 No
- 16a. If yes, please write some ways blogging has supported your role as an INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER in your school.
- 16b. If yes, please write some ways blogging has supported your role as a TECHNOLOGY LEADER in your school.
- 16c. If no, please write your reasons for stating why you feel this way.
17. What advice or encouragement would you give principals who are interested in starting their own blog?
18. Please use the space here to provide any additional information you feel would be useful in understanding the BENEFITS of blogging as a principal.
19. Please use the space here to provide any additional information you feel would be useful in understanding the CHALLENGES of blogging as a principal.

PART IV: Quick Demographic Questions

Just a few more quick questions!

For these questions, please give details for the school/district/region that you work(ed) in when you blogged as a principal.

20. Select the grade levels that best describes your school. (Check all that apply)
 Preschool
 Elementary
 Middle/Junior High School
 Secondary/High School
 Other: (please specify)
21. What is the student population of your school? (Choose one.)
 Fewer than 250
 250-500
 501-1000

Greater than 1000

22. How is your school district best described? (Choose one)

Rural

Suburban

Urban

Other: (please specify)

23. In what region is your school located?

US- Northeast

US- Southeast

US- Midwest

US- Southwest

US- Northwest

Canada- Eastern

Canada- Mid-Provincial

Canada- Western

Other: (please specify)

24. What is your gender?

Male

Female

25. In which age range are you located? (Choose one)

20-30

31-40

41-50

51-60

61+

Thank you for taking this survey. I appreciate it very much!

If you would like to receive an executive summary of the findings from this study, please provide me with contact information by emailing me directly at enge0390@umn.edu. By contacting me in a means separate from this survey, there will be no way to track your survey responses directly to you.

Appendix C: Survey notification email and reminder emails

May 14, 2010

[You are receiving this message because you are now, or once were, a principal with a blog.]

Greetings!

My doctoral student at the University of Minnesota, Reggie Engebritson, is conducting what we believe is the first-ever study of principals who blog. We are hopeful that you will help her with this important research. **We need all of the responses that we can get – as you know, there aren't that many of you!**

Here's the link:

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/PrincipalBlogSurvey>

The survey should take you no more than 20 minutes. Reggie will send you a reminder in a week or so. Thanks in advance for participating in this unique research project. If you have questions about this research, you can contact her at 218-741-5284 or enge0390@umn.edu.

All my best,
SCOTT
(please note my new phone number!)

Scott McLeod, J.D., Ph.D.
Associate Professor & Director, CASTLE
Iowa State University, 7077-CASTLE or 707-722-7853
Blog @ www.dangerouslyirrelevant.org
Twitter @ www.twitter.com/mcleod
Full contact info @ www.dangerouslyirrelevant.org/contact.html

Email Reminder sent one week later: May 23, 2010

Dear Principal,

You recently received an email from Dr. Scott McLeod, Associate Professor in the department of Educational Leadership and Policy at the University of Iowa and Director of CASTLE, informing you of a research study on principals who blog. This email contains the link to the survey and your personal invitation to participate. Please participate if you have a current blog, or used to have a blog as a principal.

You are invited to participate in this exploratory research into why principals blog, the benefits of blogging and the potential impact of blogging on instructional and technology leadership. There is no published research that examines these specific topics. Given the increasing demands on principals, an exploration of blogging as a way to support principal practice is warranted.

Your participation is extremely important to ensure a sufficient number of participants to make the results of this study valid. I recognize that, as a principal, the demands on your time are enormous. I thank you in advance for considering, and hopefully, choosing to participate.

This study will serve as part of my doctoral thesis at the University of Minnesota. The survey should take about 15 minutes to complete. At the end of the survey you need only click on the box "Submit" and the survey will be sent.

To start the survey, click on the link:

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/PrincipalBlogSurvey>

Regardless of whether you choose to participate or not, I will gladly send you an executive summary of the findings. To receive a summary, please provide me with contact information by emailing me directly at enge0390@umn.edu. By contacting me in a means separate from this survey, there will be no way to track your survey responses directly to you.

Sincerely,

Reggie Engebritson
University of Minnesota Doctoral Student
Executive Director, Northland Learning Center
Director of Special Education, Northland Special Education Cooperative

Last email reminder sent one week later: May 30, 2010

Dear Principal,

This is a reminder email if you have not completed the survey invitation you were sent recently. If you have already completed the survey, thank you very much!!

Don't have a current blog as a principal? If you used to have a blog as a principal, you can also complete the survey.

You may have recently received an email from Dr. Scott McLeod, Associate Professor in the department of Educational Leadership and Policy at the University of Iowa and Director of CASTLE, informing you of a research study on principals who blog. This email contains the link to the survey.

You are invited to participate in this exploratory research into why principals blog, the benefits of blogging and the potential impact of blogging on instructional and technology leadership. There is no published research that examines these specific topics. Given the increasing demands on principals, an exploration of blogging as a way to support principal practice is warranted.

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This study will serve as part of my doctoral thesis at the University of Minnesota. The survey should take about 15 minutes to complete. At the end of the survey you need only click on the box "Submit" and the survey will be sent.

To start the survey, click on the link:
<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/PrincipalBlogSurvey>

Regardless of whether you choose to participate or not, I will gladly send you an executive summary of the findings. To receive a summary, please provide me with contact information by emailing me directly at enge0390@umn.edu. By contacting me in a means separate from this survey, there will be no way to track your survey responses directly to you.

Sincerely,

Ms. Reggie Engebritson
University of Minnesota Doctoral Student
Executive Director, Northland Learning Center
Director of Special Education, Northland Special Education Cooperative

Appendix D: Consent Statement

Principals Who Blog

You are invited to complete a survey regarding principals who blog.

You were selected as a possible participant because you are a principal or leader of a school who maintains an educational blog. You are asked to read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to complete the survey.

This study is being conducted by a doctoral student as part of the requirements for a thesis research at the University of Minnesota.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to examine why school principals blog, to identify the focus of their blogs, and to determine the usefulness of blogs as a technology tool to support principal roles as instructional and technology leaders.

Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will complete an online survey. The survey should take about 15 minutes to complete.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study

Over the past few years, blogging has become more common among educational leaders but very little is known regarding why, when, and about what principals blog. This national study seeks to identify ways that blogging is viewed as supporting principal leadership.

There are no immediate or expected risks for participating in the study. The survey is completely anonymous and confidential. Once your responses are entered into an electronic file, the original survey is destroyed. The sample includes principals from throughout the country and there will be no way to track who specifically responds to the survey.

The primary benefit to participating in the survey is knowing that you are contributing to a study that will inform the field of education about why principals blog and the ways in which blogs are viewed as potentially supporting principal leadership. You also will receive an executive summary of the results prior to results being published and available to a wider audience. Finally, some of the questions on the survey may prompt you to think more broadly about ways in which to use blogging to support your practice as a school principal.

Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions

The researcher conducting this study is Reggie Engebritson, a doctoral student in the Educational Policy and Administration (EdPA) Department at the University of Minnesota. If you have questions at any time, you are encouraged to contact me (Reggie) at (320) 333-2593 or enge0390@umn.edu. My co-advisors are: Dr. Jennifer York-Barr at (612) 625-6387, yorkx001@umn.edu, Dr. Amy Garrett Dikkers at (612) 625-2213, garre014@umn.edu and Dr. Scott McLeod at (707-722-7853, mcleod@iastate.edu. You may contact them at any time as well.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

Statement of Consent

By clicking the button below indicates that you have read the above information and you consent to participate in this study.