"WHERE THE HELL HAVE YOU BEEN FOR THREE YEARS?"

THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES OF PRINCIPALS WHEN RECOMMENDING

MARGINAL TEACHERS FOR TENURE

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

"Where the hell have you been for three years?"

The Decision-Making Processes of Principals When Recommending Marginal Teachers for

Tenure

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Dissertation Chairperson: Catherine A. Lugg, Ph. D.

Ever-increasing mandates regarding teacher tenure are meant to ensure quality teachers are in the classroom, but there continues to be circumstances of ineffective teachers receiving permanent status in our schools (Ingersoll, 1999). With ever-expanding accountability on the part of the teacher, it is necessary to examine how these marginal teachers earned their tenure (Oswald, 1989). This study examined the decision-making processes principals experience when making the decision to recommend marginal teachers for tenure.

Through snowball sampling, participants took part in a semi-structured interview to determine the influences upon their decision-making as principals. The study was based upon the conceptual framework used in Kimball and Milanowski's (2009) research. Limitations to the study occurred as a result of using a semi-structured interview format. Sample size and method may also have been a limitation to the study. Additional limitations may have occurred as a result of the level of participant comfort due to being interviewed in person and in a region near their employment.

This study was significant because the results indicate that school principals have the will and skill necessary to remove those teachers (Cooper, Ehrensal, & Bromme, 2005). It is within

the context of the micro-political background that principals, particularly novice principles, struggle with making the decision to remove marginal teachers. Novice principals feel conflict between their desire to be educational leaders and the necessity of being school managers (Cooper, Ehrensal & Bromme, 2005). Those novice principals, in particular, need to be protected from the micro-political ramifications they may face when making the decision to not renew a marginal teacher.

This study holds implications for both future research and policy and practice. Researchers should probe more deeply and more broadly into the influences that shape principals' decision-making behaviors. Future research should also inform the reshaping principal training principal mentorship programs to provide support for new principals faced with the task of recommending tenure. The implications for policy imply that current measures used to evaluate teacher efficacy may not be the most helpful means for preventing ineffective teachers from obtaining tenure. Instead, attention needs to be focused upon the evaluators themselves and on school districts providing the support school principals need to remove marginal teachers from their positions.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Page

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Some call them "deadwood" (Elder, 2004, p. 15). Others refer to them as "cryogenics;" a group who just doesn't care (Evans, 1996, p. 274). Both terms refer to poor quality teachers; those who bring blight to public schools. These teachers do not only have an effect on their individual classrooms, as if that wasn't bad enough. School performance is also affected by teacher quality (Ingersoll, 2001).

Studies published in the 1980's reported that there would be a shortage of teachers in the near future (Darling-Hammond, 1984, Murnane, Singer & Willett, 1989). This was supposed to lead to more unqualified teachers being employed as a consequence (Ingersoll, 2001). As a result of the enactment of school quality policies by state and federal governments, as well as vast media coverage, there has been a strong focus by teachers' associations, local school districts, and the media upon the quality of teachers in classrooms (Ingersoll, 1999). While it may seem to be a harsh reality, teachers do not only share responsibility for student success; they also must share part of the responsibility for student failure (Duke & Salmonowicz, 2010).

One of the most frequently proposed changes by state and federal political leaders, as well as by the general public, to enhance our schools has been to improve teacher quality (Liu & Moore-Johnson, 2006; Tucker, et al, 2003). Most of these reform efforts, however, have focused upon effective schools as a whole and not upon individual teachers (Tucker, 1997). Programs have designed policies to recruit teachers of higher quality from the private workforce. One example of this type of program is "Teach for America" (Ingersoll, 2001). There have been

initiatives set forth by programs such as these that offer signing bonuses, tuition reimbursement and student-loan forgiveness (Ingersoll, 2001).

The importance of having quality teachers in the classroom is far-reaching. According to Hanushek (1992), a full grade level difference can be found among students taught by a highly capable teacher when compared to students taught by one who is considered weak. In another study by Sanders and Rivers (1996), the researchers found that student achievement differed by 50 percentile points when examining students who were taught by New York City teachers rated to be of the highest quality versus those of the lowest (cited in Lankford, Loeb, & Wykoff, 2002). Over time, the ramifications of having weak teachers upon student learning can add up to years of deficiencies.

Using data from the SASS (Schools and Staffing Survey), a 1993 report from the U.S. Department of Education found between 5 and 15 percent of almost 2.5 million teachers to be incompetent (U.S. Department of Education, 1993, para. 5). These data were obtained from a combination of sources that gathered relevant data. These sources include, but are not limited to: data from the Schools and Staffing Survey (1993-94), which uses data provided from the late 1980's, the 1993 Baccalaureate and Beyond study, the 1994 National Assessment of Education Progress, and the American Federation of Teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 1993). The data provided were used in comparison to older SASS reports and to international reports on teacher quality (U.S. Department of Education, 1993). That equates to between 125,000 to 375,000 marginal teachers affecting students every day. Whether the rate of incompetency is measured conservatively or liberally, any poor teacher can have a negative effect on numerous children throughout their careers (Hanushek, 1992). Although teacher reform continues to be at the top of the nation's school reform agenda, and with good reason, mediocre-to-poor teachers

continue to receive tenure status in their schools (Liu & Moore-Johnson, 2006). In one study, principals reported that for every 100 teachers they supervised, they regarded 1.53 as incompetent and tenured (Tucker, 1997). Nevertheless, the dismissal rate of tenured teachers remains at less than 1 percent nationwide (Lawrence, Vachon, Leake & Leake, 2005; Tucker, 1997).

This dissertation analyzed the decision-making behaviors of public school principals with regards to the teachers whom they considered low-performing, and the factors that influenced their behavior when they identified an unsatisfactory teacher (Oswald, 1989). The dissertation attempted to determine how public school principals made their decisions based on the knowledge that certain teachers in their school were marginal pedagogues.

Ideally, educational administrators should seek the most qualified teachers, and at the same time, they should remove those who under perform. Yet, school principals face many challenges when charged with this task. They need to differentiate between those teachers who are competent and effective, versus those who are weak. Tenure laws and teachers' unions can present powerful obstacles as well (Cooper, Ehrensal, & Bromme, 2005; Koppich, 2005). Additionally, administrators make their decisions based on personal attributes defined by their motivation to take action, their ability to interpret information and proceed, and the school environment in which they are working (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009). In an era of ever-expanding accountability mandates, researchers, policymakers and practitioners need to understand how school principals make decisions and then either choose to act or not act on these decisions regarding weak and ineffective teachers prior to their receipt of tenure.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the influences upon the decision-making process of school principals when deciding to recommend tenure for marginal teachers. It examined the decisions as an effect of the principal's will, skill, or social context when making the determination, as based upon the framework set forth by Kimball and Milanowski (2009). Because there is so little current research on the decision making processes of principals and the recommendation of tenure for teachers, the study contributes to the current research by examining the decisions and understanding how they were made.

Significance of Study

There are few studies that examine the decision-making processes of school principals, and to date there have been none that have analyzed the influences on decision-making when principals decide to recommend tenure for teachers they deem to be ineffective or marginal. The majority of studies have examined the will, skill and social context involved with influencing the accuracy of appraisal of teacher effectiveness in the classroom (Jacob & Lefgren, 2006, Bernardin & Cardy, 1982). Other studies focus on the correlation between teacher evaluation and student outcomes (Milanowski, 2004, Medley & Coker, 1987, Landy & Farr, 1980). Still more studies seek to inform the reader about the importance of having a quality teacher in the classroom and the ramifications of employing ineffective teachers (Duke & Salmonowicz, 2010, Liu & Moore-Johnson, 2006, Ingersoll, 1999). There is a significant gap in the literature regarding studies that analyze the decision-making processes of principals when they recommend tenure for marginal or ineffective teachers. This study attempts to close that gap.

Research Question

1. What are the decision-making influences on school principals when making the

   determination to recommend tenure for marginal teachers?

Summary

The examination of the behaviors and influences on principals when making the decision

to recommend tenure to marginal teachers is a worthwhile contribution to educational research.

With student outcomes and high-stakes testing in the forefront of the media, keeping an efficient

and able classroom teacher is the main focus of many school districts, but we know from the

research that this is not always happening (Elder, 2004, Ingersoll, 2001).

Instead, there are situations when teachers of poor quality are recommended for tenure by

their principals. It is imperative that research determine why this occurring so that it can be

understood why this is occurring in schools, and what measures can be implemented to counter-

act the negative impact upon students.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this section, a review of the literature has been conducted to provide the reader with a better understanding of the research conducted regarding defining the marginal teacher, the roles of administrative leadership, and obstacles faced by administrative leadership in schools. This literature review also explores the domains of will, skill and social context as they apply to the decision-making processes of principals as provided by Kimball and Milanowski's (2009) study on decision making by school leadership when evaluating teachers.

It is important to note an inconsistency in the literature. The use of "principal" and "administrator" are often used interchangeably. For instance, in Kimball and Milanowski's (2009) research, the focus is on teacher evaluations and school leadership decision making. The researchers refer to validity in evaluation results across principals and "principal decision-making" in one section, but also refer to the "acceptance by teachers and administrators" in the next (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009, pp. 36-37). They further discuss the "variation among evaluators" that goes on within school districts, which does not refer directly to school principals, but implies that the researchers are encompassing district-wide administration (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009, p. 38). Their study did not focus upon who the evaluators were within the district's structure, just that they were individuals with the power to evaluate and supervise teachers. Tucker (1997) also used the terms interchangeably, or without discrimination. In most instances, she refers to the principal as the key evaluator when examining teacher competency, but also makes reference to "teacher-administrator collaboration" and "administrative action" (Tucker, 1997, p. 106). Tucker's (1997) research questions include administrative responses to teacher evaluations, while she is looking solely at principals in her

study. Bridges (1992) referred to administrators, supervisors, directors and principals throughout

his book, at times to distinguish between different rankings of teacher-evaluators, but other times

indiscriminately. For instance, Bridges (1992) stated, "…administrators sometimes tighten the

evaluation procedures and put pressures on these teachers to improve or to leave the district" (p.

42). In this statement, it is up to the reader to infer the level of seniority of this administrator.

Other anecdotal information is explained in terms of a "personnel director" taking action after a

principal had acted, and a "superintendent" following up further (p. 35). The word

"administrator" tends to be used with ambiguity in some of the research, leaving the reader to

infer meaning and level of superiority in a district. For the purposes of this research, the term

"principal" will refer to the educational leader of a public school. The term "administrator" will

refer to any public school administrator including: principals, district directors, assistant

superintendents and superintendents. "Administrator" will only be used when the literature

pertains to research about multi-levels of educational leadership in a school district. "Principal,"

"superintendent," etc., will be used to succinctly and accurately define to which school

administrator is being referred.

Defining the Marginal Teacher

One of the most difficult challenges faced by school administrators are the decisions they

need to make regarding problematic teachers (Yariv, 2004). In most schools, public school

teachers can be sanctioned, and in some cases dismissed, for acting immorally, incompetently, or

insubordinately (Raths & Lyman, 2003). In cases where teacher misconduct is an issue, the

decision to sanction a teacher is clear to most principals (Lawrence, Vachon, Leake & Leake,

2005). "Teacher misconduct" is an umbrella term that includes, but is not limited to: unexcused

absences or tardiness, neglect of duty, drug abuse, sexual abuse, using corporal punishment or

criminal acts (Lawrence, Vachon, Leake & Leake, 2005, p. 7).

While delineations exist for what constitutes immoral behavior or insubordination,

descriptions of incompetent behavior on the part of a teacher tend to be vague, if referenced at

all. Yariv (2004) describes problematic teachers as "marginal," "poorly performing," and

"incompetent" (p. 150). In his study, Yariv (2004) suggests that all of these labels are matters of

degree, and not terms of absoluteness (p. 150). These terms, rather, are used in relation to other

teachers (Yariv, 2004). Other researchers agree that there is no definitive way to define an

incompetent or marginal teacher (Raths & Lyman, 2003). Because of the subjectivity involved

with evaluating teachers, we need to resort to less direct methods when defining an incompetent

teacher.

Describing the marginal teacher falls into a grey area. Definitions blur and it is more

difficult for school principals and central office administrators to define and identify teachers

who are working below standard, but do not commit acts that are considered to be blatant

misconduct. A marginal teacher is one who falls on the spectrum between being competent and

incompetent (Lawrence, Vachon, Leake & Leake, 2005). Essex (2004) defines teacher

incompetence as: inefficiency, lack of skill, inadequate knowledge of curriculum, failure or

refusal to teach the curriculum, failure to collaborate with co-workers and parents, the inability to

manage the classroom, including student behaviors, or deficiencies of attitude. This definition

may be clear if a teacher exhibits all or even most of these characteristics, but fails to address the

teacher who might only exhibit one. A teacher without adequate knowledge of their curriculum

may have a detrimental effect on students in an advanced placement biology class, whereas

another teacher without a full command of biology may be sufficient in a special education

replacement science class where that teacher has time to learn with his or her students. Failure to

teach the curriculum could be the result of a teacher who is insubordinate to direct orders, or due

to a teacher who is learning a new reading program during a pilot program.

Upon the teacher competency spectrum, Lawrence, Vachon, Leake and Leake (2005)

describe what they consider to be a marginal teacher. In their book, *The Marginal Teacher*

(2005), they provide a series of six charts, each with four to ten characteristics that may be used

to describe a marginal teacher. These characteristics fall under the headings of: classroom

preparation and instruction, teaching, school procedures, classroom management, professional

responsibilities, and relationship to principal (Lawrence, et al, 2005). Each characteristic is

presented as a question such as, "Does the teacher…" followed by a yes or no statement. Of the

forty listed questions, the authors assert that if the majority of the answers are "yes", then the

teacher in question is a marginal, or ineffective, teacher (Lawrence, et al, 2005).

While such a method may provide a good basis for teacher evaluators to determine that a

teacher is ineffective, it is inadequate for teachers who only exhibited some of these

characteristics. For instance, under the heading "Classroom Preparation…," there are only four

questions. If a teacher is satisfactory according to the forty-six other questions, then it would

seem they are, in fact, effective. However, these four questions deal with following the district-

approved curriculum, preparing lesson plans, using a variety of instructional methods, and using

instructional time adequately (Lawrence, et al, 2005). That same teacher may have excellent

classroom management, participate in all contract-mandated extra activities, come to work on

time, and follow school procedures. Lacking only four characteristics of an effective teacher, in

this case, could prove detrimental to the education of the students in this teacher's classroom.

Therefore, while a helpful tool, the checklist provided by Lawrence, Vachon, Leake and Leake (2005) may not always provide an accurate measure of teacher competency.

Findings from Yariv's (2004) and Raths and Lyman's (2003) studies seem to indicate measures of teacher competency could be applied to determine the definition of an incompetent teacher. Yet, these too, prove to be an unsatisfactory method. As reported in some studies, a teacher's academic background, level of intelligence, or the quality of college they graduated from cannot be used as indicators of an individual's ability to teach well (Ballou, 1996). These characteristics, while seemingly important, were not statistically significant indications. However, there have been other studies that have found a positive correlation between a teacher's academic abilities and their students' outcomes (Baker & Dickerson, 2006).

Torff and Sessions (2005) surveyed over two hundred principals to determine what they felt were the causes of teaching ineffectiveness. In their study, they compared the answers of principals in high-performing schools with low-performing schools to see if there was a discrepancy in what constituted an ineffective teacher. Their participants reported data that was inconsistent with a lot of the existing information, mainly because there were little disparaging data to show that ineffective teachers looked differently in high-performing schools than in low-performing schools. As opposed to lacking content knowledge as a major factor that indicates teacher ineffectiveness, the researchers found that a lack of classroom management skills was the strongest indicator of poor teaching (Torff & Sessions, 2005). Closely linked to poor teaching was the inability to implement lessons and the inability to form rapport with their students (Torff & Sessions, 2005). The principals surveyed reported that a lack of content knowledge was one of the smallest indicators of ineffective teaching, similar to the results they found for teachers who struggled with lesson-planning (Torff & Sessions, 2005).

Teacher competency can be described in other, possibly less measurable ways. Ornstein's (1993) research states that a competent teacher is one who "strives to meet academic goals, structures activities carefully and explicitly, covers content thoroughly, does lots of practice and reviews, explains concepts and procedures, monitors classroom progress, gives checks and homework regularly, and holds students accountable" (p. 24). It is up to the administrator to make their own subjective decisions of what these skills and abilities look like prior to entering the classroom.

These are fairly subjective criterion on which to judge performance; many of these items have not been operationalized, and are therefore left open to interpretation. For instance, it is not possible to quantify how much practice constitutes "lots". Identifying whether a teacher is adequately monitoring classroom progress is also open to personal interpretation. Some teachers may choose to enter concrete data on a spreadsheet, while other teachers may rely on body language clues of the students and judges understanding according to the answers provided to open-ended questions.

Evaluation Tools

To try to limit the subjectivity involved in teacher evaluation, school districts adopt tools that they use to evaluate teacher performance. There are almost as many evaluation tools as there are different school districts. Districts may choose to create their own tools, or utilize an evaluation framework based upon research. Below I will summarize the frameworks of three evaluation tools that are most widely used or referenced throughout the participant interviews to follow.

The Hunter Model

Madeline Hunter posed her model for effective instruction as a series of principles that worked together to inform teacher decision-making (Hunter, 1976). It is through these principles that a number of more current researchers have based their models, including Danielson and Marzano.

According to Hunter (1976), successful teaching is not based upon who a teacher is, but rather what they decided to do in the classroom. Hunter outlined two sets of principles to guide teachers to be more competent pedagogues. These two principles were developed by research that took place in the 1960's and 1970's at University Elementary School, University of California (Hunter, 1976). During this time, Hunter and her colleagues, in addition to relying upon their own teaching experiences, conducted a thorough review of the literature pertaining to how teachers can become more successful, and what knowledge and skills were necessary to be an effective teacher (Hunter, 1976). The first set, the "what" of teaching, asks teachers to focus upon the intended objective of a lesson, create the appropriate level of difficulty for the student or students in question, and monitor and adjust the learning task to meet the needs of all of the learners (Hunter, 1976). The second set of principles, known as the "how," focuses upon how a teacher influences and motivates the students, increases the rate and degree of learning (higher-order thinking), gets a student to retain the information, and encourages generalization of the topics taught (Hunter, 1976). These two principles are further divided: In essence, "Hunterism" is based upon the 1976 work of Hunter's regarding effective direct instruction and the decision-making processes teacher undergo while actively instructing. She provided seven elements that could be found within a strong lesson, and described situations when some or all of these elements might be applied (Hunter, 1984). The seven elements of the Hunter model that an

observer would seek are: the learning objective, the anticipatory set (or activating prior

knowledge), the lesson objective, actual input (or information), checking for understanding,

guided practice of the lesson, and then independent practice (Hunter, 1984). These steps may not

appear in the same order of every lesson plan, nor does every step occur in every lesson plan; it

is simply a guideline for what, overall, a good lesson should include (Hunter, 1984).

Hunter stresses two points about her principles. First, these principles are not a cut-and-

dry recipe for good teaching; but instead are meant as a guide for effective teaching (Hunter,

1985, 1976). Secondly, these principles were not developed to evaluate teachers (Hunter, 1985).

Instead, they were used to assist teachers with self-reflection and increase excellence. She admits

that the model cannot "save all teachers," but that it attempts to remediate pedagogy based upon

best practices that have been established by research into teaching (Hunter, 1985, p. 59).

<div align="center">The Danielson Framework</div>

Using research conducted by Education Testing Service (ETS) to create the Praxis test

for teachers, Charlotte Danielson constructed a framework for identifying the teaching practices

that created the best student outcomes (Alvarez & Anderson-Ketchmark, 2011). According to

Alvarez and Anderson-Ketchmark (2011), Danielson's intentions for this framework were that it

was to be used by teachers to self-assess, by higher education institutions to prepare teachers,

and for school districts to rate teacher performance and make recommendations on hiring and

firing. Danielson (2007) designed the framework to evaluate teachers and other educational

professionals (child study team, nurses) across experiences and settings.

Danielson's (2007) work is grounded in the constructivist teaching approach to student

achievement. Constructivism means that learners rely on their past experiences and knowledge to

make sense of new information (Danielson, 2007). In this type of process, teachers act as a guide

to knowledge. While this type of teaching is the main focus of the domains in the Danielson

framework, she does acknowledge that other teaching methods, such as memorization, are

valuable in the classroom as well (Danielson, 2007).

Charlotte Danielson (2007) identified the responsibilities of teachers and found there

were twenty-two components making up those responsibilities. Danielson (2007), based upon the

work of Scriven (1988), and Dwyer (1994), identified four key domains in which teachers need

to exhibit successful performance, and using those four domains, separated the twenty-two

components into clusters.

Danielson's domains describe what a teacher should be able to do and what they should

know to be considered an effective teacher. In the first domain, teachers need to demonstrate

successful planning and preparation to guide their teaching. Domain 2 requires an efficient,

cooperative and respectful classroom environment as developed and facilitated by the teacher.

The third domain reflects the teacher's ability to reflect instruction, and the fourth consists of the

teacher's participation in other professional responsibilities (Danielson, 1996). It is a teacher's

knowledgeable and skillful application of these four domains, on a regular basis, that

characterize an accomplished, effective teacher.

Throughout her framework, Danielson creates a vocabulary designed to enhance

conversations about teaching and education. Clear descriptions of terms referring to strong

teaching practices versus weak practices are embedded in the domains to help teachers

strengthen their pedagogical skill-set (Danielson, 2007).

While it is outside the scope of this study to evaluate the usefulness or validity of this

tool, there have been a number of reviews on use of the Danielson framework to evaluate

effective teaching. The New Jersey Education Association evaluated the framework, and found

that its members felt that this was a fair tool that gave teachers direction to make improvements (NJEA, 2011). Kimball, White, Milanowski and Borman (2004) analyzed data that related the outcomes of the evaluation tool regarding teacher performance and student outcomes, and found that there was a positive correlation between the two.

The Marzano Framework

To improve instruction, Marzano, Pickering and Pollock (2001) discuss nine teaching strategies, based upon decades of research, meant to improve student outcomes. Teachers need to instill a sense of importance in their students by teaching the ability to identify similarities and differences, teaching how to summarize and take notes, recognizing student effort, providing ample practice in class and through homework, providing time for cooperative learning among students, giving students feedback regarding their efforts towards class objectives, teaching students to develop and test hypotheses, utilizing "non-linguistic representations" such as graphic organizers and charts, and activating prior knowledge before beginning a lesson (Marzano, Pickering & Pollock, 2001). Differing from the Danielson framework, Marzano (2007) poses his framework in the form of questions. Instead of laying out a rubric for the teacher, Marzano (2007) encourages teachers to ask themselves questions regarding the nine strategies, such as, "What will I do to engage students?" or "What will I do to communicate high expectations for all students?" When all nine of these factors are incorporated into a lesson, though perhaps not all in the same day, that lesson is considered to be instructionally sound. Within the teacher's manual, rich descriptions of each of the nine strategies are provided to give the teacher a clear picture of what is expected in their classroom. The teacher's manual contains forty-seven sections to accomplish this goal.

Marzano's framework has been used for teacher self-assessment and to evaluate teaching (Marzano, 2007). Similar to the concept of domains set forth by Danielson (2007), Marzano makes reference to "dimensions" during teacher evaluations, and there are five instead of four. Dimension 1 refers to the importance of positive attitudes and perceptions about learning; exactly: classroom climate and the value of tasks put forth to students. Dimension 2 refers to a teacher's ability to help students acquire and integrate knowledge. Dimension 3 deals with methods to refine knowledge and extend that knowledge out from the basics. The fourth dimension refers to giving the students opportunities to use their acquired knowledge in meaningful ways, such as through problem-solving or experiments. The fifth dimension, "Productive Habits of Mind" examines the means by which a teacher instills a desire to move towards higher-order or creative thinking in the student (Marzano, 2007).

While there may be numerous tools utilized to evaluate the efficiency of teaching, many school districts choose to utilize frameworks that attempt to look at the whole picture of teaching, as opposed to examining just one aspect, such as student test scores or classroom management ability. For this literature review, three main tools were examined: the Hunter model, the Danielson framework, and the Marzano framework. The Hunter model attempts to describe the behaviors of teaching that are most effective for producing positive student outcomes. The Danielson framework and the Marzano framework base themselves upon Hunter's model, while incorporating their own vocabulary to describe the complex act of teaching. These three works were referenced by the study participants throughout the interviews below.

If we accept any of these definitions of a strong teacher, then conversely, we can define the marginal teacher as one who cannot or will not help his or her students become successful

through any of these methods (Leake & Leake, 1995). They do not employ the characteristics of a competent teacher with regularity. In addition, their negative traits and actions do not seem to happen once, or in a single setting, and then pass. In a study of Chicago schools, Jacob (2010) found that teachers who were dismissed from one school were 45% more likely than first year teachers to be dismissed from teaching at their next place of employment (p. 25). These results are commensurate with other studies findings that marginal teachers did not just struggle through their first year, but that their issues may be on-going (Bridges, 1992).

Teacher quality matters. Although the research is inconclusive regarding the measurement of teacher competence, which then makes the job of school principals quite a challenge, it is important that principals weed out teachers who are not performing in accordance to the school district's teaching standards.

Administrative leadership

Effective principals run successful schools. The literature on educational leadership dictates that leadership in these schools focus on a number of characteristics to ensure their schools remain effective. These include creating a school climate conducive to student learning, enforcing an emphasis on learning, holding expectations that all students can learn, and regularly monitoring and assessing student performance (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan & Lee, 1982). All of these leadership roles are dependent upon the support of the teachers. Without teacher support and follow-through, none of these characteristics will be visible.

A major area that distinguishes effective educational leadership from ineffective managerial leadership lies within a principal's decision-making power (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan & Lee, 1982). Those leaders who can assert their power and make what they consider to be

logical decisions regarding personnel will be much more successful than their counterparts who

have trouble mobilizing their staff and gaining the acceptance of others.

Obstacles faced by administrators

Administrators at both the school and district level face a number of obstacles when

deciding whether or not to remove an unsatisfactory teacher. Research suggests that school

leaders value criteria other than evaluation documents when making their determinations (Heck,

2007). Some school-level administrators have been found to evaluate teachers using intuition,

without even being aware of the reasons behind their actions (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009).

Furthermore, school administrators at all levels admit that their decision-making is done

throughout the school year, and is focused on numerous decision points (Kimball & Milanowski,

2009). Peterson (1987) purports that multiple methods are used to evaluate teachers, including

parent surveys, student progress, peer reviews, and documentation of professional activities, in

addition to systematic observations performed by evaluators.

Teacher tenure laws

Some reformers argue that ineffective teachers remain in the classroom due to the

overweening power of tenure laws (Koppich, 2005, Oswald, 1989). Tenure insinuates a

guarantee of employment. Instead, it was meant to guarantee teachers due process after they had

completed a probationary term of service (Koppich, 2005). Koppich (2005) argues that, due to

bureaucratic red tape and insufficient evaluation procedures, tenure has turned into the guarantee

of permanent employment it is now perceived to be.

Teacher tenure laws were developed to protect experienced teachers from dismissal due

to arbitrary or capricious actions on the part of administrators. New Jersey Statutes Annotated

(N.J.S.A.), title 18A denotes the law regarding provisions for awarding tenure to teachers.

Tenure, in general, is awarded to a teacher upon successful employment in a school district for three years and one day (NJSBA, 2006, sect. 1). Under N.J.S.A. 18A:6-10, "No tenured employee can be dismissed or reduced in compensation except for inefficiency, incapacity, unbecoming conduct or other just cause" which is a "very technical procedure," with the burden of proof placed on the school board, and therefore upon the school administration (NJSBA, 2006, sect. 3). In New Jersey, for tenure charges due to teacher inefficiency to be filed, evidence against the teacher needs to be compiled having followed all procedures dictated by the law. Afterward, the school board must follow all procedures as outlined by N.J.S.A. 18A and N.J.A.C. 6a:3-5.1; a lengthy and expensive process for the school district (NJSBA, 2006, attach. 2).Consequently, tenure laws may work to protect some incompetent teachers from dismissal (Oswald, 1989). Due to the stringency of the law on teacher tenure and the inability for school districts to release inefficient tenured teachers with any kind of ease, principals need to identify weak teachers prior to their receipt of tenure.

<div align="center">Teachers unions</div>

Principals face constraints placed on them by laws, rules and policies (Cooper, Ehrensal & Bromme, 2005). Teacher contracts can make dismissal an arduous task. Contracts define the obligations of various parties, and are a major law-related part of the evaluation process (Thurston, Ory, Mayberry & Braskamp, 1984). They delineate the terms and conditions of a teacher's work (Koppich, 2005). Collective bargaining agreements often prescribe how observations, evaluations and corrective action plans can be conducted (Cooper, et al, 2005). Collective bargaining agreements have been designed to give legal power to teacher associations against administrative coalitions (Firestone & Riehl, 2005).

In a study by Painter (2000), 67% of principals interviewed responded that their greatest barrier to dealing with inefficient teachers came from the teacher's association. Removing sub-par teachers can become more difficult with the involvement of union representation. Union officials may become stuck between their desire to preserve the reputations of their teachers as competent professionals, thereby assisting with the removal of marginal teachers, and their mission to protect their association members (Yariv, 2004). Evaluators may feel their power is compromised due to a low comfort level they feel dealing with teacher associations. In her study, some of Painter's (2000) respondents noted that their colleagues were hesitant to suggest dismissals due to their discomfort with unions and grievance procedures. Painter (2000) believes it is possible that some administrators may over-perceive the barriers for dismissal put in place by teacher unions and contracts.

<div align="center">Obstacles Faced by Novice Principals</div>

In addition to the obstacles faced by principals who have been working in the title for enough time to be comfortable come the obstacles faced by those who are transitioning into the position. During their transition into their new position, novice principals are faced with learning new technical skills and the culture and climate of their setting, while facing the expectations that others have set forth (Shoho & Barnett, 2010).

The majority of research prepared on the experiences of novice principals has been done in case study format in English speaking countries (Shoho & Barnett, 2010). Novice principals focus a lot of their time on understanding the politics and staff attitudes in their schools, while trying to work out the areas of need educationally (Shoho & Barnett, 2010).

Shoho and Barnett's (2010) research also found the novice principals must learn their roles in terms of what they will, or will not, be able to change. For instance, Duke and

Salmonowicz's (2010) case study on a first year "turn-around" principal showed that when the

new principal confronted teachers about their ineffective teaching methods as evident from the

prior year's data, they were skeptical of her assertions and did not accept her findings. It is

important to note that this situation was experienced by a principal who was new to the school,

but not necessarily new to the position itself, indicating a possibility for novice administrators to

be discounted either further due to their lack of experience. This situation is supported, however,

by research conducted by Male (2002), which found that conflicts can arise with novice

principals because teachers perceive them differently from more veteran principals.

Novice principals may also feel the need to live up to the legacy of their forerunner

(Shoho & Barnett, 2010). These new principals often feel compared to their predecessor, creating

conflicting feelings for the novice (Shoho & Barnett, 2010). They may doubt their efficacy as a

principal, or they may feel the desire to prove their abilities quickly. This, combined with the

feeling that these new principals are now responsible for a host of new tasks and challenges,

increases the anxiety they feel when trying to make decisions that will positively impact the

school environment, but not have a negative impact on their forming reputations as school

leaders.

Shoho and Barnett's (2010) study also found that one of the main challenges a new

principal faces is in the area of community leadership. They reported spending an unpredictably

large amount of time working on "parental and political-school climate issues" (p. 576). They

reported struggling with the idea of past-precedent when determining why situations were

occurring in their schools. The task of changing school climate led many of the study participants

into a new realm of handling political issues not yet tackled, such as working with the teachers,

the board of education, the community, and the students at the same time (Shoho & Barnett, 2010).

<center>Administrative Decision-Making</center>

The belief that teacher tenure decisions are based upon union involvement and tenure law difficulties may not always be the complete professional reality. We know very little as to how administrators make their decisions regarding teacher performance (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009). Rating teacher quality is a complex task, and there has been little agreement on how teachers should be measured (Heck, 2007, Medley, 1987). Principals' decisions regarding personnel can be the most difficult choices they make in their careers and researchers have found few direct criteria administrators can use to determine the correct course of action for dismissing teachers (Duke & Salmonowicz, 2010) .

One study conducted by Peterson (1987) found teacher evaluations to be conducted qualitatively using instructional guidelines meant to direct administrators' judgments (p. 314). In many districts, teachers are evaluated both summatively and formatively. Summative evaluations are those that rate teachers according to criteria and guidelines that will result in rewards for excellence, and punitive measures when necessary (Raths & Lyman, 2003). Formative evaluations are those that are designed to improve teaching with guidance and action plans, with no focus on reward and punishment (Raths & Lyman, 2003). They are, instead, focused on building the skills of the teacher. For a staff evaluation program to be effective, it needs to address methods for improving teaching, but it also needs to identify unsatisfactory teacher performance (Larson, 1981). Milanowski (2004) has found evidence that using standards-based evaluations may be useful in determining portrayals of teaching methods that have affects on student learning. Even though classroom observations and teacher supervision as a whole have

been considered omnipresent functions of school principals, they occur infrequently and are often reported to be less than helpful by the teachers themselves (Stein & Nelson, 2003). Stein and Nelson (2003) assert that these evaluations are nothing more than symbolic gestures. While symbols may be useful in upholding long-standing traditions, it is doubtful they would impart any real change in the teaching habits put forth by an instructor, particularly one who is already struggling.

Whether based in the school or central office, administrators are not left to flounder when evaluating teachers. New Jersey Statutes Annotated 18A:27-3.1 clearly outlines the procedural requirements for all district administrators, including supervisors, principals, directors and superintendents, who have been trained to evaluate staff to follow when observing and evaluation non-tenured teaching staff. It also outlines the procedures to take when non-renewing teaching faculty. Timelines and dates for giving notice of non-renewal are clearly stated (N.J.S.A. 18A:27-10, 18A:27-3.2). These guidelines do not, however, take into account the personal aspects of the decision-making process.

Kimball and Milanowski (2009) have noted differences in validity across different principals, which they determine problematic in an era when standards-based evaluations are used to determine teacher quality, areas in need of professional growth, and in some areas, teacher pay. This is consistent with other findings examining subjective performance appraisals and distorted views of practice (Woehr, 1994). Researchers have also found that the use of standards-based evaluative tools incorporates more evidence about a teacher's skills and abilities than traditional evaluations tools, thereby presenting a fuller picture of the teacher's capabilities (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009).

In the past, Blau and Kahn (1981) examined general layoffs, as reported by the National Longitudinal Surveys, through a framework that implied dismissals usually occurred for one of two reasons: a decrease in demand for services, equitable to servicing less students in a school, or as a result of an employer searching for a better fit between management and employee. In a human services field, there are conceivably more reasons one would choose to dismiss a teacher than supply and demand, or best fit, however this study did include salary-earners who have completed their schooling (Blau & Kahn, 1981).

Kimball and Milanowski (2009) developed a conceptual framework to identify the influences teachers' evaluators might encounter that cause there to be differences in ratings between principals on teachers. I am using this framework to determine how administrators make their decisions when rating poor teachers.

Conceptual Framework

The purpose of my phenomenological study was to determine what factors influenced how administrators made the decision to grant tenure to weak or underperforming teachers. My research question was, "What are the influences on principals when making the decision to grant tenure to marginal teachers?" This study was conceptualized based upon a framework provided by Kimball and Milanowski (2009) that was originally used to identify the influences on principals, as evaluators, that cause differences in ratings between principals upon teacher performance. The researchers used a mixed methods approach to make their findings. Using survey data, Kimball and Milanowski (2009) were able to compute correlational data between teacher performance and aspects that determine how efficacious those teachers are. Their research was also phenomenological in nature because it seeks to understand the experiences of

building principals while making their tenure decisions and to give contextual meaning to those

experiences (Cresswell, 2007).

In summation, Kimball and Milanowski (2009) found that evaluator motivation (will),

evaluator expertise (skill), and evaluation context (the school environment) are the three main

influences on administrative decision making. The researchers looked at a large western school

district to examine the validity of teacher evaluation results when compared to average

classroom achievement. The correlation between the two factors averaged .22, but there were

some strong differences between the accuracy of ratings (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009). There

was a considerable amount of variance amongst the strength of the performance rating and the

level of student achievement for the teachers evaluated. Negative correlations were even found in

some cases, indicating that some teachers were rated highly even though they presented with

lower-performing students, while other teachers rated lower and had students who performed

well (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009). They continued their study by looking for evidence that the

evaluator's skill, will, or environmental context had influence on the ratings they gave to

teachers. They found that when evaluators were trained, their individual accuracy was of little

importance. Upon interview, evaluators were asked questions regarding their backgrounds, how

they felt about and carried out teacher evaluations, and school climate. Principals did not identify

score accuracy as a primary goal of evaluations, indicating a lack of motivation to truly use their

evaluative tools to rate teachers' performance. Instead, building principals indicated they were

more interested in simply completing the process (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009). Many relied

upon their prior knowledge of teachers, or past business experience to guide their evaluations,

indicating that evaluator preparation, including training with evaluation tools and evaluating the

work performance was others, was less valued than personally perceived skill. Unfortunately for

school principals, these findings indicate that there seem to be "no short-cuts to sound decision-making" (Duke & Salmonowicz, 2010, p. 56). Instead of instinct and contextual inputs, principals must rely on the proper utilization of evaluative tools.

Kimball and Milanowski's framework is supported by prior research. In Suzanne Painter's (2000) study, *Principal's Perceptions of Barriers to Teacher Dismissal*, she interviewed Oregon principals to determine which barriers they felt they encountered when dealing with low-performing teachers. Her findings revealed a number of factors principals use to make their determinations, and they were not limited to "best fit" in a school or student enrollment. For instance, Painter (2000) found that 67% of the principals she interviewed felt that the teachers' unions were a major obstacle to overcome, and therefore pushed teachers through to avoid any negative interactions. Again, since administrative decision-making is done throughout the school year, and is focused on numerous decision points (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009). A problem can be created if the principal's first evaluative impression is positive, followed by negative observations. Peterson (1987) purports that numerous methods are used to evaluate teachers, including parent surveys, student progress, peer reviews, and documentation of professional activities in addition to systematic observations performed by evaluators. The multiplicity of interactions used to evaluate teachers can be too overwhelming for principals to conduct their evaluations effectively.

Barriers such as these are placed into the three categories I have been using as my conceptual categories, as listed by Kimball and Milanowski (2009): *will*, *skill* and *social context*. It is within the confines of these three barriers that I analyzed the preliminary interview data to determine how school principals make their decisions regarding marginal teachers receiving tenure.

Evaluator Will

An evaluator's will to dismiss an under-performing teacher means the difference between getting the teacher out of the classroom, or allowing that teacher to continue to negatively affect children. Unfortunately, the dismissal of low-performing teachers does not happen often, indicating that administrators are not motivated to address all of the issues surrounding a dismissal. Some teachers continue to teach, while, as one study shows, principals reported dealing with these teachers in ways other than dismissal (Painter, 2000). They would counsel teachers until they were able to obtain a score of "satisfactory," which could take years, they would encourage retirement, change the placement of the teacher within the district, or enact some other form of removal (Painter, 2000, p. 258).

Evaluator will is also described as motivation (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009). It can be affected by a number of different aspects. The attitudes of the administrator toward the evaluation process can impact the validity of results (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009). For example, in their research, Kimball and Milanowski's results found that evaluators saw few results stemming from use of an evaluation tool, and reserved their proper usage for "only the weakest teachers" (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009, p. 61).

It stands to reason that instructional leaders can be motivated either intrinsically or extrinsically to remove a marginal teacher, or to ignore the trouble with employing an ineffective teacher. Incentives encourage effort and action, and work as a reward (Benabou & Tirole, 2003). The evaluator must look at the incentives they may have to make a decision one way or another. They are put in a position where they must decide how much time and energy should be invested into the ineffective teacher by working to change them before looking at other options, such as re-assignment or non-renewal (Duke & Salmonowicz, 2010).

However, there may not be enough of an incentive to make the right decision and let go of a teacher who is performing marginally. Instead, there may be more of an immediate incentive to keep the teacher in place. This relates to the idea that individuals are led by short-term reinforcement at the expense of long-term payoffs; precisely, the principal gets out of confronting a poor teacher and doing paperwork now, but at the expense of having to work with an ineffective teacher in their school possibly until retirement (Benabou & Tirole, 2003). Additionally, there may be "hidden costs" pertaining to the perceived reward of taking action, which would prevent an aware principal from making the decision to remove the marginal teacher from the classroom (Benabou & Tirole, 2003, p. 490). Hidden costs would work aversively to the decision-making process. These hidden costs may be factors associated with the micro-political social context domain, such as alienation of the faculty or disapproval of the community, or they may be associated with the skill domain, causing superiors to question the principal's ability to judge good teaching or to micro-analyze the evaluative paperwork that was prepared prior to making the decision to let this teacher go.

The importance evaluators place on distinguishing teachers from their peers can vary, in addition to which weaknesses the evaluator values more strongly (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009). Evaluator *will* can be described in terms of evaluation leniency. The amount of leniency on teacher ineffectiveness or ineptitude an evaluator is willing to grant may be affected by their motivation as well (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009). Kimball and Milanowski (2009) assert that leniency lessens the range of evaluation scores, and also prevents as many scores from being placed at the lower end of the rating distribution.

Evaluator *will* can include the motivation an administrator may feel to use their time and energy to appraise teacher quality. Dismissals for teaching ineffectiveness may not occur as often

as those for insubordination or negligence because it is more difficult and time consuming to prove (Oswald, 1989). Duke and Salmonowicz's (2010) research has shown that principals need to decide how much energy and time they are willing and able to invest in inadequate teachers before considering dismissal.

Will can also be examined from the perspective of the evaluator's need to avoid personal conflicts. There is a reigning tradition of avoidance of serious conflict among administrators (Evans, 1996). Evans (1996) reports that, "a strong norm of conflict avoidance" exists amid school administrators (p. 275). As Evans (1996) describes, the regularity and bluntness of criticism is much softer, overall, among leader-staff relations in schools than in the corporate world.

Researchers have found a tendency of school administrators, particularly at the building level, to avoid direct conflict with their teachers (Yariv, 2004). In one study, only external interventions (such as a complaint from parents) were enough to cause the principal to directly confront inadequate teachers (Yariv, 2004). In Kimball and Milanowski's (2009) research, principals reported writing evaluation summaries with careful language, and kept these summaries purposely vague. This was a possible action meant to reduce complications in school climate and across working relationships (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009, Evans, 1996). Bridges (1986) has also found that administrators tend to be inclined to endure their staffs' shortcomings, rather than face the problem head-on. Therefore, it could take years for an administrator to confront the sub-par teacher (Leake & Leake, 1995).

Principals' will to deal with incompetent staff may also be affected by their lack of will to form conflicts with outside influences. School leaders may be less inclined to rate teachers accurately if they fear repercussions from the local teachers association. According to Cooper

and Sureau (2008), "…fear shapes and drives perceptions, interactions, and strategies…" (p. 88). This fear may inhibit an administrator's will to focus on the negative aspects of a teacher's performance. Historically, teachers' unions have been perceived as organizations with a focus on increasing salary levels, and less interested in teacher quality (Koppich, 2005). They also focused upon the protection of teachers (Koppich, 2005). Teachers' unions took their cues from the industrial unions of the 1800's, which promoted separation of labor and management (Koppich, 2005). Under this model, when something goes wrong, the union looks to place blame on the district and administration, instead of looking to its constituents (Koppich, 2005). Management, therefore, has a persistent, underlying fear of the collective group's power and their ability to lay blame or stop working due to their actions (Cooper & Sureau, 2008). In a study of the Chicago Public School District evaluation process, using data from 2007, Jacob (2010) found that only 15 of over 11,000 teachers were rated "unsatisfactory", and only 641 of those teachers received a rating of "satisfactory" (p. 10). Over 11,000 other teachers all received higher ratings. School leaders may not have the support they need to combat their local teachers association, or they may not have the self-esteem to feel they can successfully win against the group even when they have the evidence needed to support their decisions.

Principals may be more inclined to rate teachers in a negative fashion if certain budgetary restraints are present. If a program is financed through outside revenue sources, teachers working in that area may be affected. A principal may be prone to dismiss teachers from that area if revenue sources become scarce or are eliminated (Jacob, 2010). Conversely, some programs or grants may call for teachers of a scarce population; if the positions are hard to fill, principals may be more disposed to make allowances for less than proficient teaching skills. For example, school or grant programs aimed at educating severely impaired students require special education

teachers with specialty experiences; possibly autism or behavioral disorder experience. Another

example may be a fine arts program that is funded through a grant; a teacher with an art

certification may be required for the program, but once funding is cut, they may need to be

removed.

<div align="center">Evaluator Skill</div>

Another obstacle to achieving accurate performance ratings of teachers lies within an

principal's skill. A principal may produce biased ratings of teacher performance for any number

of reasons, all related to their evaluative skills. The more skilled a principal is at evaluating

employees, the more accurately they will likely rate teacher performance (Kimball &

Milanowski, 2009). Peterson (1987) states that the ability to critically evaluate teachers is vital to

rewarding excellent performance, and to identifying less than acceptable teacher performance.

Milanowski (2004) contends principals that use evaluations for making decisions on teacher

performance are most interested in validating their scores, and not necessarily interested in

influencing changes.

Some research has shown that principals can easily identify teachers who are the most

and least effective in the classroom when examining student standardized scores, but have

difficulty differentiating between the efficacy and abilities of teachers falling in the middle of the

continuum (Jacob & Lefgren, 2008). It has also been suggested that principals are less occupied

with extreme cases that happen rarely, and are mainly concerned with the daily behaviors of

weak teachers (Yariv, 2004). Jacob and Lefgren (2008) have found that principals having

difficulty distinguishing teacher quality amongst "middle range" performing teachers often miss

"fine grain" determinations that may have a drastic impact on those teachers' renewal or ability

to receive tenure status. In a 2008 study, they found a very low correlation (between 0.18 and

0.32) with a principal's ability to subjectively identify teachers' abilities to raise student

achievement in math and reading (Jacob & Lefgren, 2008). These findings support Medley's

(1987) earlier findings, which compiled the results of over eleven studies that looked at

principals' ratings of teacher performance and actual efficacy; the rates showed only slightly

more accuracy than if the ratings had been given by chance. In his study, Peterson (1987) found

a stronger correlation between teacher tests and their efficacy than administrator reports and

teacher efficacy. He also found that administrators' reports had a very low correlation (0.05) to

other measures of teacher efficacy, such as parental and student reports or peer reviews.

Evaluations are judgments made by the principal. These judgments of teaching ability

need to be made as objectively as possible to be used effectively for the removal of teachers

(Danielson & McGreal, 2000). They should be fair, and their main goal should be to paint an

accurate and fair picture of the teacher. Ambiguity of the information presented should be

avoided, and clear, measurable observations need to be recorded (Danielson & McGreal, 2000).

Meanwhile, evaluators in Kimball and Milanowski's (2009) research did not report that making

accurate evaluations was a primary goal for distinguishing between good and mediocre teachers.

The evaluation of the quality of teachers has always depended upon someone's judgment of their

performance in the classroom, and research indicates that these judgments may be a hindrance to

keeping teachers of low-quality out of the classroom (Medley, 1987).

Without proper training and knowledge, the "halo effect" may cause evaluators to rate

teachers with interference. This can occur when the rater's ideas of a subject, in this case the

teacher, is effected by their overall impression, instead of looking at different factors (Vance,

Winne & Wright, 1983). The evaluator is unable to differentiate the aspects of the subject's

performance behaviors for rating purposes (Vance, et al, 1983). Medley (1987) describes the

halo effect as the rater giving the highest evaluative score to the teacher who looked the most

effective during observations. This does not mean that teacher was best; the best mediocre

teacher is still mediocre. Because of the halo effect, teacher evaluators may perceive mediocre to

weak teachers as effective because they are being compared to other teachers who perform

similarly. Evaluated in another context, these less effective teachers would stand out when

compared to strong teachers. Conversely, when compared to highly ineffective teachers, these

marginal teachers may seem like stellar educators. Medley's (1987) research discusses how this

effect essentially invalidates evaluation scores.

      Another study by Hain and Smith (1966) found that the halo effect could be caused by

the tool given to principals for teacher evaluation. Their study showed that the words and phrases

found on these evaluations, meant to call attention to certain teaching characteristics deemed

favorable, actually provided opportunities for raters to use their own interpretations, thus

removing the objectivity from the tool (Hain & Smith, 1966). The scores of the group of teachers

being evaluated are dictated by the judgments of the principal and what they perceive to be the

most effective teaching practice they have observed, and not what the most effective teaching

practices are.

      In relation to the halo effect is the concept of evaluator schemata. Schemata are used to

help individuals categorize observations; in this instance, teacher efficacy. Bernardin and Cardy

(1982) warn that faulty results may be obtained when a teacher evaluator employs schemata that

may skew their perceptions of teacher quality. They contend that evaluations may give a better

indication of what the evaluator expects to see, based on their schemata, rather than actual

circumstances (Bernardin & Cardy, 1982). These schemata may be based on race, sex, or age of

the teacher, or be over-simplified or irrelevant to the observation all-together (Bernardin &

Cardy, 1982).

Thurston, Ory, Mayberry and Braskamp (1984) have found some evaluators to be so

adept at using evaluations as teacher rating tools that there have been no grounds for challenging

that evaluation. Most principals, though, face difficulty with using evaluation tools to determine

teacher efficacy while discounting the social aspects of teaching (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009).

In one study, evaluators stated that they were more lenient towards teachers who contested their

evaluations to the point of using teacher self-input to write their evaluations (Kimball &

Milanowski, 2009).

Kimball and Milanowski (2009) include the evaluator's own familiarity with job content

in the category of evaluator skill. Public school principals may not be experienced with all of the

subjects they may be evaluating (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009). Charlotte Danielson, an expert

on teacher evaluations, accuses school principals of having less expertise regarding pedagogical

approaches, discipline, of the development of students than teachers do, even though they are

their supervisors (Danielson, 2000, Scriven, 1988). Evaluators may be uncomfortable rating a

teacher based on their own lack of knowledge with academic content (Kimball & Milanowski,

2009). Yet, according to Bottoms (2003), school principals do not need to know everything

about every subject they will be evaluating. His research asserts that principals need to be

familiar with broad concepts taught in the curriculum, but they do not need to be experts in every

subject (Bottoms, 2003). He also states that it is important to understand course-leveling. Instead

of being a master of all subjects taught, the principal needs to be able to identify research-based,

appropriate instructional strategies (Bottoms, 2003).

The level of training evaluators have received for conducting a teacher evaluation may not be sufficient (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009). Because of the importance placed on evaluations for administrative decision-making, evaluators are held to a professional standard of performance (Thurston, Ory, Mayberry & Braskamp, 1984). Principals are expected to have the ability to observe teacher behaviors and translate these into an evaluative score (Milanowski, 2004). Without proper training and experience, evaluation malpractice could occur, and nullify the evaluation report, thereby making it more difficult to remove a weak teacher (Thurston et al, 1984). While it is to be expected that a teacher would refute a poor evaluation, without proper evaluation training, the principal may become the focus of the review. In that case, the principal's practice would be examined to determine if it had differed from other, accepted standards (Thurston, 1984).

All of these issues can be influenced by an individual's tacit knowledge. Nestor-Baker and Hoy (2001) state tacit knowledge is based upon the familiarity that one has related to their job experience, but also includes other components. A major component of tacit knowledge is how information and experience are used by the individual. A school principal may be aware of the presence of a weak teacher in their building, and also recognize that the resources needed to positively influence that teacher's performance would be greater than the cost of replacing that person. If a principal can use their tacit knowledge to recognize that the situation caused by employing a weak teacher may only get worse, then they would have the opportunity to take measures to remove that teacher prior to their receiving tenure. Tacit knowledge, like any other kind of knowledge, does not appear to the same extent in all individuals. Therefore, there are variations in the abilities for which different principals can adapt themselves to changing

situations, and react to those situations using instinct as well as experience (Nestor-Baker & Hoy, 2001).

Duke and Salmonowicz (2010) have found that principals may have difficulty with understanding the necessary steps they must take when documenting inadequate teachers. They need to understand school personnel policies, past practices, and how to gain support from central office when making their decisions (Duke & Salmonowicz, 2010). School leaders are also exposed to informal peer pressure which can skew their knowledge of good practice (Firestone & Riehl, 2005).

<div align="center">School Environment/Social Context</div>

Successful leaders are leaders who can change their behaviors based upon the unique demands of their environment (Gates, Blanchard & Hersey, 1976). The school environment, or context, is fluid and influenced by time and other factors (Driscoll & Goldring, 2005). The effective leader understands that their efficacy depends upon the relationship between the context in which they work and the environment in which they are situated (Griffith, 1999). Contextual elements consist of, but are not limited to, political interventions, community involvement, district leadership and service interventions (Driscoll & Goldring, 2005). These elements can be placed in the broader categories of macro-politics, micro-politics, and other.

Social context is an essential component of decision-making, particularly for principals (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2001). Spillane et al, (2001) assert that decision-making is constrained by the situation in which it takes place. While knowledge and skill are both functions of leadership decision-making processes, the enactment of leadership tasks becomes much more complicated when people and situations are also factors (Spillane et al, 2001). Basically, the

"situation does not simply 'affect' what school leaders do, it is *constitutive of their*

practices[sic]" (Spillane et al, 2001, p. 26).

These ideas lead research to separate into two main sections of social context: macro-

politics and micro-politics. The majority of research regarding politics in the school has been

examined through the political science lens (Lindle & Mawhinney, 2003). There are also gaps in

the research regarding micro-politics and the teacher-principal relationship as having numerous

levels of control and power (Cooper, Ehrensal & Bromme, 2005).

Macro-politics

When speaking of the organizational politics of the school district, it would be folly to

assume that the district, as a whole, is the unit of analysis (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993). Instead,

macro-politics at the school level are typically defined as external relationships with at the local,

state or national level (Blase & Blase, 2002, Bacharach & Mundell, 1993). These types of

politics usually involve association with entities such as the state department of education, state

boards of education, and teachers' unions. More locally, and typically more directly involved,

Blase and Blase (2002) list school superintendents, local school boards, and other local

organizations as macro-political influences.

While many of these entities may seem far removed from the individual decision-making

processes of school principals regarding marginal teachers, it is through these policy-makers that

school principals may encounter struggles as they attempt to implement policies and procedures

dictated by these agencies (Blase & Blase, 2002). State departments of education dictate how

often non-tenured teachers should be evaluated; school boards create policy and determine which

evaluation tools will be used to evaluate those teachers, while the teacher's union may ask for a

voice in the choice as well. The school district's environment depends upon the relationships with these outside groups to impose their actions, thereby making it impossible to look at the school district itself as one macro-political unit (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993).

There is very little up-to-date research regarding macro-politics and the schools, and what there is has been written outside of the United States. In a Belgian article by Kelchtermans (2007), policy measures from outside the school district level are examined. Further studies examine school-choice or school district mergers through the macro-political lens, but little research addresses decision-making as a function of macro-politics.

<div align="center">Micro-politics</div>

Micro-politics, on the other hand, are not as clearly defined. Hoyle's (1986) definition of micro-politics states it is the way individuals and groups in an organization use their resources to further their interests. Blase and Blase (2002) offer to define micro-politics in relation to schools as "the immediate, ongoing, dynamic interaction between and among individuals and groups, and such interaction occurs at all levels of public education" (p. 9). It is defined by infrastructure in the school as much as by the social relations within the building. It also refers to formal and informal power amongst the individuals within the school, throughout the district, and found within different groups.

Organizations are inevitably political (Bolman & Deal, 2008). With politics, issues of power are created. According to Bolman and Deal (2008), power can be equated with authority; giving people the ability to make decisions. As these researchers found, anyone working in a formal capacity must have the authority to keep control of their subordinates (Bolman & Deal, 2008). This authority only works so long as partisans are convinced that the person in power is working in their best interests (Bolman & Deal, 2008). School principals are given positional

authority by others in central office and through goals directed by their state government, but

derived from regulations mandated by the federal government. With this power, principals have

the ability to make decisions regarding the evaluations and re-hiring of their faculty and staff.

Principals can lose this positional power if they are deemed incompetent or evil, perhaps as the

result of situations that arise when they determine teachers unfit to continue. To keep their

faculty's trust and acceptance, a school principal may deviate from what they know is the right

thing to do by removing a marginal teacher.

The power bestowed upon a principal to make decisions about the instructional

management of their school is highly dependent upon the individual school district's culture.

Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan and Lee (1982) found that principal leadership is often constrained by

the school district. For instance, a district with an unspoken culture of keeping a low profile and

maintaining strong community relations may be very hesitant to show support in favor of teacher

non-renewals (Bossert, et al, 1982). Conversely, some districts may be more inclined to show

active support for their principals' decisions, thereby increasing the chances a principal would

act to remove a weak teacher from their faculty's ranks.

The school principal may also find themselves in the grips of coercive power. This ability

to punish others may be overwhelming to some school principals (Bolman & Deal, 2008). This

may become evident when an incoming administrator "cleans house" and removes what they

perceive as deadwood from the school. Positional power inflicted by central office administrators

and use of evaluation tools also guard against this capricious use of authority on the part of an

administrator by providing checks and balances (Danielson, 2000).

Principals need to be sensitive to their environment when making decisions about how to

handle inadequate teachers (Duke & Salmonowicz, 2010). School principals have to be receptive

to the demands of outside constituents' demands and needs (Driscoll & Goldring in Firestone &

Riehl, 2005). This could include responding to the politics surrounding the initial decision to hire

the teacher in question, or around their current position and status in the community. Political

pressures on the central administration may have a role upon the principal's decision making.

There is some evidence found to support the notion that favoritism and other social or political

pressures have weight on these decisions (Jacob & Lefgren, 2008, Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

Teachers have been hired for reasons other than their skills; because they are relatives of or in

debt to school board members, or possibly members of prominent community groups (Tyack &

Cuban, 1995). This knowledge has led to teacher mistrust of an administrator's ability to be fair

(Tyack & Cuban, 1995). When cuts need to be made, and two non-tenured teachers are being

evaluated, the more effective teacher could be released, while the less-effective, but politically

tied teacher goes on to teach another year.

Other external influences may play a role in the decision to remove ineffective teachers.

Parent and student challenges to administrative decisions regarding the removal of a teacher can

change the flow of decision-making power from the principal to the community (Bossert, Dwyer,

Rowan, & Lee, 1982). While a principal's decision to remove a teacher may be supported with

evaluations and paperwork, public outcry from parents and students may influence the final

decision by the school board. It is imperative that a school leader know the "community power

structures" at play in their school district (Griffith, 1999, p. 268).

The existing school culture can have influence on the principal's decision-making

processes with regards to ineffective teachers. The literature shows that organizational climate is

a strong indicator of determining the effectiveness of a school leader (Griffith, 1999). Bossert,

Dwyer, Rowan and Lee (1982) also found that an effective school leader is one who knows their

community power structures. These community power structures could refer to the external

community, or the internal faculty community. In many schools, the community's culture

dictates that most, if not all experienced teachers expect to receive evaluation ratings of

excellence, even if they aren't deserved (Danielson, 2000). Receiving a low score would be

considered a serious affront to their professional status and the culture of the school. The

principal must, then, decide to work against the established past practices and school culture

while working through the process of removing a weak teacher from the ranks. This requires the

knowledge of how to deal with human relations problems, an area in which principals report a

lack of training (Tucker, 1997, Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan & Lee, 1982).

The removal of teachers from a school may also polarize the teaching staff (Tucker,

1997). Some faculty may support the decision to uphold pedagogical standards, while others may

resent the termination of one from their ranks. This divide may result in uncomfortable situations

for the teachers, but also may isolate the principal to a certain extent. The principal must be

prepared to lose some collegial relationships and to repair a negative school climate (Tucker,

1997).

The removal of teachers from classroom can sometimes by inhibited dependent upon

their subject-area specialization. Following Spillane, Halverson and Diamond's (2001) assertion

that decision-making is constrained by the situation in which it takes place, the same holds true

for the teaching situation, particularly when it is a difficult position to fill. School principals may

be less inclined to remove a teacher from a classroom when they know it will be very difficult to

find a replacement. The tendency for this situation to occur happens often for special education

settings, particularly those that deal with behaviorally challenged or emotionally disturbed

students. Finding competent and qualified special education teachers continues to be a challenge

for school districts (Billingsley, 2004). Tissington and Grow (2007), advocates for alternative certification for teachers of children with special needs, found that the teaching area with the highest demand for quality teachers is special education for behavioral disorders. Billingsley's (2004) research supports this claim. Because these positions are so difficult to fill, school principals may be apt to be complacent with any teacher in the role, as opposed to leaving a position unfulfilled.

School personnel must follow the rules for accountability and the mandates set forth by state and federal law and subsequent regulations. While educators work to reform teaching practices, adapt curriculum, and implement programs to address the specific needs of their students, they neglect the one major factor that affects all students, every day. School principals continue to allow incompetent teachers into classrooms, and perpetuate the detrimental effects on student learning. These detriments are far-reaching and all-encompassing. It is in the capacity of the building principal that these damages can be prevented, or at least rectified by making the decision to remove marginal teachers from the classrooms.

To further muddy the waters and make the politics of school leadership more difficult, the role of the principal becomes more confused when they must act as both a leader and a manager, while simultaneously working to build trust with their teachers and develop a rapport (Cooper, Ehrensal & Bromme, 2005). Essentially, the principal needs to wear two hats: one of the supervisor, and one of the servant, while not losing their political power from either end of the spectrum. When it comes to the evaluation of a staff member, principals negotiate carefully; they must impose their will on the teacher to enact improvements and the teacher must accept that the principal's opinion matters more than their own, while attempting to keep a collegial

relationship with room for providing the trust and support a teacher expects (Cooper, Ehrensal & Bromme, 2005).

While any of these social context factors are enough to make the decision-making processes of school principals muddled, particularly when dealing with the difficult task of removing an ineffective teacher, the impact of these factors is strengthened when that principal is a novice. Parkay, Currie and Rhodes (1992) conducted a longitudinal study on twelve individuals brand-new to the principalship. They found novice principals enter their new careers and meet with five different socialization stages as they go through the years: stage 1 is survival, stage 2 is control, stage 3 is stability, stage 4 is educational leadership, and stage 5 is professional actualization (Parkay, Currie, & Rhodes, 1992). Principals do not all move through the same stages within the same allotted time periods; others report missing some stages all-together. Most principals, however, do start in stage 1 (Parkay, Currie, & Rhodes, 1992).

During the first stage, novice principals enter their new careers and are immediately overwhelmed with the daunting size and depths of their tasks. Principals report feeling overwhelmed and insecure in their abilities. At times, they reported feeling inadequate. Some of the principals in the study referred to this period as traumatizing and chaotic (Parkay, Currie & Rhodes, 1992). Making a decision on the performance of a teacher while experiencing feelings of personal inadequacy would seem to be very difficult, and it makes sense that the principal would question their ability to make an accurate assessment in this one area, while concurrently struggling in other areas of their position.

<center>Institutional and Sense-Making Theories</center>

While any of these factors is enough to influence the decision making processes of a school principal, multiple variables from any, or all, of the three frames may interact with one

another to manipulate the decisions referring to incompetent teachers. School principals are

rarely presented with one message regarding teacher performance; instead, they may face a

combination of messages from political factors, social norms, and context, in addition to what

they already know and are willing to do. This combination of factors can be described using

institutional theory. Institutional theory allows us to understand how social and political norms

influence actions and cognition (Coburn, 2001).

Sense-making theory explores how principals take all of the inputs, including

evaluations, observations, political motivations, etc., and then make meaning from that

information (Coburn, 2001). To make sense of a situation, the principal uses their prior

knowledge, as discussed earlier, and fits new information into pre-formed constructs (Coburn,

2001). Possibly more important than prior experiences, sense-making theory proposes that

decision-making is a process that is socially embedded in the contextual environment (Fig. 1)

(Coburn, 2001). While research shows that evaluating teachers is mainly subjective, this theory

suggests that the process of evaluating teachers and acting on those results is subjective

according to person and context. Thus, we can use institutional and sense-making theories to

design a conceptual framework describing how school principals make their decisions on

whether to grant tenure to incompetent teachers.

Figure 1
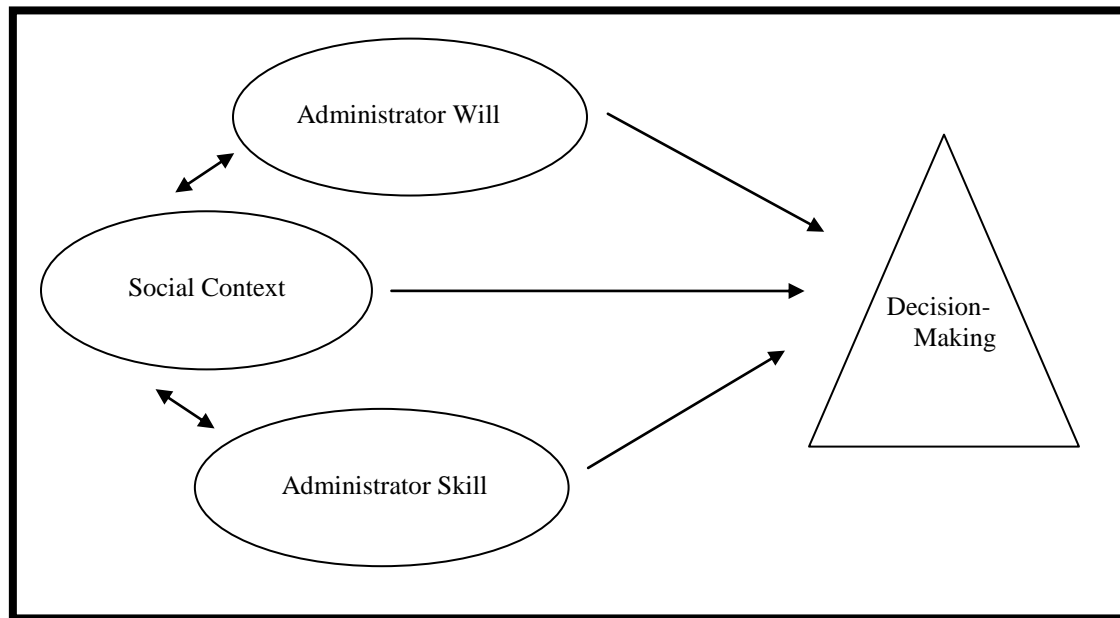
As shown in Figure 1, decision making is influenced by a principal's skill, will and social context; however, social norms, political agents, and current context affect all of the factors as well.

Pilot Study

My pilot study participant sample consisted of two school principals; one was a principal while the other was working as an administrator in their district's central office, but reflected upon their time as a principal for this study. Both participants had extensive experience in public school settings, which was preferable in my study because it is within the public schools that laws regarding teacher evaluation, renewal, and tenure are pertinent. While private school principals make decision regarding the re-hiring of their teachers, most private schools have their own policies based upon renewal, and may not have to offer tenure status to their teachers. Both principals had experience with evaluating teacher efficacy and making the recommendation to

renew or not re-hire teachers based upon their evaluations. Finally, to participate in the study, each participant needed to sign and initial the informed consent form provided (Appendix B).

I obtained my sample of school principals through the process of snowball sampling (Patton, 2002). I had access to a limited number of school principals, and of those, confidentiality made obtaining an interview difficult. Therefore, it worked best for me when I approached the individuals I knew with the question of, "Who would I speak to if I wanted to know about making the difficult decision to grant tenure to a teacher who may not have been strong?"

To study the decision making process of school principals when allowing incompetent teachers to return to their schools during my pilot study, I used a semi-structured interview format (see Appendix A). This format was appropriate because, being a qualitative study, I was able to get answers to complex questions (Slavin, 2007). In addition, the semi-structured interview format was chosen because it allowed participants to describe, in detail, the phenomenon I was studying (Slavin, 2007). The interviews allowed for lengthy responses that had the ability to provide multi-faceted data. This type of data collection also provided me with the ability to create my own themes if necessary (Slavin, 2007). An interview guide was used to ensure that all topics necessary to explore my research question were explored (Patton, 1990). Each participant interview lasted for approximately one hour.

Through these semi-structured interview transcriptions, I looked for evidence to support Kimball and Milanowski's (2009) framework that decisions were made in relation to the domains of will, skill and social context. In addition to these domains, I added a fourth domain during analysis, "other," in case I was able to come across any information that did not fit into one of the previous categories. It was within the four domains that I coded my data. There was

no need to "re-invent the wheel;" I took my coding start list from this existing conceptual

framework, one method suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994). Because I used a priori

coding, the amount of data was greatly reduced; I had a starting point, and was able to weed out

what was not important with more ease than if I had been using deductive coding procedures.

Within these domains, I found evidence of sub-domains. These sub-domains emerged

during coding, helped me to fine-tune my data findings. For instance, under the domain of skills,

I was working under the assumption that a lack of skill would be caused by principal

shortcomings when utilizing evaluation tools, or having been provided too little training and

practice with those tools. I found through my interviews that the amount of time spent on the job

was a factor in the decision making of those principals. While I coded the actual data, however, I

kept to my four main codes, and added in the descriptive codes for finer analysis as marginal

remarks (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

To triangulate my data, I had independent third parties read my transcribed interviews

and tell me what they thought they saw. This falls under Patton's (1990) idea of analyst

triangulation. My readers had been in consistent agreement with what we saw (Miles &

Huberman, 1994). I had my classmates read through my transcribed interviews as well, as a

means of perspective triangulation (Patton, 1990).

Pilot Study Analysis

To analyze my interview data, I transcribed the data myself. I used Microsoft Word 2010

as my word processing program, and played back the interviews at 50% speed. I then read

through the interview transcripts and found noteworthy statements relating to how principals had

said they were making decisions to grant tenure to incompetent teachers, and how they had been

influenced to make these decisions (Creswell, 2007). I coded these statements according to

principal will, skill and social context. To guide the coding, I interpreted the statements with guidance from my literature review that provided examples of what constitutes decisions made based upon will, skill or social context, or a combination of the factors. It was from these coded statements that I began to find recurring themes that indicated the principals' experiences and influences. These themes provided the "essence" of the phenomenological experience of the principals from which a reader can gain a better understanding of the decision-making processes and dilemmas faced by those administrators (Creswell, 2007, p. 62). In addition to transcriptions, I referred to the notes I took during the interview process to clarify any situations (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Results

My research question for this study asked, "How do school principals make the decision to recommend tenure for teachers they recognize to be marginal?" I was looking for the influences on their decision-making process as put forth through the domains of *will*, *skill* and *social context*. In this pilot study, there was not an instance of one particular domain standing out as more influential than the rest. Instead, it seems that will, skill and social context interacted with one another, and influenced the administrative decision-making process on a more complex level. It did seem, however, that participants were less likely to talk about aspects of the *will* domain; they preferred to speak in concrete terms and focus more on *skill* or components that would not indicate a lack of skill on their part, particularly by explaining how they were not trained. The participants also preferred to focus on the social context surrounding the situation.

Also, at no point did either interviewee reveal that they had one, sole reason for acting in the way that they did. Because of these circumstances, it does not make sense to examine the

results based upon distinct domains, rather it would be more informative to compare and contrast

the reasons each participant provided in their interview as an interaction of the three domains

together.

Finally, through the course of the interview I was looking to see if the participants could

provide me with a definition of what constitutes a weak or marginal teacher. While it was not

one of my research questions, I was curious to find out if their interpretations of "weak" or

"marginal" were similar or different.

Pilot Study Findings

Implications for the Researcher

By examining the similarities of the statements provided by the two participants, I began

to see that my coding method was effective. There was evidence of will, skill and social context

all being factors in the process school principals used to decide upon recommending a teacher for

tenure. To date, I have not needed the fourth domain called "other." All of the data at this time

has given me evidence that my framework was appropriate. I also sensed that my approach to the

research questions was on track after analyzing my data. This became apparent by examining all

of the similarities between the two interviews. Both refer to a lack of social capital and being

new to the position as hurdles they encountered while making their decisions. Both participants

also felt that the teacher in question was "nice", but after years of experience, neither participant

felt that being "nice" is enough to overcome mediocre teaching.

Thus far, I have not seen any evidence that a lack of skill, or knowledge about how to do

the job influenced the decision to recommend tenure. The two participants knew the law, knew

procedures, and understood the detriment of having teachers who were unprepared or did not

show up to work. Both also asserted that, although they were not trained in the use of their district's evaluative tool, that it was not a barrier to being able to make a sound decision. It seems that other aspects of skill, such as the proficiency of dealing with social ramifications were the larger hurdle. Conversely, by examining the differences in the statements provided by the pilot study participants, I had evidence that there will not be one clear-cut influence on the decision-making process of school principals. Instead, a complicated interplay of a number of factors seemed to be the basis for the decision outcome on the part of the school principal.

The most pertinent implication for research, thus far, was that more data is needed on the subject. While I could make preliminary assertions based upon what I have found, I had not yet reached a level of saturation by finding repeating trends in data. Nothing conclusive is apparent; it may never become apparent.

Summary

Teacher efficacy has been at the forefront of many research studies looking to improve student outcomes. There are clear definitions provided to tell an evaluator what skills and abilities are necessary for a teacher to be considered effective and successful, and there is also support explaining what is lacking in a teacher considered unsatisfactory. In the middle, the marginal teacher, or the less-effective teacher, is more difficult to pin down with a definition.

To remedy this problem, studies have been conducted to develop frameworks and observation tools to be used by school principals and other administrators to determine which teachers are performing at a satisfactory level and which are performing below a satisfactory level. While it is possible to have as many evaluation tools as schools, many of the observational frameworks in use today are based upon the work of Hunter, Danielson, or Marzano.

To date, there has been little research conducted analyzing the processes and influences that occur when principals make the decision to recommend a marginal teacher for tenure. To examine the decision making processes of principals when making the decision to recommend marginal teachers for tenure, Kimball and Milanowski's (2009) framework for evaluator decision-making was utilized. The researchers examined the decision-making process in accordance to the domains of will, the motivation to act, skill, or the knowledge to know there is a problem, and social context, which explains the macro- or micro-political influences surrounding a situation (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009). To determine which of these domains has the strongest influence upon the decision-making process, a qualitative approach is a necessity. Using the conceptual framework provided by Kimball and Milanowski (2009), case studies can be evaluated to determine the significant factors in the decision-making process. A cross-case study method is used to examine the phenomena in the study while allowing generalizations and idiosyncrasies to become evident (Yin, 2009).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study focused upon examining the decision-making processes that public school principals go through when making the determination to recommend tenure to teachers they deem to be marginal. I used a case study method to examine seven different cases of principals who had worked with teachers who were marginal and tenured, and the processes they went through when making the decision to recommend tenure or dismissal for marginal, but non-tenured teachers. A case study inquiry was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to examine a phenomenon, in this case decision making regarding tenure and marginal teachers, in detail, while taking into account the context in which that phenomenon occurs (Yin, 2009). Through this approach, I was able to utilize an existing conceptual theory to guide my data collection, as well as being able to use multiple sources of data, in this case, participant interviews, to triangulate data (Yin, 2009).

Research Question

What are the decision-making influences on school principals when making the determination to recommend tenure for marginal teachers?

Participant Sampling

For my dissertation research, I found seven participants to allow me to conduct a phenomenological case study (Slavin, 2007). To generate the most pertinent data, principals who recommended tenure to teachers they did not feel truly deserved permanent statuses were sought. Initially for this study, I had planned to interview a minimum of three school principals, with a focus on attaining data from six, to allow for enough data to be accrued for analysis. Fortunately, gaining access to principals who were willing to participate in the study according to my timeline

was less difficult than originally assumed. To better triangulate my data, I made the attempt to seek out more participants to strengthen my research, finalizing my participant pool at seven.

I obtained my sample of school principals through the process of snowball sampling (Patton, 2002). I had access to a limited number of school principals, and of those, confidentiality made obtaining an interview very difficult. It worked best for me when I approached individuals I knew with the question of, "Who would I speak to if I wanted to know about making the difficult decision to grant tenure to a teacher who may not have been strong?"

The participants of this study were given pseudonyms as a measure of protecting anonymity; a requirement of the Rutgers University Institutional Review Board on the Protection of Human Subjects and as part of the informed consent form each participant signed prior to taking part in the study (Appendix B). The participants were anonymous due to the controversial nature of the study, and anonymity was meant to protect the participants (Yin, 2009).

Methods Rationale

To study the decision making process of school principals when allowing marginal teachers to return to their schools, I used a semi-structured interview format (see Appendix A). This format was appropriate because, being a qualitative study, I was able to get answers to complex questions (Slavin, 2007). In addition, the semi-structured interview format was chosen because it allowed participants to describe, in detail, the phenomenon being studied (Slavin, 2007). The interviews allowed for lengthy responses that had the ability to provide multi-faceted data. This type of data collection also provided me with the ability to create my own themes as necessary (Slavin, 2007). An interview guide was used to ensure that all topics necessary to explore my research question were explored (Patton, 1990). Each participant interview lasted for approximately one hour.

The interview questions were piloted during the spring of 2011 on two participants. Piloting my interview questions permitted me to become more comfortable with asking the questions, the flow and ordering of the questions, and to learn where to anticipate follow-up questions being needed. I did not change the format of the questions or the order of the questions based upon the pilot interviews, but I was made more aware of how the interview made participants react emotionally, which allowed me to edit the tone and pacing of my interview to match the needs of the participant.

<div align="center">Benefits and Limitations to the Methodology</div>

There were benefits as well as limitations to this type of data collection. First, this method allowed me to explore areas through conversation, but also provided guidelines to ensure timeliness. Any gaps in the answers provided by the participants were then able to be probed (Patton, 1990). In addition, due to the potential for questions to be highly sensitive in nature, the use of an interview outline provided the opportunity for me to word questions in a non-judgmental manner when I felt that the participant was becoming uncomfortable with the interview topic.

While the strengths of this method outweighed the negatives, there were weaknesses to this method as well. It is possible that some topics were omitted because of the phrasing of interview questions, or because I was not aware enough to ask about them (Patton, 1990). Also, the participant's interpretation of the questions was a potential limitation to the responses provided to me (Patton, 1990). Finally, the participants were informed, in writing and verbally, that at any time they could choose to discontinue their participation in the study. Because of this, the subjects may have provided very rich, pertinent data, but may have then decided to recant their statements at a later time, leaving gaps in data, or removed their entire interview from the

data pool. Fortunately, this was not the case with any participants. One participant agreed to participate in the study, but later chose to decline participation after reading the participant letter (Appendix B).

<div align="center">Data Analysis</div>

I transcribed my interviews myself, noting pauses, differentiating between long and short pauses, and including any other verbal cues the subjects provided. While it may seem fruitless to include this minutia, this method was recommended by Strauss and Corbin's (2008) methodology for examining data on a closer level. Understanding pauses and interjections could have assisted me with fully interpreting the data, as well as help outsiders to make meaning from the transcriptions.

Once the transcriptions were complete, I began the process of coding the data. Coding allowed me to identify the most meaningful information in the data sets so that I could later go back and organize the data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Coffey and Atkinson state that breaking down content into codes aides in making the information more manageable, thus easier to retrieve, organize and interpret.

Throughout the semi-structured interviews, I looked for evidence to support Kimball and Milanowski's (2009) framework that decisions were made in relation to the domains of will, skill and social context. In addition to these domains, I kept the option of using a fourth domain during analysis, "other," if I came across any information that did not fit into one of the previous categories, which did not occur during data analysis. I coded according to the existing conceptual framework, one method suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994).

My codes were clearly defined through my literature review so that they were able to be used and understood dependably by other readers (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Each code had a

specific one- to two-word name for ease of analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The code names

were simply: will, skill, social context (sc), or other. Coding in this manner is considered

"descriptive" coding, because the codes do not require much interpretation on the part of the

reader (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 57). It is important to note that some passages were

constitutive of more than one code at a time. As Coffey and Atkinson (1996) state, data on a

topic is not always found in the same spot for each interview, nor are the codes always found

exclusively throughout the data. At times the codes were mixed together. For instance, skill and

social context may have been coded at the same time.

I used a combination of Microsoft Word and colored highlighters to code my data. This is

the straight-forward type of data analysis described by Miles and Huberman (1994). While

transcribing my interviews, I added in comments, as necessary, with a short description of what

code(s) I saw. Using different colored highlighters, or by adding comments to the transcription

with Microsoft Word, I outlined passages or sections and labeled them with the domains I felt

were shown in the section. I went through this a number of times, and each time I either added

another domain to a passage, or I found an additional passage to highlight. This type of analysis

is consistent with Strauss and Corbin's (2008) chapter regarding microanalysis of data. The

authors proclaim that this type of microscopic analysis "obliges the researcher to examine the

specifics of the data" (p. 65). I was able to dissect the details of my data and analyze those details

as a means of sense-making.

The task of coding is not considered a "mechanistic activity" (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996,

p. 37). As a result of the level of complexity involved in coding, decisions had to be made

regarding codes. To determine which code would be applicable to a certain phrase or passage

during an interview, I relied heavily on my literature review and the domains specified by

Kimball and Milanowski's (2009) research.

When looking for data to support the domain of will, I read for information that discussed

the evaluator's attitudes toward the evaluation process, including level of difficulty, the amount

of time they would spend on an observation, or the amount of energy necessary to conduct a

thorough faculty evaluation. I was also looking for evidence that the participant was taking into

account the difficulties they would face if they tried to recommend non-renewal for the teacher,

as well as the tasks they felt they were forced to go through to remove the teacher. The desire to

avoid conflict with staff, the teacher's association or the school board also indicated that will was

a factor in the decision-making process.

To find evidence of skill, I looked for information regarding training on the use of an

evaluation tool. The level of training or confidence a participant had with their evaluation tool

would have been coded for skill as well. I also coded for skill if an administrator indicated that

they had difficulty identifying a marginal teacher from a highly qualified teacher or an

incompetent teacher, or felt that they had made a mistake with a teacher.

The codes for social context were also based upon the literature review. Decisions that

were made based upon the school culture or community were coded for social context. Also

included in the social context code were evidence of issues of power, whether stemming from

central office administration, the school board, or another principal. The subject of coercive

power, as well as when the participant admitted to taking into account their status in the school,

the district or the community were coded for social context as well. Factors that were external to

the job performance of the staff in question, such as coaching, extra-curricular responsibilities, or

nepotism were all coded as social context.

When working with qualitative studies, Slavin (2007) regards data triangulation as being of the utmost importance. He asserts that conclusions made through one aspect of research need to be supported by other means (Slavin, 2007). I mainly engaged in data triangulation for this study; with the aim of using information from a number or interviews "to corroborate the same fact or phenomenon" (Yin, 2009, p. 116).Yin (2009) asserts that triangulation has been achieved when multiple sources reveal evidence to support the study. Using multiple sources in my case study prevents construct validity from being a limitation to my study as well. Having multiple sources provided more than one account of a phenomenon (Yin, 2009).To further triangulate my data, I had an independent third party read my transcribed interviews and relay their ideas on the passages. This fell under Patton's (1990) idea of analyst triangulation. My reader was in consistent agreement with what they saw in relation to my beliefs about the passages (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

To increase reliability in this study, I maintained a strict chain of evidence, available to readers of this study, as suggested by Yin (2009). The interview protocol is attached to the study (Appendix A), and hard copies of each interview, completing with coding notes, will be available for five years. The transcribed interviews are kept in a secure database, also for five years.

Study Limitations

There were several limitations to my study that must be acknowledged. The conceptual framework of this study provided certain limitations. The conceptual framework for this study was taken from Kimball and Milanowski's (2009) quantitative research, and was applied to my qualitative research. Kimball and Milanowski (2009) found correlations in their data survey that led the researchers to conclude that principals make their decisions mainly within three domains:

will, skill and social context. While these three domains had the strongest influences on teacher

evaluation ratings, due to the nature of quantitative research, the interaction of these domains

upon one another was found, but was not able to be explained in the data. I hoped to overcome

this limitation by examining interview data that explained the interaction of these domains within

each other, instead of as single units.

 Methodologically, there were certain limitations to this study. The semi-structured, open-

ended interview format limits the naturalness of the interview, such as would be found in an

unstructured conversation (Patton, 1990). As an interview, my results may have generated

conclusions that were imprecise because of the nature of qualitative research. Interview results

could have been influenced by the characteristics of the interviewer (Slavin, 2007). A change in

interview setting was also anticipated for each participant, which may have impacted the results

of the interview as well (Slavin, 2007).

 Another limiting factor due to my methodology was in the depth and analysis of the

responses I received from the participants. Some participants in the study may have been

influenced to give less than elaborate answers to interview questions because of the face-to-face

meeting during the interview (Slavin, 2007). Others may have been more inclined to give richer

data. Because I used a semi-structured interview format, the breadth and depth of information I

received differed by participant (Patton, 1990). It was necessary to attempt to create a level of

comfort with the participants that was conducive to allowing all of them to give their most honest

answers; however, some participants were more forthcoming than others.

 Sampling for this study poses another limitation to this study. One area of limitation to

my study was my method of participant sampling. The sampling method was purposeful, not

randomized, because I needed to find participants willing to discuss this topic. Because I also

used snowball sampling to obtain my participants, my sample could not be randomized. This

provided an opportunity for selection bias to skew my data and may have prevented

generalization of my findings (Patton, 1990). In addition, interviewing participants in the

immediate region may also have limited the ability for my results to be generalized (Patton,

1990). All of the participants I interview were within driving distance, meaning they were all

from the New Jersey, New York, or Pennsylvania areas. Different data may have been obtained

in different parts of the country, or even across different states, dependent upon the laws in place

in the individual states for hiring, granting tenure and removing teachers.

The small sample size imposed limitations. Because of the difficulty of finding

participants, my study may not have the breadth of information that might have been found in a

study conducted with twice the number of participants (Patton, 1990). Larger samples could not

have provided the in-depth data that I had hoped to find, and the smaller samples provided

opportunities to receive a more detailed accounting, which supported the purpose of this study

(Patton, 1990).

<div align="center">Role of the Researcher</div>

While interviewing participants for this study, I was aware that my role as a teacher could

have had an effect on what subjects revealed during the interviews. Also, my position as a

teacher could also have affected how I interpreted what they said, both as school administrators

describing their decision-making processes, but also as a self-evaluative look at my own

performance in the classroom. I wanted to make the subjects of my study comfortable during the

interview to ensure the most honest information was given. To keep my participants

comfortable, and as a stipulation of my IRB agreement, I offered to conduct my interviews at any

location and time that made them comfortable, and away from their school districts. I stopped

interviews to allow for interruptions that would typically happen during the administrators' work day, and kept their information and the reason for our meeting confidential. To remain impartial as I interpreted meaning from statements that were made by participants, I re-read transcripts instead of re-listening to recorded interviews. I also had an impartial third party read the statements to ensure that I was in fact remaining neutral to the statements given by the participants. It was also important for me to remember that, although the participants tried to be open and honest, there may have been information that was withheld during the interview either purposefully or accidentally.

As a result of these precautions, most of the study participants seemed to be at ease and provided in-depth interviews describing their experiences and influences when making the determination to recommend tenure for marginal teachers. The participants also seemed to give candid responses to questions pertaining to the influences their peers may have experienced when placed in the same situations.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

In this section, I present the results of the multiple case studies performed. There is a narrative written on each individual case including descriptions of the participants, a brief background of their career, their experiences using teacher evaluation tools, and their experiences with recommending marginal teachers for tenure. Presentation of these profiles provides backdrop knowledge of each participant, and allows for deeper understanding of the study results. A brief analysis of the subjects' decision-making procedures follows. Afterwards, a two-part, cross-case analysis is presented; one analysis on evidence of skill and will as factors in the decision-making process, and one analysis of evidence of social context being a factor in the decision-making processes of the study participants.

Table-Participant Profiles

Subject	Age	Race	Gender	Years in Education	Years as a Principal	Total Years in Administration	Characteristics of School	DFG	Received training for evaluation tool at placement in question?	Recommended a marginal teacher for tenure?
Cher	50-55	Caucasian	Female	30+	19	23	Suburban, Middle-sized school, Mainly middle income with lower income, Growing mix of minorities	F G	Yes	No
Dionne	50-55	Caucasian	Female	30+	9	11	Suburban, Small, Filled to capacity, Primarily white, Growing in population of students of Indian decent, High ESL intake, under 10% special education population	F G	No	Yes
Murray	35-40	Caucasian	Male	9	2	2	Suburban/Rural, Small, mainly middle/lower income, Few minorities, 16% special education population	D E	Yes	No
Tai	55+	Caucasian	Female	30+	1	3	Rural/Suburban, Small, mainly middle/lower income, Few minorities, 16% special education population	D E	Yes/No	No
Christian	45-55	Caucasian	Male	20+	1	12	Urban/Suburban, mainly lower income, many minorities, 20% special education population	A	No	Yes
Travis	45-55	Caucasian	Male	13	4	8	Suburban/Rural, Small, mainly middle/lower income, Few minorities, 17% special education population	D E	Yes	Yes
Amber	45-55	Caucasian	Female	17	7	3	Suburban/Rural, Small, mainly lower income, high percentage of minorities, 20% special education population	B	No	Yes

Cher

Background Information

Cher was a Caucasian female, between 50 and 55 years of age and a former elementary school principal. At the time of the interview, Cher was retired, but still working on a private basis with school principals. She had worked as a school administrator in various roles for over 23 years. Cher worked in a medium-sized, suburban school district with an FG district-factor group rating. New Jersey district-factor group (DFG) ratings indicate the financial capacity of a school district and allow for comparisons of student performance across groups and within groups (New Jersey Department of Education, para.1, 2004). DFGs are based upon a number of variables, including the median family income and local unemployment rate. DFGs are not concrete; they can change over time dependent upon changes in the overall socio-economic status of the district. This school district consisted of mainly middle-income families, but had a growing population of mixed minorities. Less than 15% of her last school's population was receiving special education services.

Cher was asked to describe herself as a school principal. She felt that she was very people-oriented and that it was her responsibility to project an air of calm, even during a crisis. She thought it was essential to sleep on big decisions when it was possible, and try to avoid making snap judgments when she could. Maintaining a stable environment for the students and their families was very important to Cher.

Experience with Evaluation Tools and Training

When asked to describe the training she underwent to begin evaluating teachers, Cher maintained that she had "absolutely no training." Cher began her administrative career in a very small district. She used her own perspective from having been a teacher for over ten years. She

spoke with other school administrators about what they deemed to be priority when conducting

an observation. She took the time to read through other evaluations and to study other forms and

tools used.

Later, Cher moved to a larger district, one with over 40 school administrators. It was here

that she underwent formal training on the use of the district's evaluation tool and took part in

staff development aimed at connecting changes in the models of instruction and the evaluation

tools. When asked if she found this type of professional development helpful, Cher replied that it

was reaffirming; the trainings confirmed that what she had been doing was in the right direction.

During the interview, Cher was asked if she ever had any trouble utilizing a school

district's evaluation tools. She replied that sometimes they were dated. For instance, with such a

state-wide push for using technology in the classroom, she had come across evaluation tools that

did not even address utilizing technology. The same problem occurred when she looked for

evidence of teachers actively engaging students in the classroom. There was no section

specifically describing what this should look like. To compensate for such gaps, Cher worked

these areas into the comments and recommendations sections of evaluations, and then brought

these problems to the attention of other administrators during administrative council meetings.

Making the Decision to Recommend Tenure

During her tenure as a principal, Cher estimated that she recommended tenure for

anywhere between 30 and 50 teachers or related services faculty. She was asked if she had ever

recommended anyone for tenure who she felt was marginal. Cher replied very adamantly that no,

she had *never* done that. She explained that the tenure process was very rigorous after her first

year in the small school district. In the larger district, each candidate needed to have great

evaluations, including one from either the Superintendent or Assistant Superintendent. After the

evaluation process was completed for the year, a round-table discussion took place, during which

the principal had to make a very strong case to get the faculty-member tenure. The process

recognized the high-stakes involved with granting tenure to teacher, and if there was any doubt,

the person was not recommended for tenure. When it was asked of Cher to explain some of the

factors that she looked for when making the decision to recommend tenure for a teacher, she

replied that she mainly looked for structure and organization in the classroom and throughout

lesson plans, in addition to energy and enthusiasm for teaching and the students. Cher also felt

that manner of dress and speaking were important factors in teaching. Cher recalled individuals

who came in for interviews wearing outrageous outfits, or the early childhood educator who

wore very high heels on a daily basis. While she could not formally judge people according to

how they are dressed, she inferred from the way they were dressed that they may not have good

decision-making skills. Cher also stated that it was important that the teachers she hired be

comfortable with asking for help, while maintaining a level of intelligence that should go with

the job. For instance, Cher had a new teacher start as a long-term substitute for a behaviorally

disabled classroom. As a new teacher, asking for help with classroom management made sense.

But when Cher and the director of special services met with this teacher regularly, offering

advice and help to get control of her classroom, this teacher could not make the changes

necessary. This teacher was unable to manage the duties of the job and was asked to leave.

Cher described a situation she had faced when she had recommended a teacher for tenure,

but then felt she was wrong for doing so. She had hired two teachers at the same time; both out

of college and new to teaching, and both worked within the same department. While both were

strong individuals, she felt the teacher in question was the stronger leader of the two. As it turned

out, shortly after he received tenure, things seemed to fall apart. Cher remembered that he started

coming in late and would miss duty assignments. She also recalled that, while it was not

pertinent to job performance, the teacher's physical appearance started to deteriorate. At the

annual holiday party, in addition to other staff get-togethers, he would drink too much. Soon

after, this teacher became inappropriate with a student-teacher in the building. This caused the

teacher to be suspended without pay for three days. Although Cher felt that once you make a

decision about a teacher, you had to live with it as a principal, the superintendent felt differently

and had this teacher transferred to another school.

Cher was asked about people she did not recommend for tenure and why she made those

decisions. As an example of how detrimental the decision to recommend tenure for an unfit

teacher could be, Cher discussed a teacher she had hired and had worked under her for two years.

She had good references and had experience in the early childhood position for which she was

hired. After those two years, the teacher was transferred to another building because the program

had changed. It was here that another administrator recommended this teacher for tenure. The

teacher wanted to teach at a higher grade level, and was transferred to yet another building, and

back under the charge of Cher. It was then that Cher realized how "incredibly mean" this teacher

was to the students. The staff reported to Cher that they did not like her, and the students came to

her and reported behavior that was unprofessional. Because this teacher had tenure, Cher felt she

had her for the long haul. She tried to make this teacher a basic skills teacher, with the hopes that

she would be less likely to terrorize students if she was not with them throughout the entire day.

Cher reported that as a result of this change in teaching assignment, the teacher "spread her

meanness wherever she travelled during the day." Parents and co-teachers continued to complain

about this teacher's behavior. One day, a parent came to Cher with a print-out from Facebook

that showed this teacher bragging on-line about making a student cry and some other things she

had done to the students. Cher sighed and said, "Even though I technically didn't give her tenure, I hired her, and so she was one of my career disappointments."

Cher also shared the story of another teacher she would not recommend for tenure. She had hired a new teacher for 4th grade. Cher explained that it was typical for new teachers to have difficulty with pacing when creating lesson plans. This teacher, however, could not seem to grasp the pacing concept throughout the year. Cher would regularly meet with the teacher to go over plans, and though plans were due every two weeks, she had this teacher show her the plans on a weekly basis. After two years in the position, this teacher showed no growth in the area, and Cher did not renew her contract.

Another teacher not recommended for tenure was working in a preschool disabled classroom, and she seemed to rely heavily on the paraprofessionals to do the planning and the instruction. When Cher would come into the classroom to observe, it always seemed to be playtime. The teacher was asked to set up portfolios for the students' work, and she refused to do so. Another example that the teacher's behavior was misaligned with the characteristics of a strong teacher was evident when the teacher was asked to move a chair out of the way of the number-line so that the students could see it, and she refused. Cher wrote in her final evaluation for the year that this teacher did not seem to be a good match for the school, and then cited all of the recommendations she had given that were not followed through with. The teacher signed her evaluation and turned in a rebuttal that Cher remembered clearly: "She didn't understand why this happened because she did implement all of the recommendations with which she agreed."

Cher said that any of the marginal teachers who received tenure in her building were inherited, particularly during restructuring in the district. When schools were undergoing change, such as gaining or losing an entire grade level, Cher would ask the superintendent of her school

if there were any people up for tenure coming in that year. Her feelings on the subject were that

she should have been able to go to their present location, observe them and do one of their

evaluations. She was not comfortable relying solely on her colleagues' decisions in this matter,

even though they were all professional and shared her same philosophies. This situation arose

with one teacher who she was going to inherit the next year; Cher observed him and wrote him a

negative evaluation after observing his class. His time management skills were very poor, as

evidenced by giving a spelling test for 30 full minutes of an announced observation, and then

followed up the spelling test with a vocabulary test that took twice as long. He had very long

lesson plans for that day, but very boring, and he did not cover most of the material he had

planned on. The current principal was shocked at her report. Cher told him, "Look, I'm not

saying he's not a nice guy, he seems very friendly, the kids seem to like him, but I don't want

this guy coming to my building." It ended with this teacher being transferred to another school

building to teach in a study skills program. He did get tenure, but Cher felt justified in what she

did by going on record against this teacher and advocating for her building and students. Asked

if she would have taken the same actions as a novice administrator, Cher said no, she would not

have acted in the same manner because she was new and the superintendent worked in a very

political manner. This particular situation occurred after 10 years in the position, and she felt

much more comfortable with taking these actions now that she was more familiar with her

superintendent and her position as principal.

Cher wanted to make sure that, while there were negative examples of teachers in her

narrative, that some marginal teachers improved dramatically when working towards tenure. She

related one example of a young male teacher who struggled through his first two years. Cher's

gut instinct in most cases was, "After two years, I will let you go," but in this case, she gave this

teacher a third year, but sent him on to his summer with a warning. She explained to the teacher that he really had to improve himself to find himself renewed after the upcoming school year. Cher did not know exactly what happened over the summer, but he came back as a strong educational leader, and became one of the best teachers in her school. When questioned as to why she decided to give this teacher an additional year, Cher explained that he was not like the other teachers she had not renewed. He had the will; when she met with him he always wanted to do a good job, but he was lacking in skill. The others had seemed to have no real will to improve. That was the difference that caused Cher to give this teacher one more chance.

Analysis of Cher's Decision-Making Process

Through an analysis of how Cher made her decisions to recommend tenure, it seems that skill was a large component. At the beginning of her career as a principal, Cher relied mainly on what she knew to be good teaching practices from her past history and through studying best practices in college. Although she originally was not given formal training on conducting evaluations in her first school district, she was given extensive training and staff development once she moved to a new, larger school district. She noted that when curricular models were changed, the administrators of the district were given training in these areas so that they would know what to look for while evaluating teacher performance.

Cher further discussed her skills with recognizing marginal teachers when she discussed the incident with the teacher working in a behaviorally challenged class. She met with the teacher repeatedly to attempt to help this teacher rectify the situation and teach her class. Another example of Cher's skills with recognizing underperforming teachers was evident during the discussion regarding a 4th grade teacher who required help to plan and pace frequently. Cher had put her on a weekly lesson plan review versus the norm of a bi-weekly review. She made

suggestions and followed up regularly, although the teacher did not follow through with the

plans Cher had put forth. In the end, Cher's skills helped her identify two teachers who were not

going to be able to rise above the level of "marginal", and she recommended they not be re-hired

the next year. Thus, while skill was a strong factor in Cher's decision-making model, it was a

strength that helped her make the decision to not renew marginal teachers.

Supporting the domain of social context as a factor in her decision-making, Cher

described the incident when she did not want a particular non-tenured teacher placed in her

school. When probed further, Cher had indicated that, were she not a novice principal, she

would not have spoken up against a decision to move this teacher to her school because of the

political ties her first superintendent had throughout the school district and the community. She

also indicated that she was afraid that there would be an air of negativity amongst her staff and

parents if word got out that she was blocking a fellow teacher.

Cher admitted during the interview that social context was a factor throughout the hiring

process. When receiving resumes for open positions, some resumes would be marked "must-

see," indicating that they were the relative or friend of someone within the district. Sometimes

the must-see was the daughter of a state assemblyman or senator. There were also "must-sees"

based on ethnic diversity to meet affirmative action requirements. That stated, Cher said that she,

unlike other principals of the district, was never given a "must-hire." The other principals would

ask about this, and Cher assumed that it was because the superintendent was politically savvy

and realized that Cher had a lot of experience from other school districts, and lived in town,

whereas most of her colleagues did not have both of those variables factoring into their histories.

While she stressed that she could not be certain, Cher thought that may have been why the

superintendent did not direct the political hire toward her, and instead sent them to be interviewed for positions in other schools within the district.

In summation, Cher was a Caucasian female working as a principal in a middle socio-economic status school district. Cher reported never recommending a marginal teacher for tenure. Her accounts describe evaluator skill and social context as integral influences when she would make the decision to re-new or let go of a marginal teacher. She described a lack of training in evaluating teacher performance early in her career, followed by extensive training once she moved to the larger school district she discussed here, but maintained that the trainings reinforced what she had already been doing. Social context was certainly the strongest factor when Cher made her decisions. When looking for candidates, she would specifically look for men or individuals of varied ethnicities. Cher would also hire for specific positions, particularly special education positions which tend to be difficult to staff. She also admitted to interviewing "must-sees" or people with political connections to the town or district.

<p style="text-align:center">Dionne</p>

Background

Dionne was a Caucasian female between 50 and 55 years of age. Dionne was a principal at an elementary school. She was in her 11th year as a school administrator at the time of the interview, with nine years of experience as a principal and two as an assistant principal. Prior to becoming a school administrator, Dionne was an elementary school teacher. Dionne worked in a school district with an FG district-factor group rating, indicating low instances of poverty within the school district. The school had mostly Caucasian students with an influx of students of Indian decent. The school was also home-base for the elementary ESL program, lending itself to be

more diverse than other elementary schools within the district. In addition, the school had less

than 10% of its population receiving special education services.

When asked to describe herself as a principal, Dionne felt her primary role was that of a

coach to the teachers. She stated, "I try to make sure that everybody gets what they need....not

only do people have the materials, but they might need staff development or they might need

information or they might need to be connected (to other teachers)." Her main focus was to help

the people who worked with her to do their jobs to the best of their abilities.

Experience with Evaluation Tools and Training

Dionne had been formally evaluating teacher performance for 11 years. She had a staff of

over 40 teachers, and three quarters of those teachers she hired or recommended for tenure

during her time in this school. When asked about teachers she has had the opportunity to

recommend for tenure, more have been recommended than not.

Dionne discussed her history with training in reference to writing teacher evaluations.

She received formal training while going through school administrator classes at a university.

Dionne said that, as a new assistant principal, she received teacher portfolio training, and training

in peer coaching behaviors via Hunterism. Dionne also stated that she worked with great

administrators and had a very strong mentor during her first years as an assistant principal. As a

Covey trainer, based upon the book, *Seven Habits of Highly Successful People*, by Steven Covey,

Dionne's mentor taught her how to get people to go in the direction she wanted them to, and how

to support those people in reaching their goals. However, when she began her first job as a

principal in her current district, Dionne did not recall receiving formal training from that school

district. She remembered that the year before there were a lot of administrators hired and they

went through an extensive training, in addition to discussions about the district changing their

evaluative tool to focus on teacher portfolios, whereas she did not receive the same opportunity.

Making the Decision to Recommend Tenure

Dionne reported that she was very uncomfortable with placing a label on teachers who

were under-performing. She did not like to call them "incompetent" or "marginal" during the

beginning of the interview, but for ease of discussion, she did fall into using the terms when they

were applicable. When asked, Dionne described a marginal teacher as compared to Danielson's

book *Enhancing Instructional Practice*. Dionne would give her first- and second-year teachers a

copy of this book to clarify their role and the expectations placed upon their performance.

According to Dionne, she felt that any teacher she hired was put through a rigorous interview

process, including a thorough reference check, and finally had to successfully demonstrate

lessons. Most importantly, Dionne believed that when she had hired anyone to be a teacher, their

heart was in the right place; they wanted to do what was best for children. She felt that those

teachers who were problematic were hired by others, and she had adopted them either by moving

into a school where they were already working or transferred from another school. Dionne

described problematic teachers as being unable to adjust to the minor aspects of the job. She

stated that an incompetent teacher was one, who, with assistance, still had difficulty with lesson

planning or classroom management. She understood that a first year teacher was going to go

through a "learning curve," and will not have "a huge toolbox or bag of tricks up their sleeve to

get their job done" as a 30-year veteran. Dionne described a problematic teacher as one who had

difficulty when they: "come out of an intellectual environment of a college and says, 'Well, I

know how to teach literacy, …. or math, or inferential science' but getting that to happen with

the children who are physically in front of them, and doing the planning and talking to parents

and doing report cards." She believed that an incompetent teacher would stand out within the first couple weeks of school.

With that belief, though, Dionne understood that a teacher in this predicament was going to need a lot of coaching while in the classroom and outside of the classroom. She did not believe that incompetency was permanent; rather, she asserted that there were occasions when novice teachers were not taught all of the skills they needed to be successful while they were in college. However, Dionne noted that there were differences between the incompetent teacher, who had not had enough exposure, versus one who was simply marginal. Dionne felt that a lot of times weak teachers had the ability to improve, if they had a passion for teaching, they were bright, and they were inquisitive. She also felt it is important that the teacher is willing to ask for, and receive help from other teachers around them, and be a good team player. According to Dionne, an incompetent teacher is one who is a danger to the students. A marginal teacher is one who did not reach the level of excellence she expected in her school.

Dionne discussed a time when she recommended a marginal teacher for tenure. When she recommended this teacher, it was because she was new to the district and did not have all of the information she needed to truly make such a decision. Dionne posited, "being a novice worked against me." She felt that her first few years as a principal were a struggle, particularly because she had not built "the bridges" with personnel that she currently has. These bridges, which Dionne referred to as the "informal information highway" allowed her to get information on the people in her building, and therefore conduct her own investigations to determine if there was a problem in a classroom or with a given professional.

Dionne explained that the teacher in question was given a non-renewal notice at the end of the previous year. This teacher had packed up her classroom and was ready to leave. While

she was not sure of the details, Dionne recalled that this teacher showed her observations and

evaluations for the past two years to a building union representative. That representative went to

the superintendent, who then looked at the paperwork and did not understand why this teacher

was being let go. This teacher was given a third year by the superintendent.

It was at this point that Dionne was hired by the school district as a first-year principal.

She explained this time as "trial by fire;" thrown into the situation without her "informal

information highway," and leading a school. Dionne described the situation metaphorically,

equating this time to riding a motorcycle for the first time, without a lesson and no helmet, and

speeding down a highway, hanging on for dear life. To compensate for being such a novice, she

scheduled observations, complete with pre- and post-observation conferences. She admitted that

she did not conduct as many informal observations as she does now, possibly because of being

overwhelmed at the start of her career. Prior to Dionne's arrival, the former principal would pop-

in, write up what they observed during a lesson, and then leave a write-up in the teachers'

mailboxes for them to sign. Dionne believed in a more hands-on approach, but this was not well-

received by the staff. Dionne also explained that she did not have a transition period with the

former principal. She believed that principal had left under tenuous circumstances. All that she

knew was that the superintendent had made it clear when he hired Dionne that he wanted things

done differently, not the way they had always occurred. When Dionne observed and evaluated

the marginal teacher in question, she saw a happy teacher who seemed to care about children.

The teacher was working in a different capacity than they had during the previous year.

Towards the end of the year, during an administrative council-type meeting, a district

supervisor told Dionne that he had met with the former principal outside of school. This former

principal asked that supervisor to inform Dionne that she should not recommend this teacher for

tenure. The supervisor announced this in front of the superintendent and many district

administrators. She recalled feeling very angry and put on the spot at this time. Had the former

principal contacted Dionne and had a sit-down with her, she believed that things would have

been different, however, this conversation between the principal and the supervisor happened in

a supermarket, and the information was presented at an administrative meeting. This left a bad

feeling with Dionne, who wanted to rely on her own judgment. In addition, the superintendent

informed Dionne that there was no reason to let this teacher go at this point anyway, since all of

her past evaluations were adequate. Although Dionne realized now that prior to tenure, teachers

are employed provisionally, and in hindsight understood that this particular superintendent was

"gun-shy" when it came to the union or critical parents, at the time she agreed with

superintendent because his order was aligned with what she had planned.

The teacher received tenure. And the first year, Dionne continued to support this teacher

and work with her like any other. It was two or three years later, though, that Dionne finally

made connections with her "informal information highway." At this point, teachers started to

come to her with complaints that indicated this teacher was either lacking in intelligence, or was

highly manipulative and good at getting others to do her job for her.

At this point in the interview, Dionne became very wary of giving me more details. The

teacher in question was still employed in the district at the time of this interview. However, she

mentioned that she discovered that, before an announced observation, this teacher was coached

by four or five other teachers. Also, during unannounced, informal observations (that Dionne

admitted started a bit later in her career) she saw this teacher change her attitude and persona,

suddenly becoming more enthusiastic and smiling. When she would leave, though, she would

hear this teacher start yelling again, "I told you to sit down!" Dionne felt that the students would

look to her as if to say, "Please don't leave us!" Dionne also alluded to a general lack of preparation; she stated that there were problems with walking in unannounced and this teacher did not having lesson plans prepared.

When asked what she took away from this situation, Dionne said that she learned to stand up to her superintendent if she truly wanted to get rid of someone she didn't feel was extraordinary. Now that she felt more secure with her position, Dionne wished she could have relived that moment with the supervisor again and said to him, "You know what? Thank you, but at the same time, YOU should have been in that classroom observing that person, putting paper on this person if you felt in your gut that that person wasn't good. Don't say to me after you've had no responsibility all year long that YOU need to let that teacher go."

Dionne said that this situation was a thorn in her side every day. This teacher was regularly late, or had no lesson plans. This marginal teacher had been put into a teaming situation currently, but Dionne recognized that this was not a solution to the problem. In a prior small-group teaching situation, Dionne found this teacher in the hallways when she was supposed to be teaching in class. She wrote disciplinary referrals on this person as she would any other teacher, however, if it was a similar situation involving a teacher who was consistently on target and had a bad day, she usually gave them another chance. She stressed that, while this can happen, she would be back in that person's classroom four or five times to make sure they were on point in the future. Because of this situation, Dionne now documented everything. Every time a staff member was late, every walk-through evaluation, all were written down and filed, with an accompanying memo sent to the staff member.

Analysis of Dionne's Decision-Making Process

Skill was not a major influence upon Dionne's decision to recommend tenure for a marginal teacher. Like Cher, Dionne did not receive much formal training when she first became a supervisor in a school district. She was trained in the use of teacher portfolios, but never used this training. However, when she transferred districts and became a principal, she had very intensive, formal training in the use of the evaluation tools and peer coaching. At no point during the interview did Dionne question her ability to recognize good teaching or to differentiate between strong and marginal pedagogy. In fact, she was very secure in her ability, and cited professional development provided by the Covey trainer who mentored Dionne early on in her career. Because of this training, she felt very secure in her ability to support a staff and get them to do what she wanted them to do. Because of this training, Dionne believed that she "had good people skills coming in" to the school.

While *will* played a small part in Dionne's decision-making processes, social context was the strongest factor in shaping her decisions. As a first-year principal, Dionne was unaware of the existing culture and climate of her new school, limiting her knowledge of the school's social context, which ultimately led her to make the decision to recommend tenure for a marginal teacher. Dionne stated that when this happened it was, "my first year as a principal, here's this third year teacher, this lack of information from the informal network…" Dionne was given information by administrators who were privy to such informal but crucial knowledge; however, in a way that made Dionne want to do what she thought was the right thing at the time. The negative comments, and being put on the spot at a meeting, made Dionne determined to make her own decision about the faculty member in question, indicating that *will* was involved.

In summation, Dionne was a Caucasian female principal who was very heavily influenced in her decision-making processes by social context factors, particularly because she

was a first-year principal at the time. Dionne did not feel that skill was a mitigating factor in her decision-making; she was confident she knew good teaching from mediocre to bad teaching. Will was not a factor either; she knew she only wanted the best faculty with her. Instead, social context influences played the largest role in swaying her actions.

Murray

Background

Murray was a Caucasian male and the youngest participant in this study, between 35 and 40 years old. Murray was also the newest school administrator interviewed. He had over ten years of experience in education, but only the last two had been in the capacity of assistant principal. When asked to describe his current school and district, Murray took a different tack than the other participants. He explained them in terms of climate; reporting that his school was one where the teachers cared more about their students than the subjects they teach. This, he explained, was in contrast to other schools in the district and other schools that he had worked in, where he said the climate and culture were so different that you could feel the difference in the school within ten minutes of being there. Murray worked in a school district with DE district-factor group rating. It was a small, suburban district with almost 16% of its population requiring special services. The majority of students in the district were Caucasian.

Murray was asked to describe himself as an administrator. Murray explained that he liked to take everything case-by-case, but cautioned that this did not mean his discipline policies were wildly inconsistent. Instead, he explained that in this position, he becomes privy to certain bits of information that may change the way a discipline problem is viewed. Murray believed in backing

his teachers and supporting them with their issues in the classroom to ensure that learning can

take place in every classroom, every day.

Murray was then asked to describe himself as an administrator in relation to the teachers.

He still felt that each situation needed to be taken on a case-by-case basis, while acknowledging

that he was dealing with adults who were supposed to be professionals. He added that there were

some teachers who had built up "major collateral" with the front office. He explained that

sometimes someone had a bad day, or their child became sick, and for the people who had the

collateral, he was more likely to tell those teachers to take care of their needs. Murray felt it was

a two-way street that benefitted both parties. He said, "It isn't so black and white. Because if

there's a sick kid I'm not saying hey, take .25 of a sick day, because you know, I'm building

collateral as well, and any administrator would be." He cautioned that he had heard of situations

when the staff abused the collateral, such as by leaving early every Friday.

Experience with Evaluation Tools and Training

When asked about teacher evaluations, Murray had been conducting them for two years.

He was never trained to do teacher evaluations in his current district. He had conducted a

practice evaluation during his internship, and as a teacher he had been evaluated numerous times.

Instead of a formal training, the superintendent de-briefed Murray on how he wanted the

observations to be conducted. For instance, the superintendent explained what he wanted Murray

to detail in the recommendations section or the description section of teacher evaluations. The

superintendent also gave Murray tips on staying out of trouble. For example, the superintendent

recommended to Murray that he should stay focused upon stating only observable facts. Murray

was told to ensure that his recommendations for teacher improvement were related to the

description of what was observed during the evaluation. Additionally, the superintendent stressed

that basic grammar and spelling were extremely important when writing teaching evaluations. Murray was also advised to always sign documents in blue ink, which would prevent any situation where a teacher might accuse the administrator of changing an evaluation document at a later date. He described the meeting with the superintendent as, "It wasn't, 'This is how we're gonna improve instruction.' It was, 'Here's how I'm gonna save your ass from litigation.'" While the district did not offer formal training for conducting teacher evaluations, Murray was able to rely upon his years as a teacher, his classes in graduate school, and the methods that he intuitively felt made up a good lesson.

Murray felt that the evaluation tool he was using in his district had room for improvement. His document used both narrative and box-checking. He appreciated the narrative section, because it allowed for enough of a description of the teaching methods he observed. The boxes that corresponded with standards only had three levels for evaluation: Meets Standards, Needs Improvement, or Not Applicable. Murray felt there were other levels between the two. The criteria could have been more descriptive than what was given.

Making the Decision to Recommend Tenure

When asked about taking part in conversations to recommend teachers for tenure, Murray mentioned that he was always part of a round-table discussion. The round-table discussions included the superintendent, district directors, principals and assistant principals. Attendance was mandatory. Although it was accepted during the discussion that the school principal had the ultimate say, there was plenty of time for discussion about each candidate. There was always a push by central office administrators to bring marginal teachers to light early on, and not to wait until the last day of the last year to announce that they were not fit to continue in the district.

Murray also discussed the superintendent's need for a paper trail when a teacher did not seem to be proficient.

On the topic of teacher tenure, Murray was asked if there had ever been a time when a teacher was recommended for tenure that was not great. Murray was technical with his point that there were great teachers, but acknowledged there were also teachers who are great at some things. He felt that, "we put people up for tenure sometimes that aren't great teachers but they might be spot on for something, you know?" Murray said that, "what it all boils down to is what is good for kids; it's a solid no for someone who is harmful to children, or if doubt creeps into your mind when considering them." Murray considered though, that there are teachers who were great in some areas, and weak in others, but they remained good for the organization as a whole. That said, Murray stressed that student achievement had to be the main priority for the teacher, and when teachers followed that basic premise, they typically would receive tenure.

Murray realized that a teacher who may be struggling had to be recognized early on, and needed to be worked with. He felt that if a poor teacher slipped through the cracks with no remediation, it was the fault of the administration. If a novice teacher was average or below average during their first year, and did not show any improvement with remediation by year three, Murray believed he was to blame for that. He stated that he feels the teachers' growth was the responsibility of the school administrators. Murray also looked at other factors. If the teacher had shown no growth after the first year, whether they were average or above average, Murray asked himself, "Is this person coachable? Is this person so set in their ways that they aren't going to listen to the things [we] have to say?" Murray preferred a teacher who showed development and a willingness to change over someone who stagnated and did not embrace change.

When directly asked if there were any major influential factors in his decision-making process regarding recommending tenure for teachers Murray was most focused on the question of, "Is this person good for students?" Murray admitted that being a new administrator was a factor in his decision-making. He felt that the teachers would look at him differently if he recommended that a teacher not receive tenure at this point in his career. He would be more comfortable making that decision with upwards of 10 or 15 years in the position, but with only two years of experience, he felt his decision would be questioned. It was not only the perception of the other teachers that he was worried about, but also those of the parents and the community as a whole that he feared. While Murray believed his paperwork would be in order and that there was no doubting that the teacher in question was not good for children, he understood how individuals' perceptions of him would change for the worse.

Analysis of Murray's Decision-Making Process

Murray indicated that the majority of his decision-making process involved examining the social context in which he was working. The largest influence was based upon how long he had been in the position of principal and how comfortable he would be making the decision with more years of experience in this capacity. Murray stated that his decision would be questioned as a new principal or one who was new to a school, whereas his decision would be more widely accepted were he a veteran principal or had worked in his district at length prior to obtaining this position.

These feelings are supported by Tucker's (1997) work that reported that principals may feel backlash from teachers who are resentful at the thought of having one of their own ranks let go. She found that personality characteristics, such as when individuals are uncomfortable with confrontation, can act as a deterrent to taking action to remove a marginal teacher (Tucker, 1997;

Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan & Lee, 1982). Murray understood that marginal teachers can have a negative effect on the students, but he also realized that decisions that need to be made are not always easy. As determined by Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2001), the role of school leadership becomes much more complicated when people and their feelings are involved.

In summation, Murray was a Caucasian male and was the newest principal interviewed in this study. Murray fully believed that social context influences are the strongest factors when making the decision to re-new or let go of a marginal teacher. Murray also felt that being a novice principal, and the social-contextual factors, such as a fear of backlash from the faculty, which go along with this status, was the over-arching reason why a marginal teacher would be renewed.

Christian

Background

Christian was the first participant interviewed. He was very forthcoming and reflective in his responses. Christian was a Caucasian male between the ages of 50 and 55 years old. At the time of this interview, Christian had over 30 years of educational experience, more than 10 of which were in the capacity of school administration. At the time of this interview, Christian was working as a central office administrator, but reflected upon his past as well. He had started off as a special education teacher, and then worked his way through various administrative positions. For this interview, Christian reflected upon his current district which had a District Factor Group rating of "A" in addition to past places of employment.

Experience with Evaluation Tools and Training

Regarding training with the district's evaluation tool, Christian did not feel he really had any training at all. He explained that it was a straight-forward, check-off-the-box document, with very little area for adding narrative comments. The document gave choices of either the evaluator having seen evidence of the teaching behavior in the classroom, or not having seen that item during the observation.

Christian was asked about any difficulties he had using this district's evaluation tool. He stated that one of the most pertinent problems occurred when he was trying to fit the instructional criteria onto faculty trained to be counselors or working in positions that were not teachers. He considered it doing the best he could "to fit the circle in the square" so that the evaluation would make sense.

At the time of this interview, the district was working to rectify this issue in some way. The evaluative tool they were working on was based on Danielson's work (2000). When the tool was being developed for use, Christian partnered with the high school principal, and then worked with the teacher's association to establish a guiding set of principles regarding what they felt was good teaching. They then incorporated Danielson's model into their ideas on teacher supervision. Christian stated that a long part of the process was through the negotiation of words. The document needed to represent the teachers, principals, custodians, teaching assistants and related services. They decided it would be best to break into sub-committees and create rubrics for each of the categories, while simultaneously leaving common themes intact. The common threads included punctuality and preparedness, attendance and work ethic.

Making the Decision to Recommend Tenure

Christian was asked to describe what he felt a marginal teacher was. First, he required clarification on the term "marginal." He asked, "Marginal passable or marginal bad?" and was given the option. Christian's first response was, "You'd know it when you see it." His second statement was more intuitive; he felt that over the course of his career he was able to determine very quickly who cared for children. However, he emphasized, "Here's the thing. If you can really, really care about kids, but if you can't teach, then I don't want you in the classroom." Christian discussed how teaching is actually a very complicated profession. He referenced the works of Danielson and spoke about the rubrics she created to describe strong pedagogy, a welcoming classroom environment, and proper planning and preparation. Christian felt that a strong teacher could put all of these pieces together, in addition to connecting with their students. Christian pointed out that if he asked a teacher, "What's the point?" regarding a lesson, and the teacher gave you nothing, then you knew there was a problem.

As the educational leader, Christian wanted his expectations to be very clear to all of the staff that he oversaw in his school or district. Christian described a scenario with a physical education teacher where he asked, "What's the point?" Christian had met with this physical education teacher during a pre-observation, and asked him what new learning would be going on during the lesson. The students were learning about handball and they would be playing team handball at the end of the unit. Christian asked what skills the students would be learning, and what strategies they would learn as a result of being in the class that day. The gym teacher could not give an answer. Christian and teacher discussed the types of questions he would be asking, and they determined the questions were very low-level; mostly recall questions. Christian encouraged the teacher to try to ask more "why" questions, such as, "Why is it better to throw this way?" or "Why is it easier to score a goal when you are looking at the net versus from the

side of the net?" The teacher was also planning on using an exit ticket with the students, because he had heard that Christian liked to see that sort thing at the end of the class. Exit tickets are similar to mini-quizzes that teachers administer prior to students leaving the classroom. It allows the teacher and the student to assess what learning had taken place during that time and to further reflect on what changes or review may be necessary to re-teach a concept. While using an exit ticket was a good teaching practice, the teacher did not really ask deep-thinking questions; again they were recall questions. Together, they re-worked the exit ticket to make it applicable to the lesson, encourage higher-order thinking, and have the students work together on a task. This scenario addressed Christian's concerns that a teacher needed to give attention to the "so what?" of a lesson.

Returning to the concept of what Christian felt constituted a marginal teacher, he explained that good lesson design was expected from teachers, and he stressed that marginal teachers do not do this. Christian also explained that marginal teachers tended to have poor communication with parents, and they also had the tendency to give assessments that were less than informative. He explained that the tests and quizzes he had seen given by marginal teachers were not connected to the objective of the lesson, and were oftentimes very focused on recalling information, instead of synthesizing the information.

Christian divulged that at his current administrative level, he did not typically observe 1st or 2nd year teachers anymore. Instead, he participated in the final round that most teachers needed to advance through to get their recommendation for tenure. Christian stressed that when another principal or supervisor does not feel that a 1st or 2nd year teacher should be renewed, he liked to be called to observe that teacher as well. At times he would do an informal walk-through, but he also acknowledged that it made the new teachers nervous when he came in. They

understood that if a central office administrator was coming to watch them, there must be a problem.

During the course of his tenure as a school administrator, Christian recommended tenure for over 50 teachers. He was asked if he had ever struggled with the decision to recommend tenure for one of them, and he admitted that he had. During his first administrative job, Christian was working in both the capacity of a teacher and a supervisor of other teachers. He was new to the school, and to the position, but he remembered struggling with the new routine of being in a new school, whereas the teachers there were very accustomed to their established roles and routines. He remembered one teacher who he knew truly loved the students, however, when Christian observed her, he noticed that she was very disorganized in her planning and with her delivery of instruction. This was the teacher's third year, and she was going to receive tenure in the fall. Christian said his gut instinct was to not recommend tenure, but he was uncomfortable. He went and spoke to the building principal about this teacher; the principal didn't force him to give a good recommendation, but did not stop him from doing so, either. He told Christian he could do what he needed to do. He was a very hands-off principal, and he was retiring that year. Christian also spent a lot of time discussing this decision with the Assistant Principal. He personally liked this teacher as well, and was very focused on supporting her work with Emotionally Disturbed students. He defended the teacher's short-comings as alternative pedagogy that was appropriate for teaching Emotionally Disturbed students. He felt that in such a classroom, alternative teaching practices were necessary. Christian didn't feel she needed to become more traditional with her teaching, but he did feel she was lacking in her focus on any academics in the class.

Christian lamented that he felt this woman was a very nice person, and at the same time,

he was fearful of backlash from the other staff members. He felt badly about his decision, but he

made the recommendation for tenure. She was tenured on the first day of school the next year.

This was not a decision that rested quietly with Christian. He felt that, as a new

administrator, he was hopeful that he could have made this recommendation work. He could

have worked with her, and hopefully in the end helped her. Christian stated, "I was wrong. I'd

never do it again. Doubt means don't. Those are my words. So if I have any doubt whatsoever, I

don't do it."

During this interview, Christian said he felt like he had made this decision that morning,

even though it had been twelve years ago. He remembered struggling with the decision, sitting at

his desk making a chart weighing the pros and cons of his decision. He remembered that above

all, he really liked her as a person, and that outweighed her pedagogical weaknesses. Christian

said he was a person who, when he makes a decision, he sticks with it. He wrote the

recommendation memo, and for a little while, he was happy that he made someone else happy.

Christian spoke about the outcomes of this decision. First and foremost, Christian felt he

learned a lesson. He has been reflecting on this decision for over a decade; and while at the time

it seemed like the right decision, he now knows that it is never the right decision to make an

adult happy. The most important factor was to determine what is good for kids.

Christian also reflected upon the fiscal aspects of this decision. This was a young teacher;

maybe in her mid-20's at the time. Given his decision, that school district will pay that teacher

close to a million dollars, or more, over the course of her career if she chooses to stay in that

school until retirement. Christian observed that he made a million dollar decision, and he hoped

that since he had left that district, she had gotten better. Otherwise, that was a lot of money to waste.

When asked if Christian had to deal with any fall-out from his decision directly, he did not. Soon after making this decision, he accepted another administrative position in a different district. Christian claimed that he also felt plagued by this decision; he was not around to live with the decision he made-to fix it or deal with its consequences. This teacher became someone else's proverbial headache. He regretted that he did not see this decision through to the end.

As a result of this experience, Christian has made a number of very difficult decisions in his career, but he does not regret them. While it was a hard move to make, it was never personal. When Christian did not feel that a teacher was good for kids, he let them go. Christian recommended that no school administrator, no matter what level, ever become friends with their staff. He says it is very difficult to be a friend and a supervisor.

Christian also recommended that anyone pursuing school administration have high expectations; high expectations for themselves, their staff, and for the students. He felt that any tenure decision should never be a surprise. Christian was very blunt when he said, "If you are supervising somebody for three years, and you can't figure out in three years that they're not a good fit, or they're not effective in the classroom, then you know, where the hell have you been for three years?" The evaluating supervisors should have honest communication with their staff, be present in the classrooms of their staff, and always keep in mind that they need to make the hard decisions to keep the best interests of the students in focus.

Analysis of Christian's Decision-Making Process

Christian did not feel that skill played a major role in his decision-making process. While he does not feel he was adequately trained to use his district's evaluation tool at the time he made

the decision to recommend tenure for a marginal teacher, he was able to contrast a quality teacher in comparison to a marginal teacher. He also had little difficulty with using the evaluation tool; the most pertinent problem occurred when he was attempting to fit non-instructional staff evaluations into a document designed to address teachers.

Social context played a large part in Christian's decision to recommend tenure for a marginal teacher. He was brand new to the school, and the teacher in question was in her third year. He felt that she was "a very nice person" and was very fearful of how her non-renewal would affect his relationship with the other staff, indicating that the micropolitics of the school culture played a key role in his decision making, supported by Griffith's (1999) research indicating that the effectiveness of a school leader relies upon the organizational climate of the school. Christian was also worried about losing collegial relationships that he was working on establishing during his short time in the position, in alignment with Tucker's (1997) findings.

At the time of this decision, Christian had only been working in an administrative capacity for a year. When he made the decision, he truly felt he could work with the teacher and make the situation viable. What he did not realize, though, was that he would leave the district to take another position in another school district at the end of the year. He stated with regret, "I made this decision and I don't have to live with it. I can go and she was going to be someone else's problem… When I think about it now, I say, 'wow' you know? I didn't even see that through."

In summary, Christian was a Caucasian male who made the decision to re-new a marginal teacher as a novice principal. His primary influence were related to the social context of the situation; he was new, the teacher had been in the school longer than he had, and Christian feared a backlash from the faculty if she was let go.

Tai

Tai was the least forthcoming of all of the participants. She seemed very uncomfortable

discussing the subject matter at hand, even though she had agreed to the interview and

understood that she could choose to end the interview or recant her statements at any time.

Background

Tai was a Caucasian woman between the ages of 50 and 55 years old. At the time of this

interview, Tai had worked in public education for over 35 years. She began as a special

education teacher across all grade levels, and then worked as a part of the child study team. The

three prior to this interview were in the administrative capacity. She had always worked in the

same school district; one with a district factor group rating that has increased from a B to a DE

during her tenure. The district has less than 17% of its population receiving special services, and

is almost 100% Caucasian.

Experience with Evaluation Tools and Training

Tai immediately started evaluating teacher performance in the classroom. When asked if

she felt she was trained to use the district's evaluative tools, she replied both yes and no. The

administrative team worked together to develop the tool, and they then met with a trainer from

the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association. This trainer had the group focus upon

what evaluative principles they valued most and how these specifically applied to the instrument

they were developing. However, she did not receive formal training with the tool.

Tai's biggest concern with evaluating teacher performance was the lack of district

administrators available to conduct the requisite number of observations. In the last year, Tai

conducted 73 observations herself, including those for teachers, child study team members,

related service providers, office staff, and paraprofessionals. Often, administrators need to

observe staff from other buildings and across disciplines, some of which they may not be familiar with.

Making the Decision to Recommend Tenure

At the time of this interview, Tai had been involved with the decision-making process for ten teachers to receive tenure. While Tai would not discuss how she felt about their performance, she did say that, due to budgetary restraints, three of those staff members had to be non-renewed. She was vague on the details, and said that, had the situation been different, those three may have been recommended for tenure. She did not feel that she had been put into a position to recommend tenure for any who were marginal, however, when asked how the decision was made for which teachers would not be re-hired, she would not comment.

Tai talked about some factors that might influence her decisions regarding weak teachers. She felt that it became quickly apparent if a teacher was marginal. She also felt that it is the responsibility of the supervisor to facilitate the improvement of instruction and achievement of students. She asserted that it was their responsibility to work with the talents and skills of this teacher, and to enhance incremental development on the part of that teacher. According to Tai, it is the responsibility of the supervisor to follow up with that staff member and ensure that they have what they need to perform, whether it be additional resources, professional development, or regular meetings and discussions with their administrators. Tai said that she hoped that if all of these measures were followed through with, that at the end of the third year there would be no question as to whether a person should receive tenure.

Tai was asked to consider the important outcomes that could result from recommending tenure for those who were marginal. Tai stressed that, "If it **were** to happen that someone who was marginal were granted tenure, personally, I would have to reflect about my own

competencies." She went on, "If it were to happen, (pause) my thoughts would go toward the students. This particular staff member may not be prepared to give them the very best. I would continue to work with this staff…"

Tai did not seem open to the idea that a marginal teacher could ever receive tenure. She continued to deny the possibility when asked if a decision to recommend tenure for a marginal teacher would be supported by the district. She replied that it could not happen because several administrators evaluate each staff member. "Given this approach to supervision, several people would have observed and evaluated and worked with this staff member," Tai explained. She completed the interview by stating it was very difficult to answer these questions.

Analysis of Tai's Decision-Making Process

Tai believed that the reason marginal teachers receive tenure has to do with the skill of the administrator. Tai reported that if an ineffective teacher she had been supervising received tenure, she would need to examine her own abilities as an administrator. She spoke about the supports that should be given to ineffective teachers, and how these supports rest on the shoulders of the administrators, and put no onus upon the teachers themselves. Teachers needed to be given resources, checked up on, and met with repeatedly. I speculate that Tai's views, however, were more closely aligned with Kimball and Milanowski's (2009) description of evaluator "will."

To summarize, Tai was a Caucasian female who attributed the decision to keep a marginal teacher all to evaluator skill. Though she denied ever making the decision to do so herself, Tai felt that any administrator who willingly renewed a marginal teacher did not have the skills to know how to work with that teacher to facilitate improvement or recognize that the teacher was in need.

Amber

Amber was the most difficult subject to interview. She answered very tersely and

directly, and while she was not purposely evasive, she did not seem to value giving detail to her

answers.

Background

Amber was a Caucasian female between 50 and 55 years of age. She had over 25 years of

experience in education, with the last 15 being in an administrative capacity. At the time of the

interview, she worked as the director of curriculum and instruction in her school district. She had

also worked in the capacity of educational supervisor, vice principal, principal and athletic

director. She worked in a school district with a district factor group rating of B. The district had a

very high poverty level and a high percentage of students requiring special services. While the

student population was diverse, the teaching staff were mainly Caucasian. At the time of this

interview, Amber confided that the district had not been able to hire new staff in over a year due

to budget cuts.

Experience with Evaluation Tools and Training

Amber had been evaluating teacher performance for 17 years. Although Amber's district

was piloting an evaluation tool inspired by Marzano's (2007) works, they were evaluating

instruction based upon Madeline's Hunter's (1984) work. Marzano's teacher evaluation model is

based upon four domains similar to the Charlotte Danielson model. The difference, however, is

that the Marzano model focuses one domain on reflective instructional practice, while the

Danielson model focuses upon the classroom environment (Marzano Research Laboratory, 2011,

p. 1). Amber was provided very little training on the use of the district evaluative tools, mostly

because they were forms with check-boxes and a small section for narrative commentary. Most

of the training she underwent came from her graduate classes when she was getting her

administrative certifications.

When asked about any problems she may have had using the evaluative tools, Amber felt

that they were very straight-forward, but they left too much room for subjectivity. She felt that

responses would be different dependent upon who the observer was, though there was no

direction on the form. Amber felt she always used certain criteria; however, she was very vague

about what these criteria were. When prodded, Amber admitted that historically, there had not

been a strong practice of collaboration or comparing and contrasting observation forms. Instead,

the process was more of a checks-and-balances, procedural tasks. She said that now, though,

with the newly imposed teacher evaluation system, this process would be improved.

Making the Decision to Recommend Tenure

During her administrative career, Amber had recommended tenure for up to 15 teachers.

She confessed that in her position, Amber typically observed a non-tenured teacher once in their

three years. When asked if there had ever been a time when she had recommended tenure for a

teacher who she deemed marginal, Amber replied, "Maybe one or two." When she was asked to

describe the situations, Amber sighed with a very long hesitation.

Amber started her story by stating that, had past practice not demanded a consensus when

recommending tenure, she might not have made the decision she did. Amber wanted to stop here,

but she added that she felt the teacher was too much of a traditionalist. She was a lecturer, and

did not work collaboratively with other teachers. She was described as, "a teacher on the stage,

rather than a facilitator." This was a special education teacher, working in the capacity of teacher

for students with emotional disturbances. Amber felt that this teacher was uncomfortable in this

position. At this same time, the district was going through budget cuts, and the administrators

needed to make non-renewal determinations based upon evaluation performance and "other

circumstances." Amber said she did not want to keep this teacher, but there were other

administrators who disagreed. When probed, Amber confessed that there was political pressure

with this particular teacher. The other building administrator had been new the previous year,

and was non-tenured in his position. He had been forced to make staffing cuts because of fiscal

constraints that year. Amber reported that these cuts were poorly received among the staff, and

there was backlash. She also felt that the position itself was a difficult one to fill; most teachers

who were capable of teaching a class like this one were also highly qualified in multiple subject

areas, making them valuable within the school district and easy to move around as needed.

Amber was asked if she had ever recommended that a teacher not receive tenure, and had

her recommendation dismissed by central office administration. She answered that this had never

happened. She has been successful with letting people go prior to their tenure year. She alluded

to some issues teachers of the past may have had, such as working collegially with others or a

failure to show growth through the school years, however, she was avoiding other reasons. When

pressed, Amber divulged that there were a number of teachers let go due to drug-related

problems in that school district. When asked if this was a common occurrence, Amber specified,

"We've had MANY, well, several here." She disclosed that the offenses happened outside of

school.

When Amber has had to make the decision to recommend tenure for a teacher, she looked

first to that teacher's character and their ability to relate to students. She felt that content can be

learned, but it was the teacher's personality and character that needed to come pre-set. When

asked to describe the ideal "character" of a strong teacher, Amber felt it was that teacher's ability to separate friendship from being a teacher, and their ability to be a positive role model.

Following these guidelines, Amber also indicated that she felt there were teachers she was currently working with who "absolutely" never should have been granted tenure, although she was not part of the decision-making process. She felt that an important outcome from these decisions was that the administrators and supervisors responsible for these decisions have to do a better job at conducting objective evaluations, and then following the appropriate protocol if they are found to be ineffective educators. This included follow up visits and providing coaching techniques to get them teaching at a higher level. If these measures fail, and the teacher cannot meet the requirements set forth by the district, those teachers needed to be let go.

When probed further about the processes that shaped the decisions of her colleagues to recommend tenure for marginal teachers, Amber felt that they either did not do enough observations to make an accurate decision, or they did not want to be involved in the decision in the first place. When asked how often this situation happens, Amber indicated that "NOW it happens rarely," and admitted that in the past it happened more. Amber wanted to stop this part of the interview, indicating that there were issues surrounding the superintendency, and these problems were in the past. She did say that more than one superintendent felt that if there was not enough support in paperwork to suggest non-renewal, then the teacher would be granted tenure. Amber stated, "In other words, tenure was assumed unless you had damning evidence that it wasn't."

Further, Amber discussed how at certain times in her career, if the teacher in question was under the jurisdiction of another supervisor, no matter how strongly she felt against a teacher, it was that supervisor's decision. This statement contradicted Amber's earlier assertion

that her tenure recommendations were not discounted by other school administrators. This situation occurred most when the circumstances revolved around recommending tenure for teachers with dual roles as sports coaches, particularly at the high school level. Amber was asked pointedly if she felt that a teacher who was not very good, but had a role in sports was ever granted tenure. Amber replied that this absolutely occurred in her past. When pressed further to determine how far into the extra-curricular realm this occurred, it turned out that it was a very frequent occurrence with coaching staff, and less so with other extra-curricular areas such as in the arts. Asked why she thought this was so, Amber replied, "…remember my experience as an athletic director; athletics is a very large part of the school system. And especially if you are in a community where athletics is valued. Um, it will trump textbooks." Amber felt it was often a political move to keep the community happy.

Analysis of Amber's Decision-Making Process

Skill was not a factor that had a major effect upon Amber's decision-making processes. As with the majority of the other participants, Amber received very little training on the district evaluation tools, but she received training in her graduate school classes. She did not feel that there was much difficulty in use of the tools and that they were very "straightforward;" however she did mention that subjectivity across evaluators could be a factor when the principal looks at all of the data to make their determination to renew or not renew a teacher. Amber felt she knew what strong teaching looked like.

An analysis of Amber's decision-making process when making the determination to recommend tenure for teachers seems to be based upon a number of social-context issues. To begin, Amber referred to "past practice" in her district dictating that a consensus amongst administrators was needed to recommend tenure or deny tenure. The general tone in the school

district was that an abundance of evidence must be entered to deny tenure, and even then, tenure may still be granted.

The fear of backlash by teachers and the community was a reality in Amber's school district, deterring school principals further from making the decision to deny tenure. When a teacher was denied in the past, community backlash, teacher backlash, as well as negativity from the superintendent all occurred when a colleague of Amber's made their decision. Griffith's (1999) research on power struggles with the community supports this fear, as well as work done by Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan and Lee (1982).

Moreover, Amber admitted that those teachers with strong ties to the community, usually through extra-curricular activities, are less likely to be let go than a teacher not involved in extra activities. An involvement in sports seemed to be the proverbial "get out of jail free" card in Amber's district, and she, too, admitted to playing a part in this.

In summation, Amber was a Caucasian female in a small school district. She attributed her decision to renew a marginal teacher, and that of her peers, to social context influences. Unlike some of the other participants, Amber felt that whether the principal was novice or veteran did not matter as much as the fear of backlash from the upper administration, faculty and community if the decision to remove a teacher was made.

Travis

In stark contrast to Amber, Travis was forthcoming with his answers during the interview. He was focused on defining "the marginal teacher," and was fascinated that there was no literature that can, definitively, make that definition. Travis was very sports-oriented, having been a coach for many years, and alluded to athletics quite often in his short, but informative interview.

Background

Travis was a high school principal. Travis had been a principal for 4 ½ years, and prior to that he was a vice principal for close to 4 years. Before entering administration, Travis was a business education teacher and the dean of students, as well as working as a coach for one of the district's high-profile sports teams. Travis had been in the same school district for over 11 years. He was working towards his doctoral degree at the time of this interview.

Travis's school district was a DE district. He notes that this district has undergone changes, shifting the district from a CD to a DE in the past few years. His high school had nearly 550 enrolled students. Athletically, the school was a group I school. While the district was not very diverse racially or socio-economically, this has been changing throughout the duration of Travis's tenure. He managed a staff of around 65 faculty and staff in a district that employed nearly 200.

When asked to describe himself as an administrator, Travis said he is "a collaborative decision-maker." He tried to make every decision with students in mind first. Travis admitted that this could be difficult. He spoke about some classes he had taken, and also about messages he received from administration in the central office. The basic premise was to value certain stakeholders, including the board of education, parents, central office administrators, and the needs of the community. The students were rarely in the forefront. While he spoke about this, he became passionate when explaining how he can accomplish this ideal; "But I really want to know, how does it impact the students and instructional capacity in the classroom now?" He felt that if an administrator or a teacher can advocate to him in that way, he will advocate for them and get them what they need to be successful. Conversely, if a request cannot be supported by

stating how it will benefit the students, or a student, Travis was more likely to deny a request or research it further.

Travis also reported that he is transparent; he does not like to keep his motives a secret from his staff. He preferred, instead, to have his staff be aware of the direction in which he was heading, so that they would trust him and be willing to make the changes necessary to meet the goals of any reform initiatives he may implement.

Travis reflected upon his time as a novice principal, and recalled that he thought he wanted to be a "transformational type leader, like what you learn in your administrative classes…" He went on to say, "and that's real big and deep, but I think I support my staff by trying to run interference to upper administration for them to do their job better in the classroom."

Experience with Evaluation Tools and Training

Travis had been formally evaluating teacher performance for 8 years. He was trained to evaluate teachers using the Understanding By Design Model by Wiggins and McTighe, the Danielson model by Charlotte Danielson, and then using a hybrid evaluation tool developed by the teacher's union. Travis was being re-trained in the Danielson model utilizing a format called Teachscape, following the directive given by the state of NJ for EE4NJ. Teachscape is an on-online observation and assessment tool. It allows school principals and administrators to observe videos that exhibit evidence of the Danielson domains as practiced in model classrooms, and then compare this information to what they see when assessing their teachers (Danielson, 2011). Asked about being on his fourth model in eight years, Travis attributed these changes to a high turn-over in superintendents and curriculum directors in his district.

Asked to speak about difficulties with evaluation tools, Travis went in a different

direction from the other candidates to begin. The observation tools Travis had experience with

have longer or shorter narrative sections for each domain being evaluated. Some, he reported, are

more labor intensive than others, which could be a major burden when you do 65 or more each

year. In addition, Travis reported doing hundreds of informal observations, ranging in time from

4 minutes to 25 minutes per session. He felt he could recognize good teaching and student

engagement immediately. He used a lot of this information to complete staff annual reviews,

which Travis felt offered more information than one snapshot he received from a formal

observation, in addition to the labor-intensive writing which included correcting for time-slots

and transitions during the observation period.

Travis was asked if he had experienced any other problems using the district's evaluation

tools, and his main problem was, "I don't like doing formal evaluations, period. I think the most

important stuff comes out of real, open and honest post-observation discussions…" He added,

"It's you and I talking about how the student was engaged, or why you don't try this" that he felt

was more important. Travis believed it was most important for teachers to trust him as the

building principal. If they did not trust him, they would not feel free to try new things, and

instead they would feel like his observations were an "I gotcha!" moment. He went on to say,

"What happens with formal observations, I believe as an administrator, is they are always an 'I

gotcha' to those marginal or below marginal teachers" which Travis felt could keep them from

improving by trying new things.

Travis didn't formally document what he saw during an informal observation or walk-

through, but he would jot himself a note. Later, he would email the teacher dependent upon what

he saw. It could have been anything from, "I saw this. I loved it. I want you to share that at the

next faculty meeting," or "I stopped in and saw this. It was great, but I noticed I haven't seen you use technology, "or "I saw this student in the back; is everything ok?" Other times he stopped in during lunch or even in the hallway for a brief discussion on what he saw, perhaps regarding a student or curriculum pacing. Travis said that this gave him a better understanding of where the school stood curricular-wise and regarding culture and climate. He also stated that a lot of times he wasn't going in to see the teacher per se, but he was more interested in the student make-up of a classroom or to see what students were taking. Occasionally he noted that "frequent fliers" were sent to the office for behavioral difficulties and he was interested to see the classroom and who else was taking that class. It is for these reasons that Travis placed higher value upon informal observations in lieu of formal evaluations.

Making the Decision to Recommend Tenure

Travis has had the opportunity to recommend tenure for over two dozen teachers and professional staff during his administrative career as both a vice principal and a principal. He admitted that there had been a circumstance when he recommended a marginal faculty member for tenure. This same staff member was originally recommended for non-renewal, but Travis was not given the support he needed, and was therefore forced to change his decision. Travis was a first-year principal, and was given information from the previous principal regarding this staff member. Travis did not want this information; instead he wanted to form his own opinion. He claimed, "I didn't want to be soured." He was able to form his own opinion during the course of the school year. Travis spoke to his superintendent about this individual and was told, "If you feel you can do better, then do not recommend him." This particular superintendent, however, left after that year. Travis decided to give this teacher another year to grow and improve. When it was apparent that things were not getting better, he went to speak to central office. Travis was

told by his subsequent superintendent that, "…short of any egregious documented activities, you gotta take the whole package. Can you work with them further?"

Travis reflected upon the questions and asked, "What is marginal? Is the concept of marginal 'Is it as high as it can be, or can I do better?' or is it, 'You know, they are improving, or showing improvement'?" Travis preferred to use the definition of a teacher or staff member showing improvement.

Travis continued back to the discussion on the teacher in question. He did have documentation on this faculty member, but because he was not with the person the whole three years, he felt he was at a disadvantage and did not have as much as he needed. He feels there is a politics game involved. Travis felt that he was coerced from the beginning by the former principal and former superintendent to sever ties with this teacher, even though he did not have all of the evidence. Being a novice, he did not quite understand the politics involved regarding co-curricular activities, either. This person was also involved in co-curricular activities, some of which board members' children were taking part in.

Travis did not make this decision alone. He remembered being indecisive; unsure if his decision was based on the staff's merit and ability, or based upon the information he was given walking into the situation. Aligned with Travis' assertion that he preferred to work collaboratively, he brought in the other district administrators who had observed him through the years to ask their opinions. He had seven administrators including the vice principal, athletic director, supervisor of special services and the director of curriculum and instruction. He asked them how they felt about this staff member's performance, and whether they thought he should receive tenure. All but one felt the teacher should not have been recommended for tenure.

Travis felt vindicated. He wrote a letter to the staff person telling them they would not be renewed, and met with him personally before giving him the letter. It was the hour before the board of education meeting when the non-renewal would be publicly approved. The superintendent approached Travis and told him there was not enough documentation to support a non-renewal of this faculty member, and that this situation would head towards a Donaldson hearing. A Donaldson hearing is held when a non-renewed teacher requests an informal meeting before the school board during a closed-session meeting. The faculty member uses this meeting as an attempt to convince the board that they should retain their position. The board then makes a decision regarding the faculty member's employment, and informs them in writing (N.J.S.A. 18a: 27-4.1).

Travis recalled his frustration; outside of evaluation documentation of performance, there was also documentation of a theft of funds. Travis states they were, "small funds, but very much documented." Travis did not know what to do at this point, and felt backed into a corner. He said that when he feels that way, he has two choices, and one of them is to fight.

Travis held to his decision, and was quickly approaching a Donaldson hearing. The superintendent wanted to avoid a hearing, and informed Travis that this person would be placed on an improvement plan, and they would defer tenure. They were able to do this based upon a technicality; the original hire was for a maternity leave coverage position, and it did not officially count toward tenure. This gave the district three more months at the beginning of the next school year to see improvement from this staff member.

Travis took this opportunity to document the employee very closely. "Of course," Travis stated, "this person was more diligent in his capacity." He was recommended for, and received tenure after the three-month waiting period. Travis says that since this incident the staff member

is doing an above-average job, however, "If I had my druthers, if I had been in the principalship longer, and I had a little more support up top, I would NOT renew this person." He said he had never been more upset with someone who was his superior before. He had been told what to do, and that the outcome would be to remove this person from the district, and after doing what he was told, he was "put under the bus." When an explanation had to be given to the board of education describing the change in recommendation, the superintendent told them during executive session, "Oh, it's the principal's recommendation" followed by Travis going in front of the board and justifying himself.

Travis said he learned a lot about politics and community politics from this experience. He learned that, no matter what he reads or was taught in his administrative classes, politics do play a role, and faculty participation in extra-curriculars do play a role.

Analysis of Travis's Decision-Making Process

Similar to the reports of Murray and Christian, Travis felt that he made his administrative decisions based upon students first. Their outcomes and experiences were most important.

Consistent with Kimball and Milanowski's (2009) research upon the decision-making practices of school administrators, Travis made a lot of his decisions based upon intuition. He relied more heavily upon informal walk-throughs than upon formal observations when determining whether a teacher is effective or marginal. His decision-making was done throughout the school year, and was focused on numerous decision points, not one main point of focus, such as a formal observation or end of the year evaluation (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009).

In summation, Travis was a Caucasian male new to the principalship. He attributed his decision to renewing a marginal teacher to his status as a novice principal and a lack of support from central office administration. He did not point his decision to *will*; in fact he was very

motivated to work with this teacher, and once it was clear there would be no improvement, to

remove him. Travis felt skill played a small part in his decision-making process; however, rather

than referring to skill as in recognizing a marginal teacher as his influence, it was a lack of

political skill as related to social context that had an influence upon his decision.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

To summarize this chapter, each of the participants' interviews was analyzed to

determine the influences that were part of their decision-making processes with regards to

recommending tenure for marginal teachers. Throughout the cases, participants revealed distinct

situations that forced them to make the choice between renewal and non-renewal for the

teachers; nevertheless, trends did emerge. The majority of principals who acknowledged that

they recommended a marginal teacher for tenure did so due to influences related to the social

context frame. Will also played a part in the decision-making process, but to a lesser degree.

Skill, particularly the ability to recognize a marginal teacher, was not a factor in any of the cases.

Utilizing these findings, an analysis across cases will allow for an in-depth examination and

cross examination of the themes in relation to the conceptual framework based upon the research

of Kimball and Milanowski (2009).

CHAPTER V

CROSS-CASE COMPARISONS

This chapter provides a cross-case comparison of the data from Chapter IV. In this chapter, the data were evaluated to determine the decision-making influences upon the principals when they made the decision to recommend tenure for marginal teachers. The cases were examined and compared within the context of the conceptual framework based upon Kimball and Milanowski's (2009) research that looked at the influences upon decision-making that affect school administrators.

Below, the responses of the participants have been grouped according to how they were coded. Responses were coded according to Kimball and Milanowski's (2009) framework indicating that will, skill and social context are the three domains of administrative decision-making. Some statements refer to more than one code, and thus have been included in more than one table. Following the data tables, an analysis of the participants' statements in relation to each of these domains is provided.

Table 1
Evidence of Evaluator Will

Subject	Evidence
Cher	"…there were times when I would bring that to the attention at an administrators council meeting or bring it to the assistant superintendent of personnel… there was nothing in the evaluation instrument addressing the use of technology to either actively engage students or support the instruction or help plan the instruction or research the instruction or anything..."
	"No matter how many times I would meet with her, and talk about it, and um, sit with her, in fact I put her on, I used to review plan books every two weeks, and I put her on a weekly plan review."
	(speaking of a teacher being accused of unprofessional conduct) "I will be looking into this. It's not something I can do in a day, it may take me a week to interview people and so forth…"
Dionne	"Direct observation and frequent direct observation is extremely important… As the biggest part of your job. And that being said, that continues to be a challenge."
	"I try to go through each week looking for one particular thing."
	"He didn't hire me because I was going to do things the way they were done around here. I was gonna do them differently."
	"Ok. The very last meeting that the superintendent has with the principals before that end of April date where you have to say you have it or you don't have it, a supervisor starts telling me that he met up with the former principal in Shoprite or somewhere, and he said she said I shouldn't be giving her tenure. So, I thought that was the most bizarre conversation you could have in Shoprite. But he's dressing me down in front of the superintendent and other principals by saying what I've seen from this teacher is inaccurate based on this conversation he's having with the former principal. Now, the principal would have taken the time to have a conversation with me, which did not do and apparently wasn't welcome to do, because I think there was bad blood when she left. So I was really upset and angry. I was professional but I was angry that this person would question my judgment. And, me being the personality that I am, I dug in my heels. And the superintendent basically told me there was no way I was going to be able to let this teacher go anyway, because there wasn't good paper on her. You know, we're going back to the year before."
	"So I did. And so I supported this teacher, and I actually went to bat a couple of times."

Table 1

Evidence of Evaluator Will

Subject	Evidence
Murray	"And stuff like that and there has to be reasons why and there has to be a paper trail as to why and there as to be, it has to be um, you know, tightened up from that area."
	"I keep going back to is this good for the school, good for the organization, but that really is it. That really is it. The kids have to be learning and the kids have to be safe."
	"Either way you've got to get your paperwork set."
	"That teacher should have an idea that there was a corrective action plan in place."
Christian	"And then, I am one of these people that when I make a decision, I make a decision, and I don't look back."
	"So for me, I asked that her tenure be deferred. I would have liked to have the year to evaluate her and make my own decision."
	"Well, here's the thing. If you can really really care about kids, but if you can't teach, then I don't want you in the classroom."
	"And I want my expectations to be clear."
Travis	"Different evaluation tools have longer narratives or descriptors for each domain, and we changed, probably have done three or four now over the 8 years I've been an administrator here, and um, some of them are more labor intensive than others. Um, you know, I do hundreds of informal you know, walk-through, that range anywhere from four minutes to maybe twenty to twenty-five minutes, and I can recognize good teaching and student engagement immediately. And I use a lot of that information in my summative or APRs. But, when you do a snapshot formal observation, um, I think the hardest thing for me, um, the narrative and the labor-intensive it does to writing it down, and correcting different time slots and transitions."
	"I did have documentation. Probably not as much as I needed."
	"As a non-tenured principal, I did not want to do this."
Amber	(asked about bringing teaching gaps to the teacher's attention) "It has been in the past. I think there is definitely more attention, I would say, in the past two years. And it's not an easy thing to do."
	(asked what do you think was a factor in decision-making) "The path of least resistance."

Table 2

Evidence of Evaluator Skill

Subject	Evidence
Cher	"When I first started evaluating teachers, I had no training. I did it on my own perspective having been a teacher of 11 years. I remember asking the current administrators that I was working with for the kinds of things they looked for and what they thought were priorities. I read a lot of forms and evaluations."
	"Then I moved into a much more sophisticated, larger district… so there was a lot of staff development for us. And when we changed our model of instruction, there was a lot of attention given to how would that connect with special area teachers."
	"I probably recommended somewhere between 30 and 50 (teachers) in my career."
	(speaking of an inadequate teacher) "I mean, we went to her with help, um, more than her coming to us."
	"No matter how many times I would meet with her, and talk about it, and um, sit with her, in fact I put her on, I used to review plan books every two weeks, and I put her on a weekly plan review."
Dionne	"With regard to using any administrative tool to do evaluations, I honestly don't recall before I started any training."
	"I was an aspiring administrator, so I was taught to do observations and evaluations and practiced that in my schooling at Rider."
	"I think I've hired nearly every person. I've hired 3/4 of the people that are currently working in the school and I've got 40-some teachers."
	"I'm experienced much further now than I was as my first year as a principal. So in these years of principalling, I have gained many tools, many from this district as well as on my own learning about what I can see whether a teachers effective or not."
	"I feel like I am much more confident in my knowledge of what a teacher does or doesn't do."
	"…and that's why he hired me. Based on my experience."

Table 2

Evidence of Evaluator Skill

Subject	Evidence
Murray	"…but that formal piece, and, and anything I took from how to observe I took from just the teaching methods that I learned. You know? Like, um, any classes I took in special ed and how the brain works and the books I read and you know, THOSE are the things that I took to what a good lesson looks like. So I think that carried me a whole lot.
	"And stuff like that and there has to be reasons why and there has to be a paper trail as to why and there as to be, it has to be um, you know, tightened up from that area."
	"Either way you've got to get your paperwork set."
Tai	"As an administrator, we worked together to develop the tool, and then we met with a trainer from NJPSA to talk about evaluation principles and how they specifically apply to the instrument we are currently using."
	"I believe that if a staff member is marginal it quickly becomes apparent."
	"If it were to happen that someone who was marginal were granted tenure, personally, I would have to reflect about my own competencies."

Table 2
Evidence of Evaluator Skill

Subject	Evidence
Christian	(asked how he describes a marginal teacher) "You'd know it when you'd see it, right?"
	"My training as a clinical observer came from the books that I read. So I read Danielson, I read you know, I knew how as a teacher I knew when I got good observations or when I didn't get good observations, so I knew that."
	"It was trial by fire."
	"Over the course of the years I've been able to have this like, weird radar or (pause) who cares about kids. And who doesn't."
	(asked how many teachers he has evaluated for tenure) "Over 13 years or so as in an advisory role, and oh my God, it's got to be over 50."
	"If you are supervising somebody for three years, and you can't figure out in three years that they're not a good fit, or they're not effective in the classroom, then you know, where the hell have you been for three years, right?"
Amber	"Well, there was very little training from the school districts per se, because most of the um, most of the evaluation forms are narrative with criteria, so in terms of formal training from the district, relatively none. Most of the training came from obviously your graduate programs and what you took to get your certifications."
	"You better have done your job in the observation to recommend NOT giving tenure."

Table 3

Evidence of Evaluator Social Context

Subject	Evidence
Cher	"So, we hire someone for a behaviorally disabled class, which is a challenge."
	(When asked if Cher would tell her superiors that she did not want a certain teacher in her school) "Not with the superintendent who was there when I first got there, because he was very political. Um, I was there about 10-11 years when I did that. And it was with a superintendent that I respected a lot."
	(When asked about hiring practices) "I would say that for sure when I was looking at resumes I would scan through, you know, when you look at elementary resumes, you're looking at hundreds. And I would scan through them for men. Definitely. And people that I thought would be ethnic."
	"You mean must-sees? Um, you know, sometimes it was real obvious like you'd get somebody who was like a state senator or state assemblyman's daughter or whatever it is. It was really obvious that way. But you know, sometimes they were from board of education members. And at first I used to be upset about that, but then I thought about it and said, you know, if I were a board member, and not my daughter or son, but if I were a board member and knew somebody and I saw them grow up... "

Table 3

Evidence of Evaluator Social Context

Subject	Evidence
Dionne	"There was a time when I recommended tenure and I was ignorant of certain information. And fought for it VEHEMENTLY. But it was because I was a first-year principal and did not have all the information I should have. My being a novice worked against me."
	"I feel like I am much more confident in my knowledge of what a teacher does or doesn't do. So, much more confident because I have access to what I would call the informal information highway, as opposed to the formal information. When you're a brand new administrator in a building, my experience was that I didn't have enough access to what I would call the informal."
	"…the first year as a principal, here's this third year teacher, this lack of information from the informal network, I'm trial by fire…"
	"I did not have a transition with the building principal, either, because the building principal had left before I came on board by several months. That was another factor, when I said all those factors? The building principal was gone, the building principal was holding information about this particular teacher because obviously she did not want the teacher recommended for renewal, remember? But she was gone. She left under what I understand was possibly not great circumstances."
	"Ok. The very last meeting that the superintendent has with the principals before that end of April date where you have to say you have it or you don't have it, a supervisor starts telling me that he met up with the former principal in Shoprite or somewhere, and he said she said I shouldn't be giving her tenure. So, I thought that was the most bizarre conversation you could have in Shoprite. But he's dressing me down in front of the superintendent and other principals by saying what I've seen from this teacher is inaccurate based on this conversation he's having with the former principal. Now, the principal would have taken the time to have a conversation with me, which did not do and apparently wasn't welcome to do, because I think there was bad blood when she left. So I was really upset and angry. I was professional but I was angry that this person would question my judgment. And, me being the personality that I am, I dug in my heels. And the superintendent basically told me there was no way I was going to be able to let this teacher go anyway, because there wasn't good paper on her. You know, we're going back to the year before."

Table 3

Evidence of Evaluator Social Context

Subject	Evidence
Murray	"There's always conversations, of course. It's the principal's ultimate call, but there's always conversations. "
	"Administrative council are involved in the conversations just, 'Hey, if you know, and make sure that it, you're not gonna um, put up for tenure, make sure you know, we know it early.' And stuff like that and there has to be reasons why and there has to be a paper trail as to why and there as to be, it has to be um, you know, tightened up from that area."
	(asked about making the decision not to re-new a teacher as a novice administrator) "I know that the teachers will look at me differently. Its not a question of whether or not."
	"I mean, maybe I'm not viewed as the principal yet. If I take over this job in February, maybe I'm not quite yet, viewed as that principal, ya know? The transition wouldn't be seamless. It would be, any way you slice it, sloppy and not clean. So um, so that would be a difficult decision."
	(asked about making the decision not to re-new a teacher as a 15-year veteran administrator) "Without a question. Without a question."
	"It would possibly be how, um, you know, how parents could line up against the administrator"
	"That teacher is a coach. I coached. I certainly still have allies from me coaching just because I spent so much time with their kid and they appreciated that time. That's the same thing. I mean, that dynamic you need to understand that not only could the teachers line up against you, but the community members, the parents, and maybe those parents are going to talk to board members. There are stories, and you know, there are stories in other districts and obviously that could occur."
	"And anybody would look at you differently with that kind of experience."
Tai	"We are so spread out that most of us evaluate staff in many buildings, and in many different disciplines."

Table 3

Evidence of Evaluator Social Context

Subject	Evidence
Christian	"I was new to this whole supervision thing, and I was like, like a teacher with like I taught part of the day and I did supervision part of the day. And I was evaluating them. And we were working side-by-side. And I was new to the routine and they were in the routine for a long time."
	"…the trickiest part of the job. Its really sort of a unique, scrappy little place and it's gritty. So its got this um, it sits in _____ county which is one of the most affluent counties in the nation, its got this um, urban about it, that I had to accommodate to, because the districts I've worked in before this have been, um, high performing, affluent, very homogenized school districts."
	"So I knew what other people were telling me about her, and I knew what I saw on paper, and I wasn't necessarily happy about it, but I didn't have the day to day interactions with this person."
	"So for me, I asked that her tenure be deferred. I would have liked to have the year to evaluate her and make my own decision."
	"…my gut told me not to recommend her for tenure and so I spoke to my principal about it at the time, and um, he didn't like, force me to do it, and he didn't stop, he didn't put a lot of pressure because he was a good guy. He said, 'I'll do whatever you want me to do.'"
	"The principal was very hands-off, and he was retiring. He didn't care."
	"And I, what I did with this person was I recommended her for tenure because I thought she was a really nice person. I thought she would grow."
	"I think I was probably a little fearful of the back, the back, the backlash. Cuz she had been there, she had been at the school for 3 years, and I had been there for one year. So I recommended her for tenure, and it was a mistake. If I had to do it again, I wouldn't have done it."
	"But I think I'm more secure, you know, I was a newbie administrator and I was thinking and feeling that, I probably could have made it work. You know? I probably could have helped her. And, I think I was wrong."
	"I would say it doesn't, it never should matter that I made the adults happy. I think at the time it made adults happy."

"You know some of these decisions have been very painful decisions. Because they're people that I like, and um, but they're not good for kids. And um, which why I never, ever, ever, ever have friends at work. Because I can't be your friend and then be your supervisor because when I, when you ask me to do something I can't do or I'm not comfortable doing or you do something stupid and I have to say something, now I'm not your friend anymore. So I don't want to any part of that."

"No, the principal was very very hands off, and he was retiring, so..."

"I did speak with one of the assistant principals and he and I spent a lot of time talking about it. Um, and he liked her. So it wasn't like, she... we had her with, um, she's a special ed teacher. We had her with these (pause) emotionally disturbed class, and you know, she connected with them. You know so it sorta lent itself to this."

"So if you tenure somebody and they're a special ed teacher, and they've got k-12 certification, I think about these things now."

Table 3

Evidence of Evaluator Social Context

Subject	Evidence
Travis	"There's one, and I ended up recommending him for tenure. And now, this is a first-year principal."
	"You know, they are improving, and showing improvement. And I like, I usually go to that area. I like to see improvement. I did not have the whole three years of this particular faculty member, which was already against me. I did have documentation. Probably not as much as I needed."
	"There's a politics game involved."
	"I think I was coerced, by a previous principal unfortunately, and by the superintendent at that time, to really push for non-renewal right off the get-go. Um, not having all the evidence. Also, not understanding the politics."
	"This person was involved in co-curriculars. And there were board members' children that were involved in co-curriculars."
	"…the new superintendent says that we do not have enough support…"
	"As a non-tenured principal, I did not want to do this."
	"…if I had my druthers, if I was in my principalship longer, and I had a little more support up top, I would NOT renew this person."
	"I also learned that politics and community politics and board member politics takes, do play a role, and the co-curriculars DO play a role."

Table 3

Evidence of Evaluator Social Context

Subject	Evidence
Amber	(asked about recommending non-renewal for a marginal teacher) "As I said, it was solely my recommendation so there might not have been a total consensus on that recommendation. So me personally? I probably would NOT have recommended that individual, but because it's a decision that's made, um, you know, with different administrators involved."
	"I think there was probably, um, a little bit of political pressure, um, this particular person, um, I think we had the other administrator who recommended that the person remain in tact was a non-tenured. Um, and had to make some cuts in the previous year, and you know, didn't receive that very well from the board of education."
	"So in that particular case, that we're talking about, that teacher happened to be qualified in multiple subject areas, (*so it behooved everyone*) financially."
	(asked if teachers have received tenure because they were involved in extra-curricular activities) "That occurs… More often if you are a coach."
	"I think, because, uh, you know remember my experience as an athletic director, athletics is a very large part of a school system. And especially if you're in a community where athletics is valued. Um, it will trump textbooks."
	(asked if it is the same for all extra-curriculars) "I would say there are some with the, you know, the other co-curricular activities, but I would say nowhere near than with the athletics."
	(referring to backlash for a decision by a new administrator to not re-new a teacher) "Yes *<there was backlash because it was a new administrator>*. The community was upset."
	"It was an interim superintendent at the time, so there was really not, it was solely the recommendation of the administrative team. The interim really didn't have, what's the word I want to use, a lot of clout with the board of education."

Analysis of Will and Skill

Because I used a priori coding, the amount of data I needed to analyze was greatly

reduced; I had domains to identify which data were pertinent to my study and was able to weed

out what was not pertinent to my research question: What are the factors in the decision-making

processes of school principals when they make the decision to recommend tenure for teachers

they deem to be marginal. As an influence on their decision-making processes, the domains of

will and skill were less frequently given as a motive than social context. While evidence

supporting the influence of will and skill are pertinent, the evidence that social context was a

factor in the decision-making process of principals was over-whelming and spanned the

responses of all but one subject. Additionally, Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2001) remind

us that we cannot separate influences upon decision-making from the context in which they are

made.

Analysis of Will

Evidence that will was a factor in the decision making process was fairly sparse. There

was little to indicate that the principals interviewed were not motivated to do their observations,

write their evaluations, or file the paperwork necessary to remove a marginal teacher.

Kimball and Milanowski's (2009) research provided evidence that the attitudes the

evaluators held had an impact upon the validity of the results of the evaluation. Aligned with

Kimball and Milanowski's (2009) assertion that states they would become frustrated or put less

importance on an evaluation when evaluators saw few results from the outcomes of a written

observation, Travis gave his account about preparing teacher evaluations. Travis did not view

formal observations as being of valuable. He reported that he had used three or four formats to

evaluate teachers during the eight years he had been an administrator. Some of these were more labor-intensive than others; some required a much longer narrative section whereas others required checked boxes. While it was a requirement of the teacher's contract, and New Jersey law that he conducts formal evaluations, Travis felt that shorter, informal walk-though observations yielded better information and used these walk-through evaluations to prepare a teacher's annual performance review. Murray indicated that longer narrative evaluations should be mixed with check-list evaluations to shorten the process somewhat, but keep it individualized.

Conversely, Dionne understood that completing all of the yearly evaluations may be a challenge, but that it was important, and "the biggest part of your job", indicating that the motivation to complete her evaluations was always present. Cher discussed how she would bring deficiencies in the evaluation documents to the attention of her superior and her peers in an attempt increase the validity of the observation documents; another indication that the will to conduct evaluations was never a factor in her decision-making process.

One aspect of Dionne's decision to tenure a marginal teacher was based partly on *will*, while simultaneously being based upon social context factors she was facing at the time. When Dionne was in her meeting with the superintendent of schools and her other administrative colleagues, she remembered feeling put on the spot and "dressed down" by one of those colleagues. As the colleague confronted her on her decision to renew this teacher, and discussed the feelings he had and the former principal, Dionne felt attacked and judged. Describing her feelings, Dionne recalled that she "was really upset and angry. I was professional but I was angry that this person would question my judgment. And, my being the personality I am, I dug in my heels." This reaction indicated the Dionne was motivated to do what she had decided, possibly at

the expense of the school, because she felt her judgment and her ability to recognize good

teaching was being questioned.

While *will* was not a major factor in the decision making processes of those subjects

interviewed, some of the study participants speculated that the decisions of their peers may have

been influenced by will. Although Amber was influenced most by other factors, she felt that the

decisions of her colleagues were made because they either did not conduct enough evaluations to

make an accurate decision about a teacher's effectiveness, or they did not want to be involved in

the decision in the first place. Although there is no direct evidence that this occurred, it is

supported by Oswald's (1989) work positing that evaluators feel it is more difficult and time

consuming to give a negative evaluation or prove teacher ineffectiveness than it is pass the

teacher along. These examples of will as a motivator can also be supported by the idea that

evaluators may engage in behaviors to avoid confrontations, thereby becoming more lenient in

their evaluations (Evans, 1996).

There was evidence that the subjects interviewed were motivated to avoid uncomfortable

situations, as suggested by Evans' (1996) work and the work of Cooper and Sureau (2008).

Cooper and Sureau (2008) reported that school leaders may be disinclined to report upon teacher

performance negatively if they feared backlash from outside influences. The subjects reported

feeling this way as a result of social context factors, and did not continue to feel the need to

avoid conflict amongst their staff as they because more settled in their positions. Additionally,

Cher provided counter-evidence to this assertion when she had to investigate reports of a teacher

accused of unprofessional conduct in the classroom. She investigated the incident thoroughly,

and removed her from the classroom. In the end, the teacher was transferred to another school,

but Cher felt she had done everything that should could to build a case against tenure had the

teacher stayed in her building.

Throughout the course of the interviews, no participant indicated that they renewed

marginal teacher simply because they were not motivated to do the work needed to remove that

person. Rather, as suggested by Painter (2000), the interviewees indicated that they were

motivated to improve the performance of the teachers they deemed to be marginal, most often by

regularly meeting with and working with teachers they deemed in need of improvement. Painter

(2000) described situations when principals would counsel their teachers to assist them with

becoming satisfactory teachers. Cher discussed how she repeatedly met with the teacher she

wanted removed, and even put her on a weekly review of her lesson plans, instead of the bi-

weekly norm. Dionne regularly "went to bat" for her teacher".

<div align="center">Analysis of Skill</div>

Many of the participants in the study indicated that they did not report that their decision

to recommend a marginal teacher for tenure was due to lack of skill. The more seniority a subject

had, the more individuals they had evaluated during their time as a school leader, and the more

teachers they had recommended for faculty. Cher recommended upwards of 50 teachers for

tenure, while Dionne had hired nearly three quarters of the teachers currently working for her in

her school. In just one year, Tai had recommended tenure or non-renewal for ten staff members,

and in 5 years, Travis had recommended tenure for almost two dozen teachers and staff

members. With the exceptions of Tai and Murray, who were the newest administrators in the

study, all of the study subjects had gone through the process or recommending or denying tenure

over twenty times.

Kimball and Milanowski (2009) found that the level of training most principals receive to evaluate teachers is insufficient. This assertion may be supported by the results of the participants' interviews. Cher had no training when she first started evaluating teacher performance. Cher used her own experiences as a teacher to evaluate what good teaching looked like; a tactic Kimball and Milanowski (2009) report as being a habit of school leaders. It wasn't until she moved to a large district that Cher received formal training in the use of the district's evaluative tools. Dionne had a similar experience. Murray started with little training in his school district. Like Cher and Dionne, he relied heavily on his own experiences with teaching and on the information he learned in his school administrator classes. Amber relayed that she had very little training from her school district because the evaluation documents were narratives with criteria. She too, received most of her training in her graduate classes. Thurston, Ory, Mayberry, and Braskamp (1984) stated that with such high importance placed upon teacher evaluations, allowing principals to administer evaluations without a high level training could cause a negative teacher evaluation to be nullified, which makes the removal of a marginal teacher even more difficult.

Tai and Christian reported extensive training and involvement in the development with their evaluative tools, however, it should be noted here that this was not an occurrence during their first years as school administrators; rather, this type of involvement occurred years later, when they were at points in their careers that would indicate they were veterans in their positions. Tai worked as part of an administrative team in her district to develop an observation tool based upon the Danielson model. The group then met with a trainer from the New Jersey Public School Administrators group to discuss the usefulness of the tool, and how it would apply to situations specific to her school district. The teachers' union was then asked to examine the

tool and give their input. Once they had approved, the faculty of the district then went through a day-long training regarding the use of the tool in the classroom.

Christian's district put together a formal task force consisting of teachers, administrators, parents and students. Together they worked as teams to develop an evaluative tool that would be useful across schools and disciplines, including staff members who were not part of the teacher's collective bargaining unit. The teachers and staff were trained on the use of the tool and informed of what the administrators would be looking at to determine job efficacy.

Tai was the only participant of the study to report that, had she recommended a marginal teacher for tenure, she would have to re-visit her skills as an educator and an administrator. Not one other subject reported that their decision was based upon the influence of skill. She responded that, "if it were to happen that someone who was marginal were granted tenure, personally, I would have to reflect about my own competencies." However, Tai also felt that "if a staff member is marginal it quickly becomes apparent" providing counter-evidence to her previous statement.

<div align="center">Analysis of Social Context</div>

The domain of social context yielded the most results on the part of the subjects. Aside from Tai, all of the study subjects indicated that at least one aspect of social context either influenced their decision, or would influence their decision. In addition, when discussing the decision-making process of their colleagues, the study participants indicated that they believed they were influenced by social context factors as well.

Social context had a major impact on the decision-making processes of school leaders, most particularly with principals (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2001). The majority of social context influences consisted of, but not limited to, political interventions, community

involvement, and district leadership (Driscoll & Goldring, 2005). Because the domain of social

context spans so many categories and topics, the evidence will be divided into three further

categories: macro-politics, micro-politics and other. It is within these three sub-domains the data

obtained from the study participants can be analyzed.

Macro-political influences

There was some, albeit a small amount, of evidence of political intervention as an

influence on principal decision-making. Cher talked about "must-sees," teachers applying for the

job who were referred by prominent members of society that she had to interview. "You'd get

somebody who was like a state senator or state assemblyman's daughter or whatever it is. It was

really obvious that way. But you know, sometimes they were from the board of education

members." This finding was consistent with research conducted by Blase and Blase (2002), who

found that entities which seem far-removed from the decision-making process of principals still

have an impact when it comes to implementing policies and procedures, including the hiring

process.

Micro-political influences

Recall that micro-political influences are those that are based upon the ways individuals

or groups within an organization, using the infrastructure of an organization or social

relationships, use their power to obtain resources, whether they be physical or the ability to

influence others (Blase & Blase, 2002). The way that these groups or individuals react with, and

use, their power refers to the school climate. The majority of participants interviewed claimed

that their decision to recommend a marginal teacher for tenure was based upon the micro-

political influences of school climate.

The Micro-politics of Social Climate: Backlash Pressures

A factor that appeared throughout the interviews was the influence of school climate, most particularly the reaction of the other faculty members, when making the decision to re-new a marginal teacher and recommend tenure. Principals claimed that teachers within the school may resent the decision of an administrator to remove a teacher; a belief that is supported by research (Tucker, 1997). To make the decision to not renew a marginal teacher, a school principal runs the risk of ruining relationships they are building with the staff in their buildings, as well as possibly damaging the school climate (Tucker, 1997). Christian stated that he was worried about what the other teachers in the building would think about his decision were he to not re-new a marginal teacher. He felt that, because the teacher in question and the other faculty members had been in their school longer, they would side with the teacher. He stated, "I think I was probably a little fearful of the back, the back, the backlash. Cuz, she had been there, she had been at the school for three years, and I had been there for one year. So I recommended her for tenure, and it was a mistake."

Murray felt similarly to Christian, and stated that, were he to have to make the decision to not renew a marginal teacher: "I know that the teachers will look at me differently. It's not a question of whether or not." He went on to justify his feelings that, as a new principal, "…maybe I'm not viewed as the principal yet," causing the teachers to question his judgment in such matters.

In addition to a possible polarization of the staff, some of the principals were afraid of the backlash on the part of the community. Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan and Lee's (1982) research showed that individuals in a district that maintained community relations and were proponents of preventing any negativity from leaking into the community would be less inclined to show support for teacher non-renewals. They also found this to be the case in districts with a history of

student and community challenges to decisions that would remove a non-tenured teacher from

the district (Bossert, et al, 1982).

This research describes exactly what Murray was fearful of, were he to make the decision

to remove a non-tenured teacher as a novice principal. When he was asked about how he would

be viewed after he made the decision, Murray replied, that he was fearful of "how the parents

could line up against the administrator." Amber's experience supported Murray's fears. When

discussing the backlash of the community on a fellow administrator who made the decision to

cut a non-tenured teacher, she recalled that "Yes. The community was very upset."

<div align="center">Micro-politics and the Hard-to-Fill Positions</div>

Christian, Dionne and Amber faced difficult decision when they needed to make the

decision to replace teachers who were working in positions that are typically difficult to fill.

Christian knew that the efficacy of the teacher in question was low, but she was a special

education teacher working with severely impaired, behavioral students. These principals

questioned whether they should let these special education teachers go, and in the end, they were

influenced, no matter in how minor a way, by the fact they were working in the capacity of

difficult to fill teaching positions. These assertions, that there is a teacher shortage in the field of

special education with a specialization in behavioral disorders are aligned with those made by

Tissington and Grow (2007).

The research tells us that teachers of students with behavior disorders are difficult to find

and retain (Billingsley, 2004). It would follow, then, that principals with this type of experience

are even more difficult to find. Prather-Jones (2011) found that the school principal was the main

support necessary to have an efficient and effective behavioral program in a school district. In

her qualitative study, teachers of behaviorally impaired students reported that support from their

school administration, both collegial and behavioral, as well as providing appreciation, was the

key to the teachers' perceived effectiveness (Prather-Jones, 2011). Additionally, a strong

understand of special education programming was seen to foster a positive school climate for

teachers of students with behavioral difficulties (Prather-Jones, 2011). Leading under these

conditions, while working as a novice principal (see below), would seem especially difficult, and

could account for the decision-making processes followed by Christian, Dionne, and Amber.

<div align="center">Being a Novice Administrator</div>

Shoho and Barnett (2010) found that new principals spend their time attempting to learn

the politics, attitudes and policies of the school in which they are employed. These findings are

consistent with the findings of this study. Murray discussed his decision-making processes from

the viewpoint of a novice administrator. He is non-tenured in his position, and has been in the

school he serves for as long as he has been an administrator. He worried that, were he to make

the decision to non-renew a marginal teacher, the other faculty members may not even view him

as a principal yet. When he was asked to compare these feelings to the decision being made by a

15-year veteran, Murray replied that the outcomes would be different, and more accepted,

"without a question." He felt that it would be much easier on the staff and the community to

make the decision as a 15-veteran principal, stating that "anybody would look at you differently

with that type of experience." Murray's gut-feeling is also supported by Male's (2003) research

that found teachers to perceive novice principals differently from veteran principals, indicating

that, if put in the position, he may find himself in the midst of a school climate crisis.

Travis also felt that being a novice principal worked against him while making one of the

most important decisions of his career. He felt he was at a disadvantage being new; he did not

have all of the information he needed to make an informed decision. He stated, "As a non-

tenured principal, I did not want to do this." Because he was new to the position, he did not have a grasp of the social climate in the school at that time, and he was unaware of the real game of politics at play when making the decision to renew, or not renew a teacher who was also involved in extra-curricular coaching.

Dionne, too, felt that her novice status severely impaired her ability to make the decision. As a novice principal, Dionne wasn't privy to the "informal information highway." She stated, "When you're brand new as an administrator in the building, I, my experience was that I didn't have enough access to what I would call the informal. Teachers know an awful lot about each other, and, once you build enough bridges, people will come in and tell you things about their colleagues and then I have an opportunity to investigate on my own." Essentially, the interpersonal connections Dionne needed to make a sound decision to renew or not renew a teacher were not present when she was new to the school.

Dionne's decision-making process was affected by being a novice to the position in another way, as well. Dionne spoke about the pressure she faced at an administrative meeting to conform to the wishes of the former principal. Dionne talked about "digging her heels in" at this, which is aligned to Shoho and Barnett's (2010) assertion that novice principals tend to feel a need to establish their power, whereas principals with more experience and a reputation in their school lighten their approach to utilize a leadership style that is more inclusive of the advice of others. Dionne may have also felt the need to react in the way she did because of an overwhelming sense that she was being measured against her predecessors (Shoho & Barnett, 2010).

The Micro-politics of District Leadership

Other times, the participants of the study made their decision as a result of district leadership. There were two different scenarios: on one hand, the administrators were very hands-off, and on the other, the administrators were coercive. Travis reflected upon his situation, and remembered that the superintendent at the time gave ambiguous advice, essentially telling Travis the decision was on him. That same superintendent left the next year. Because he was a new administrator, and he was trying to form his own opinion, he gave the teacher another year. While Travis discussed the scenario at the end of the next year, he said, "I think I was coerced, by a previous principal unfortunately, and by the superintendent at that time, to really push for non-renewal right off the get-go."

While Christian was discussing his decision-making situation, he recalled talking to the other principal in charge at the time, and receiving no support. Christian remembers that the principal was retiring, and felt that he "just didn't care." This left Christian essentially on his own to make a decision about recommending tenure for a marginal teacher. Although he admits to making a plus/minus delta chart, indicating that he knew this teacher was not essentially good for kids, he made the decision to renew her. At the time, Christian felt it would have been a more painful decision to let this teacher go. Now, he admits, if he ever feels doubt, he makes the decision to not re-new a teacher.

Amber, on the other hand, met with a different scenario. Amber had mentioned from the beginning that she may have decided differently had past practice not dictated that all administration present had to reach a consensus when deciding not to recommend tenure for a teacher. She was coerced by the other administrators in the district to retain an underperforming teacher. This was particularly true if the teacher in question was also a coach; the administration was willing to look the other way more graciously in these cases. Her superintendent took a

stance that there needed to be overwhelming evidence in place, or as Amber stated, "damning evidence", to consider not recommending tenure for a teacher. She states that the final factor in her decision to renew the marginal teacher was that it was the path of least resistance in the end.

This chapter compared the data results found in Chapter IV. The data were both evaluated to determine what the influences were upon the decisions of public school principals, and then compared the data with the conceptual framework based upon the research of Kimball and Milanowski (2009). Responses were evaluated according to will, skill, and social context and placed in a data table, and also analyzed and compared to the existing research literature.

The data obtained in the study showed that, while will and skill are sometimes components in the decision-making processes of principals when making the determination to recommend tenure for marginal teachers, the domain of social context is the strongest influence upon their decision-making processes. The micro-political influences had the most weight upon decision-making; particularly when the principal was a novice. Hard-to-fill teaching positions, particularly those in special education, were also an influence in the decision-making process.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I synthesize my findings from my participants' interviews, and use this information to build the argument that the strongest influence on the decision-making process of school principals when determining whether a marginal teacher should receive tenure is due to social context influences. As I revisit my research question, I posit that the strongest influence under the social context paradigm in particular is being new to the position of principal I also address the limitations to my findings.

Findings in Light of Existing Research: Will, Skill and Social Context

The focus of this study was to determine what the major influences were upon the decision-making process of school principals when making the decision to recommend tenure for marginal teachers. While answers varied amongst the participants interviewed during the study, the results indicated major trends in the influences upon the decision-making process.

The results of this study do not show that individual "will" was a problem. All of the participants relayed how important strong, effective teachers were to their schools and to the students. The data obtained provides plenty of counter-evidence that administrative skill is the problem. Participants in the study all assert that they had the skills and knowledge necessary to objectively evaluate non-tenured teachers. Seven participants all agreed that whether or not they had training with the use of evaluative tools, they based their evaluations upon their own teaching histories, what they learned to be "best practices" and what they felt was just good teaching. When asked, Tai said that had she made the determination to recommend tenure for a marginal teacher, she would need to reflect upon her own skills. However, she also felt that she

had the skills to recognize good teaching, and seems to have had enough practice with more than

73 observations under her belt.

The strongest influence upon the decision-making practices of school administration

when recommending the tenure of marginal teachers seems to fall under the social context

paradigm. The principals and administrators who admitted to recommending tenure for marginal

teachers relayed their reasons as mostly being new to administrative duties and afraid of backlash

from other faculty. A major component of the decision-making processes of principals when they

recommend tenure for marginal teachers is their status as a novice. This was the case with

Christian, Amber, Travis and Dionne. Even those who have not engaged in this practice

mentioned they were afraid of the backlash they would receive since they were new to the

position, such as Murray did in his interview. Throughout the statements given by Murray,

Dionne, Travis, Christian and Amber, we have seen a repeat of statements similar to Dionne's

quote, "Being a novice worked against me." Knowing this from the research, it would seem that

a large part of the problem of tenuring marginal teachers is in giving new principals the authority

to singularly make the determination to recommend tenure, or recommend dismissal, without the

proper information. "In particular, most new principals understood that their role during the first

year (unless specifically charged by the central office or superintendent) was to learn and

understand the school culture and personnel before attempting any major change initiatives…"

(Shoho & Barnett, 2010, p. 576).

As Griffith (1999) pointed out, an effective leader is one who knows that their

relationship with their environment is directly related to their efficacy. This idea is supported by

the subjects who felt that they were not ready to make a decision that would paint them in a

negative light, such as letting a teacher go, prior to forming solid relationships within their new

placements. Dionne clearly stated that, "being a novice worked against me."

It seems that Murray, Dionne, Christian and Travis all fell into the micro-political traps

referred to by Cooper, Ehrensal, and Bromme (2005). They struggled with the concept of

collegial leadership; separating being an educational leader who wanted to have the trust of the

teachers and provide them with supports, and the manager, doing what is best for the

organization (Cooper, Ehrensal, & Bromme, 2005).

<div align="center">Incidental Findings</div>

<div align="center">What is a Marginal Teacher?</div>

As previously cited in the literature review, there is no clear definition of what constitutes

a marginal teacher. Researchers agreed that teachers who were successful were those who were

skilled, efficient, had knowledge of the curriculum they would be teaching, and had classroom

management abilities (Lawrence, Vachon, Leake & Leake, 2005). Many researchers agreed,

however, that there was no one, concrete way to define a poorly-performing teacher, and that at

times, it was relative to the performance of other teachers (Yariv, 2004, Raths & Lyman, 2003).

The same findings were found across or throughout participant interviews.

Cher spoke about what she looks for in a teacher she would recommend for tenure:

organized, structured, well dressed, speaks properly, with plenty of energy and enthusiasm. She

felt they should have a certain level of intelligence. Cher then focused in on teachers who she

would not hire, not citing their pedagogy or character traits, but mainly focusing on the way they

dressed. She discussed the inappropriate shoes a candidate was wearing, and stated that she

would infer from the way they were dressed that they did not make good decisions. She spoke

about an early childhood educator who constantly wore very high heels; indicating she had poor

decision-making skills to Cher. The teacher was not renewed. This type of informal evaluation is consistent with the work of Lugg and Tooms (2010). In their research, they found that there are norms associated with professional dress, and that these norms were typically perpetuated by school administrators (Lugg & Tooms, 2010). Those who did not adhere to the unspoken code of dress were typically seen as less credible, similar to the description given by Cher about this teacher.

The participants of the interview were unable to clearly define a marginal teacher, but many of them came to a consensus about how they knew what a good teacher was. Murray, Christian, Dionne and Travis all asked themselves, "Is this person good for kids?" A highly subjective means to determine teacher efficacy, asking this question prior to making the decision to renew or not renew a teacher indicates that principals may use their instincts above all else when making the determination. This is supported by Jacob and Lefgren's (2008) study that found principals often make subjective decisions regarding teacher efficacy. Instead of taking into account concrete facts, such as student performance on tests, finalized lesson plans, and teacher participation in school efforts, principals rely on their knowledge of what they feel good teaching practices are and how they perceive a teacher's skill with classroom management (Duke & Salmonowicz, 2010).

<center>Credibility of the Study</center>

To increase the credibility of the data findings of this study, I engaged in three types of data triangulation: triangulation of sources, analyst triangulation, and perspective triangulation (Patton, 1990).

To triangulate my sources, I compared the consistency of the answers given by the interviewed subjects (Patton, 1990).The information obtained from the seven participants was

checked for consistency across interviews. Many of the participants came to the same

conclusions regarding their responses to the interview questions: being a novice principal worked

against them, indicating a strong constant amongst the responses. There were two subjects,

however, who produced different results. One participant did not ever make the decision to

recommend tenure for a marginal teacher, while another participant believed that, had she done

this, it would have been a result of her skill.

To further increase the reliability and validity of my results, I engaged in triangulation

through the use of multiple analysts (Patton, 1990). While I initially coded the results of the

interviews independently, I then passed the interviews to an independent party to analyze and

code as suggest by Patton (1990).

Through the use of perspective triangulation, I checked my findings against the

conceptual framework used for the study by Kimball and Milanowski (2009). During this

process, I found that my data fell into the three domains they suggested, and there was no need

for the fourth domain of "other".

<div align="center">Limitations to the Study</div>

It is important to recognize the limitations to a study while synthesizing the data.

Although limitations to methodology were discussed in Chapter III, it is important to consider

limitations due to the data itself.

The data obtained in this study are limited to the situations faced by the seven

participants interviewed. This would be considered distortion error; consideration must be given

to the fact that the situations themselves were not observed, but where instead recalled, and

because of the selective sampling of subjects due to the use of snowball-sampling techniques

(Patton, 1990).

While the sampling decision was purposeful due to the sensitive nature of the interview questions, it is possible that under other conditions, such as quantitative research methods, that other subjects would have been willing to participate in the study as well, possibly yielding different information. The presence of the evaluator, then, may also be a limitation to the study data (Patton, 1990). The study participants may have altered their responses due to my direct presence and an awareness that the interview was being audio-recorded. The participants may also have felt the effects of what Patton (1990) refers to as emphatic neutrality; the subjects may have thought that I was very interested in or invested in their responses, when in reality, I was attempting to remain neutral.

It is possible that my conclusions are affected by the experience of my subjects, which was limited to mainly suburban school districts within the state of New Jersey. The data may also be affected by the fact that all of the subjects interviewed were Caucasian.

Moreover, because it was so difficult to obtain subjects who were willing to speak about their experiences with this matter, there is a large amount of speculation on behalf of some of the participants themselves as to why these circumstances have occurred. While their interpretations of the situations may be accurate, they did not directly ask the decision-makers themselves. Finally, personality differences amongst the participants had an effect on the data collected. Some participants were more willing to talk about their experiences than others, and some participants offered more detail when answering questions than others did, even with question re-phrasing, prodding, and attempts at discourse.

Implications

Implications for Leadership Preparation

Future research would be beneficial for novice principals and graduate schools of education to reframe the focuses of future principal training and induction. As evident from this study and the body of existing literature, novice principals face a particular struggle with making personnel decisions during their first years. The literature points out the importance of mentorship programs throughout the induction period of a novice principal. Crippen (2004) suggests a mentoring program for all novice principals in a new school district, which would match up a veteran principal, or in smaller districts, the superintendent, with the novice principal to act as a "lifeline" when problems arise (p. 19). She suggests that this relationship could provide a sounding board and confidant for the new principal, without the risk of the novice principal losing their authority with the teachers or looking incompetent to their superiors (Crippen, 2004). Shoho and Barnett (2010) recognize that the most effective way school districts attempt to guide new principals is through mentorship programs, whereas the most popular method is through the use of reflective activities and tools that help the principal to self-assess. Their research has found, however, that new-principal induction programs are more focused upon student outcomes than on how to function as principal in a new setting (Shoho & Barnett, 2010). Shoho and Barnett (2010) and Crippen (2004) both purport the importance of "fit" between the mentor and mentee; that during this time, the principal needs to feel comfortable with their mentor, and the mentor needs to genuinely be interested in assisting and guiding the principal. In fact, programs can be compromised when the model does not put importance on best fit (Shoho & Barnett, 2010). Future research should look at the efficacy of models of mentorship programs for new principals to provide such an outlet for these principals and shape

principal graduate programs. "It is the responsibility of those who prepare principals, especially

principals charged with turning around low-performing schools, to do whatever they can to

promote sound decision-making." (Duke & Salmonowicz, 2010, p.57). There is room for

improvement in principal-preparation programs.

<div align="center">Implications for Future Research</div>

Because much of the body of literature based upon school politics is born from a political

science frame, it would be beneficial to further examine school politics through other lenses. We

are so limited to theories that come mainly from political science, and give little attention to the

micro-political aspects of schools, that we continue to fail to understand how teacher

development, student learning, and collaboration amongst educators can foster school

improvement (Blase & Blase, 2002). Therefore, it would be beneficial for research to further

pursue the micro-political influences upon schools.

The research has further implications for future research regarding the true complexity of

the decision-making processes principals face when distinguishing effective teachers from

marginal teachers. Rockoff and Speroni (2011) examined objective versus subjective teacher

ratings to determine the current and future effectiveness of teachers. Subjective evaluations

included pre-teaching college work and information obtained during teacher mentorship

programs, while objective evaluation information was obtained by using standardized teacher

evaluation rubrics (Rockoff & Speroni, 2011). In their research, they found very little difference

between the two evaluation types; both produced similar results indicating which teachers were

highly effective versus marginal (Rockoff & Speroni, 2011). While almost all research has found

a strong predictive correlation between objective evaluations and student achievement, Rockoff

and Speroni (2011) found that teachers with a high subjective rating produce greater outcomes

for their students. There is a significant gap in the literature pertaining to how objective

evaluations ignore the complexity of personnel roles in the schools. For instance, teacher

effectiveness needs to be examined in relation to the types of students a teacher is assigned to

teach, such as when a teacher is consistently assigned to groups of students that are well-behaved

or behaviorally challenged. Additionally, aligned with Jacob and Lefgren's (2008) research, this

study found that social and political pressures interfere with a principal's ability to assess teacher

performance regardless of the ratings obtained by objective evaluations, thereby negating the

usefulness of these types of evaluations.

Implications for Policy

The findings of this study and throughout the body of research literature are counter-

intuitive to the state of New Jersey's new teacher evaluation plan, "Teacher Effective and

Accountability for the Children of New Jersey Act" or TEACHNJ. Title 18A:6-118 of this law

states that the NJ Supreme Court has "found that a multitude of factors play a vital role in the

quality of a child's education, including effectiveness in teaching methods and evaluations". This

section of the law goes on to state that the new teacher evaluation system will focus upon student

outcomes and student growth to measure the effectiveness of the teacher. In none of the literature

reviewed for this study did any researcher state that student growth or student outcomes were the

means by which a teacher was deemed marginal or incompetent. Similarly, throughout the

interviews, while student engagement and curriculum where points of import for the principals,

not one principal mentioned that a reason they would deem a teacher as poorly performing was

correlated to the outcomes of the students in their charge.

The point of the TEACHNJ act is to identify poorly performing teachers and either a)

make it more difficult for teachers to earn tenure, or b) make it easier to remove marginal

teachers from the classroom. This is evident in section 18A:6-118a. stating the act is being put into legislation to assist school districts with making "personnel decisions." This study finds that, in many cases, the teachers receive tenure in spite of being marginal, and not because they were not identified as marginal in the first place. None of the participants in the study claimed that they did not know a teacher was underperforming at the time. Instead, they were influenced by outside, political factors that the TEACHNJ Act cannot prevent.

To attempt to counter-act this problem, the TEACHNJ Act, supported by research from numerous sources, including Cooper, Ehrensal and Bromme (2005), are suggesting moving evaluations towards a portfolio system. Portfolios allow the teacher to demonstrate that positive student outcomes are occurring, while also allowing them to prove that they are performing in accordance to whatever framework the school district is using, whether it be Danielson (2007), Marzano (2007), or another set of teacher behaviors the district uses as a guideline. Online portfolio systems, such as Teachscape, using Danielson's (2007) vocabulary and domains to identify effective teaching, or PD360, which uses Danielson (2007), Marzano (2007), or a number of other evaluation tools as a framework that can be used to create portfolios that can be under constant review by the principal and other administrators involved in making tenure decisions, rather than waiting for one specified day during a post-observation meeting.

Conclusion

The ramifications of have ineffective or marginal teachers is dire and far-reaching (Hanushek, 1992). This qualitative study provided detailed interviews examining the influences

upon school principals when faced with the decision to recommend or deny tenure for marginal teachers.

While skill and will were influential upon the decision-making process, social context, especially micro-political factors, supply the strongest weight upon the decisions of school principals. Novice principals, more often than veteran principals, tend to struggle when they find themselves in the tenuous position of making the recommendation for or against tenuring a marginal teacher. Because of their novice status, these principals face the same challenges as veterans, but with less support from their staff and less knowledge of the micro-political playing field of their school and the community. Fear of community and faculty backlash was another strong factor of sway in the decision-making process.

The results of this study indicate that while all principals need the agreement and support of their administrative colleagues and superiors when making this decision, novice principals are in need of further assistance to ensure they have the power and basis for making the correct decision, and while not free of, but protected from the micro-political ramifications that may follow.

Appendix A

Administrator Semi-Structured Interview Protocol
Re: Evaluations of Teacher Performance & Renewal

Name:
Interviewer:
Date: Location:

What is your current position?

How many years have you worked as an administrator in general? In your current position?

Do you currently evaluate teachers' performance in the classroom? How often? What types of certificated staff do you evaluate?

(If yes) Tell me about the training you received to use your district's evaluation tools. How were you trained? Do you feel these tools relate to all areas that you evaluate?

(If yes) Have you experienced any problems using the current tool? What were they?

For how many teachers have you had the opportunity to recommend for tenure?

Have you ever struggled with the decision to grant a teacher tenure? (*if yes*) Can you tell me about that?

Of those teachers, has there ever been a time that you recommended tenure for a teacher who you would deem marginal?

Can you tell me about that situation?

What were some factors that influenced your decision? *(Try not to prompt)*

What would you consider the most important outcome from this decision? *(Effects on the students, with the community, on test scores?)*

What would you consider the most trying result of this decision?

Were you supported in your decision to recommend tenure to a teacher who was deemed inadequate?

Is there anything you would like to add at this point in time?

Thank you so much for participating. When I have finished transcribing our interview, I would like to call you and speak again regarding your answers. You may, at that time, wish to add or clarify a point, and I may need to check for understanding of some things you reported. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Appendix B

Informed Consent form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a research study that is being conducted by Jessica Howland , who is a doctoral candidate in the ETPA Department at Rutgers University. The purpose of this research is to determine the decision-making influences upon school principals when they decide to recommend tenure to teachers they deem to be marginal.

Approximately 3-10 subjects between the ages of 35 and 85 years old will participate in the study, and each individual's participation will last approximately 1-2 hours.

The study procedures include participating first in a semi-structured interview and then possible follow-up communication if clarification is needed.

This research is anonymous. Anonymous means that I will record no information about you that could identify you. This means that I will not record your name, address, phone number, date of birth, etc. If you agree to take part in the study, you will be assigned a random code name that will be used on interview. Your name will not be linked to the code name that is assigned to you. There will be no way to link your responses back to you. Therefore, data collection is anonymous.

The research team and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated. All study data will be kept for 3 years.

There are no risks or discomforts that are anticipated from your participation in the study. Potential risks or discomforts include possible emotional feelings of sadness or regret when asked questions during the interview.

You have been told that the benefits of taking part in this study may be the opportunity to discuss feelings, perceptions, and influences related to the experience of recommending permanent status to a weak faculty member. However, you may receive no direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, and you may withdraw at any time during the study procedures without any penalty to you. In addition, you may choose not to answer any questions with which you are not comfortable.

If you have any questions about the study or study procedures, you may contact myself at (*609) 581-5887,* or Howlands6@verizon.net or dissertation advisor Catherine Lugg at (908) 507-3243 or catherine.lugg@gse.rutgers.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University at:

Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
3 Rutgers Plaza
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559
Tel: 848-932-0150
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

Sign below if you agree to participate in this research study:

Subject (Print) _____

Subject Signature _____ Date _____

Principal Investigator Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix C

Audio/Videotape Addendum to Consent form

AUDIO/VIDEOTAPE ADDENDUM TO CONSENT FORM

You have already agreed to participate in a research study entitled: The Decision-Making Processes of Principals when Recommending Marginal Teachers for Tenure, conducted by Jessica Howland We are asking for your permission to allow us to audiotape as part of that research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The recording(s) will be used for transcription of interviews leading to data analysis by the researcher.

The recording(s) will NOT include the subjects name or any other identifier.

The recording(s) will be stored in a locked file cabinet with no link to subjects' identity and will be retained for three years.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Subject (Print) _____

Subject Signature _____   Date _____

Principal Investigator Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix D

IRB APPROVAL

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
ASB III, 3 Rutgers Plaza, Cook Campus
New Brunswick, NJ 08901

August 13, 2012

P.I. Name: Howland
Protocol #: 12-638M

Jessica Howland
187 Chapman Ave
Hamilton NJ 08610

Dear Jessica Howland: √

(Initial / **Amendment** / Continuation / Continuation w/ Amendment)

Protocol Title: "The Decision - Making Processess of School Principals when Granting Tenure to Marginal Teachers"

This is to advise you that the above-referenced study has been presented to the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, and the following action was taken subject to the conditions and explanations provided below:

Approval Date:	8/6/2012	**Expiration Date:**	8/5/2013
Expedited Category(s):	6,7	**Approved # of Subject(s):**	10

This approval is based on the assumption that the materials you submitted to the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP) contain a complete and accurate description of the ways in which human subjects are involved in your research. The following conditions apply:
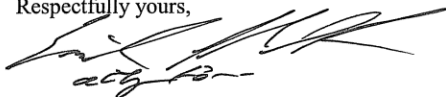
- **This Approval-**The research will be conducted according to the most recent version of the protocol that was submitted. **This approval is valid ONLY for the dates listed above;**
- **Reporting-**ORSP must be immediately informed of any injuries to subjects that occur and/or problems that arise, in the course of your research;
- **Modifications-**Any proposed changes MUST be submitted to the IRB as an amendment for review and approval prior to implementation;
- **Consent Form(s)-**Each person who signs a consent document will be given a copy of that document, if you are using such documents in your research. The Principal Investigator must retain all signed documents for at least three years after the conclusion of the research;
- **Continuing Review-**You should receive a courtesy e-mail renewal notice for a Request for Continuing Review before the expiration of this project's approval. However, it is your responsibility to ensure that an application for continuing review has been submitted to the IRB for review and approval prior to the expiration date to extend the approval period;

Additional Notes: Expedited Approval per 45 CFR 46.110

Failure to comply with these conditions will result in withdrawal of this approval.

Please note that the IRB has the authority to observe, or have a third party observe, the consent process or the research itself. The Federal-wide Assurance (FWA) number for the Rutgers University IRB is FWA00003913; this number may be requested on funding applications or by collaborators.

Respectfully yours,

Sheryl Goldberg
Director of Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
gibel@grants.rutgers.edu

cc: Catherine A. Lugg

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